

<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz>

ResearchSpace@Auckland

Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage.

<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback>

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the [Library Thesis Consent Form](#) and [Deposit Licence](#).

**ITALO CALVINO AND THE PYGMALION PARADIGM:
FASHIONING THE FEMININE IN *I NOSTRI ANTENATI*
AND *GLI AMORI DIFFICILI***

Bridget Tompkins

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Italian Studies
The University of Auckland
2013*

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation of the feminine in two of Italo Calvino's early collections, *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili*, using the Pygmalion paradigm as the theoretical framework and adopting a feminist approach. The Pygmalion paradigm concerns the creation by a male 'artist' of a feminine ideal and highlights the artificiality and self-reflecting narcissistic desire associated with the creation process. I emphasise Calvino's active and deliberate work of self-creation, accomplished through extensive self-commentaries in which he directed critical attention as much by what he omitted to say as by what he stressed, and highlight both the lack of importance Calvino placed on the feminine in his narratives and the relative absence of critical attention focused on this area. Relying on the analogy between Pygmalion's pieces of ivory and Barthes's 'seme' and drawing upon the ideas underlying Kristevan intertextuality, I demonstrate that, despite Calvino's professed lack of interest in character development, his female characters are carefully and purposefully constructed. In this feminist reading, I illustrate that Calvino's favouring of weightless writing and economy of expression, accomplished through his use of well-recognised literary tropes, stereotypical forms and ideas, and by his borrowings from the literary canon, all of which derive from a strongly patriarchal heritage, results in female characters that overwhelmingly reflect their androcentric inspiration. Approaching through the narcissism, fetishism and Oedipal themes, and the associated fear of castration that accompanies Pygmalion's creative gesture, I reveal the substantial psychological substratum underlying Calvino's narratives and challenge his professed lack of interest in the psychological dimension. A close reading of Calvino's narratives, engaging directly with Freud, Lacan and the feminist psychoanalytical thinking of Kofmann, Kristeva, Kaplan and others, demonstrates how Calvino uses his female characters as foils for the existential reflections of his typically maladjusted and narcissistic male characters. Finally, a detailed examination of the deliberations of Calvino's rare female protagonists discloses reasoning that is, at times, androcentric to the point of being laughable to the modern female reader.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors, Associate Professor Bernadette Luciano and Doctor Hilary Chung, who have skilfully guided me through this project with the utmost professionalism, providing a perfect balance of academic direction and encouragement. Together they have given me the confidence to follow my own path and ensured that the entire process has remained a positive and rewarding experience.

I am especially indebted to Associate Professor Luciano, who has patiently and unselfishly offered me her unfailing support and friendship throughout my years at the University of Auckland. Without the benefit of her wisdom, experience and considerable intelligence, I would not be where I am today.

I would like to thank the University of Auckland for their generous financial support provided through the University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Ellen McRae for professionally editing this thesis. I would also like to express my appreciation for her additional advice and support on technical matters surrounding the submission process.

Finally, I owe my deepest gratitude to my family, but I am particularly appreciative of the unfailing support and encouragement of my husband, Simon, who has never once questioned my determined pursuit of this less conventional path.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	IV
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: CALVINO AS PYGMALIONESQUE CRAFTSMAN	28
INTRODUCTION	28
THE MAN BEHIND THE PEN	31
CALVINO CONSTRUCTS HIS FEMALE CHARACTERS	58
Constructing the Desirable Woman	65
Constructing the Undesirable Woman	79
Building a Female Character from Mythology and Fiction.....	87
Fashioning a Female Character Incorporating Autobiographical Features	99
CHAPTER TWO: PYGMALION’S CREATIVE GESTURE AND THE CALVINIAN TEXT	115
INTRODUCTION	115
APPLYING THE PYGMALION MYTH	118
Representations of Woman as Dangerous and/or Undesirable.....	119
<i>Battista</i>	120
<i>Sun-Tanned Woman and Delia H.</i>	125
<i>Priscilla</i>	132
Fetishism, Narcissism and Oedipal Themes	139
<i>Fetishism</i>	140
<i>Narcissism</i>	147
<i>Oedipal Themes</i>	165
CONCLUSION.....	173
CHAPTER THREE: CALVINO SPEAKS FOR GALATEA: QUESTIONS OF PERSPECTIVE	175
INTRODUCTION	175

ISOTTA AND STEFANIA	179
Isotta	183
Stefania	198
SUOR TEODORA/BRADAMANTE	206
CONCLUSION.....	233
CONCLUSION	234
AFTERWORD	244
PYGMALION’S BRIDE	244
APPENDIX.....	247
<i>I NOSTRI ANTENATI</i>	247
<i>GLI AMORI DIFFICILI</i>	247
<i>DIFFICULT LOVES</i>	249
BIBLIOGRAPHY	250

INTRODUCTION

Italo Calvino (1923–85) is one of Italy’s best known and most discussed post-World War II writers. His work is widely recognised for its originality and innovation and its propensity to defy classification—features that have inspired significant critical interest in his work from the outset. Yet, despite the breadth and depth of the critical analysis undertaken to date, remarkably little of this attention has been directed towards the representation of the feminine in Calvino’s literature. In this study, I take a detailed look at issues associated with the creation of female characters in two of Calvino’s earlier collections, *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili*.

The Pygmalion paradigm provides the broad theoretical framework for the study, and I have chosen it because of its ability to cater for a number of different, but related, critical approaches within the ambit of its overarching umbrella. Stripped to its barest essentials, the Pygmalion paradigm concerns the creation, or moulding, of one individual to another’s specifications—prototypically, the creation by a male of a feminine ideal—and is thus inherently a paradigm well suited to a study of female characters in the work of a male author. The bare bones of the paradigm are given substance by the Pygmalion myth. Although generally described as Greek in origin,¹ the version of the myth most commonly referred to and the one almost universally used as the blue print for the Pygmalion paradigm is that found in Book X of the Roman poet Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which dates from around the year 8 AD. In recognition of both its widespread usage and its particular suitability to the subject matter of this study, I also rely on Ovid’s variation of the myth, although other interpretations are acknowledged. In basic terms, Ovid’s version relates how Pygmalion, a Cypriot sculptor, crafted from ivory a statue of his ideal woman. He proceeded to fall in love with his own creation, which was eventually gifted life by the goddess Venus.

This study focuses upon the stories collected in *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili*, almost all of which were written in the 1950s and thus belong to Calvino’s early career. There is general consensus that the first phase of Calvino’s literary career ended around 1963.

¹ The legend pre-dates the Greeks and the name Pygmalion is probably Phoenician.

During this initial period, his writing was unusual but still, for the most part, followed traditional narrative patterns, even if departures from the traditional and hints of what was to follow become increasingly evident as the decade progresses. The collections *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili* represent the two predominant strands of Calvino's pre-1964 writing; the stories that make up *Gli amori difficili* can be loosely described as realist and have roots in the Italian postwar neorealist tradition, whereas the three short novels comprising *I nostri antenati* are historical fantasies.²

Several of Calvino's narratives would provide excellent material for this investigation, for female characters appear throughout Calvino's oeuvre: the *Cosmicomiche* stories,³ the metanarrative *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (1979) and Calvino's posthumous volume *Sotto il sole giaguaro* (1986) all present as obvious candidates for such a discussion. The idea of the feminine is an integral component of almost all of Calvino's fiction, and a major issue became that of selecting appropriate texts from among many equally convincing possibilities. In the end, it was my observation that the essential elements of Calvino's representation of the feminine remain relatively constant throughout his literary career and transcend all his various stylistic modes that finally led me to reject a broader diachronic investigation in favour of this more narrowly focused synchronic study.

Both thematically and stylistically, the stories found in these volumes provide a comprehensive sample of Calvino's literary output during an immensely important period in his writing career. It was during the 1950s and early 1960s, when Calvino was in his thirties, that he matured as a writer and truly established his own writing voice. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to detect early signs of the way his work would later develop within

² This classification of Calvino's writing into pre- and post-1964 is very loose, and the thirteen-story edition of *Gli amori difficili* used here was not published in this form until 1970. See the Appendix for more detailed information about the publishing histories of *Gli amori difficili* and *I nostri antenati*.

³ I am referring here not just to the twelve-story collection *Le cosmicomiche*, which was published by Einaudi in 1965, but to the complete collection *Tutte le cosmicomiche*. The complete collection also includes *Ti con zero* (1967), *La memoria del mondo e altre storie cosmicomiche* (1968) and *Cosmicomiche vecchie e nuove* (1984). The word *Cosmicomiche* is commonly used to refer collectively to all of these pseudo-scientific, fantastic tales.

these crucial early narratives.⁴ For example, the role of the reader and both the benefits and dangers attached to the reading process—a theme which is fully explored in Calvino’s important hypernovel *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*⁵—is the subject of the short story “L’avventura di un lettore,” but is also present as a secondary motif in *Il visconte dimezzato* and *Il barone rampante*, and in many other works from this period. The blurring of the boundaries between literature and life, the writer’s overt intrusion into his/her own text, the links between the written and the visual worlds, the word as a sign and the whole field of semiotics are all ideas that Calvino develops in his later postmodern writing, but are already in evidence in a number of the stories included in this discussion. One need look no further than the connection made between the female skier and a parenthesis in “L’avventura di uno sciatore” for a small illustration of the way that Calvino links visual signs and the written word: “la sua figura appena disegnata come un’oscillante parentesi” (RR 2: 1180).⁶ Nonetheless, it is in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, the last tale in the fantastic trilogy, that Calvino really shows the direction in which his writing would develop, for this novel incorporates aspects of all the features mentioned above and the female pairing Suor Teodora/Bradamante provides an important medium for many of his innovative experiments.⁷

Another influential factor in the decision to concentrate on these particular volumes was that, within the pages of these collections, are found the only female sole protagonists in Calvino’s entire oeuvre. These are Isotta Barbarino, the unfortunate bather in “L’avventura di una bagnante,” and Stefania R., the venturesome wife of “L’avventura di una moglie,” and the

⁴ In her 1983 doctoral thesis “Love and Narrative Unity in Calvino,” Miriam Friedman observes: “In these stories [*Gli amori difficili*], the origins of several key concepts and themes which are enlarged upon in later works can be discovered *in nuce*” (31).

⁵ *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore* has a metanarrative structuring but “Calvino calls this a hypernovel” (Krysinski 197).

⁶ Literary quotations are taken from the three-volume Mondadori edition *Calvino Romanzi e Racconti* (RR).

⁷ This view finds support in Joseph Francese’s article “The Refashioning of Calvino’s Public Self-Image in the 1950s and 1960s.” He suggests that it was no accident that the collections *I racconti* (which includes many of the stories found in *Gli amori difficili* 1970) and *I nostri antenati* were published when they were and that “Calvino actively moved forward the re-fashioning of his public image [a subject canvassed in Chapter One] with the *ex post facto* editing of his entire career as a writer through two collections of previously published works [...]. Calvino proposed first *I racconti* [1958] and then *I nostri antenati* as guides for his exegesis of his work, past, present, and future, explicitly defining for his critics the trajectory his work had followed and tacitly indicating to his reader the direction in which he wished to be encouraged to proceed” (136).

dual character Suor Teodora/Bradamante in *Il cavaliere inesistente* provides a rare example of the female as co-protagonist.⁸ In addition, the three short novels included in *I nostri antenati* are among Calvino's longest pieces of writing and the female characters who appear in these fantastic tales are some of his most fully developed.

Certain constants have been identified in Calvino's representation of the feminine. Guido Bonsaver devotes the greater part of a chapter of his book *Il mondo scritto: Forme e ideologia nella narrativa di Italo Calvino* to a discussion of the topic and considers that most of Calvino's female characters can be fitted into one of two categories: "La donna 'isterica'" (hysterical woman) or "La donna-Gaia" (Earth Mother).⁹ Bonsaver concedes, however, that this categorisation is not all encompassing and concludes that all that can definitely be said about Calvino's female characters is that they play a secondary role in his stories and often function simply as a counterpoint to their male counterparts.¹⁰ In the final chapter of her book *Under the Radiant Sun and the Crescent Moon*, Angela Jeannet also considers the female figure in Calvino's writing. Using a broad brush and a longitudinal approach, she provides a comprehensive overview of the development of the female character across Calvino's oeuvre, highlighting in particular the pervasive use of the moon metaphor in association with the feminine in his narratives.

Although Bonsaver's and Jeannet's analyses are extremely useful at a general level, once the focus is narrowed as is necessary for a detailed examination of specific texts, it soon becomes evident that many of Calvino's female characters defy general categorisation systems. This is especially true of both collections under consideration here. By way of illustration: Viola, the principal female character in *Il barone rampante*, the second novel in the fantasy trilogy, is unquestionably Bonsaver's archetypal donna 'isterica' and the female skier in "L'avventura di uno sciatore" illustrates wonderfully the qualities of his 'donna-Gaia,' but, unfortunately, most of the female characters appearing alongside these two, either within the same story or grouped into the same collection, simply cannot be readily slotted into either of these

⁸ Elide Massolari is also co-protagonist with her husband, Arturo, in "L'avventura di due sposi." Outside of these collections, the female reader in the metanarrative *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* is arguably the only other female character in Calvino's oeuvre who attains true co-protagonist status.

⁹ In Ancient Greek religion, Gaia was the goddess or personification of Earth.

¹⁰ See Bonsaver Chapter 3.2 "L'ombra del femminile" (234–51).

categories. Similar comments can be applied to Jeannet's general groupings despite the strength of her observations in overall terms.

In recognition of the difficulties associated with categorising Calvino's female characters, I have opted instead to approach the two collections from three different methodological angles, each of which reflects a different issue raised by the Pygmalion scenario. Broadly speaking, my first approach directly links Calvino to Pygmalion. The focus in Chapter One is upon the way that Calvino crafts his female characters and uses the analogy between the creative process of writing and the physical creation involved in the plastic arts. The discussion also includes a close consideration of extra-textual factors that may have influenced Calvino's creative direction. In contrast, the discussion in Chapter Two remains principally within the text. Psychological issues raised by Pygmalion's act of creation are used to structure an examination of the way Calvino uses his female characters within his stories as vehicles through which to both emphasise and reflect the inadequacies of his male characters. The unifying feature of Chapter Three is the presence of a female protagonist, or co-protagonist in the case of Suor Teodora/Bradamante, and attention focuses on issues associated with Calvino's portrayal of the world from a feminine perspective—or in terms of the paradigm, from the point of view of Pygmalion's statue.

Although Ovid gave the Pygmalion myth the literary form that most rely on today, the myth certainly existed before him. The earlier Greek versions tend to tell of a Cypriot, sometimes a king, who fell in love with a statue of Aphrodite, the goddess of love—known as Venus by the Romans. In these versions, the statue is pre-existing and thus not made by Pygmalion, and although these earlier Pygmalions make love to their statue companions, their relationships remain at the level of agalmatophilia, or statue love, for the statues do not come to life.¹¹ However, as Ovid's version of the myth is almost universally assumed to sit at the base of the Pygmalion paradigm in modern times, agalmatophilia typically cedes its primacy to the issues associated with the act of creation, generally of an idealised woman, by a male 'artist.'

¹¹ Agalmatophilia is not only associated with Pygmalion's name. See Patricia Salzman-Mitchell's "A Whole Out of Pieces: Pygmalion's Ivory Statue in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" (293).

The analogy between Pygmalion's creative gesture and that of the author Calvino is fundamental to my approach in this thesis.¹²

According to Ovid's telling of the story, Pygmalion was a Cypriot sculptor who, in disgust at the wickedness and shameless behaviour of the Propoeteides, the women who surrounded him, "with marvellous artistry, [...] skilfully carved a snowy ivory statue [...] lovelier than any woman born" (231).¹³ He subsequently fell in love with his own flawless creation, adorned and embraced it and "called it his bedfellow." Pygmalion then prayed to Venus to give him as a wife "one like the ivory maiden" (232). The goddess obliged by animating his statue, and Pygmalion immediately married and had a child with her: his own perfect creation.

In its simplest terms, the Pygmalion myth tells of a man who was not satisfied with the real women who were available to him, but who also found himself unable to live contentedly without a female companion. His solution was to carve the woman he would like to have at his side, and fortunately for Pygmalion, whose story belongs to mythology, the goddess Venus answered his prayers and gave life to this ideal woman. According to Kathleen McConnell, the statue became commonly known as Galatea during the Renaissance ("Creating" 687), but Michelle E. Bloom and others suggest that the date was somewhat later (293).¹⁴ Although the name has never been accepted universally,¹⁵ for simplicity and in recognition of general practice, Pygmalion's statue is referred to as Galatea throughout this study. As J. Hillis Miller observes in the Proem to his *Versions of Pygmalion*, what this myth highlights is that "[f]or Pygmalion, the other is not really other. Pygmalion has himself made

¹² Relevant aspects of this topic are explored in Chapter One, but for a detailed account of the history and development of the Pygmalion myth, see Mario Materassi's "Artificial Women, Pygmalion Paradigm, and Faulkner's Gordon in *Mosquitoes*" and also Salzman-Mitchell. A modern novel that deals with the Pygmalion myth and agalmatophilia is Barry Unsworth's 1986 novel *Stone Virgin*.

¹³ I rely on Mary M. Innes's 1955 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for all quotations.

¹⁴ Bloom says that the name Galatea might have been assigned to the statue "as late as the eighteenth century, in Rousseau's 1770 short dramatic piece, *Pygmalion*" (293). However, according to Meyer Reinhold, Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe de Cordonnier, who died in 1746, was the first to use the name Galatea in a *roman* that contained a version of the myth; cf. discussion in Chapter Two. An unrelated Galatea, a sea-nymph, appears in book VIII of the *Metamorphoses*.

¹⁵ For example, following the lead of Alison Sharrock, Salzman-Mitchell refers to Ovid's statue as "Eburna" (299) in recognition of the ivory from which she is created. (Eburnus means made of, or decorated with, ivory in Latin.)

Galatea. She is the mirror image of his desire” (4). However, the Pygmalion story does not exist in isolation. Like all the tales in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, it forms part of a concatenating series that must be considered as a unit, and I elaborate further on these interlinking stories at various stages throughout this study. When viewed as components of a whole, the interconnected tales provide an opportunity to look more broadly at the real implications of Pygmalion’s actions, because they illustrate in graphic terms some of the messages that underlie, but may be hidden in, the basic Pygmalion episode. To quote again from J.H. Miller’s Proem, in the *Metamorphoses*, “Ovid’s stories show that you always get some form of what you want, but you get it in ways that reveal what is illicit or grotesque in what you want” (1). Or in Jane O’Sullivan’s words, “there is, it would seem, no such thing as a favour with no strings attached” (133), for although the sequence of events surrounding Pygmalion’s actions might appear to give him what he desires, subsequent generations of his family pay the price for his narcissistic longings.

J.H. Miller describes the Pygmalion myth as the literalising allegory of the trope of prosopopoeia, which is the trope that “ascribes a face, a name, or a voice to the absent, the inanimate, or the dead” (4). According to Ovid, Pygmalion, with the help of Venus, creates and then gives life to an inanimate object. The process of anthropomorphism is quite literal in this myth, but J.H. Miller claims that the acts of writing, reading and narrating can all be considered forms of prosopopoeia: “prosopopoeia, Pygmalion’s creative gesture, is the correct name for what author, narrator, and reader do” (49). They are all creative tasks that give life and meaning to the written word, and according to J.H. Miller, “even the most traditional rhetorical definition of prosopopoeia begins with language” (5). J.H. Miller’s linkage of the trope of prosopopoeia, the Pygmalion myth and the reading, writing and narrating processes highlights how broadly the parameters of the Pygmalion paradigm can be made to extend. It also illustrates why it is such a useful theoretical tool in this study, especially as J.H. Miller’s observations can be applied at both the intra- and extra-textual levels. At the intra-textual level, or when focusing specifically on the contents of the texts, the breadth of the parameter permits the wide-ranging discussion necessary to consider the way the female characters are represented, how they relate to their respective male counterparts and the textual functions they fulfil. It also provides the framework for analysis that centres on the role of the narrator in the representation process. But it is an equally useful tool for discussions that cross the textual boundaries—when Calvino is placed in the

Pygmalion role and where extra-textual factors concerning both the author and his reading public are raised.

Although the main focus of this study is directed towards the writing process, with specific emphasis on Calvino's role as the Pygmalionesque creator of female characters, the important interpretive role played by the reader must not be overlooked. M. Bloom writes that "[t]o some extent [...] literature renders readers no less than authors Pygmalion figures because, as Chambers suggests, 'c'est le lecteur qui est chargé de vivifier la création de l'auteur'" (304).¹⁶ As a female reader of Calvino's texts, I find this particularly significant, for as Lucia Re observes, "una lettrice di Calvino è sempre in qualche modo fuori posto, o meglio 'spiazzata' dal lettore ideale di Calvino, il quale [...] è sempre implicitamente di sesso maschile" ("Calvino e il cinema" 96).¹⁷ What Re is acknowledging with this remark is that Calvino's writing displays a noticeably androcentric perspective, and one of the principal objectives of this study is to explore the various ways this androcentrism manifests in his representation of the feminine. Judith Fetterley used the word "*immascultation*"¹⁸ to refer to the process whereby "women are taught to think as men, to identify with the male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male value system" (xx). In conducting my analysis, I actively resist being "immasculated by the text" (Schweickart 33), adopting feminist interpretative techniques and drawing freely from views expressed by feminist critics, particularly when considering Calvino's strong use of stereotypes and the apparent inconsistencies and questions of point of view that arise in his representation of female characters. However, although I consciously insert myself as a feminist reader into the "gaps and silences" (Pearce 45) in the text, I acknowledge that "a literary work cannot be understood apart from the social, historical, and cultural context within which it was written" (Schweickart 30–31). In Chapter One, I explore in some detail the context, both personal and historical, in which Calvino was writing with the aim of better understanding and explaining his representation of the feminine.

¹⁶ Bloom translates Chamber's French: "it is the reader who is responsible for animating the author's creation" and gives the reference Chambers, Ross. "L'Ange et l'automate: variations sur le mythe de l'Actrice de Nerval à Proust." *Archives des Lettres Modernes* 9 128 (1971): (3–80) but specifically for this quotation (44–45).

¹⁷ Re partially excepts the female reader in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* from this observation.

¹⁸ Unless indicated otherwise, all italics are as per the original text quoted. Italics are not used for the Italian language; however, from time to time they are used for other languages, for example, German terms used by Freud. Where other critics use italics for foreign languages, I leave them as per the original text.

Narration is the third element of the creative process that J.H. Miller includes in the trope of prosopopoeia, and it is an important component of this study. Although today this reasoning might be thought dated, Calvino's writing on the subject of narration is in keeping with opinions expressed in the early 1960s by theorists such as Wayne C. Booth and Charles Glicksberg. According to Booth, the word "[n]arrator" is usually taken to mean the 'I' of a work, but the 'I' is seldom if ever identical with the implied image of the artist." The narrating 'I' is a form of "second self" (73), or to use Glicksberg's term, "a mask." He, she or it—for a narrator need not be human—operates as a distancing device in the written material, allowing the author to deliver the story from a perspective that his or her own persona might not reasonably permit. The narrating voice may be assigned to a character within the story, not necessarily an active participant, or it might remain more closely aligned with the author, an observing eye. But as Glicksberg observes, "[w]hatever mask the writer may assume, in his writings he is presenting in effect a symbolic version of himself in different disguises, though this version represents a 'second self' rather than a strictly autobiographical self" (xiv). Glicksberg's observations are reflected in Calvino's own remark in his 1978 essay "I livelli della realtà in letteratura": "È sempre solo una proiezione di se stesso che l'autore mette in gioco nella scrittura, e può essere la proiezione d'una vera parte di se stesso come la proiezione d'un io fittizio, d'una maschera" (S 1: 390).¹⁹ And although this statement appeared towards the end of Calvino's career, it seems that he never fundamentally changed his stance throughout his life, even if the issues and the way he explored them did evolve over time. In an article that appeared in the Communist daily *L'Unità*, in January 1947 (some 30 years previously), Calvino had already admitted that through his writing he studied himself:

in fondo non studio che me stesso, non cerco che di esprimere me stesso, non cerco di rappresentare che dei simboli di me stesso nei personaggi e nelle immagini e nella lingua e nella tecnica narrativa [...] non sono in fin dei conti che uno dei vecchi scrittori individualisti che però s'esteriorizza in «simboli» d'interesse attuale e collettivo. (S 1: 1478)

¹⁹ Most quotations are taken from the two-volume Mondadori edition *Calvino Saggi* (S). Usually, but not always, the name of the particular essay or article will also appear, either in the body of the text or in a footnote.

Through these statements, Calvino acknowledges a direct personal involvement with his texts and suggests that he uses his characters as symbols through which to address social issues. Although his later statement (1978) also makes it clear that the views expressed by his various narrating voices could be as much a projection of a fictitious as of a real self,²⁰ Calvino's statements raise a number of issues, including the extent to which he always distinguishes between these two selves and the degree to which his readers should accept without question his pronouncements about the messages delivered in his stories. In Chapter One, I specifically address this concern, demonstrating why Calvino's statements should be taken very cautiously. His pronouncement that he is projecting himself when he writes becomes particularly significant in those rare instances in which his stories have female protagonists and forms an integral part of the discussion in Chapter Three.

In keeping with their realist roots, the thirteen stories in *Gli amori difficili* are all delivered in the third person by an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator. In contrast, the fantastic tales all have identified intradiegetic narrators, and Calvino has deliberately created and crafted all three of them so that he can plausibly manipulate the way that the events of the stories are related. By presenting all characters to the reader through the eyes of a narrator, or a "second self," who is also a character in the story, Calvino further distances himself from the storytelling function and hands each of them an important role in the creative process.

The narrator of the first of the fantastic tales, *Il visconte dimezzato*, is the young, orphaned and estranged nephew of Medardo, the protagonist. He is a naive narrator, which gives the author licence to present the story with "childlike candour" without the "restrictive influences of convention and ambition" (Woodhouse 60–61). His youth and his relatively unsupervised

²⁰ While commenting in his book *Italo Calvino, le linee e i margini* upon Calvino's non-fictional autobiographical essay collection "Una pietra sopra," which was not published until 1980 but contains essays written from 1955, Mario Barenghi writes: "Una pietra sopra' può bensì porsi come una sorta di autobiografia intellettuale: ma solo dopo aver appurato in sede teorica che il rapporto scrittore/opera è elastico, parziale, non necessitante, mediato com'è dalla figura 'costruita' del personaggio-autore" (129). He goes on to add that the projection in the role of author in autobiographical writing of a self that is clearly somewhat fictionalised and functional in a generic sense leads to a result not dissimilar to a truly fictionalised representation of the self: "Le maschere, infine, servono tanto a nascondersi, quanto a rivelarsi. E una volta stabilito che quella dell'autore è comunque una maschera, l'allestimento di una raccolta di saggi obbedirà a principi costruttivi non dissimili da quelli d'una silloge di racconti" (130).

lifestyle also give the young narrator access to places from which an adult narrator might be barred, which permits Calvino to use him “as a dark-comedy tool” (Markey 70). His ability to enter the feminine realm is particularly privileged, for he appears to enjoy relatively unfettered access to both Pamela, the country lass, and the old nurse, Sebastiana.

Biagio, the narrator of *Il barone rampante*, is the younger brother of Cosimo, the protagonist, and he is an old man when he gives his account of his brother’s colourful life. This means that the story takes the form of a retrospective reflection, displaying all the uncertainties and nostalgia associated with that form of narration. In his Nota to the 1960 edition of the trilogy,²¹ Calvino explains that he decided to create the figure of a sympathetic, but antithetical, younger brother to act as narrator to counter his own tendency to identify himself too much with Cosimo:

Per *Il barone rampante* avevo il problema di correggere la mia spinta troppo forte a identificarmi col protagonista, e qui misi in opera il ben noto dispositivo Serenus Zeitblom;²² cioè fin dalle prime battute mandai avanti come ‘io’ un personaggio di carattere antitetico a Cosimo, un fratello posato e pieno di buon senso. (RR 1: 1218)

Notwithstanding Calvino’s stated intentions, a degree of caution needs to be exercised before accepting without question that Biagio really does function as a distancing device within the text. Biagio quite clearly views Cosimo and his chosen way of life through rose-tinted glasses. Indeed, in *Italo Calvino and the Compass of Literature*, Eugenio Bolongaro observes that there are times in the text when “the voices of the narrator, the protagonist, and the author vibrate with a shared pathos” (88). This remark clearly suggests that Calvino’s distancing device does not always operate as the author might have intended; however, Constance Markey rightly points out that it would be a mistake to think that Biagio’s goodwill towards Cosimo necessarily “mirrors the author’s mind” (75).²³ But perhaps most

²¹ Generally, the Nota to the 1960 edition is simply referred to as Nota, although from time to time it appears as Nota 1960 to distinguish it from Calvino’s other Notas.

²² Serenus Zeitblom is the narrator of the life of the dark and troubled Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*.

²³ Although Markey was not specifically referring to the way that Biagio presents characters when she made this statement, the sentiment can be equally applied to that question. Markey was drawing attention to the fact that it

relevant in this context is the impact of Biagio's obvious admiration for his brother upon the way Calvino presents the novel's other characters to the reader. All characters pass through Biagio's biased filter and they do not all emerge favourably from the process. In Chapters One and Two, aspects of the representation of female characters appearing in this narrative are examined at length. Although Markey's comment suggests that she accepts for the most part Calvino's statement that Biagio's presence distances Calvino from identifying, and being identified, too much with the thoughts and actions of Cosimo, Bolongaro's reminds us that placing a fictitious pen into the hands of a distancing narrator does not alter the reality that, ultimately, the creative force remains with the author; "he is present behind all his imaginary beings" (Glicksberg xiv). At an intra-textual level, the narrator might act in a Pygmalionesque capacity, but in the broader context, the creative role belongs to Calvino, and much of the discussion of the representation of female characters appearing in this novel looks directly to Calvino's authorial input.

The narrator of *Il cavaliere inesistente* has already been the subject of much critical attention and she, or they, for the pairing Suor Teodora/Bradamante is eventually revealed as a single entity, receives significant attention in Chapter Three. *Il cavaliere inesistente* is a metadiegetic narrative, and because the narrative unfolds at two distinct levels, it raises a number of complex issues relating to both the representation of characters and point of view. The primary narrative is delivered in the first person by Suor Teodora, who recounts her life in the convent and the act of writing the secondary narrative. This secondary narrative initially appears to be the primary narrative and involves a cast of characters, including Suor Teodora herself but with another identity, that of the Amazon Bradamante. The diegesis is complicated, for it is not until the end of the novel that it becomes apparent that this is in fact an autodiegetic narrative and that Suor Teodora and Bradamante are one and the same character. From the broadest perspective, it is Calvino who is the Pygmalion figure, and questions arise as to why he chose a female character to act as an intradiegetic narrator and whose point of view prevails. The questions of narrative point of view and perspective are also important when adopting the narrower intra-textual approach, for although the author of the secondary narrative is ostensibly female, the point of view is that of an omniscient narrator, who adopts various different perspectives throughout the story.

is "Biagio who is the typical eighteenth-century man imbued with the perspective of the Enlightenment, not Calvino" (74).

Suor Teodora is far more obviously a Pygmalion-like creator than are the intradiegetic narrators of the earlier fantasy novels. Her creative role is both openly acknowledged and emphasised, for the task of writing is the principal theme of the primary narrative. An intrusive narrator is not an unusual literary device, nor is the Pirandellian concept of the play-within-a-play (in this case a story-within-a-story) unique. But in whatever mode a story is presented, Frederick Holmes's observation (made with specific reference to John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) remains true: "the novelist can never actually cease to manipulate his characters; he can only create the illusion of having done so" (189). In fact, Fowles expresses a similar opinion himself within the novel, but in a manner that emphasises the godlike creative role of the author: "[t]he novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even the most aleatory avant-garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely)" (99). This is the basic premise upon which the discussion in Chapter One is based, in which Calvino is viewed as a compressed Pygmalion-Venus (creating and life-giving) figure. It is also an understanding fundamental to the analysis undertaken in Chapter Three, in which the possibility of authorial transvestism is a significant consideration in the discussion surrounding Calvino's representation of a feminine perspective.

The Pygmalion myth has been used as a theoretical framework for studying character formation on numerous occasions and in several different ways. Martin S. Day divides myths into four basic types: 'archaic,' 'intermediate,' 'derivative' and 'ideological.'²⁴ The 'archaic myth' "operates only in the society to which it is indigenous" (Joshua xi), but an 'intermediate myth' such as Ovid's Pygmalion, which is only one of many such myths in the *Metamorphoses*, is the work of a "highly conscious artist, dominated by aesthetic impulses and intent upon neat, attractive telling of a good story" (Day 5). Like the original myth, renarrations of Pygmalion's story commonly involve the creation of a single character, or a reasonably homogeneous group of characters, and characters within the work itself can be readily labelled the 'creator' and/or the 'created.' There are numerous works in which strong plot connections to the basic Pygmalion story are in evidence. This is not really surprising in light of M. Bloom's observation that much of the literature of the nineteenth century was afflicted by the "Pygmalion Complex" (291); a time frame Vicki R. Kennell extends when

²⁴ See Day (3–9) for a fuller discussion of these categories.

she states that “the tale of Pygmalion, with some re-visioning, has permeated much of the twentieth-century narrative scene” (73).

Although so much interest over such a prolonged period has resulted in an extension of the concept of creation far beyond the boundaries of the original myth, there remain many situations in which the basic Pygmalion storyline is clearly recognisable in the plot of a novel, drama or film. Among the most obvious examples are George Bernard Shaw’s 1912 play *Pygmalion* and the more modern cinematic adaptations of the same idea found in the films *My Fair Lady* (Cukor 1964), *Educating Rita* (Gilbert 1983) and, with a few minor differences, *Pretty Woman* (Marshall 1990). A major departure from the original in these variations of the myth is that there is no suggestion of supernatural agency. This means that “the distinction between the creator-god and creator-artist” or the “Pygmalion-Venus duo” (Kennell 73) is collapsed into a single male ‘creator’: Professor Higgins in *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady*, Dr Frank Bryant in *Educating Rita* and Edward Lewis in *Pretty Woman*.²⁵ However, although the supernatural element is no longer present, “man’s arrogant assumption of the god-like prerogative of creation and control” (O’Sullivan 137) is still very much in evidence. In these variations, the creation process, or the “project of figuratively sculpting the feminine” (136), replaces “physical creation [with] linguistic transformation” (Kennell 73), although in *Pretty Woman* the emphasis remains far more fully on creating the physically ideal woman. As Kennell explains with specific reference to Professor Higgins’s transformation of Eliza Dolittle, “Shaw’s revisions of Ovid come down to a shift from ontology (Galatea’s physical creation) to epistemology (a consideration of how Eliza’s identity was formed)” (74). This shifts the focus from creating human life to creating a new social identity: from flower seller to ‘lady’ in Eliza’s case; from strongly Liverpoolian accented hairdresser to refined and educated woman in the case of Rita; and for *Pretty Woman*’s Vivian, from common hooker to socialite.

The Pygmalion role is usually the prerogative of men, but it is not exclusively so. Colette’s 1920 novel *Chéri* provides an excellent example of the reversal of the stereotypical situation. In this novel, the older courtesan Léa grooms her young companion Chéri, and it is he who displays all the behaviours generally associated with frivolous, pampered and dependent

²⁵ An Italian variant on this theme can be found in the relationship between Gianni and Elide in the well-regarded 1974 film *C’eravamo tanto amati*, directed by Ettore Scola.

femininity. Another example is provided by Muriel Spark's 1961 novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Although the basic Pygmalion plot is not as immediately obvious here, the underlying theme is Pygmalionesque creation and the construction of social identity is a central tenet. This novel, which has an all-female cast, provides a prime example of a woman who creates her own identity out of "the composite identities she creates for her girls" (Kennell 79). Nonetheless, in varying ways, what all these stories demonstrate is that creation can be an unpredictable process. Unlike the mythical Galatea, Eliza, Rita and Miss Brodie's 'set,' all possess minds of their own and prove to be ultimately uncontrollable by their creators: Vivian constantly points out that money is buying her transformation and that it is a business arrangement for her; Chéri proves himself unable to live independently of Léa when she wishes to release him. The scenario in which the Pygmalion-Galatea roles are reversed has particular relevance to the narration of *Il cavaliere inesistente*. When the pen is in the hands of Suor Teodora, she takes on the Pygmalion function; yet she ultimately remains a Galatea figure, for as a fictive author, she remains Calvino's creation.

The examples above do not involve any form of animation or artificial life; the transformations revolve around forming, or changing, a social identity. But the Pygmalion myth itself tells of the bringing to life of an inanimate object. In this respect, the myth differs from most of the tales in the *Metamorphoses* in which the metamorphoses "go from human to inhuman, life to death, animate to inanimate" (J.H. Miller 3). There are many examples in literature, film and popular culture of situations in which inanimate objects are created and 'brought to life' in the loosest understanding of the term, and almost inevitably this form of creation, which obviously usurps divine power, is associated with a strong sense of danger and the Freudian notion of the uncanny.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) provides one of the earlier and more enduring portrayals of the dangers associated with man's attempt to use science to usurp the creative role of God. The grotesque and mysterious elements of the story connect it to the Gothic tradition; today it is probably most commonly associated with the horror genre, although it is also often thought to be an early example of science fiction. Exactly how the monster is created is left vague in the novel, but the well-known 1931 film adaptation of the

story introduced the idea that it was created from body parts robbed from the graveyard.²⁶ Relying on McConnell's remark that it is a "popularly held premise that created—as opposed to procreated—humans are uncanny, and therefore Gothic" ("Dark" 178), Frankenstein's monster is clearly an uncanny creation. This definition of the uncanny can be traced to comments made by Freud, who observes in his 1919 essay "The 'Uncanny'" that²⁷

often [his male patients] declare that there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *Unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning. ("Uncanny" 245)

According to McConnell, Freud considered that there was a belief at the time he was writing "that even natural childbirth is uncanny," and so it follows "that someone who springs from an 'unnatural' process will be doubly estranged" ("Dark" 178).

In narrow psychoanalytical terms, Freud contends that "the uncanny proceeds from something familiar that has been repressed" ("Uncanny" 247); specifically, he is referring to the repression of the fear of castration. However, he concedes that "*there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life*" (249). Freud distinguishes "between works of fiction whose conventions admit animistic beliefs and those which claim to situate themselves in the realm of everyday reality" (Kofman, *Freud* 126). In his exploration of the uncanny in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816), Freud assigned the concept of uncanniness to the Sandman and to the fear of castration he invoked, symbolised by the threat he posed of stealing one's eyes. According to Freud, the prime source of this uncanniness lay in determining whether the threat was real or imaginary. In contrast, Freud considered of lesser importance the question of whether Olympia, the clockwork doll, was animate or inanimate, and did not dwell upon issues of uncanniness that might reasonably be associated with her character. Because fairytales, and by logical extension the fantastic, "admit animistic beliefs," they would not produce uncanny feelings according to Freud's reasoning. Particularly relevant in this context is his remark that "we

²⁶ The 1931 Universal Pictures film *Frankenstein* was directed by James Whale. Although loosely based on Mary Shelley's novel, it is more closely linked to Peggy Webling's 1927 eponymous play.

²⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Freud's work come from Strachey's *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 volumes).

should hardly call it uncanny when Pygmalion's beautiful statue comes to life" ("Uncanny" 246). One of many disagreements Sarah Kofman has with Freud's interpretation of the uncanny in *Der Sandmann* is the fact that it is not always possible to classify works of fiction neatly by literary genre. Nor does she consider that the presence or absence of uncanniness is as black and white as Freud would wish. The fact that Olympia is fairly obviously a clockwork doll does not of itself diminish or exclude the possibility of associating the concept of uncanniness with her character.

Despite Freud's pronouncement, uncanny is a word that is often associated with the Pygmalionesque space, and it is also a term that fits easily with much of Calvino's narrative output. Even a cursory analysis of Calvino's writing shows the extent to which it resists ready classification, and as Calvino himself pointed out, "all'interno dell'universo della parola scritta si possono individuare molti livelli di realtà" (S 1: 384). Although Freud's reasoning would account for the uncanniness found in many of the stories in *Gli amori difficili*, it would presumably negate, or at least diminish, its presence in the fantastic trilogy. Nevertheless, I suggest that despite their fantastic status, the numerous levels of reality operating in the trilogy add to, rather than detract from, the aura of uncanniness present in all three texts. In a technical sense, only Medardo from *Il visconte dimezzato*, who exists as two fully functioning halves, and Agilulfo, the perfect but non-existent knight from *Il cavaliere inesistente*, are truly fantastical creations. Other characters, including Cosimo from *Il barone rampante*, who spends his life in the trees, are fanciful, weird or eccentric rather than impossible. But whether they are fantastic or not, there are many characters in the trilogy that give rise to feelings of uncanniness, and Battista, the highly improbable, but not fantastical, sister of Cosimo and Biagio, provides an obvious example. Many elements of both the familiar and the repressed are associated with her unusual persona. Not only does her character literalise the castration complex but it also displays strong associations with both Eros and the death instinct—features that Freud also connects to the concept of *Unheimlich* (uncanny).

Frankenstein and *Der Sandmann* are foundational works; however, since their publication, there has been an ever-increasing variety of films and literature that revolve around artificial beings. In her recent article "Virtual Metamorphoses: Cosmetic and Cybernetic Revisions of Pygmalion's 'Living Doll,'" O'Sullivan explores the Pygmalion theme in film, emphasising the inability in that medium "to separate vision from interpretation" and the "dire consequences of the fetishizing of the ocular" (134). Her article covers a wide variety of

films, but the last section is devoted to science fiction and the creation of androids—particularly female androids, or “gynoids” (Stratton 208).²⁸ The films she lists include a number of early silent films; examples of more recent films she discusses are the Silicone Valley inspired *The Stepford Wives* (Forbes 1975; Oz 2004)²⁹ and *Blade Runner* (Ridley 1982) with its futuristic gynoids.³⁰

The fetishism inherent in Pygmalion’s decision to carve his ideal woman is central to O’Sullivan’s article and is a theme pursued in Chapter Two of this study, which approaches Pygmalion’s actions from a more psychoanalytical perspective. In Freudian terms, fetishism is another aspect of the male castration complex and it “involves displacing the sight of woman’s imaginary castration onto a variety of reassuring but often surprising objects” (Mulvey, *Visual and Other* 10). In *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Laura Mulvey states that women’s “significance lies first and foremost in their lack of a penis and their star turn is to symbolise the castration which men fear” (11). For the purposes of her article, O’Sullivan defines fetishism as “a process by which a concurrently feared and desired object—in this case, a woman—is refashioned to conform to idealised notions of femininity,” the aim being to “tame her” and to render her “compliant and familiar” (134). Her definition of fetishism fits well with Pygmalion’s behaviour. As Ovid tells the story, in deliberate rejection of “the loathsome Propoetides [...] with marvellous artistry” Pygmalion fashioned for himself a statue of his ideal woman and he made it “lovelier than any woman born” (231).

In contrast to the fetishism that both O’Sullivan and Ovid describe, which is evidenced in the creation of a physical female object, whether it be a statue or a gynoid, the fetishism demonstrated in Calvino’s stories is typically only tangentially directed towards a female character. Having said this, the fetishistic behaviour displayed by Agilulfo during his evening spent in the company of the ‘seductress’ Priscilla closely resembles the fetishistic manner in which Pygmalion adorned his beloved statue. The ironic twist is that in *Il cavaliere inesistente* the fetishistic activity is carried out by Agilulfo, but his non-existent state in fact

²⁸ In *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption*, Stratton states that his definition of the term gynoid includes “any manufactured version of a woman, including dolls and mannequins” (208).

²⁹ The film versions of the *The Stepford Wives* are based on Ira Levin’s eponymous book, which was published in 1972.

³⁰ See Sullivan (149–54) for a full discussion of these films.

aligns him, at least metaphorically, with Pygmalion's statue. Although present in *I nostri antenati*, fetishistic behaviour is a particularly strong feature of a number of the stories in *Gli amori difficili*. However, although it revolves around a female character, the fetishistic activity in these tales does not generally involve moulding her overtly, even in the decorative sense, in the way that Pygmalion fetishises his statue. For example, Amedeo Oliva, the protagonist of "L'avventura di un lettore," displays a fetishistic attachment to books, preferring to experience life and love vicariously rather than through active participation. The slavish attention that Federico V. devotes to his routine as he journeys by train to see his lover in "L'avventura di un viaggiatore" also exhibits all the signs of a fetish, and the reader can justifiably conclude that the ritual attached to the journey has more significance for Federico than the actual arrival. Antonino, the obsessive photographer in "L'avventura di un fotografo," is as close to a Pygmalion figure as one finds in Calvino's stories. But although he does initially physically adorn his model/lover Bice, he is not primarily interested in physically moulding her. His fetish is witnessed instead in his desire to capture her essence in creating the perfect photograph.

The statue Pygmalion carved for his own enjoyment was no ordinary piece of art: she was superior to any living woman; indeed, so lovely that he "fell in love with his own creation" (Ovid 231). Pygmalion makes something that not even God was capable of producing, so that, in effect, "what Pygmalion does is a usurpation of divine power" (J.H. Miller 9). Once it is created, Pygmalion prefers his statue to any naturally created woman, treating it as if it were alive, running his hands over it and "feeling it to see whether it was flesh or ivory." He brings it presents "that girls enjoy" (Ovid 231), dresses it "in woman's robes" and even places it on a couch and calls it "his bedfellow" (232). Not only is Pygmalion's behaviour fetishistic but his creative actions are also extremely narcissistic. His statue is a direct reflection of his own desire—and what he desires is his own conception of beauty and perfection delivered in a form that remains under his control.

Like the Pygmalion myth, the origins of the Narcissus myth belong in antiquity, but according to Louise Vinge, Ovid's rendition, which appears in the third book of the *Metamorphoses*, provides the most extensive account of the story in classical literature.³¹

³¹ Louise Vinge's book *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century* (first published in 1967 in Swedish) provides a detailed analysis of the Narcissus theme and its associated motifs with

Although they appear in completely different sections of the *Metamorphoses*, the Narcissus and Pygmalion stories share a number of motifs, which makes an awareness of the Narcissus episode a useful tool when discussing Pygmalion's story and its relationship to the notion of author as creator. At the same time, the complicated structure of the *Metamorphoses*, with its interlinking inner motifs, means that the Narcissus myth, like Pygmalion's story, cannot be considered in isolation.

Of particular relevance to this study is the fate of the nymph Echo, who appears at both the beginning and the end of the Narcissus episode, and whose tale, to use Vinge's terminology, illustrates the "*motif of reflection* in its auditory form" (11). In Ovid's account, Echo is deprived of the ability to communicate freely by the goddess Juno in retaliation for Echo's ploy of detaining her with long discussions and thereby allowing the nymphs "lying with her Jupiter on the mountainside" time to flee. Although Echo remained talkative once Juno had exacted her revenge, "[a]ll she could do was to repeat the last words of the many phrases that she heard" (83). When Echo sees and falls in love with Narcissus, she cannot initiate conversation and tell him of her love. She can only wait until he speaks and then repeat his last words.

Echo's story reflects in many ways the position of the female characters in Calvino's stories. Their powers of speech are obviously not limited to repetition, but the clear presence of a masculine narrating voice means that often they do not appear to speak as independently functioning entities. Although this comment applies to all female characters, it is a particularly important consideration in Chapter Three when the representations of the female protagonists in "L'avventura di una bagnante" and "L'avventura di una moglie," and Suor Teodora of *Il cavaliere inesistente* are examined. Phrasing this idea within the bounds of the Pygmalion paradigm, the question posed in Chapter Three is 'when Galatea speaks, what does she say?' Couched in terms of the Narcissus-Echo relationship, the question concerns the extent to which the views expressed by these significant female characters (and indeed all female characters) merely reflect, or echo, a masculine point of view. Returning to Calvino's statement that in his work "in fondo non studio che me stesso," one could argue that to some

particular emphasis on the way that "the figure of Narcissus has been used throughout the ages" (xiv). Although Ovid's version of the Narcissus theme was not the only classical version to inspire later authors, it was certainly the most influential, and it is the only version relied upon in this study.

extent the male protagonists may be narcissistic reflections of the male author and that, as a corollary, the female characters positioned in secondary roles merely echo in a supporting capacity the viewpoint of either the male characters or the author. The position of the three female protagonists is different, but in Chapter Three I argue that, despite their protagonist status, ultimately they all function in much the same way as the secondary female characters. In other words, they display little diegetic freedom and continue to merely echo Calvino's male-orientated world view.

Vinge writes that it is "generally considered that Ovid was the first to combine the Echo and Narcissus themes" (11–12), and that the connection appears logical because the motif of reflection connects the two episodes. Whereas Echo's story represents auditory reflection, the motif presents in the form of visual reflection in the Narcissus episode. Not only did Narcissus mock Echo; he spurned the advances of all other nymphs and male admirers. Finally, one of the scorned youths prayed to heaven: "May he himself fall in love with another, as we have done with him! May he too be unable to gain his loved one!" (85). Hearing his prayer, Nemesis, the goddess of retribution and the punisher of excessive hubris, intervened. Stooping to slake his thirst in a still pool of water, Narcissus "was enchanted by the beautiful reflection that he saw" and "fell in love with an insubstantial hope, mistaking a mere shadow for a real body." Narcissus is spellbound by his own image: "Unwittingly, he desired himself, and was himself the object of his own approval, at once seeking and sought" (85). He is described as remaining motionless "like a statue carved from Parian marble," which provides an obvious connection between his "beautiful reflection" and Pygmalion's perfect ivory statue. Yet it also adds support to the discussion in Chapter One, in which I adopt Patricia Salzman-Mitchell's view that Ovid's choice of ivory, rather than marble, for Galatea's construction was a deliberate decision. Just as Pygmalion kissed his lifeless statue, Narcissus tried in vain to kiss his own reflection; neither the statue nor the reflection could respond. However, the two tales diverge at this point, for, as we know, Venus gifted Pygmalion his desire in the form of an animated Galatea. Narcissus, on the other hand, at least in Ovid's version of the tale, finally realises that he has fallen in love with his own reflection and dies from grief at the hopelessness of his situation.

Calvino's male protagonists do not fall in love with their own reflections and die, but they are almost all surrounded by what Robert Rushing describes as a "narcissistic shell" (46). Like Narcissus, they are so bound up with their own concerns that they, generally quite

inadvertently, end up by losing, or never attaining, the woman they desire. In fact, Rushing notes that one of the recurring patterns in Calvino's later works is "the loss of woman as a kind of foundational moment, a marker of the subject's entry into history" (45). The word subject here means male subject and history refers to the Lacanian idea of the Symbolic rather than the world of the Imaginary. Although Rushing's article concentrates upon Calvino's *Cosmicomiche* stories, the motif of 'loss of woman,' or 'non-attainment of desire/woman,' is also a significant theme in *Gli amori difficili*.

Narcissus may have fallen in love with his own image, but Pygmalion fell in love with his own creation. The narcissism involved in Pygmalion's attachment to his statue is undeniable; however, the concept of a creator falling in love with his/her creation also raises the issue of Oedipal incest. J.H. Miller sums up Pygmalion's position very concisely: "Pygmalion is Galatea's fathering maker as well as her husband. To sleep with her is to sleep with his own daughter" (10–11). He continues by pointing out that Pygmalion avoided "the otherness of other persons," shunning relationships with other humans; "[b]ut a relation in which there is no otherness, in which the same mates with the same, is, precisely, incest" (11). Just as narcissism can be associated with the authorial process, Oedipal questions can also be raised in this context. In simple terms, if the author is viewed as the fathering/mothering maker of the characters in a narrative, then they are all his/her metaphorical children. Despite the inherent truth in this observation, my primary focus is upon situations in which the Oedipal scenario is invoked at either the thematic or the metaphoric level within the text. There are a number of instances where this occurs in both *Gli amori difficili* and *I nostri antenati*, and in Chapter Two I examine two of the most obvious examples, which are the relationship between Sofronia and Torrismondo in *Il cavaliere inesistente* and the encounter on the train between the young soldier and the nameless widow in "L'avventura di un soldato."

In Greek mythology, Oedipus was the King of Thebes, who killed his father and married his mother in fulfilment of a prophecy, and thereby brought ruin to both his family and his city. Much of what is known of the Oedipus legend comes from the plays written in the fifth century BC by the Greek tragedian Sophocles. In Sophocles' play *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus performs both actions unwittingly, for he is not aware of his true identity. The truth of his situation does not become clear until many years have passed and after he has fathered four children with his mother, Jocasta. Borrowing from the legend, Freud gave the name Oedipus complex to the psychological theory that posits the existence of largely subconscious desires

in children to compete with, even eliminate, the parent of the same sex and to possess the parent of the opposite sex. Or, to quote Kaja Silverman, “The Oedipal paradigm functions to generate an impossible desire to *be* the father in the male child, and to have the father in the female child” (“Kaspar” 79).

Whereas Narcissus represents an obsession with the self and a denial of reality, the Oedipus legend focuses upon responsibility and guilt. The incestuous relationship between Oedipus and his mother is an unwitting one, and *Oedipus the King* is a tragedy: Jocasta eventually commits suicide, and Oedipus blinds himself and goes into exile. In contrast, Pygmalion appears to suffer no adverse consequences as a result of his incestuous desire for his “snowy ivory statue,” although the same cannot be said for future generations of his family. As J.H. Miller remarks: “For Ovid the appropriate punishment always comes, though in this case it is deferred” (10). Nevertheless, it is worthy of note that Ovid’s female characters shoulder a disproportionate burden of this “appropriate punishment.”

A universal feature of all variations of the Pygmalion story from its archaic beginnings is the beauty of the love object. Ovid’s version is no exception: Pygmalion carves a statue of his feminine ideal and Galatea is said to possess preternatural beauty. In fact, the story suggests that Pygmalion falls in love with his statue quite simply because he finds it beautiful. But Pygmalion is not unique in this respect. From time immemorial, beauty appears to have been a fundamental feature of the ideal woman. Nevertheless, the word ‘ideal’ is impossible to define in objective terms. In *The Subject of Semiotics*, Silverman states that “[i]deal’ is a term which has meaning only within a system of values” (160), and that “ideal representations are always socially mediated” (161). Despite the indeterminate nature of the word ideal, underlying Ovid’s story there is a basic acceptance of the notion that the ideal female is both attainable and within the creative capacity of man—although he does draw short of granting Pygmalion the full life-giving creative powers of a god. To quote O’Sullivan, Pygmalion creates “an ideal substitute for a real woman” (136), and the fact that his statue is more beautiful than “any woman born” certainly suggests that Pygmalion possesses preternatural creative skills. But significantly, Pygmalion’s ideal substitute proves less than perfect. The beautiful statue remains no more than a tangible projection of Pygmalion’s mental image of ideal femininity and cannot respond to his kisses and embraces until gifted life through the intervention of the goddess Venus. Thus, it requires the combined efforts of Pygmalion and Venus to create the truly perfect woman.

Ovid is not alone in refraining from bestowing full godlike creative powers upon a mortal and in stopping short of suggesting that perfection is within the creative capacity of man. But what is intended by the concept of perfection is as elusive as the definition of the ideal. The following passage from Jeanette Winterson's 1985 novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* provides interesting illumination. Writing about the message delivered in a sermon on perfection at a church conference, she states:

Perfection, the man said was a thing to aspire to. It was the condition of Godhead, it was the condition of the man before the Fall. It could only be truly realized in the next world, but we had a sense of it, a maddening, impossible sense, which was both a blessing and a curse.

“Perfection,” he announced, “is flawlessness.” (58)

To underscore the problems associated with this declaration, Winterson continues her story with a tale, a fable of sorts, which tells of a prince who wanted as a wife someone who sounds very much like Pygmalion's Galatea: “I want a woman, without blemish inside or out, flawless in every respect” (59). Eventually, the prince's advisor found such a woman—“the most beautiful thing he had ever seen”—and on checking her credentials, the advisor was informed that “[s]he's perfect” (61). However, the woman does not accept this description of herself, demonstrating that perfection is not flawlessness but instead involves a balance of characteristics, and in a reversal of traditions she chooses death over marriage to the prince.

Although it might frequently be represented as a quality to aspire to, especially for a woman, it is fair to say that even in the world of fiction there is general recognition that human perfection is unattainable. As Kofman points out when commenting on Hoffmann's mechanical doll Olympia, “[p]erfection is [...] the sign that one is dealing with a machine which is mimicking life” (*Freud* 148). Calvino expresses the same sentiment in his portrayal of Agilulfo, the seemingly perfect but non-existent knight, and the films featuring artificial creations mentioned earlier are among many that deliver equally negative messages about man's attempts to better the creative powers of Nature. Nevertheless, however subjective notions of perfection and the ideal remain, when they are applied to the feminine form, beauty appears to be a fundamental component of both, and in Chapter One, I demonstrate

how Calvino makes it clear, even if only by indirect means, that his most desirable female characters are physically attractive.

Finally, although this study is constructed around the Pygmalion paradigm, both Ovid's version of the Pygmalion myth (indeed, the *Metamorphoses* as a whole) and Calvino's entire oeuvre lend themselves well to discussion within the umbrella of poststructural 'intertextuality.' The arrival of intertextual theory can be traced to the French *Tel Quel* school of the 1960s and 1970s (Gray 21), but the term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva and derives from her combination of the theoretical models of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the Russian philosopher, semiotician and literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin. Saussure's notion of the differential sign, which revealed the literary sign as a non-unitary, non-stable, relational unit, is at the base of many of the major theories of intertextuality (Allen 11), and Kristeva introduced the work of Bakhtin to the French-speaking world, mainly through her 1960s essays "The Bounded Text" (*Desire* 36–63) and "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (64–91). Bakhtin acknowledged the active roles of both the speaker and the listener in the speech act, recognising that "any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree." No speaker is "the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe" (*Speech* 69), for every utterance presupposes the existence of an earlier utterance; it "begins as the response to something else, and ends, prepared or otherwise, as something to be responded to" (Gray 24). In a similar fashion, the "text can only ever exist through, inside, and across other texts, and through its readers" (Gray 3). Calvino's deliberate and very overt use of intertextuality is explored in Chapter One. However, Bakhtin's recognition of the interpretive, or 'creative,' role of the reader (or listener) has added significance in that it provides theoretical support for J.H. Miller's inclusion of reading as one the creative processes encompassed by the trope of prosopopoeia. Equally relevant in this context is my earlier acknowledgement that, in my analysis of Calvino's writing, I adopt feminist interpretive techniques and actively resist becoming "immasculated by the text."

All three of the following chapters are readily accommodated within the theoretical parameters offered by the Pygmalion paradigm; however, a very different departure point is used to launch the discussion in each chapter and this is reflected in the chapter titles. The approach taken in the first chapter, "Calvino as Pygmalionesque Craftsman," relies on the analogy between Pygmalion, the mythical sculptor who crafted his ideal woman from ivory, and Italo Calvino, the author who created female characters with a pen. Under this approach,

Calvino is unequivocally acknowledged as the Pygmalion figure and the emphasis is placed upon the construction process. This crosses the boundary between extra-textual factors that concern the author and the writing process and the text itself. Recognising the fundamental importance of the artist in the creative process, the first section of this chapter remains primarily at the extra-textual level and focuses on environmental factors that may have influenced Calvino's attitudes and opinions. It also discusses the way in which Calvino, in Pygmalionesque fashion, consciously worked to create his own public image. In the second section, the focus moves from Calvino himself to concentrate instead on his artistic production. The discussion is principally structured around the conceptual similarity between building a female form from pieces of ivory and the process of piecing together a female character from fragments, which include myth, legend, literature, cinema and real-life experiences. However, it is also acknowledged that building a character, like constructing a text, relies on already existent discourse and, although the discussion draws from many sources, principal theoretical support is provided by ideas arising from Bakhtin's dialogism, Kristeva's notion of intertextuality and Roland Barthes's theoretical writing on textual analysis. Unlike Pygmalion, who only created a statue of his ideal woman, Calvino presents both positive and negative images of femininity in his narratives, which is also reflected in the discussion.

In contrast to Chapter One, the analysis in Chapter Two, "Pygmalion's Creative Gesture and the Calvinian Text," remains largely at the intra-textual level, even if it is recognised that Calvino can never be completely divorced from his text. Drawing heavily upon Freudian thinking,³² this chapter explores how the themes of narcissism, fetishism and the Oedipal scenario—all issues associated with Pygmalion's act of creation—are evidenced in the behaviour of characters within the texts. Generally it is male characters that display these Pygmalion tendencies; however, the central concern is the way these issues affect the representation of the female characters. The exception is Viola, whose character is discussed as a representation of the Freudian narcissistic woman, with attention paid to the ways she both fits and resists this classification. It is also recognised that Pygmalion's rejection of the

³² Although Freudian readings of Calvino are uncommon, Calvino himself invites such analysis. In his Introduction to the 1980 English edition of *Our Ancestors* (translated by Isabel Quigley) he writes: "So I agree to the books being read as existential or as structural works, as Marxist or neo-Kantian, Freudianly or Jungianly; but above all I am glad when I see that no single key will turn all their locks" (ix-x).

wicked Propepotides is a fundamental aspect of the story, for it provides the impetus for, and rationale behind, all subsequent events. After all, Pygmalion's decision to craft his statue is justified by his shunning of the wicked women who surrounded him. Since a prominent theme in Calvino's writing is the representation of the feminine as in some way threatening or dangerous to man, an exploration of the way this manifests itself within the text forms an important part of the earlier analysis in this chapter.

A more fluid approach to textual boundaries is required in Chapter Three, "Calvino Speaks for Galatea: Questions of Perspective," for the Pygmalion role remains in a state of flux and is shared between Calvino and his narrators. Although the common denominator in this chapter is the presence of a female protagonist, the very different nature of the stories involved requires its division into two sections. The two *Amori difficili* ("L'avventura di una bagnante" and "L'avventura di una moglie") are the subject of the first section; the second section focuses exclusively on *Il cavaliere inesistente*. Of primary interest with the two short stories is the nature of the problems faced by the female protagonists and the way they are said to deal with their difficulties. Attention is directed towards exposing the marked androcentricity evidenced in the delivery of a supposedly feminine perspective. In contrast, *Il cavaliere inesistente* is an early example of the postmodern metanarrative involving both a primary and a secondary narrative, and the breaching of textual boundaries and authorial presence in the text are features of the plot. Questions of narration, the fiction real-life boundary and where the Pygmalion role lies are all important components of the discussion. The situation is made more complicated by the placing of a fictional pen in the hands of a narrating nun, which also raises the question of authorial cross-dressing. However, notwithstanding the considerable differences between the *Amori difficili* stories and *Il cavaliere inesistente*, a fundamental feature of the analysis of all three texts is the degree to which the point of view ever becomes that of the central female character. I constantly question whether there is any sense that Galatea is voicing her own opinion or does it appear that Pygmalion is speaking for her?

CHAPTER ONE: CALVINO AS PYGMALIONESQUE CRAFTSMAN

Introduction

The fundamental theme around which the Pygmalion paradigm revolves is the creation by a man of a feminine ideal, and this chapter stems from the analogy between Pygmalion's physical construction of an ivory woman and Calvino's creation of female characters. Recalling the observation of J.H. Miller, Ovid's variation of the Pygmalion myth transforms it into the literalising allegory of the trope of prosopopoeia, which has its origins in the Greek word προσωποποιία and encompasses the concepts of *prósopon* (face, person) and *poiéin* (to make, to do). Prosopopoeia is synonymous with the more familiar term 'personification' when that word is used to refer to an abstract idea or quality represented as a person or a creature, for as J.H. Miller explains, "[p]rosopopoeia is the ascription to entities that are not really alive first of a *name*, then of a face, and finally [...] of a voice" (5). J.H. Miller notes that, for a written text, prosopopoeia can be used to describe the actions of author, narrator and reader; however, the focus of this section is directed primarily towards the creative role of the author.

The approach taken breaks down the real world/textual boundary and acknowledges Calvino's role in the production of his texts. Because it is Pygmalion who literalises the creative act, Calvino is compared to the sculptor, but the reality is that Pygmalion is himself the fictional creation of Ovid, and Ovid's is only one of many variations of the Pygmalion story. Ovid's source was most probably Philostephanus of Cyrene, who was writing in the Hellenistic period. Although most of his work has been lost, we know from the writings of other early Christian writers, Clement of Alexandria and Arnobius, that Philostephanus narrated the legend of Pygmalion in one of his works, *On Cyprus*. Jane M. Miller writes that "[i]n Philostephanus' version of the legend, Pygmalion falls in love with a statue of Venus but he is not himself a sculptor" (205). So agalmatophilia rather than the creative act lies at the heart of Philostephanus' interpretation of the Pygmalion legend.³³ Ovid changes the

³³ This discussion draws from ideas expressed by both Jane Miller (205–07) and Salzman-Mitchell (291–95).

dynamics of the legend quite significantly when he casts Pygmalion in the role of sculptor and has him fall in love, not with a pre-existing statue, but with his own creation. The creative act and falling in love with the beautiful statue are inextricably linked in Ovid's version, and it is this linkage that ultimately gives rise to the Pygmalion paradigm with all its associated issues.

According to Ovid, Pygmalion's creative impulse was spurred both by his need for female companionship and by his abhorrence of the women who surrounded him: the "loathsome Propoetides," who embodied all "the many faults which nature ha[d] implanted in the female sex." To meet his needs, Pygmalion "skilfully carved a snowy ivory statue" that "had all the appearance of a real girl." In contrast to Pygmalion, who sculpted a physical object using solid material, Calvino's generative activity produced female characters that take shape only in the imagination. This lack of three-dimensionality does not, however, render his effort any less an act of creation; nor does the absence of tangible mass mean that Calvino has plucked his characters from thin air. Although, at the start of his creative process, Calvino possessed nothing more substantial than a pen and a sheet of paper, his blank page was never really blank, for as Fabrizio Scrivano points out: "Non si produce dal niente, ma neppure nel niente" (84). A statement that reflects the earlier observation of Elio Vittorini, found in *Le due tensioni*, that works are not born "sotto i cavoli" but are instead "figli di una cultura e, quello che più conta, di una coscienza letteraria" (191).

This chapter concentrates upon two distinct but related aspects of the notion of author as creator, or of Calvino as a Pygmalion figure. Focus is initially directed towards factors directly related to the 'creation,' or make-up, of the author himself. Recognising what both Scrivano and Vittorini make explicit, that no author works in a vacuum but is himself/herself the product of a specific time and place, it explores some of the factors that might have influenced Calvino's attitudes, opinions and narrative technique, emphasising those factors relevant to his portrayal of the feminine in his writing. Apart from the fact that Pygmalion did not wish to associate himself with the Propoetides, who appear to have been his only choice of female companionship, Ovid's myth supplies no details about the social and cultural environment in which Pygmalion created his statue. In contrast to Pygmalion's situation, much more is known about Calvino's life; he did not create "nel niente," and also produced a great deal of self-reflective and autobiographical material. In fact, in his 1995 article "Autobiografia di una conchiglia," Domenico Scarpa describes Calvino as "uno degli scrittori

più autobiografici che la nostra letteratura abbia mai conosciuto” (305); and Scarpa was referring to the less openly acknowledged autobiographical references to be found in Calvino’s fictional output, rather than to his extensive and openly autobiographical non-fiction writing. However, I also discuss the dangers and disadvantages arising from having access to so much information about the author written by the author himself. With the assistance of views expressed by critics who have not simply taken Calvino at his word, I highlight reasons why the information and opinions Calvino supplies need to be treated as useful, but subjective, contributions—or as opinion rather than fact.

In the second section, attention moves from directly focusing on Calvino to concentrate instead upon the ‘physical’ creation of his female characters. Or, in terms of the myth, attention is directed towards the mechanics of crafting Galatea, the statue. Calvino remains very much in evidence all the same, for he is holding the metaphorical chisel. My discussion relies on ideas expressed by Salzman-Mitchell in her article “A Whole out of Pieces: Pygmalion’s Ivory Statue in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.” Salzman-Mitchell considers that “Ovid purposely made Pygmalion’s maiden of ivory and that he was not taking the material in a metaphorical sense” (303). As she explains, the very nature of the material means that Pygmalion could not “sculpt his statue out of only one piece of ivory,” but rather that he needed to “carve several pieces and then put them together” (294). In Salzman-Mitchell’s opinion, the fact that Ovid has Pygmalion create an ivory, rather than a marble, statue has been overlooked by many critics. Although she concedes that not all critics have ignored the necessarily segmented nature of Pygmalion’s ivory statue, pointing out that D. F. Bauer “cleverly observes how piecing different parts together to make an attractive ‘whole’ could well be a metaphor for the literary production of the *Metamorphoses* itself” (304).³⁴

Whatever Ovid’s intentions, the relevant detail for the purposes of this discussion is that Pygmalion crafted his statue from pieces; it was not a pre-existing form awaiting release inside a block of marble. The emphasis in the second section is placed on the analogy

³⁴ The choice of ivory might have further symbolic relevance. In her essay “Crosses and Boxes: Latin and Vernacular” in *Equally in God’s Image*, Julia Bolton Holloway points out that “[i]vory was used in Homeric texts with the knowledge that the word punned in Greek with the verb to deceive: *elephas/elephairomai*.” She goes on to note that later Gothic de luxe ivories associated ivory with mendacity, cupidity “the world of procreation [and] with women’s sexuality.”

between Pygmalion's crafting of his female statue from pieces of ivory, and Calvino's piecing together of his female characters using fragments garnered from many different sources. These include, but are not limited to, literature, mythology and fairytales, the cinema, and various life experiences. But, although the analogy between the creative acts of Pygmalion and Calvino are fundamental to this discussion, literary creations cannot be viewed simply as naked statues, or stand-alone pieces of art; Calvino's female characters do not exist devoid of a context.

The Man Behind the Pen

Any discussion of the influences and experiences that helped form Calvino's ideas about woman must start by recognising that there are two dimensions to Calvino's identity. There is Calvino as he constructed himself, and there is Calvino the man behind his public facade. Acknowledging the strength of Franco Ricci's observation that "[p]erhaps no other Italian author has exemplified the notion of self-creation as much as Calvino" ("Quest" 70), it is important to recognise that the figure Calvino presented to the world in his extensive autobiographical writing is as carefully crafted as the fictional characters in his stories.

Calvino was an essentially reserved and private man, but over the years he revealed considerable information about his life and opinions in various ways, including essays, interviews and publically accessible letters. At the same time, it is fair to say that information of a more personal nature is largely confined to reflections on his early years growing up in Liguria. Calvino reached adulthood in turbulent times, and his involvement with the Garibaldi partisans at the end of the Second World War particularly forced him to confront issues for which his essentially bourgeois upbringing had not prepared him. Much of his writing, both fiction and non-fiction, especially in the decades immediately after the war, centred on his desire to develop an individual narrative voice. The task of establishing an independent identity and of avoiding being categorised by others was a conscious effort, and one that became a lifelong preoccupation. It was also one that was carried out in a very public and almost obsessive fashion. In her 1998 book *Pasolini contro Calvino*, Carla Benedetti voiced the opinion that Calvino

si è [...] imbozzolato con il filo dell'autocommento, dentro al fitto involucro delle sue autoprefazioni, quarte di copertina, interventi critici e autocritici, con

la sua discreta ma ininterrotta attività di autopromozione. Calvino si è costruito addosso negli anni un'immagine d'autore: l'ha costruita con accortezza e con innumerevoli ritocchi, fabbricandosi lui stesso anche i valori letterari che avrebbero potuto valorizzarla. (24)

Benedetti's observation is indirectly supported by a comment made by Calvino to Elsa de' Giorgi during the 1950s. While comparing his method of reading to her own, de' Giorgi records that Calvino said "Io penso ormai editorialmente a cosa possono pensare i critici che conosco, quelli che stimo e quelli che non stimo" (84). Although he was referring to the way he approached the work of others, I suggest that his prefaces and self-commentaries were a conscious attempt to second-guess the views of his own critics, so that he could direct them in their analysis of his writing into the areas he wished pursued. Or, to explain this in the terminology used by Barthes in his essay "The Death of the Author" (published in *Image, Music, Text*), by acting as his own critic, Calvino attempted "to give his text(s) an Author" with the intention of imposing a limit on his texts, "to furnish (them) with a final signified, to close the writing" (147).

Drawing upon Benedetti's remarks, Joseph Francese illustrates in his article "The Refashioning of Calvino's Public Self-Image in the 1950s and early 1960s" how, as part of his attempt to create the self-image he desired, which was that of "an autonomous, liberal intellectual" (126), and to influence the future reading of his work, Calvino put considerable effort into "editing," "re-writing," and "rearranging the chronology of his fictions, casting some works into relief while banishing others to the shadows" (145). Both *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili* were reordered before the definitive editions were settled upon, and the short stories "L'avventura di un fotografo" and "L'avventura di uno sciatore" were significantly rewritten for inclusion in the 1970 edition of *Gli amori difficili*.³⁵ Francese's article lends considerable support to my discussion of the way that Calvino purposefully directed attention towards the issues he wished to emphasise. However, by focusing on the

³⁵ See Appendix for the publishing histories of *I racconti* and *I nostri antenati*. See Francese's article for his explanation of the 1960 ordering of the stories in *I nostri antenati* and the subsequent reordering that occurred in the 1967 edition, which differs from that given by Calvino. For an interesting practical illustration of the way Calvino 'cleaned up' his language from one version of a text to another, see changes to the original text of "L'avventura di un soldato" in "Note e notizie sui testi" (RR 1: 1298–31). Calvino's original version of the story used far cruder language than now appears.

representation of the feminine in Calvino's writing rather than on his intellectual development, my analysis in turn adds an extra dimension to Francese's argument.

Much of the information relied on here comes from Calvino's autobiographical pen, so it is essential to keep in mind that all autobiographical writing involves, by its very nature, some degree of conscious manipulation of the writer's image. Re's observation is also significant: "È nota l'avversione di Calvino per l'autobiografia, e il senso quasi di angoscia che lo coglieva quando doveva parlare di sè" ("Calvino e l'enigma" 116). Clearly, there will always be gaps and inconsistencies in an autobiography. All the same, Calvino worked hard at creating his own image and at giving the impression that he was not leaving gaps and, perhaps as a consequence of this constant crafting process, he often contradicted himself.³⁶ This is not to say that Calvino deliberately lied, and in any case, as Stanley Fish points out, "[a]utobiographers cannot lie because anything they say, however mendacious, is the truth about themselves, whether they know it or not" (A19). According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Fish's statement acknowledges that "any utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, characterizes its writer" (12). One of the characteristics of this writer, as Benedetti is at pains to point out, is that he was so successful in directing criticism towards the areas that he thought were important and that he wished to be considered features of his own literary production that "la vasta letteratura critica su Calvino, tranne poche eccezioni, non conosce altri criteri di valutazione e di lettura se non quelli che Calvino stesso le ha fornito" (24). What this indicates is that Calvino, in a Pygmalionesque manner, not only created the characters in his fictional texts; he also, with what Benedetti describes as a "narcisismo cagionevole" (25), created through his non-fiction an image of the 'ideal' writer—an image he then proceeded to demonstrate coincided with his own writing practices.

³⁶ Instances of contradiction in Calvino's non-fiction writing have been pointed out by a number of critics. For example, Gabriele points to the contradictory statements made by Calvino about the use of erotic details in literature in his 1961 article in "Otto domande sull'erotismo in letteratura" (*Nuovi argomenti*) and his 1969 article "Il sesso e il riso" (*Una pietra sopra* [S 1: 261]). Francese's article provides many examples of situations in which Calvino changes his stance during the 1950s and 1960s in the process of shaping his image. Gabriele also makes the point that Calvino's "large output of self-commentary in the form of interviews, essays, and introductions to his texts [...] rather than clarifying [his] opinions and theories [...] further confuses the issue" (*Italo* 14).

Calvino did not prioritise character development, openly declaring on a number of occasions that he was not interested in delving into the psychological interiors of his creations: “non ho mai sentito una forte spinta a esplorare l’interiorità psicologica” (S 1: 437);³⁷ “non m’interessavano [...] la psicologia, l’interiorità, gli interni, la famiglia, il costume, la società (specie se buona società)” (RR 1: 1208).³⁸ However, he did not see this as a shortcoming in his writing style, stating in a 1968 television interview:

Agli scrittori che come me non sono attratti dalla psicologia, dall’analisi dei sentimenti, dall’introspezione, si aprono orizzonti che non sono certo meno vasti di quelli dominati da personaggi dalla individualità ben scolpita o di quelli che si rivelano a chi esplora dall’interno l’animo umano. (S 1: 234)³⁹

Not only did Calvino consider that equally vast horizons open up to writers who do not dwell upon the psychological; he also considered that not forcing himself to sweat “umanità da tutti i pori” (S 1: 234) was not a sign that in his literature he was evading what is human.⁴⁰ With pronouncements of this nature, Calvino channelled critical attention in the direction he wished, so that, in Benedetti’s words, “[c]hi esalta Calvino loda la sua geometrica, il suo rigore formale e mentale, la sua leggerezza, la sua capacità di variare accento e genere di scrittura, la sua sensibilità al visibile e alle superfici” (24), and those who criticise him attack aspects of exactly these same characteristics.

It is true that Calvino’s characters are almost universally poorly developed and emotionally reserved. In fact, they bear an uncanny resemblance to the flattened hide of the thirty-five-year-old man that attracted his attention in the Spitzner Wax Museum in Paris, which Calvino described as a “tappeto umano, schiacciato come un fiore nelle pagine d’un libro” (S 1: 437). Indeed, Calvino emphasised his preference for this type of image over the more gruesomely realistic objects he encountered in the museum by stating that “m’è apparso là in mezzo come l’immagine più fraterna e riposante,” and he admitted that his gaze immediately shunned

³⁷ “Il museo dei mostri di cera” (1980).

³⁸ Nota 1960.

³⁹ “Due interviste su scienza e letteratura” (1968).

⁴⁰ Although most critics have taken Calvino at his word and not looked for psychological themes in his writing, this is not universally the case. In this study, I refer to the observations of some of the critics who have read Calvino’s work psychoanalytically; examples include Barbara Spackman, Robert Rushing, Kathryn Hume, Franco Ricci, Lucia Re and Claudia Nocentini.

“ogni immagine in cui il dentro s’effonde nel fuori” (S 1: 437). It is also correct that Calvino considered, or at least openly pronounced, that he introduced female characters into his stories primarily to fulfil textual functions. As noted in the Introduction, the female protagonist is a rarity in his literature and few words in Calvino’s prolific literary discourse are devoted to aspects of the feminine in his writing.

An example of the relative insignificance that Calvino places on the female presence in his fiction can be found in his Nota to the 1960 edition of *I nostri antenati*. After stating that the “nocciolo ideologico-morale” of *Il visconte dimezzato* was the “[d]imidato, mutilato, incompleto, nemico a se stesso” state of contemporary man, represented literally in the divided character of Medardo, Calvino goes on to explain how he shifted to Maestro Pietrochiodo, the carpenter, “tipi di mutilazione dell’uomo contemporaneo non poteva caricarla sul protagonista” (RR 1: 1211). He then comments that Doctor Trelawney was created to represent pure science that was out of touch with everyday human concerns, and the Huguenots and the lepers were introduced to represent “il moralismo” and “l’edonismo” (RR 1: 1212) respectively. Having directed attention to what he considered the ‘important’ or ‘serious’ themes of his story, Calvino makes the following comment about the other characters in the tale: “mi pare che non abbiano altro senso che la loro funzionalità nell’intreccio narrativo,” so that “[i]l personaggio della ragazza (la pastorella Pamela) è appena uno schematico ideogramma di concretezza femminile in contrasto con la disumanità del dimezzato” (RR 1: 1212) What Calvino appears to be saying is that Pamela’s role is purely actantial and that, although her presence in the novel is essential for structural purposes, he considers that any messages that may be delivered through her character are incidental to the main thrust of the novel. However, Calvino’s statement that he introduced Pamela’s character to simply act as a contrast to the “dimezzato” undervalues her crucial function within the narrative, even if the following quotation from Bonsaver, which is speaking in general terms about the female presence in Calvino’s writing, is indicative of a more conventional way of viewing the Calvinian female character:

Un dato indiscutibile che emerge è prima di tutto la secondarietà dei ruoli affidati alle figure di donna. A questo si aggiunge il fatto che la presenza di personaggi femminili ha spesso la funzione di fornire semplicemente un controcanto all’elemento maschile. (*Mondo* 244)

Admittedly, like most of Calvino's female characters, Pamela is cast in a role secondary to and supportive of the male protagonist (or protagonists in this case). As Tommasina Gabriele observes, Pamela is generally "interpreted as a positive symbol of Nature, or of a communion with natural life, in contrast to Medardo's abnormal schism." However, as "symbol of Nature, Pamela is both impetus and goal, essential thematically as well as narratively" (*Italo* 47), and there is no reason why her role in the unfolding of the story should be considered any less important than that of the secondary characters Calvino chooses to accentuate in his *Nota*. The urge to possess Pamela is one of the strongest forces driving both the Good and the Bad Medardos, and is the ultimate catalyst for their reunification. It is also one of the more significant and interesting themes in the entire tale. If Calvino considers that the divided viscount is a metaphor for the conflicted state of modern man, his resolution of the tale, whether he acknowledges it or not, can also be read metaphorically to illustrate that the process of restoring equilibrium requires significant female input.

Following the opinions expressed by Barbara Spackman in her article "Calvino's Non-Knowledge," the suggestion that he might not have realised what his works were doing or saying would have been an anathema to Calvino, despite his concession at the end of his *Nota* that readers were entitled to read his trilogy as they wished: "Così come siete padroni d'interpretare come volete queste tre storie, e non dovete sentirvi vincolati affatto dalla deposizione che ora ho reso sulla loro genesi" (RR 1: 1219). It is significant, however, that this granting of licence to the reader to decide for him/herself what he intended in his texts came only after Calvino had given his own fairly thorough explanation of his motivations and intentions.

Early in his *Nota*, Calvino dismissed the importance of "la psicologia" (RR 1: 1208) in his writing, which is something critics appear to have accepted, for as Rushing observes, there are "some notable lacunae in Calvino criticism: in particular, there is a certain penury of psychoanalytical criticism" (44). In Ricci's opinion, critics have typically ignored "the psychological implications of Calvino's writings and have accepted the author's sanction on psychological themes because of lack of thematic evidence" ("Quest" 53). In a more ironic assessment, Spackman considers that the fact that "Calvino's works have not, for the most part, been read psychoanalytically, is no doubt [...] acknowledgement that he knows better than we do" what his works are about, and she suggests that he "wanted to make sure we knew it" (7). As an example, she singles out his "1979 response to Angelo Guglielmi's

suggestion that Ludmilla, of *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, was created to seduce the average reader," even if Calvino was himself unaware of it. Spackman presents Calvino's indignant and very public reply to Guglielmi: "Insomma, se mi dai del seduttore, passi; dell'adulatore, passi; del mercante in fiera, passi anche quello; ma se mi dai inconsapevole, allora mi offendo!" (7).⁴¹ According to Spackman, "you do not have to be a psychoanalyst to hear Calvino's resistance to the very notion that something in his text might escape his conscious control, that he might not know what his characters are up to, what his language means to say" (7). She adds that the assertion "he knows very well" immediately makes the psychoanalyst await the proviso "but all the same" (8), or, in Octave Mannoni's original French, "Je sais bien, mais quand même." Nevertheless, to understand Calvino the 'creator,' it is important to appreciate how tirelessly he worked and how very successful he was in creating a particular image of himself, and how artfully he guided criticism of his writing into the areas he thought important. However, it is also valid to suggest that there may remain within his texts what Spackman describes as "a splitting between what a text knows and what it does" (8). So that, despite Calvino's extensive analysis of his own writing, there is clearly much that he leaves unsaid and arguably unrecognised, and in Chapter Two I explore in some detail the psychology associated with Calvino's representation of the feminine.

I turn now towards the more concrete biographical aspects of Calvino's history to gain an understanding of factors that contributed towards forming him as a person but with the emphasis placed on those elements that may have influenced his ideas about women and the feminine world in general. Once again, Calvino's autobiographical writing is the primary, though not exclusive, source of biographical information. Calvino died in 1985 at the age of sixty-three and access to certain biographical material relevant to this study remains limited for the time being. However, due to its importance in fully comprehending aspects of Calvino's representation of the feminine in his texts, particularly those written in the mid to late 1950s, to the extent that it is possible, this section also explores areas of Calvino's private life that he does not openly acknowledge and that have remained largely overlooked by the critics to date.

⁴¹ In footnote 2 of her article, Spackman gives the reference for this exchange as the "Presentazione dell'autore" (ix-x), which is included in the Mondadori paperback edition of *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (Milan: Mondadori, 1994).

Calvino was born in Santiago de Las Vegas, Cuba, on 15 October 1923, but by 1925 the family had relocated to Italy. Until he was in his twenties, Calvino lived with his parents and a younger brother, Floriano (Florio), in his father's ancestral town of San Remo on the Ligurian coast. Calvino describes the San Remo of his childhood as a unique city that was quite different from the rest of Italy at that time. As well as the locals, the citizens included “vecchi inglesi, granduchi russi, gente eccentrica e cosmopolita,” but Calvino states that his own family was unusual even for San Remo: “i miei genitori erano persone non più giovani, scienziati, adoratori della natura, liberi pensatori, personalità diverse tra loro ed entrambe all'opposto del clima del paese” (S 2: 2735).⁴²

Both Calvino's parents were scientists; his father, Mario Calvino, was an agronomist and his mother, Evelina Mameli Calvino (Eva), a Sardinian by birth, was a botanist. Although neither of his parents supported the Fascist government, it was his mother who most openly and vehemently opposed the regime: “era d'un antifascismo intransigente” (S 2: 2736). However, Calvino considers that the quality that probably most marked his parents as non-conformists was their intransigence in the area of religion. He describes them as “liberi pensatori,” remarking that “«ateo» era una parola troppo forte per quei tempi.” His parents, but most particularly his mother, ensured that neither son was exposed to formal Roman Catholic religious instruction and Calvino writes that once he reached the more senior level of his schooling and entered the state run “ginnasio,” this often meant spending an hour alone in the corridor while the religious lesson was in progress. According to Calvino, this exposed him to a position of isolation that obliged him at times to close himself in a kind of “silenziosa resistenza passiva” in the face of his companions and teachers, so that he was regarded “come una bestia rara” (S 2: 2737). Far from resenting this situation, Calvino says that he admired his parents for sticking to their principles, stating that, in light of their beliefs, to have not withdrawn their sons from religious classes would have been an “atto di mancanza di coraggio, assolutamente dannoso pedagogicamente” (S 2: 2738).

At the rational level, Calvino clearly respected his parents' strength of conviction and their refusal to compromise in the area of religious instruction. However, in her book *Ho visto partire il tuo treno*, the actress Elsa de' Giorgi, with whom Calvino had an intense romantic

⁴² “Autobiografia politica giovanile” (1960).

relationship during the 1950s, suggests that, psychologically, Calvino was in fact profoundly affected by this religious ostracism from his peers:

Per chi abbia frequentato con assiduità e confidenza il suo pensiero, Calvino era allora segretamente disorientato dall'ateismo vissuto con assoluta naturalezza nella propria famiglia di scienziati, serenamente positivisti. Lo turbava quella serenità a petto della complessa problematicità del proprio spirito. Già da ragazzo, raccontava, era imbarazzato di non saper rispondere ai compagni di scuola quando, sapendolo non cattolico, gli chiedevano a quale religione appartenesse: "Se non sei cattolico, sarai ebreo, protestante, valdese. Qualcosa sarai pure."

Lui ci restava male e insoddisfatto quando a casa, interpellato il padre, si sentiva rispondere con un'alzata di spalle e un sorriso di dire ai compagni che un uomo non aveva bisogno di appartenere a una religione per essere buon cittadino. Ma in realtà questa condizione, vissuta senza problemi nell'ambito familiare, a scuola gliene creava: timido e introverso, lo isolava dai compagni e si trovava a invidiare quelli che parlavano tra loro di feste, comunioni, cresime, riti che li associavano. (167–68)

Despite his parents' best intentions, it was impossible for Calvino not to be exposed to the Church and its iconography in some manner. Indeed, in an interview conducted in 1983 for the *Paris Review* by Damien Pettigrew, Calvino states that his first elementary school in San Remo was a private Protestant institution where the "teachers stuffed me full of scripture." Therefore, it is more accurate to say that Calvino's relationship to religion was unconventional rather than non-existent, and although religious references are not a notable feature of his literature, they certainly occur, and often in connection with his female characters. Frequently, they take the form of allusion to characters and/or scenes found in the works of earlier writers such as Dante Alighieri or Torquato Tasso, whose works revolve around religious themes. These are literary rather than religious references and are generally fairly positive. Examples of such allusions include Sofronia from *Il cavaliere inesistente*, who shares her name and important features with Tasso's older virgin in *Gerusalemme liberata*, and the references to Dante's Beatrice associated with the "ragazza celeste-cielo" (RR 2: 1177) in "L'avventura di uno sciatore."

In contrast, direct references to religion tend to have more negative connotations in Calvino's writing. For example, forcing Battista, the hapless sister of Cosimo in *Il barone rampante*, to wear a nun's habit was never intended to indicate that she had dedicated herself to a life of religious devotion. The vacuous religious practices of the Huguenots from *Il visconte dimezzato* provide another example. Calvino informs us in his Nota that he introduced this group to represent "un'etica religiosa senza religione." Although he states that his intention was to evoke this theme in a mode "più simpatetica che satirica" (RR 1: 1212), I suggest that Calvino does not try hard to elicit feelings of sympathy for the plight of this exiled religious group, and the nameless wife of "[il] vecchio Ezechiele" (RR 1: 396) is portrayed as the most unrelentingly dour and devoted of them all. Nevertheless, Calvino possibly delivers his most scathing portrayal of religious vacuity in *Il cavaliere inesistente* with his depiction of the all-male community, the Knights of the Holy Grail. Examples of more covert ironic references to religion to be found in connection with female characters in these collections include the description of Viola's skirt and blouse as "quasi monacale" (RR: I 710) when she joins Cosimo in the trees for their first sexual liaison, and the equally ironic explanation given for her absences from Paris as a retreat "in un convento, a macerarsi nelle penitenze" (RR 1: 723).⁴³ The concepts of sin and penance are also fundamental themes in the stories of both Isotta and Stefania, Calvino's female protagonists in *Gli amori difficili*, and in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Suor Teodora is assigned the arduous task of writing as a form of penance.

Even if they are infrequent and not a prominent feature of his writing, the presence in Calvino's stories of relatively negative images associated with religion undermines his comment that his upbringing made him "tollerante verso le opinioni altrui, particolarmente nel campo religioso," and that he remained "completamente privo di quel gusto dell'anticlericalismo così frequente in chi è cresciuto in mezzo ai preti" (S 2: 2737-38). Calvino was certainly not beyond parodying the clergy and religion in general, but nor was he slow to use religious allusions to evoke positive images when it suited his purposes.

In a 1984 interview with Felice Froio, which is published in *Eremita a Parigi* under the title "Dietro il successo," Calvino remarks that both his parents possessed "una fortissima

⁴³ This is ironic because the reader is well aware that when Viola is absent from her glittering life in Paris, far from doing penance in a convent as her Parisian acquaintances conjecture, she is in Ombrosa conducting a passionate affair in the trees with Cosimo.

personalità” and a love of all things botanical. Where they differed was in their modes of self-expression. Whereas his father expressed his personality “come vitalità pratica,” Calvino observes that his mother expressed hers “come una severità di studiosa” (249). De’ Giorgi expresses similar sentiments about Eva Mameli, although in a rather gentler fashion, writing that an important element in her relationship with Calvino was “l’amicizia che legò subito sua madre a me.” She goes on to state that “[c]olpiva nella madre di Calvino una straordinaria purezza, una sorta di stupore gentile davanti alle cose che la commuovevano” (25). Although she describes Eva Mameli as a “[s]tudiosa tenacissima e appassionata,” de’ Giorgi also recalls the gracious and thoughtful manner in which she would explain the way a plant developed to the uninformed. With her husband, Mario, Eva had created at the Villa Meridiana, the family home in San Remo, “un giardino botanico sperimentale che [...] era il secondo d’Europa” (26). This beautiful and exotic garden was her passion; “era un universo del quale la piccola persona alacre, caparbia e gentile, pareva essere l’affettuoso conciliante demiurgo.” De’ Giorgi obviously held Calvino’s mother in high regard, but it is also possible to detect from her comments reasons why the young Calvino might have spurned his mother’s botanical seriousness. The garden was a place of study, not a place for playing games: “I suoi figli, da ragazzi, non avevano mai potuto giocarci, ammonite da cartelli che denominavano fiori e piante nei loro latini lunghi e dotti” (26).

In 1962, Calvino wrote “La strada di San Giovanni” in homage to his father who died in 1951. Of his mother, Calvino has little to say in this story, but what he does write offers an important insight into the way he perceived her presence. In the early morning, his father would enter their bedroom and attempt to rouse Calvino and his brother with brusque words and shakes before setting out for the family land at nearby San Giovanni. These noisy attempts were ignored by the boys, who continued on in bed until their mother, quietly and efficiently, came in and drew the curtains:

No, non è la voce di mia madre che ritorna, in queste pagine risuonanti della rumorosa e lontana presenza paterna, ma un suo dominio silenzioso: la sua figura si affaccia tra queste righe, poi subito si ritrae, resta nel margine; ecco che è passata nella nostra stanza, non l’abbiamo sentita uscire, ed il sonno è finito per sempre. (RR 3: 14)

Calvino's mother appears to have been a strong and important presence in his life, but in contrast to his father, she ruled with a quiet force. She was an intelligent and educated woman who had extraordinary strength of character and firmly held convictions, but she exerted her control with a quiet seriousness. In his essay "Autobiografia politica giovanile," while speaking of his wartime experiences as a member of the Italian Resistance movement, Calvino adds, almost as a footnote, the following tribute to his mother:

Non posso tralasciare qui di ricordare [...] il posto che nell'esperienza di quei mesi ebbe mia madre, come esempio di tenacia e di coraggio in una Resistenza intesa come giustizia naturale e virtù familiare, quando esortava i due figli a partecipare alla lotta armata, e nel suo comportarsi con dignità e fermezza di fronte alle SS e ai militi, e nella lunga detenzione come ostaggio, e quando la brigata nera per tre volte finse di fucilare mio padre davanti ai suoi occhi. I fatti storici a cui partecipano le madri acquistano la grandezza e l'invincibilità dei fenomeni naturali. (S 2: 2746)

Eva Mameli certainly provided Calvino with one idea of femininity, and I will argue at a later stage that many of her characteristics can be identified, albeit in a well-disguised form, in the figure of the Generalessa, the eccentric mother of Cosimo, Biagio and Battista in *Il barone rampante*. But it is notable that very few of Calvino's female characters are weak, and as a rule, they have far fewer existential worries than their male counterparts. The principal female characters in all three of the fantastic novels are strong, independent women. Pamela, the country girl, is not cowered into submission by either the Good or the Bad Viscount, Viola spends time in the trees with Cosimo as she sees fit, and Bradamante appears to choose when she will be a nun and when she will be a warrior (or perhaps it is Suor Teodora who chooses?). Even the more minor female characters in the trilogy have opinions, and the strong woman, or at least the woman who knows her own mind, is a fairly universal figure in Calvino's oeuvre.

The influence of his mother upon Calvino's conception of the feminine was significant, but it was only one of a number of factors. It would be remiss in a study of the feminine in Calvino's writing not to acknowledge the importance of his romantic involvement with de' Giorgi during the period in which many of the stories in this study were written. Calvino does not acknowledge de' Giorgi in his autobiographical writing, but their relationship lasted for

four years, from the beginning of 1955 until the end of 1958, and a close friendship continued until around 1960 when Calvino went to the United States on a study scholarship. There is a hint of scandal attached to their association because its commencement coincided with the disappearance of de' Giorgi's husband, Sandrino Contini Bonacossi, and the subsequent breakdown of their marriage: "con un colpo di scena Sandrino a scomparire dalla mia vita e Calvino a introdurvisi nel momento della massima tensione a vivere la sua" (de' Giorgi 19).⁴⁴ Calvino was not himself married at this time, for he did not marry Esther Singer (Chichita), an Argentinian translator, until 1964. Nevertheless, speaking openly about Calvino's liaison with de' Giorgi has proved controversial and a truly informed discussion about the nature of the relationship that existed between them, and of the influence de' Giorgi might have had over Calvino's writing, will not be possible for a few years yet.

In 1990, taking offence at comments made about her by Pietro Citati, the literary critic of the newspaper *Repubblica*, de' Giorgi revealed that she had 407 letters written by Calvino to her during the years of their close friendship. Soon after, in 1992, she also published her book about their time together (*Ho visto partire il tuo treno*). Since 1994, 297 of the letters have been in the possession of the Fondo Manoscritti of the University of Pavia, and of these, 144 (from June 1955 to the end of the summer of 1958) were placed under embargo for twenty-five years due to the sensitive nature of their contents. Although not subject to the same embargo, the remaining 153 letters are only accessible with the permission of Calvino's widow and have remained infrequently consulted to date. De' Giorgi, who was eight years older than Calvino, died in 1997, some twelve years after Calvino's death by stroke in 1985. Controversy erupted in August 2004 when extracts from some of the letters written by Calvino to de' Giorgi were published in the *Corriere della Sera* in an article by Paolo Di Stefano, which was headed "Elsa, Italo e il conte scomparso." The source of the material published was not made clear by the newspaper, but an injunction was sought by Calvino's widow and daughter suppressing publication of further material.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Alessandro (Sandrino) Contini Bonacossi was the heir to one of Italy's most valuable art collections and there were rumours of financial scandal associated with his name. He was found dead by hanging in a Washington hotel in 1975, but had long been separated from his wife before this occurrence.

⁴⁵ See also the *New York Times* article by Elisabetta Povoledo (August 20, 2004) "Italian Novelist's Love Letters Turn Political."

Maria Corti, the Italian writer, academic and personal acquaintance of Calvino, was granted access to many of the letters, and in 1998 she wrote an article entitled “Un eccezionale epistolario d’amore di Italo Calvino.” This article is one of the few officially sanctioned sources of information dealing with the correspondence and is the authority I refer to when possible. De’ Giorgi’s book is a legitimate source of information, but it is difficult to critically evaluate her account of the relationship without access to the letters. At the same time, the fact that de’ Giorgi is not a disinterested party does not invalidate her recollection of events any more than Calvino’s failure to mention the significance of their relationship in his autobiographical writing and introductory notes to works written in that period should be taken as an indication that the relationship should be ignored. A properly informed discussion requires access to a variety of opinions; hence, the perspectives of both Calvino and de’ Giorgi are important.

Bonsaver draws attention to some of the complex issues associated with Calvinian criticism to date. Speaking of *Il barone rampante*, he writes that the most fundamental drive in the novel is “il tema del rapporto io-mondo esterno e, nel caso più specificatamente autobiografico, il tema del rapporto di Calvino con la società italiana” (*Mondo* 46). In a footnote, he elaborates further:

Nel capitolo precedente si è citato il passo in cui le vicende di Cosimo sembrano alludere all’uscita di Calvino dal PCI⁴⁶ (avventura durante i mesi di composizione del *Barone*). Altri dettagli, di nessun valore critico ma interessante dal punto di vista biografico, vengono aggiunti da Elsa de’ Giorgi, compagna di Calvino in quegli anni, nella sua purtroppo svenevole autobiografia romanzata in cui presenta un Calvino intento a travasare il loro rapporto passionale nelle vicende amorose di Cosimo and Viola [...]. Ricordo infine il ben più utile contributo di C. Cases, *Calvino e il “pathos della distanza”*, in cui la radice esistenziale del romanzo—il conflitto tra individualità e “comunità necessaria”—viene acutamente identificata e messa nudo (*Mondo* 101-02n62)

As noted in the Introduction, Bonsaver was one of the first writers to devote significant attention to the female characters in Calvino’s work and he does at least acknowledge de’

⁴⁶ PCI: Partito Comunista Italiano, or the Italian Communist Party.

Giorgi's presence in Calvino's life, which is uncommon. Also, his book was published only three years after that of de' Giorgi and while she was still alive. Nevertheless, Bonsaver clearly does not credit her reflections with any academic merit, sandwiching mention of her observations between those of critics who instead emphasise influences that Calvino himself accentuates. In describing de' Giorgi's book as a "svenevole autobiografia romanzata," Bonsaver links her writing to the style traditionally associated with the romanzo rosa, and the manner in which he dismisses the value of her contribution towards understanding the forces motivating Calvino in his work supports Arslan and Pozzato's observation that "[o]gni discorso critico sulla letteratura rosa è contraddistinto da un certo margine di imbarazzato più o meno evidente" (1027).

Veiled reference to de' Giorgi surfaces again later in Bonsaver's book when he explains why he gave the title of the "donna 'isterica'" to one of the two categories into which he divided Calvino's female characters. He explains that he arrived at the idea after reading the chapter in Kristeva's *Histoires d'amour* devoted to the psychoanalytical definition of love, which contains the details of the behaviour of one of her ex-patients, who displayed "all the delightful throes of hysteria" (Kristeva, *Tales* 51). Bonsaver then states that the same characteristics displayed by Kristeva's patient could readily be observed in a type of female character that recurs in Calvino's writing, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, adding: "Le ragioni extra-letterarie di tale fenomeno, ammesso ve ne siano, le lasciamo ai futuri biografi" (*Mondo* 234). De' Giorgi's name is never mentioned, but there is little doubt that Bonsaver is alluding to her when he refers to extra-literary influences evident in Calvino's characterisation process. Despite his dismissive treatment of de' Giorgi's claims to see autobiographical references in the Viola-Cosimo relationship earlier in his book, Bonsaver offers Viola as one of his principal examples of a "donna 'isterica,'" and unsurprisingly, he presents the relationship between Calvino's male protagonists and this type of female character in a less than glowing light: "Irrazionalità e sadomasochismo sembrano dominare questo tipo di rapporti; il protagonista s'immerge volontariamente in una vita amorosa impossibile e gioisce delle complicazioni che ne derivano" (*Mondo* 237). Bonsaver's "donna 'isterica'" is a difficult woman, dangerously attractive but problematic in her irrationality.

Unlike those of Bonsaver, Corti's observations often openly corroborate de' Giorgi's recollections. How much of the correspondence between Calvino and de' Giorgi that Corti had access to is uncertain, for she comments that the "gioielleria della nostra critica manca di

alcuni preziosi pezzi.” Nevertheless, the information obtained from the “seducente epistolario” (306) that she has read is a significant aid to understanding the representation of the female characters in a number of the stories included in this study, and many of her observations are incorporated into the analysis undertaken in the second part of this chapter.

As already observed, both Benedetti and Francese draw attention to the way in which Calvino meticulously and astutely crafted his own image, and Benedetti specifically states that it is her intention in her study to “sottrarre l’opera di Calvino a quell’aura di assolutezza di cui è stata ricoperta, e che certo non giova a una sua lettura critica” (24). Calvino has plenty to say about factors that motivated his writing; however, personal relationships are not among them, and literary critics appear, for the most part, to have exercised considerable discretion in this area. This discretion is exemplified by the following quotation from Scarpa’s *Italo Calvino*. After briefly acknowledging the importance of de’ Giorgi’s four-year presence in Calvino’s life, which he supports with a quotation from Corti’s article, Scarpa comments:

Dai brevi lacerti apparsi qua e là s’indovina che l’amore fu grande e accidentato, ragionato ed estatico, delicato e furioso. E basta così: la discrezione vuole che ci si fermi. Solo quando i testi saranno disponibili sapremo il resto; e sapremo quanto di Elsa de’ Giorgi sopravvive nella Viola del *Barone rampante*, nella Claudia della *Nuvola di smog*, nei personaggi femminili della serie di racconti *Gli amori difficili*. (*Italo* 20)⁴⁷

Scarpa correctly points out that a fully informed discussion cannot take place until the letters are freely available. Nevertheless, for my purposes, discretion would lead to distortion and a balanced analysis of the representation of certain female characters that Calvino created in this period requires me to rely on information sourced from both de’ Giorgi’s book and Corti’s article, however incomplete the picture currently remains.

Regardless of the level of importance one places on Calvino’s relationship with de’ Giorgi, it is intriguing that an actress was “il primo vero amore della sua vita” (Scarpa, *Italo* 20), for although he remained publically silent about de’ Giorgi’s influence, Calvino frequently pointed to the important role the cinema played in shaping his perception of the world. His interest in the cinema was lifelong and strongly influenced his writing both stylistically and

⁴⁷ *Italo Calvino* is the title of books by both Scarpa (1999) and McLaughlin (1998).

thematically. In “Visibilità,” the fourth of the proposed Millennium lectures collected in the posthumous collection *Lezioni americane: Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*,⁴⁸ Calvino wrote at length about the relationship between the word and the image. He likened the imagination to a “cinema mentale” that never stops projecting images “alla nostra vista interiore” (S 2: 699). According to Calvino, the genesis of the imaginary in literary production is the “immagine visuale” rather than the “espressione verbale” (S 2: 702), and he explained that in his own situation the first thing that came into his mind when devising a story was a mental image. Only once the writing process was under way did words begin to take precedence: “dal momento in cui comincio a mettere nero su bianco, è la parola scritta che conta: prima come ricerca d’un equivalente dell’immagine visiva, poi come sviluppo coerente dell’impostazione stilistica iniziale, e a poco a poco resta padrona del campo” (S 2: 704). This close relationship between the image and the written word is also communicated to the reader of his narratives, leading Re to observe that “[l]eggere Calvino è sempre come vedere un film” (“Calvino e il cinema” 95).

Calvino described himself as “un figlio della «civiltà delle immagini»” (S 2: 708), relating that he was composing his own stories to fit the cartoons in the children’s weekly the *Corriere dei Piccoli* long before he could read. His fascination with images matured into a love of the cinema and, as he explains in “L’autobiografia di uno spettatore,” during the years of his adolescence “il cinema è stato per me il mondo.” But more importantly, it represented an “altro mondo” (RR 3: 27) quite at odds with the daily world surrounding him. It was a form of evasion of reality, and as it was also a world of which his mother did not fully approve, it represented a form of defiance and escape from parental authority. In a 1981 interview with Lietta Tornabuoni, which was originally published in *La Stampa* with the title “Calvino: Il cinema inesistente,” Calvino relates that when he was a young child his mother brought him to the cinema, but that she only chose educative films. He did manage to see some comedy, but Charlie Chaplin (Charlot) was considered “troppo maleducato” by Eva Mameli, who preferred Harold Lloyd “perché si comportava molto meglio” and was “più composto” (131). When he was older, Calvino would escape to the cinema by leaving the house unseen, or pretending to go to study with a friend. He particularly enjoyed arriving for

⁴⁸ Calvino died before the sixth essay was completed, but his widow, Esther Calvino, preferred to keep the title he had chosen. The essays are: “Leggerezza,” “Rapidità,” “Esattezza,” “Visibilità,” “Molteplicità” and the sixth was to have been “Consistenza.”

the first showing, at two in the afternoon, when he might find the cinema half empty, as if it were for him alone.

Calvino writes that between the ages of thirteen and eighteen he saw all the films he could, including the Italian Fascist films of the period. But the local films were not the ones that formed a lasting impression; they did not belong to the “cinema come altra dimensione del mondo” (RR 3: 37). The American films of the 1930s were the ones that most attracted him, and their most alluring quality was their ability to transport him to a world that was completely outside his experience—a world “che è senza un prima e senza un poi.” Calvino also enjoyed the French films of that era, but they spoke to him of broader social issues and were not so removed from his daily existence. Moreover, unlike the French films, the American cinema of that time had nothing to do with literature. This gave them a special place in the phase of his life in which his interest in literature was flowering, meaning that his years as a “spettatore” existed in parallel but separately, in his view, from his entry into the literary world. Especially attractive to Calvino was the aspect of “distanza” associated with his cinematic experience. He explains that the cinema

[r]ispondeva a un bisogno di distanza, di dilazione dei confini del reale, di veder aprirsi intorno delle dimensioni incommensurabili, astratte come entità geometriche, ma anche concrete, assolutamente piene di facce e situazioni e ambienti, che col mondo dell’esperienza diretta stabilivano una loro rete (astratta) di rapporti. (RR 3: 41)

As Alfonso Berardinelli reinforces, “[l]’occhio è per Calvino la prima manifestazione, il primo organo della mente” (45), and the eye by its very nature must function from a distance. This fundamental characteristic of the eye neatly encompasses the two words “spettatore” and “distanza,” words that encapsulate the connection between Calvino’s cinematic experience and his literary production. In the Calvinian pre-Second World War viewing experience, the role of the spectator and distance went together largely as a matter of course, which was not the case after the war. For Calvino, after the war, there was no longer “un mondo dentro lo schermo illuminato nella sala buia, e fuori un altro mondo eterogeneo separato da una discontinuità netta, oceano o abisso” (RR 3: 41). Like neorealist literature, the neorealist films of the immediate postwar years brought the everyday world to the screen, removing to a large degree the important dimension of distance he so enjoyed. Further, Calvino did not like

it when literature and cinema treated the same themes, as the opening lines in his 1953 article “Il realismo italiano nel cinema e nella narrativa” attest: “A me il cinema quando somiglia alla letteratura dà fastidio; e la letteratura quando somiglia al cinema anche” (S 2: 1888).⁴⁹

Even though Calvino liked to maintain a separation between literature and the cinema, Re considers that, for Calvino, the cinema, like literature, was always “un oggetto (per quanto amoroso e visivo), di *lettura*,” and hence an experience essentially “solitaria e silenziosa” (“Calvino e il cinema” 98). Calvino did not regard going to the cinema as a social occasion, and much of his film viewing took place during the summer vacation while many of his friends were away from the city holidaying in the mountains or the countryside. But even during the school term, Calvino records that he was often inside the theatre while his school companions were outside playing. Answering “il canto delle sirene” (RR 3: 31), he would sit comfortably in the dark, near-empty theatre, with his legs over the seat in front, revelling in what Re terms “l’erotismo dello spettatore.” According to Re, this ‘eroticism of the spectator’ went on to become the most fundamental characteristic of Calvino the writer, giving form and control to his entire literary and critical production (“Calvino e il cinema” 94–95).

The need for distance in order to see clearly is a theme Calvino often promoted and one he pursued quite literally in *Il barone rampante*. In his Nota, Calvino explains that Cosimo’s decision to remain in the trees was a representation in literary terms of the idea that “per essere *con* gli altri veramente, la sola via era d’essere separato dagli altri” (RR 1: 1214). Cosimo views the world from a distance; he is a spectator in the cinema of life (even if that life is fiction). Although he does actively participate in the life of the community around him, it is only to the extent that he can do so from the trees and in the manner that he chooses, so that, effectively, he always maintains a distance and views the world from afar. Frequently, the reader also takes on a quasi-spectatorial role alongside the narrator, for as Re indicates, the point of view in Calvino’s stories is heightened and refined in a cinematic sense: “C’è

⁴⁹ Despite this comment, Calvino’s work does show overt signs of his love of the cinema. Antonino, the protagonist of “L’avventura di un fotografo” has a name remarkably similar to that of the Italian modernist film director and screenwriter, Michelangelo Antonioni (1912–2007). Also, as de Lauretis observes in “Reading the (Post)Modern Text: *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*,” both “L’avventura di un lettore” and Antonioni’s film *L’avventura* (1960) are “very much centred on desire, absence, negativity, deferment, all of which are exactly inscribed in the form of the film text” (132). Calvino also expressed a desire to be copied in the cinema: “a me piacerebbe soprattutto venir plagiato dal cinema: rende meno, ma è più lusinghiero” (Tornabuoni 133).

sempre ‘colui che vede,’ uno scrutatore, uno spettatore di cui seguiamo lo sguardo nel (rin)tracciare il senso di una storia” (“Calvino e il cinema” 95). Calvino’s narratives are delivered for the most part from the perspective of either an omniscient or an intradiegetic narrator.

The Italian passion for dubbing foreign films only reinforced Calvino’s appreciation of the cinema as primarily a visual experience, for as he points out, the Italian movie-going public only ever received half of every actor or actress—only the figure and not the voice. This separation of the voice and the image added to the enchantment of the film in Calvino’s opinion, and he viewed it as a sign that “la forza del cinema è nata muta,” adding that for the Italian spectator, at least, the word was always heard like a superimposition, “una didascalia in stampatello” (RR 3: 37). In this sense, for Calvino, a dubbed film shared certain properties with his beloved comics, whose captions were for him an interesting, but not indispensable, part of the reading process. The distance between the American actresses Calvino encountered in the pre-war films and the women with whom he was in contact in his daily existence only reinforced his tendency to focus on the visual and to discount the auditory:

Tra il catalogo delle donne incontrate nei film americani e il catalogo delle donne che s’incontrano fuori dello schermo nella vita di tutti i giorni non si riusciva a stabilire un rapporto; direi che dove finiva l’uno cominciava l’altro. (Con le donne dei film francesi invece questo rapporto c’era). (RR 3: 36)

The French films bridged the gap between the world he knew and elsewhere. The French actresses had “una presenza carnale” and they became imbedded in his memory as “donne vive e insieme come fantasmi erotici” (RR 3: 34). In contrast, an American film “sapeva di Palmolive, lustro e asettico,” and the eroticism of the Hollywood stars was “sublimato, stilizzato, idealizzato.” The dazzling whiteness of the black and white films transfigured their bare skin so that even the more carnal of the American actresses, such as the platinum blonde Jean Harlow, took on a glowing and unreal quality. To the eyes of the adolescent Calvino, Marlene Dietrich was not so much a direct object of desire as a representation of desire itself, “come essenza extraterrestre” (RR 3: 34).

Extraterrestrial or unworldly qualities are often associated with the feminine in Calvino’s literature, and some of the most self-evident examples of this linkage are found in the

Cosmicomiche tales, many of which deal quite literally with extraterrestrial themes. As Jeannet illustrates in her aptly named chapter on the feminine in Calvino's literature, "Under the Crescent Moon," the moon metaphor with its link to "distance and yearning" (172) occurs frequently throughout Calvino's oeuvre.⁵⁰ However, given its pervasiveness, it is interesting that the moon motif is rarely invoked in *Gli amori difficili* and *I nostri antenati*. The only really notable occurrence of the motif is found in *Il barone rampante* at the end of chapter 16, just before Cosimo meets Ursula and experiences love for the first time. Feeling that something is missing from his life, he looks to the heavens for an answer: "Ecco: forse c'era un albero così alto che salendo toccasse un altro mondo, la luna" (RR 1: 677).

Important though the visual was in shaping Calvino's ideas, it was not only the physical appearance of the American actresses that attracted his attention and highlighted the distance between the world of the screen and the world of his everyday experience. Calvino records that the most important feminine model presented in the American films was the female who rivalled her male counterparts "in risolutezza e ostinazione e spirito e ingegno." He particularly favoured Myrna Loy for her intelligent and ironic command of herself in confrontation with men, and she became for him the prototype of a feminine ideal "forse uxorio forse sororale, comunque d'identificazione di gusto, di stile." Myrna Loy existed alongside American and French actresses such as Jean Harlow and Vivian Romance, whose characters displayed an "aggressività carnale," and Greta Garbo or Michèle Morgan, with their "passione estenuante e languida" (RR 3: 36), for whom Calvino admits he experienced a form of attraction laced with fear.

According to Calvino, the autonomy and initiative of these American actresses delivered a message that he took on board, for they displayed a type of behaviour he did not see in the women he encountered in his day-to-day existence in provincial Italy. He reflects that there were both positive and negative sides to his youthful construction of "un olimpo di donne ideali," who were beyond his reach for the time being. On the positive side was the incentive it gave him to not merely content himself with the women with whom he was currently in

⁵⁰ Two examples from different periods in Calvino's writing career are the "ragazza lunare" (RR 1: 1138) from "Luna e Gnac," one of the *Marcovaldo* stories, and "Luna di pomeriggio" from the *Palomar* collection. In Jeannet's opinion, the latter contains Calvino's "most lyrical homage to the cosmic presence that is the sign of the feminine" (172).

contact and to project his desires further on “nel futuro o nell’altrove o nel difficile” (RR 3: 36). He acknowledges, however, that the negative side of idealising an inaccessible female model was that he did not learn to look at real women “con occhio pronto a scoprire bellezze inedite, non conformi ai canoni, a inventare personaggi nuovi con ciò che il caso o la ricerca ci fa incontrare nel nostro orizzonte” (RR 3: 37). This is an important comment because it supports my observations in this thesis of the difficulty that Calvino had in creating fully developed female characters and his tendency to create women that conformed to stereotypes, both positive and negative.

The female characters to which Calvino’s male protagonists are romantically attached are almost always autonomous and confident, and even in the historical fantasies, his female characters display very modern attitudes towards sex. Pamela, Viola and Suor Teodora/Bradamante are also women who rival their male counterparts in resoluteness, persistency, spirit and intelligence. There are few Calvinian female characters who do not, like Myrna Loy, display “padronanza di sé di fronte all’uomo” (RR 3: 36). Interestingly, the characters who most closely resemble the provincial Italian women of Calvino’s direct experience are the female protagonists Isotta and Stefania, and possibly Elide Massolari, who is co-protagonist with her husband, Arturo, in “L’avventura di due sposi.”

The cinema certainly influenced Calvino’s perception of the feminine, but he openly acknowledged, both in interviews and in his extensive autobiographical writing, that he also borrowed from and built upon the work of other authors. In a 1980 interview, while discussing Calvino’s relationship with the work of other writers and to the artist Paul Klee, Tullio Pericoli refers to Calvino as a “scrittore-ladro.” In his response, Calvino admits that he had always been aware of borrowing from, or of paying tribute to others, elaborating that for him “fare omaggio a un autore significa appropriarsi di qualcosa che è suo” (S 2: 1805). Earlier in the interview, Calvino observed that it is always the case that “l’arte nasce da altra arte, così come la poesia nasce da altra poesia [...] anche quando uno crede semplicemente di far parlare il proprio cuore, o di imitare la natura” (S 2: 1803). Underlying these comments can be discerned Bakhtin’s notion of ‘dialogism,’ which recognises that “[e]verything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others” (*Dialogic* 426). In her 1966 essay “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” in one of her first references to ‘intertextuality,’ Kristeva argues that “each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word

(text) can be read” (*Desire* 66). Scrivano conveys a similar idea when he writes that “[o]gni volta che l’inchiostro sporca la pagina, quel singolo tratto sembra dover fare necessariamente i conti con tutte le storie che ha già raccontato, con tutte le cose che ha già significato” (84). The idea of the continuity and interdependence of the written word is a theme Calvino particularly endorsed and actively pursued. For him, a book should never be considered a solitary object existing independently of other books:

I libri sono fatti per essere in tanti, un libro singolo ha senso solo in quanto s’affianca ad altri libri, in quanto segue e precede altri libri [...] La nostra civiltà si basa sulla molteplicità dei libri; la verità si trova solo inseguendola dalle pagine d’un volume a quelle d’un altro volume, come una farfalla dalle ali variegata che si nutre di linguaggi diversi, di confronti, di contraddizioni. (S 2: 1847)⁵¹

In fact, Calvino goes so far as to suggest that the idea of “un libro assoluto [...] è una tentazione diabolica” (S 2: 1848), which accords with a view he had expressed many years previously in his article “Saremo come Omero!” (1948). Following an exhortation to writers by Emilio Sereni, the then head of the cultural office of the PCI, “to abandon their individualism” in the spirit of neorealism and to free literature “of the heritage of bourgeois art” (Re, *Calvino and the Age* 68), Calvino responded that behind every artist there is a body of “traduzione,” a “[b]ella e nobile cosa,” and that it is only by working on that tradition that a writer can “innovar[si] e innestare i nuovi contenuti” (S 1: 1483–84).⁵² In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, as part of a broader and more philosophical discussion of the unities of discourse, Michel Foucault makes a similar observation about the interconnectedness of texts:

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network [...] The book is not simply the object that one holds in one’s hands; and it cannot remain within the parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. (23)

⁵¹ “Il libro, i libri” (1984).

⁵² See Re *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement* (68–70) for a more comprehensive account of the sentiments expressed by Calvino in this article.

The influence of other writers and of the literary tradition in general pervades Calvino's entire oeuvre, and the use of intertextuality is a prominent feature of his characterisation process. My analysis in all three chapters includes extensive discussion of the many ways Calvino uses intertextual referencing to attribute certain features to his female characters. This ranges from his purposeful choice of names for his characters through to the active incorporation into the plot of his own narratives motifs and themes garnered from across the literary spectrum. However, perhaps the two most pervasive influences evidenced in Calvino's writing are that of the traditional fairytale and the work of the Italian Renaissance poet Ludovico Ariosto.

Berardinelli writes that “[f]in dal principio i racconti di Calvino sono fiabe” (53), but the “fairy-tale quality of his writing” (Weiss 13) was noted by critics from the outset. In his 1947 review of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Cesare Pavese described Calvino as a “scoiattolo della penna,” who “climbed into the trees, more for fun than fear, to observe partisan life as a fable of the forest, clamorous, multicoloured, different” (Weiss 17; Pavese 245). Hence, it is not surprising that Calvino was chosen by his employer, the publishing house Einaudi, for the task of collecting, translating and editing a selection of traditional Italian fairytales during the 1950s.⁵³ For two years, Calvino was immersed in this project, and the end product of his labour, *Le fiabe italiane*, was published in 1956. This collection “delle più belle novelle del popolo italiano” (*Fiabe* xi) was intended to provide for the Italian people a resource similar to the collections given to the Germans by the brothers Grimm and to the Russians by Alexander Afanasyev more than a century earlier.⁵⁴

Calvino remarks in his Introduction to the *Fiabe* on the fantasy element attached to these two years of research and writing, commenting that “[p]er due anni ho vissuto in mezzo a boschi e palazzi incantati, col problema di come meglio vedere in viso la bella sconosciuta che si corica ogni notte al fianco del cavaliere” (12). But enchanting though it was to live for two

⁵³ The word fairytale is used although Calvino's collection of 'fiabe' includes fairytales and folktales. Both words are used here because it is the similarities rather than the differences between the classes that are important in this context.

⁵⁴ Interesting in this context is fairytale number 140 in *Le fiabe italiane*, “Il Reuccio fatto a mano” (764–89). Based on two versions from Calabrian oral tradition, this story involves motifs similar to the Pygmalion myth with the notable difference that, in the Calabrian version, the female (a princess) creates her ideal male companion (from sugar and flour) and he is brought to life by her singing.

years in a world of fantasy and magic, Calvino states that it was not the subject matter of the fairytales or a nostalgic yearning for tales from his childhood that really attracted him. In his essay “Rapidità,” the second of the Millennium essays, Calvino writes that what most appealed was the structural simplicity and narrative efficiency of the genre:

Se in un’epoca della mia attività letteraria sono stato attratto dai folktales, dai fairytales, non è stato per fedeltà a una tradizione etnica (dato che le mie radici sono un’Italia del tutto moderna e cosmopolita) né per nostalgia delle letture infantili (nella mia famiglia un bambino doveva leggere solo i libri istruttivi e con qualche fondamento scientifico) ma per interesse stilistico e strutturale, per l’economia, il ritmo, la logica essenziale con cui sono raccontate. (S 1: 660)

Interestingly, Calvino’s public pronouncement differs somewhat from the opinion he expresses in private correspondence with de’ Giorgi that emphasises the importance of content rather than style and illustrates why one should be alert to the way that Calvino consciously projected an image of himself, often tempered by what Francese refers to as “the idealized filter of Calvino’s memory” (136). Corti discloses that in his correspondence with de’ Giorgi written in the same period in which he was working on the *Fiabe*, “Calvino le confessa di essere attratto dall’universo delle fiabe soprattutto dal tema dell’amore e dal riflettere sul fascino della bellezza.” Using a direct quotation from one of his letters to de’ Giorgi, Corti adds that Calvino emphatically notes the

centinaia di varianti del mito stupefacente di Amore e Psiche, dapprima narrato da Apuleio, sul mito “della rivelazione della bellezza nell’atto dell’amore e il suo mistero e la facilità di perderla”⁵⁵ e l’infinita drammatica ripetizione dell’evento nelle fiabe, che le rende vere, cioè spiegazione della vita. (305–06)

Notwithstanding these different statements about what it was that most attracted him to fairytales, there is no question that structural issues were exceedingly important to Calvino. Although written and first published shortly before he was involved with the *Fiabe italiane*, *Il visconte dimezzato* contains some of Calvino’s most overt gestures towards the fairytale mode. The tale begins, “C’era una guerra...” (RR 1: 370) and ends in the happily ever after fashion, albeit qualified—that is, typical of the genre. But like all Calvinian fiction, it nods

⁵⁵ This section is presented by Corti as a quotation from Calvino’s letter to de’ Giorgi, but de’ Giorgi herself makes similar comments in her book (168–69).

towards but does not conform to all the structural features of the class as outlined by Propp.⁵⁶ Pamela, the country lass, fulfils the role of the generic character “the princess [...] or sought-after personage” (Markey 98), but she is certainly never portrayed as a damsel in distress. However, the damsel in distress motif, which is also a well-recognised component of many traditional myths, is a theme that Calvino employs on a number of occasions in both *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili*. This motif features prominently and is examined at length in the discussion surrounding the representations of Sofronia and the unfortunate Isotta.

In his review of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Pavese not only noted the fairytale or fable-like qualities of Calvino’s writing; he also pointed to what he termed the “sapore ariostesco” (246) permeating the novel. Although Pavese was the first to mention it, the presence of Ariosto in Calvino’s literature has been frequently acknowledged by critics since that date. In “Calvino lettore dell’Ariosto,” Lene Waage Petersen writes that, during the 1950s, the structural influence of the fable on Calvino’s writing was largely superseded by that of Ariosto: “La grande impresa delle *Fiabe italiane* sembra aver coronato e insieme esaurito la stagione in cui la struttura fiabesca era sentita come modello o punto di riferimento per un narrare esistenziale, non realistico” (232). Although initially Calvino’s writing displayed a “presenza ariostesca ‘invisibile’ o implicita” (230), Waage Petersen considers that, beginning with *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Calvino started to reflect in an explicit fashion “la sua riflessione poetica in una lettura delle qualità formal-stilistiche del poema ariostesco” (232).⁵⁷

Calvino himself often referred to his close affinity with Ariosto. In his 1959 article “Tre correnti del romanzo italiano d’oggi,” Calvino stated that “[t]ra tutti i poeti della nostra tradizione, quello che sento più vicino e nello stesso tempo più oscuramente affascinante è Ludovico Ariosto, e non mi stanco di rileggerlo” (S 1: 74). He also openly acknowledged the direct Ariostan influence in his work, considering the traces so manifest that he did not have to continually point them out: “penso che tali tracce di predilezione siano abbastanza vistose per lasciare che il lettore le trovi da sé” (S 1: 769).⁵⁸ Such was Calvino’s affinity for Ariosto

⁵⁶ See *Morphology of the Folktale* (19–86) for a detailed description of the structural features Propp associates with the folktale.

⁵⁷ For a fuller discussion of Ariosto in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, see Margareth Hagen’s “La seduzione del cavaliere inesistente.”

⁵⁸ “Piccola antologia di ottave” (1975).

that in 1970 he published a retelling of the *Furioso* intended as “un tipo di *mediazione* tra i testi” (Ariosto and Calvino vii) and the modern reader, who might otherwise find the Italian Renaissance classic incomprehensible.

Not surprisingly, in light of Waage Petersen’s observations, the most overt, or explicit, intertextual connections to Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* in the works under consideration are to be found in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, which Re describes as a “mock-heroic parody of the chivalric world of the *Furioso*” (“Ariosto and Calvino” 212). Of course, the Renaissance epic *Orlando furioso*, which is a continuation of Matteo Maria Boiardo’s unfinished chivalric romance *Orlando innamorato*, is itself a parody of the chivalric genre.⁵⁹ However, adopting Linda Hutcheon’s terminology, although Calvino’s parody of the *Furioso* involves the “ironic ‘trans-contextualization’ and inversion,” or “repetition with a difference,” that is typical of the genre, his irony is generally more “playful” than “belittling” (*Theory* 32); it is a “combination of respectful homage and ironically thumbed nose” (33). Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate when discussing the representations of Bradamante, Sofronia and the lascivious widow Priscilla, all of whom clearly display Ariostan connections, Calvino’s parody may not belittle the *Furioso*, but his female characters often fall victim to his “playful” irony.

Although thematic references to the *Furioso* are important, as with the fairytale, Calvino’s public pronouncements indicate that he considered Ariosto’s greatest influence on his writing to be upon structure and narrative. The concept of ‘avventura’ and the idea of movement that goes with the adventure is a fundamental component of Ariosto’s poetry and one that is well recognised by Calvino: “[f]in dall’inizio il *Furioso* si annuncia come il poema del movimento, o meglio, annuncia il particolare tipo di movimento che lo percorrerà da cima a fondo, movimento a linee spezzate, a zig zag” (S 1: 762). All thirteen of the stories in *Gli amori difficili* are titled “L’avventura di...,” and in Re’s words, in these stories “Calvino correlates and interweaves movement and action with desire in endless permutations; his is a

⁵⁹ Although Ariosto’s *Furioso* continues Boiardo’s unfinished chivalric romance, his debt to Ovid has been recognised from the publication of the first version of the poem in 1516. However, in his article “The Orlando Furioso and Ovid’s Revision of the Aeneid,” Daniel Javitch discusses whether Ariosto’s work reflects a “possible awareness of Ovid’s revisionary relationship to Virgil” (1024). Javitch then goes on to suggest that “[e]ven more [... than] he imitates the *Metamorphoses* Ariosto borrows from and imitates the *Aeneid*” (1025). The logical extension of these observations is that, in borrowing from Ariosto, Calvino in his turn indirectly draws upon both Ovid (*Metamorphoses*) and Virgil (*Aeneid*).

modern version of Ariosto's *inchiesta amorosa*." Re goes on to suggest that "L'avventura di due sposi" is the story that best embodies this "modern version of Ariosto's quest," for this married couple, who are both factory workers but working different shifts, are doomed never to meet in bed together. As one gets up to go to work, the other arrives home. They spend few waking hours together and the time they do spend is marked with tension: her desire for more of his attention and his desire not to be late for work, and vice versa. It is ironic that their moment of closest intimacy is when each is in the bed alone: each automatically seeks the warmth left by the recently vacated other and chooses to sleep in that same warm spot. Re considers that the "perfect circularity of their never-ending quest mirrors the circularity of Ariosto's *inchiesta amorosa*, in which the object of desire remains perennially out of reach" ("Ariosto and Calvino" 218).

The Ariostan zigzag is also a feature of Calvino's writing, and it is often associated with the actions of female characters: Viola zigzags on her horse; the female skier descends the slope with a zigzagging motion. And in Re's opinion, the completely abstract tale "L'avventura di un automobilista," which was not written until 1967 and contains actants known only as 'I,' Y and Z, represents a "most schematic and effective modern interpretation of mimetic desire and the zigzag but ultimately circular movement of the Ariostan quest" ("Ariosto and Calvino" 219).⁶⁰

The focus to this point has been upon factors, both personal and environmental, that helped 'create' Calvino, the author, identifying influences that helped shape his view of women. Attention now turns towards the texts themselves with a discussion of how these influences manifest themselves in practical terms—or, how they are evidenced in Calvino's representation of his female characters.

Calvino Constructs His Female Characters

This second part of Chapter One relies upon the concept of creation as a process of assembly. My thinking is influenced by ideas expressed in Salzman-Mitchell's recent article in which she discusses the notion of building a statue from pieces and explores in some detail the practicalities involved in constructing a statue from ivory. Ovid does not explain quite how

⁶⁰ 'I' here indicates that this is a first person narrative, and the 'I' is never given a title.

Pygmalion created his ivory maiden, stating simply that, “with marvellous artistry, he skilfully carved a snowy ivory statue.” Like Salzman-Mitchell, I consider that it is self-evident that Pygmalion’s statue could only have been pieced together, for there is no known elephant large enough to supply a tusk of the dimensions necessary to allow the construction of even the smallest life-sized ivory woman. And yet, as Douglas F. Bauer points out, ivory “is doubtless the most challenging medium, for it exacted a skillful joining of numerous pieces and fragments; yet no obstacle can frustrate the truly gifted artisan” (16). It is this idea that is pursued in the following discussion, in which Calvino’s female characters are viewed as the products of a conscious construction process—one that involves assembling material drawn from many sources in ways that best suit the narrative purposes of the author.

In 1950, Calvino accompanied the publication of his short story “Pesci grossi, pesci piccoli” with an introductory note that spoke of his desire to represent “dei caratteri pieni e adulti, di far muovere delle vere figure di donna. Qualcosa, però, che non son mai riuscito a esprimere, per quante volte abbia tentato” (63). Calvino made this comment when he was commencing a serious attempt to distance himself from his first novel, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, a book he felt “defined him too much” and in many ways “constrained” him (McLaughlin, *Italo* 34). Calvino considered himself a writer with a social conscience, but he did not feel comfortable writing within the confines he felt that the Italian postwar neorealist movement imposed upon him. Martin McLaughlin observes that from an “early stage Calvino was non-conformist” (*Italo* 19), but whereas Calvino’s search for autonomy and the degree to which he can be considered a ‘committed’ writer have been well pursued by the critics,⁶¹ the question of the representation of women in his writing, both during this formative period and throughout his writing career, has remained relatively unexplored. Underlying my suggestion that Calvino’s female characters are created from pieces is an inherent acceptance of the notion that there is a discernible element of artificiality in their construction. Whatever Calvino may have intended in this area of his writing, and despite his expressed desire “di far muovere delle vere figure di donna,” I suggest that, when creating his female characters, Calvino displays

⁶¹ Many critics touch on this aspect of Calvino’s writing, but Eugenio Bolongaro’s *Italo Calvino and the Compass of Literature* (2003) specifically examines the way in which Calvino discusses “the role of the intellectual” and “the ethical and political dimension of literature” (book jacket) in his works written between 1948 and 1963. Re also extensively explores the environment in which Calvino produced his early works in *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*.

what Iris Murdoch terms the “almost irresistible human tendency to seek consolation in fantasy” (352).

The concept of artificially constructing the ideal woman from pieces drawn from many sources has a long history in the realm of cultural production. In *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis*, Elizabeth Mansfield writes that the classical tale of Zeuxis, who according to tradition was a Greek artist living in Southern Italy somewhere around the fourth century BC, “is one of the West’s most enduring myths of artistic creation” (xii). Both Cicero and Pliny the Elder provide accounts of this story, which differ slightly but not in the essential details. According to Cicero, in order to portray Helen of Troy, purportedly the world’s most beautiful woman, Zeuxis had five lovely maidens parade before him. Pliny is silent as to the identity of the subject of Zeuxis’ painting but explicitly mentions that the five maidens were nude.⁶² What Cicero and Pliny both record is that Zeuxis drew the best features from all five models to create his painting of the beautiful woman, so that his ideal woman was in fact a synthesis. The Italian Renaissance artist Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino (Raphael) expressed a similar idea in a letter to Castiglione in 1514 when he wrote that, in the absence of “good judges and of beautiful women,” he made “do with a certain idea [‘certa Idea’] which comes into [his] head.”⁶³ Clark Hulse states that, although Raphael is not making a definitive statement about his “compositional habits or the nature of his artistic representation,” this comment is, nonetheless, a “skillful mystification of the creative process by which Raphael comes up with, originates, and thereby owns the beautiful images he produces.” Hulse further observes that the “method espoused by Raphael is instantly recognizable as that of the ancient painter Zeuxis” (87). Like Zeuxis’ painting, Raphael’s beautiful women arise from a process of synthesis, for in the absence of a model, he combines ideas he has in his head. However, Mansfield, who unlike Raphael is specifically addressing the concept of the ‘ideal’ rather than the merely beautiful, considers that Zeuxis’ method shows that he “cannot work without a model,” and that “he requires a stable referent

⁶² Interestingly, Mansfield notes that in Cicero’s account, to help choose his female models Zeuxis was taken to the gymnasium in Croton to examine nude youths, the brothers of the local women (19 and 22).

⁶³ “Ma essendo carestia e di buoni giudici, et di belle donne, io mi seruo di certa Idea, che mi uiene nella mente.” Clark Hulse in footnote 26 (195) gives the reference (Vincenzo Glozio, ed., *Raffaello nei documenti* [Città del Vaticano, 1936], (31). The English translation is from Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny, *Raphael* (97). An interesting aside is that Raphael was specifically responding to Castiglione’s praise for his painting of the nymph Galatea (c. 1512), part of a fresco originally executed for Chigi (now the Farnesina, Rome).

to perceived reality” (28), which suggests that the “painter cannot *conceive* of ideal form” because otherwise “no model would be necessary” (29).⁶⁴

According to Mansfield, stories such as Pygmalion “characterize creativity as a consequence of emotional or corporeal stimuli [... T]hey link art making to love, sexual fulfilment, and psychic and physical wholeness [... endowing] artistic activity with the power to transcend human shortcomings.”⁶⁵ In contrast, she considers that “the Zeuxis myth valorizes an intellectual rather than an emotional approach to art making” (7). Since Calvino viewed himself as an intellectual rather than an emotional writer, in all likelihood, he would have preferred to be compared to Zeuxis than to Pygmalion. But Salzman-Mitchell’s approach to Pygmalion’s statue creation deals with mechanical rather than intellectual or emotional aspects and recognises the strong link between the two stories at the technical level: like Zeuxis, Pygmalion forms a whole from many parts. As Salzman-Mitchell explains, “[i]n Zeuxis, these parts belong to different real women, in Pygmalion, the diverse pieces of ivory are transformed into ideal body parts by the sculptor’s imagination.” Pygmalion’s “statue is born from a mental image” (307), which recalls Raphael’s “*certa Idea*” and supports the notion of forming a female figure from pieces that are not necessarily modelled on real-life women. In approaching Calvino’s representation of the feminine, I assume that, unlike Zeuxis, Calvino’s primary aim was not to achieve any form of classical mimesis in his character formation. Although he drew ideas from existing sources, which included, but are certainly not confined to, real-life models, I consider that Calvino’s female characters are the synthetic product of a very deliberate construction process. They are designed to conform to a “*certa Idea*,” or to play a certain role in his “*cinema mentale*” (S 1: 699), and there is very little evidence that Calvino genuinely attempted “*di far muovere delle vere figure di donna.*”

⁶⁴ Although these statements are in seeming conflict, the difference really centres on the word ‘ideal.’ Raphael is talking about producing a beautiful woman but Zeuxis is trying to produce the ‘most beautiful,’ or ideal, woman. The great German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) also believed that ideal beauty was created by combining a variety of features from different individuals. However, he recognised that combining these various features was not just a mechanical task and that the fundamental ingredient was the ability of the individual artist, developed over time and through experience.

⁶⁵ Mansfield links the Pygmalion story to those of the Corinthian Maid and Apelles Painting Campaspe. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Mansfield chapter 1, “Art as Myth,” particularly pp. 4–7.

In her article, Salzman-Mitchell discusses in some detail the practicalities of constructing a statue from ivory, and the nature of the material means that this is not a simple procedure. As I have already signalled, Calvino's character creation is not a straightforward process either, despite the fact that character development was a feature that Calvino says he did not prioritise in his writing. Indeed, Ricci writes that sometimes Calvino's characters are "elaborated only in so far as is necessary to remove them from total anonymity" ("Silence" 54). Although Calvino devotes few words to physical description in his literature, a disproportionate number of words that are so directed are applied to describing his female characters. This lends support to my contention that, despite Calvino's comments to the contrary, constructing his female characters was both an important and a very deliberate part of his narrative process. Even so, using Bonsaver's words, Calvino's female characters "sono figure dalla psicologia difficilmente credibile, mancano di 'tridimensionalità', di 'carne e ossa'" (*Mondo* 232).

Notwithstanding their tendency to resemble pressed flowers, or cardboard cut-out dolls,⁶⁶ the appearance of simplicity and lack of detail in Calvino's representation of the feminine is deceptive and can largely be attributed to a conscious stylistic technique. McLaughlin writes that even in this "first phase of his literary career" (1945–64) Calvino was already "in pursuit of that lightness and geometric writing that became his hallmark" (*Italo* 154).⁶⁷ Calvino does not waste words supplying extraneous details, and his predilection for this approach to writing is comprehensively discussed in "Leggerezza," the first essay in the Millennium series, in which he explains: "la mia operazione è stata il più delle volte una sottrazione di peso" (S 1: 631.) Calvino's remark recalls a statement made by the Irish novelist, playwright and satirist Brian O'Nolan (using the nom de plume Flann O'Brien) in his 1938 novel *At Swim-Two-Birds*:

Characters should be interchangeable as between one book and another [...].

The modern novel should be largely a work of reference. Most authors spend

⁶⁶ In some respects, Calvino's characters bear an affinity to Torrismondo's description of the paladins' shields in *Il cavaliere inesistente*. He states that they are not made from iron but rather "sono carta, che la puoi passare da parte a parte con un dito" (RR 1: 1006).

⁶⁷ McLaughlin makes this comment while considering the forces directing Calvino's rewritings of his work during the first twenty years of his literary activity (1945–64) and should be read in conjunction with Francese's article.

their time saying what has been said before—usually much better. A wealth of references to existing works would acquaint the reader instantaneously with the nature of each character, would obviate tiresome explanations... (33)

O’Nolan was clearly being facetious, but Calvino’s writing style, particularly his desire for “leggerezza,” shows a certain affinity for the sentiments O’Nolan expresses, for he devoted a great deal of effort to the subtraction of weight, creating characters that are distinctly minimalist and yet familiar. Calvino refers to his preference for ‘weightless’ writing on many occasions and in a number of different contexts. For example, in “Rapidità,” while explaining his attraction to folktales and fairytales, Calvino comments that “la prima caratteristica del folktale è l’economia espressiva” (S 1: 662). The economy of expression found in these compact tales was something he not only admired and tried to emulate but also felt suited him temperamentally. In the same Millennium essay, he wrote that he was temperamentally best suited to expressing himself in short texts: “la mia opera è fatta in gran parte di *short stories*.” He also considered that, in his preference for short literary forms, he was merely following the true calling of Italian literature, which he describes as being “povera di romanzieri ma sempre ricca di poeti” (S 1: 671). Calvino felt that for the prose writer, as for the poet writing verse, success lay in the felicity of verbal expression, which sometimes comes about in a sudden flash of inspiration but generally involves “una paziente ricerca del *mot juste*, della frase in cui ogni parola è insostituibile, dell’accostamento di suoni e di concetti più efficace e denso di significato” (S 1: 670–71).

In terms of characterisation, the abbreviated but dense style of writing preferred by Calvino results in the frequent use of metaphor, mythological and literary allusions, and recognised stereotypical associations, often given an ironic reinterpretation. Parody features prominently in Calvino’s characterisation process and as Patrizia Bettella notes, “parody entails the idea of palimpsest, the rewriting or remaking of a strong literary model” (*Ugly* 83). But Calvino also relied heavily on other comedic tools in his writing, notably irony and satire used other than parodically,⁶⁸ especially when dealing with the erotic. In an essay first published in 1969, which is now referred to as “Il sesso e il riso,” Calvino writes that “[i]n letteratura la

⁶⁸ See Ziva Ben-Porat’s article “Method in Madness: Notes on the Structure of Parody, Based on MAD TV Satires” (247–49) for excellent definitions of parody and satire, and for a discussion of the relationship and difference between them.

sessualità è un linguaggio in cui quello che non si dice è più importante di quello che si dice” (S 1: 261). Later in the same essay, he points to the deep bond between sex and laughter at the anthropological level, adding that “il riso è pure difesa della trepidazione umana di fronte alla rivelazione del sesso” (S 1: 262). In light of these statements, it is not surprising to find that comedic devices feature prominently in Calvino’s representation of the feminine. With a few notable exceptions, the feminine in his oeuvre is almost always associated in some way with the erotic and the issue is approached from a male perspective. Calvino frequently constructs a humorous situation by creating and then subverting a stereotype, but he uses humour as a way of relieving the sexual tension. Mary Anne Ferguson comments in her Introduction to *Images of Women in Literature*, that stereotypical “character types used in comedy and satire make readers who recognize them feel superior and hence in a position to laugh” (5). But as I will demonstrate, there are a number of instances when this feeling of superiority strongly favours the male reader, making his use of humour one of the more noticeably androcentric aspects of Calvino’s writing technique, which leads critics such as Re to observe that the Calvino’s ideal reader is always implicitly male.

Calvino’s narrative style, with its use of meticulously selected words and carefully juxtaposed concepts that are dense with meaning but typically short on explanation, results in a product that allows for multiple levels of interpretation. Calvino himself provides one of the best images of what is meant by multiple levels of interpretation in a speech given in 1963 in support of Emilio Gadda in which he compared both the reality of the world and good literature to an artichoke:

La realtà del mondo si presenta ai nostri occhi multipla, spinosa, a strati fittamente sovrapposti. Come un carciofo. Ciò che conta per noi nell’opera letteraria è la possibilità di continuare a sfogliarla come un carciofo infinito, scoprendo dimensioni di lettura sempre nuove. (S 1: 1067)⁶⁹

Although Calvino’s writing is generally accessible, his approach does offer more to an informed readership. In Wolfgang Iser’s terminology, Calvino provides plenty of opportunity for the reader well versed in the Western cultural heritage to fill “in the gaps left by the text itself” (55). This observation is especially applicable to Calvino’s method of character formation, and in the following discussion, by exposing the multi-layered nature of Calvino’s

⁶⁹ “Il mondo è un carciofo (per Carlo Emilio Gadda)” (1963).

construction process, I demonstrate that he devoted considerable attention to the representation of his female characters, despite his intimations to the contrary.

I approach Calvino's construction of the feminine from four different perspectives in the following discussion, concentrating primarily on the more fully developed female characters found in the fantastic trilogy.

Constructing the Desirable Woman

At its most basic level, the Pygmalion paradigm involves the creation by a male of a feminine ideal, but as Silverman observes, "'Ideal' is a term which has meaning only within a system of values" (*Subject* 160) and "ideal representations are always socially mediated" (161). I would add that even within any given society or system of values, 'ideal' remains a subjective concept. Resorting to the *Oxford English Dictionary* only confirms the lack of a precise definition for the word. Nevertheless, intrinsic to the definition is the suggestion that the word 'ideal' refers in some way to something "answering to one's highest conception;" to something which is regarded as "perfect or supremely excellent in its kind;" a "person or thing regarded as realizing the highest conception, a perfect example or representative" ("Ideal"). According to Pygmalion's criteria, once she becomes a living woman, Galatea represents an ideal for womanhood. But commonly, the word 'ideal' points to the world of ideas rather than to something concrete—the 'idea' of Galatea while still in the mind of Pygmalion. In this sense, the 'ideal' can be thought of as an idea or archetype, as something existing only in idea form, in the imagination, and thus not real or practical—or, as Winterson's preacher pronounces, "a thing to aspire to" but only truly realisable "in the next world" (*Oranges* 58). Used in this manner, the ideal woman can legitimately be thought of as something imaginary, existing only as a mental concept in the mind of her creator and possibly not attainable in reality. By their very nature, depictions of the ideal woman in art, literature and the cinema are the outward representations of the intangible idea existing in the artist's head rather than manifestations of any flesh and blood woman. Raphael's paintings of beautiful women, who are the product of his "certa Idea," Pygmalion's Galatea while still a statue, and Calvino's female characters are all examples of this form of artistic representation, but so are the female screen actresses who made such an impression upon the young Calvino during his years as a "spettatore."

The concept of the ideal is intrinsic to this study, particularly as it manifests itself in the guise of the idealised woman, or, as is common in *Gli amori difficili*, a more general idealisation of the feminine state. However, Calvino's conception of the feminine ideal is hard to identify, for although he both employs and subverts stereotypes, the only consistent feature of his representation of the feminine is that it is something 'other' than male. What can be said with more certainty is that Calvino's ideal woman would not fit the image of the traditional Madonna, or the subservient 'donna del focolare' idealised by Mussolini and commonly found in the work of male authors writing in the interwar years. In *Bellissima*, Stephen Gundle observes that, among these authors, "there was a recurrent fantasy of women as passive, available, maternal, uncontaminated in any way by modernity." Gundle goes on to comment that, in their narratives, the women, who were commonly represented as "generic images often of groups or categories of women," "never speak, never challenge men, never betray expectations and are always surveyed by men" (87). Although Calvino's female characters certainly display some of the traits outlined by Gundle, they usually bear a stronger resemblance to the comparatively independent and assertive Hollywood actresses that Calvino was introduced to during his years as a "spettatore." Typically, his female characters are a complex blend of attractive and repulsive forces, representing both what is most desired and most feared by the Calvinian male.⁷⁰ The focus in this section is upon Calvino's crafting process, with attention directed towards examining the features Calvino incorporates when building a female character he wishes to portray as desirable.

Ovid does not go so far as to suggest that Pygmalion created and fell in love with a goddess, but the statue he carves is "lovelier than any woman born," and the implication is that Pygmalion fell in love with his creation because of its great beauty. In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes's structural analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, Barthes states that "[b]eauty (unlike ugliness) cannot be explained [...] deprived of any anterior code, beauty would be mute" (33). These sentiments support Walter Pater's much earlier observation that "[b]eauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative; and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness" (xxv). Explaining how substance is given to this otherwise meaningless quality, Barthes writes that "beauty is referred to a

⁷⁰ A psychoanalytically orientated discussion of the intra-textual relationship between Calvino's male and female characters is the subject of Chapter Two

variety of codes: *lovely as Venus?*” (34),⁷¹ and indeed, the history of the Pygmalion myth suggests that Ovid’s description of Galatea as “lovelier than any woman born” is merely code for “lovely as Venus.” Later in his analysis, Barthes remarks that the seemingly “obligatory link between beauty and love” is a “commonplace truism,” with beauty supplying the “*secure* code” necessary to support novelistic love, “which is itself a code” (143). Although beauty “has no referent,” for it “cannot be described,” Barthes notes that the link between beauty and love is supported by an “abundance of authorities” throughout literary history, providing as examples “Venus, the Sultan’s daughter, Raphael’s Madonnas, etc.” The multiplicity of these anterior models brings the “love established by this beauty [...] under the *natural* rules of culture” (143), so that the codes of love and beauty now meet and rest upon one another creating a circularity: “beauty obliges me to love, but also what I love is inevitably beautiful” (144). Calvino clearly favours the abstract, but he leaves his reader in little doubt that his male protagonists are erotically associated (‘in love’ is usually too strong an expression) with attractive women. This is despite the fact that he generally avoids directly describing a female character as beautiful. Instead, Calvino communicates her attractiveness and concomitant desirability by more indirect means, employing as signifiers devices derived from literary conventions, stereotypical associations and by allusion.

There are instances in both *Gli amori difficili* and *I nostri antenati* in which Calvino does directly describe a female character as beautiful, and use of the unqualified “bella” is significant. It is an example of a word that is “insostituibile,” used in a manner that is both inexplicit yet “efficace e denso di significato.” Enrico Gnei, the protagonist of “L’avventura di un impiegato,” quite unexpectedly finds himself spending the night with “una bella signora” (RR 2: 1086), a woman who would normally be beyond his reach, and Delia H. is introduced in “L’avventura di un poeta” simply as a “donna molto bella” (RR 2: 1167). The beauty of Viola D’Ondariva, possibly Calvino’s most fully developed female character, is referred to explicitly on a number of occasions in *Il barone rampante*, and there is no question that her attraction is closely linked to her beauty. Cosimo’s first sighting of Viola when she returns to Ombrosa as an adult is of an unidentified blonde horsewoman. Before he has even confirmed her identity, he is trying to see her face in the hope that “quel viso si sarebbe rivelato bellissimo” (RR 1: 705). When Viola joins Cosimo in the trees for the first

⁷¹ The question mark is Barthes’s way of indicating that the referent (in this case Venus) must remain invisible to “affirm the code without realizing (without compromising) its original” (34).

time he exclaims, “—Ma di’: come sei bella” (RR 1: 712). Even Biagio describes Viola as “[m]olto bella e brillante” (RR 1: 724) when he tells Cosimo about his encounter with her in Paris. There is also a much less conventional example to be found in *Il cavaliere inesistente* in which the young knight Rambaldo describes Bradamante to his “compagni di tenda” as “bellissima,” but adds, “non so il viso” (RR 1: 990). This is because, in a satirical parody of the trope of love-at-first-sight, Rambaldo has fallen instantly in love with the urinating Bradamante’s exposed, and evidently beautiful, bottom half. Her face, on the other hand, has remained hidden beneath her armour.

Perhaps significantly, Calvino openly recognises and discusses the seeming necessity for beauty, particularly feminine beauty, in *La giornata d’uno scrutatore*. This is a novella with strong autobiographical overtones that Calvino had been working on for many years prior to its 1963 publication date, so the sentiments expressed were logically also in his mind as he was writing the stories under consideration in this study.⁷² Amerigo Ormea, the protagonist, spends Election Day 1953 as a scrutineer inside the Cottolengo Institute, a religious institution that cared for the physically and mentally handicapped—or in Marilyn Schneider’s more graphic terminology, Amerigo passes polling day inside “Torino’s celebrated monument to Christian charity that is a refuge for the deformed, despised, and demented” (100). At a certain point, out of boredom, Amerigo begins to daydream and to think of “un mondo in cui non ci fosse più la bellezza. Ed era alla bellezza femminile che pensava” (RR 2: 24). Faced with so many mentally challenged and physically disfigured individuals, Amerigo asks himself:

Cos’è questo nostro bisogno di bellezza? [...]. Un carattere acquisito, un riflesso condizionato, una convenzione linguistica? E cos’è, in sé, la bellezza fisica? Un sogno, un privilegio, un dato irrazionale della sorte, come—tra costoro—la bruttezza, la deformità, la minorazione? O è un modello via via diverso che noi ci fingiamo, storico più che naturale, una proiezione dei nostri valori di cultura? (RR 2: 25)

⁷² See McLaughlin *Italo Calvino* (72–75), Scarpa *Italo Calvino* (130–33), and Ermanno Bencivenga “Philosophy and Literature in Calvino’s Tales” (205–06) for specific reference to autobiographical links in *La giornata d’uno scrutatore*.

Gore Vidal points out that when Amerigo decides that conceptions of beauty probably came from the Greeks, he recalls that “i greci uccidevano i bambini deformi, o le bambine in sovrannumero” (145), which suggested that “porre la bellezza troppo in alto nella scala dei valori è già il primo passo verso una civiltà disumana” (RR 2: 25). Although this discussion appears inside a novella, it is an interesting reflection with relevance in the present context, for it suggests that Calvino recognised that overvaluing beauty could have negative consequences.

Nonetheless, this awareness did not stop Calvino using beauty as a primary symbol of feminine desirability in his characterisation process, which is in keeping with Barthes’s earlier explanation of the traditional circularity of the relationship between beauty and love. The connection between beauty and other favourable attributes is also deeply embedded in Western cultural thinking. According to the Neoplatonists, outer beauty was a sign of inner beauty, so that beauty and goodness, or godliness, were inextricably linked. This meant that to idolise a beautiful woman was akin to worshipping God, for she provided a direct conduit to the Almighty; Dante’s Beatrice, or Petrarca’s Laura, are among the better recognised examples of women used for this purpose. Although the tenets of Neoplatonic thinking had been long discarded and certainly held no sway with the secular Calvino, many of the tropes and topoi associated with Neoplatonic poetry, which borrowed in turn from earlier models, are ingrained in the Italian cultural psyche, and Calvino certainly exploited them in both the positive and negative representation of his female characters.

To construct his female characters so that they would deliver the messages he wished to impart without the need for well-roundedness and psychological depth, Calvino actively employed stereotypes and clichés. Bettella points to Francesco Petrarca and Giovanni Boccaccio, both followers of the Neoplatonic tradition, as the two authors who contributed the most towards the formation of the “stereotyped models of feminine beauty that became established in literature by the sixteenth century” (*Ugly* 83). According to Bettella, in the short canon favoured by Petrarca “light and colour are considered the primary sources of beauty” (84), and it was Petrarca’s golden-haired Laura, as immortalised in his *Canzoniere*, who came to provide the “model of physical perfection and moral dignity in lyrical poetry”

(86).⁷³ Until the sixteenth century, “classical models of blonde beauty and women with complexions as white as snow” dominated the high literary tradition, and blonde hair became the “primary symbol of feminine beauty” (133). Although conceptions of beauty have moved on from the strict sixteenth-century conventions, as Bettella indicates, “blondness is one feature that has persisted over the centuries as emblem of female beauty both in literature and real life” (134). But even Ovid, who was writing over two thousand years ago, has Pygmalion carve a “snowy ivory” female, and in an odd way the strength of the connection between blondness, or pale complexion, and beauty is highlighted by the fact that it also appears in literature with homoerotic overtones, in which the power balance of male writer and object of desire is equally relevant. An example is the “wonderfully handsome” Dorian from Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, who is said to possess both “frank blue eyes” and “crisp gold hair” (18).

Blondness is a feature closely associated with Viola’s name, both as a child and when she is a young woman. The first description given of the young Viola is of “una bambina bionda” (RR 1: 563), and as an adult she is said to be “bionda come da bambina” (RR 1: 709). But not only is Viola blonde; so too are her horses, which are an important symbol of her relative freedom in contrast to the constraints of Cosimo’s tree-bound existence. As a child Viola rides “un cavallino nano bianco” (RR 1: 585), and as she gallops away from the young fruit thieves leaving them to their squalid hovels, her appearance is described as the “apparizione della bambina bionda al galoppo” (RR 1: 593). The first thing Cosimo notes when Viola reappears in his life as a grown woman is “un’amazzone [...] bionda” (RR 1: 705) riding a “cavallo bianco” (RR 1: 707). Although Viola is directly referred to as beautiful within the text, the double use of the blonde stereotype in connection with her name reinforces her identity as a desirable woman.

The Amazon Bradamante is also blonde, but unlike Viola, she is not directly described as such and the reader is left to surmise this in a more roundabout fashion. When Rambaldo spies the half-naked Bradamante through the reeds, he sees among other features her “liscio ventre piumato d’oro.” As noted earlier, Rambaldo immediately falls head over heels in love

⁷³ See Bettella’s *The Ugly Woman* (83–87) for further discussion of the formation and fixation of conventions of female literary beauty prior to the sixteenth century, and for an explanation of the long and short canons used to represent feminine beauty in literature from the late Middle Ages.

and later describes her as “bellissima” on the strength of this observation. The episode also provides one of the best examples of the way in which Calvino uses parody satirically to “distort existing literary models” by offering the “antithesis of [an] accepted cultural model,” delivering instead “a world turned upside down” (Bettella, *Ugly* 83). Rambaldo falls instantly in love with Bradamante’s blonde beauty, but in total contrast to the traditional trope of love-at-first-sight, it is not her unmasked head and face that captivate him.⁷⁴

The enchanting and accomplished young Swiss skier in “L’avventura di uno sciatore” is another blonde female character. Blondness may not be her most notable feature but it certainly adds to her fascination. She is referred to as the “ragazza bionda” (RR 2: 1174) early in the text, but the reader is again reminded of her blondness when “il grasso” disparagingly states, “Beh, non è poi quel gran campione, la bionda” (RR 2: 1176). Of course, this statement is ironic and designed to highlight the fat boy’s relative lack of finesse, for the unfolding of the story leaves little doubt that the graceful female skier is far closer to being a champion than he will ever be. However, though significant, blondness is not the defining characteristic of the unnamed female skier. The feature that is most closely associated with her character is her sky-blue hood; she is referred to throughout simply as “la ragazza celeste-cielo” (RR 2: 1177).

This story was first published in 1959 in the journal *Successo* under the title “La ragazza celeste-cielo,” and before that it appeared in an undated manuscript with the title “Il cappuccio da sci celeste-cielo.” It is one of the stories found in the 1970 collection that was not included in the 1958 *Racconti*, and a number of changes were made to the original story before it was included in *Gli amori difficili* (1970).⁷⁵ One of the principal changes was the elevation of the “ragazzo con gli occhiali verdi” (RR 2: 1174) to main protagonist, so that, despite the fundamental role played by the female skier in the story, it becomes his adventure. What has remained consistent throughout the evolution of the tale is the presence of a sky-blue hood, and Giovanni Bardazzi writes that the ‘sky-blue’ “[n]on si tratta semplicemente del colore di un capo d’abbigliamento, bensì di una qualità intrinseca della persona: la ragazza è una creatura celestiale e beatifica.” He suggests that the colour sky blue defines the

⁷⁴ This topic is pursued further in Chapter Three.

⁷⁵ See the notes on *Gli amori difficili* in the Mondadori edition for a full discussion of the publishing history of “L’avventura di un sciatore” (RR 2: 1453–54).

female skier, creating her “clima” (264) and lending her a heavenly or otherworldly quality. Bardazzi’s observation finds its genesis in a comment Calvino made in 1958 in a letter to Elémire Zolla. Referring to Pasternik’s Lara in *Doctor Zhivago*, Calvino writes that “Lara è definita dai rapporti con gli uomini che ha intorno; si crea un particolare «clima di Lara» e questo basta. E poi in fondo quando uno scrittore crea un’atmosfera di «fascino» attorno a un personaggio di donna, finisce per non farcela vedere mai in faccia” (*Libri* 257–58). Although the reason why Bardazzi suggests this “clima” is perfectly clear in English, in the Italian language, where both ‘celeste’ and ‘cielo’ are words used to refer to heaven, the “clima” surrounding her character is even more pronounced.

The traditional connotations of the colour blue are not as straightforward as those associated with blondness. Nevertheless, when Calvino uses this colour in association with his female characters, it is unlikely to be sheer chance. Vivian and Wilhelmina Jacobs’s 1958 article “The Color Blue: Its Use as Metaphor and Symbol” provides one of the more detailed accounts of the colour blue and its associations through time, and they conclude that there is “no single factor that may explain the reputation acquired by blue” (46). Blue has not always been seen as a positive colour, particularly in the British literary tradition in which there was an “early union of blue and darkness” (37). But they note that, in the Church, “blue has become the traditional color of the Virgin Mary” (29), and Daniel V. Thompson observes that blue has contrived “to establish itself [...] as the emblem of maidenhood” (128). These connections to the Virgin Mary and maidenhood link the colour blue to virginity, purity, innocence, even perfection, and in the case of Mary, also to the sky and heaven.

Although Calvino would have been well aware of the association between the colour blue and Mary, his declared secularity makes it difficult to imagine that he was seriously connecting his female characters to a religious figure, except, perhaps, as a springboard for irony or parody. Nevertheless, Calvino’s method of characterisation, which relies on readily recognisable associations rather than direct description, means that using the colour blue was an effective and efficient way to bestow upon his female characters certain qualities often associated with Mary. The female skier’s sky-blue hood and the pristine environment in which her story unfolds certainly evoke Marian images of purity, innocence and possibly even virginity, even if the strongest allusion here is to Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. References to both Virgil and Beatrice can be discerned in the female skier’s characterisation as she

‘guides’ the very earthly young male skier beyond the top of the ski lift to the ‘Earthly Paradise’ at the crest of the sunlit mountain.

The colour blue also features in Viola’s characterisation but with rather more complex connotations. When Cosimo first encounters the ten-year-old Viola she is wearing “un vestito azzurro” (RR: I 563), which translates readily into English as a ‘sky-blue’ dress.⁷⁶ But for Viola, the combination of blonde hair and blue dress do not produce the beatific “clima” that is associated with the female skier. The visual imagery surrounding Viola’s introduction to the text provides an excellent example of Calvinian irony. On his first afternoon in the trees, the twelve-year-old Cosimo encounters what appears to be the stereotypical blonde-headed angel-child, who, dressed in blue, is swinging nonchalantly on a swing suspended from a tree situated in a lush garden. Toril Moi writes that “the dominant literary images of femininity are male fantasies” (57), and with Viola, Calvino creates a character that both embodies and subverts this fantasy image. For the ambivalence of Viola’s character is immediately signalled in the juxtaposition of conflicting images: the blonde girl in the “azzurro” dress, swinging in such a carefree manner in an Eden-like setting, is also eating an apple. She is the one figure Cosimo most desires to be with, and yet she also poses the greatest danger to his autonomy; she is both Mary and Eve, and Calvino expresses this symbolically in the associated imagery.⁷⁷

Bradamante is another character associated with the colour blue from the outset. When she enters *Il cavaliere inesistente* in chapter 4, she is described as wearing “una guarnacca color pervinca,” and waving from her helmet is a “cimiero di lunghe piume anch’esse color

⁷⁶ In the Vintage Classics edition of Archibald Colquhoun’s English translation of *Il barone rampante* (*The Baron in the Trees*), as published in *Our Ancestors*, the young Viola is described as wearing a green dress (89). In the Harcourt edition, by the same translator, of the single title, *The Baron in the Trees*, the dress is “light blue” (16).

⁷⁷ Although the lush garden of the Ondarivas more intuitively evokes Garden of Eden references (reinforced by the presence of an apple), it is also true that Viola is confined in an enclosed garden. Commenting on Sofronia’s role in Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*, Naomi Yavneh quotes the lines “È il suo pregio maggior che tra le mura/ d’angusta casa asconde i suoi gran pregi....” (2.14), and goes on to observe that “hiding her merits within narrow walls, evokes the tropes of the intensely erotic *Song of Songs* that traditionally figure the Virgin as ‘hortus conclusus’ (garden enclosed) or ‘turris eburnea’ (tower of ivory)” (276). It is therefore also feasible to read Virgin Mary, or at least virginal, references into the imagery surrounding Viola in the garden, even if the Eve references are more dominant.

pervinca” (RR 1: 987). ‘Pervinca’ is also the colour of the eyes of Cosimo’s first love, Ursula: “una ragazza con occhi di bellissimo color pervinca” (RR 1: 683). Since periwinkle blue is commonly identified as blue-violet, and since the word violet is ‘viola’ in Italian, the colour provides a loose but obvious connection between Bradamante, Ursula and Viola. Despite their many differences, all three have been constructed as desirable women, but whereas it could be argued that the colour blue does impart a vaguely angel-child, or angel-woman, aura to Ursula, any associations with the notions of purity and the celestial in Viola’s and Bradamante’s characterisations are accompanied by strong irony. Viola’s characterisation includes clear temptress Eve references, but the most openly ironic nod to the celestial is surely the final revelation that Bradamante is the alter ego of the narrating nun, Suor Teodora. Connotations of purity associated with the colour blue are equally ironic, but since Viola only appears in blue as a young girl, it is fair to say that in her case the colour could validly be considered a symbol of her maidenhood. In contrast, Bradamante’s periwinkle cloak and plumes never signify virginity or purity. Rambaldo’s tent companions inform him that he is unlikely to win Bradamante’s favour not on account of her virginal modesty, but rather because “Bradamante o si passa i generali o i mozzi di stalla!” (RR 1: 991). No reason is ever given to explain Bradamante’s polarised choice of sexual partners, despite the fact that she is later revealed as the narrator of the story; a revelation that also exposes the nun Suor Teodora as neither virginal nor celibate. All that can really be said is that associating Bradamante’s name with the colour blue simply adds another layer of ambiguity to her already deceptive characterisation.⁷⁸

Pink is the other colour that Calvino actively incorporates into the representation of certain female characters. Like blue, pink has strong stereotypical and metaphorical associations, which are reinforced in the Italian language, in which ‘rosa’ also means rose. The sky-blue hooded female skier has “il viso [...] d’un rosa che diventava rosso sulle guance” (RR 2: 1174) and Pamela, the country lass in *Il visconte dimezzato* with whom both halves of Medardo fall in love, is wearing “una semplice vesticciuola rosa” (RR 1: 404) when the bad

⁷⁸ A knight clad in periwinkle reappears in “Storia del guerriero sopravvissuto” (*La taverna dei destini incrociati* in *Il castello dei destini incrociati* [1973]). He is also discovered to be a she by a young knight who spies her making her ablutions. Unlike Bradamante, this periwinkle Amazon undresses completely and her blondness has disappeared; this Amazon has “capelli bruni.” Her dark hair accompanies a far more menacing character, for she belongs to “un reggimento di guerriere gigantesche” (RR 2: 570): “Regine punitrici governeranno per i prossimi millenni” (RR 2: 571).

half first spies her. But without doubt, the strongest symbolic use of the word ‘rosa’ occurs in connection with Ursula’s character, and it is the flower, rather than the colour, that is most closely associated with her name.

When Cosimo first notices Ursula, she is sitting apart from the others in an alder tree, and one of his first actions is to pick her a rose and pin it on her head. As Gabriele notes in her study of Eros and language in Calvino’s writing, the image of the rose is the “poetic and erotic figure *par excellence*” (*Italo* 52) and it is often used as the symbol of virginity. Ursula might have periwinkle eyes, but if Calvino has endowed her with a “clima,” it is associated with the rose and what it signifies, and it cannot be coincidental that she shares her name with the tenth-century virgin martyr, Saint Ursula.⁷⁹ In fact, Calvino confirms that his choice of names was well considered in a short article written in 1952, “Personaggi e nomi”:

Io credo che i nomi dei personaggi siano molto importanti. Quando, scrivendo, devo introdurre un personaggio nuovo, e ho già chiarissimo in testa come sarà questo personaggio, mi fermo a cercare alle volte anche per delle mezzore, e finché non ho trovato un nome che sia il vero, l’unico nome di quel personaggio, non riesco ad andare avanti. (S 2: 1746)

According to Miriam E. Friedman, Calvino provides three different images of love in *Il barone rampante*: “The sweet, uncomplicated (and perhaps chaste) love which exists with Ursula” (65–66); the pure animal lust that Cosimo experiences immediately after his time with the Spaniards; and the “violently emotional,” “complicated and destructive” (66) love relationship between Cosimo and Viola. His first, more innocent, romantic encounter with Ursula provides a contrast to the much more passionate affair that Cosimo has with Viola later in the novel, and the period of pure lust can be viewed as a hiatus between these two more meaningful relationships. Calvino constructs Ursula’s character to provide an antithesis, not to Cosimo, but to Viola, for as Friedman puts it, in total contrast to Viola, Ursula is “sweet and docile, and willing to be led by Cosimo” (60). Indeed, the idealised image of

⁷⁹ Along with Saint Agnes and Saint Catherine of Alexandria (and possibly others), Saint Ursula is often referred to as the patron saint of virgins. See Albert Poncelet’s “St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins” (web) for a full discussion of this legend.

passive feminine subjectivity resulting from Ursula's characterisation creates one of the few Galatea-like figures in Calvino's oeuvre.⁸⁰

In the Ursula-Cosimo interlude, Calvino represents love in its more innocent form, or love in its first blush, immediately linking the young lovers both symbolically and linguistically. The rose more commonly grows closer to the ground, but the "rosa rampicante" (RR 1: 684) climbs into the treetops, which conveniently provides Cosimo, the "barone rampante," with all the opportunities symbolically associated with the action of plucking the rose. When Ursula holds out her hands to take the rose from Cosimo, he figuratively claims her by pinning it on her head himself. Clichés abound in this episode, which parodies in a far more innocent way than does the farcical episode in *Il cavaliere inesistente* both the trope of love-at-first-sight and the act of falling in love in general. Here Calvino parodies more through the heavy use of metaphor than by the use of ridicule and laughter, his more common method of dealing with love and Eros.⁸¹ Cosimo teaches Ursula to 'fly' as he ferries her to a "mandorlo tenero e non vasto" (RR 1: 684), where they have their first kiss. This imagery of flying is repeated later in the novel in the context of love, with equally playful but far less innocent overtones, when Calvino describes the sexual relationship between Cosimo and Viola as they fly together in the treetops. In his essay "Leggerezza," Calvino gives examples of lightness in three different senses: lightness of language, lightness of narration of a train of thought and lightness in visual imagery. Flying through the treetops is a good example of lightness of visual imagery, conveying superbly the concept of "gravità senza peso" (S 1: 646), a quality Calvino particularly admired in the poetry of Guido Cavalcanti. Whether or not Ursula loses her virginity, or whether Cosimo loses his for that matter, is not the real focus of this episode, and as if to emphasise this, Calvino mixes metaphors to deliver conflicting messages. Although Cosimo plucks the rose and pins it on Ursula's head, "[I]a rosa non s'è persa" (RR 1: 684) as she flies between the trees.

For the female skier, the word 'rosa' merely adds an extra dimension to the themes of purity, perfection and otherworldliness already strongly linked with her character. These associations connect her directly to beatific women such as the aforementioned Laura and Beatrice; although obviously, as married women, neither of these late medieval icons of idolised

⁸⁰ Sofronia's character is another example in the texts under discussion.

⁸¹ See "Il sesso e il riso" (S 1: 261–65).

femininity were virgins. However, since they were also dead and therefore completely inaccessible, they could be safely worshipped without the taint of sexual impropriety and posed no risk of rejection to their adoring suitors. The Swiss nationality of the female skier sets her apart in a similar fashion; and although the story is certainly not without erotic undertones, with her long-legged fluidity, she is portrayed as beyond the reach of the uncouth and uncoordinated group of friends as she descends the slopes “bel bello, prendendo i suoi zig-zag tutti precisi” (RR 2: 1176). But Calvino’s characterisation process is not one dimensional and a far more modern influence can also be detected in his portrayal of the aloof, otherworldly and unattainable female skier, who glides effortlessly through her dazzling white environment leaving a clearly discernible track behind her as she goes. This is the influence of the pre-Second World War cinema. In the “biancore abbigliante” (RR 3: 34) of the black and white films, the adolescent Calvino was presented with sanitised American actresses in an environment in which the erotic dimension was glorified and stylised, and the female skier can readily be considered a metaphorical representation of one of these idealised and unobtainable American actresses.

Pamela is a less straightforward character than either Ursula or the Swiss girl, and her connection to the word ‘rosa’ is certainly more ambiguous. Although she does not appear in *Il visconte dimezzato* until halfway through the story, she plays a pivotal role in the unfolding of the narrative. She is introduced in the following manner: “Pamela, che grassottella e scalza, con indosso una semplice vesticciuola rosa, se ne stava bocconi sull’erba, dormicchiando, parlando con le capre e annusando i fiori” (RR 1: 404). The imagery surrounding her introduction presents Pamela as the classic woman of the pastoral idyll. Or to use more modern analogies, she appears to be a carefree Pippi Longstocking figure, or Heidi in the Swiss pastures. There is also an air of the stylised cartoon about her characterisation, which reflects Calvino’s early love of comics. Pamela’s simple pink dress merely emphasises the virginal note already implicit in the rest of the imagery, which portrays her as an innocent and unsophisticated country lass. Although her character is not among those discussed by Jeannet in this context, Pamela presents in many ways as a grown-up version of Jeannet’s “bambina.” This image of the feminine appears in Calvino’s fiction predominantly during the late 1940s and early 1950s, and as Jeannet describes her, the “bambina” is “autonomous in its reserve, sure of itself, and full of disdain for its male peer” (157).⁸² Pamela is a wily survivor,

⁸² See Jeannet (155–61) for a fuller discussion of the “bambina.”

extremely independent and she is also a remarkable semiologist. But though Pamela is young, she is not a child, and despite the initial impression imparted in the imagery surrounding her introduction to the text, any idea that she is a simple and modest country girl is soon dispelled. Like Calvino's favoured actress Myrna Loy, Pamela displays "padronanza di sé di fronte all'uomo," for she is one of the few characters in *Il visconte dimezzato* who is not terrified by the Bad Medardo. She certainly does not set much store by her virginity (if indeed she is a virgin, for this is only an assumption). Calvino plays with the pastoral virgin topos when constructing her character, and his choice of the name Pamela, which is not typically Italian, is one of the strongest indications that he is doing so.

Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded is the title of the British author Samuel Richardson's first and arguably most well-known novel; published in 1740, it laid the foundation for Richardson's status as one of the founding fathers of the modern novel. Calvino almost certainly took the name Pamela from the title of this book, for he was clearly familiar with Richardson's work: *Clarissa*, one of Richardson's other celebrated novels, features in *Il barone rampante*.⁸³ The name Pamela is also widely recognised in Italy thanks to Carlo Goldoni, the eighteenth-century Venetian playwright and librettist who wrote two plays and a libretto based on Richardson's novel.⁸⁴ According to Albert Carter, Calvino's Pamela "combines the standards of pastoral virginity with the shrewdness and emotional responses of Samuel Richardson's Pamela" (31). However, unlike Richardson's Pamela, the eventual marriage of Calvino's Pamela to a man well above her own social standing cannot be considered an example of 'virtue rewarded.' Although she refuses to go and live locked away in the castle with the Bad Medardo, she is happy to be his in the woods: "Pamela era sdraiata sugli aghi di pino [...] Se

⁸³ The brigand Gian dei Brughi is reading Richardson's *Clarissa* when he is captured and taken to prison.

⁸⁴ Goldoni's comedy *Pamela, o sia la virtù premiata* (1750) is directly based on Richardson's novel and he also wrote a sequel *Pamela maritata* (1760). Ted Emery writes that Goldoni readapted his Richardson adaption "for the operatic theatre in his libretto of 1756, *La buona figliuola*." (573). Emery comments that Goldoni had to make a number of ideological changes in his adaptations of Richardson's original work to better suit his Venetian audience. The most important change being the social status of the principal characters, for an "English nobleman who married a non-noble did no more than commit a social faux pas; a Venetian in the same position lost some of his aristocratic privileges and, worse, could not pass his nobility on to his children" (574). Goldoni felt obliged to change Richardson's conclusion so that his Pamela is discovered to be the daughter of an exiled Scottish Count and therefore of noble birth. Calvino does nothing to change Pamela's birth status, but he uses a similar convenient last minute revelation to Goldoni to regularise the relationship between Sofronia and Torrismondo in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, which rather ironically also involves the Scottish nobility.

mi volete, venitemi a trovare qui nel bosco [...] sarò vostra se la volete ma qui sugli aghi di pino” (RR 1: 407). In complete contrast to Richardson’s Pamela and as a satirical parody of the modest virgin topos, Pamela makes it clear that she wants “un assaggio” (RR 1: 406) of what she might expect from a halved man before she is willing to commit to living with him. And in a reversal of the usual scheme of things, it is the man (and this applies to both halves) who is reticent—perhaps understandably in the circumstances.

Constructing the Undesirable Woman

The Pygmalion paradigm concerns itself with the creation of a feminine ideal; the woman desired by her (generally) male creator. Although their desirability is rarely expressed in terms of unalloyed positivity, Calvino’s female characters are usually represented as fundamentally desirable. Nonetheless, the feminine in Calvino’s writing typically represents a combination of what is most desired and what is most feared by the Calvinian male character. This means that, typically, his female characters combine in varying proportions features of both Galatea and the Propoetides, something expressed clearly in the angel-Eve imagery accompanying Viola’s introduction to the text. In this section, I examine the way Calvino builds up an image of undesirable femininity; and since she is probably Calvino’s most fully developed fearsome female character—an unequivocal Propoetide—Battista di Rondò, the elder sister of Cosimo and Biagio (the narrator of *Il barone rampante*), is the ideal candidate around which to centre the discussion.⁸⁵

The Propoetides are an Ovidian addition to the Pygmalion myth, and in Mary Sheriff’s opinion, he “invented the Propoetides to explain why Pygmalion scorned women” (148). Sheriff explains that, according to Ovid, “the loathsome Propoetides [...] dared to deny the divinity of Venus,” and as punishment for this crime, “[t]he goddess of love transforms them into prostitutes and strikes them, it seems, with a kind of nymphomania, an insatiable desire for sexual pleasure” (148). In Ovid’s own words, Pygmalion crafted his beautiful statue because “he was revolted by the many faults which nature had implanted in the female sex.”

⁸⁵ Battista’s closest rival for this title would probably be Lotaria, who is a radical feminist and the bad sister of Ludmilla, la Lettrice, in *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*. Other fearsome women exist in Calvino’s literature, for example, the Amazons in “Storia del guerriero sopravvissuto,” but they are not well-developed characters.

On becoming prostitutes, “all sense of shame” left the Propoetides and “the blood hardened in their cheeks” so that “it required only a slight alteration to transform them into stony flints” (231). Ovid gives no further description of the Propoetides and leaves to the reader’s imagination what the “slight alteration” might entail, but I suggest that being transformed into “stony flints” did not improve the appearance of the unfortunate Propoetides, whom nature had already burdened with “many faults.” Although the force of Ovid’s condemnation falls upon their promiscuity rather than their physical appearance, he makes it clear that, even before they became stony flints, the Propoetides never compared in beauty to Galatea, for she is described as “lovelier than any woman born” (231).

As prostitutes, the Propoetides are both undesirable and menacing, at least in the eyes of Pygmalion, but as stony flints, these licentious women also become unavailable. The irony is that the ivory statue Pygmalion creates to console himself—his vision of the desirable woman—is beautiful and unthreatening but equally unavailable. From the small amount of information that Ovid provides, one can surmise that, for Pygmalion, the undesirable woman is first and foremost liberal with her sexuality. By leaving ambiguous the physical attractiveness of the Propoetides before they are turned to stone, Ovid allows for the commonly exploited situation whereby the male victim falls for the beautiful, but dangerous, seductress. This is a theme that Calvino openly pursues in *Il cavaliere inesistente* in the scene involving Priscilla and her maidens in their bear-besieged castle, and an examination of what occurs inside Priscilla’s castle forms part of the discussion in Chapter Two. I have chosen here to focus solely on Battista because her character provides a relatively rare example of unmitigated negativity within Calvino’s oeuvre. Her characterisation epitomises that of the stereotypical undesirable woman; she is portrayed as unattractive, is sexually promiscuous by implication, and she represents danger to the masculine world.

As a female character, Battista stands out as not only eccentric but an example of Calvinian humour taken to the grotesque. Marilyn Migiel describes her as an “aggressive figure” (58) and Markey calls her the “wicked sister” (73). For Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, she is the “terribile Battista” (257). She is a “lunatic” (49) according to John Woodhouse, but merely “indulged” (39) in the opinion of Carter. These statements give an indication of the various ways that Battista has been described by the critics, and the common thread is that she is not an endearing character.

Biagio introduces Battista in chapter 1 of the novel as “nostra sorella Battista, monaca di casa” (RR 1: 549), which immediately marks her as unconventional even among the dysfunctional di Rondò family. Although her age is not specified, she is probably in her late teens; certainly, she is significantly older than Cosimo and Biagio, who are twelve and eight respectively at the beginning of the story.⁸⁶ Battista is the family cook and revels in preparing macabre dishes for the family table, which, for reasons that remain unclear, the family generally appears to eat. Indeed, it is because he defied his father and refused to eat one of Battista’s meals, which consisted solely of snail dishes, that Cosimo fled the family table and commenced his life in the trees. Cosimo is a rebel but so is Battista; according to Biagio, Battista “era sempre stata un animo ribelle e solitario” (RR 1: 554–55). Without question, the most disturbing aspect of her characterisation is her seeming love of knives and other weaponry, and of the actions of segmenting and slicing. In Freudian terms, Calvino fashions in Battista the archetypal castrating woman, and the psychoanalytical implications of this characteristic are pursued in the following chapter. Perhaps predictably for such a negative character, Battista is also represented as an ugly woman who has inappropriate sexual urges.

It is made clear from the outset that Battista has not voluntarily taken to wearing a nun’s habit and that she has no religious vocation: “nostra sorella finì sepolta in casa, con gli abiti da monaca, pur senz’aver pronunciato voti neppure di terziaria, data la sua dubbia vocazione” (RR 1: 555). She is made to dress as a nun by her father, the Baron, after a mysterious encounter of an arguably sexual nature with the Marchesino della Mela, son of a family hostile to her own. Her father, whom Calvino represents as traditional to the point of being old-fashioned, appears to take it for granted that the only explanation for the mysterious appearance of the Marchesino in their home was that he had come to seduce and violate Battista. This traditional view finds support in Theodora A. Jankowski’s assertion that early modern society has “constructed woman as rapable, dominatable, conquerable, and men as rapists, dominators, and conquerors” (86).⁸⁷ However, Calvino disrupts any idea that Battista

⁸⁶ Barengi writes in his “Note e notizie sui testi” that among Calvino’s notes on *Il barone rampante* a chronological table was found in which he indicated that Cosimo was born in 1755, “più giovane di otto anni della sorella Battista, più anziano di quattro del narratore Biagio” (RR 1: 1335). This indicates that Calvino, at least initially, had a definite idea of the age difference between Battista and her brothers even if the final text is silent on the issue.

⁸⁷ Jankowski makes this comment when discussing early Modern English love poetry, but Biagio’s explanation appears to support this sentiment.

might be a victim by strongly implying that she was probably the real aggressor in the incident. Although the facts of the case were never determined, and as part of the process of building her image as a dangerous woman, Calvino has Biagio observe that if rape had been on the young Marchesino's mind, Battista managed to defend herself very effectively against her unlikely rapist, it was "quel bietolone lentigginoso" who called for help and was found "con i calzoni a brandelli, lacerati come dagli artigli d'una tigre" (RR 1: 555). Because the Della Mela family refused to make their son marry Battista and thereby restore her honour, she was compelled by her father to dress as a nun, and although she was not sent to a convent, she was confined to the house.

Questions arise as to why the secular Calvino chose to dress Battista as a nun. The question is relevant in light of Calvino's assertion that his lack of religious education left him without that taste for anticlericalism that was so common in those who had grown up surrounded by the clergy. Presenting Battista as a nun does not amount to anticlericalism, but the choice of her garb is not a neutral one, and Calvino quite obviously exploits the parodic opportunities offered by a nun's habit. She might dress like a nun, but it is made clear in the novel that Battista does not wish to *be* a nun,⁸⁸ and she unquestionably does not behave like a nun. Indeed, aspects of her character evoke images of that other, more famous reluctant wearer of the nun's habit, Gertrude Monaca di Monza, who appears in Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*. Although critics have generally ignored this connection, Bolongaro refers to the echoes of Manzoni's "dissolute nun" (94) when discussing Battista's role in sending Cosimo to live in the trees. Both Battista and Gertrude are depicted as strong-willed females forced into the role of nun by authoritarian fathers. Unfortunately for Gertrude, obvious lack of vocation does not stop her father from locking her away in a convent—a practice that was quite in keeping with the historical periods in which both stories are set. However, for reasons never clarified, Battista's lack of true religious calling merely limits her incarceration to the family home. But neither of them makes a good nun, and of both it could be said that she is "una monaca; ma non è una monaca come l'altre" (Manzoni 140).

In *A Theory of Parody*, Hutcheon describes parody as "a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion" (6). Calvino uses Battista's character to play with the concept of the nun as a representation of the sexually repressed, which is a variation, or

⁸⁸ Emphasis is mine.

“ironic inversion,” of the symbol of the chaste nun. In doing this, Calvino strengthens the link between Battista and the Monaca di Monza, for they are both depicted as having a dark and mysterious sensuality. Manzoni supplies few details, but as a fully professed nun, Gertrude has an affair with a young man who lives near the convent. In contrast, Battista is made to dress as a nun only after her mysterious encounter of an arguably sexual nature. Although less obvious, being confined to a nun’s habit for her alleged misdemeanour also provides a thematic link to the Pygmalion myth. The primary reason given for Pygmalion’s rejection of the Propoetides is their sexual liberality, and their punishment is ‘confinement’ in stone. Not that Ovid’s explanation for the Propoetides’ promiscuity bears close scrutiny, for it came about as a punishment by Venus for an ill-defined crime against her divinity. Therefore, it was Venus who caused them to become prostitutes and as a consequence “to lose their good names” because of their promiscuous behaviour. At the same time, Venus sees fit to gift life to Pygmalion’s idealised statue, which he has made in rejection of the wanton Propoetides and called his bedfellow.⁸⁹ But whatever else one might take from this sequence of events, one clear message to emerge is that women should not express their sexuality openly or freely.

Calvino plays mercilessly with this idea in Battista’s characterisation. Soon after Cosimo takes to the trees, the Count and Countess d’Estomac and their “figlio zerbinotto, un cacastecchi imparruccato” come to dine with the di Rondò family. Battista, who we are told has not seen a young man apart from stable hands and village boys since the incident with the Marchesino della Mela, appears dressed “con la cuffia da monaca, ma tutta messa su con nastri e gale, la cipria in viso, i mezzi guanti” (RR 1: 616). On Calvino’s part, this is a further parody of the image of the sexually repressed nun and reinforces the connection between Battista’s and Gertrude’s characters. In her 2001 article “*La monaca di Monza: Manzoni’s Bad Girl and the Repudiation of the Imagination*,” Mary Ann McDonald Carolan argues that for Gertrude, “the prototypical subversive figure, silence translates into forced acquiescence and covert rebellion” (80). Although Battista’s rebellion is hardly covert, she does acquiesce to her father’s command to dress like a nun. Nevertheless, she manages to exhibit her rebellious streak by subverting his attempts to control her sexuality, for her ribbons and powder indicate that, despite her nun’s habit, “she is not a nun like the others” and that she is

⁸⁹ Some of the confusion here probably comes about because Ovid has drawn from earlier versions of the myth in which Pygmalion falls in love with a statue of Venus; cf. the discussion earlier in this chapter.

sexually available. Commenting on Canossa's observations on female adornment in Castiglione's famed Renaissance handbook, *Il libro del cortegiano*, Finucci writes that "[a]n excessively attired female body is grotesque and disobedient." Disobedient in this context means "transgress[ing] social limitations" by artificially enhancing one's appearance. Finucci adds further that "the result of Canossa's construction is to label ridiculous any woman perceived as excessively made-up and overtly put together or any woman whose 'feminine wiles' are scandalously evident to the other's gaze" (*Lady* 51). Calvino, through the medium of Biagio, endorses Canossa's statement, making it clear that Battista is ridiculous and is displaying her sexuality in an inappropriate manner. This is an example of the way in which, by satirically parodying a stereotype, Calvino merely reinforces the messages it is intended to deliver, for Battista emerges as both sexually repressed and ridiculous. Calvino does allow Battista a small victory because she eventually marries the freckled fool and is released from her nun's habit. But the messages are mixed, for although Battista's rebellion eventually frees her from the clutches of her family, Calvino makes it clear that Battista's is something of a Pyrrhic victory. He represents her marriage as a match between seriously flawed characters and clearly signals that her family is relieved to be rid of her.

Bettella states that the "general tendency in the aesthetic perception of women in literature is to divide feminine figures into two categories: the beautiful, good-natured, virtuous and the ugly, sinful, wicked" ("Fosca" 133). This is a general tendency that Calvino fully exploits in his construction of Battista. Although the sinful and wicked parts of her characterisation have been touched upon, the few words Calvino directs towards describing Battista's physical features leave no doubt that she is also an ugly woman. This supports Barthes's observation that, in contrast to beauty, "ugliness can be abundantly described" (*S/Z* 59). Battista is said to possess "occhi stralunati [...] i denti stretti" and a "gialla faccina da topo" (RR 1: 551). Yellow skin typically connotes ill health,⁹⁰ and beautiful women do not look like rats, or even mice, in the Western literary tradition. But Battista also has a "vocetta stridula" (RR 1: 557), and when the young count bows to her at their first meeting, she is said to laugh hysterically: "lei, risatine isteriche" (RR 1: 616). Her hands are "sottili" (RR 1: 556) but unusually powerful: she is "famosa per fare a braccio di ferro anche con gli stallieri;" and in the incident with the Marchesino, it is implied that her thin hands have the "artigli d'una tigre" (RR 1: 555).

⁹⁰ Yellow skin may also connote Asian ethnicity but that is clearly not intended here.

The association of animal imagery with Battista's name is an important feature of her characterisation. As Ann Caesar observes, "animality in a woman is often linked to either a criminal disposition or sexual appetite." She adds that animal imagery is a "familiar *topos* in the history of misogyny" (225). When writing about what inspires respect and fear in woman in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche refers to "her genuine, carnivore-like, cunning flexibility, her tiger-claws beneath the glove" (190). Freud also uses animal references when explaining the charm of the narcissistic woman, linking her not only to children, "cats and the large beasts of prey," but also to "criminals and humorists" ("On Narcissism" 89). Calvino would have been well aware of the tiger-femme fatale connection linked to the figure of Varia Nesteroff in Pirandello's novel *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* (1925), but Battista's character also contains shades of Bertha Mason, the quintessential 'madwoman in the attic,' who is wife of Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Bertha has an unsettling laugh, attacks with a knife and bites like a tiger (239), and she is also described as a "clothed hyena" (328).⁹¹ For her part, as well as possessing the rolling eyes of a madwoman ("occhi stralunati"), Battista uses knives and a gun, laughs hysterically with the Contino d'Estomac and is physically linked to tigers and rats. Battista is represented as a restless and if not mad, certainly eccentric, individual. According to Biagio, "quell'anima senza pace di nostra sorella Battista percorreva la notte tutta la casa a caccia di topi, reggendo un candeliere, e con lo schioppo sotto il braccio" (RR 1: 557). This strongly evokes images of the night-time wanderings of the dangerous Bertha with her dark and destructive sexuality.

What makes Battista's character both interesting and grotesque is that she combines her rebellious streak with her creative talent and in the process produces some truly extraordinary culinary creations. Biagio acknowledges that she is "bravissima nel cucinare" and can make unlikely dishes taste delicious: "certi crostini di paté, aveva preparato una volta, finissimi a dire il vero, di fegato di topo" (RR 1: 555). On the other hand, many of Battista's dishes, although edible, offend the family's sensibilities and quite literally depict images of Freudian

⁹¹ Teresa de Lauretis also notes a possible reference to *Jane Eyre* in her article "Reading the (Post) Modern Text: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*": "Whether intentionally or not I do not know, Calvino appropriates the famous ending of *Jane Eyre*, 'Reader, I married him,' and re-writes it to fit his plan: 'Reader, you married her.' Only in compliance with the current liberal ideology of gender equality, he writes: 'Now you are man and wife, a Reader and Reader.' As if that fooled anyone" (139).

castration: “una testa di porco dalla cui bocca usciva, come cacciasse fuori la lingua, un’aragosta rossa, e l’aragosta nelle pinze teneva la lingua del maiale come se glie l’avesse strappata” (RR 1: 556). In Bolongaro’s words, “[t]he essence of her rebellion is an emphatic and theatrical transgression against taste” (93), and this is taste in both senses of the word. Calvino makes it clear that Battista finds her voice and her solace in her cooking: “Il suo animo tristo s’esplicava soprattutto nella cucina.” However, Battista’s characterisation is completely devoid of the nurturing and caring side that is traditionally associated with the role of cooking for the family. To quote Claudia Nocentini, “Battista’s cooking is sadistic (vis-à-vis both eaters and animals), because it emphasises cruelty at the expense of nourishment” (“Fiat” 23). This is a further example of the way in which Calvino uses Battista’s character satirically to present the “antithesis of official cultural models” and to deliver what Bettella terms “a world turned upside down.”⁹² Calvino does grant Battista a minor concession, for Biagio confesses that most of her horrible creations are “opere di finissima orafria animale o vegetale” (RR 1: 555), which she makes more for the artistic effect than for any pleasure she achieves from watching the family eat disgusting food. Nonetheless, Biagio’s admission ultimately does little to improve Battista’s negative image, for both the nature of her chosen ingredients and the way she expresses herself artistically are difficult to view as anything other than profoundly disturbing.

Battista’s name is clearly intended as an important part of her characterisation, for it is traditionally a male name in Italian and the reference is to John the Baptist. In Christian teaching, John the Baptist was beheaded at the request of Salome, and since Battista is represented as a knife wielder, Salome is perhaps the more obvious name for Calvino to have chosen for her character. However, John the Baptist is commonly described as the one who came first to prepare the world for the arrival of Jesus Christ, and as the rebellious elder sister, Battista can, in a similar way, be considered the rebel who came first to prepare the family for Cosimo, the much ‘greater’ rebel. Calvino points to this link when he has Biagio comment that Battista “tradiva nei riguardi di Cosimo una specie d’invidia, come se, abituata a tenere la famiglia col fiato sospeso per le sue stranezze, ora avesse trovato qualcuno che la superava” (RR 1: 574).

⁹² In his later short story “Tutto in un punto” (*Le Cosmicomiche*), Calvino proves himself quite capable of combining danger and the nurturing roles in a single female character. Mrs Ph(i)Nk₀ causes the Big Bang with her desire to find enough space to make tagliatelle for everyone (RR 2: 118–23).

In his *Nota*, Calvino makes the following comment about the role that secondary characters play in *Il barone rampante*: “Sui personaggi comprimari [...] [i]l dato che li accomuna quasi tutti è d’essere dei solitari, ognuno con una maniera sbagliata d’esserlo, intorno a quell’unica maniera giusta che è quella del protagonista” (RR 1: 1215). In other words, Calvino says that he introduced the secondary characters specifically to illustrate the wrong ways of expressing one’s individuality, or being a solitary and breaking with convention, so that he could better justify Cosimo’s own eccentric behaviour. For example, Cosimo’s natural uncle, the Cavalier Enea Silvio Carrega, is a solitary who does not engage at all with those around him even though he is living in their midst. His behaviour is clearly contrasted with that of the tree-bound Cosimo, who takes an active interest in the life of his community. I suggest that the name Battista confirms that the contrast between Battista’s and Cosimo’s ways of expressing themselves is intended to highlight that the aggressive and controlling mode chosen by Battista was “sbagliata.” Whether this is a useful or valid comparison is another matter, for Cosimo, as a future baron, has far wider options than his sister. This question is revisited and addressed more thoroughly in Chapter Two.

Building a Female Character from Mythology and Fiction

Intertextual referencing is a prominent feature of Calvino’s writing, and examples of borrowings incorporated into his characterisation process so far include those just mentioned in relation to Battista, the satirical nod to Richardson’s *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* that is evident in the construction of Pamela’s character, and references to the rich heritage bequeathed to Western literature by the trio Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarca. To these can be added Calvino’s statement in a 1985 interview with Corti that he based Viola’s character on “la Pisana,” a character in the nineteenth-century Italian writer Ippolito Nievo’s realist-idealist romance *Le confessioni d’un ottuagenario*: “il personaggio femminile ha per modello la Pisana” (S 2: 2920).⁹³ Calvino’s female characters may not be well developed but they are meticulously constructed and show clear evidence of Calvino’s “paziente ricerca del *mot juste*”—the ‘word’ that best communicates his ideas through ‘weightless writing’ and economy of expression.

⁹³ This interview was published in the literary magazine *Autografo* in October 1985 soon after Calvino’s death (19 September 1985).

The epitome of this ‘weightless’ writing, even if only in a literal sense, can be found in Sofronia’s characterisation. With the exception of those female characters in *Gli amori difficili* that are ‘weightless’ to the point of non-existence, there would be few significant female characters to whom Bonaer’s observation that Calvino’s females “mancano di ‘tridimensionalità’, di ‘carne e ossa’” applies more completely. As D. S. Carne-Ross said of Ariosto’s Angelica, a character with whom Sofronia shares many features, she is not even “a character; she is rather a poetic image or, more exactly, she is a *sequence of images* through which she is presented” (qtd. in Finucci, *Lady* 109).⁹⁴ Notwithstanding the almost diaphanous quality of her representation, Sofronia’s character, like all characters, can be thought of in terms of what Barthes describes as “a collection of semes” (*S/Z* 191). Barthes’s seme is somewhat analogous to one of Pygmalion’s pieces of ivory. It is a basic building block, and just as Galatea was constructed using many pieces of ivory, it takes a number of semes to create a character. Each seme contributes something different, for as Barthes explains, “the seme is the unit of the signifier” (17) and the signifier points to a particular meaning that is “based on connotation” (8). Connotation, according to Barthes, is “a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of the text (or of another text)” (8). The connotations arising from Sofronia’s characterisation are largely anterior and intertextual, for Calvino draws heavily from earlier texts in her creation, using intertextuality in the manner Kristeva defined in *La révolution du langage poétique* “as the transportation of one or more *systems* of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position” (*Desire* 15).⁹⁵ The “new articulation” takes on particular significance in this context, for *Il cavaliere inesistente* is an early postmodern metafiction, and as Hutcheon observes in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, “postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges” (3). *Il cavaliere inesistente* falls within the broader definition of what Hutcheon terms a “histiographic metafiction,” because it is a novel that is “both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay(s) claim to historical events and personages” (5). Exploring the self-reflexive nature of this narrative is left to Chapter Three, where it is discussed in relation to Suor Teodora/Bradamante’s characterisation. The current

⁹⁴ Finucci attributes this quotation to Carne-Ross (205).

⁹⁵ This quotation comes from Leon Roudiez’s “Introduction” to the English translation of Kristeva’s *Desire in Language* and the italics are Kristeva’s.

focus is on the way that Calvino builds up Sofronia's character by drawing upon well-recognised historical sources, especially mythical and literary sources, paying particular attention to the way he disrupts "pre-existing forms of continuity" (Foucault 25) by offering parodic reinterpretations of traditional themes to expose what Hutcheon terms the "ironic discontinuity that is revealed at the heart of continuity, difference at the heart of similarity" (*Poetics* 11).

For a character whose existence and true identity are crucial to the unfolding of the storyline, Sofronia remains a remarkably nebulous character throughout. Her characterisation, or rather, what her character connotes, must be determined from the story that surrounds her, for Sofronia does not 'physically' appear in the novel until the end of chapter 9 of 12, and even then her presence is fleeting. Nevertheless, in the process of piecing together her chimerical character, Calvino manages with considerable deftness to both satirise and parody the inordinate importance placed upon a woman's virginity under the chivalric code, the figure of the damsel in distress and the Oedipus myth. To do this he borrows heavily and openly from the Renaissance writers Ariosto and Tasso, but he also adapts for his own purposes both the traditional Oedipus legend and Freud's interpretations of it.

Although Ursula's character might represent virginal innocence, the status of her virginity is never a significant part of her story. She is merely a pawn who plays a brief side role, albeit a relatively important one, in the *Bildung* of the protagonist, Cosimo. In contrast, Sofronia's virginity is a vital aspect of her characterisation. Her destiny and that of Agilulfo, the non-existent knight, are inextricably linked to her continued virginal status. Calvino parodies the romance narrative genre in many ways in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, but his satirical treatment of the status of the virgin in the world of chivalry is one of his more blatant ways of doing so. The quest, which is most commonly a voyage of self-discovery by a young man, lies at the heart of the chivalric romance. But a similar theme, although often portrayed more as an internal quest, is a feature of many other genres, including the picaresque novel and the Bildungsroman, both of which have special relevance to Cosimo's journey to maturity in *Il barone rampante*.⁹⁶ The quest motif provides the impetus to Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and it

⁹⁶ In her 1992 article "Literature as Education and the Near-Perfect Protagonist: Narrative Structure in *Il barone rampante*", Tommasina Gabriele states, "In fact, *Il barone rampante* lends itself perfectly to interpretation as a *bildungsroman*, tracing the development of its central character from rebellious boy to highly individualistic

is the one Calvino adopts to describe Agilulfo's farcical journey to prove Sofronia's virginity fifteen years after he first saved her from almost certainly losing it at the hands of "due briganti da strada che volevano abusare di lei" (RR 1: 1016). In *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Calvino uses Sofronia's character to play a similar, if less active, role to that of Ariosto's Angelica in *Orlando furioso*. In *The Lady Vanishes*, while discussing Angelica's function, Finucci comments that as "the generator of the quests of all the main heroes, she is the indispensable object of mimetic desire, the other who keeps the plot unfolding through digressions and false starts" (110–11). Like Angelica, Sofronia only has narrative value while she remains a virgin. Agilulfo's knighthood depends on the fact that Sofronia, the daughter of the King of Scotland, was a virgin when he rescued her, as Calvino makes clear in the following quotation from the novel:

Il codice della cavalleria allora vigente prescriveva che chi aveva salvato da pericolo certo la verginità d'una fanciulla di nobile lignaggio fosse immediatamente armato cavaliere; ma per aver salvato da violenza carnale una nobildonna non più vergine era prescritta solamente una menzione d'onore e soldo doppio per tre mesi. (RR 1: 1014)

This passage from *Il cavaliere inesistente* is merely a more concrete and satirical way of expressing the sentiments communicated in Sacripante's famous Catullan hymn to the unpicked rose in *Orlando furioso*. Finucci notes that "[a]live and unmarried, Angelica is pursued for her rose—a trope of maidenhood and her genitals—to which all her worth is tied, as long as her rose remains intact" (*Lady* 112). A message Sacripante poetically delivers in the following manner:

La verginella è simile alla rosa,
 ch'in bel giardin su la nativa spina
 mentre sola e sicura si riposa,
 nè gregge nè pastor se le avvicina;

 Ma non s'è tosto dal materno stelo
 rimossa viene e dal suo ceppo verde,

adult" (91). But, despite Gabriele's remark, more commonly *Il barone rampante* is viewed as having some but not all of the characteristics of a Bildungsroman, for it is a life story rather than just a novel of formation.

che quanto avea dagli uomini e dal cielo
favor, grazia e bellezza, tutto perde. (Ariosto 1.42–43)

As both Angelica's and Sofronia's stories highlight, virginity is considered an asset. What remains ambiguous, however, is to whom that asset has more value: the woman or the men who pursue her. Angelica's character is active; she is forever in flight. In Finucci's words, "she is beyond man and beyond men pursuing her, whether they want to rape her or make her comply with their desire" (*Lady* 111). In contrast, Calvino portrays Sofronia as a far more passive and accessible character, for there is not the slightest hint of autonomy attached to her persona. She remains forever pliable as Calvino constantly moulds her identity to best suit the needs of the man into whose hands she has currently fallen. The passage Ovid uses to describe Galatea's transformation from statue to living woman expresses this idea perfectly. Like Pygmalion's Galatea, in Calvino's hands, Sofronia can be likened to the warmed wax of Hymettus:

at his [Pygmalion's] touch the ivory lost its hardness, and grew soft: his fingers made an imprint on the yielding surface, just as the wax of Hymettus melts in the sun and, worked by men's fingers, is fashioned into many different shapes, and made fit for use by being used. (232)

When commenting on the position of women in Renaissance Italy, Finucci makes the following observation, which can readily be applied to Sofronia's situation:

It was a woman's dependence on man—his authority and his utterances [...]—that in a sense allowed man to cast himself as a unified social being. In this construction, woman was the necessary non-self man needed in representation to define both who he was and who he was not (or did not want to appear to be). (*Lady* 12)

Sofronia is the non-self Calvino creates to meet Agilulfo's desperate need to affirm his very existence, but Calvino also provides her with an equally important role in establishing Torrismondo's identity. Understanding the fluidity of Sofronia's identity is aided by recalling the Zeuxis myth, whereby he took various features from a number of different women and amalgamated them to create his painting of the legendary Helen. However, although the idea of creating something using parts taken from a number of sources makes the comparison useful, the end result of a painter's or a sculptor's labour is a static product. In contrast, a

character in a novel or a film is rarely static. Indeed, the most significant feature of Sofronia's characterisation is that her identity remains in a state of flux throughout the story. Calvino's creation process is an ongoing task. Like Zeuxis, Calvino draws from many sources but he continues to add features throughout the tale, and it is what these new features signify that reshapes Sofronia's identity. In drawing from and adapting anterior models to better suit his own narrative purposes, Calvino creates in Sofronia a composite character. Yet, although her various ancestries and what they signify remain evident, in Kristeva's terminology, Sofronia's character is clearly "a new articulation" of these transported "systems of signs" (*Desire* 15).

Since Calvino does not assign names to his characters on a whim, it is no surprise to discover that Sofronia shares her name and some significant features with the "[v]ergine [...] di già matura/verginità" (2.14),⁹⁷ the "veiled virgin" (Yavneh 270), from Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. Like Ariosto's Angelica, Tasso's Sofronia is a far more proactive character, for she is prepared to accept the role of Christian martyr even if her life is eventually spared. Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* is a late Renaissance religious epic poem based on the medieval First Crusade, so it is hardly surprising that his Sofronia has strong Christian associations. Although loosely based around Charlemagne's ninth-century religious campaigns, Calvino's *Il cavaliere inesistente* is a mock chivalric romance and parodies rather than emulates serious religious fiction. Calvino's Sofronia, like Tasso's, can validly be considered a virgin "di già matura/verginità," for she is around thirty-three when she loses her virginity to the twenty-year-old Torrismondo, although this is not a detail to which attention is ever drawn in the narrative. But unlike Tasso, Calvino is not interested in creating a character that is prepared to die a virgin martyr, and one of his more satirical ploys is to use her character to play with the theme of Christian-Infidel union. After her first rescue by Agilulfo, the reader learns that Sofronia becomes "suor Palmira [...] la più pia e casta di tutto il vescovado" (RR 1: 1039). However, in seeming contradiction of this statement, when her convent is sacked and she is carried off by Moorish pirates, Sofronia is depicted as being quite resigned to her next identity as Azira, the three hundred and sixty-fifth wife of the Sultan of Morocco. Without

⁹⁷ Tasso (2.14). Calvino acknowledges that Sofronia's name is borrowed from Tasso in a letter (8 June 1964) to the Romanian translator Despina Mladoveanu, who was seeking translation guidance for the names in *Il cavaliere inesistente*. Calvino wrote, "Sofronia: è anch'esso un nome carico di tradizione nella letteratura italiana, specialmente perché è un personaggio del Tasso" (RR 1: 1364).

consulting Sofronia's wishes, and very much to suit his own purposes, Agilulfo again arrives just in time to safeguard her "immacolata virtù." He 'rescues' her "dall'obbrobrio delle nozze pagane" (RR 1: 1042) on the very evening that the Sultan is to pay his first conjugal visit. Sofronia is portrayed as ambivalent rather than overjoyed about being saved from such a shameful union, but as befits her function within the story, which is to represent compliant and pliable femininity, she goes meekly with Agilulfo in accordance with her stereotypical role of woman in need of rescuing.

The figure of the damsel in distress is a time-honoured motif in Western cultural production. It frequently occurs in myths and fairytales and is an important theme in chivalric literature; it is also well represented in the films that Calvino watched in his youth. Calvino's female characters are more typically independent rather than helpless women. Nevertheless, the damsel in distress motif is well represented within the body of writing considered in this study. Rescuing a virgin might have gained the greatest rewards according to the chivalric code, but as an honourable knight, Agilulfo is duty-bound to help any female in distress, virgin or otherwise. This explains his willingness to enter the bear-besieged castle of the widow Priscilla against the advice of the hermit he encounters by the side of the road. But although it is only to be expected that the damsel in distress motif will occur in a blatant parody of the chivalric romance genre such as *Il cavaliere inesistente*, it is also a significant theme in "L'avventura di una bagnante" and will be explored further in Chapter Three.

Finucci introduces chapter 6 of *The Lady Vanishes* with the following quotation attributed to Mae West: "Funny, every man I meet wants to protect me; I can't figure out what from" (169). These are words that could convincingly be attributed to Sofronia, for although she only has one principal rescuer, Agilulfo, she is undoubtedly Calvino's quintessential damsel in distress; even Torrismondo's first inclination upon discovering her in the cave is to save her: "Vorrei offrirvi la protezione della mia spada" (RR 1: 1053). Like Mae West, Sofronia is portrayed as being somewhat bemused by the reaction she provokes, and Calvino represents her as being resigned to, rather than desirous of, her status. For this reason, I suggest that Calvino's primary purpose is to satirise the actions of the male characters, as he in no way empowers Sofronia in the process. Given her damsel in distress role, it could perhaps have been predicted that intertwined with the obvious references to Tasso's epic are many of the essential features of the classical Andromeda myth. These Andromedan connections do not occur according to the traditional sequence of events, nor are they always in an immediately

recognisable form, but there can be little doubt that Calvino uses Sofronia's character to play with the essential elements of this time-honoured myth.

The story of Andromeda comes from ancient antiquity and, as Harold C. Knutson observes, it "originally formed part of the cycle of exploits that grew up around the legendary hero Perseus, slayer of the Gorgons." Although Perseus is probably best recognised as the slayer of "the fearful Medusa" (61), a mythological character who features again in Chapter Two, the Andromeda episode is also a highly significant part of his story. The fact that Perseus happens upon and rescues the hapless Andromeda while in the possession of the severed head of the equally feminine Medusa only serves to highlight some of the ambiguities inherent in the messages contained in many of the mythical tales.

As with all tales that have their origins in antiquity, there are numerous early versions of the Andromeda story. But through a reconstruction of the surviving interwoven legends, Knutson identifies the constituent parts, or the archetypal framework, of the myth as follows:

- 1) it is set against a maritime background where the waves break against the rocky shore;
- 2) a beautiful, naked woman, chained to a rock at the water's edge, awaits her fate with painful resignation;
- 3) a monster, whose terrifying bulk is just about to break the surface of the water, is about to emerge from the sea;
- 4) an intrepid hero flies through the air, and attacks and kills the monster;
- 5) a wedding takes place between the hero and the prize of his victory, the victim herself. (62)

According to Knutson, this same pattern occurs in other classical myths and he gives a number of examples including "the rescue of Hesione by Heracles" and "Jason's slaying of the hundred-eyed dragon that was used to threaten Medea" (63). He goes on to comment that sometimes the young maiden is held prisoner in a cave and that Andromeda's story is only one version of a wider tradition, which encompasses "a whole range of traditional folk tales and legends, such as the story of Saint George and the dragon and the legends of the chivalric tradition" (67).

Just as Ovid provides the best known classical version of the Pygmalion myth, the account of the rescue of Andromeda by Perseus as it appears in Book IV of his *Metamorphoses* has also

been used as the main source for later adaptations of that story. Although the full story is not important here, the essential details as supplied by Ovid are that Perseus spies the princess Andromeda chained to rocks on the sea's edge while returning home on his winged feet and still in possession of the severed head of Medusa. Ovid does not explicitly state that she is naked, stating only that Perseus "would have taken her for a marble statue, had not the breeze stirred her hair, and warm tears streamed from her eyes." Perseus falls in love, "[a]mazed at the sight of such rare beauty," and he slays the "menacing monster" (112) that rises out of the sea to take her. But this is not an entirely selfless act on the part of Perseus. Before he saves her, he makes a contract with Andromeda's parents "that she shall be mine, if my valour can save her" (113), so that Andromeda is "at once the cause and the reward of his heroic deed" (114).⁹⁸

The "ironic reworking of [...] history" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 5) is one of the hallmarks of postmodernism, and Calvino's propensity for intermingling references from various sources and for moulding them to suit his own narrative purposes is strongly evidenced in *Il cavaliere inesistente*. As an example of this "ironic reworking," the Andromedan references present in Sofronia's characterisation only really become clear after she has been rescued and is safely sleeping naked in a coastal cave.⁹⁹ But once the spectre of the Andromeda story has fully emerged, other more subtle references to the myth become obvious. Most of the constituent parts of the classical myth can be identified in one form or another in connection with Sofronia's story, even if they are sometimes more recognisable as links to Ariosto's Angelica and his ill-fated, but much eulogised, Isabella.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Metamorphoses* Book IV.

⁹⁹ As Gabriele notes, the love scene in the cave between Torrismondo and Sofronia is also "reminiscent of Boccaccio's Cimone coming upon the sleeping Ephigenia [...] (*Decameron* 5.1)" (*Eros* 51).

¹⁰⁰ The Andromeda myth strengthens the link between Sofronia and Ariosto's Angelica, even if Ariosto's Angelica-Ruggiero episode borrows far more overtly from Ovid's version of the rescue of Andromeda by Perseus than does Calvino's presentation of Sofronia's story. However, in some respects, Calvino's Sofronia shares even more features with Ariosto's Isabella, which just emphasises Sofronia's composite nature. It is Angelica who is saved from the sea monster in the *Furioso*, but it is Isabella who is shipwrecked, taken by pirates who do not rape her, and is rescued from a cave by Orlando, who also leaves her virginity intact. Isabella is a Saracen, which loosely links her to Sofronia's identity as Azira after she has been taken by pirates to be the wife of the Sultan of Morocco. Isabella is in love with the Scottish prince Zerbino and both Sofronia and Torrismondo are members of the Scottish royalty. Unfortunately, Isabella's fate is death, whereas Sofronia's is marriage, ultimately aligning Sofronia with Angelica.

Both Andromeda and Sofronia are princesses and thus a worthy prize for any suitor. Although not directly described as beautiful, Sofronia's appearance is clearly pleasing according to the old man who tells Agilulfo that she has been abducted from her English convent: "Non più una giovanetta, era ancor sempre ben piacente" (RR 1: 1038). This statement also acknowledges the conventional linkage of beauty to youth, for the old man is saying that Sofronia is pleasing to look at despite her age. Although Calvino is obviously emphasising this traditional association here, where he is dealing in the world of mythology, he does not always make this connection. There are a number of instances in *Gli amori difficili* when the male protagonist is attracted to a woman who is not especially young; the "vedova provinciale" (RR 1: 319) who fascinates the young soldier Tomagra in "L'avventura di un soldato," and the "bella signora" (RR 2: 1086) with whom Enrico Gnei spends the night in "L'avventura di un impiegato" are two examples.

Although Sofronia is never chained to rocks, she certainly faces dangers, for she is sent off into the wilderness by her stepmother, abducted from her convent by Moorish pirates and nearly drowned at sea—all fates she appears to accept with complete resignation. Rocks do, however, figure menacingly in her story, for she is shipwrecked on the Breton rocks on her return from Morocco in the company of Agilulfo and Gurdulù. On the other hand, monsters in *Il cavaliere inesistente* are more of the metaphorical kind, or only indirectly affect Sofronia. The closest thing to a traditional monster in this tale is the whale that overturns the ship carrying Agilulfo and Gurdulù to Morocco while on their quest to prove her virginity. But in a truly Calvinian twist, the oil from this whale lubricates Agilulfo's joints, allowing him to remain rust free as he walks to Morocco along the ocean floor. Mythical heroes more typically fly to the rescue of damsels in distress, and monsters often emerge from the ocean depths. So to send Agilulfo to the rescue via the seabed, which is about as far from the skies as is possible, is an added reversal of conventions and compounds the confused nature of the role that he plays in episodes involving Sofronia.

Although Agilulfo is portrayed as the quintessential Carolingian knight and earns his knighthood for his first rescue of Sofronia, unconventionally, if not farcically, his interest lies in maintaining rather than claiming her virginity. Indeed, after his second rescue, it is vital to Agilulfo's very existence that Sofronia remains intact until her virginity can be verified by Charlemagne. In contrast, Sofronia herself is not portrayed as placing anything like the same

importance upon retaining her virginal status. Although it is ostensibly in accordance with his role as the epitome of knightly valour that Agilulfo thrice saves the virginal Sofronia (twice from certain loss of her virginity and once from drowning), his actions are ultimately no more disinterested than those of Perseus. As Finucci observes, “life, literature, and myth have consistently promised man” that “by gallantly offering help” a “reward is forthcoming” (*Lady* 127). For Agilulfo, who is incapable of claiming a physical reward, the prize he most desires is his knighthood and his identity. More commonly, however, and in accordance with the Andromeda myth, the reward is possession of the rescued female, traditionally through marriage. Marriage is indeed the eventual destiny of Tasso’s Sofronia, but in a bizarre reversal of fortunes, in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Agilulfo loses everything and Torrismondo, in many ways his rival, wins Sofronia in marriage.

Through this move, and with Ariostan deftness, Calvino successfully merges the Andromeda myth with the Oedipus story, for not only does Calvino build into Sofronia’s character features taken from sources including Tasso’s Sofronia, various Ariostan representations of the feminine, and the mythical Andromeda, but he also casts her for a short period in the role of Jocasta, the mother of the legendary Oedipus. In *Il cavaliere inesistente*, both the traditional Oedipus story and the Freudian interpretation of the myth exist thematically among the sub-plots of the novel, so that the Oedipal link becomes more than mere metaphorical allusion or psychoanalytical interpretation. In his play upon the Oedipal scenario, Calvino casts Torrismondo in the role of Oedipus, the protagonist of the legend. However, in her capacity of forever malleable “necessary non-self,” Calvino hands Sofronia an ambiguous identity for most of the novel: she is either the virgin who is needed for Agilulfo’s story, or she is Torrismondo’s mother. Of course, along her journey, Sofronia also takes on other identities: to Torrismondo’s question “Qual è il vostro nome?” Sofronia replies, “Azira; o suor Palmira. Secondo se nel gineceo del sultano o in convento” (RR 1: 1053). But these names merely emphasise her lack of independence, and her true identity does not become clear until the end of the novel, although she never becomes independent.

Sofronia’s name is first mentioned in chapter 7 of the novel, during a banquet for Charlemagne’s paladins. To spite Agilulfo and at the risk of losing his own position in Charlemagne’s army, Torrismondo challenges Agilulfo’s right to his titles and rank, stating that the virgin Agilulfo saved from certain rape fifteen years previously could not have been a virgin, for Sofronia is his mother. He alleges that she bore him at the age of thirteen and that

his unidentifiable father belongs to the supposedly celibate order the Knights of the Holy Grail. Agilulfo does not believe Torrismondo's assertions and sets out on his farcical quest to find Sofronia and reclaim his title by proving that she was a virgin when he rescued her. On his own quest, Torrismondo finds and is thoroughly disillusioned by his encounter with his collective 'father,' the Knights of the Holy Grail. He rejects his paternal heritage and wanders "per le nazioni" suffering an identity crisis: "Non so chi sono" (RR 1: 1052). On his journey, he comes across the naked Sofronia asleep in the cave on the Breton coast in which she has been left by Agilulfo, who in the meanwhile has gone to fetch Charlemagne to prove to him that Sofronia remains a virgin.

The only physical description Calvino provides of Sofronia occurs at this point, and it is so vague and generic that it merely confirms her non-self status. In Jeannet's words, she is presented as "a Giorgione-like figure contemplated in her soft, erotic physicality" (165). But Calvino plays with Sofronia's description, for although the passage starts in a traditional manner with a vaguely Petrarchan tone, it rapidly descends into farce as he drops the qualifying adjectives from the list of her body parts and descends into the unlikely realm of her big toe. As if to emphasise Sofronia's lack of substance, her physical description is contained within a passage that is really describing the culmination of Torrismondo's emotional journey:

ecco che finalmente al vedere quelle lunghe nere ciglia abbassate sulla guancia piena e pallida, e la tenerezza di quel corpo abbandonato, e la mano posata sul colmo seno, e i molli capelli sciolti, e il labbro, l'anca, l'alluce, il respiro, ora pare che quel desiderio si acqueti. (RR 1: 1052)

Torrismondo desires Sofronia, and after remaining a virgin for thirty-three years, Sofronia conveniently yields to his advances. To say that Calvino portrays Sofronia as a willing participant would be to overstate the case; resigned would be a more accurate description. Certainly, this is not rape, but it demonstrates how Calvino continues to mould Sofronia like a lump of softened wax to meet his narrative purposes, and those purposes revolve around the needs of his male characters. To the twenty-year-old Torrismondo's statement that "il sentimento che mi ha infiammato alla vostra vista non trasmodi in propositi che voi potreste considerare non onesti," Sofronia, the "[v]ergine [...] di già matura/verginità," gives the

following inexplicit reply: “Oh, non fatevi scrupolo, sapete, ne ho viste tante. Benché, ogni volta, quando arriva al punto, salta su il Salvatore, sempre lui” (RR 1: 1053).

Although the reader is well aware of the ‘presumed’ identity of these two characters, as befits the farcical nature of the tale, neither Sofronia nor Torrismondo recognises the other. When Agilulfo returns with Charlemagne, a period of crisis ensues, with Sofronia’s identity at its centre: her identity as a virgin, and her identity in terms of her lineage. The crisis proves the undoing of Agilulfo, who dissolves into thin air, wrongly thinking that his reason for existing has evaporated with Sofronia’s loss of virginity. Although Calvino regularises the relationship between Torrismondo and Sofronia by revealing that they are not blood relatives after all, I would argue that Oedipal undertones are never really stilled. Nevertheless, the revelation conveniently allows Torrismondo to marry Sofronia and thereby rejoin the patriarchal order. She is remoulded into ‘wife’ and absorbed into the system with him, joining the citizens of Curvaldia and embarking upon a life in what appears to be the utopian society as espoused by Fourier, in which all “avranno secondo quello che varranno” (RR 1: 1062).¹⁰¹

Fashioning a Female Character Incorporating Autobiographical Features

When critics observe that Calvino is a very autobiographical writer, they are usually referring to the fact that he explores in his writing, even if indirectly, issues that he openly acknowledged interested and affected him, such as the role of the writer in society, the question of political commitment and difficulties associated with living in a rapidly industrialising society.¹⁰² As Bolongaro observes, Calvino was “an intellectual who [was] struggling to work out how to act within an increasingly complex world” (6). Similarly, his incorporation into his writing of the landscape, especially the flora and fauna, of his native Liguria is widely recognised.¹⁰³ What critics do not generally mean when they say that Calvino’s writing is autobiographical is that he based his fictitious characters on people he knew, although the fact that a number of his male protagonists clearly reflect Calvino’s own

¹⁰¹ In 1971, Calvino published two essays about the Utopian Socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837): “Per Fourier 1. La società amorosa” and “Per Fourier 2. L’ordinatore dei desideri.” In 1973, he published “Per Fourier 3. Commiato. L’utopia pulviscolare.” These are now found in S 1: (274–314).

¹⁰² These themes are all explored to varying degrees in *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili* but are also well represented in the *Marcivaldo* stories and various *Racconti* that Calvino was writing during this period.

¹⁰³ For example, see Claudia Nocentini’s *Italo Calvino and the Landscape of Childhood*.

attitudes, opinions and problems is widely acknowledged.¹⁰⁴ Calvino himself sometimes openly admits to his personal identification with certain characters, the most obvious for present purposes being Cosimo de Rondò. In fact, de' Giorgi writes that hiding himself in his works was a conscious game for Calvino:

Più volte mi confidava, non proprio scherzando, quanto gli piacesse nascondersi nel proprio lavoro per stimolare il lettore a cercarne il segreto; e questo proprio quando proponeva le apparenze più facili. Secondo lui questa era la funzione del critico, scoprire il segnale dell'opera e divulgarlo. Vedeva il critico come un'entità astratta ma nello stesso tempo giocava a impacciarlo con divertita monelleria. Come uno scoiattolo, diceva, col cacciatore. "Io mi nascondo, fuggo, sta a te acchiapparmi. Io scrittore scrivo, tu critico scopri quello che c'è sotto." (173)¹⁰⁵

Critics have often detected Calvino's presence within his stories, but there are instances in which women who were significant in his life can also be identified hiding within his pages. On the whole, Calvino's characterisation process is a relatively unexplored area of his writing, which supports Benedetti's assertion that critics have tended to focus upon those areas of Calvino's writing that he prioritised himself. However, the relative lack of interest also probably reflects the fact that Calvino's characters are poorly developed in a traditional sense. Nevertheless, although Calvino did not draw attention to his female characters, many of them are very purposefully crafted: they may lack "tridimensionalità", di "carne e ossa" but they are more than simple flattened flowers.

Traces of autobiography can be determined in a number of the stories in *Gli amori difficili*, particularly "L'avventura di un viaggiatore" and "L'avventura di un poeta," but I focus principally in this section on two better developed characters, the Generalessa and Viola, both of whom appear in *Il barone rampante*. Calvino's admission to a strong personal identification with this novel, in combination with comments made by de' Giorgi and others,

¹⁰⁴ Many possible references could be given to support this comment, a number of which are given at various points in this study, but McLaughlin's *Italo Calvino* and Scarpa's *Italo Calvino* both include numerous examples of instances in which the issues faced by Calvino's protagonists are recognisably autobiographical.

¹⁰⁵ In comparing himself to a squirrel, Calvino is only reflecting Pavese who referred to Calvino as "lo scoiattolo della penna" (245).

reinforces the impression that both of these characters display features that can be attributed to women who were important in Calvino's life in the period in which this novel was written. Also, as neither character fits comfortably into a conventional stereotype, even of the composite variety discernible in Sofronia's characterisation, the presence of autobiographical referencing becomes both easier to detect and harder for Calvino to disguise.

The Baroness Corradina di Rondò, generally referred to as the Generalessa, is Cosimo, Biagio and Battista's mother, which immediately makes her an uncommon figure in Calvino's writing. When critics classify Calvino's female characters, they often point to his tendency to create what Marilyn Schneider describes as "an archetypal woman who is both seductive and injurious: Earth Mother, Amazon, Siren, Venus" (110). Bonsaver, on the other hand, considers that most Calvinian female characters can be classified under just two headings: the "donna 'isterica'" or the "donna-Gaia." Discussion of the "donna isterica" is left until Chapter Two, but the "donna-Gaia is of interest here. In classical mythology, Gaia is "la Terra," and the Earth in mythology "è una forza creatrice asessuata, è materia che genera materia, è la Natura nel suo perfetto ciclo autarchico" (*Mondo* 239). The image arising from this description is of a mysteriously aloof sort of woman, who is in touch with nature, self-sufficient and has no need of masculine company. This type of figure occurs commonly in Calvino's writing and the female skier is an obvious example, but Jeannet's "bambina" would also fit into this category and Pamela's resemblance to that figure has already been acknowledged.¹⁰⁶ Not all of the characters that would fit into Bonsaver's "donna-Gaia" category are such aloof creatures, for it also caters to the more stereotypical nurturing Earth Mother figure. Perhaps the quintessential nurturing Earth Mother in Calvino's writing is Mrs Ph(i)Nk₀ from "Tutto in un punto," whom Bonsaver describes as "il trionfo della donna-madre" because she combines the features of pagan Gaia and the Christian Madonna: "si tratta cioè della donna glorificata per la sua capacità di concepire, proteggere e accudire altri essere umani" (*Mondo* 242). Although not exactly a "donna glorificata," Calvino represents the old nurse Sebastiana in *Il visconte dimezzato* as a fairly stereotypical Earth Mother: "aveva dato il latte a tutti i giovani della famiglia Terralba, ed era andata a letto con tutti i più anziani, e aveva chiuso gli occhi a tutti i morti" (RR 1: 379). She is also said to know "le virtù di tutte le erbe" (RR 1: 412). In contrast, the Generalessa, who is cast in the role of an

¹⁰⁶ Jeannet's "bambina" is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

actual mother as opposed to a mother figure, is not an Earth Mother, nor is she sufficiently aloof to fit comfortably into Bonsaver's broader category of "donna-Gaia."

Before looking more closely at the Generalessa's character and to lend support to my suggestion that her characterisation shows signs of the 'real,' I will briefly refer to Calvino's realist story *La speculazione edilizia*, which was started shortly before he wrote *Il barone rampante* but was not finished until soon after. McLaughlin detects references to Calvino's mother Eva Mameli in this long short story, writing in his 1998 article "*La speculazione edilizia*: Natura e storia in un racconto 'difficile'":

La speculazione edilizia costituisce una specie di poesia d'amore alla sua città, scritta in modo tipicamente calviniano e paradossale quando essa diventava sempre più difficile da abitare. Gli aspetti paradossali del libro andrebbero analizzati più a fondo, perché dietro la forte denuncia della realtà contemporanea, a guardarci bene, si può intravedere un affettuoso omaggio alla madre dell'autore. Solo un grande appassionato del paradosso della complessità come Calvino avrebbe pensato di scrivere un romanzo che fosse allo stesso tempo un'aperta denuncia della distruzione dell'ambiente e sotto questa denuncia, come in un palinsesto, un atto di *pietas* filiale nei confronti della madre. (205–06)

McLaughlin sees Eva Mameli's figure in the image of the older woman (the protagonist's mother) who peeks through the thick foliage of her carefully tended garden that is gradually being lost to urban development. He further observes that it is curious that the garden, the mother and the snails (a symbol of the patient work in the garden of the mother)—images that occur three times together in *La speculazione edilizia*—are all found in the first chapter of *Il barone rampante*. Of course, as McLaughlin also notes, in *Il barone rampante* "le lumache e la madre diventano elementi meno positivi, le une provocando la ribellione di Cosimo, l'altra essendo raffigurata in modo caricaturale, come la Generalessa" ("Speculazione" 211). Although it is quite straightforward for McLaughlin to suggest that the images of the mother that occur in *La speculazione edilizia* can be seen as a form of homage to Calvino's mother in the manner of the homage to his father found in the *La strada di San Giovanni* (211), it is understandably more controversial to suggest that the Generalessa, who is a decidedly

eccentric figure, bears a resemblance to Eva Mameli. Nonetheless, this is precisely the proposition I am pursuing.

The Generalessa is portrayed as a very unconventional woman, but she belongs to a family in which eccentricity is the norm. The picture Calvino paints of the Generalessa, through the medium of her younger son, Biagio, is of a woman who does not fit comfortably into the role of mother in an aristocratic Italian household. Or perhaps more accurately, of a woman whose principal interest lies outside of her maternal responsibilities. Calvino supplies few descriptive details, but her physical appearance is unremarkable and her lack of conventionality certainly does not reside in her appearance. The Generalessa is “una donnina delicata” (RR 1: 588); “era sempre stata una donnetta con la pelle rosata e il naso in su” (RR 1: 552). The use of diminutives suggests not only smallness of stature but also that she presents as an unassertive little woman, which is further emphasised by Biagio’s observation that his mother “non contava” (RR 1: 551). Although Calvino does not openly refer to beauty, or lack of it, in his representation of the Generalessa, the general tenor of his description of her stature and countenance reflects de’ Giorgi’s description of Eva Mameli: “una donna piccola, fragile, dal viso marcato non bello” (26).

Oddly, the most immediately recognisable link between the fictitious character and Calvino’s mother is obvious precisely because of the extreme ideological difference it creates between the two: whereas the Generalessa has a passion for all things military, Calvino’s mother had “una tenace fede pacifista” (S 2: 2735). In a number of autobiographical essays, Calvino describes his parents as old-fashioned and his family as non-conformist: “una famiglia non conformista, avulsa al costume corrente e alle tradizioni” (S 2: 2711). This statement by Calvino about his own family bears remarkable similarities to Biagio’s comment about his parents in the first chapter of *Il barone rampante*: “Ma in fondo erano tutt’e due rimasti ai tempi delle Guerre di Successione, lei con le artiglierie per la testa, lui con gli alberi genealogici” (RR 1: 553).

The Generalessa Corradina di Rondò is not Italian: “Nostra madre era una Von Kurtewitz, Konradine, figlia del Generale Konrad von Kurtewitz, che vent’anni prima aveva occupato le nostre terre al comando delle truppe di Maria Teresa d’Austria” (RR 1: 552). She spent her early life travelling from camp to camp with her father and his soldiers, and as a result developed a love for the military life and all its accoutrements. She is portrayed as having

two great passions: a love of all things military, a stereotypically masculine pursuit, and a love of needlework, which is stereotypically feminine. The manner in which she combines her love of these seemingly incompatible passions is one of the more startling features of her characterisation. This unlikely combination of interests also reinforces her comic status and is possibly an attempt on Calvino's part to distance her character from too obviously autobiographical connections. Most of the *Generalessa's* day is spent locked away in her apartments working at her lacemaking, embroidery and petit point, and at the same time re-enacting old battles. For she does not create the usual feminine art work with her needle:

Erano pizzi e ricami che rappresentavano di solito mappe geografiche; e stesi su cuscini o drappi d'arazzo, nostra madre li punteggiava di spilli e bandierine, segnando i piani di battaglia delle Guerre di Successione, che conosceva a menadito. Oppure ricamava cannoni, con le varie traiettorie che partivano dalla bocca da fuoco, e le forcelle di tiro, e gli angoli di proiezione, perché era molto competente di balistica, e aveva per di più a disposizione tutta la biblioteca di suo padre il Generale, con trattati d'arte militare e tavole di tiro e atlanti. (RR 1: 552)

The *Generalessa* is portrayed as a loner who pursues traditional feminine pursuits with single-minded determination and in a most unorthodox fashion. In a similar vein, de' Giorgi describes Mameli as "una donna solitaria, con rare amicizie" (29), and whereas gardening is not an unfeminine pursuit, the serious gardening that was required to create the magnificent experimental botanical garden at the Villa Meridiana was a far less conventional undertaking.

The *Generalessa's* interest in maps and plotting trajectories of both cannon balls and Cosimo's movements in the trees also recalls Eva Mameli's "severità di studiosa" and her academic interest in botany. Neither woman is represented as having much time for activities that have no educational outcome. Biagio refers twice to the serious and studious nature of the *Generalessa's* personality in the novel. The first is a long parenthetical comment made when he first discovers his mother with the coloured flags she used for communicating with Cosimo once he had taken to the trees:

(Io ne provai un certo dispetto, perché non sapevo che nostra madre possedesse quelle bandierine e le sapesse maneggiare, e certo sarebbe stato bello se ci avesse insegnato a giocare con lei alle bandierine, soprattutto prima,

quand'eravamo tutti e due più piccoli; ma nostra madre non faceva mai nulla per gioco, e adesso non c'era più da sperare). (RR 1: 588)

The second reference to games in connection with the Generalessa occurs on the day she dies. Cosimo is blowing soap bubbles into the room to amuse her, and her exclamation, “O che giochi fate!” reminds Biagio that when they were children she always disapproved of their games as “troppo futili e infantili.” However, now, “forse per la prima volta, prendeva piacere a un nostro gioco” (RR 1: 700). Ironically, it is once again too late, as she dies at this point.

The comments by Biagio about his mother's seriousness and her apparent lack of willingness to share with them her knowledge of military ‘games,’ such as signalling with flags, are the only places in the novel where one gets any real sense of criticism of the Generalessa. Despite her manner, which is “troppo sbrigativa e autoritaria” (RR 1: 673), and her tools of war and military ways, “rimaneva pur sempre madre lo stesso, col cuore stretto in gola, e il fazzoletto appallottolato in mano” (RR 1: 588). She is a conventional mother who is afraid that Cosimo might fall from the trees, and who is ready to send him warm apple syrup and oilcloth for shelter when it begins to rain and first aid when he is injured. This reflects Calvino's comments about his own mother, whom he clearly admired for her strength of character and moral courage, even if he did occasionally hint that he would have liked her to have been a little less austere. This also perhaps explains why, for the most developed mother figure in Calvino's literature, the Generalessa is one of the least stereotypical images of the maternal in his writing. In the following extract from the novel, Biagio explains that the Generalessa reduces all problems to a practical level but that her logic is that of an army general rather than that of Mother Nature:

In nostra madre, invece, lo stato d'ansietà materna, da sentimento fluido che sovrasta tutto, s'era consolidato, come in lei dopo un po' tendeva a fare ogni sentimento, in decisioni pratiche e ricerche di strumenti adatti, come devono risolversi appunto le preoccupazioni d'un generale. (RR 1: 587)

I suggest that it takes very little imagination to read this also as Calvino's explanation for the way that he felt his own mother handled her maternal role, and that through her character he provides a significant alternative representation of a mother.

Elsa de' Giorgi's influence is also readily discernible in the representation of certain female characters in these narratives. In her article written after viewing the available correspondence between Calvino and de' Giorgi composed during the years of their relationship, Corti comments that within their pages can be found "la fase embrionale di alcuni racconti composti in quegli anni e i cui motivi sono sorprendentemente riconoscibili nei testi epistolari" (301). As might be anticipated, Corti's observation is fully supported by de' Giorgi's own detailed record of her time spent with Calvino. Her book includes many passages presented as direct quotations from Calvino. Although she does not clearly reference these quotations, it is reasonable to presume that many are taken from letters written to her by Calvino, including perhaps from those that are currently embargoed. Despite Bonsaver's dismissive assessment of *Ho visto partire il tuo treno* as a "svenevole autobiografia romanzata" (*Mondo* 101), de' Giorgi's book provides an excellent insight into the profound effect the relationship had upon Calvino. It is wise, however, to reiterate Smith and Watson's observation that "any utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, characterizes its writer" (12). What de' Giorgi presents is her own view of the importance of her presence in Calvino's life, and she makes it clear that she considers that her influence was profound and far reaching. Notwithstanding these qualifications, it would appear that establishing a relationship with the beautiful Italian actress represented for Calvino the culmination of that seemingly elusive dream he had held since his adolescent days as a spectator; in de' Giorgi he finally gained access to that elite of much admired but seemingly unattainable women. This observation is supported by de' Giorgi's remark that, through her, Calvino unexpectedly achieved his goal "amare una donna come quelle che si sognano nell'adolescenza e poi non si ha più il coraggio—'per intervento malvezzo di scetticismo' diceva—di sognare" (50).

Perhaps the story that most outwardly relates to Calvino's relationship with de' Giorgi in an autobiographical sense is *La nuvola di smog*, which was first published in 1958. It is included in the 1970 collection of *Gli amori difficili* in Part Two, which is called "La vita difficile." The similarities between events as related in Calvino's short story and real-life happenings as recorded in de' Giorgi's book are unmistakable,¹⁰⁷ but the strong autobiographical elements emerge also from Corti's reading of the correspondence. In Corti's words: "Si può riflettere che varie sono le cose che si somigliano fra brani delle lettere e *La nuvola di smog*, a partire

¹⁰⁷ See de' Giorgi (44–48).

dalla triste camera ammobiliata, dove per di più c'è l'inquilino che ascolta le telefonate.” In one of his letters to de' Giorgi, Calvino writes, “Per colmo di sventura qui la camera vicino al telefono è occupata da un inquilino e non posso parlare liberamente” (303). The figure of Claudia, “una donna molto bella ed elegante” (RR 1: 924), bears an unmistakable resemblance to de' Giorgi, just as the male protagonist appears to mirror Calvino himself. According to Corti, a recurring theme in the letters is “lo stupore che Calvino prova di fronte all'importanza che questo amore assume nella sua attività scrittoria” (302). She goes on to comment that “[i]ntroverso e fedele al potere della ragione,” Calvino reflects at length in his letters on the nature of love and the psychological effects of this love upon him, which was a novel experience for the author. He discovers that “la felicità è generata dalla bellezza dell'oggetto, il corpo della donna, e che questa felicità cambia tutte le precedenti prospettive sul reale, le aspirazioni.” After hating the train and the telephone for years, he now desires them passionately as they bring him “alla bellezza-felicità” (303).

Although the importance of the telephone is emphasised in *La nuvola di smog*, the train, that other element “di disturbo” (Corti 303), is the subject of “L'avventura di un viaggiatore.” In his unsigned, third-person “Nota introduttiva” to *Gli amori difficili*, which was published in 1970 and hence well after his relationship with de' Giorgi had ended, Calvino explains the story in the following impersonal manner: “al termine d'un viaggio per raggiungere l'amante, un uomo capisce che la vera notte d'amore è quella che ha passato in uno scomodo scompartimento di seconda classe correndo verso di lei” (RR 2: 1289). But this fictional quest, or journey in pursuit of the object of desire, appears to mirror the real-life quest commonly undertaken by Calvino in this phase of his life. De' Giorgi relates that Calvino often travelled by train from Turin to Rome “in terza classe” to visit her. In the period when her husband, Sandrino, was absent without explanation, meetings between Calvino and de' Giorgi were difficult because she was hounded by the press. Sometimes he had to wait days to see her, but as de' Giorgi explains, he still came “pur di potermi telefonare dalla stessa città più volte” (22). This sheds light on the reason why Calvino might have concluded that “la vera notte d'amore” was the night spent in anticipation of what might follow and why Federico's first action upon reaching Termini station was to telephone Cinzia: “i telefoni grigi non attendevano che lui. Infilò il gettone, fece il numero, ascoltò col batticuore il trillo lontano, udì il —Pronto...—di Cinzia” (RR 2: 1125).

Another adventure story that clearly displays autobiographical roots involving de' Giorgi is "L'avventura di un poeta." Corti remarks that, in a letter to de' Giorgi written in 1958, Calvino wrote:

Ho cominciato un racconto, ho deciso che il mio libro di racconti non culminerà con il gruppo di racconti meccanici, che non riesco a scrivere, ma con un gruppo di racconti d'amore, o meglio sulla difficoltà di comunicare ancora, gruppo di racconti in parte già scritti, in parte pensati da molto tempo, che volevo tenere per fare un libro a sé—e l'ultimo, sarà un racconto che mi porto in testa da Praia ed è intitolato L'avventura d'un poeta e c'è uno, poeta, che va a fare il bagno in barca con una donna bellissima e bionda che nuota nuda in una grotta, e capisce che ha toccato il culmine della bellezza e che non avrà mai parole per esprimere. (308)

De' Giorgi explains that "il mare era per entrambi una dimensione necessaria quanto la natura" (33), and she records that in the summer they spent hours in her small boat swimming and exploring the Ligurian coast. In light of these comments, I suggest that it is impossible not to link the blonde beauty of de' Giorgi to "Delia H., donna molto bella," who sits in a small boat with "Usnelli, poeta abbastanza conosciuto" and enters into a grotto on "una piccola isola [...] deserta" on the "costa Meridione" (RR 2: 1166). According to Corti, as well as exploring the Ligurian coast, Calvino and de' Giorgi also spent time in Praia in Calabria, and often went by rowing boat to a grotto on the small island of Dino.

Nevertheless, it is the portrayal of the relationship between Cosimo and Viola in *Il barone rampante* that perhaps best captures the profound psychological effect the relationship with de' Giorgi had upon Calvino, the man who was by nature introverted and a firm believer in the power of reason. The distancing device afforded by the fantasy novel format handed him the freedom he needed to reflect openly "sulla natura dell'amore e della passione, sugli effetti psicologici che lo intricano" (Corti 303) and to marvel at the sheer novelty of these unexpected experiences. Mario Barenghi writes that Viola is "forse la più memorabile figura femminile concepita da Calvino (parente sia della Pisana di Ippolito Nievo, sia dell'Angelica ariostesca), personifica l'«alterità» femminile" (*Calvino* 38). Although Calvino frequently admitted to Ariosto's presence in his writing and directly acknowledges the influence of

Nievo's Pisana in the character of Viola,¹⁰⁸ he never publically mentions de' Giorgi's name. In contrast to Bonsaver, Corti states that "[l]'invito a leggere questo racconto come simbolico viene da Calvino stesso, pronto a pesare il rapporto fra il barone Cosimo e Viola la ragazzina bionda, al peso dell'autobiografia" (308). Corti notes that the first edition of the novel was dedicated to 'Paloma,' which was one of his nicknames for de' Giorgi, just as he had dedicated his *Fiabe*, published the year previously, to R.D.S. or 'raggio di sole' (an anagram of Elsa de' Giorgi minus an 'e'). Viola's surname d'Ondariva can also be seen as a subtle variation of Spuma d'Onda, which was another of Calvino's names for de' Giorgi.¹⁰⁹

Violante d'Ondariva, or Viola as she is generally called, is portrayed as a disruptive force right from her first appearance in *Il barone rampante*. She is represented as a temptress and a danger to Cosimo and his chosen way of life. Cosimo is irresistibly attracted to her even though in her presence his "world turns upside down and he loses his equilibrium" (Friedman 58–59). As her full name, Violante, suggests, she "violates' the boundaries of Cosimo's individuality" (Gabriele, *Italo* 125). On the very day that the twelve-year-old Cosimo climbs into the trees vowing never to come down again, he comes face to face with the one factor that might seriously challenge his pledge: his desire to be with Viola. In his Introduction to the *Fiabe italiane*, Calvino wrote that "gli innamoramenti più concreti e sofferti delle fiabe [...] sono di quando la persona amata prima la si possiede e poi la si deve conquistare" (48). This public statement is reinforced by de' Giorgi, who quotes Calvino as remarking that

[i]mparo che la tensione massima dell'amore non è possedere una donna, ma conquistarla [...]. La tensione di un uomo moderno non è nello sfuggire un amore difficile, ma una donna come te è il massimo premio per un intellettuale moderno perché lo affranca dalla viltà. (de' Giorgi 38)

Daring to love de' Giorgi was something the normally introverted and reserved Calvino was proud of: "Ho avuto coraggio ad amarti" (de' Giorgi 51). That she returned his love amazed him, for he had given up hope of ever attaining a woman of her ilk.

¹⁰⁸“il personaggio femminile ha per il modello la Pisana” (S 2: 2920).

¹⁰⁹ De' Giorgi writes, “La prima copia di stampa del *Barone rampante* Calvino me la portò di persona a Milano [...]. In stampa il libro era dedicato ‘A Viola’ e a mano ‘A Paloma, il barone’” (41).

An obvious link between Viola and de' Giorgi is their blonde beauty. Pygmalion crafted a motionless statue, and although she is eventually animated, it is Galatea's appearance, rather than her behaviour, that is her most significant feature; she is Pygmalion's physically ideal woman. In contrast, although her beauty is undeniably important and probably has strong autobiographical links, in fashioning Viola, it is possibly through her mode of behaviour that Calvino most obviously incorporates features that demonstrate the influence of de' Giorgi. The strongest autobiographical referencing is evidenced in the manner Calvino portrays Viola's way of interacting with Cosimo and all the men who come into contact with her. Three areas where de' Giorgi's influence is discernible in both concrete and abstract ways in Viola's characterisation are the various names Calvino assigns to her character, Viola's way of ensuring her physical comfort and the theme of jealousy.

If, as Bardazzi suggests, there is a “clima' di Viola” (264), I suggest it is encapsulated in her various names: Violante, Viola, Sinforosa and Sofonisba are all names that Calvino uses in connection with her character. Although recognising the obviously exaggerated nature of her character, which is not unexpected in a fantastic tale, comments made by both de' Giorgi and Corti suggest that Viola's “clima” is similar to the one Calvino associates with de' Giorgi. The name Violante and what it might be intended to signify was discussed above, and although Viola is a perfectly obvious nickname deriving from Violante, it has important significance in its own right. In Italian, Viola is the colour purple but it is also the name given to flowers of the genus *Viola*, which includes not only the violet, but also those known as pansies in English. It was the juice of the pansy that Oberon, King of the Fairies in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, used as a love potion. Pansy juice sprinkled on the eyes of a sleeper made the victim fall in love with the first thing it saw upon awakening, implying that the pansy, or Viola, at least on the symbolic level, has an intrinsic ability to allure.¹¹⁰ The power to entrance is therefore inherent in Viola's name, but it is further emphasised by the nickname Sinforosa, which was given to her as a child by the little fruit thieves, who rivalled Cosimo for her affection. Sinforosa is generally considered to be the “feminine name of the Greek ‘Symphoreo’” and means “she who attracts all to her”

¹¹⁰ What Oberon is referring to is not the modern pansy but the Heartease or ‘viola tricolor,’ which is a common European wild flower and goes by many other names in English (e.g. love-in-idleness and Johnny-jump-up, to mention two). The quotation that explains the effect of the pansy juice can be found in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2.1).

(Montuori). In contrast, the symbolic connotations associated with the name Sofonisba, the name Cosimo gives Viola when she reappears in his life as an adult, are slightly more complex. Having verified that the blonde horsewoman he spied galloping through the fields is indeed “la ragazzina vista a dodici anni sull’altalena,” Cosimo identifies her as “Sofonisba Viola Violante d’Ondariva” (RR 1: 706).¹¹¹ Historically, Sofonisba was a Carthaginian woman who lived during the Second Punic War. Her story is the subject of a number of tragedies and operas, and is included in Petrarca’s unfinished Latin epic the *Africa*. Donald Gilman describes Petrarca’s Sofonisba as a woman who “seduces but suffers” (112). Briefly, Sofonisba is a pawn in male power struggles, and her story involves loyalty to her father, marriage to one man for political reasons and ‘seduction’ of another for love. Although the name Sofonisba points to literary and not autobiographical referencing, she is symbolically important to this study for her position in a romantic triangle, and because her faults are depicted as lying in her “overpowering sensuality, deceitful devices, and adulterous transgressions,” all of which make her “the stereotypical seductress” (111).¹¹² By attaching the name Sofonisba in front of all her others, I suggest that Cosimo is indicating that he recognises that Viola’s return will introduce a disruptive, but not necessarily undesirable, element to his life. The name Sofonisba can also be interpreted as an indirect link through Viola’s character to de’ Giorgi, who was still married to, and by her own accounts still deeply attached to, her husband, Sandrino, at the time her relationship with Calvino took place. It recognises that de’ Giorgi, like Sofonisba, “seduces but suffers” while playing her part in a romantic triangle.¹¹³

The unlikely nature of the relationship between Calvino and de’ Giorgi, the beautiful blonde actress used to a life of high society and luxury and the “signore nero e secco” (de’ Giorgi 51) recognised for “[l]a sua avarizia ligure (ma anche sarda)” (de’ Giorgi 56), is reflected in the novel in the relationship played out in the treetops between Cosimo and Viola: “Cosimo, amante insaziabile, era uno stoico, un asceta, un puritano” (RR 1: 715), and “Viola era [...

¹¹¹ The Archibald Colquhoun translation *The Baron in the Trees* does not use the name Sofonisba here. Depending on the edition, the quotation appears variously: “Viola Violante of Ondariva, the Sinforosa” (222) (Vintage); “Sinforosa Viola Violante of Ondariva” (152) (Harcourt).

¹¹² For a full discussion of Sofonisba’s role in Petrarca’s *Africa*, see Gilman’s “Petrarch’s Sophonisba: Seduction, Sacrifice, and Patriarchal Politics” (111–38).

¹¹³ Throughout her book, de’ Giorgi makes it clear that in loving Calvino she did not stop loving her husband, Sandrino. Chapter 1 of her book gives a good explanation of the nature of her affection for Sandrino.

una] donna raffinata, capricciosa, viziata” (RR I: 716). In her book, de’ Giorgi relates how she helped Calvino move from his dingy and uncomfortable lodging house, that “avrebbe potuto essere quella di Raskolnikov in *Delitto e castigo*” (48), into a house in Turin: “Era la prima casa che Calvino abitava da solo e padrone” (49). Once he was established in this house, she used to visit him there, and she states, “[m]i facevo un dovere di provvederla di quel necessario che, nel ritmo del mio comfort, era connotato dal superfluo” (77). De’ Giorgi sees direct reference to her need to surround herself with all the comforts of life in Calvino’s description of the fantastic “rifugi nascosti sugli alberi” in which Cosimo and Viola carried out their romantic trysts: “amache che avvolgevano i loro corpi come in una foglia accartocciata, o padiglioni pensili, con tendaggi che volavano al vento, o giacigli di piume” (RR 1: 716). She includes the following quotation from *Il barone rampante* in her book (77) and considers it a direct reference to her way of behaving on arrival in Turin to stay at Calvino’s house:

In questi apparecchi s’esplicava il genio di Donna Viola: dovunque si trovasse la Marchesa aveva il dono di creare attorno a sé agio, lusso e una complicata comodità; complicata a vedersi, ma che lei voleva doveva immediatamente vederla compiuta a tutti i costi. (RR 1: 716)

Jealousy is a strongly expressed sentiment in *Il barone rampante*, and it is a fundamental aspect of Cosimo and Viola’s relationship. According to de’ Giorgi, jealousy also featured prominently in her relationship with Calvino: “La gelosia [...]. Quanto narra *nel Barone rampante* tra Cosimo e Viola era vero; non nei fatti, certo, ma nel clima.” By way of illustration she records that, on arrival at her house, Calvino would glance at her accumulated mail trying to work out who was writing to her: “Calvino ero geloso, gelosissimo” (38). A good part of Viola’s danger is shown to lie in her ability to incite jealousy. It is jealousy of the attention that Viola is giving to the fruit thieves that nearly makes the young Cosimo fall from the trees, and it is jealousy of the two naval officers that results in behaviour from Cosimo that plays a crucial role in their final parting. The effects of jealousy on Cosimo in the novel serve to illustrate in a literary form a view expressed by Calvino a number of years later in an interview for radio and television. In this 1981 interview, Calvino states that jealousy “è un sentimento che nuoce più al geloso che all’oggetto della gelosia” (Finocchiaro Chimirri 94). He went on to recognise that some degree of jealousy is perhaps inevitable in love, but displays a more mature attitude when he adds that what can change is “il modo di

viverla, per riuscire a essere se stessi, pienamente se stessi, nel rapporto amoroso” (Finocchiaro Chimirri 94).¹¹⁴

From the outset, Viola’s character is associated with romantic triangles, acknowledged symbolically, as proposed earlier, through the name Sofonisba. These triangles are often structured so that Viola and Cosimo each occupy a point, and the third position is frequently occupied by more than one man. Of course, in the Calvino-de’ Giorgi relationship, the third point was prominently occupied by Sandrino. However, he did not occupy it alone, for by her own account, de’ Giorgi had many male admirers, and Calvino was not comfortable with this situation: “Qualche volta era geloso. Quando Gadda mi scrisse su una pagina di un suo libro: ‘A Elsa alta lettrice’, quasi si arrabbiò” (84). As in real life, jealousy lies at the heart of the fictitious triangles in *Il barone rampante*, with both boys and grown men fighting over Viola in her role of object of desire. Although Viola explicitly tells Cosimo “—Ecco. Sei geloso. Guarda che non ti permetterò mai d’essere geloso” (RR 1: 711), there are numerous indications in the novel that she actively incites jealousy. She also appears to enjoy it, for at one point, when Viola has returned to Cosimo after a period of absence, the reader is told that “[c]ome sempre, la gelosia di lui le fece piacere” (RR 1: 724).

Although Viola professes her love for Cosimo—“ti amo”—she clearly does not find it necessary to love only Cosimo. And despite her statement that “[I]’amore è tutto” (RR 1: 718), like Cosimo, she does not appear to believe that love should be complete renunciation of self. Like Cosimo and Viola, Calvino and de’ Giorgi lived separate lives and, according to de’ Giorgi, this suited Calvino: “concordava con me che insistevo su una vita separata in due città diverse, legata da lettere e incontri d’amore” (52). Nevertheless, perhaps Calvino’s tendency towards jealousy finds expression in the following quotation from *Il barone rampante*, which is moderated slightly by being presented to Cosimo as hearsay. On returning to Ombrossa after a trip to Paris, Biagio reports a Parisian friend saying of Viola: “—Di rado tanta bellezza s’è accompagnata a tanta irrequietudine,— [...] —I pettegoli

¹¹⁴ This interview with Calvino, along with interviews with other prominent Italians, was later reproduced in A. Sinigaglia, *Vent’anni al Duemila*. Torino: ERI, 1982. The interview with Calvino also appears in Finocchiaro Chimirri’s *Italo Calvino tra realtà e favola*, which is the text referred to here. Chapter 5 of Gabriele’s book provides an in-depth discussion of what she describes as the “darker side of love” that is “evident in many of Calvino’s works” (117). She discusses Calvino’s attitude to love, “specifically, love as a threat” (118), as disclosed in his 1981 interview.

vogliono che a Parigi ella passi da un amante all'altro, in una giostra così continua da non permettere a nessuno di dirla sua e dirsi privilegiato” (RR 1: 723). This portrays Viola as a tease and a flirt, and de' Giorgi writes that this aspect of her own character worried Calvino: “L'argomento della mia civetteria occupava molto spazio non solo nelle sue lettere, ma nella sua mente: il filo da cui s'era lasciato guidare per inseguire nel suo labirinto il fascino inafferrabile di Viola” (81).

Hence, even if it is not acknowledged by Calvino in his extensive autobiographical writing, female characters exist in his narratives that appear to have been fashioned in part using material borrowed from women with whom the author was familiar. Thus, I consider that autobiographical referencing can legitimately be added to the contributions made by borrowings from the broad literary tradition, various tropes, topoi and stereotypical forms, and the influence of the cinema to further enrich the multidimensional collection of metaphorical ivory that Calvino, in his Pygmalionesque role of author, uses to construct his female characters.

CHAPTER TWO: PYGMALION'S CREATIVE GESTURE AND THE CALVINIAN TEXT

Introduction

The distinguishing feature of Ovid's retelling of the Pygmalion story is that he moves beyond agalmatophilia, or the adoration of a beautiful statue, by presenting Pygmalion as the creator of his ideal woman. Ovid indicates that it is the goddess Venus who ultimately gifts life to Pygmalion's ivory woman; nonetheless, he conflates ideas of art and male creativity, or reproductive powers, by blurring the boundary between Pygmalion as sculptor and his role as life giver. Although he falls short of bestowing full godlike powers upon Pygmalion, Ovid portrays Pygmalion's caresses as a significant factor in Galatea's animation: "he laid his lips on hers again, and touched her breast with his hands—at his touch the ivory lost its hardness, and grew soft" (232). In Chapter One, the idea of creation, or construction, of female characters is treated literally. Calvino is considered the Pygmalion figure, and although the entire text is obviously his creation, the analysis deals specifically with factors relevant to his representation of the female characters; they are considered his works of art, or metaphorical Galatea's. In contrast, the focus in Chapter Two is almost exclusively at the intra-textual level; here, Calvino steps back into the position occupied by Ovid in the Pygmalion story. Attention moves from the notion of construction and is directed instead towards psychological issues raised by Pygmalion's creative gesture. My analysis explores the way these issues are evidenced in the attitudes and behaviour principally of the male characters, but with the purpose of examining how they affect the representation of female characters.

Although Geoffrey Miles observes that the Pygmalion episode as presented by Ovid may be essentially Ovid's own invention, "a literary creation rather than a genuine myth," he also points out that, in contrast to many other stories in the *Metamorphoses*, for Pygmalion's story, "Ovid's is the oldest version we have, the only substantial ancient version, and the source of all subsequent versions" (332). Joshua writes that Ovid's Pygmalion story is "most often used by the critics as an archetype" (xiv), explaining that although "[a]rchetypes are by no means easily defined [...] critics concur that there is a universal quality in archetypal narrative which leads to its transmission through the ages, and generates its applicability to

texts that may or may not be intentionally alluding to it” (xii). Ovid’s myth lies at the base of the archetype, but a variety of interpretations of his text has led to many different emphases in the archetype. As Joshua observes, “the Pygmalion story is a polysemic narrative which works within a literary tradition” (xxi), and over time the story has developed, or evolved, “reflecting changes in culture and literary tradition” (xix). As a result, artists are often not directly responding to Ovid’s myth but to subsequent interpretations of it; indeed, my own analysis of Calvino’s narratives draws upon ideas expressed in texts that are only indirectly connected to Ovid’s Pygmalion story.

Meyer Reinhold writes that Ovid’s version “remained the canonical form of the myth until the end of the seventeenth century” (316). During the Middle Ages and for at least part of the Renaissance period, the Pygmalion story was generally considered an example of the excesses of idolatry. Miles suggests that this is very probably a result of views expressed by the early Christian writers Clement of Alexandria and Arnobius of Sicca, both of whom drew upon the writings of the third-century BC Greek scholar Philostephanus rather than from Ovid and claimed that Pygmalion was a young Cypriot “who blasphemously fell in love with the sacred statue of Aphrodite in her temple, and tried to make love to it” (332).¹¹⁵ Pygmalion’s persistence in the face of a seemingly hopeless love has also been read metaphorically to show the need for perseverance in love. In this interpretation, as Miles explains, “the statue stands for a beloved who is cold, hard, and unresponsive as stone, but can eventually be melted by a persistent suitor” (334). This theme is immediately recognisable as one intrinsic to courtly love literature, and the medieval French poet Jean de Meun’s (c. 1276) long and satirical continuation of Guillaume de Lorris’s (c. 1230) *Roman de la rose* actively incorporates the Pygmalion myth.¹¹⁶ But it is a theme that has had a lasting influence, and Miles observes that “generations of love poets have alluded to Pygmalion and his statue in self-pity or self-encouragement” (334).

¹¹⁵ See Miles’s *Classical Mythology in English Literature* (332–34) and (348–50) for a fuller discussion of the writings of Clement of Alexandria, c. AD 200 and Arnobius of Sicca, c. AD 300. See also Jane Miller’s “Some Versions of Pygmalion.”

¹¹⁶ See *The Romance of the Rose* (de Lorris and de Meun 340–46) for de Meun’s interpretation of the Pygmalion story. De Meun also illustrates that linking the tales of Narcissus and Pygmalion has a long history. Although Pygmalion admits his love for his statue is insane, he justifies it by comparing himself to Narcissus: “I am [...] less of a fool, for, when I wish, I go to this image and take it, embrace it, and kiss it [...]. But Narcissus could not possess what he saw in the fountain” (341).

Although not always a popular theme, the Pygmalion story maintained a continued presence in some form after the Middle Ages. This is evidenced by examples as diverse as the painting by the Italian Renaissance artist Agnolo Bronzino (1530), which harks back to the medieval idolatry tradition, and Shakespeare's awakening of Hermione's statue in the last scene of the *Winter's Tale*, which in Miles's view creates "a deliberate counter-version to the puritanical suspicion of art, love, and women which runs through most Renaissance versions of Pygmalion" (337).¹¹⁷ But during the first half of the eighteenth century in France and Germany, the myth received a new impetus with works such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's short musical drama *Pygmalion*, which was composed in 1762 and first performed in 1770. According to Reinhold, although Rousseau was not the first to use the name, the popularity of his mythical monodrama probably embedded the name Galatea in the popular consciousness. Annegret Dinter, who was principally concerned with French and German versions of the Pygmalion story but also provides some Italian examples, describes the "eighteenth century as the heyday of the legend" (qtd. in Miles 337). In contrast, in reference to English literature, Joshua writes that "although all periods show some interest in the Pygmalion story, its heyday is the nineteenth century, and its favoured genre is poetry" (xx). Nonetheless, from the eighteenth century, the Pygmalion story was retold and reinterpreted constantly and the following discussion of the representation of the feminine in Calvino's texts draws as much from themes and ideas raised by these reworkings as it does from a strict analysis of Ovid's myth.

When viewed in isolation, Ovid's Pygmalion episode raises many issues relevant to a study of the representation of male-female interactions. Nevertheless, the context in which Ovid positioned the episode within his *Metamorphoses* is very significant, for the arrangement of the text is as much an Ovidian invention as the Pygmalion story itself. Thus, an appreciation of the issues raised by the Pygmalion story is enhanced by reading the episode as merely part, albeit a crucial component, of a linked sequence. To underline the significance of the Pygmalion story, Bauer suggests that it is a metaphor for the whole *Metamorphoses*, noting among other things the "figurative equation between the sculpture of Pygmalion and the art of the poet." He argues that Ovid attempts through the *Metamorphoses* to "resurrect the heritage of antiquity for the benefit of posterity" in the belief that "of all human enterprises

¹¹⁷ Miles is writing specifically about the Pygmalion influence in English literature.

only the fine arts are capable of performing such miracles” (13).¹¹⁸ Bauer sees Ovid as “a poet bent on demonstrating the vitality of the arts” who “remold[ed] and animat[ed] the fragments of a lifeless legend” (14)—just as Pygmalion crafted his ivory statue. In a certain sense, both Pygmalion’s statue and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* can be considered ‘concrete’ manifestations of Kristevan intertextuality, and in Chapter One I described how Calvino also demonstrated “the vitality of the arts” by selecting and adapting for his own narrative purposes fragments from many historical sources, including from the works of Ovid. In contrast, the intention in this section is to acknowledge the broader aims of both Ovid and Calvino, but to direct the specific focus towards the finer details of the narratives themselves, using issues raised by Pygmalion’s supreme act of creativity as the vehicle through which to approach Calvino’s portrayal of the feminine. My method involves coupling a theoretical discussion of some of the issues relevant to male-female interactions that are raised by the Pygmalion story to an exploration of the way in which these same issues are evidenced in the behaviour of characters within the Calvinian text.

Applying the Pygmalion Myth

It is not surprising that the Pygmalion myth has attracted the particular attention of feminist critics, who “argue that Graeco-Roman myths are often masculine constructs whose narratives only reflect the anxieties of male psyches” (Humm 17). Both Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Calvino’s texts are also masculine constructs, and Dana Renga is only one of many to remark that “Calvino is recognized for his consistent creation of texts proffering male points-of-view” (373). However, borrowing the words of Susan Schibanoff, although Calvino is “writing like a man,” I am “reading *as* a woman” (95). Schibanoff was summarising the response of Christine de Pisan to Jean de Montreuil’s accusation that she was reading the *Romance of the Rose* like a woman, the implication being that to read like a woman was to misread (94–95). It is from the perspective of a female reader “who is not co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded” (Fetterley

¹¹⁸ See Bauer’s “Function of Pygmalion in *Metamorphoses*”: “the conscious poet must function to eternalize the ephemeral and to resurrect the obsolete” (21). Bauer also divides the nine “erotic narratives” (10) of Book X into three frames with the Pygmalion myth at the centre. The third frame, which immediately surrounds the Pygmalion myth, involves the Propoetides and the Myrrha-Cinyras episodes, namely, the prostitution of the Propoetides, and Myrrha’s incestuous desire for her father.

xii) that I explore and comment in this chapter upon the following issues that arise from Ovid's myth and are well represented in Calvino's narratives: the portrayal of the feminine as something dangerous or undesirable; the narcissism inherent in Pygmalion's creative act; the fetishistic quality of Pygmalion's behaviour as he idolises his statue; and the Oedipal themes raised by Pygmalion's marriage to his figurative 'daughter.' Although approached through selected texts, these issues are tightly intertwined and represented in most of the narratives included in this study, and the fear of castration that underlies the Freudian Oedipus complex is closely associated with them all.

Representations of Woman as Dangerous and/or Undesirable

Ovid immediately precedes his Pygmalion episode with an account of the fate of the wicked Propoetides, whose introduction appears specifically designed to justify Pygmalion's decision to create in their place an artificial woman who represented his vision of the ideal. As Christopher Knight summarises, "Regarding women, [Pygmalion's] is a love hate relation: he loves the ideal, but hates the actual" (215).

Calvino presents the reader with a number of quite different female characters within *Gli amori difficili* and *I nostri antenati*, but a consistent feature of his representation is the portrayal of woman as a disruptive element and one that poses some form of danger, real or imagined, to the men who surround her. To phrase this within the Pygmalion framework, one could say that many of Calvino's female characters appear to be descendants of the wicked Propoetides. But the situation is ambiguous, for woman in both the Pygmalion myth and the Calvinian text is a "concurrently feared and desired object" (O'Sullivan 134). In the myth, fear is represented as loathing and Pygmalion is able to disassociate himself from the women he dreads, fashioning in their stead the woman of his imagination. In contrast, desire and fear, or "the tension between instinctual drives and self-preservation" (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 750), continue hand in hand for the Calvinian male character, and using a cross-section of narratives, I explore some of the different ways this manifests in the representation of female characters.

Battista

Most of Calvino's female characters evoke feelings of both fear and desire in the males they are associated with; however, Battista di Rondò stands out as being completely devoid of attractive features. Her character has already been used to illustrate the devices Calvino employs to 'physically' construct the figure of an undesirable woman. In this section, I use her character to explore the way the undesirable woman functions within the Calvinian text. Battista has been selected because she is unquestionably one of Calvino's least desirable female characters,¹¹⁹ graphically representing what in Freudian thinking is a man's worst fear. She is a metaphorical castrator, a threatening figure who visibly wields the knife and openly displays what Bolongaro terms a "Gothic viciousness" (93) as she cuts and slices innocent creatures. In keeping with the theme of ancestry linking the three fantasy novels, Sanguinetti Katz connects her character to the equally Gothic Bad Medardo from *Il visconte dimezzato*, stating that "il sadismo del visconte cattivo trova un'eco nell'aggressione orale ed anale della terribile Battista" (257).¹²⁰

Battista is a character who dwells solely on the negative side of the feminine binary as defined by Bettella; namely, the "ugly, sinful, wicked" ("Fosca" 133) woman. Confined to the house and dressed as a nun, this rebellious and despised elder sister of Cosimo and Biagio controls what the family eats. Why she has been given this task is never explained, but even at the most literal level, the gruesome meals she delights in presenting to the family table epitomise the dark side of femininity and turn the nurturing function more typically associated with food preparation on its head. Battista's character provokes a strong sense of the Freudian uncanny with its associations to Eros and the death instinct, and literalises the Kleinian definition of the superego as "something which bites, devours and cuts" (71). Among the totally dysfunctional di Rondò family, Battista alone is described as appearing at ease at the table, and the implication is that her ease stems from the feelings of discomfort she provokes in others. According to Biagio, even their father, the Baron, is afraid of Battista as

¹¹⁹ Battista has an antecedent in the "brunaccia" (RR 1: 145), 'la Nera,' who is the prostitute sister of Pin, the young narrator of Calvino's first novel, the neorealist *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947). Schneider describes Nera as "an incarnation of the feminine life force in its destructive aspect alone" (99), a comment that could also apply to Battista.

¹²⁰ In a similar vein, Nocentini writes that "Battista embodies the archetypal witch; projecting the sadistic, almost cannibalistic desires of the child preparing to move out of the phase of oral fixation" ("Fiat" 23).

she sits stripping chicken “con un accanimento minuzioso, fibra per fibra, con certi coltellini appuntiti [...] specie di lancette da chirurgo” (RR 1: 551), with her rolling eyes, her pointy teeth and her little yellow ratlike face appearing menacingly beneath the starched wings of her nun’s headdress.

The means by which Battista procures the ingredients for her macabre concoctions and the sadistic, yet imaginative, way in which she presents her meals to the family table symbolise “the threat of castration, of diminished sexual power, and of the destruction of self” (Migiel 59) to those who consume her food. It is made quite clear that Battista puts a great deal of thought into her gruesome culinary creations. Indeed, Biagio relates that the events that unfold in *Il barone rampante* can all be traced back to a macabre but artistic snail dish that Battista prepared for the family, and the horror provoked in the two brothers at the thought of her preparation methods:

Poi le lumache: era riuscita a decapitare non so quante lumache, e le teste, quelle teste di cavallucci molli molli, le aveva infisse, credo con uno stecchino, ognuna su un bigné, e parevano, come vennero in tavola, uno stormo di piccolissimi cigni. E ancor più della vista di quei manicaretti faceva impressione pensare dello zelante accanimento che certo Battista v’aveva messo a prepararli, immaginare le sue mani sottili mentre smembravano quei corpicini d’animali. (RR 1: 556)

Although a flock of tiny swans is inherently an attractive image, it is only Battista’s artistic ability that is a positive feature here. The decapitated snails used in the construction of these tiny swans provide yet another veiled reference to the danger Battista represents. As Freud writes in “The Taboo of Virginity,” “[b]eheading is well-known to us as a symbolic substitute for castrating” (207), and in “Medusa’s Head” he pronounces that “[t]o decapitate=to castrate” (273). As edible art, the dish leaves much to be desired, and Cosimo and Biagio took the side of the snails, letting loose all the snails that Battista was purging in a barrel in the cellar. As punishment, they were beaten by their father and locked up for three days on a prison diet. The novel begins on the day that they are allowed back to the family table, and in retaliation, Battista, “sovrintendente alla cucina” (RR 1: 558), serves snail soup and snails as a main course. Cosimo responds to his father’s command to either eat the meal or leave the table by climbing into a holm oak and declaring “io non scenderò più” (RR 1: 559).

Justifying Cosimo's extreme method of defying his father's authority and winning the sympathy and understanding of the reader, who might otherwise consider Cosimo's action a mere childish tantrum, required evidence of stronger provocation than merely being forced to eat a meal of snails, which is not such an unusual food in itself. And this is where Battista's role and what she symbolises becomes so important. I suggest that, read metaphorically, Cosimo's reaction is as much, if not more, a refusal to fall under the control of Battista, a personification of the frightening powers of female sexuality, as it is a refusal to obey his father and thus to defy the social order. In the "Taboo of Virginity," Freud attempted to formalise and give a more scientific explanation for the male fear, or dread, of the female:

Perhaps this dread is based on the fact that woman is different from man, forever incomprehensible and mysterious, strange and therefore apparently hostile. The man is afraid of being weakened by the woman, infected with her femininity, and of then showing himself incapable [of an erection?]. (198–99)¹²¹

In this light, escaping from Battista's control makes more understandable an otherwise irrational overreaction to his father's command, and indeed every attempt is made in the novel to show that, although he is turning his back on his biological heritage, Cosimo is not rejecting the law of the Father. In Bolongaro's words, "Cosimo is not contesting his father's right to impose discipline" per se, but rather he is protesting against his father's way of exercising his authority, his "inability to weigh causes and effects" and to "act according to reason" (89); "Cosimo does not rebel against the figure of the Father but against this particular father and his particular logic" (99). In fact, the entire novel is designed to demonstrate that, despite spending his life in the trees, Cosimo remains in close touch with both his family and his community. As Biagio explains: "Insomma, Cosimo, con tutta la sua famosa fuga, viveva accosto a noi quasi come prima. Era un solitario che non sfuggiva la gente" (RR 1: 614).

Almost without exception, the strongest and most unmodified invectives are saved for Battista and her way of exercising her individuality. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Biagio concedes that both Cosimo and Battista are rebels and essentially solitary individuals. Nevertheless, there is little question that Battista is one of the secondary characters "con una

¹²¹ The comment in brackets was added by Beers (75).

maniera sbagliata” that Calvino introduced to the text specifically to contrast with Cosimo and to reinforce the “unica maniera giusta” (RR 1: 1215) represented by Cosimo’s unusual way of living. In his analysis, Bolongaro appears to accept the validity of contrasting Battista’s and Cosimo’s different ways of behaving, supporting his views by comparing some of their unconventional modes of expressing their rebellious individuality. He states that Cosimo’s rebellion is much more overt in the sense that he vocalises his displeasure and physically removes himself from his father’s house, commenting that, in contrast, Battista’s protest is silent; she “accepts confinement within the home and eventually marries well, much to everyone’s surprise.” According to Bolongaro, “[w]hile Cosimo’s revolt is based on a sense of injustice and constitutes a moral challenge to the father’s authority, Battista’s is grounded in sensibility and takes essentially the form of an aesthetic challenge” (93). He continues by remarking upon the sensuous nature of Battista’s rebellion; she demands the right to sensual satisfaction, whereas “Cosimo demands justice based on reason” (94).

However, in making his observations, Bolongaro places no weight on the fact that these views are presented to the reader by Biagio in his Pygmalionesque role of narrator. Biagio’s sympathies lie openly with Cosimo, and just as Pygmalion hated the “loathsome Propoetides,” Biagio loathes his sister, Battista. Nor does Bolongaro appear to recognise that any comparison between Battista and Cosimo is not a comparison of equals, for they do not have the same choices available to them. As a woman, Battista does not have the luxury of climbing into the trees like Cosimo, the future baron. To criticise Battista for accepting “confinement within the home” becomes unmeaningful if one acknowledges that, however unconventional she might be, Battista’s character is still that of a late-eighteenth-century woman. In fact, given her more limited options, her ‘silent’ revolt can just as readily be interpreted as a revolt “based on a sense of injustice” as Cosimo’s more vocal protest, and thus equally “constitutes a moral challenge to the father’s authority.” How could a woman forced to dress as a nun and to remain housebound rebel more forcefully, one wonders? In a similar fashion, Battista’s demand for sensual satisfaction becomes far less extraordinary when one considers Cosimo’s later love life in the trees, which is discussed later in this chapter. Cosimo’s libidinous exploits draw approbation rather than condemnation from Biagio.

Notwithstanding these observations, Battista is certainly portrayed as both a dangerous and an undesirable woman, but I suggest that there are two distinct sides to her characterisation.

Most obviously, Battista fulfils the simple function of contrasting with Cosimo, as suggested by Calvino and outlined by Bolongaro. Her extraordinarily threatening demeanour puts reason on the side of Cosimo and injects a degree of rationality into his flight to the treetops, which could otherwise appear just an absurd overreaction to his father's command to eat his meal. At this level, the fact that Battista is female is not essential. In contrast, her feminine status is crucial for her second and more profound role, which is to literalise what is more commonly expressed metaphorically, namely the fearful and emasculating side of femininity associated with the Freudian castration complex. Of course, according to Freudian thinking, by mere virtue of being a woman, Battista is metaphorically castrated and thus an inferior being.¹²² However, as Kaplan argues in *Cultures of Fetishism*, “[b]ehind every proclamation of female inferiority [in Freud’s writing] lurks a forbidden and shameful identification with the powers of female sexuality” (31). It is relevant, therefore, that once they have served their narrative function, significant female figures in Calvino’s fantasy novels are not left wandering freely through the text with their dangerous female sexuality unchecked. They might be unconventional women, but there is nothing unconventional about their fates, for they are all recuperated into the system using the stereotypical narrative closures of marriage, death or the convent. The Generalessa dies; it remains unclear whether Ursula dies or becomes a nun; both Viola and Pamela are safely married off. Even the feisty Bradamante’s freedom is qualified, for it is implied that she will periodically reassume her Suor Teodora identity and ‘retreat’ to the convent, and it is left ambiguous how her relationship with Rambaldo will evolve.

Despite entering the text as a satirical ‘monaca di casa,’ Biagio explains that the convent is not a feasible option for Battista given “la sua dubbia vocazione” (RR 1: 555). Clearly, there is nothing of the pious nun in Battista’s representation but, like Manzoni’s Gertrude, many women have historically been sent to the convent despite a dubious vocation, which makes Biagio’s statement somewhat unconvincing. Perhaps a better explanation for why Battista is not ultimately handed this fate is Calvino’s secular philosophy. Although he was quite prepared to play satirically with the image of the nun, Calvino falls short of endorsing the stereotypical closure the convent traditionally offers and his female characters only enter the convent on a temporary (Bradamante) or indeterminate (Ursula) basis. Battista’s destiny is

¹²² In “Femininity,” Freud writes, “as a result of the discovery of women’s lack of a penis they are debased in value for girls just as they are for boys and later perhaps for men” (127).

marriage, but even her absorption into the traditional role of wife is accompanied by considerable black humour.

The destructive side of female sexuality is graphically illustrated in Battista's first implicitly sexual encounter, and this is symbolically reinforced in the name assigned to her victim, who is introduced as "quel bietolone lentigginoso" (RR 1: 555) the Marchesino della Mela. This most intuitively translates into English as 'that freckled fool, the young Marquis of Apple.' However, the food imagery is not limited to the apple, for a "bietolone" is a fool only in the colloquial sense and a 'bietola' is actually a type of vegetable. Describing the Marchesino using these terms has the effect of rendering him doubly edible, and the implication is that Battista does indeed attempt to devour him rather as one might an apple, or even chard. The Marchesino escapes her clutches, but Battista later marries "il Contino d'Estomac," who is unflatteringly described as "un figlio zerbinotto, un cacastecchi imparruccato" (RR 1: 616). But even this tight-fisted and bewigged dandy is created superior to Battista, for as Migiel puts it, "[i]f it is true that *nomina sunt consequentia rerum* [...] the count triumphs over Battista because as a 'stomach' he is an eater and not exclusively the thing consumed" (59).

Sun-Tanned Woman and Delia H.

The danger Battista represents to the male world is portrayed quite literally, but typically, the disruptive and dangerous qualities of the Calvinian female character are presented in a more oblique manner. In fact, the title Calvino gives to his short story collection, *Gli amori difficili*, quite succinctly sums up the connection between desire and difficulty that consistently accompanies his representation of the feminine. Contrary to what the title might suggest, there is very little love, at least of the romantic variety, to be found in *Gli amori difficili*. The word 'difficult' more accurately conveys the general tone of the stories, for in all of them there is a sense of loss or absence and a mismatch of goals and/or desires. In all but three of the stories, this difficulty is experienced most acutely by the male protagonist.¹²³ Although present in some form in all the stories in *Gli amori difficili*, I examine the interconnectedness between danger and desire that is associated with the feminine, using two stories in which the

¹²³ The exceptions are "L'avventura di una bagnante" and "L'avventura di una moglie," which have female protagonists, and "L'avventura di due sposi," in which husband and wife are co-protagonists. The 'difficulty' remains with the protagonist regardless of gender.

themes are particularly well represented: “L’avventura di un lettore” and “L’avventura di un poeta.” Like all *Gli amori difficili* stories, these are presented by an omniscient third-person narrator.

Amedeo Oliva is the protagonist of “L’avventura di un lettore,” and for some time he has tended to reduce to the minimum his participation in active life. He is a lover of books and an avid reader, who prefers to live life vicariously through the characters he encounters in his tomes, for he feels that “[o]ltre la superficie della pagina s’entrava in un mondo in cui la vita era più vita che di qua” (RR 2: 1128). Speaking in general terms, Ricci considers that the stories in *Gli amori difficili* “deal with the transcendent questions of what it is to be a man or woman in an increasingly complex society and the possibility of a meaningful rapport within a circumscribed labyrinthine existence” (“Silence” 54).¹²⁴ Renga expresses something similar when she states that “*Gli amori difficili* critically assesses the illusion of the ‘economic miracle’ [of the 50s and 60s] that is based on images of economic prosperity and the unified patriarchal family” (372). According to Ricci, Amedeo uses books to “momentarily overcome, or at least temporarily escape from the social labyrinth” (“Silence” 62), and he states that Calvino allows the “protagonist to view reality through the cultural medium of exchange, i.e., the novel.” Ricci then suggests that the reading process “mediates regularity against external chaos at the same time as the external unregulated space intrudes upon the internal organization of the novel” (63). Applying Ricci’s reasoning to the facts of the story reveals that Calvino introduces this “external chaos” into “L’avventura di lettore” in the form of a female sunbather. He uses her character to symbolise the problems associated with negotiating “the social labyrinth.” The arrival of the “la signora abbronzata” (RR 2: 1131) on the rocky beach threatens to disrupt Amedeo’s orderly retreat from the real world, and she represents danger as she tempts Amedeo with real, or ‘chaotic,’ rather than vicarious, and ‘regulated,’ pleasure.

Taking a psychoanalytic approach and focusing only on the text itself rather than Ricci’s broader philosophical perspective leads one to recognise that, regardless of its possible

¹²⁴ Ricci’s inclusion of woman in his statement probably reflects the fact that two of the stories have female protagonists. However, as I demonstrate in Chapter Three, regardless of the gender of the protagonist, the stories in *Gli amori difficili* remain essentially male-orientated texts and have little to say that is meaningful about what it is to be a woman.

symbolic status as a “cultural medium of exchange,” the book in this short story represents a fetish object. A fuller discussion of fetishism is left until later in this chapter, but the following comment made by Kaplan in *Female Perversions* usefully explains Amedeo’s attitude to both books and women:

the fetish object [in this case a book], unlike the woman herself, can be controlled and manipulated [... and] is significantly more reliable than a living person [... for i]t expects neither commitment nor emotional engagement [...]. Unlike a fully alive, human female being with dangerous, unpredictable desires, who must be wooed and courted, fetish objects are relatively safe, easily available, undemanding of reciprocity. (35)

The plot of “L’avventura di un lettore” relates the stages through which Amedeo progresses as he attempts to neutralise through ratiocination the threat to his narcissistically regulated and self-absorbed existence that is posed by his real, yet barely acknowledged, desire for the sun-tanned woman who comes to share his stretch of deserted coastline. Amedeo first notices that a woman has arrived to sunbathe on a pebbly beach near to his rocky ledge when he briefly raises his eyes from his book. She is initially described as being very tanned, thin, and not very young or particularly beautiful (both observations Amedeo later revises). But what really draws his eye, for he cannot resist repeated further glances, is her most becoming near nudity: “le giovava l’esser nuda (portava un «due pezzi» succinto e molto rimboccato ai bordi per prendere più sole che poteva)” (RR 2: 1130). Her presence both excites and unsettles him as he is gradually drawn from his safe inner world towards the real world that encompasses the tanned woman.

Amedeo’s fear is not of physical contact but of commitment. Of course, he is not unique in this respect; he shares his fear with, among others, the better known Rodolphe from Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. Though willing to seduce Emma, whom he considers a mere bored housewife, Rodolphe is, to use Kaplan’s words, ultimately “frightened of intimacy and cannot tolerate the untidiness of love” (*Female* 206). When Amedeo first notices the tanned woman, he pans his eye over her body in cinematic fashion, noting “le gambe non ricche ma armoniose, il ventre ottimamente liscio” and so forth.¹²⁵ Continuing with this process of

¹²⁵ Amedeo’s preference for the enclosed world of the book over the real world can be read as a metaphor for the youthful Calvino’s love for escaping his everyday existence by immersing himself in the private world of the

fetishistic objectification, he then attempts to classify her as if she were goods for purchase, weighing up her desirability against her inconvenience value. His assessment could easily be considered a fictionalised representation of Kaplan's explanation for why the fetish object is valued over the real:

Amedeo classificò il tipo, la donna indipendente, in villeggiatura da sola, che preferisce agli stabilimenti affollati la scogliera più deserta, e le piace star lì a diventar nera come il carbone; valutò la parte di pigra sensualità e di cronica insoddisfazione che c'era in lei; pensò di sfuggita alle probabilità che offriva per un'avventura di rapido esito, le commisurò con la prospettiva d'una conversazione convenzionale, d'un programma serale, di probabili difficoltà logistiche, dello sforzo d'attenzione che sempre richiede il far conoscenza anche superficialmente con una persona, e continuò a leggere, convinto che quella donna non poteva affatto interessarlo. (RR 2: 1130–31)

In theory, according to Amedeo's reasoning, the tanned woman is not worth pursuing. But reason does not prevail. In "the tension between instinctual drives and self-preservation," instinctual drives take the upper hand (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 750) and Amedeo finds himself justifying decisions that appear to run counter to logic. For example, when he finds it necessary to shift positions on the rocky beach, Amedeo moves closer to the woman, reasoning that it would appear rude to move to a more secluded spot, which just incidentally would also obscure his view of the bikini-clad woman.

Appropriately, the opportunity for the first verbal and physical contact between Amedeo and the woman is provided by a medusa: the jellyfish that shares its name with the mythical Gorgon so feared by men. In Freudian thinking, the Medusa symbolises for males both the horror felt on seeing the castrated female condition and the danger of being reduced to a similarly castrated state.¹²⁶ To quote Mulvey, "the Medusa is the sign of male castration anxiety" (*Visual and Other* 11), so it seems fitting that Amedeo's opening line is "Attenzione! Può essere pericolosa!" (RR 2: 1133). Although his shout is directed at the boys who are playing with a large medusa they have found, the metaphorical linkage between the

cinema. To use Fofi's words, by his actions, Calvino was "valorizzando il 'dentro' del cinema a scapito del 'fuori' della realtà" (16). In Amedeo's story, Calvino uses the female sunbather as a metaphor for "realtà."

¹²⁶ "Medusa's Head" (273–74).

danger of the real medusa and that of the tanned woman is unmistakable, especially as it is she, rather than the boys, who is the real target of Amedeo's attention. It is also the woman, not the boys, who heeds his shout and who asks him if it bites. Amedeo replies that it can sting, but the woman's question foreshadows events later in the story when she bites the back of his hand in annoyance at his lack of willingness to leave his book and enter into conversation with her. She is a medusa that bites rather than stings, but her danger is signalled in both physical and metaphorical terms in the story.

Every attempt is made to show that the sun-tanned woman should be beneath Amedeo's consideration, from her "zoccoletti di legno dai tacchi molto alti, inadatti per quegli scogli" (RR 2: 1132) to her obvious lack of intellectual rigour, witnessed by her preference for "«Annabella» [...] un giornoletto di quelli femminili" (RR 2: 1137) as opposed to Amedeo's worthy tomes. Nevertheless, despite her obvious shortcomings, she successfully manages to insert her disconcerting presence into his rational equation. When women and sexual desire enter the discussion, a rogue element is introduced that appears to render the male's power of reasoning totally ineffective. Contrary to all logic, it is the woman and the irrational she represents that hold sway, and, despite Amedeo's best intentions, little by little he is drawn towards an inevitable sexual entanglement. Yet, until the end, Amedeo attempts to demonstrate that he is being drawn into something irrational against his better judgement. As he throws himself at the woman, he is reasoning, "[d]ato che deve avvenire, avvenga subito!" (RR 2: 1140), and he tries not to lose his place in the book, even "nel trasporto dei suoi abbracci." He solves his dilemma, at least from his own point of view, by objectifying the woman so that she and the pleasure she represents become almost a sub-plot in his book. In fact, if viewed metaphorically, this episode encapsulates many of the ideas on the erotics of reading that Barthes later presented in *The Pleasure of the Text*. However, relying on Ricci's terminology, Amedeo engages in the 'chaotic,' but real, pleasure of sexual relations while still remaining ostensibly within the controllable world of his novel. According to Amedeo, "l'intesa amorosa era perfetta," even though he acknowledges that "[p]oteva forse stato essere protratta più a lungo" (RR 2: 1141). On the face of it, he has successfully negotiated his way through Ricci's social labyrinth, for he has enjoyed, but controlled, the "external chaos" posed by the presence of a desirable woman. Nevertheless, as with all the stories in *Gli amori difficili*, there is a strong note of irony attached to the tale. Who really controls the situation is ambiguous; the story unfolds solely from Amedeo's perspective, but there are plenty of indications in the inherent satire that Amedeo's idea of success is flawed.

In contrast to the sun-tanned woman, the danger posed by Delia H. in “L’avventura di un poeta” is expressed in a more subtle manner and it is difficult at first glance to see any link between this “donna molto bella” (RR 2: 1166) and the wicked Propoetides. However, it soon becomes clear that Delia’s danger lies in her beauty and concomitant sexual allure, which unwittingly conspire with the natural beauty of the surroundings to disconcert and disempower Usnelli, the protagonist of this story. On a sunny summer’s day, Delia and Usnelli approach a small and isolated island in a rowing boat, intending to lazily explore the area. He is rowing and she is lying in the boat talking enthusiastically about everything she sees. Usnelli, on the other hand, whose life generally revolves around words, is struck by the silence of their surroundings. He is cautious by nature, sparing of emotional displays and wary of too-obvious beauty. Delia’s enthusiasm and ready words simultaneously disturb and enthrall him: “[d]a quando amava Delia egli vedeva in pericolo il suo cauto, avaro rapporto col mondo, ma non voleva rinunciare a nulla né di sé né della felicità che gli si apriva” (RR 2: 1167). Like the sun-tanned woman, Delia belongs to the “external unregulated space” (Ricci, “Silence” 63), a place from which Usnelli feels alienated but which he is forced to confront in the presence of the desirable Delia.

Upon entering a beautiful grotto, Delia feels completely in tune with the spirituality of their magnificent surroundings: “Qui capisci gli dèi” (RR 2: 1167). In contrast, Usnelli, to use Ricci’s words, is “linked to its ineffable muteness” (“Silence” 65). Delia begins to shout out invocations and lines of poetry, enjoying the sound of her voice echoing in return. Instead, Usnelli, poet by vocation, can only make meaningless sounds and heads the boat deeper into the grotto “come un pesce degli abissi, che fugge le acque illuminate” (RR 2: 1167). Delia is afraid of the darkness and they return to the broader, lighter part of the cavern, where she enters the water and swims naked before the spellbound Usnelli. He realises that, just as the beauty of the grotto has rendered him speechless, he is equally unable to articulate his love for Delia, “in tutte le sue poesie, non aveva mai scritto un verso d’amore” (RR 2: 1168).

Under the enthralled gaze of Usnelli, the naked Delia is transformed into an enticing sea nymph as she swims with “un movimento come di danza; sospeso a mezz’acqua, sorridendogli” (RR 2: 1169). Her arched foot is likened to an innocent little fish, but menace lurks just below the surface of this entrancing display with all its erotic overtones. In the introduction to his study on the midday tradition in Italian literature, Nicolas Perella states:

there is ample evidence to show that noontide was an hour in which the presence of divinities or semidivinities (sirens or nymphs as well as the more august goddesses and Pan) could be sensed or witnessed by mortals; but to behold them was a dangerous and at times fatal adventure. (7)

According to John Ahern, Calvino's attention was probably first drawn to this tradition by Giuseppe Ungaretti in his "Discorso secondo su Leopardi," which appeared in *Paragone*—the same journal in which a number of Calvino's essays and stories were published in the early 1950s (9). The danger inherent in Usnelli's privileged viewing of the naked, swimming Delia is first announced when she, like the earlier sun-tanned woman, is linked to the medusa: "La pelle più bianca sul seno e ai fianchi quasi non si distingueva, perché tutta la sua persona mandava quel chiarore azzurrino, di medusa" (RR 2: 1169). This danger is further alluded to throughout the passage, which provides one of the better examples of active scopophilia, or seeing as desire "in which the eye functions as phallus," to be found among these narratives. The "equation between eye and phallus, blindness and castration" (Mykyta 53) is a crucial part of the Oedipus myth and will be discussed in more detail in that context. But worthy of note here is the mention of Delia's "stella come d'un frutto marino" (RR 2: 1169), which, like the medusa, is a veiled reference to the threat of castration through the Freudian linking of the uncanny to the sight of the female genitals.

Drawing from Perella, Ahern notes that the literary ancestor of this episode is the Ovidian myth of Diana and Actaeon (*Metamorphoses* III: 77–80). One day after hunting, Actaeon happened by chance upon Diana and her nymphs bathing naked in a grotto. Diana was furious, and as a punishment, and to ensure that he would never communicate what he had seen, Actaeon was turned into a stag; he was rendered physically incapable of communication. Fortunately for Usnelli, he is only temporarily struck dumb after seeing the beautiful Delia swimming naked in the water. Nonetheless, as we have already learned that Usnelli is incapable of writing about love and beauty, there is no need to render him mute; on this subject, he will remain forever silent:

Usnelli, sul canotto, era tutt'occhi. Capiva che quel che ora la vita dava a lui era qualcosa che non a tutti è dato di fissare a occhi aperti, come il cuore più abbagliante del sole. E nel cuore di questo sole era silenzio. Tutto quello che

era lì in quel momento non poteva essere tradotto in nient'altro, forse nemmeno in un ricordo. (RR 2: 1169)

Re-emerging from the grotto, Usnelli is once again faced with the grim reality of everyday life when they encounter a group of poor fishermen. Little by little, he is released from the spell exerted upon him both by the natural beauty of the grotto and by Delia. In the harshness of the real world, his words come thick and fast, “disperato come un urlo” (RR 2: 1172). But although he vanquishes the silencing effect of Delia’s beauty, all indications are that words of love or beauty remain with her and forever beyond his control.

Priscilla

Both the sun-tanned woman and Delia H. represent some sort of threat to their respective male companions, but they are not frightening figures and remain desirable women. They would not cause Pygmalion to forsake the company of women for a life of celibacy as might the fearsome Battista. Her danger is represented in an overt fashion, being physically unattractive and openly flaunting her instruments of destruction with all their associated castration threats. But the black humour associated with her character stems for the most part from the atypical way she behaves in the stereotypically unthreatening roles of sister, nun, cook, and finally, wife. In contrast, Priscilla, the final female character discussed in this section, represents the reverse of the situations just analysed. Rather than introducing danger to a situation in which danger is not generally considered to lie, the episode in which Priscilla appears is presented as a comical account of the disempowerment of the archetypal dangerous woman.

Priscilla is a minor character in *Il cavaliere inesistente* and the episode in which she features is a clever and amusing farce. Cast in the role of the wicked enchantress, Priscilla is an attractive widow, who, aided by her ladies-in-waiting, waylays unsuspecting knights, distracts them from their duties and then destroys them as she satisfies “la sua insaziabile lascivia” (RR 1: 1026). The most obvious interpretation of the episode in which she features is that this archetypal wanton Propoetide, femme fatale or modern deadly doll, is beaten at her own game, for she attempts to seduce the perfect, but non-existent, knight: the man she most wants but can never have. Both Pygmalion’s beautiful statue and Agilulfo have a fatal flaw; despite their extreme desirability, neither is capable of physically delivering what their

admirers most wish. However, as is so often the case in Calvino's narratives, made more obvious perhaps when reading *as* a woman, the situation is more complex than it first appears, for Priscilla really does pose a threat to Agilulfo and it is one that could be 'mortal.' The danger is not that Agilulfo will lose himself to lust, but that he will lose control of the situation and be absorbed into the irrational realm of the feminine. Agilulfo's very existence depends on maintaining certainty and control; he must avoid the "limbo incerto" and ensure that there is always in front of him a solid wall against which he can pitch "la tensione della sua volontà" (RR 1: 968).

The point of departure that removes *Il cavaliere inesistente* from being merely a fanciful historical tale is the figure of Agilulfo, the non-existent knight. Dressed in pure white armour and the epitome of knightly perfection, this walking, talking, fighting, but empty, suit of armour keeps itself functioning "[c]on la forza di volontà" and faith in the "santa causa!" (RR 1: 959). Agilulfo is waylaid by Priscilla at the beginning of his farcical quest to prove Sofronia's virginity. It is because of his strong adherence to the code of chivalric duty that Agilulfo enters Priscilla's castle when she sends one of her ladies-in-waiting to ask for help, explaining, "io sono cavaliere e sarebbe scortesia sottrarmi alla richiesta formale di soccorso di una donna in lacrime" (RR 1: 1026). On hearing the nature of his quest, Priscilla 'entices' him to stay the night, stating that she has no scruples delaying for a night one who has undertaken an "impresa cavalleresca che avesse una meta così sfuggente" (RR 1: 1027).

Before he enters her domain, Agilulfo is forewarned by an alms-seeking hermit, one of Priscilla's many victims, that the tale of being besieged by bears is a ploy she uses to lure unsuspecting and honourable knights to her castle. Once they are inside, she purportedly ravages them, leaving them in a ruinous state. When the hermit asks Agilulfo "—Non temete le fiamme della lussuria?" (RR 1: 1026), he responds evasively. Of course, the reader is well aware of the irony attached to both the hermit's warning and Agilulfo's reply, for the usual danger that a wanton seductress poses to men will not trouble Agilulfo. Nor will the "male fear of being castrated or devoured by women" (Beers 75) concern him, at least in a conventional sense. "Ironic inversion is a characteristic of all parody" (Hutcheon, *Theory* 6), and in both literal and figurative terms, Agilulfo's non-existent state means that he is already a 'castrated' male. Indeed, he is the perfect knight for this mission because there is no man more suited to saving a woman from danger and no man less likely to fall victim to her amorous demands.

Agilulfo does not enter Priscilla's castle alone. He is accompanied by his binary opposite, his squire Gurdulù. As Charlemagne observes early in the novel, Gurdulù is a man who "c'è ma non sa d'esserci" whereas Agilulfo "sa d'esserci e invece non c'è" (RR 1: 974). Like Agilulfo, Gurdulù is not capable of falling complete victim to Priscilla and her ladies, for he has no sense of his own existence. He is an "esempio di fusione dell'io nella totalità che lo circonda" (Modena 48), which means that he has no identity, or self, to lose. He can, and does, fall victim to the fires of lust, but he suffers no loss of identity in the process, and identity is at the heart of this novel. Just as Agilulfo's night with Priscilla is intended to reflect all that is poetic and refined in love, Gurdulù's represents all that is purely carnal: "Agilulfo è l'esperto d'amore, ma non sa praticarlo" (Hagen 883), but Gurdulù responds instinctively to what is placed before him, viewing his surroundings (in this case Priscilla's ladies) as an extension of himself.

It is integral to the farcical nature of the episode that these two are incapable of falling under the control of their wicked seducers in the manner of more conventionally 'whole' men, but it does not diminish the danger to men that Priscilla and her maidens are intended to represent. Priscilla's name links her to some fearsome literary ancestors. Most notable are the witches Alcina from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, who transforms her unsuspecting victims into trees, and Tasso's Armida, who, in the *Gerusalemme liberata*, is sent by the infidel to distract Christian soldiers from their holy war. Both of these 'witches' trace their origins to the mythical Circe, who, out of jealousy for Glaucus' love for the beautiful Scylla, transformed her into the terrible sea monster feared by Ulysses and his fellow sailors.¹²⁷ Schneider observes that the name Priscilla is a diminutive of Prisco, which carries the sense of anteriority in its Latin meaning so that Pri-scilla can be seen to reference Scylla (94).

Nevertheless, why Priscilla, her maidens and all their lascivious ancestors (including the Propoetides) should feel a compulsion to ravage unsuspecting males (of whatever type) is never clarified. One interpretation is that they suffer from a condition termed nymphomania in Enlightenment France. Sheriff states that, in the *Encyclopédie*,¹²⁸ "nymphomania, or *fureur uterine*," is defined as a "delirium, a disease of the venereal appetite that drives women to use

¹²⁷ *Metamorphoses* XIII (309–10) and XIV (312–13).

¹²⁸ The full name is *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–65), edited by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (Sheriff 15).

every possible means to try to extinguish the uncontrollable ardour that devours them” (126). According to the *Encyclopédie*, the disease was caused by a vicious cycle of vibrations sent between the woman’s brain and her genitals that “disrupts the proper functioning of her imaginative functions” (Sheriff 126) and it was a “woman’s disease that had no male counterpart” (127).¹²⁹ Nymphomania is frequently connected to the metaphor of fire and, perhaps unsurprisingly, a fire figures in the ‘seduction’ of Agilulfo by Priscilla. After commenting that a “certo natural tepore” was considered beneficial for love, Agilulfo sets about lighting a fire in Priscilla’s apartment, embellishing his conversation about the flames with references, comparisons and allusions to the warmth of sentiments and sensations. Priscilla delights in the heat and stretches her hands towards the flames. In her metaphorically enflamed state, she suggests that they continue their enjoyment between the covers lying down: “Quale grato tepore [...] quanto dev’essere dolce gustarlo tra le coltri, coricato...” (RR 1: 1031).

Priscilla attempts to lure Agilulfo to her bed whereas he does everything in his power to procrastinate. He waxes lyrical on the difficult art of making a bed, spending much time and energy pulling apart and remaking Priscilla’s “letto da regina” (RR 1: 1031). When Priscilla removes her clothes, Agilulfo invites her to embrace him in his armour, which she does; “stringendo gambe e braccia attorno alla corazza” (RR 1: 1032), trying one after another every way in which armour could be embraced. Priscilla’s actions mimic the embracing, entwining, devouring attributes of the Jungian ‘Terrible Mother,’ symbolically represented by different cultures in a number of forms including serpents, dragons and devouring monsters not dissimilar to the mythical Scylla. As William Beers notes, in Jungian thinking these monstrous images represent the “unconscious dread of the mother’s womb” since to “re-enter the womb would be to extinguish consciousness and thus to die” (86).

This is appropriate symbolism in Agilulfo’s case, for although the threat Priscilla represents to him is not that faced by other men, he is not immune from danger. Agilulfo’s very existence demands that he maintains “la tensione della volontà” (RR 1: 968), because if he loses control of his rational self, he risks the extinction of his consciousness and will cease to exist. To lose control of himself even momentarily, to lapse into the irrational, would mean certain ‘death’ for Agilulfo, which is why he must not allow himself to submit to Priscilla’s

¹²⁹ For a discussion of nymphomania and its relevance in eighteenth century France, see Sheriff (126–33).

desire to possess him. Of course, as an empty suit of armour, possessing Agilulfo can only mean possessing his mind. Like Abelard, the twelfth-century monk who was literally castrated for conducting an illicit affair with Heloise, Agilulfo must rationalise his figuratively castrated state as one that is ultimately good. This allows him to separate the “reasonable from the passionate” (Sheriff 215), a separation that is vital for his ‘survival.’ The danger inherent in submitting to ‘passion,’ namely, ceasing to exist, which is symbolised by Priscilla’s entwining embraces, is reinforced metaphorically when Agilulfo stretches out upon the bed as if on a tomb. This scene also illustrates Bonsaver’s observation that “[l]’erotismo nei testi di Calvino porta con sé un’oscura minaccia di morte” (*Mondo* 229).

Strong overtones of Pygmalion’s adoration of Galatea are to be found in the account of Agilulfo and Priscilla’s night of romance, even if there is decidedly more farce involved in the latter episode, in which a good deal of the wooing is done by the figurative statue. Unlike Galatea, Agilulfo has the power of speech and can captivate Priscilla with talk of love, and with poetry and references to nightingales and moonlight vistas, but the notion of the naked Priscilla embracing Agilulfo’s empty “armatura tutta bianca” (RR 1: 957) is not far removed from Pygmalion’s kissing and embracing of his “snowy ivory statue” (Ovid 231). There is also an eerie similarity between the idea of Agilulfo’s pure white suit of armour stretched out on Priscilla’s “letto da regina” (RR 1: 1031) and Pygmalion’s placement of his snowy statue on a “couch that was covered with cloths of Tyrian purple” (Ovid 232). Similarly, Pygmalion’s fetishistic efforts to decorate his statue with necklaces, chains and pearls are echoed when Agilulfo dresses and adorns Priscilla’s hair with pins, veils and jewels. In both stories, there is a human figure lusting after a perfect, but unobtainable, object. However, this combination of perfection and unavailability also suggests a Lacanian reading of the Agilulfo-Priscilla episode as a satirical representation of courtly love, which is especially appropriate in the historical context of this narrative. In his essay “God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman,” Lacan writes: “For the man, whose lady was entirely, in the most servile sense of the term, his female subject, courtly love is the only way of coming off elegantly from the absence of sexual relation [sic]” (141). In this farcical scene, Agilulfo performs to perfection the role of the desiring suitor expected in the courtly love scenario, but it is not because the lady is unavailable; it is because he literalises ‘male lack.’

According to knightly tradition, the arrival of dawn signals to Agilulfo that he must leave to continue his quest. Agilulfo has survived the night with Priscilla in the only way he can: he

maintains control of the situation. Read metaphorically, Perseus has outsmarted the Gorgon by deflecting the danger of Medusa with words instead of a mirror. Nevertheless, the way Agilulfo maintains control is far from overbearing. In fact, his attentiveness to Priscilla, especially in the latter part of the evening, shows a caring side to his non-existent self that is almost ‘super’ human and Priscilla is left feeling very satisfied with her time spent in his company. Even so, despite both Agilulfo’s and Priscilla’s apparent satisfaction, there is a strong implication in the underlying humour of the text that Agilulfo has outfoxed Priscilla; he has both saved himself from falling into the clutches of a wanton Propoetide and fooled her into feeling ecstatic about less than she was intending. Priscilla’s stammering but euphoric response to her ladies’ enquiry about the success of her evening is designed to highlight this: “Un uomo, un uomo ... Una notte, un continuo, un paradiso...” (RR 1: 1034). This is emphasised when her ladies dismiss their own very active evening with Gurdulù as a “niente” (RR 1: 1035).

Clearly, the dismissive response of Priscilla’s ladies is meant to be read as ironically as that of Priscilla, but the way that Gurdulù’s evening in the company of the ladies transpires also deserves attention. In the words of Nicola Longo, Gurdulù’s and Agilulfo’s different evenings represent “[l]a doppia storia amorosa, l’una più volte consumata, l’altra rimasta al di qua della soglia, perciò perfettamente e specularmente corrispondente alla prima” (62). When she first meets Agilulfo, Priscilla declares, “so bene chi siete e chi *non* siete” (RR 1: 1027). This declaration raises questions about the way Priscilla is subsequently said to behave, especially as the emphasis on “*non*” occurs in the text. Nevertheless, relying on Hutcheon’s definition of parody as “imitation characterized by ironic inversion” (*Theory* 6), it is relatively straightforward to read Priscilla’s night with Agilulfo as a parodic reinterpretation of the traditional ‘seduction of a gallant knight’ topos. However, even if Gurdulù’s evening with Priscilla’s ladies can arguably be interpreted in a similar way, the nature of the inversion employed in their encounter calls for comment.

When Priscilla and Agilulfo retire to her apartments, her ladies are left with Gurdulù, whom they describe as a “bel tocco di palafreniere” (RR 1: 1027), but he also has fleas and smells dreadful. Priscilla’s ladies proceed to bathe him, after which they begin to play a game of ball, and Gurdulù, characteristically, melts into his surroundings: “Gurdulù ormai non capiva più niente. Tra il bagno tiepido che gli avevano fatto fare, i profumi e quelle carni bianche e rosa, ormai il suo solo desiderio era di fondersi alla generale fragranza” (RR 1 1029).

Although Gurdulù is said to be unaware of his actions, it is fairly obvious what is implied as he rolls on a soft cushion with one girl, seizes another by the waist, and runs off with yet another girl over his shoulder. All the time he blithely ignores protests such as “—Via, sciò, sciò, ma che noioso, ma che irruento, no, mi fa male, ma di’...” (RR 1: 1029), for eventually they all succumbed. Nowhere is there any suggestion that the women wish to ravish Gurdulù; they are not portrayed as wanton Propoetides and show no signs of nymphomania. Without doubt it is within Gurdulù, and not Priscilla’s ladies-in-waiting, that “le fiamme della lussuria” (RR 1: 1026) burn strongly, and the only danger he faces is his own lack of self-control.

For Bolongaro, “Agilulfo is will, Gurdulù is all nature” (139), so that for Gurdulù the “boundary between the ‘me’ and the ‘not-me’ is so fragile that the moment [he] fixes his attention on anything he develops such a strong empathy with the thing observed that he attempts to adopt its mode of being” (139). This may be the rationale behind Gurdulù’s extraordinary behaviour, for his textual function is to represent a character that exists devoid of ethical considerations. Nevertheless, there is an uncomfortable edge to the humour surrounding Gurdulù’s evening of pleasure in Priscilla’s castle. It is one thing to humorously depict Gurdulù’s inability to distinguish his own identity from inanimate objects such as a bowl of soup or sea water, or even from a duck, but different issues arise when he exercises his desire to merge into the general fragrance of the women who surround him by carrying them off and using them at will. In this episode, Priscilla’s ladies are reduced to objects to a degree that makes some of the humour problematic, for much of it relies on the fact that the women do not actively consent to being Gurdulù’s playthings, meaning that the ironic inversion employed in this parody arguably amounts to rape.

Notwithstanding these observations, this episode provides a good example of the way that Calvino constructs humour by creating and then subverting a well-recognised stereotype, and the humour is clearly intended to lie in the apparent contradiction between the women’s summation of their evenings and the actual events that take place. However, to fully appreciate the humour in comedy and satire, the reader must both recognise the stereotypical character types and feel superior to them (Ferguson 5). Acknowledging the humour in an androcentric episode of this nature requires the reader to identify with the male point of view, for this is where the feeling of superiority lies. On the other hand, a feminist reading of this episode reveals alternative interpretations. Although I have already indicated the questionable

nature of the implicit humour in the Gurdulù-Priscilla's ladies encounter, there are alternative readings for other aspects of the humour in this narrative. Hutcheon writes in *Narcissistic Narrative* that "from its origins the novel has displayed an interest in *moulding* its reader (27). Nevertheless, for this 'moulding' to occur in an androcentric novel, the female reader must allow herself to be immasculated by the text, and as Shoshana Felman observes, there are times when a text displays "its own resistance to itself, its own specific literary, inadvertent textual transgression of its male assumptions and prescriptions," offering interpretations that go beyond the "deliberate intention of the writer's consciousness" (6). This episode offers some equally humorous opportunities to the female reader, for one of the greatest ironies is that, if Agilulfo is considered the victor in the encounter with Priscilla, the victory does not lie with a man; it lies with a non-existent man. He is literally and figuratively castrated, which in Freudian terms makes him no better than a woman. It is also quite possible to view the different accounts of Priscilla and her ladies about their respective evenings as truthful reflections rather than as the ironic inversions of the truth that are implied by the text. Agilulfo may contain the danger Priscilla poses to his sense of self, for she does not engulf him, but Priscilla clearly enjoys her evening. The absence of physical consummation does not of itself render disingenuous her description of the time spent in his company as "un paradiso." Similarly, it should not be assumed that Priscilla's women are not speaking their minds when they dismiss Gurdulù's maniacal sexual antics as a "niente." Hence, although Calvino creates and subverts well-known stereotypes with this episode, at times, his text displays "inadvertent textual transgression of its male assumptions and prescriptions," which offers both the male and the female reader the possibility of feeling superiority, placing both in a position to laugh.

Fetishism, Narcissism and Oedipal Themes

The representation of the feminine as a dangerous and disruptive element is an important precursor to the Pygmalion episode, but the wanton Propoetides belong to the concatenating series that encompasses the myth rather than to the Pygmalion myth itself. Equally relevant is the incestuous encounter between Pygmalion's great-granddaughter, Myrrha, and her father, Cinyras (Pygmalion's grandson). This immediately follows the Pygmalion story and links to the final episode in Book X, which relates how Myrrha's son, Adonis, "became the darling of Venus, and avenged the passion which had assailed his mother" (239). Grazed by one of her

son Cupid's arrows, Venus fell in love with the handsome mortal but soon lost him, for Adonis ignored her warning not to hunt wild animals and was killed by a wild boar.

These surrounding stories are fundamental to appreciating that, although Pygmalion achieves his heart's desire, the myth exposes attitudes and behaviour that are more typically punished than rewarded in the *Metamorphoses*. The punishment in the *Metamorphoses* is a halfway state, "neither death nor life" (J.H. Miller 2): the prostituting Propoetides turn into "stony flints"; the unfortunate Myrrha becomes a weeping myrrha tree and gives birth to Adonis through a split in her trunk; and so that there would "be an everlasting token of [her] grief" (244), Venus "sprinkled Adonis' blood with sweet-smelling nectar" (245), transforming it into the short-lived anemone flower. Bauer suggests that the Pygmalion myth is a metaphor for the whole of the *Metamorphoses*, which aligns Pygmalion's narcissistic creativity with that of the author. But although Pygmalion's desire materialises and he escapes punishment for his excessive hubris, subsequent generations of his family pay the price, suggesting that Ovid was well aware that Pygmalion's gesture merited censure. The narcissistic and fetishistic elements of Pygmalion's behaviour raise obvious questions, but Ovid saves his real wrath for the Oedipal inferences attached to Pygmalion's gesture, for he repeats the theme, quite literally, in the long and censorious Myrrha and Cinyras episode that immediately follows Pygmalion's story. As I demonstrate in the following discussion, these tightly interrelated issues are also well represented within the Calvinian text and are especially evident in connection to the portrayal of the feminine. Although fetishism, narcissism and Oedipal themes commonly appear together, I treat each of these subjects separately in the following analysis to better explore the features specific to each. To do this, I have selected a cross-section of texts to illustrate how integral these concepts are to both collections and to allow discussion of some of the different facets of each topic.

Fetishism

O'Sullivan defines fetishism as

a process by which a concurrently feared and desired object—in this case, a woman—is refashioned to conform to idealised notions of femininity, in a bid to render her a compliant and familiar substitute for that unruly object and, in so doing, to tame her. (134)

Pygmalion did not refashion and tame an errant Propoetide. Instead, he rejected these fearsome women, who represented the fear of castration, creating in their place a statue that was preternaturally lovely. Following Mulvey's comment that "Freud saw the fetish object itself as phallic replacement" (*Visual and Other* 11), Galatea, in her role of substitute, can be considered a fetish object, or phallic replacement, and thus a counter to Pygmalion's castration anxiety. Galatea's role as a fetish object is further reinforced when it is said that Pygmalion "kissed the statue, and imagined that it kissed him back, spoke to it and embraced it, and thought he felt his fingers sink into the limbs he touched, so that he was afraid lest a bruise appear where he pressed the flesh" (Ovid 231). Pygmalion dresses and decorates his statue "in woman's robes, and put rings on its fingers, long necklaces round its neck," he places her "on a couch" and calls it "his bedfellow" (232). In short, Pygmalion has created the perfect phallic replacement, or fetish object.

In "L'avventura di un lettore" the book functions as a fetish object. It is a reassuring phallic replacement, operating as a buffer against the insecurities Amedeo encounters when dealing with the external world. If one replaces 'me' with Amedeo's name, this statement finds support in Barthes's observation in *The Pleasure of the Text* that "[t]he text is a fetish object, and *this fetish desires me*" (27). Or, restated in words taken from Freud's 1927 paper "Fetishism," for Amedeo the book is "a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it" (154). In Freudian psychoanalysis, the notion of 'disavowal' is fundamental to fetishism. The word Freud uses in the original German is *Verleugnung*, which Bruce Fink notes is in many ways closer to "the English term 'denial,'" stating that "indeed the French have preferred the term *déni*, close in meaning and use to denial" (40). In his article "I Know Well, but All the Same..." Octave Mannoni gives a useful summary of Freud's explanation of "how *Verleugnung* comes into play in the constitution of fetishism":

When a child first becomes aware of the anatomy of the female body, he discovers, in reality, the absence of a penis; but, so as to preserve his belief in the existence of the maternal phallus, he disavows or repudiates the refutation of his belief that is imposed by reality. (69)

According to Kaplan, the crucial point about fetishism is that "the fetishist brings to his misperception of anatomical differences the themes of *absence* and *presence* that belong to early infancy" (*Female* 73).

The themes of absence and presence are integral to “L’avventura di un viaggiatore” since “Federico V., abitante in una città dell’Italia settentrionale” (RR 2: 1110) journeys by train to spend time with his lover, Cinzia U., who lives in Rome. Ricci suggests that the “physical presence of the train fills the void created by the absence of Cinzia” (“Silence” 57) and that the “train, in essence, becomes a complaisant surrogate lover” (*Difficult* 67). The train, with its “moto amoroso, di carezza” (RR 2: 1114), certainly plays a significant role in the overall schema, but it is not of itself a substitute for Cinzia. Federico’s way of finding presence in the face of absence is situated in his adherence to a ritual that involves comforting objects and familiar routines. This ritual is played out in the controlled environment of the train carriage and operates like the Freudian fetish, representing a “token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it.”

Federico feels a sense of inner calm as he approaches the station, despite the race against time to buy his ticket and catch the train. He plays with a telephone token in his overcoat pocket, this “oggetto preziosissimo” is “l’unica prova tangibile di quel che all’arrivo l’attendeva” (RR 2: 1111). In this emblematic form, Cinzia resides in his pocket, operating like a talisman against the squalor and dust of the second-class compartment; “stringendo in mano il gettone del telefono” (RR 2: 1113), Federico reminds himself of the reward awaiting him at the end of his quest. He has the fetishist’s need for predicability, for he has learned “il trovarsi in un ambiente in cui ogni cosa non poteva che essere al suo posto, uguale a sempre, anonima, senza possibili sorprese, gli infondeva calma, coscienza di se stesso, libertà di pensieri” (RR 2: 1112). Just before departing, Federico obtains the final object he requires for his “perfetta notte d’amore” (RR 2: 1125) in the train carriage: a pillow, square and flat as an envelope. The elderly pillow man posts it like a letter through the carriage window with his “mani che danno fiducia.” This pillow is another symbolic rendering of the absent Cinzia; it is “un oggetto morbido [...] e candido [...]. Conteneva in sé, come un concetto è racchiuso in un segno ideografico, l’idea del letto, del crogiolamento, della intimità” (RR 2: 1113). For Federico, the pillow is an island of freshness, a buffer against the coarse bristles of the upholstery and a comforting reminder of other intimacies and charms. In fact, hiring the pillow is a way of enjoying in advance these sweet intimacies—a way of entering “nella dimensione in cui regnava Cinzia, nel cerchio racchiuso dalle sue morbide braccia” (RR 2: 1114).

Federico builds around himself a private cocoon that separates him from a succession of fellow travellers. Even as he shares the carriage with them on the long overnight journey, he blocks them from his mind: “La sua forza era sempre stata quella d’espellere dall’area dei suoi pensieri ogni aspetto della realtà che lo disturbasse o che non gli servisse.” He feels superior to them, for he is “volando tra le braccia d’una donna come Cinzia U.” (RR 2: 1115). His train companions exist instead in a far greyer world. However, although the controllable Cinzia exists in symbols such as the telephone token and the pillow, Cinzia, the woman, belongs to the real and uncontrollable world, and as Ricci observes, the “real world of Cinzia U. and the private world of Federico on the train are mutually exclusive” (*Difficult* 68). Once Federico arrives in Rome, he must emerge from his cocoon and expose all his fears and insecurities by entering with Cinzia into the tension of their days together, “nell’affannosa guerra delle ore” (RR 2: 1125). Federico can never explain to Cinzia, who comfortably inhabits the “insidiously dreadful world” (Ricci, “Introversion” 340), why the perfect night of love for him is the safe and secluded night spent on the train with her symbolic substitutes, rather than those chaotic days spent with her real person.¹³⁰

“L’avventura di un fotografo,” like “L’avventura di un lettore,” is an “adventure in obsession, looking and controlling” (Renga 380). Antonino Paraggi is introduced as a non-photographer, which isolates him from his friends and colleagues, who are progressively settling down with wives and families that they photograph avidly “come cacciatori” (RR 2: 1096). Re observes in “Calvino e l’enigma della fotografia” that “[i]nvece di legare la fotografia soprattutto alla morte, come farà Roland Barthes anni dopo (1980), o alla violenza, come farà Susan Sontag (1977), Calvino la mette in rapporto alla sessualità, o meglio, alla riproduzione sessuale” (117–18). In his 1955 article “La follia del mirino,” on which “L’avventura di un fotografo” is based, Calvino comments that “spesso la passione fotografica nasce in modo naturale e quasi fisiologico come fenomeno secondario della paternità” (S 2: 2217–18). Antonino is a rational man, who enjoys “sdipanando il filo delle ragioni generali dai garbugli particolari” (RR 2: 1096), and he is a philosopher by mental disposition. His objection to his friends’ passion for photography is largely based upon what Re terms the “irrazionale assurdità

¹³⁰ In Chapter One, I suggest that this is one of the stories that displays autobiographical content. Why Federico might have preferred (indeed fetishised) the ritual of travelling to Rome to his time spent in the city becomes clearer when one understands that Calvino’s own trips from Turin to Rome to visit Elsa de’ Giorgi were often fraught with difficulty.

dell'atto di estrarre dal flusso del tempo e della vita un'immagine, e di farne un feticcio fotografico scambiandolo per un segno autentico di identità” (“Calvino e l'enigma” 122).¹³¹ Antonino considers that the irrational passion for photography “è legata a, anzi nasce *da*, il desiderio irrazionale di accoppiarsi e riprodursi” (125). But this point of view is, as the story suggests, a trick Antonino played on himself. It is a way of not acknowledging that it is not the desire to take photographs that is alienating him from his friends but rather his continuing bachelorhood. Eventually, Antonino decides to become a photographer in an attempt to understand what the photograph and its corollary, reproductive passion, really are. However, in this story, the photograph remains an enigma, an unsolved mystery, like the enigma of sexuality, and particularly for Antonino, “quello della sessualità femminile” (126).

Antonino's attitude towards photography changes from one of sarcastic derision to fetishistic obsession as he attempts to understand “the construction of the objective world through looking behind the object's reflected image” (Renga 379). He wishes to take photographs that make clear the various relationships we each have with the world that become hidden by artifices such as convention, culture and fashion that affect their composition. However, his task is ultimately doomed, for as Barthes observes in *Camera Lucida*, “[p]hotography evades us” (4). “Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible; it is not what we see [... for] the referent adheres” (6). And the referent in Antonino's photographs is a woman named Bice. She becomes the grounds of representation in this story, and thus she is ultimately the fetish object. In *Painting with Words, Writing with Pictures*, Ricci comments that “[j]ust as Perseus defeats Medusa by catching her debilitating stare on a polished shield, Antonino will attempt to deflect the mesmerizing influence of photography by setting up a similar *mise en abyme* play of reflected images” (45), and the vast majority of those images are of Bice.

Calvino uses the character of Antonino as a vehicle through which to explore his own obsession with the gaze. More particularly, perhaps, this story is a study in active scopophilia, which is closely allied to voyeurism, a disorder in which sexual gratification is derived by observing others in secret. Both scopophilia and voyeurism are fetishistic behaviours and the

¹³¹ In fact, Re assigns this attitude to Calvino himself, noting that this view almost certainly “rimanda alla lettura di Pirandello, e in particolare del romanzo *Si gira!* del 1915 (poi intitolato *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore*)” (“Calvino e l'enigma” 122).

specifically voyeuristic nature of Antonino's actions is highlighted by his wish to purchase "una di quelle vecchie macchine a soffietto [...] montate su un trepiede" (RR 2: 1101). This black-hooded observation space bears comparison with the youthful Calvino's favourite hiding spot, the dark interior of the cinema. Both are perfect voyeuristic hiding places, and it is from the safety of his dark enclosure that Antonino first photographs Bice. Although Bice's character plays a vital role in this story, she is not ascribed a position of importance. She is introduced as a "[c]erta Bice, ex cognata di qualcuno" and her friend is equally anonymous, a "certa Lydia, ex segretario di qualche altro" (RR 2: 1100). Lydia fades from the scene fairly rapidly, recognising "un'aria sinistra, minacciosa" (RR 2: 1102) in the way Antonino sets up his photographic studio. Bice, instead, assumes the role of photographic model and short-term lover of Antonino.

As Re notes, Bice's obviously Dantesque name alludes to the visions of Beatrice unveiled in cantos 31 and 32 of Dante's Purgatory ("Calvino e l'enigma" 126), and this scene is evoked parodically in the story. However, like most female characters in Calvino's texts, Bice is not portrayed as an ingénue. Although Lydia considers that there is something menacing in Antonino's behaviour, Bice appears unperturbed. Indeed, at least initially, it is Bice who is portrayed as the, if not exactly menacing, then certainly disruptive element in the story. She arrives alone at Antonino's house for the first photographic session: "Rideva un po' di sottocchi, inclinando il capo da una parte" and her mannerisms are "un po' vezzosi un po' ironici" (RR 2: 1102). Just as Pygmalion dressed and adorned his statue, Antonino treats Bice as an object to manipulate, making her dress and pose endlessly—with old-fashioned nostalgia, as a tennis player in action and so forth. He vainly attempts to distil her, to capture her essence, "il suo carattere vero" (RR 2: 1102), finally deciding that

[s]olo in abito da sera Bice sarebbe diventata un soggetto fotografico, con la scollatura che segna un confine netto tra il bianco della pelle e lo scuro della stoffa sottolineato dal luccichio dei gioielli, un confine tra un'essenza di donna atemporale e quasi impersonale nella sua nudità e l'altra astrazione, sociale questa, dell'abito, simbolo d'un ruolo altrettanto impersonale, come il drappeggio d'una statua allegorica. (RR 2: 1105).

But, however much Antonino tries to impersonalise her and render her controllable, Bice remains beyond his grasp. Only when she removes her clothes and stands nude¹³² before him, so that he simultaneously views and snaps her with voyeuristic fervour from the safety and seclusion of his hooded enclosure, does Antonino feel satisfied and that he has really captured Bice. Like a true voyeur, whose pleasure is derived from looking rather than participating, when Antonino emerges “euforico” from under his hood and confronts the naked Bice, he confounds her by simply stating, “Adesso puoi coprirti [...]. usciamo” (RR 2: 1106). Despite this inauspicious beginning, Bice and Antonino become lovers and commence living together. But for Antonino, “quello che nasce è un «amore difficile», continuamente alimentato dal senso della vista” (Santoro 100). Susan Sontag writes in *On Photography* (first published in 1977), “There is aggression implicit in every use of the camera” (7). Eventually, Bice also recognises this aggression, for, fed up with his “violenze fotografiche” (RR 2: 1107) and of being constantly followed by his photographic lens, she decides to leave Antonino. Despite her physical absence, Bice remains, nonetheless, the object of Antonino’s obsessive behaviour. While she was with him, Antonino decided that “[e]ra una Bice invisibile che voleva possedere” (RR 2: 1107)—a Bice completely alone, unaware that she was being looked at and the object of no gaze, his or anyone else’s. Of course, the very nature of photography makes this impossible, and the absurdity of Antonino’s wish is accentuated when Bice leaves him, thereby rendering herself literally invisible to his lens. Antonino’s fetishistic desire to possess Bice, to capture her very essence, is redirected towards photographing the void as he first attempts to capture “l’assenza di Bice” (RR 2: 1108), and finally everything else that resists photography. Like Pygmalion, Antonino strives for an ideal—something that only exists in the recesses of his own mind. He rejects the real woman, and constantly strives to capture a controllable and idealised photographic version of Bice rather than to deal with her tangible person. But unlike Pygmalion, who was aided by a beneficent Venus, Antonino is unable to achieve his ideal and is ultimately left looking at and controlling nothing. He descends into near madness and appears doomed, at least for the meantime, to continue his “bachelor existence, without any wife to share his home” (Ovid 231).

¹³² I use nude rather than naked here intentionally, relying on Berger’s comment that “[t]o be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognised for oneself” (54). Antonino is trying to capture his own particular notion of Bice rather than the person she might consider herself to be.

Narcissism

According to Mulvey, “[w]omen are simply the scenery onto which men project their narcissistic fantasies” (*Visual and Other* 13), and Antonino’s behaviour, although fetishistic, is also strongly narcissistic. Just as Pygmalion’s Galatea was the direct reflection of the sculptor’s desire, for Antonino, the perfect photograph of Bice could only ever be the product of his imagination. In contrast to Narcissus, Pygmalion remains blissfully unaware of the narcissism inherent in his love for Galatea and, atypically for Ovid, his excessive hubris is rewarded rather than punished, for he is granted the object of his desire.

Like “L’avventura di un fotografo,” “L’avventura di un miope” revolves around sight. In this scopophilic and strongly narcissistic tale, looking and being looked at take on fetishistic proportions, and once again, the gaze is firmly directed towards women. Amilcare Carruga, the protagonist, is described as “ancor giovane, non sprovvisto di risorse, senza esagerate ambizioni materiali o spirituali” (RR 2: 1142). In other words, he is a very ordinary young man and probably every bit as boring in himself as he is said to find the world around him. Like all but one of the male protagonists of *Gli amori difficili*, it is implied that he is also unmarried.

On discovering that he is short-sighted, Amilcare is fitted with glasses, and he finds that a whole new world opens to him. One of his most pleasing discoveries is that he can now run a far more critically informed eye over the women he encounters on the street. Without glasses, he sees the women as intangible, blurred shadows, but when wearing them he is able to see them “con l’esatto gioco di pieni e vuoti che fanno i loro corpi muovendosi dentro le vesti,” and can evaluate the freshness of their skin and the warmth of their gaze. In fact, he sees them in such intimate detail that “non più soltanto gli pareva un vederle ma già addirittura un possederle” (RR 2: 1143). The notion of possession associated with the male gaze, with its associated implications of spectatorship and distance, presence and absence, was also discussed above, where it was said of Antonino that “[e]ra una Bice invisibile che voleva possedere.” However, just as Antonino’s aim was ultimately impossible and left him quite literally trying to possess an absent Bice, Amilcare’s possession of the women he surveys remains in the imaginary.

Amilcare relishes the newly acquired (or perhaps reacquired) scopophilic opportunities afforded by his new glasses; his life is becoming richer and he is slowly learning to live. When walking and resting his eyes without wearing his glasses, he gains much pleasure from guessing whether a woman might be attractive and hence worth putting his glasses on to look at, or whether she is instead “troppo modesta, insignificante, da non prendersi in considerazione” (RR 2: 1143), and therefore not worth the effort. However, Amilcare is ultimately challenged by his own narcissism, for he does not wish to be thought of as “uno con gli occhiali” (RR 2: 1144). This attitude displays an almost schizoid degree of self-consciousness, relying on the definition of that word supplied by R. D. Laing in *The Divided Self*: “Self-consciousness, as the term ordinarily used, implies two things: an awareness of oneself by oneself, and *an awareness of oneself as an object of someone else’s observation*” (106). These self-reflecting tendencies are so strong in Amilcare that he soon rejects his first, more understated, glasses, which had naked lenses and thin silver arms but were “quasi femminei” (RR 2: 1145), in favour of glasses that have thick black frames. Although these new black-framed glasses allow him to see the world clearly, they render him invisible, an observation that reinforces the voyeuristic nature of his gaze. Just as Antonino looks out through his camera lens while hidden beneath a black hood, Amilcare now views the world anonymously from behind the “specie di maschera” (RR 2: 1149) provided by his enormous black frames.

In Freudian terms, Amilcare is afflicted with a form of obsessional neurosis. He seems, at least in part, to have “given up his relation to reality” but has not completely “broken off his relations to people and things.” To the extent that he has substituted the visual for the real, he suffers from the Jungian notion of “‘introversion’ of the libido” (“On Narcissism” 74); or as Freud might prefer to express it, he has not learned to balance his ego- and object-libidos and suffers from an excess of ego-libido. But perhaps it is more useful to explain Amilcare’s predicament employing the Lacanian concept of the mirror. Amilcare’s obsession with the way he looks is closely connected to his “preoccupazioni su ciò che lui stesso” is, and it is his need for glasses that accentuates this worry. Although we are told that Amilcare did not attach much importance to himself, this is immediately modified by the statement that, like many “persone più modeste, era oltremodo affezionato alla sua maniera d’essere” (RR 2: 1144). In fact, he has an almost schizoid degree of self-consciousness and does not want to become thought of as someone who wears glasses, for he does not identify with that image of himself. In the words of Jacqueline Rose, “[t]he mirror image is central to Lacan’s account of

subjectivity” (30). According to Lacanian thinking, the mirror image becomes “the model of the ego function itself, the category which enables the subject to operate as ‘I’” (30–31). However, this ‘I’ with which we speak, which “stands for our identity in language,” is not a stable unit and the “mirror image represents the moment when the subject is located in an order outside itself to which it will henceforth refer” (31). When Amilcare looks in the mirror wearing his first, more subtle, pair of glasses, he rejects the face that looks back: “se inavvertitamente gli succedeva di vedersi allo specchio con gli occhiali, provava una viva antipatia per la sua faccia” (RR 2: 1145). This is because he has already formed and loves his idea of his Lacanian ‘imaginary’ self—a concept similar to Freud’s ideal ego (*ideal-Ich*), later developed into the superego. For Amilcare, this ‘imaginary’ self is a man without glasses.

Yet another way of explaining Amilcare’s narcissism is to adopt Jean-Pierre Boulé’s definition of the concept found in his recent book, *Sartre, Self-Formation and Masculinities*. Boulé explains that he is “not using the concept in its general sense, equating narcissism with self-love,” but rather, for him

the narcissist is someone who has buried his self-expression in response to early injuries and replaced it with a highly developed, compensatory sense of self in response to his/her environment needing the individual to be something substantially different from what he or she is. (6)

Reading Amilcare’s behaviour through this approach, one could say that by adopting the large, black, masking frames in preference to the more subtle glasses, Amilcare is burying himself and taking on a compensatory identity.

Regardless of how one explains Amilcare’s narcissism, it remains the case that his need for glasses triggers an identity crisis. But as explained, his seemingly irrational solution to this crisis is to reject the inconspicuous glasses and to further alienate himself from his identity ideal by hiding behind glasses with a “montatura di plastica nera, una cornice larga due dita [...] una specie di mascherina che gli nascondeva mezza faccia” (RR 2: 1145–46). This perverse solution accentuates the scopophilic and narcissistic side of Amilcare’s character, especially because, in this disguised form, it is said that “si sentiva se stesso” (RR 2: 1146). As Amilcare does not always wear his glasses, he now has two identities, neither of which is a functioning whole. There is the man wearing glasses who can see and participate in the

world, whose narcissistic identity remains intact, but who lives as an anonymous voyeur. There is also Amilcare without glasses, who is immediately recognisable to others but is unable to function as himself, for he cannot see the world; his narcissistic instincts are satisfied, for he is not “uno con gli occhiali,” but he is figuratively castrated, for, like the blinded Oedipus, he cannot see.

Amilcare’s story is about “the ironies of vision,” because in order to see properly he must “lose sight of the real” (Renga 382), and the extent of Amilcare’s dilemma comes to a head when he returns to his provincial home city V. after a ten-year absence. As per usual in the Calvinian text, the desire for a woman is used to highlight the reality of Amilcare’s predicament. Encountering his old girlfriend Isa Maria Bietti in the street, Amilcare attempts to attract her attention by blocking her path. Isa Maria does not recognise him behind his black-framed mask and pushes him aside with her elbow, uttering a dismissive comment. All of a sudden Amilcare realises that “era solo per Isa Maria Bietti che era tornato, che solo per Isa Maria Bietti s’era voluto staccare da V. ed era stato lontano tanti anni, che tutto, tutto nella sua vita e tutto al mondo era soltanto per Isa Maria Bietti.” These comments clearly situate Isa Maria on the pedestal of desire. Nevertheless, even in his distressed state, Amilcare’s narcissism remains strong enough for him to regret not having noticed whether Isa Maria “era cambiata, ingrassata, invecchiata” (RR 2: 1149), or whether she was still as attractive as ever. He is confronted with the reality that he cannot see Isa Maria and be recognised by her at the same time. Never emerging as a character, all the reader learns about Isa Maria is that she is, or perhaps was, attractive and that she is wearing a red coat when Amilcare encounters her on the street. She remains forever an object of desire residing within the imagination of Amilcare so that her position can be likened to that of the ‘lady’ as described by Kristeva in her discussion of the troubadours’ songs:

courtly songs neither describe nor relate [...]. They have no object—the lady is seldom defined and, slipping away between restrained presence and absence, she simply is an imaginary addressee, the pretext for the incantation [...] the courtly song refers to its own performance. (*Tales* 287)

Amilcare is also caught up in his own performance, which centres on which identity he wishes to adopt, with his choice of glasses being the determining factor. But like Narcissus, he is ultimately caught up in the “vertigo of a love with no object other than a mirage”

(Kristeva, *Tales* 104), because throughout his performance, Isa Maria remains perched upon her inaccessible pedestal as ephemeral as a mirage.

Isa Maria's role in the story is to illustrate that Amilcare cannot retain his sense of self and achieve love, for, as so commonly happens in the Calvinian narrative, "woman must be lost to protect the protagonist's narcissistic shell" (Rushing 46). But Isa Maria also has a wider symbolic role, for Amilcare's inability to form an amorous relationship is also a metaphor for his lack of connection with the world in general.

The introverted protagonists of *Gli amori difficili* are all narcissistic, for in varying degrees they are their own primary love objects. Narcissism is also in evidence in all three of the fantasy novels, and it is not confined to the principal male characters, for Pamela, Viola and Suor Teodora/Bradamante all display some of the characteristics of the Freudian narcissistic woman. The self-sufficiency and "enigmatic nature" ("On Narcissism" 89) of the Freudian narcissistic woman is, in fact, a recurring feature of Calvino's female characters, although it presents in its purest form in those that remain largely in the imaginary, as is the case in *Gli amori difficili*. With Calvino's better developed female characters, admittedly far less common in his oeuvre, the case is less straightforward. As I demonstrate in the following discussion of Violante d'Ondariva (Viola), although many features of the Freudian narcissistic woman are present in her characterisation, she fails to meet one of his most crucial criteria, for though she loves herself, she is not complete unto herself. This is because Viola is introduced to the story to fulfil the role of love object in Cosimo's narcissistic adventure, and hence she cannot remain in self-contained isolation beyond his reach. Although she proves hard to fathom, she is ultimately accessible, and her character in some respects better fits René Girard's definition of the coquette, or Bonsaver's "donna 'isterica.'" Nevertheless, Viola's character provides an excellent example of the importance of narcissism in the characterisation of many Calvinian females, for much of her allure is associated with her narcissistic qualities.

In his 1914 article "On Narcissism: An Introduction," Freud highlights crucial differences in his conception of narcissism as it relates to men and women. In Freudian thinking, there are two basic object-choices available to human beings, and these are "the anaclitic or [...] the narcissistic type." After "postulating a primary narcissism in everyone" arising from the "two original sexual objects—himself and the woman who nurses him," Freud writes that in

forming object-choice there are fundamental differences between men and women. Anaclitic love, or “complete object-love of the attachment type,” is a “characteristic of the male.” This type of love “displays the marked sexual overvaluation” (“On Narcissism” 88) of the object: “love and passion in particular, would lead to a libidinal impoverishment of the male ego to the benefit of the love-object” (Kofman, “Narcissistic” 36). Freud then observes that a different path is taken by the “type of female most frequently met with, which is probably the purest and truest one” (“On Narcissism” 88). In compensation for their social restrictions and particularly if the woman is good-looking, she does not transfer her love to an object but instead develops a self-sufficiency and an enigmatic nature. In her discussion of the representation of Ariosto’s Angelica, Finucci describes the Freudian narcissistic woman in the following manner:

[These women] seem able to love only themselves and prefer to be loved rather than to love. Their self-love, in turn, makes them self-sufficient, enigmatic, and inaccessible. Men are greatly attracted by these apparently selfish women, not just because their beauty generates fantasies but also because they have retained their self-centeredness instead of transferring it to a love object [... T]hey lure others the same way self-absorbed cats, children, beasts of prey, criminals, and humorists seem to do. (*Lady* 115)¹³³

Finucci goes on to note that “[p]osited this way, the narcissistic woman is dangerous,” and not the least because she can “disrupt sexual dichotomies because the self-enclosed nature of her desire enables her to do without man and his desire” (*Lady* 115). One of Viola’s principal roles in the novel is to pose a serious threat to Cosimo’s resolve to stay in the trees, and in this respect, she is a dangerous woman. She makes two crucial appearances in the novel, one as a child and the other as an adult, and the danger she poses is built into her characterisation both implicitly and explicitly. Portrayed as a beautiful and desirable woman, she is self-willed and as stubborn as Cosimo himself. Symbolically, she is a femme fatale or an Eve figure, who, to use Aurore Frasson-Marin’s term, represents for Cosimo “la chute” (48), or the fall into temptation and the danger of renunciation of self. Viola’s link to the ‘fall’ is in direct opposition to the ‘ascension’ that Frasson-Marin considers is symbolised in Cosimo’s ascent to the trees and reinforced in the bird imagery that constantly surrounds him.

¹³³ Finucci’s quotation indirectly refers to comments about women made by both Nietzsche and Freud explained earlier.

Although Freud posits three types of women, he states that the narcissistic is the most “frequently met” and “probably the purest and truest.”¹³⁴ In Kofman’s words:

men fantasize this type of woman as being the very ‘essence’ of woman, as the ‘eternal feminine’. They do so because she corresponds the best, despite her ‘incongruity’, to the desires of men, since she represents the lost part of their own narcissism, which has been projected to the exterior. (“Narcissistic” 39)

Or, as Kofman explains in *The Enigma of Woman*, “men’s fascination with this eternal feminine is nothing but fascination with their own double” and is accompanied by “the feeling of uncanniness, *Unheimlichkeit*” (56). Ultimately, Freud brings the self-sufficient narcissistic woman back into the system. However, he does not do this by having her project her love away from herself and towards a male partner, who seems to remain permanently out of the love equation, but rather through the path of pregnancy. The child is part of her own body, “a part of her own ego,” and the love she bears for her child is love for the other; it is “overvaluing the object” (Kofman, *Enigma* 58) or anaclitic love of the masculine type. In her narcissistic state, the woman does not see herself as a castrated male, an inferior being, and is thus free from the associated problems of hysteria and neuroticism. But once she becomes a mother and is “[r]econfined in her normal and normative role” (Finucci, *Lady* 115), she is faced with these afflictions.

This connection with hysteria highlights one reason why Viola does not readily fit the criteria of the Freudian narcissistic woman. Bonsaver uses Viola’s character as his principal example when explaining what he means by the term ‘hysterical’ woman, noting the particular prevalence of this type of woman in Calvino’s writing during the 1950s and 1960s (234). By defining Viola as a “*donna isterica*,” Bonsaver obviously includes hysteria in her character traits from the outset, which indicates that, in his opinion, although she displays many of the characteristics of the narcissist, she does not meet the strict criteria of the Freudian

¹³⁴ Freud gives three types of women in “On Narcissism”: the narcissistic (cured by pregnancy and motherhood), “the women who love according to the masculine type and who also develop the sexual overvaluation proper to that type” (89), and finally those who before “puberty feel masculine and develop some way along masculine lines” (90).

narcissistic woman. Bonsaver explains that he arrived at the title through reading Kristeva's *Histoires d'amour*, in which she gives the long history of an ex-patient:

le sue continue rivendicazioni amorose, sempre più audaci e compromettenti, innescano una spirale perversa che si chiude con l'implosione dei sentimenti della donna, la quale rimane 'fredda', insoddisfatta, angosciata, rivelando così, spiega Kristeva, "toutes les affres délicieuses de l'hystérie." (Bonsaver, *Mondo* 234)¹³⁵

Viola is a beautiful woman, and as Bettella observes, "feminine beauty is defined primarily for men's pleasure" ("Fosca" 3). Even as a child Viola holds a fascination for the male sex, as witnessed by the almost magnetic attraction she holds over both Cosimo and the young fruit thieves, despite behaviour on her part that could reasonably be expected to have the opposite effect. But her appeal does not reside in her beauty alone. Much of her attraction resides in her apparent autonomy, her self-assurance and her serene disregard for her male peers, which are all features associated with the classic narcissistic woman. Jeannet and Bonsaver are among those who observe that this self-assured and self-contained girl child appears early in Calvino's writing career. Jeannet calls her the "bambina" (155): an "image of the feminine that is autonomous in its reserve, sure of itself, and full of serene disdain for its male peers" (157). Examples of the "bambina" can be seen in a number of Calvino's realist short stories, but the figure of Mariassa in "Un bastimento carico di granchi"¹³⁶ is the one referred to by both Bonsaver (235) and Jeannet (157). In this story, the six-year-old Mariassa shows complete disdain and indifference towards the boys who find her alone on a local shipwreck. She displays neither fear of what they might do to her nor desire for their company, and finally dives from the boat with ease to escape their clutches when they decide to take her as a hostage. During the 1950s, as Jeannet observes with direct reference to the young Viola, this "bambina" figure in Calvino's narratives begins to accentuate her imperiousness, becoming a "budding Amazon in the magical world of childhood" (164).

What differentiates Viola from most of her predecessors is that she does not remain completely aloof from her male admirers; she not only interacts but also exerts her authority.

¹³⁵ The reference for Kristeva's quotation is *Histoires d'amour* (54): in translation "all the delightful throes of hysteria" (Kristeva, *Tales* 51).

¹³⁶ (RR 1: 162–67)

When, as a child, she first discovers Cosimo peering down at her from the treetops as she swings, she quickly recovers from her surprise, takes the upper hand in the conversation and makes fun of him in the process. She laughs at his suggestion that he is a “terribile brigante” (RR 1: 565). She is completely unimpressed, saying that she knows the chief brigand personally and that he brings her presents at Christmas and Easter. She also laughs at his clothes and generally makes Cosimo annoyed, jealous and ashamed. All his bravado and attempts to impress Viola leave her completely unfazed, and when he boasts about his decision to live in the trees, she has him define exactly what his territory will be. Nevertheless, as Migiel points out, although “she appears manipulative and threatening in her first encounter with Cosimo,” all Viola really does is “make clear to Cosimo his own limitations” (65). To put this in Sartrean terms, by getting him to define exactly what his territory will be, in effect, Viola has Cosimo spell out the loss of freedom that he is accepting along with his voluntary choice to live in the trees, so that instead of expressing his new-found freedom, Cosimo actually finds himself defining his limitations. Viola immediately illustrates her own relative freedom by claiming visiting rights to his zone, although in reality it is Cosimo who first invites her: “—Ma io non sono egoista come te. Io nel mio territorio ti ci invito—” (RR 1: 566). Viola may have access to his territory, but she makes it clear that for his choice to have meaning it necessarily excludes him from similar rights to the ground: “Tu invece sei sacro e inviolabile finché sei sugli alberi, nel tuo territorio [...] Tu hai la signoria degli alberi, va bene?, ma se tocchi una volta terra con un piede, perdi tutto il tuo regno e resti l’ultimo degli schiavi” (RR 1: 567). Thus, although Cosimo may have made the original decision to live in the trees, it is Viola who provides the impetus to set this decision in concrete.

Viola is free to come and go, but Cosimo is stuck firmly in the trees, and one of the persistent and very Ariostan images in this novel is that of Viola galloping around the countryside on her white horse under the gaze of the tree-bound Cosimo. For Jeannet, the image of woman on horseback associated with both Viola and Bradamante provides “the prototypical image of the free woman who satisfies the (male) dream of a (female) vital energy” (165). In a similar vein, Migiel observes that Viola’s swing is an “apt symbol of her free suspension between two worlds” (65); and her tree-climbing horse serves the same function later in the novel. These are clearly idealised images of female freedom, for Viola is not really as free as these images suggest. She is stuck in the world of strict aristocratic conventions from which Cosimo has just broken free, and she is not really afforded much liberty at all. She may be

domineering while in the company of Cosimo and the little fruit thieves, but she is only given the liberty to go out on her pony because her family never suspects that she will consort with those who are not of her social standing and have no idea of her connection with the fruit thieves.

For Freud, the “self-contentment” and “inaccessibility” (“On Narcissism” 89) of the narcissistic woman are part of her attraction, and Viola’s limited availability is one of her more significant characteristics. Indeed, part of Cosimo’s initial attraction to the neighbouring garden is the fact that the di Rondò and d’Ondariva families are estranged. Hence, the budding friendship between Viola and Cosimo is not encouraged, and sending her to boarding school renders literal Viola’s inaccessibility for a number of years. Of course, at the plot level, this also removes her dangerously tempting character from the centre stage for a crucial period, freeing Cosimo to pursue other avenues of sensual experience. When she returns to the story, Viola is still a young woman, but conveniently, she is now a widow and thus has far greater moral freedom. As she explains to Cosimo, “sono vedova e posso fare quello che mi piace, a dire il vero.” But Cosimo’s ego is not bruised by this marriage, for she informs him that she had been forced to marry and had very pragmatically chosen “il pretendente più decrepito che esistesse,” reasoning: “«Così resterò vedova prima»” (RR 1: 711). Importantly in the Freudian scheme, her continuing childless state means that she has not yet been recuperated into the system by transferring her self-love to the child-object; thus she can still theoretically conform to the Freudian definition of the narcissistic woman.

Viola loves herself and also desires to be loved, which are both features of narcissistic women, according to Freud, who also writes that “the man who fulfils this condition [i.e. loving them] is the one who finds favour with them” (“On Narcissism” 89). A number of years later, in his 1933 lecture “Femininity,” Freud further opined that for women “to be loved is a stronger need for them than to love” (132). The day Viola first joins Cosimo in the trees as an adult, she asks him: “—...E mi amerai sempre, assolutamente, sopra ogni cosa, e sapresti fare qualsiasi cosa per me” (RR 1: 712). Cosimo’s loud explosions “di gioia incontenibile” (RR 1: 719) when she arrives back to see him again after an absence delight her, for “[n]ulla quanto queste esuberanze rendevano felice la Marchesa” (RR 1: 720). These examples illustrate Viola’s desire to be loved, but she fails to meet the requirements of the narcissistic woman because she is not free from desire herself. The adult Viola also wishes to love, even if she does not always show it in the same ways that Cosimo does: “L’ostinazione

amorosa di Viola s'incontrava con quella di Cosimo, e talora si scontrava" (RR 1: 715). When Cosimo asks her why she makes him suffer, she replies, "Perché ti amo." In fact, "L'amore è tutto" (RR 1: 718) for Viola, and it is not her inability to love that eventually drives them apart, but rather their different philosophies on how to love. Cosimo's ultimate preference for the rational over the emotional and his refusal to come down from the trees inevitably dooms him to a life without any woman, let alone one as desirable as Viola.

Nevertheless, although Viola professes her love for Cosimo, it is made clear through her representation that she does not feel it necessary to love only Cosimo. She spends much of her time away from Ombrosa, and a good part of that time is spent in Paris. Since the story is narrated by Biagio, who could not plausibly have firsthand knowledge of much of what he relates, details of Cosimo and Viola's love affair and what Viola did in her absence from Ombrosa necessarily came to him from other sources. For example, Biagio reports a Parisian friend saying of Viola, "—Di rado tanta bellezza s'è accompagnata a tanta irrequietudine, [...] I pettegoli vogliono che a Parigi ella passi da un amante all'altro, in una giostra così continua da non permettere a nessuno di dirla sua e dirsi privilegiato" (RR 1: 723). These comments portray Viola as a tease and a flirt, and by repeating the gossip, Biagio is implicitly endorsing it.

Viola's restlessness and apparent need to be loved is one of the most complex aspects of her characterisation, for as Bonsaver observes, "[I]'io di Viola si nutre voracemente di continui atti d'amore." He goes on to state that her "ingordigia sentimentale" (236) is evidenced in her apparent need to be pursued by more than one suitor at a time, noting the similarity between Viola's behaviour and that of an ex-patient of Kristeva. Bonsaver then provides the following quotation from Kristeva's *Tales of Love* to illustrate this similarity:¹³⁷

Concern for an essential narcissistic protection makes her "obliging, friendly, kind," whereas her two ("never fewer than two," Marie specifies) sexual partners with whom she maintains alternating separate and conflictive relationships allow her to lose nothing of either the structure or the bounties of her childhood, and they restore to her a completion that is sometimes

¹³⁷ Bonsaver (*Mondo* 237) quotes from the original French *Histoires d'amour* (54).

“suffocating” but very satisfying, above all during the quarrels of the threesome. (51)

Although Bonsaver uses Kristeva’s history of this ex-patient as inspiration for his “*donna ‘isterica,*” Viola’s need to be desired by many is also a characteristic of René Girard’s coquette. According to Finucci, Girard was more preoccupied than Freud with “the dangers that the narcissistic woman embodies” and turned the “self-sufficient, self-centred Freudian woman into a coquette, an object essential to mimetic desire” (*Lady* 115).¹³⁸ In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Girard states that the “coquette seeks to be desired because she needs masculine desires, directed at her, to feed her coquetry and enable her to play her role as a coquette” (370). He goes on to say that the “coquette is all the more exciting, and her mimetic seduction is all the stronger, if she attracts the desires of many” (371). In her discussion of Girard’s coquette, Finucci comments that this type of “woman is so taken with herself as to be not simply inaccessible but the epitome of insolent inaccessibility” (*Lady* 116).

Viola’s active courting of the love of more than one man at a time suggests that her character might more closely resemble the coquette than the Freudian narcissistic woman. Certainly, a strong feature of Viola’s characterisation is her role as object of mimetic desire, for her ability to attract a number of men at the same time adds to her allure, especially for Cosimo. From the very beginning, Viola is associated with romantic triangles of the nature important to Kristeva’s ex-patient, and frequently more than two men are involved.¹³⁹ These triangles are often structured so that Viola and Cosimo each occupy a point, and the third point is occupied by more than one man. At the heart of these triangles lies jealousy, for the men fight over Viola in her role of object of desire. However, it is important to reiterate that Biagio’s delivery of the narrative clearly favours Cosimo’s perspective, and much of Biagio’s information can only have been received indirectly from Cosimo. Bearing this in mind, although Viola explicitly tells Cosimo “—Ecco. Sei geloso. Guarda che non ti permetterò mai d’essere geloso” (RR 1:711), there are numerous indications in the novel that she actively incites jealousy. She also appears to enjoy it, for at one point, when Viola has returned to

¹³⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of ‘mimetic desire,’ see the dialogue between René Girard and the psychiatrists Guy Lefort and Jean-Michel Oughourlian: “Mimetic Desire” in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (283–98). For a discussion of ‘object rivalry,’ see (294–98).

¹³⁹ The word men also includes boys, for Viola displays this behaviour both as a girl and as a woman.

Cosimo after a period of absence, the reader is informed that “[c]ome sempre, la gelosia di lui le fece piacere” (RR 1: 724). Not that Viola is completely immune from jealousy herself—a characteristic that militates against calling her a Freudian narcissistic woman. At the beginning of their affair, when Cosimo brings her to his secret place, a shell-shaped hollow in a nut tree, Viola taunts him that he is not much of a man if he has not brought other women into this hollow. But when he admits that he has, she is jealous and gives him “uno schiaffo in faccia a piena palma” (RR 1: 713).

Jealousy is a fundamental aspect of Cosimo and Viola’s relationship, and a good part of Viola’s danger is shown to lie in her ability to incite this sentiment. It is jealousy of the attention that Viola is giving to the fruit thieves that nearly makes the young Cosimo fall from the trees, and it is jealousy of the two naval officers that results in behaviour from Cosimo that plays a crucial role in their final parting. But although Viola’s desire to be the centre of attention and to attract more than one suitor at a time suggests that she might indeed be a coquette, it is debatable whether her behaviour makes her “not simply inaccessible but the epitome of insolent inaccessibility,” a quality Finucci assigns to this type of woman. It is quite evident in the novel that Viola makes herself accessible to Cosimo on many occasions, although her ultimate availability to other men remains more in the realm of hearsay and speculation. In fact, Cosimo’s refusal to climb down from the trees arguably makes him, rather than Viola, the true “epitome of insolent inaccessibility.”

Ultimately, it is the manner in which Viola is sidelined in the text that aligns her character more fully with the narcissistic woman than the coquette. Having represented his narcissistic woman as a totally self-sufficient being, Freud created a problem, for he also wrote that these attractive women were “the type of female most commonly met with” (“On Narcissism” 88). Not only do these observations raise the obvious question of where men could successfully focus their anaclitic, or object-love, but the concept of the self-sufficient woman is clearly at odds with the continuance of the human race. Freud’s solution of pregnancy to the problem of the narcissistic woman presupposed marriage but did not place any importance on marriage for love. When Viola finally leaves Cosimo, like Ariosto’s Orlando, his grief causes him to go mad for a period. Viola does not suffer in such a dramatic fashion, but she is certainly not granted complete freedom; she is married off and assigned the role of the neurotic woman instead.

As Finucci explains, the neurotic woman, who is a further development of Freud's narcissist, "needs a man to unravel the riddle of her sex, to explain to her her own lack. Her independence is gone, her danger erased. Man is back at the center of her world" (*Lady* 115). Viola's break with Cosimo is inevitable, for this is his story and he cannot leave the trees and marry her. But Viola's dangerous desirability is not left unchecked, nor is she permitted to completely forget Cosimo. According to Biagio, once Viola leaves Cosimo she goes abroad and dreams of "gli alberi d'Ombrosa" (RR 1: 733). Eventually, she marries an English lord and moves to Calcutta, where she is said to spend her life constantly catching fleeting glances of a phantom Cosimo among the leaves of the forest she views from her terrace. Unsurprisingly, this explanation also finds support in Freud, who observes in "The Taboo of Virginity," "The husband is almost always so to speak only a substitute, never the right man; it is another man—in typical cases the father—who has first claim to a woman's love, the husband at most takes second place" (203). Cosimo is not Viola's father, but the implication in Biagio's observation is that Viola's husband is a substitute because Cosimo remains at the forefront of her mind.

Bolongaro considers that Viola escapes "to an exquisite nostalgia that is quite harmless" (120), but I question to whom this exquisite nostalgia really belongs. It is relevant that the account of Viola's life after Ombrosa is delivered by Biagio, who is writing a retrospective account of the life of his brother, Cosimo. There is no explanation given in the text for how this intradiegetic narrator could have had any conception of what was in Viola's mind once she had disappeared so completely from the scene. Therefore, it would be more accurate to suggest that it is Biagio who is really indulging in "an exquisite nostalgia" when he relates that Viola continues to think of Cosimo and the trees of Ombrosa. Given the well-acknowledged authorial identification with the protagonist and the unacknowledged autobiographical content in the text, I further suggest that a degree of narcissism may also lie in the extra-textual dimension.

The presence of the narcissistic woman in the Calvinian text is significant, but the following example of the way narcissism affects the representation of Calvino's female characters, which is provided in the account of the events that take place in chapter 19 of *Il barone rampante*, is arguably one of the most interesting. Little critical attention has been directed towards this chapter, probably because in the overall scheme of the narrative it is considered little more than an interesting diversion—an amusing but less important phase in Cosimo's

Bildung. Nevertheless, this interlude reads like the quintessential male narcissistic fantasy, and like the Priscilla episode, the account of the events that are said to occur in this chapter provides one of the better illustrations of the sort of writing that led Re (and others) to observe that a female reader of Calvino's texts is always to a certain extent out of place, "o meglio 'spiazzata'" from the ideal reader ("Calvino e il cinema" 96), who is always implicitly male.

If *Il barone rampante* is the *Bildung* to which McLaughlin refers (*Italo* 38), then this is the phase in which Cosimo 'sows his wild oats,' fitting neatly between his first relatively innocent amorous episode with Ursula and his subsequent passionate and tempestuous love affair with the beautiful, desirable and worldly Viola. Most of what unfolds in this chapter is presented to the reader in the form of gossip and hearsay, but in the process, Biagio succeeds in representing his brother as a Casanova figure to whom women are irresistibly drawn.¹⁴⁰ However, although Biagio portrays Cosimo as the object of female desire, in no way does Cosimo assume the status of object. He remains firmly at the centre of the action as subject, and the gaze remains unquestionably masculine.

Mulvey writes that the "determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly" (*Visual and Other* 19), and Biagio certainly styles the women who appear in this chapter to flatter Cosimo as he builds up the picture of a man who holds a certain fascination for women. There are rumours that "una certa Checchina, di là dalla valle" (RR 1: 691) is Cosimo's mistress. "Una certa Dorotea, donna galante" meets with him, also "[u]n'altra, tale Zobeida," and "una matura nobildonna" (RR 1: 692). There is also a story about "una ragazza" (RR 1: 693) who feels herself lifted into the treetops by two long monkey-like arms and, somewhat disconcertingly, I suggest, is said to later give birth to twins.¹⁴¹ None of these characters have faces, and those that have names are impersonalised into "una certa" or "tale," which renders them inconsequential and undifferentiated. These faceless female objects seem to have been designed for the sole purpose of boosting the male

¹⁴⁰ To connect Cosimo with Casanova is not so extraordinary when one considers that they both belong to the same period in history. Giacomo Casanova, the famous libertine, author and adventurer, was born in Venice in 1725 and died in 1798, and the fictitious Cosimo lived between 1745 and 1820. In addition, at the time of his death in 1985, Calvino was working on a "*risrittura* of Casanova's memoirs" (Hume, "Sensuality" 160).

¹⁴¹ This behaviour is reminiscent of the way Gurdulù behaves with Priscilla's girls.

ego. In fact, using Susan Rubin Suleiman's words, the female characters are presented in such an impersonal manner that "*characters* [...] is not the right word [...] we can call them, at most, *figures*" (127). Suleiman is relying on the distinction between character and figure made by Barthes in *S/Z*. For Barthes, a proper name is needed before there can be a character, for this proper name "acts as a magnetic field for the semes" (*S/Z* 67), drawing these "dispersed traits [...] into a stable configuration, a character with a personality and a biography" (Suleiman 127–28). In contrast, a figure is "not a combination of semes concentrated in a legal Name, nor can biography, psychology, or time encompass it" (*S/Z* 68). Nevertheless, it can be deduced from Barthes's discussion of the "Proper Name" (*S/Z* 94) that, although a character must have a name, "a named character can also function as a figure" (Suleiman 128) or "an impersonal network of symbols combined under [a] proper name" (*S/Z* 94). Whether named or unnamed, the female characters presented in chapter 19 all fall within Barthes's definition of a figure. Indeed, if one were to follow Barthes's terminology, many of Calvino's 'female characters' could be termed 'female figures.'

Although Cosimo is portrayed as the target of female attention, the reader never learns what it is that they find so attractive about him. Cosimo's physiognomy remains a mystery throughout the novel, although Biagio informs us that since his time with the Spaniards Cosimo has begun to take more care of his person and has "smesso di girare infagottato di pelo come un orso," wearing instead "calzoni e marsina attillata e cappello a tuba, all'inglese" (RR 1: 692). In addition, he is shaving his beard and grooming his wig. Significantly, there are no negative inferences in this attempt by Cosimo to attract women by dressing well. This contrasts strongly with Biagio's attitude towards Battista's similar attempts to make herself more attractive to the young Marchesino earlier in the novel. In fact, such is Cosimo's apparent attractiveness to women that "[i] fidanzati e i mariti, adesso, guai se le loro morose o mogli alzavano gli occhi verso un albero" (RR 1: 691). Biagio even speculates that the women chatter about Cosimo when they meet. Dorotea announces herself well satisfied with Cosimo's performance, and who is better qualified to attest to one's virility than a woman introduced as a "donna galante"? But not only do courtesans and unsophisticated country girls want to visit Cosimo; his allure is strong enough to attract women of a higher social status. A "matura nobildonna" is rumoured to have had her carriage driven often to a certain spot where she could send her old coachman off to collect mushrooms in the woods, disappearing from the carriage in his absence "come venisse rapita

in cielo, su per fitte fronde che sovrastavano la strada” (RR 1: 692). Whatever happened to her during her heavenly sojourn left her looking “languida” (RR 1: 693), by all accounts.

Although the entire chapter reads as an exercise in masculine ego building, perhaps the most fantastically narcissistic incident is the event that is purported to have taken place in “la Quercia delle Cinque Passere.” Commenting on the name given to the oak tree in question, Biagio adds that “noi vecchi sappiamo quello che vuol dire,” for in Italian there is a sexual ‘double entendre’ in the word ‘passera.’ Of all the things that are said about women in this chapter, both implicitly and explicitly, this is the incident that best demonstrates the androcentric orientation of the text, showing how women are made fun of and truly objectified for the benefit of a masculine audience. Biagio conveniently distances himself by stating that the tale comes from “un certo Gè, mercante di zibibbo,” but adds that he is a man whom one can credit. Of course, the juxtapositioning of ‘liquor merchant’ and ‘reliability’ is intentionally ironic and a signal to the reader that what Biagio is about to relate could all be a drunken fantasy. But as the story goes, such is Cosimo’s attraction that “certe madame genovesi” took it upon themselves to visit him, and this is the scene that Gè claims to have come across one day while out hunting:

Se le era portate tutte cinque sui rami, Cosimo, una qua e una là, e si godevano il tepore, tutte nude, cogli ombrellini aperti per non farsi scottar dal sole, e il Barone era là in mezzo, che leggeva versi latini, non riuscii a capire se d’Ovidio o di Lucrezio. (RR 1: 693)

When commenting on the “split between active/male and passive/female” or “woman as object” and “male as bearer of the look” in film, Mulvey writes:

In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle. (*Visual and Other* 19)

Mulvey’s comments are no less applicable to this novel than they would be to film, for what image could better convey her concept of *to-be-looked-at-ness* than five naked women sitting in an oak tree holding parasols? As an erotic spectacle at the intradiegetic level, they are on display to both Cosimo and Gè, although Cosimo is portrayed as being above the spectacle

and unaware of their temptation as he reads to them from the Latin classics. Obviously, the fact that Cosimo is reading Latin rather than looking is part of the joke, as is the fact that Gè could not make out whether it was Ovid or Lucretius that Cosimo was reading. This episode recalls the scene in *Il visconte dimezzato* in which the uneducable Good Medardo reads from Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* to a bored Pamela, who is lying on the ground making herself completely available to him. But perhaps a better analogy is the painting "Concert Champêtre" by the sixteenth-century Italian artist Tiziano Vecellio, or Titian.¹⁴² In this painting, two fully clothed male musicians appear completely oblivious of the naked women beside them; one of whom is facing them with a flute, the other of whom is facing outwards displaying her nakedness to the entire world.¹⁴³ For Gè to be interested in listening to Cosimo is about as unlikely as it is to suggest that a man viewing Titian's painting is interested in the tune that the musicians are playing.

No mention is made of what Cosimo is, or is not, wearing in the oak tree, for that is apparently not important. As Berger observed about female nudity in art:

Women are depicted in a quite different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him. (64)

It seems to be presumed in this instance that the viewer is not interested in what Cosimo looks like and that the women alone are the objects of the gaze. This brings the extra-textual dimension into the debate, adding weight to the suggestion that the intended reader of this novel is masculine. When Pygmalion's naked statue came to life, she "[t]imidly raised her eyes, saw her lover and the light of day together" (Ovid 232); in other words, Galatea's first

¹⁴² Although the Louvre in Paris now assigns this painting to Titian (c. 1485–1576), there is considerable debate as to whether it is actually by Giorgione (c. 1477–1510), another Italian High Renaissance painter of the same school.

¹⁴³ Another more recent example is "Le déjeuner sur l'herbe" (1862–63) by the nineteenth-century French painter Edouard Manet (1832–83), which similarly juxtaposes a naked woman with two fully clothed men, who appear to be carrying on a conversation oblivious to the fact that she is sitting naked in their midst. She is also looking out towards the spectator. Interestingly in the context of this study, the French novelist Émile Zola evokes Manet's painting in his novel *L'Oeuvre* (1886). Zola's artist protagonist, Claude Lantier, paints a picture in which a fully clothed male, who has his back to the viewer, is depicted looking towards three naked women.

action was to look with adoring and submissive eyes upon her creator. Although Cosimo occupies a position similar to the disinterested male musicians in Titian's painting, the spectacle in the oak tree is clearly designed to flatter an audience wider than Gè, who views, after all, from a position of almost voyeuristic anonymity. Cosimo might appear disinterested in the spectacle but perhaps this is because the 'ideal' spectator is outside of the text—the author and/or the male reader perhaps? The image of Cosimo sitting nonchalantly in the tree reading Latin texts while surrounded by adoring naked women reflects back an idealised imaginary self to a male audience—one who is complete unto himself and, in Lacanian terms, removed from “the instability played out in the register of demand and desire” (Rose 33). Or as Freud might phrase it, for the man who loves “[a]ccording to the narcissistic type,” Cosimo represents “[the man] he himself would like to be” (“On Narcissism” 90). This episode exemplifies male narcissism at both the intra- and extra-textual levels, but using Berger's terminology, the female reader is once again “split in two” (46): “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (47); certainly, this scene provides no obvious idealised imaginary self to reflect back on the female reader.

Oedipal Themes

Pygmalion is Galatea's creator and her figurative father, which adds an obviously incestuous flavour to their immediate marriage. To elaborate briefly on points raised elsewhere, Ovid implicitly acknowledges his uncharacteristic leniency, not by punishing Pygmalion, but by quickly launching into the far longer episode that tells of the incestuous relationship between Pygmalion's great-granddaughter, Myrrha, and her father, Cinyras.¹⁴⁴ Ovid introduces the episode with the following warning: “The story I am going to tell is a horrible one.” It was not Cupid's bow that caused Myrrha to desire her father; instead “[o]ne of the three sisters, armed with firebrands from the Styx and swollen snakes, breathed a blight on her” (233). Because Myrrha's story plays out in literal terms what can be interpreted at the metaphorical level from Pygmalion's actions, it provides a useful contrast to the Pygmalion story, and it is noteworthy that Ovid reserves his punishment for the female party alone. In terms of the representation of men and women, the most fundamental message to be garnered from the Pygmalion episode and the stories that immediately surround it is that the truly ideal woman

¹⁴⁴ Cinyras is the son of Paphos, who is the child of Pygmalion and Galatea. Opinions differ as to whether Paphos' gender is masculine or feminine.

is one created by a man. However, an important secondary message, which is really implicit in the first, is that woman, if left to her own devices, poses a danger to man and society; in which respect, 'society' and 'man' are essentially synonymous.

Myrrha's story lends support to the view Freud expressed in "Femininity" that for "girls the Oedipus situation is the outcome of a long and difficult development." For Myrrha, the Oedipus situation proves more a battleground than the "haven of refuge" Freud suggests. "[D]riven out of her attachment to her mother through the influence of her envy for the penis," Myrrha competes with her mother for her father's attention and actively pursues her "wish for a penis-baby" (Freud, "Femininity" 129). In Freudian terms, she remains trapped in the Oedipal situation and does not successfully form her superego. Ovid narrates that Myrrha rejected all the suitors vying for her hand and longed only for "the one man excluded from their number" (233): her father, Cinyras. Such was Myrrha's desire for her father that "while the king's bed was empty," while his wife Cenchreis (Myrrha's mother) was taking part in the holy feast of Ceres, where all married women "for nine nights hold love and all male contact in the category of forbidden things" (236), Myrrha enters her father's bed without revealing her identity and receives her penis-baby in the literal sense. However, the full force of Oedipal censure falls upon her shoulders as she, in her metamorphosed state, delivers Adonis through a cleavage in her trunk.

Myrrha's incest is deliberate, but that of the legendary Oedipus and his mother/wife, Jocasta, occurs unwittingly. Nevertheless, their punishment is severe, and de Lauretis considers that it was "no accident of cultural history that Freud, an avid reader of literature, chose the hero of Sophocles' drama as the emblem of Everyman's passage into adult life, his advent to culture and history" (*Alice* 125). Calvino was also an avid reader, and openly acknowledged the influence in his writing of both other writers and the literary tradition in general. In his narratives, he actively incorporates the ideas of both Sophocles and Freud, but although the Oedipus theme in Calvino's writing is widespread and well recognised, it is not, to my knowledge, well explored.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Ricci's article "The Quest for Sonship in *Le città invisibili* and 'La strada di Giovanni' by Italo Calvino" is one that deals directly with the "Oedipal drama" (62). Ricci observes that the child protagonist (the young Calvino) of "La strada di San Giovanni" "is caught between the symbolic canon of the father and a desire for the mother" (55).

In Chapter One, I discussed how Calvino draws thematically from both Sophocles' version of the Oedipus legend and Freud's reinterpretation of the myth when creating the Sofronia-Torrismondo story in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, the most significant borrowing being Calvino's building up of the 'almost' incestuous relationship between Torrismondo and Sofronia. Like Oedipus and Jocasta, neither Sofronia nor Torrismondo is aware of the other's identity when they make love in a cave. But as events unfold, their relationship is only spared from being incestuous due to Calvino's nimble incorporation of farcical twists in the plot that conveniently iron out questions of consanguinity. In accordance with the fluid nature of her characterisation, Sofronia moves rapidly from being cast in the role of Torrismondo's mother, to that of his half-sister, until finally it is disclosed that they do not share a blood relationship at all. However, as I suggested in the previous chapter, although Sofronia and Torrismondo's association is regularised at the plot level, many of the psychological features associated with the Freudian Oedipus complex underlie their relationship, and it is from this angle that I now return to their story.

Sofronia's principal role in the novel is to support the telling of both Agilulfo's and Torrismondo's stories, and in many ways, she is the truly non-existent character in this novel. In Torrismondo's case, Sofronia's character is required to enable the relating of his Oedipal journey. She remains mute and what she thinks or feels is recorded only insofar as is necessary to give credence to Torrismondo's tale. In chapter 7 of *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Torrismondo attempts to strip Agilulfo of his right to his titles by declaring that Sofronia was his mother and therefore could not have been a virgin when rescued by him. However, by this action, Torrismondo also declares himself a bastard and consequently not eligible for his own knightly status. At the same time as Agilulfo sets off on his quest to prove Sofronia's virginity, Torrismondo embarks on his own journey to discover and gain legal recognition from his paternal inheritance, the Knights of the Holy Grail.

In Freudian terms, Torrismondo suffers from an unresolved Oedipus complex. Symbolically, when he leaves Charlemagne and his paladins, Torrismondo somewhat belatedly turns away from his early "object-cathexis for his mother" ("Ego" 31), and he begins his journey towards identification with his father and the subsequent development of his superego—necessary prerequisites for assuming his place in the patriarchal order. But Torrismondo's experience with his collective father, the Knights of the Holy Grail, is not positive. They turn out to be

superficial hypocrites, who abuse their elitist position as celibate upholders of the faith and ignore the welfare of the peasants on whom they rely for sustenance. Torrismondo's story includes a clever play upon Freud's statement that "[y]ou *ought to be* like this (like your father)" but "[y]ou *may not be* like this (like your father)—that is, you may not do all that he does" ("Ego" 34). Freud is talking about the development of the superego, or the ego-ideal, in a young boy, which requires the boy to identify with his father but to realise that the father's choice of sexual partner (i.e. the boy's mother) is not available to him. In the Freudian scheme, this exercise is designed to suppress the Oedipus complex, but with characteristic irony, Calvino plays with this dictate, creating a "world turned upside down." Torrismondo does not become like his father(s)¹⁴⁶ and does indeed turn his sexual attention, even if unwittingly, onto the person he thinks is his mother. Nonetheless, with a few crucial tweaks of the plot, Torrismondo emerges unscathed from the Oedipal situation and successfully assumes his proper place within the symbolic order with Sofronia at his side as wife.

On rejecting the law of the Father by turning his back on the Knights of the Holy Grail, Torrismondo fortuitously wanders back into the world of pre-Oedipal plenitude. He stumbles upon the naked Sofronia sleeping in a cave on the Breton shoreline. In his *Nota*, Calvino writes that Sofronia represents "l'amore come pace, nostalgia del sonno prenatale" (RR 1: 1217), and what Torrismondo discovers is the epitome of passive and receptive femininity in an enclosed womblike space. Torrismondo does not recognise Sofronia, so he is unaware that he is looking at his putative mother, but the sight of her invokes a strong sensation of the uncanny: "something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it" ("Uncanny" 245).

Sofronia has been rescued from a shipwreck by Agilulfo and Gurdulù and left sleeping in the cave. This action reinforces the odd relationship that exists between Torrismondo and Agilulfo, for in the Freudian scheme, by rescuing Sofronia from the water, Agilulfo symbolically "makes her a mother." But he does not make "her his own mother" ("Special" 174), and indeed, Agilulfo does not want her to be a mother, for in his mind he is rescuing an

¹⁴⁶ The Knights of the Holy Grail are a celibate order and therefore there should be no progeny from among their ranks. However, just as they are proven to be hypocrites in other directions, they soon agree that, although no one knight among the ranks could be acknowledged as Torrismondo's father, they could countenance a collective paternity.

Andromeda-like virgin. The dual symbolism associated with this scene, the rescued virgin and the mother figure, demonstrates symbolically that Agilulfo and Torrismondo, who think that they need Sofronia to meet different requirements (virgin or mother), in fact, both really need the woman lying in the cave to be a virgin.

To reach this realisation, however, Torrismondo needs to move through the Oedipus scenario. There are many earlier passages in the novel that point to Torrismondo's strong metaphorical desire for a return to the womb and to the undifferentiated pre-Oedipal period. When announcing to the paladins that Sofronia was his mother, he states: "Mi diede alla luce al sereno, in una brughiera." He adds that Sofronia raised him in the wilderness until he was five and together they wandered the fields and woods of England, living in caves. Hence, the uncanny experience on discovering Sofronia in a similar cave, especially because Torrismondo recalls with nostalgia that period: "[q]uesti primi ricordi sono quelli del più bel periodo della mia vita" (RR 1: 1016). On discovering the sleeping woman:

Quel desiderio che l'aveva mosso per il mondo, di luoghi vellutati da una morbida vegetazione, percorsi da un basso vento radente, e di terse giornate senza sole, ecco che finalmente al vedere quelle lunghe nere ciglia abbassate sulla guancia piena e pallida, e la tenerezza di quel corpo abbandonato, e la mano posata sul colmo seno, e i molli capelli sciolti, e il labbro, l'anca, l'alluce, il respiro, ora pare che quel desiderio si acqueti. (RR 1: 1052)

The cave is a well-known metaphor for the womb; it also provides a link between the two phases of Torrismondo's life in which Sofronia plays an important role. The day that Sofronia was rescued by Agilulfo from the brigands and as a consequence separated from Torrismondo, she had left him "a guardia della nostra spelonca" (RR 1: 1016), and fifteen years later, he finds her again asleep "in una grotta" (RR 1: 1052). Torrismondo does not recognise Sofronia as his lost mother, but the emotion he experiences is Lacanian 'desire.' In her "Introduction" to *Feminine Sexuality*, Juliet Mitchell observes that, for Lacan, "the object that is longed for only comes into existence *as an object* when it is lost [...] desire only exists because of an initial failure of satisfaction [...] and] persists as an effect of a primordial absence" (6). The sight of the naked and sleeping Sofronia and the desire it arouses in him is an uncanny experience, but it stills the yearning in Torrismondo, who intuitively feels that he has found the 'object' he has been seeking, even if he remains unaware that he has been

unconsciously searching for his lost mother. Torrismondo's feelings are not unusual, for most of Calvino's male characters are seeking something they feel is missing, which is something connected to the feminine world—a sentiment Alice Jardine further extends by observing that “[i]t may be that men always feel as if they have ‘lost something’ whenever they speak of woman or women” (68).

Unlike Torrismondo, the reader is well aware that he has not had his desire aroused by ‘generic femininity’ but has instead fallen in love with his supposed mother. He cannot identify why he is so attracted to Sofronia, but he is aware that something more than just her vulnerable beauty has affected his emotions: “Sto cercando qualcosa che sempre mi è mancata e solo ora che vi vedo so cos’è” (RR 1: 1053). The irony contained in Torrismondo's statement is obvious, for he has found his lost ‘mother’ and is unwittingly admitting to an Oedipal yearning to possess her. Sofronia goes by a number of different names in the novel, and it is to Azira that Torrismondo makes love, declaring, “Azira, mi pare d’avervi sempre amata [...] d’essermi già smarrito in voi...” (RR 1: 1053), a statement that does nothing to dispel Oedipal sentiments. But a further irony is that Torrismondo rejects the Knights of the Holy Grail, not because they had seduced his mother (Sofronia), but rather because he was disgusted by “the thought that he could have been generated by such an emotionless group of listless sleep-walkers” (Woodhouse 46). Yet the mother he idealises turns out not to be his mother (but does become his wife), whereas the knights remain his biological father.

At the technical level, Torrismondo and Sofronia's Oedipal dilemma is resolved almost as soon as they become aware of its existence. By clearing up a number of misunderstandings, it is made clear that Sofronia and Torrismondo share no blood relationship and are thus free to marry. So although Torrismondo might reject his father(s), he does not reject the law of the Father. He merely enters the symbolic order by another route: as husband of Sofronia. Although this is a very neat solution for the purposes of the plot, it leaves the Oedipal question hovering in the background. The fact remains that Torrismondo has married the woman he identified with as mother, and Sofronia has married the boy she thought was her half-brother.

The thirteen-year age difference between Sofronia and Torrismondo is mentioned in *Il cavaliere inesistente* only in so far as is necessary to give credence to Torrismondo's assertion that she is his mother. However, even if there were no suggestion of a blood

relationship, the twenty-year-old Torrismondo's desire for the thirty-three-year-old woman he finds sleeping in a cave raises the Oedipal spectre in itself, especially as it goes against literary norms in which age difference trends in the opposite direction. Freud writes in "A Special Type of Object Choice" that "the preference shown by young men for maturer women" reveals "unmistakably the maternal prototype of the object-choice" (169). In the same article, Freud also links the 'mother' to the 'prostitute' in a boy's mind because "the difference between [... them] is not so very great, since basically they do the same thing" (171). Sebastiana, the old nurse in *Il visconte dimezzato*, is a character that illustrates this line of reasoning, for "aveva dato il latte a tutti i giovani della famiglia Terralba, ed era andata a letto con tutti i più anziani" (RR 1: 379). But Armanda, from "L'avventura di un bandito," who is openly represented as a prostitute, is also relevant to this discussion, for she reigns supreme in her large bed and her body "sembra lo occupi tutto" (RR 2: 1036). In the course of the narrative, three men take turns beside her and the least significant of these is her husband, Lilin, whose child-sized body lies beside her like "una grinza della coperta" (RR 2: 1036).

Nevertheless, among the stories in *Gli amori difficili*, the one that most obviously incorporates Oedipal references of the nature of the sexual attraction of a younger male to an older female character is "L'avventura di un soldato." The whole plot of this narrative revolves around the seduction of an anonymous provincial widow by the young soldier Tomagra in the compartment of a moving train. It is not entirely clear, however, whether the events related in the story are meant to be taken as an account of something that actually occurs, or are instead a youthful fantasy on the part of the soldier. Nor is it certain, if the reader accepts that a seduction does take place, who actually seduces whom. In fact, Ahern, who sees the tale as just one of many reworkings of the Widow of Ephesus in Petronius' *Satyricon*, categorically states that "[w]hen the two silently make love at the end of the tale, Tomagra comically believes that he has seduced the widow, although the opposite is true" (3). Whatever scenario one accepts, in Bonsaver's opinion, this story is "certo il racconto più 'sensuale' che Calvino abbia mai scritto" (*Mondo* 225–26).

Physically, the widow is imposing, for she is a tall and shapely woman. Her body is blooming and "sodo," although "le alte curve" are "addolcite da una matronale morbidezza" (RR 1: 319). Her widow status is firmly indicated by her attire: "il vestito era di seta nera, appropriato a un lungo lutto" and she wears a matronly hat with a veil. The description of the

widow's clothing subtly indicates both her dangerous and her desirable qualities. Her dress is embellished with "guarnizioni e gale inutili" and "il velo le passava intorno al viso piovendole dal giro d'un pesante antiquato cappello" (RR 1: 319). Thus, her overly decorated outfit is modified by her veiled face and as Finucci observes, "[d]ecorated, woman is dangerous; covered, she is coveted" (*Lady* 52). However, equally mixed messages can be associated with the cover afforded by the widow's veil, for "[t]he veil is the paradoxical signifier of both innocence and corruption, both vulnerability and (sexual) threat. Although ostensibly there to protect the wearer, the veil also protects the viewer" (Pearce 58). Again, this is communicated in the imagery, for although covering her face neutralises, or diminishes, to some extent the danger signalled by her other adornments, the widow's veil clearly does not hide her tightly sealed lips that have been hastily tinted a violent red. These factors, combined with her matronly softness, are presented as an indication that the widow is probably closer to forty than thirty, and this difference in age between the widow and Tomagra, a young infantry soldier on his first leave, is an immediate Oedipal signal.

The story unfolds entirely from the point of view of Tomagra, and the widow is portrayed as being almost as immobile as Pygmalion's ivory statue. As Gabriele remarks, "the widow [...] never becomes human" (*Italo* 96). She certainly occupies physical space in the story, but she is both statuesque and statue-like. As a thinking, participating presence, she is completely absent.¹⁴⁷ The inclusion of adjectives such as "marmoreo," "irraggiungibile," (RR 1: 319) and "impassibile" (RR 1: 320) in her representation is just one of the many ways she is shown to be absent yet present at the same time. As illustrated earlier in relation to "L'avventura di un viaggiatore," the notion of absence and presence, with its phallic replacement connotations, is the hallmark of fetishistic behaviour, and the widow's character could easily be discussed from this angle. But however one approaches the story, the widow typifies what de Lauretis terms "a notorious cliché of Western literary writing," for she is the ultimate example of "woman as passive capacity, receptivity, readiness to receive" (*Technologies* 75).

Another major connection between this story and the Oedipus myth is the linking of the widow's character to that of the legendary Sphinx. Tomagra is momentarily uncertain

¹⁴⁷ The initial printing of this story in *Ultimo viene il corvo* (1949) included a number of passages that were more sexually explicit in nature but at the same time humanised the widow in a way that is absent in later versions. See RR 1: (1298–1301) for a record of these changes.

whether he should consider her completely impassive demeanour to be a positive or negative signal, and whether he should take it as a sign to continue or desist with his tentative and subversive advances upon her body. The reaction of the omniscient narrator is to declare, “ma lei, lei, lei era una sfinge” (RR 2: 324). After Oedipus had unwittingly killed his father, Laius, and before he could enter Thebes, which is where he married his mother, Jocasta (again unwittingly), Oedipus had to answer the riddle of the Sphinx. Oedipus’ unexpected success in solving the riddle led to the suicide of the Sphinx, which freed the city of Thebes but made possible Oedipus’ incestuous marriage. Mention of the word Sphinx is a metaphorical signal for danger, particularly danger of the Oedipal kind. This is always associated with a sense of social taboo, and fittingly for this theme, most of the exploratory activity that Tomagra carries out on the widow’s body occurs while there are other people in the train compartment. Tomagra is dangerously exposed to the reactions of both the widow and the other passengers. Gabriele observes that Tomagra is on “an internal adventure that can be interpreted both as a sexual fantasy and a sexual bildungsroman.” She considers that the trip is crucial to his “sense of self, to his self-confidence” (*Italo* 95). Tomagra sets himself the challenge of conquering the sphinx, but what the ‘sphinx’ thinks is both unknowable and seemingly unimportant. The widow’s presence is vital to the unfolding of the plot, but it is Tomagra’s story, even if it is a fantasy, and she is an object not far removed in concept from the ivory Galatea. What actually occurs on the train is ultimately not important. But whether the happenings are considered to be merely a figment of Tomagra’s overactive, youthful imagination or something that really takes place, the Oedipal connotations of this story are unmistakable.

Conclusion

Pygmalion’s rejection of the Propoetides and creation of a replacement woman fashioned on a narcissistic fantasy rather than on a living woman raises a number of psychological questions. In this chapter, I have established that Calvino’s writing is also profoundly psychological despite his declaration that he was not interested in exploring the psychological dimension. A credible explanation for why this aspect of his writing has remained comparatively neglected for so long is that Calvino guided critical attention as much by what he omitted from the conversation as by what he accentuated. By emphasising his lack of interest in the psychological, not only did Calvino divert attention from the psychological in

his narratives but he also skilfully deflected attention from the almost complete absence of Freud's name in his critical writing. This omission is significant for such a prolific and eclectic essayist and commentator as Calvino, writing between the 1940s and the 1980s, because Freud is one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. Apart from the short article "Freud e il Marxismo," which was originally published in *L'Unità* in 1946 (S 2: 2127-28), and a statement in his preface to the English translation of *Our Ancestors* that he agreed to the books being read "Freudianly or Jungianly" (ix), Calvino barely refers to Freud.

Undeterred by Calvino's tactics, my own analysis in this chapter has relied heavily both on Freud and on Lacan's subsequent revision of his theories. The thoughts and behaviours of Calvino's characters, both male and female, bear the unmistakable imprint of Freudian thinking, and this detailed examination of the representation of the feminine engaging directly with Freud's writing addresses a significant omission from Calvinian analysis to date. Like Pygmalion, Calvino's male characters have a love-hate relationship with the women with whom they are associated, in which love is typically represented as sexual desire and hate is interpreted as fear. What ultimately binds these concepts together is the Freudian Oedipus complex and the symbolic castration it entails, which associates sexual desire with danger. In the Freudian scheme, danger is represented as the emasculating power of female sexuality, the fear of which provokes narcissistic and fetishistic defence mechanisms in the desiring males. With the exception of Battista, who represents danger alone, I have indicated through detailed textual analysis a variety of different ways in which Calvino's female characters function as objects created specifically to represent the dichotomy of desire and danger. I have also highlighted the devices Calvino employs in creating female characters who flatter the narcissistic propensities of the male characters with whom they are associated and draw attention to the fact that Calvino's females rarely function as characters in their own right.

CHAPTER THREE: CALVINO SPEAKS FOR GALATEA: QUESTIONS OF PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

In Ovid's myth, Galatea remains silent. She epitomises compliant femininity as she comes to life blushing, timidly raising her eyes and greeting Pygmalion, her creator. Ovid reinforces the erotic dimensions of the myth by adding that, nine months from her animation, "Pygmalion's bride bore a child." As Gail Marshall explains, Ovid's Galatea "remains only and always the image of Pygmalion's desire" (18), a relationship that J. H. Miller describes with the following simile: "It is as if Narcissus' reflection in the pool had come alive and could return his love" (5). Ovid gifts Pygmalion the woman of his fantasies, but the question arises as to how Galatea might view the turn of events. If Galatea were to speak, what might she say? Would we learn why she comes to life blushing and of what she is afraid?

Although the way that Galatea has been depicted has varied through time, reflecting the fashions and concerns of different eras, until relatively recently, the myth has remained almost exclusively Pygmalion's story. Aspects of Pygmalion's personality and the nature of his creative act have been extensively explored, but Galatea has typically remained merely a beautiful, compliant and essentially voiceless form. As Joshua observes, until the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the story was reclaimed by women writers, the "Pygmalion story [was] largely perpetuated as an instance of the male definition of the female: Galatea's body and her identity [were] created to his specifications" (136). How Pygmalion's creative gesture was viewed has varied considerably through the ages. This ranges from the positive theological gloss applied by John Gower, a contemporary of Chaucer, who in his *Confessio Amantis* "interprets the story as evidence for the importance of articulate prayer" (Joshua 12), through to the less obvious references to the myth found in works such as Thomas Hardy's last published novel, *The Well-Beloved* (1897), in which Jocelyn Pierston's success as a sculptor is contrasted with his unsuccessful love life. Hardy exposes in the novel both the futility of Pierston's search for the ideal feminine and the ultimate "pre-eminence of life over art" (Bezrucka 229).

Joshua notes that a more serious attempt was made to portray Galatea's point of view in the late 1800s and the early part of last century, citing as evidence the writings of the American poets Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Genevieve Taggard and Roselle Mercier Montgomery and the Irish poet Emily Henrietta Hickey. Nonetheless, Joshua qualifies this observation by adding that, despite the "advances in feminist revisionism, the story remains the property of men in the twentieth century" (155).¹⁴⁸ What has not remained the property of men, however, is the use of the myth as a critical tool for studying the representation of the feminine, even in works that bear no thematic resemblance to Ovid's Pygmalion story. It is in this manner that I apply the myth in this chapter, which investigates the instances in which Calvino presents his stories using female protagonists. To restate this in terms of the Pygmalion scenario: in this chapter, I examine how Calvino in his Pygmalionesque role of author represents the world from Galatea's perspective.

The discussion centres almost exclusively on the two short stories "L'avventura di una bagnante" and "L'avventura di una moglie," and on *Il cavaliere inesistente*, the third fantastic tale. The unifying feature of these narratives is that the stories are all presented by a narrator who has access to the thoughts of the female protagonist, although this statement requires qualification in the case of *Il cavaliere inesistente*. The narrative structure is relatively straightforward in the *Gli amori difficili* stories, which are delivered in the third person by an omniscient narrator, but it is far more complex in *Il cavaliere inesistente* and is compounded by the way that deceit and identity issues are structural features of the plot. *Il cavaliere inesistente* includes both a primary and a secondary narrative, and it is only the primary narrative, which is a first-person account of Suor Teodora's life in the convent and the act of writing the secondary narrative, that is ostensibly delivered from a female point of view. The secondary narrative is written by the nun Suor Teodora, but it is seemingly narrated by an omniscient narrator and the perspective shifts throughout. Understandably, the complexity of the narrative structure of this early postmodern novel raises issues that are not present in *Gli amori difficili*. To cater for this difference and to allow for a more comprehensive discussion

¹⁴⁸ An interesting and little known early variation of the Pygmalion and Galatea theme presented primarily from Galatea's perspective can be found in Louisa May Alcott's short novel *A Marble Woman: or The Mysterious Model*, which was originally published in serial form during 1865 in the weekly magazine *The Flag of Our Union* under the pseudonym A. M. Barnard. For both the novel and an Introduction by Madeleine Stern (7–29), see *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*.

of the way in which Calvino presents the world from a feminine perspective, I have divided the chapter into two sections. The first section, “Isotta and Stefania,” considers the dilemmas faced by the female protagonists of the two short stories, “L’avventura di una bagnante” and “L’avventura di una moglie.” Through an analysis of both the predicaments they face and the way they are portrayed as handling their difficult circumstances, I examine their stories as instances of the representation of a feminine perspective as defined by a male author. When relevant, the discussion includes a comparison of these stories with others in the collection that have male protagonists. In the second section, “Suor Teodora/Bradamante,” I examine questions of point of view and aspects of narrative structure in *Il cavaliere inesistente* that relate specifically to the question of feminine perspective. I also speculate upon reasons why Calvino might have created a female character to play the role of first-person narrator of the primary narrative.

Some fundamental understandings accompany me in the following analysis, which are well introduced by the following observation made in a 1990 article in the *Independent Magazine* by Jeanette Winterson:

It’s not polite to criticise heroes, but if I had met Calvino I would have had to ask him about his women. Or rather his lack of them. He doesn’t write about us, not in any meaningful way, indeed hardly head on at all. Worse, there are very many clues which give away the assumption that he thinks of his readers as male too. (“Italo” 48)¹⁴⁹

Responding to Winterson’s comment in his *Il mondo scritto*, Bonsaver offers the opinion that what makes Calvino’s work so particular is not so much the lack of women in his writing, since there are many, but rather the fact that they rarely attain the status of protagonist and that they are barely credible and lack proper definition. Nor does Bonsaver find evidence to support Winterson’s contention that Calvino also thinks of his readers as male, finding instead that Calvino’s works merely demonstrate a pronouncedly masculine narrating hand:

¹⁴⁹ Despite the apparent negativity of this comment, Winterson speaks of her admiration for Calvino in this *Independent* article. See Bonsaver’s paper “Cities of the Imagination: Traces of Italo Calvino in Jeanette Winterson’s Fiction” (1995) for a discussion of the recurrent presence of Calvino, and particularly of *Le città invisibili*, in Winterson’s novels.

Nei romanzi di Calvino, la rappresentazione dei personaggi femminili sembra essere costantemente legata alla ‘messa in prosa’ di tensioni psichiche prettamente maschili; alla ‘mascolinità’ dei personaggi protagonisti viene cioè ad associarsi un’altrettanto pronunciata ‘mascolinità’ dell’immaginario alla base di ogni opera. I personaggi femminili nell’opera di Calvino si presentano come tante proiezioni artistiche delle pulsioni inconscie che l’uomo associa al sesso femminile. (249)

The observation that Calvino’s writing shows strongly that the authorial hand is masculine is widely acknowledged. Nevertheless, whatever Calvino’s intentions were and however well Bonsaver might explain why the female characters appear as they do in Calvino’s texts, a feeling of being excluded from the intended reading audience is almost inevitable for a female reader, who is consistently faced with female characters that are barely recognisable. Drawing upon the words of Pearce, when reading a Calvinian text, like *Winterson*, I feel that there is “a *preferred reader* who is not me” (46). However, this is not a trait peculiar to Calvino’s writing, for as Pearce further elaborates, “[h]owever complex the categories ‘male’ and ‘female’ have become, texts *do* gender their readers, either explicitly or implicitly”(47). Hence, Calvino’s female characters, which Bonsaver describes as artistic projections of the unconscious drive that males associate with the female sex, are inherently aimed towards a masculine, rather than a feminine, reading audience, which means that female readers are by implication at least partially excluded.

Ovid was possibly the first to unite the Echo and Narcissus themes, and the similarity of motifs, most particularly the motif of reflection, is an obvious connection between the two. There are, however, differences that are subtle but important for my discussion. Narcissus falls in love with his own reflected image, so his is essentially a circular self-love relationship. Echo’s situation is of a different nature, for she is herself the reflecting device: the still pool or the mirror. Once deprived of the power to initiate communication, a punishment meted out by Juno for delaying her with excessive talkativeness, Echo can merely repeat the last words she hears. Her own ideas remain unexpressed as she reflects back onto the speaker the words s/he puts into her mouth. When Echo falls in love with Narcissus, it is his words she repeats, and they are the last words she utters before losing her physical form and becoming merely a voice without substance. The thematic similarity between the Narcissus and the Pygmalion episodes is obvious, for both Narcissus’ love for

his own reflection and Pygmalion's love for Galatea, his own creation, are essentially "a reciprocity in which the same loves the same" (J.H. Miller 4). This chapter focuses on situations in which a female character is the protagonist and the perspective is ostensibly feminine, even if it is constructed by a male writer. One of the issues pursued, although not always couched in these terms, is the extent to which, even when delivered from a feminine perspective, the problems faced by the women merely echo the decidedly masculine world view of the author, making Calvino's female protagonists essentially no different from his other female characters. To rephrase this using Ovidian terminology: bearing in mind the Echo-Narcissus episode, I examine whether Galatea's perspective merely echoes that of Pygmalion.¹⁵⁰

Closely allied to the Echo-Narcissus relationship is the notion of the transvested self. In her article "«Saio o bikini? Vada per l'armatura». Esplorazioni di guardaroba del Calvino degli anni '50," Nocentini discusses the extent to which diegetic freedom is handed to the female protagonists in these same three stories. She concludes that, except perhaps for the moment when Suor Teodora exits the story clad once again in her armour, Calvino does not identify with his female protagonists. Although I agree with Nocentini's conclusion in the cases of Isotta and Stefania, I find more evidence of Calvino's transvested presence in Suor Teodora's character and will pursue this issue further at a later stage. In contrast, the discussion surrounding Isotta's and Stefania's characters relies more heavily upon the Echo-Narcissus relationship. The basic premise in both sections is that Calvino, the creator, does not identify with his female characters but that they do reflect his male-orientated world view.

Isotta and Stefania

The presence of a sole female protagonist places "L'avventura di una bagnante" and "L'avventura di una moglie" in a special position in Calvino's oeuvre. Although both stories have been included in a number of previous critical studies, for the most part, the protagonist

¹⁵⁰ Comparing the role played by women to that of Echo is not new. When discussing the role of the "donna di palazzo" or court lady in Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528), Finucci comments that "Sperone Speroni wrote [...] in *Il dialogo della cura familiare* (1535), that woman needs to behave like Echo, who never starts a conversation but always happily answers to any voice." She goes on to add that the "*Cortegiano* similarly casts women as new figures of Echo's punished loquacity" (*Lady* 39).

status of the female characters has been treated as only one aspect of an investigation that has another principal focus. In contrast, the primary concern here is to consider how Calvino, through his third-person narrators and female protagonists, attempts a feminine perspective. Or, according to Calvino, how does Galatea view the world?

“L’avventura di una bagnante” was written and first published in 1951 and is thus one of the earlier *Amori difficili* stories, appearing third in the 1970 edition.¹⁵¹ Signora Isotta Barbarino is a woman of indeterminate age. She is portrayed as an inherently conservative housewife, and although quite possibly relatively young, her outlook is presented as that of a more mature woman: “era una signora davvero alla buona e casalinga” (RR 2: 1076). Isotta’s husband has delivered her to the beach and immediately returned to the city, leaving her alone on vacation. The events of this story take place on the first day of her holiday when she ventures into the water for a swim wearing a newly purchased and very modern two-piece bathing suit. At some stage during the swim, Isotta loses the bottom half of her suit: (“«lo slip»” [RR 2: 1075]), and the story revolves around her actions and the thoughts that go through her mind before she is eventually rescued from her ignominious predicament by an older man and a young boy in a small motorboat. They safely deliver Isotta to shore and to the normality of her everyday existence, her modesty ironically restored by a much less fashionable “gonna verde a fiori arancione” (RR 2: 1084).

In contrast, “L’avventura di una moglie” was not published until 1958 and is thus one of the later written stories in the collection. It has a more youthful and modern tone, immediate indicators including Stefania R.’s more contemporary name and the absence of the title ‘Signora.’ We are also explicitly told that Stefania has only been married for a couple of years. While her husband is out of town on business, Stefania unintentionally spends the night away from home dancing and dining with friends, and later in the company of a young man named Fornero, with whom she is “*un po’* innamorata” (RR 2: 1152). Her problem is that she has left home without the key to the main door of her apartment building, and having waited until too late, she cannot return unnoticed until the concierge opens it again in the morning. After many hours spent driving around together, Fornero finally drops her near her

¹⁵¹ For a discussion of connections between Calvino’s “L’avventura di una bagnante” and Giovanni Pirelli’s short story “L’altro element,” which was published in Gettoni Einaudi in 1952, see Nocentini (“Saio” 64 and 64n16).

building at six, but Stefania discovers that she is still too early and that the door remains locked. To fill in the time before she can discretely slip back inside, she goes to a nearby bar for a coffee. In this bar, Stefania meets and converses with men the likes of whom she would never normally encounter: a barista, a night-reveller, a hunter and a factory worker. Unlike most of the other stories in *Amori difficili*, Stefania's adventure is by and large a positive experience and the word 'difficile' less accurately describes her situation.

Despite their differences, Isotta and Stefania share features that set them apart from most of the principal male characters in *Gli amori difficili*. Both are married women and, with the exception of Arturo Massolari of "L'avventura di due sposi," none of the male protagonists is married. Or perhaps to be more accurate, the marital status of the male protagonists is rarely considered relevant to the discussion. Ricci observes that the "contemplation of man's place in the world is a purpose that penetrates all of [Calvino's] works" (*Difficult* 2), and the fact that the problems faced by the male protagonists clearly deal with their relationships with the outside world supports this observation. In contrast, the difficulties encountered by both Isotta and Stefania are closely connected to their status as married women. Hence, their worlds are by implication reduced to this very narrow and traditional space, which is associated with both limitations and dissatisfaction.

This also differentiates them from Elide Massolari, who is also a married woman and a co-protagonist, and thus could validly be considered a candidate for the discussion in this section. But there is another important difference between the difficulty confronting Elide and her husband Arturo and those faced by Isotta and Stefania. Elide and Arturo's story is an exaggerated example of the problems associated with trying to function at the physical level as a married couple in the rapidly industrialising environment faced by the Italians during the 1950s. They are a modern working-class couple whose differing work schedules cause them to spend very few hours of the day together. The marital bed symbolises their dilemma because each occupies it alone and yet finds solace in the heat left there by the spouse who has recently vacated it. What makes Elide and Arturo's story special is the fact it provides a rare example in Calvino's oeuvre of a relatively positive representation of the married state, for their problem resides in the fact that they wish to spend time together but cannot for reasons beyond their control. De Lauretis writes that this story presents "an insightful rendering of the sexual relation between a woman and a man who love each other" (*Technologies* 83). Yet, I suggest that it is also possible to read the story more cynically and

to consider it a literary representation of the Lacanian notion of desire as situated in absence. As Jacqueline Rose explains in her “Introduction” to Lacan’s *Feminine Sexuality*, “Desire functions much as the zero unit in the numerical chain—its place is both constitutive *and* empty” (32).¹⁵² Although Elide and Arturo are portrayed as initially happy to see one another, after a short time together they reach the point “di urtarsi, di dirsi qualche parola brutta” (RR 2: 1164); for both of them, desire is intensified by the physical absence of the other.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this investigation, the important factor is that Elide’s problem is aligned more closely to that of the other male protagonists than it is to that of Isotta and Stefania. The difference is that, despite the difficulties faced at the personal level, Elide and Arturo are essentially represented as equals and operate as a unit facing outwards towards stresses presented by the wider world. In contrast, both Isotta and Stefania face issues that stem primarily from their positions in relationship to their husbands. Of the two, Stefania’s problem is more directly related to her married state, for the question she grapples with is whether enjoying the company of men who are not her husband, even in the absence of a sexual relationship, can be considered an act of adultery. On the other hand, Isotta’s problem is primarily an identity issue, a question of propriety and of living within the bounds of acceptable feminine behaviour. To use Re’s words, “[t]he loss of [her] suit ironically represents a veritable loss of identity” (“Ariosto” 219); and Isotta’s identity is that of the “signora vestita” (RR 2: 1078).

The centrality of a male figure, albeit an absent husband, to both Isotta’s and Stefania’s stories recalls a passage in Felman’s *What Does a Woman Want?* While discussing difficulties encountered deciphering apparent textual ambiguities in Balzac’s *The Girl with the Golden Eyes*, a novel that narrates a triangular relationship in which a woman loves both a woman and a man, Felman comments that it took her a great deal of time and effort to realise that these difficulties arose primarily “from the confusion, the misreading, the mistakes made by (experienced by) a man (a suitor) in his difficulty—and indeed his impossibility—of grasping the situation from his male perspective.” She goes on to write that this perspective is “a predominant, stereotypical perspective that puts men [...] at the center of women’s lives and that cannot conceive of femininity except as subordinate to man [...] at its center” (18). I suggest that the plots of both “L’avventura di una bagnante” and “L’avventura

¹⁵² See Lacan’s “The Meaning of the Phallus” (74–85) in *Feminine Sexuality* for a fuller explanation of this idea.

di una moglie” illustrate this stereotypical perspective well. Like Balzac’s narrator, Henri de Marsay, Calvino gives every impression that he was also incapable of conceiving of a problem that a woman might face that did not centre on her relationship with and subordination to a man: in both of these examples, a husband. In doing so, Calvino portrays a decidedly patriarchal view of the world, and as I indicate in the following analysis, by delivering these stories from a feminine perspective while adhering to a male-centred world view, Calvino introduces some conflicting attitudes and ambiguities to his texts.

The second feature that unites Isotta and Stefania and sets them apart from their male counterparts (and Elide) is the association of the notion of sin with their predicaments. Significantly, sin and the idea of penance also strengthen the link between these women and Suor Teodora, who relates that she has been given the arduous task of writing stories by her Mother Superior as her penance and as a means of earning eternal salvation. The nature of the sins does, however, vary between the narratives. Stefania’s adventure is quite emphatically associated with adultery, whereas the nature of Isotta’s ‘transgression’ offers wider interpretations. It is associated with the themes of vanity, pride and desire for more freedom, but her punishment is clearly nakedness. Notwithstanding the obvious differences, I suggest that Calvino’s linkage of the difficulties faced by all three female protagonists to the idea of sin is a significant aspect of his portrayal of the feminine, especially since he makes a particular point of emphasising the lack of religious influence in his upbringing and presents the problems faced by his male protagonists in a very secular fashion.

Isotta

In Ricci’s opinion, “negativity [...] forms the basis for all of [Calvino’s] work” (“Silence” 60), and among the protagonists of *Gli amori difficili*, Isotta is certainly not alone in finding herself caught up in an unfortunate and absurd set of circumstances. It is also true that, like her hapless male counterparts, Isotta’s predicament is exacerbated by her own seemingly irrational decision making. All the same, there is a fundamental difference between her situation and that of such irrational male characters as the myopic Amilcare Carruga, who actively chooses to hide behind thick black spectacle frames; Antonino Paraggi, who makes a conscious decision to explore the world of photography; or even the featureless ‘I’ narrator of “L’avventura di un automobilista,” who of his own volition jumps into his car after an argument with his (ex-?) girlfriend Y and sets out on a schematic journey from his home at

point A with the hope of joining Y at point B. Similarly, Enrico Gnei is invited, not forced, to spend the evening with the “bella signora”; Amedeo Oliva might protest his lack of interest in the sun-tanned woman, but he is only the hapless victim of his own desire; and even if one accepts that the young soldier Tomagra is seduced by, rather than the seducer of, the widow on the train, he still plays the ‘active’ role in the episode. The significant difference is that Isotta is a passive victim and has her difficulty thrust upon her in a way that the male protagonists do not. Isotta may choose to put on her two-piece, but she certainly does not choose to lose it, and none of the male protagonists of *Gli amori difficili* are victimised in this manner.

Nevertheless, as with many of the other protagonists in *Gli amori difficili*, Isotta’s problem arises because she steps beyond her usual mode of being and in her own small way attempts to redefine herself. When she enters the water wearing a newly purchased and very fashionable two-piece bathing suit, Isotta pushes the boundaries of her socially prescribed role of traditional bourgeois housewife. This story was first published in 1951, and although the two-piece swimsuit, as opposed to the bikini, had been in existence for a period of time, it was just beginning to appear as a commonplace item of feminine beach apparel.¹⁵³ Appearing in her new two-piece in the midst of so many strangers makes Isotta feel a little uncomfortable. Although the narrator rather unflatteringly describes her as “un po’ pingue e pigra” (RR 2: 1076), her issue does not lie with her body image, at least when clothed. In fact, we are told that Isotta is proud of her body, it is “una sua gloria, un suo motivo di compiacimento” (RR 2: 1078), and when Isotta enters the water she considers herself clothed, even if somewhat daringly so. Nor is Isotta concerned that her costume indicates a lack of “serietà” on her part, because “ormai al mare andavano tutte così.” Yet in joining the group of modern women wearing two-piece bathing suits, Isotta is stepping beyond her societally prescribed role of conservative housewife and is worried about how she will be perceived by others. She is concerned that, seeing her in such a fashionable costume, her future beach acquaintances will gain the wrong impression and consider her “sportiva, o molto alla moda” (RR 2: 1076), when in reality she is just a very ordinary, unpretentious sort of woman.

Isotta’s vague feeling of unease is dispelled when she enters the water and gives way to the enjoyment of swimming in her new outfit. Although not an athlete, Isotta is confident in the

¹⁵³ See Beth Charleston’s “The Bikini” for a brief history of the bikini.

water and takes pleasure in taking long swims far from the shore. Her new suit gives her such a feeling of intimacy with the sea that she thinks to herself, “Mi sembra d’essere nuda” (RR 2: 1076). Unfortunately for Isotta, merely allowing the idea of nakedness to enter her head brings about this very state, for at some point during her swim and without her being aware of it, she loses the bottom half of her two-piece. Losing one’s costume is not an unheard of event and it is a risk faced by both sexes, but one might still wonder how this happened to Isotta on her leisurely swim in that “mare sereno.” The explanation given in the text is that it probably happened because she was already feeling a “sensazione di sé diversa dal solito” (RR 2: 1076) and so did not notice when a certain movement of her hip caused some buttons to unfasten.

Not surprisingly, finding herself semi-naked in such a public place causes Isotta a great deal of anguish. The greater part of the story revolves around the thoughts that pass through her mind during the many hours she spends alone in the water before being rescued by a fisherman and his young son. These thoughts expose a confused attitude to her own body, particularly her naked body, and involve some interesting revelations about how she views her relationship to others, whether it be her husband, or to men and women in general. Like Stefania and Suor Teodora, Isotta links her difficult situation to the notion of sin, viewing her naked state almost as a form of divine retribution. But Isotta’s predicament is also quite obviously a parody of the damsel in distress motif with the interesting difference of being recounted from an ostensibly feminine perspective.

In “Ariosto and Calvino: The Adventures of a Reader,” Re points to the clear links between Isotta’s story and the episodes in cantos 10 and 11 of Ariosto’s *Furioso*, which tell of the rescues of the “beautiful naked Angelica” (who is rescued by Ruggiero) and of Olimpia (who is rescued by Orlando in the mistaken belief that he is rescuing Angelica) (219). Although the incidents occur at different times, both women are tied up and threatened by the same sea monster on the shores of the island of Ebuda. The danger that faces Isotta is less dramatic but potentially no less serious. After swimming to the point of exhaustion, she finally manages to keep herself from drowning by clinging to a rust-coloured buoy. However, despite a Rubinesque “dolce pinguedine” (RR 2: 1083) that allows her to stay in the water longer than most, Isotta is not out of danger and nearly succumbs to the cold.

In the traditional damsel in distress narrative, the damsel is saved by her valiant knight, who either marries her himself or marries her off to a worthy suitor; this, as we have already seen, is Sofronia's destiny. Needless to say, marriage cannot be the outcome for Isotta, who is already a married woman. Yet with his customary agility, Calvino still manages to keep her story firmly within the boundaries of the tradition, for Isotta seeks a traditional narrative and the fact that the story is related from a feminine perspective alters none of the motif's essential elements. In fact, as Jeannet observes, "[t]he world imagined from a 'female' perspective in Calvino turns out to be a mirror image of the world in its 'male' version" (167–68). Isotta's story never departs from the stereotypical perspective identified by Felman that puts men at the centre of women's lives. Isotta can only conceive of being rescued by a man: "Nelle sue deluse fantasie, le persone cui aveva sperato di potersi rivolgere erano sempre uomini" (RR 2: 1080). She reasons that "[m]ai le donne l'avrebbero salvata" and despairs that "le mancava l'uomo" (RR 2: 1081). The influence of the *Furioso* is very much in evidence in the description of Isotta's rescue, even if there are some obvious differences. The Ariostan tale involves two damsels and two valiant knights, but in "L'avventura di una bagnante," "Ariosto's doubling of the rescuing motif is ironically mimicked and estranged by Calvino, who keeps the same number of rescuers but unifies the action" (Re, "Ariosto" 219). Isotta is eventually saved, but her 'valiant knights' take the unglamorous, yet sexually unthreatening, guises of an older man and an eight-year-old boy bearing an "esagerato vestito verde e arancione" (RR 2: 1085).¹⁵⁴ From Isotta's perspective, it appears that her predicament is resolved exactly as it should be: "a un tratto tutto diventò perfetto ed immancabile." She is rescued and her rescuers are unthreatening males. Just as the newly metamorphosed Galatea blushes in the presence of Pygmalion, Isotta is said to turn from "pallida" to "rossa come il fuoco" (RR 2: 1084) as she covers her nakedness with the green and orange skirt, while her rescuers turn tactfully to look at seagulls on the horizon.

Significantly, the imagery Calvino associates with Isotta's rescue also allows him to symbolically fulfil the marriage component of the traditional damsel in distress motif, for the impression the three of them make sitting together in the boat is such that "chi guardava da

¹⁵⁴ The garment the man and boy bring to Isotta is variously described as a "vestito verde e arancione" (RR 2: 1085), "una sottana" (RR 2: 1083), and "una gonna verde a fiori arancione." Whether it is a dress or a skirt is unclear, but as "un vestito dalla moglie d'un pescatore" (RR 2: 1084), it is probably not "molto alla moda" (RR 2: 1076), which symbolically returns Isotta to her mundane existence as an ordinary housewife.

terra certo credeva che quei tre fossero una famigliola” (RR 2: 1084). Calvino metaphorically marries Isotta to her elder rescuer, but he extends his metaphor a step further, completing the task of restoring Isotta to the patriarchal order by adding the young boy to the picture. That Isotta never fits the description of the independent and self-sufficient Freudian narcissistic woman, recuperated by the arrival of a child, is just one of the many contradictory features of her characterisation. Arguably, the entire scene, both the ‘little family’ and their surroundings, is merely a metaphorical and parodic rendition of the ideal, for it is all a fiction. Isotta and the two males are not a little family any more than Isotta is a Freudian narcissistic woman, and as Calvino makes clear in “L’avventura di un poeta,” the reality of life in a fishing community is far from an Arcadian fantasy. Nevertheless, these inconsistencies are easily overlooked in the context of the idyllic imagery that accompanies the fictitious “famigliola” on their journey towards the shore.

In this final passage, the point of view of the omniscient narrator comes more prominently to the fore, and although the perspective remains primarily that of Isotta, she also merges into the wider landscape and becomes one of many once again. This scene metaphorically returns Isotta from her state of arguably self-imposed isolation, resulting from both her long off-shore swim and the loss of «lo slip», to her usual place in society. But despite her unfortunate experience, swimming “al largo” and “il sentirsi parte di quel mare sereno” (RR 2: 1076) represents a certain freedom for Isotta, which is not without erotic overtones.¹⁵⁵ In contrast, reaching the shore in the boat signals a return to her limited housewifely existence. This conflicting state of emotions perhaps explains why “[a]lla signora Isotta [...] sarebbe pure piaciuto che il viaggio continuasse ancora” (RR 2: 1085).

As a backdrop to these conflicting emotions, the reader is presented with an idealistic snapshot of the daily routine of the local fishing community as observed by Isotta and her “famigliola” on their return to the jetty. Renga assigns Isotta a relatively empowered position in this idealised scene, observing that Isotta’s traumatic experience allows her to see more clearly her own position within the world at large. Her enlightened perspective then enables her to “poetically envision her own existence” and “temporarily liberates her from entrapment in the logic of patriarchal culture,” so that Isotta is able to “reposition herself as

¹⁵⁵ Ahern compares Isotta’s erotic relation to the sea to that of Esterina in “Falsetto,” one of the poems in Montale’s *Ossi di seppia* (4).

creator rather than created, as in possession of the gaze rather than the subject of the look” (377). In contrast, Gabriele sums up this final scene by observing that once Isotta is safely clothed, her life is restored to normal and the “focus has shifted away from her” (*Italo* 101); the description of the daily chores being carried out merely emphasises this fact. My own interpretation coincides with Gabriele’s as I find little that is liberating or empowering in the description of Isotta’s rescue and conveyance to the shore. In fact, as I have already indicated, I consider that the passage more readily points to a disempowered Freudian reading. Following this approach, the poetic language found in these final paragraphs merely reflects Isotta’s euphoria at finally being rescued and in a manner that follows the traditional script she has envisaged. The imagery cleverly permits Isotta to marry, however temporarily and falsely, both her desire for freedom (being at large at sea) and her need for traditional respectability (part of a “famigliola”). This Freudian approach to the passage is indirectly supported by Nocentini’s representation of Isotta and her two rescuers as the “riconfigurazione, per quanto posticcia, di un rapporto familiare” (“Saio” 65).

Irrespective of how one interprets the final passage, Isotta’s story remains a treatise on the subject of the gaze. For Isotta, this means being simultaneously the bearer and the object of the gaze. This is a topic that appears to have fascinated Calvino throughout his writing career, and one of his most enlightening musings upon the subject, published nearly thirty years after “L’avventura di una bagnante,” is “Il seno nudo,” now found in the *Palomar* collection.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps not coincidentally, this story also involves a bikini-clad woman on a beach, but this time the unnamed woman is minus the top rather than the bottom half of her suit and her action is voluntary. Delivered from an unambiguously masculine perspective, the entire story centres on how a man should approach a topless woman: should he pretend not to notice, or look with obvious appreciation?¹⁵⁷ In the *Furioso*, neither Angelica nor Olimpia appear

¹⁵⁶“Il seno nudo” (RR 2: 880-82) is included in the 1983 *Palomar* collection (RR 2: 871-979), but it was first published as “Un uomo e un seno nudo all’orizzonte” and appeared in the *Corriere della Sera* 2 August 1977.

¹⁵⁷ According to Jeannet, Calvino was “a writer who reflects on our society’s hypocrisies and predicaments” (176). One of these contentious areas is what Finucci describes as the “politics of looking and of representing femininity in literary works.” Using “Il seno nudo” to illustrate the problem this question poses for a male observer, Finucci writes: “Mr Palomar laments the fact that it is impossible for him to look at a woman with ‘enlightened intentions’ [12], for the customary way of looking and the customary response to that look seem too ingrained in society to accommodate good readings on man’s part [...] no look can ever be innocent” (*Lady* 255–56).

troubled by their nakedness, and the naked Sofronia is portrayed sleeping peacefully in a cave when Torrismoondo discovers her. We are entitled to presume that Sofronia shed her clothes and allowed Agilulfo and Gurdulù to save her when their ship was wrecked off the Breton coast. This was a wise decision in light of the fate of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's Virginie, whose refusal to remove her clothes and swim to shore with a naked sailor results in her death in *Paul et Virginie* (1787).¹⁵⁸ Hers was a death "caused by *modesty*, the quintessentially 'natural' female virtue" (Jordanova 102). Virginie's dilemma may, however, begin to explain why Galatea came to life blushing. Was she overcome with modesty and shame when she realised that she was standing naked before Pygmalion?

Certainly, excessive modesty and the associated shame are nearly Isotta's undoing, and one of the more fascinating aspects of her characterisation is the description of the way in which she views her own nakedness. This becomes even more significant when it is compared with Bice's lack of shame when she removes her clothes and stands naked before Antonino in "L'avventura di un fotografo." But the contrast becomes even more significant when it is compared with the near eulogising of Delia H.'s nudity found in "L'avventura di un poeta" and the confidence displayed by the anonymous woman who shares Amedeo's rocky shoreline in "L'avventura di un lettore." The unnamed sunbather quite unabashedly removes her clothes for Amedeo, a man she has only just met, and both of these women unashamedly wear brief two-pieces, which by 1958, when these two stories were first published, are more likely than Isotta's to resemble a modern bikini. The sun-tanned woman wears "un «due pezzi» succinto e molto rimboccato" (RR 2: 1130), and Usnelli is said to hand Delia "quegli esigui capi di vestiario" (RR 2: 1170) when he sees fishermen approaching their boat. A major difference is that both of these women choose their nakedness. They are also displaying themselves for the benefit of a single narcissistic male observer and are described from his point of view, which is not disinterested. To borrow Finucci's words, "they are fashioned as a mirror of what the onlooker wants" (*Lady* 43), and although Finucci is describing the court women in Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano*, the sentiment is equally applicable here. As already observed, although he devotes few words to the task, Calvino generally makes it clear that his principal male characters are erotically associated with attractive woman. Delia is simply described as a "donna molta bella," and it was noted earlier that there is convincing evidence of an autobiographical element in her characterisation. But

¹⁵⁸ *Paul et Virginie* is one of the books Cosimo reads to Urusla (RR 1: 685).

perhaps a more useful illustration of this point is Amedeo's story. When he begins to admit to himself that he might be interested in a sexual liaison with the sun-tanned woman, Amedeo reassesses his first somewhat negative impression of her as "magra, non giovanissima, né di gran bellezza" (RR 2: 1130), finding her instead "una donna più piacevole e più giovane di quanto non gli fosse prima sembrato" (RR 2: 1132).

The description of the way in which Amedeo's appraisal of the anonymous woman evolves through the story, moving from apparent disinterest to sexual connection, is an interesting illustration in narrative form of Berger's comment that "[m]en survey women before treating them." On the other hand, Isotta's story provides a unique variation of another of Berger's observations: "A woman must continually watch herself" (46). And Isotta's image of herself exhibits a considerably conflicted identity as she swings between obvious narcissism and a form of self-loathing.

Isotta's sudden awareness of her naked state echoes the Genesis story. She may not have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge in literal terms, but she certainly views her nakedness as a form of punishment for metaphorically daring to eat the forbidden fruit. Isotta's conception of the forbidden fruit appears to encompass everything she has done that slightly challenges her status quo and/or gives her pleasure. Adopting Ahern's terminology, Isotta's desire to escape and her inability to do so conform to the "quintessential Montalean image of the trapped butterfly" (4):

Ma forse quel suo abbandono balneare, quella sua voglia di nuotare da sola, quell'allegria del proprio corpo nel costume a due pezzi scelto con troppa spavalderia, non erano i segni d'una fuga iniziata da tempo, la sfida a una inclinazione al peccato, le tappe d'una folle corsa a quello stato di nudità che ora le appariva in tutto il suo misero pallore? (RR 2: 1082)

In the absence of the biblical fig leaves, Isotta is left to confront her shame alone in the water and her initial calm soon turns to desperation. Displaying a complete lack of self-awareness, Isotta attempts to see herself from the point of view of others, performing quite literally Berger's act of watching herself: "ogni tanto si fermava e cercava di guardarsi [...] s'osservava in ogni inclinazione e in ogni luce, si contorceva su se stessa" (RR 2: 1077-78). Whereas Calvino's male protagonists tend to watch others, principally women, Isotta's gaze

falls primarily upon herself as she performs the roles of both voyeur and the gazed-upon Other. Despite the self-reflexive nature of Isotta's actions, the differentiation between the gazer and the gazed upon is maintained, for Isotta has difficulty accepting the sight of what confronts her beneath the water as something that belongs to herself. It is as if she has become two people, and in a strange way, she has. Despite the constant reference to her nudity in the story, the reality is that Isotta has only lost the bottom half of her two-piece, but it is a circumstance that figuratively renders her both Madonna and whore. The part of her that emerges from the water, the 'thinking' half, is still "la signora Isotta," the respectable, fully clothed housewife, who with a feigned "disinvoltura bambolesca" can flit through the company of men "come una grossa farfalla" (RR 2: 1082). On the other hand, the distasteful body that resides below the surface appears to Isotta to be an "altra persona." Much to her distress, Isotta discovers that, try as she might to flee from that 'other person' and to abandon her "alla sua sorte," she is unable to lose that "offensivo nudo corpo." Unlike the beautiful naked Delia, who gracefully dances suspended in the water, Isotta's submerged 'other person' makes movements more reminiscent of a large and ungainly trapped moth. But the final indignity for Isotta is that, with every stroke, "tutta la bianca ampiezza" of that foreign body appears on the surface flaunting its "contorni più riconoscibili e segreti" (RR 2: 1078).

Isotta's reaction to the sight of her naked lower body could also be discussed in terms of 'pudore.' There is no exact English equivalent for this word, which is related to both shame and modesty, but as Evelyne Ender explains, pudore "can only be a personal emotion" (51n23). Pudore is "the name given to a subjective reaction characterized by a physical response (flight) and a mental impression (fear) that arise in the presence of indecency—those unnamed 'things' of sex and the body" (51). Isotta's desire to flee from her nudity and her general timidity about seeking help exemplify the notion of 'pudore.' Her reaction expresses "the fear or repression of sexuality" and through her character Calvino parodies the long tradition of viewing 'pudore' as "a feminine virtue" (51).

Reflecting on her position, Isotta becomes aware that what makes the sight of her naked lower half so alien is that her pleasure in her body resides solely in her image of herself as a clothed woman. She realises that her naked body forms no part of her identity, or her Persona to use Jungian terminology. Priscilla Artom explains that Jung borrowed the term Persona from the Latin word used to describe the masks worn by actors in the classical period. It referred to the "maschera o al volto che un individuo assume per confrontarsi con il mondo"

(20). In Jung's own translated words, the Persona is "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual" (190).¹⁵⁹ Agilulfo, the non-existent knight, is an extreme example of Jung's Persona, for his entire being consists only of the mask. His character literalises Cristina Giorcelli's observation that "se l'abito è *apparenza* (superficie), di un'*essenza* (contenuto), che si maschera, l'abito può essere visto anche come epifenomeno di una mancanza di essenza, di un vuoto di essere" (6). The world of fiction contains many instances of situations in which outward appearance masks "una mancanza di essenza." Examples include Hoffmann's clockwork doll Olympia, the gynoids from the film *Blade Runner* (Ridley), and *The Stepford wives* (Forbes; Levin; Oz), all of which were referred to in the Introduction, but the animated Galatea can also be considered an instance of 'absence of self.'

Isotta is not represented as an artificial being, but in her reflections on her awkward situation, she realises that she has never associated her naked body with her "true nature." Alone or in the presence of her husband, she has always viewed being naked as some sort of disguise and a departure from the norm:

Ora la signora Isotta ricordava che anche sola o in confidenza col marito aveva sempre accompagnato il suo esser nuda con un'aria di complicità, d'ironia tra impacciata e gattesca, come se temporaneamente indossasse dei camuffamenti gioiosi ma spropositati, per una specie di segreto carnevale tra sposi. (RR 2: 1078)

Although referring to nakedness as a form of disguise might seem counterintuitive, the underlying sentiment expressed here is in line with Berger's distinction between nakedness and nudity in art: "To be naked is to be oneself [...] to be without disguise," whereas "[n]udity is a form of dress" (54). Using Berger's terminology, when Isotta is naked with her husband she considers herself to be 'nude.' Or, to return to the Jungian concept of the Persona, for Isotta, being without her clothes is as much a mask, or a metaphorical "form of dress," as are the clothes she wears in her everyday life. Her existential deliberations reveal that her "true nature" is masked in both her dressed and her undressed states. In some

¹⁵⁹ Whereas this quotation comes from Jung's "Anima and Animus," Jung explains the origin of and why he adopts the term Persona in "The Persona as a Segment of the Collective Psyche." Both form part of *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*.

respects, Isotta's cogitations illustrate the different mindsets Glicksberg identifies between the typical nineteenth-century characters that display a "confident faith that there is a true self to be found" (13) and the more twentieth-century approach, in which the protagonist often takes the form of "an absence, a self stripped of ontological truth" (xi). When Isotta enters the water she feels confident in her identity, but with the loss of her swimsuit she perceives herself as "a nothingness, a vain consciousness, a form of existence that cannot justify itself" (xi-ii).

Yet another way to approach Isotta's predicament is through the lens of the female masquerade, a concept that, like the Jungian Persona, also involves the metaphor of the mask. From Isotta's deliberations, it is clear that she views herself only in terms of how she is perceived by others. Whether she sees herself as 'respectable housewife' or 'nude,' Isotta's femininity involves a mask in the Nietzschean sense that femininity itself is a performance. In "The Female Masquerade: Ariosto and the Game of Desire," Finucci discusses the notion of the female masquerade at some length, but of particular relevance here is her observation that "there is no femininity without the mask" but that this mask can only be put on when "there is some femininity to (re)present, some game to play for someone else." The standard according to Freud "is always masculine," or in Lacanian language, "if the self is other to itself and is constituted through the desire of the Other, the masquerade of femininity can be put on only when there is a man at the keyhole" (81). As Isotta's story revolves around the way she is perceived by men, her femininity can be considered a performance.

Continuing with the idea of a game or a performance, the activities Isotta engages in while 'nude' in the company of her husband are further estranged by their association with the concept of the carnival. According to Bakhtin, the "carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent 'life turned inside out,' 'the reverse side of the world' ("monde à l'envers")" (*Problems* 122). And as Umberto Eco further explains, in carnival the "upside-down world" becomes "the norm" for "[c]arnival is revolution" ("Frames" 3):

Carnival, in order to be enjoyed, requires that rules and rituals be parodied, and that these rules and rituals already be recognized and respected. One must know to what degree certain behaviors are forbidden, and must feel the majesty of the forbidden norm, to appreciate their transgression. Without a valid law to break, carnival is impossible. (6)

From Isotta's perspective, nudity, even with her husband, is a form of transgression. The text also suggests that she participates in rather than enjoys their "segret[i] carnival[i]," for we are told that she had become accustomed to having a body with "un po' di riluttanza, dopo i primi delusi anni romantici" (RR 2: 1078). For Gabriele, this "implies that her expectations of sex were very different from her actual experience, suggesting perhaps one of the dangers of the 'mythicized' perception of sex" (*Italo* 100). But Isotta's attitude also conforms to (or echoes) the stereotype that does not acknowledge female desire and suggests that for a married woman the sex act is to be endured rather than enjoyed. This clearly contrasts with the experience of Calvino's male characters, who may suffer disappointments and challenges in their romantic pursuits, but are rarely portrayed as dissatisfied with the sex act.¹⁶⁰

Another very significant feature of Isotta's characterisation is her attitude towards those who could potentially help her. As the epitome of feminine passivity, Isotta never actively seeks to be rescued. In fact, most of her deliberations on that subject result in her finding reasons not to seek help, so that the most proactive thing she does is find herself a buoy to cling to. Even her eventual saviours, the older man and the boy, must work out for themselves that she is in need of assistance; all the initiative and activity belongs to them. Isotta's initial relatively calm and reasoned decision to find help from a lifeguard, or from some other trustworthy boater or bather who shares the beach, turns increasingly towards irrationality and despair. This is symbolised by the gradual darkening of the sky as clouds begin to cover the sun and the midday heat is tempered by an afternoon breeze. Markey observes that, in keeping with the "protagonist's modernist life review," Isotta's deepening despondency leads her to see the parallels between "her nakedness and vulnerability in the water" and "her existential, naked defenselessness on shore" (51).

However, the fact that Isotta's mishap occurs in the middle of a summer's day is also symbolically significant. The danger traditionally associated with the midday sun and the concomitant theme of midday eroticism informs the bewitching effect the sight of the naked Delia has on the poet Usnelli in "L'avventura di un poeta." Whereas the Diana-Actaeon

¹⁶⁰ However, to widen the discussion it should be emphasised that Calvino's female characters typically display "active, decidedly anti-Platonic sexual urges." Using examples from *I nostri antenati*, "Pamela, Viola, Bradamante and Priscilla have clear aspirations when it comes to physical fulfilment, and it is the male heroes, if anything, who fall short of satisfying them or succeed in doing so only by circuitous routes" (Cavallaro 36).

episode was discussed in the context of that story, its biblical counterpart is more relevant here. Isotta's irrational refusal to turn to her most obvious sources of assistance finds resonance in the story of Susanna and the Elders. The story is recorded in Daniel 13 of both the Septuagint and the Roman Catholic versions of the Old Testament and tells of the lecherous desire of two elders for Susanna, a young Hebrew wife. Overcome with lust for the beautiful Susanna, the elders take to spying on her while she walks in her garden at noon. One day Susanna decides to bathe, and the sight of her naked before their eyes "drives them from unbecoming voyeurism to an attempt at rape" (Perella 9). Isotta's distorted reasoning turns all the men who share the water with her into versions of these lecherous elders. Rightly or wrongly, she sees herself as the focus of their points and winks. Her need for trust is met with "quest'ergersi di siepi di malizia e sottinteso, un rovelto di pupille pungenti, d'incisivi scoperti in risi ambigui" (RR 2: 1079). She feels caught up in a spreading net of innuendo, ambushed and the object of voyeuristic lust like Susanna.

Isotta's attitude is clearly narcissistic. Hers is, however, a confused narcissism. She is not the self-sufficient narcissistic woman Freud describes, for she clearly desires the attention and the assistance of men. Unlike her literary ancestors Angelica and Olimpia, or the mythical Andromeda, Isotta's shackles are purely mental; as a strong swimmer she could simply swim to shore and rescue herself after all. As we have seen, for Freud, narcissistic women "have the greatest fascination for men" ("On Narcissism" 89), and Isotta's reasoning certainly discloses that she assumes that she has been placed in her predicament to fulfil men's fantasies: "come se ognuno di questi uomini da anni fantasticasse d'una donna cui doveva capitare quel ch'era capitato a lei, e passasse le estate al mare sperando d'esser lì al momento buono" (RR 2: 1079). However, Isotta's assumption that she will be rescued by a man ("le persone cui aveva sperato di potersi rivolgere erano sempre uomini") poses a dilemma, because she does not want to be rescued by the men she thinks are fantasising about doing just that. According to her own fantasy, her ideal rescuer is a faceless generic entity—a profession rather than a person: "il più possibile anonimo, quasi angelico, un bagnino, un marinaio." The genuine "bagnino" who passes her in the water is far too 'real' for her liking: "aveva labbra così carnose e muscoli così fusi coi nervi" (RR 2: 1080). Yet one of the greatest ironies in Isotta's misadventure is that the trustworthy man and young boy who do eventually rescue her are possibly the only true voyeurs in the story. Unobserved by Isotta, they have viewed her nudity from under the water while wearing goggles. But when Isotta becomes aware of this once safely ensconced in their boat, far from being ashamed, she is

said to gain a quiet narcissistic satisfaction that she has been seen. So, despite nearly drowning in the process, Isotta is portrayed as content that events have unfolded just as she expected. She has been rescued by men and has been the object of the male voyeuristic gaze, and the thought that the sight of her nakedness has given her voyeurs pleasure gives her pleasure in turn.

Although Isotta's attitude to her potential male rescuers is confused, her reason for not turning towards women for assistance is possibly even more so. This aspect demonstrates strongly the male-orientated thinking behind her story and the contradictions that arise from time to time between Isotta's role as the gazer (it is her perspective) and the gazed upon (how the omniscient narrator portrays Isotta). The narrator, who is ostensibly delivering Isotta's perspective, recognises that turning to women for help should be the obvious solution to Isotta's predicament and that "una specie di solidarietà femminile" could be expected in such a crisis. However, we are equally quickly informed that communicating with her own sex is more difficult for Isotta than the "facilità pericolosa degli incontri con gli uomini." The reason for this, according to the narrator, is because "una diffidenza" exists between women, who consider one another rivals for men's attention: a male-centric world view once again.¹⁶¹ Most of the women Isotta sees going by in catamarans are with men, and are described as being jealous and unapproachable. They are said to be seeking the open sea, where they will use their bodies as "l'arma d'una lotta aggressiva e calcolabile" (RR 2: 1080). A sure sign of the irrational narcissism associated with Isotta's characterisation is the fact that she could consider herself a rival for these jealous women as she bobs pathetically in the water wearing a bathing cap that gives her "una bambolesca espressione lievemente permalosa" (RR 2: 1079). Nor does Isotta feel any more confident about approaching groups consisting only of young girls. She is said to simply dismiss them as "giovanelle pigolanti e accaldate" (RR 2: 1080) who would not understand her.

But perhaps most interesting is Isotta's reaction to the self-sufficient sun-tanned blonde who, "piena di sufficienza e d'egoismo" (RR 2: 1080), passes her while travelling alone in a small

¹⁶¹ The lack of feminine solidarity in this androcentric tale accords with Gilbert and Gubar's observation that "female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost inevitably turn against women because the voice of the looking glass sets them against each other" (38). For an explanation of the concept of the looking glass, see chapter 1 "The Queen's Looking Glass" in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (16–44).

boat. Presented as the stereotypical Freudian narcissistic woman, this epitome of desirable and self-sufficient femininity should not be interested in men—something that makes her all the more fascinating to them. Presumably, she would also rescue herself if at all possible from a predicament such as the one in which Isotta finds herself. However, instead of considering this independent woman who is comfortable with her own body her ideal rescuer, Isotta is no more inclined to approach her than she was the other women. Isotta is intimidated by the woman's air of self-assured freedom, imagining that the blonde is setting out to find a place to sunbathe naked with no sense that nudity might be “una disgrazia o una condanna” (RR 2: 1080). It is not really surprising that a woman of Isotta's retiring disposition might hold such a woman in awe and be reluctant to seek her help; however, I suggest that extending her thoughts to imagining the naked blonde nonchalantly sunning herself on the rocks is rather more indicative of a male fantasy than the thoughts of a woman in need of assistance.

Whether there is merit in Bonsaver's suggestion that this story is designed to highlight the “maschio-dipendenza” of the Italian woman of the 1950s, or whether Felman is more insightful when she points to the impossibility for a man (in this case Calvino) to consider a situation in which a man would not be the central figure in a woman's life and thus her saviour, the following passage illustrates just how thoroughly Isotta's world revolves around men:

La signora Isotta s'accorse allora di come la donna sia sola, di come tra le sue simili sia rara (forse spezzata da patto stretto con l'uomo) la bontà solidale e spontanea, che previene gli appelli e che le affianca a un cenno d'intesa nel momento della disgrazia segreta che l'uomo non comprende. Mai le donne l'avrebbero salvata: e le mancava l'uomo. (RR 2: 1080–81).

Nevertheless, despite Spackman's observation that it would have been an anathema to Calvino to concede that there was any element of the unconscious in his writing (7), evidence in support of Felman's position is strong. For although Calvino quite obviously uses parody and subversion to highlight Isotta's irrational reasoning processes, whether intentional or not, it is ultimately only her reasoning that he suggests is irrational, not her reliance on men.

Felman's proposition receives indirect support from Rosemarie Tong, who, in explaining Lacan's somewhat ambiguous thinking on the place of women, the Oedipal complex and the Symbolic order, writes: "women are given the same words men are given: masculine words. These words cannot express what women *feel*, however; masculine words can express only what men *think* women feel" (154). Masculine words uttered by a woman may be estranging, but as the passage just quoted illustrates, the combination of masculine words and a male author can be doubly estranging, resulting in the expression of sentiments that may be barely recognisable to a female reader. Coupling Felman's idea that a man cannot conceive of a situation in which a male figure might not be central to a woman's life with Tong's suggestion of an inability to express what a woman feels using masculine words not only helps explain why Isotta is said to prefer the assistance of men, who do not understand her predicament, to that of her own sex, but also sheds light on why she displays such an extraordinarily mixed attitude towards her own body. In conclusion, Isotta's protagonist status has little influence on the androcentric delivery of her story, for Isotta can only "imagine herself as others [the male world] prefer to imagine her [... and] desire[s] herself to be as others desire her to be" (Finucci, *Lady* 40). Like Galatea, Isotta's character appears to have been "fashioned as a mirror of what [... her creator] wants" (43). However unconventional his writing is in other respects, there is little unconventional in Calvino's representation of Isotta.

Stefania

Stefania's story, like that of Isotta, is built on the foundations of an absent husband—a circumstance that temporarily situates her outside the confines of the married unit and her clearly defined role as wife. According to Gabriele, "Stefania's story is among the least ambiguous in the collection" (*Italo* 103), and in contrast to Isotta's lonely and traumatic misadventure, Stefania's night away from home is presented as a generally positive and empowering experience. However, the more positive tone of Stefania's story does not equate to the delivery of a less androcentric perspective, for Stefania's character is credited with equally confused thinking just as she, like Isotta, is ultimately restored to her place within the patriarchal order.

The presence of a female protagonist is a crucial link between "L'avventura di una bagnante" and "L'avventura di una moglie," but Stefania's story is also commonly contrasted with that

of Enrico Gnei, the protagonist of “L’avventura di un impiegato.”¹⁶² Stefania’s and Enrico’s adventures both play thematically upon the idea of ‘avventura’ as a romantic fling, which is a meaning present in the Italian word but not implicit in the English ‘adventure.’ Despite the obvious link between these two stories, there are essential differences between Stefania’s and Enrico’s circumstances that are significant in the context of this study. For this reason, an analysis of some of the differences in the delivery of these thematically similar ‘avventure’ provides a useful means of contrasting the way Calvino presents an idea from a feminine, as opposed to a masculine, perspective.

Enrico is an unmarried man and an office worker of little distinction, who spends an unsolicited and completely unexpected night of sexual pleasure in the company of a “bella signora.” The title “signora” here merely accords this anonymous woman an element of respect, which may be due entirely to her age or her social position, and does not of itself signify her marital status; she could equally be an unmarried woman, a married woman or even a widow. Whatever her status, no question of sexual impropriety, let alone sin, enters Enrico’s story. Although he proudly announces to an old school friend that he remains “Scapolo!” (RR 2: 1091), all we know about the woman is that she is an unexpected conquest for Enrico: “una donna peraltro controllata e di non facili abbandoni” who lives in a house “in collina” (RR 2: 1086)—a symbolic indicator that she would normally be beyond his social reach.

Enrico’s story starts on a high note, but it is forever in diminuendo, finally levelling when he is reabsorbed into the humdrum reality of his everyday life as an office worker. After he leaves the signora’s house, he fails miserably in his attempts to impart any of his sense of exhilaration to the various people he encounters in the early morning, so that by the time Enrico reaches his workplace his memories of the “paradisi sterminati” (RR 2: 1087) experienced during his sleepless night with the “bella signora” have begun to fade into the routine of the day. In contrast, Stefania’s story maintains a feeling of optimism and buoyancy throughout. However, unlike Friedman, who considers that “the movement in ‘L’avventura di una moglie’ is crescendo,” I merely recognise that the movement of these two stories proceeds for the most part on a “reversed line” (132). I do not view Stefania’s return to her apartment and consequent reinstatement in her disempowered role of bourgeois housewife as

¹⁶² For example, Ahern, Friedman, Gabriele, Nocentini, Renga and Ricci all make this link.

the apex of the story and hence prefer to simply note the story's positive tone. Nevertheless, her adventure does maintain a positive note, even if her high point is merely achieving a very limited degree of independence. Even the thought that her actions might amount to adultery is viewed favourably by Stefania, who sees it as gaining a sort of parity with her husband.

Neither Stefania nor Enrico actively seek their adventures, both of which trace their origins to a pleasant evening spent in the company of friends and a subsequent unexpected turn of events. However, there is a degree of ambiguity associated with Stefania's story, even if it is accompanied at times by an air of naive juvenility, for it is suggested that leaving home without the key to the main door and then not noticing this fact until the door was sure to be locked was not really an accident on her part: "come se lo avesse fatto apposta." The implication is that Stefania has (un?)consciously engineered things so that she could spend the night in the company of "quel ragazzo, Fornero" with whom she is "*un po' innamorata*" (RR 2: 1152). As it transpires, Stefania and Fornero do no more than pass "una notte da ragazzi." They merely drive back and forth until dawn. Enrico's night of endless paradise in the arms of the "bella signora" represents a more traditional romantic conquest, whereas Stefania's 'avventura' leaves her virtue intact, for she successfully resists Fornero's three or four "tentativi [...] più pericolosi" (RR 2: 1154).

The second phase of Stefania's adventure unfolds in the early morning in a bar near her apartment building, where she encounters a variety of men the likes of whom would never normally cross her path as she goes about her restricted daily life as a bourgeois housewife. The disconnect between her normal life and her experience in the bar is reinforced by the fact that not only do these encounters take place in a space she would not typically enter but they also occur at an hour of the day when she would normally still be in bed. Stefania is emboldened because she is anonymous; no one knows that she is a housewife who has been out all night without her husband: "Che aveva da sapere nulla?" (RR 2: 1155). Expressing this in terms of the Jungian Persona, in this bar Stefania removes her mask of respectable housewife with all the social conventions attached to that position and allows her "true nature" to emerge. But despite their very different characteristics, Stefania's adventure, like that of Isotta, is also easily situated within Bakhtin's definition of the carnivalistic life as "life drawn out of its *usual* rut [...] 'life turned inside out'" (*Problems* 122), or the wrong way round. Certainly, once out of her normal environment and relieved of her housewifely

Persona, Stefania discovers to her surprise that she can converse easily with these masculine strangers.

Relying on ideas about gender construction and linguistic function expressed by Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects*, Renga considers that Stefania's ease in the company of the men she encounters in the bar "reveals that 'gender' is socially constructed and perpetuated in that her characterization as a bourgeois and protected wife is shown to be fluid, variable and arbitrary" (383). Renga goes on to explain that:

Although the men in the story still 'engender' her as an available woman, Stefania specifically revisits cultural spaces traditionally associated with the male point of view—in this case a bar in the early hours of the morning—and through her discursive liberty re-engenders both herself and her milieu. (383)

However, because any independence Stefania achieves in this story is short-lived and is contaminated by its association with the notion of adultery, I take a more negative position on Calvino's representation of the world from Stefania's perspective, limiting my discussion of Stefania's positive experience to the liberation afforded by her unfamiliar surroundings and her anonymity, or the emergence from her housewifely Persona, rather than seeing it as a process of re-engenderment.

Ricci considers that as a result of their singular experiences, both Stefania and Enrico "momentarily come alive, aware of the uniqueness of the moment" (*Difficult* 72). But whereas it is her anonymity that liberates Stefania, allowing her to fully enjoy the novelty of her situation, for Enrico to maintain his sense of elation he feels that he must take the opposite path. He must emerge from his anonymity and pronounce to the world that he has been out all night: "ecco che l'avventura della notte avrebbe potuto lasciare un segno" (RR 2: 1092). To signal his adventure, Enrico attempts vainly to adopt the Persona, or put on the mask, of the man-about-town. But he fails in this undertaking and, much to his disappointment, remains a boringly ordinary man in the eyes of those he encounters. This contrasts with Stefania's largely positive, anonymous experience as she confidently orders herself a coffee from the barista; defends herself from the advances of a man who, like herself, has been out all night (the man Enrico would like to impersonate perhaps?); shares an air of complicity with a young hunter; and comfortably converses with a factory worker.

“Stefania era sola, lì in mezzo a quegli uomini, a quegli uomini diversi, e discorreva con loro. Era tranquilla, sicura di sé, non che niente che la turbasse” (RR 2: 1159).

Approaching from a slightly different perspective, Ahern explains their different responses in terms of ‘silence’ rather than ‘anonymity.’ He observes that Stefania’s “freely chosen silence unites her to others, whereas Gnei’s forced silence alienates him from his fellows” (7). However, Stefania’s and Enrico’s different reactions to their respective nights out can equally be explained in terms of taboo; the male and the female protagonist do not face the same taboos. As Renga explains, “Stefania feels as if she is testing her limitations precisely because she has them to experiment with.” On the other hand, although for Enrico his night is just as new and exciting as is Stefania’s, he “experiences no sense of liberation or emancipation” (383) because he breaks no real social convention.

Comparing Enrico and Stefania’s stories is a useful exercise, but it would be misleading to focus solely on the unusually positive nature of Stefania’s adventure, for the positivity could lead one to overlook some of the fundamental presumptions upon which her story builds. These presumptions are significant in an analysis of the way Calvino represents the world from a feminine perspective, and they have no counterpart in Enrico’s story. One of the most crucial of these relates back to Felman’s observation, for although the perspective of this story purports to be feminine, the narrative point of view clearly assigns to Stefania, as it does to Isotta, a very male-centric world view. For this reason, I suggest that the thought processes of both female protagonists can more accurately be said to echo a masculine idea of the feminine perspective rather than deliver a feminine perspective.

In many ways, Felman’s observation lies at the heart of Renga’s further explanation for why their respective nights out leave Stefania in an elated state and Enrico is “left feeling alienated and dejected.” Renga considers that “the reality of social obligation to work and duty” extinguishes Enrico’s positive memories, leaving him to realise the “impossibility of reconciling the realm of passions and senses with that of moral responsibility and accountability” (384). In other words, Enrico’s relationship with the wider world, albeit rather negative, assumes prime importance in his thoughts, moving aside the positive feelings associated with his evening with the “bella signora.” In contrast, the entire focus of Stefania’s story revolves around the way she handles herself in the presence of men in circumstances

that might normally be considered challenging, while simultaneously questioning how this ‘avventura’ might alter her relationship with her husband.

In Nocentini’s words, “Stefania R. è la personificazione di un meccanismo autodifensivo basato sul linguaggio” (“Saio” 62). Although couched in different terms, this view is supported by Bonsaver when he writes that “il destino della signora Stefania [...] è altrettanto ‘maschilizzato’” as that of Isotta, for her entire story centres on finding herself subjected to the courtesies of the male customers of the bar and on her successful manoeuvrings in the company of Fornero. Bonsaver also sees a more political message in Stefania’s story: “la donna borghese incontra l’umanità più genuina e schietta del popolino” (*Mondo* 233). Coupling this covert criticism of the sheltered middle-class woman with Bonsaver’s further suggestion that Calvino intended to represent the male dependency of the Italian woman (234) in this story lends a more cynical glow to Stefania’s essentially positive experience.

The mention of cynicism provides an appropriate introduction to the exploration of perhaps the most pronounced theme in Stefania’s story, namely, her ‘adultery.’ As indicated, the notion of wrongdoing, or sin, is one of the most obvious features linking Stefania’s story to that of Isotta and Suor Teodora/Bradamante. Nonetheless, it is somewhat ironic that the theme of adultery permeates Stefania’s adventure, because, unlike so many of the others in *Gli amori difficili*, there is no sex in her story. For Stefania, adultery lies in the mere contemplation of infidelity, which reflects the biblical definition delivered in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel.¹⁶³ The origins of the word adultery come from the Latin ‘adulterare,’ which means to falsify, corrupt, contaminate or pollute. But despite the broader biblical definition, when applied to relationships between men and women, the word adultery more generally carries with it the understanding of extramarital sex. If Calvino had wished to play a more ambiguous game, he could readily have used the less definite expression ‘infidelity.’ On the contrary, his reference to adultery is explicit, deliberate and repeated, and even if Calvino plays almost parodistically with the word, using it to expose Stefania’s youth and inexperience, he would have been well aware that, historically, to accuse a woman (as opposed to a man) of adultery was not something to be done lightly. The

¹⁶³ According to the definition of adultery found in the Sermon on the Mount, just lusting after a woman (or for a woman, lusting after a man) is sufficient to commit adultery: “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (*King James Bible*, Matt. 5.28).

following quotation from Finucci may refer to views held in Renaissance Italy, but the essence of what is expressed still held currency in many quarters in the 1950s when this story was written:

The worst thing one can do to a woman, and implicitly to the man responsible for her, is to impugn her sexual morality, because not only is she then ridiculed but also the institution of family and the authority of paterfamilias on which she juridically depends are questioned. (*Lady* 63)

The theme of adultery is central to Stefania's adventure. As soon as she leaves Fornero's car, she asks herself if their hours together make her "un'adultera" (RR 2: 1152) and she is still pondering the question at the end of the story. However, by this stage, she has found her answer: "Questo suo nuovo modo di stare in mezzo agli uomini, il nottambulo, il cacciatore, l'operaio, la faceva diversa. Era stato questo il suo adulterio, questo stare sola in mezzo a loro, così, alla pari" (RR 2: 1160).

That Stefania is not completely satisfied with her position as wife is made clear early in the story:

Stefania R. era sposa da un paio d'anni, e non aveva mai pensato di tradire suo marito. Certo c'era in questa sua vita di moglie come un'attesa, la coscienza che mancasse ancora qualcosa. Era quasi una continuazione della sua attesa di ragazza, come se per lei ancora l'uscita completa dalla minorità non fosse avvenuta, anzi le toccasse ora d'uscire da una minorità nuova, la minorità di fronte al marito, ed essere finalmente pari in faccia al mondo. Era l'adulterio, che aspettava? (RR 2: 1154)

Nevertheless, to equate parity with adultery is to equate equality with betrayal, which I suggest shines a somewhat different light on Stefania's adventure. By now, it will be apparent that the word adultery is cleverly employed in this story. By its nature, the word ensures that the existence of her absent husband remains the lens through which Stefania's actions are assessed, a point emphasised near the beginning of the tale when Stefania answers in the affirmative her own question about whether she still loved her husband despite her night spent with Fornero: "Voleva ancora bene a suo marito? Certo, gli voleva bene" (RR 2: 1154). To add a note of ambiguity, however, this positive statement is rather weakened by coming

soon after another question, which remains unanswered, about whether she was really justified in refusing Fornero's request that she leave the car and accompany him into his apartment.

Although Renga finds positive associations in the word adultery used in connection with Stefania's experience, stating that her actions during the night and early morning have "'contaminated' previously and seemingly 'fixed' notions of gender identity" (383), I have great difficulty viewing Stefania's constant rumination on the subject of adultery as anything but a negative aspect of her characterisation. Even if one overlooks the implications of extramarital sexual infidelity associated with the word and relies solely on the broader underlying themes of falsification or contamination inherent in the original Latin, I find Calvino's final linkage of Stefania's feeling of parity with the theme of adultery confused. It appears that Stefania's betrayal of her husband—her adultery—lies not in sexual desire for other men but in her new feeling of equality, both with her husband and with the men she encounters. We are told that Stefania's night out makes her feel as if she has emerged from "la minorità di fronte al marito, ed essere finalmente pari" (RR 2: 1154) and that this feeling of equality indicates to Stefania that she has finally put aside her conjugal duties. Calvino's use of the word adultery in this context can also be read as a sign that Stefania's new sensation of parity is in some way a contamination of her status as a married woman—or that for a wife to feel equal to her husband is in some way adulterous.

Nevertheless, Stefania's story is unusual for its positive tone when compared with the other *Amori difficili* stories, and although she might not really commit adultery in the more commonly understood meaning of the word, Stefania's actions are unconventional for a married woman of her era. She is certainly more proactive than Isotta. Unlike Isotta, Stefania negotiates her own way out of her difficult circumstances and thus avoids becoming a damsel in distress, even if, quite conventionally, her ultimate reward is merely to end up back in her apartment restored to the narrowness of her housewifely existence. Nevertheless, in keeping with the generally positive note accompanying this story, I suggest that although he may shut the apartment door, Calvino does not bolt it. After all, Stefania has glimpsed life beyond those confining walls and has learned that she can function independently; perhaps these are experiences that she will build upon. Or to rephrase this in terms of the Pygmalion scenario, it might take Galatea a while to do so, but there are hints that she might eventually find her voice.

Suor Teodora/Bradamante

In contrast to Isotta's and Stefania's stories, which are openly presented from the perspective of a sole female protagonist through the medium of an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator, *Il cavaliere inesistente* is a complex metadiegetic fiction consisting of a primary and a secondary narrative. It is an early example of the postmodern novel, albeit one with a neoclassical twist, and the existence of two narrative levels is not disclosed until chapter 4 when the story is already well under way. Moreover, the true complexities of the various diegeses in the narrative do not finally become clear until the end of the novel. As befits one of Calvino's more theoretically challenging pieces of writing, *Il cavaliere inesistente* has already attracted a great deal of critical attention, but issues relating specifically to the presentation of the story from a feminine perspective have so far remained relatively unexplored.

The complex narrative structure of this novel, which deliberately plays upon textual boundaries and the writing process itself, means that the Pygmalion-Galatea relationship is far more fluid and open to question here than in other areas of this study. Whereas previously Calvino as Pygmalion figure has been situated in the extra-textual space, even if identification with certain characters has been acknowledged, in this section, the notion of Calvino's presence within the text is also explored. I investigate whether he also enters the text transvested in the guise of the writing nun, Suor Teodora, who as first-person narrator and author of the secondary narrative can be considered variously a Galatea and a Pygmalion figure. Attention is directed principally towards issues raised in the primary narrative, for this is the level that features the female protagonist and from which all other areas of significance in this discussion originate. But obviously, the way that Suor Teodora represents her alter ego, Bradamante, in the secondary narrative is a matter of key interest and forms an important part of the conversation. When Suor Teodora takes on the role of writer, technically, she becomes a Pygmalion figure and Bradamante must be viewed as her creation. Nevertheless, the question becomes complicated by the extent to which the story Suor Teodora writes should be considered 'history,' her own 'autobiography,' or simply a work of

fiction, while always bearing in mind that, in the end, the whole undertaking is a fiction created by Calvino.

Relevant in this context is an aspect of Ovid's Pygmalion episode that has not been highlighted previously. Although it has been emphasised that the Pygmalion passage forms part of a concatenating sequence, attention has not been drawn to the fact that the originary point of this sequence is the Orpheus-Eurydice episode. Pygmalion's story is one of the songs of Orpheus and is thus a narrative within a narrative. After Orpheus' failed attempt to retrieve his dead wife, Eurydice, from the underworld, he plays music in the wilderness and shuns the company of women in favour of that of youths, just as Pygmalion later rejects the Propoetides in favour of his statue. In the words of Thérèse Migraïne-George:

it is the death of Eurydice which inspires Orpheus with the tale of Pygmalion, thus allowing him not only to compensate symbolically for her absence by casting her in the image of Pygmalion's statue, but also to take control over his destiny by fancying himself as a sculptor creating and vitalizing his own erotic object. (236)

Migraïne-George in her turn draws from ideas expressed by John Heath:

In Orpheus' ideal world, art and passion combine so powerfully that they can bring the dead to life [...]. Nowhere is this more clear than in the famous tale of Pygmalion, where Orpheus carefully recreates his own story, but this time with a happy ending [...]. Orpheus, now writing his own tale, puts things back in order, with the master artist animating stones again. (Heath 368–69)¹⁶⁴

To further contextualise both Orpheus' and Pygmalion's positions in the *Metamorphoses*, I refer back to Bauer's suggestion that the piecing together of Pygmalion's statue can be read as a metaphor for the literary construction of the *Metamorphoses* itself. Interpreted

¹⁶⁴ Pygmalion's statue is made from ivory and not stone. However, this is a unique situation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The reference to stone in Heath's quotation is part of a wider discussion and is not really referring to the statue but rather (at least in part) to Pygmalion himself. It relies on meaning inherent in the Latin *stupeo*: "The collection of ideas behind *stupeo*—paralysis, shock, amazement, silence, petrification—has become Orpheus' trademark..." (362). According to Heath, "Pygmalion is symbolically turned to stone [stupefied/*stupet*] as he vitalizes the ivory statue of his wife-to-be" (370).

figuratively, it provides “the fundamental thesis of [Ovid’s] poem” (13), so that Pygmalion’s creation of Galatea can be considered a literary representation of Ovid’s creation of the *Metamorphoses*. Remaining at the figurative level, the three-stage linkage between Ovid (the author) and Orpheus and Pygmalion (his literary creations) provides a useful extra dimension to this examination of the Calvino, Suor Teodora and Bradamante relationship, offering a more indirect approach to the Pygmalion-Galatea episode while still remaining within the broader parameters of the Pygmalion paradigm. In addition, it further validates the breaking down of the textual boundary required when speaking of Calvino as a Pygmalion figure, particularly when the discussion centres on his presence, even if figurative, within his own texts.

A bare outline of the primary and secondary narratives has already been given, and many aspects of the secondary narrative have been well examined in the discussion surrounding the representations of both Sofronia and Priscilla. Although the novel is called *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Agilulfo, the non-existent knight, features only in the secondary narrative and is not universally recognised as the protagonist of even that story. The primary narrative is, at least seemingly, simply the nun Suor Teodora’s homo- and intradiegetic account of both her life in the convent and the process of writing “Il cavaliere inesistente.”¹⁶⁵ She introduces herself to the text in the role of an author who is both hetero- and extradiegetic to the events she is relating: “Io che racconta questa storia sono Suor Teodora, religiosa dell’ordine di San Colombano. Scrivo in convento, desumendo da vecchie carte, da chiacchiere sentite in parlatorio e da qualche rara testimonianza di gente che c’era” (RR 1: 979).

The secondary narrative, which is by far the longer of the two, is the novel “Il cavaliere inesistente,” or the story written by Suor Teodora in her framing (primary) narrative. Although Suor Teodora is ostensibly both hetero- and extradiegetic to the novel she writes, in chapter 12, the final chapter of the ‘greater’ novel, the presence of Calvino’s overriding authorial hand finally comes to the fore, reminding the reader that real control lies in the extra-textual dimension and that the entire narrative is a fiction. In this concluding chapter, the primary and secondary narratives merge into the one narrative with a ‘deus ex machina’

¹⁶⁵ As a means of distinguishing between the novel *Il cavaliere inesistente* and the narrative that Suor Teodora is said to be writing, when it is not referred to as the secondary narrative, Suor Teodora’s story is called “Il cavaliere inesistente.”

involving Suor Teodora's unmasking of herself to disclose that she is in fact the Amazon Bradamante: "Sì, libro. Suor Teodora che narrava questa storia e la guerriera Bradamante siamo la stessa donna" (R 1: 1064). Of course, this knowledge also makes transparent the fact that Suor Teodora is really both homo- and intradiegetic to the story she writes, which is now revealed as a single autodiegetic narrative, albeit one with two distinct layers.¹⁶⁶ Perhaps more importantly, it also makes the reader question where and how the ultimate authorial figure, Calvino, really fits into this scenario.

Calvino's choice of a cloistered female as the conduit through which to deliver the story remains one of the more intriguing features of this narrative, and it is no surprise that Suor Teodora's role in the novel has already invited wide-ranging commentary. Drawing upon the observations of a variety of critics, the intention of this discussion is to focus specifically on issues that deal directly with Calvino's decision to create a woman, who is also a nun, to fulfil the role of narrating persona. I also look at her characterisation and question whether Calvino alters in any way the delivery of either the primary or secondary narrative to reflect his introduction of a female narrator/author.

Suor Teodora's position in the text is associated with a degree of confusion from the outset. Like the preceding three chapters, the introductory paragraph of chapter 4, which comes just before Suor Teodora introduces herself, seems to be written by an omniscient narrator and suggests that the narrative is recording events that happened in a previous era:

Ancora confuso era lo stato delle cose del mondo, nell'Evo in cui questa storia si svolge [...] il mondo pullulava di oggetti e facoltà e persone [...]. Era un'epoca in cui la volontà e l'ostinazione d'esserci, di marcare un'impronta, di fare attrito con tutto ciò che c'è, non veniva usata interamente.... (RR 1: 979)¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Following Genette, the term autodiegetic refers to a narrative in which there is a homodiegetic narrator who is also the protagonist/hero (*Narrative Discourse* 245). Although Suor Teodora fits this description, Bradamante's protagonist status is a far more difficult case to argue. However, as it eventually becomes clear that they are the same person and because both narrative levels merge into the single story, I consider that this can legitimately be called an autodiegetic narrative.

¹⁶⁷ Although it appears to be referring to a bygone era, this statement is generally read as a veiled comment by Calvino on contemporary society (late 1950s). Calvino adds support to this view when he states in his Introduction to the English edition (1980) of *I nostri antenati* (translated by Isabel Quigley): "I would say, in

But in introducing herself as author of the story we have been reading, Suor Teodora immediately disrupts what has thus far appeared to be a relatively straightforward fantasy tale with a strong historical base. She adds further uncertainty by delivering conflicting messages, and clearly signals her status as an unreliable narrator by dropping hints to the reader that all may not be what it seems with her story. The first signal is semantic and comes in her introductory line: “Io che racconto questa storia sono Suor Teodora.” The word ‘storia’ means both story and history in Italian, and whereas the first translation points more readily towards fiction, the second suggests something more factual. Exploiting the ambiguity inherent in the word ‘storia’ is a hallmark of postmodern fiction, and Hutcheon refers to narratives that blur the traditional boundaries between literature (or fiction) and history (or fact) as “historiographic metafiction” (*Poetics* ix). As Hutcheon explains, “[h]istoriographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today” (114). Although Calvino broaches the issue in *Il barone rampante*,¹⁶⁸ in *Il cavaliere inesistente* he far more graphically illustrates that “the contents of a historical account, like those of any text, are inevitably mediated by language: namely, an arbitrary system of signs arranged on the basis of artificial codes and conventions.” In this third historical fantasy, Calvino accords writing “a vibrant life of its own” (Cavallaro 23). Not that *Il cavaliere inesistente* ever purports to be an historical novel. Instead, it is an early postmodern metafiction with historical roots, and those roots are more firmly based in literature than history. Nonetheless, the relationship between history and literature and Hutcheon’s observations thereof remain relevant, for the narrative Suor Teodora relates (“*Il cavaliere inesistente*”) strongly references Ariosto’s *Furioso*, which in its turn situates itself in the time of the war between Charlemagne’s Christian paladins and the Saracen army’s invasion of Europe.

The discordant note in Suor Teodora’s introductory passage becomes increasingly strident the more she tells about herself and her work. She relates that she is working with information obtained from old papers found in the convent archive (“desumendo da vecchie carte,” and later, “seguendo su carte quasi illeggibili una antica cronaca” [RR 1: 1036]), from parlour

fact, that the *Knight*, in which references to the present seem most remote, says something that touches the present situation most closely of the three” (x).

¹⁶⁸ For example, in the last chapter of *Il barone rampante*, Biagio reveals that Cosimo’s story comes from thoughts he (Biagio) is recording in his notebook as an old man.

chat (“da chiacchiere sentite in parlatorio”) and from the testimony of people who were present when the events she records occurred (“da qualche rara testimonianza di gente che c’era”). Although parlour chat hints at the exaggerations associated with rumour, overall these statements infer that Suor Teodora is writing about things that actually happened; or ‘storia’ as history. However, the temporal separation between the act of recording and the events related is rendered decidedly opaque. On the one hand, Suor Teodora’s statement that she is working from old papers suggests that she is relating events from a more remote past. In contrast, her reliance on the testimony of people who were there implies that she is writing about relatively recent happenings and that she has spoken with these people in person. Provided one accepts the veracity of Suor Teodora’s story, hindsight reveals that she is herself one of the witnesses, and that despite a strong sense of temporal separation, the events she records and the act of writing must be almost contemporaneous.

Although these temporal irregularities are perplexing, Suor Teodora’s most glaringly equivocal statement comes immediately after she discloses the sources of her information when she discusses her familiarity, or lack thereof, with the events she records:

Noi monache, occasioni per conversare coi soldati, se ne ha poche: quel che non so cerco d’immaginarlo, dunque; se no come farei? E non tutto della storia mi è chiaro. Dovete compatire: si è ragazze di compagna, ancorché nobili, vissute sempre ritirate, in sperduti castelli e poi in conventi; fuor che funzioni religiose, tridui, novene, lavori dei campi, trebbiature, vendemmie, fustigazioni di servi, incesti, incendi, impiccagioni, invasioni d’eserciti, saccheggi, stupri, pestilenze, noi non si è visto niente. Cosa può sapere del mondo una povera suora? (RR 1: 979–80)

From the way this passage unfolds, it is apparent that a poor nun might actually know a great deal about the ways of the world. Indeed, Suor Teodora illustrates this very point when she relates in the secondary narrative that Sofronia, while in the guise of Suor Palmira, was carried off and deposited in a harem after her convent was sacked by Moorish pirates.

Nevertheless, a quarter of the narrative has already unfolded before the reader learns that the author of the story s/he has been reading thus far is a nun and that the story will unfold on two levels. To add to the confusion, the discrepancies in Suor Teodora’s introductory remarks

and her late introduction to the text immediately signal the presence of irony. Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg explain that “[i]rony is always the result of a disparity of understanding. In any situation in which one person knows or perceives more—or less—than another, irony must be either actually or potentially present” (240). As “the control of irony is a principal function of point of view” (241), the unexpected revelation by Suor Teodora of her status as author of the secondary narrative further destabilises any ideas the reader may have been previously forming about the identity of the narrator of “Il cavaliere inesistente.” Although just how deviously Suor Teodora has controlled irony does not become completely transparent until the very end of the narrative.

In chapter 4, what initially appeared to be an unusual fantastic tale with an omniscient and reasonably reliable narrator reveals itself as a technically complex narrative with obvious contradictions and inconsistencies. As Tracy Barrett observes, by the end of the tale it becomes clear that “[t]here are virtually no rules of standard narrator-reader relationship that Teodora/Bradamante does not break” (66). One of the most fundamental of these is Suor Teodora/Bradamante’s access to the minds of her companions. In the words of William Riggan, the “protagonist-narrator or fictional autobiographer is, to be sure, subject by nature to human limitations in recalling events and words and in delving into other characters’ minds” (23). According to this dictum, as protagonist-narrator of the primary narrative, Suor Teodora’s commentary on the writing process and life in the convent can, at least in theory, be relied upon. However, the same level of trust should not be accorded the ‘storia’ she relates, for as an autodiegetic narrative, Bradamante’s is the only mind Suor Teodora can legitimately enter. By the end of the narrative, the necessarily speculative nature of the many perspectives Suor Teodora presents to the reader through the medium of an omniscient narrator should be apparent, but perhaps the most interesting point is that Bradamante’s perspective is almost completely absent.

All three of the fantasy novels are delivered by an intradiegetic narrator who is involved but in some way removed from the action. As Calvino himself explains in his Nota to the trilogy, “Ho scelto ogni volta un personaggio marginale o comunque senza una funzione nell’intreccio.” Medardo’s young nephew, who narrates *Il visconte dimezzato*, is “un «io» ragazzo, una specie di Carlino di Fratta,” whereas Calvino explains Biagio’s narrating presence as a distancing device of the nature of Serenus Zeitblom. Not unexpectedly, Calvino devotes greater space to explaining his choice of Suor Teodora as the narrator of *Il cavaliere*

inesistente. He states that he decided to use a narrator that existed completely outside of the narration in this tale and describes his decision to create a narrating nun to fulfil this role as simply a “gioco di contrasti.” Calvino then explains that the presence of an “«io» narratore-commentatore” (RR 1: 1218) shifted his focus from the events of the narrative to the relationship between the complexities of life and the page upon which these complexities are played out in writing, adding that as the story developed, “la monaca, la penna d’oca, la mia stilografica, io stesso, tutti eravamo la stessa cosa” (RR 1: 1219). Thus, although Calvino admits to identifying with his narrator, he suggests that it was not premeditated but rather that it occurred as he was writing. Similarly, Calvino explains that the idea of making Suor Teodora and the warrior Bradamante the same person was simply a “colpo di scena” that came to him at the last minute, and he deflects attention by stating that it did not signify anything. Yet in seeming contradiction, in the very next sentence he invites the reader to extrapolate that in combining the duo he was trying to wed “l’intelligenza interiorizzatrice e la vitalità estroversa” (RR 1: 1219). Calvino does not comment on whether the “colpo di scena” came upon him while he was writing the narrative, as it does upon the reader while reading the text, or whether he had it planned in advance of putting pen to paper.

One indication that there was an element of premeditation in Calvino’s “colpo de scena” can be found in the names he gave the female duo. Albeit parodically, Bradamante clearly references Ariosto’s Bradamante, one of the better known female knights, or Amazons, in Western literature. Together with Ruggiero, the Saracen warrior who converts to Christianity to marry her, she is one of the ancestors of the Italian branch of the noble House of Este. But just as there is considerable uncertainty about the ‘true’ identity of Suor Teodora, the origins of her name can also be traced to a number of possible sources. One obvious suggestion is Theodora the wife of Justinian I, the sixth-century emperor of the Roman Byzantine empire. An influential woman in her time, she is recognised by some as one of the pioneers of feminism. Another convincing possibility is the fourth-century Roman Theodora, who refused to renounce her vow of celibacy and escaped from the brothel in which she had been incarcerated dressed in the clothes of the Christian soldier Didymus.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ There are conflicting accounts of the lives of both of these saints. Theodora, the empress, is a saint in the Greek Orthodox tradition, and Theodora (and Didymus) is a Roman Catholic saint.

The presence of an intradiegetic narrator in *Il cavaliere inesistente* is not unusual per se. Indeed, Sandy Waters argues that “the most evident way in which the Italian historical novel [...] imitates and incorporates the characteristics of historical discourse is through the literary figure of the intradiegetic narrator (who addresses the reader in some way while attending to the narrated story)” (72). The really curious feature in *Il cavaliere inesistente* is Calvino’s creation of a cloistered woman, who is also a writer, to fulfil this role. Calvino’s identification with certain of his characters is widely accepted, and his admission that he studies himself through his writing (“in fondo non studio che me stesso”) has already been well noted. His affinity with Suor Teodora and his use of her character as a means of entering the text is also commonly acknowledged by the critics. For example, I. T. Olken writes that a “strong case might be made for seeing signs of [Calvino’s] presence in Biagio and the other narrators” (40) of the trilogy, and later specifically states that “Suor Teodora allows Calvino an actively internalized role” (73) in the text. Hanna Flieger proposes that “Suor Teodora-Bradamante sta per lo scrittore” (41),¹⁷⁰ and Bolongaro colourfully acknowledges Calvino’s presence in the text by drawing upon “Flaubert’s famous dictum” to pronounce, “Suor Teodora=Bradamante c’est moi!” (156). Carles Besa Camprubí goes even further, stating that the invention of a narrator substitute with her own name and identity gave Calvino the perfect camouflage to cast out allegations of autobiography, something he had previously rejected outright (130).¹⁷¹ Calvino’s use of Suor Teodora’s character to reflect upon the writing process, a subject that greatly interested him, is particularly widely recognised and well discussed, but Scrivano’s article is one of the more recent and thorough explorations of the topic. Scrivano observes that through Suor Teodora’s activity, “la sua fatica sul foglio, le sue attese, i suoi vuoti, il suo tedio, ma anche il suo entusiasmo [... il] lettore [...] si trova trasportato fin dentro la fucina dello scrittore; lo vede impegnato nel suo spazio, nel suo ambiente, preso nella sua propria quotidianità” (95). Whether intentional or not, I suggest that Scrivano’s switch to the masculine ‘scrittore’ immediately after commenting on the activities of a female character can also be interpreted as a tacit nod to Calvino’s identification with his narrating nun.

¹⁷⁰ To be accurate, in the statement Flieger is linking Bradamante to Calvino through her love for, first, Agilulfo, as representation of abstract construction, geometric rationality, perfection and so forth, and then for Rambaldo in representing new forms, measuring oneself against the real, and hence, action.

¹⁷¹ “la invención de un de un narrador-sustituto con nombre propio y fuerte identidad y presencia le sirve a Calvino de perfecto camuflaje para conjurar todo atisbo de autobiografismo, un registro ante el cual nuestro discreto autor siempre ha mostrado un vivo rechazo” (Besa Camprubí 130).

The idea of an author entering his text, even if only metaphorically, is hardly novel. As just observed, at the metaphorical level, it is arguable that Orpheus (an intra-textual narrator) uses Pygmalion's character as a vehicle through which to fulfil his desire to bring his beloved Eurydice back to life. Similarly, the construction by Pygmalion of his ideal woman has been read as a metaphorical representation of Ovid's own masterful act of writing the *Metamorphoses*—by implication the 'ideal' narrative. A postmodern example of authorial presence in the text within a novel referred to earlier can be found in Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In this narrative, the fictitious author at one point situates himself on a train as a character within the text he is writing. However, since these examples all involve men, the issue of cross-dressing does not arise in these instances of identification of the creator with one of his/her creations. In contrast, Calvino's creation of Suor Teodora does raise this spectre, and the presence in this narrative of a character that is a writer is only really surprising because that character is a writing nun: "il più improbabile, il più travestito dei travestimenti maschili" (Pedriali 87). All the same, although Calvino readily assigns the role of writer to a female character and identifies strongly with her undertaking, whether this identification can be described as authorial transvestism, or cross-dressing, is not so certain. In fact, Nocentini considers that the lack of diegetic freedom afforded Calvino's female protagonists (Isotta, Stefania and Suor Teodora/Bradamante) negates any suggestion of authorial transvestism in these texts. In her opinion, the only point in *Il cavaliere inesistente* where authorial transvestism can be discerned is at the end of the narrative when Suor Teodora throws off her nun's habit, dons once again her armour and gallops into an uncertain future chasing Rambaldo's horse ("Saio" 65).

In *Narrative Transvestism*, Madeleine Kahn poses the question, what does a "male author have to gain from using a woman's [voice]?" As she points out, when women write using a first-person male persona, they are "borrowing the voice of authority; men are seemingly abdicating it" (2). Kahn uses the term narrative transvestism to refer to the "process whereby a male author gains access to a culturally defined female voice and sensibility but runs no risk of being trapped in the devalued female realm" (6). She explains that this accords with the real-life situation in which the "transvestite wants only temporarily to feel like a woman" (26). In her discussion of narrative transvestism, Kahn focuses specifically on instances in which a male author employs a first-person female narrator. As indicated, it is generally agreed that Calvino does not convincingly gain access to a female voice in his narratives, and

rarely is a female character given the first-person narrating voice. It would appear then that the concept of narrative transvestism has little application to his oeuvre, and the lack of a discernible feminine voice in any of the three texts she examines strongly influences Nocentini's opinion. Nevertheless, although in general agreement with Nocentini's viewpoint, especially with respect to Isotta's and Stefania's characters, I consider that the broader concept of authorial transvestism, in which transvestism is viewed as a structural device used by a male author, does have more to offer in Suor Teodora's case.

Unlike the other two female protagonists, Suor Teodora is a first-person narrator. Relying again on Kahn, I suggest that the real question to pursue when considering Calvino's choice of his female protagonist is not "did he create a believable woman? but, what did he have to gain from the attempt? What is the point of creating a rather elaborate narrative structure to gain access to a voice on the other side of the structural divide between genders?" (10). When applied to literary structures, Kahn considers that transvestism is not a "diagnosis but a metaphor" (11). Thought of in this manner, the female narrator is not intended to represent a believable woman but is instead "a male author's narrative device" (9) and one through which the binary male/female, or self/Other, can be negotiated. For, as Kahn observes, "male and female—however else they are defined—are always defined as opposites" (10). Calvino is well known for his use of intra-textual binaries. Those at play in *Gli amori difficili* revolve firmly around the perceived binary opposition male/female, and binary pairs such as Viola/Cosimo and Pamela and the two Medardos (to mention only two) are vital to the unfolding of the stories in *I nostri antenati*. Nonetheless, the majority of the contrastive pairings in the three fantasy tales do not cross the gender divide, representing instead "the juxtaposition of ideologically opposite" (Olken 39) positions, with the good and bad halves of Medardo, the divided viscount, providing the most graphic example. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that Calvino's introduction to the text of a first-person narrator in the form of a female authorial figure (his own binary opposite) can be viewed as a narrative device to give him access to a voice on the other side of the structural divide, which technically brings his action within the definition of authorial transvestism as defined by Kahn.

Nocentini offers three reasons why Calvino chose Suor Teodora as the first-person narrator of the primary narrative. Her first suggestion is that using a nun permitted Calvino further scope to treat with irony the "rilevanza del vissuto e dell'esperienza in letteratura" ("Saio" 62). She bases this opinion on the irony evident in the introductory passages discussed earlier in which

Suor Teodora pleads her ignorance of wider society while simultaneously setting forth a list of experiences that display extensive knowledge of the ways of the world. Historical verisimilitude is Nocentini's second reason, because in the medieval Christian world, scholarly pursuits were the privilege of the clergy. Of course, this comment would apply whether Calvino had chosen a male or a female narrator, and if Calvino were only concerned with historical verisimilitude, a masculine clerical figure such as Eco's narrator Adso, a Benedictine novice, in *Il nome della rosa* would have been more conventional and arguably would also more accurately reflect historical fact.¹⁷²

Thirdly, Nocentini proposes that Calvino chose a nun as narrator because of "un'ansia che probabilmente va definita omofobica per cui a soggetto eterosessuale preferisce proiettarsi in un personaggio dell'altro sesso che non immaginare se stesso in prossimità scomoda col proprio" ("Saio" 62). To support this statement she points to the negative portrayal of life in masculine institutions in *Il cavaliere inesistente*.¹⁷³ Unquestionably, the Knights of the Holy Grail, who in Calvino's words exemplify "l'esistere come esperienza mistica" (RR 1: 1217), are portrayed as superficial and effeminate hypocrites who excuse their acts of pillage by blaming them on the "furioso amore" of "il Gral, che è in noi, che ci muove" (RR 1: 1051). In a similar fashion, Charlemagne's valiant paladins become no more than an uncouth "distesa di vecchia carne d'Adamo, esalante il vino bevuto e il sudore della giornata guerresca" (RR 1: 961) once stripped of their armour and asleep in their tents. Of course, this negative portrayal is actually in Suor Teodora's narrative, "Il cavaliere inesistente," and although Nocentini does not make this distinction, it is an important point when discussing authorial cross-dressing. This is Suor Teodora's representation of life in male institutions and should not automatically be presumed to be that of Calvino. According to Nocentini, Calvino created the character of Suor Teodora as "uno stratagemma" to avoid placing himself in an all-male

¹⁷² The accuracy of the assumption that nuns had significant access to reading and writing skills is questionable and depends on when one believes that Suor Teodora was writing, that is, in the era of Charlemagne or later. In the Introduction to chapter 2 of *Equally in God's Image*, it is observed that "it was largely women who introduced Christianity, and with it the new Latin literacy, into northern Europe, teaching this to their men." However, it is then noted that "the introduction of the universities [in the medieval period ...] excluded women from their doors [... and] affected the quality of learning in the convents" (Bolton Holloway, Bechtold and Wright). Hence, from the medieval period, literacy levels among nuns was far inferior to that of the male clergy.

¹⁷³ Calvino's negative portrayal of communities is not limited to all male groupings. For example, he portrays negatively the Huguenots as well as the lepers, both heterosexual communities, in *Il visconte dimezzato*.

community, suggesting that her character allowed him to enter into the fantasy by using a convent rather than having to think of himself as “circondato da monaci, prima ancora che come monaco” (“Saio” 63). However, the proposition that Calvino chose to dress as a nun for homophobic reasons overlooks the fact that, far from diminishing sexual connotations, masquerading in a nun’s habit traditionally evokes both the erotic and the uncanny.¹⁷⁴ According to Camille Paglia, “There are religious meanings to all female impersonation [...]. A woman putting on men’s clothes merely steals social power. But a man putting on women’s clothes is searching for God” (90). Paglia’s statement linking male cross-dressing and religion is interesting in this situation, but it is difficult to seriously ascribe transcendental meaning to the secular Calvino’s identification with Suor Teodora. More pertinent is Marjorie Garber’s observation that, historically, the vow of chastity associated with the clergy has offered huge erotic potential and that “the conventions of the Gothic [...] encoded transvestism as the figure of erotic and religious transgression” (218). Garber goes on to note that in

eighteenth-century masquerade ecclesiastical dress was a favourite kind of travesty, charged with erotic significance [...]. The pretence of celibacy offered the most titillating opportunity for inversion: the scandal of cross-dressing and the scandal of religious impersonation, when present in the same transvestic figure, intensified the libertinism of the masquerade. (219)

The combination of Calvino’s self-professed secularism and the dubious religious vows of the far from celibate Suor Teodora suggest that Calvino’s choice of a nun as narrator for the primary narrative was well considered and was predicated on more complex factors than his desire to avoid imagining himself in a cloistered environment surrounded by monks. Furthermore, I suggest that, despite her failure to discern other than very marginal authorial transvestism in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Nocentini’s comments demonstrate that she sees the figure of Calvino sheltering beneath Suor Teodora’s robes.

In the Victorian era, Gerard Manley Hopkins famously voiced the opinion that “the artist’s most essential quality [is] masterly execution: it is a kind of male gift and especially marks off men from women, the begetting one’s thought on paper [...]. The male quality is the creative gift” (133). Hopkins’s view was certainly outdated by the 1950s but arguably still

¹⁷⁴ The uncanny is associated with the supposed celibacy, or symbolic castration, of the clergy.

held some currency in Italy at the time that Calvino was writing *Il cavaliere inesistente*—a narrative about writing a narrative and the nature of fiction in general. If the act of writing presupposes an author who is traditionally male, I propose that, despite the seeming paradox, crossing the gender divide and expressing his ideas on writing through the unlikely vehicle of a female character in a cultural space generally unavailable to him was a distancing device that Calvino found liberating. It gave him the opportunity to write about the process of writing in an environment that diminished, if not completely disguised, the autobiographic nature of the commentary; both the female identity and Suor Teodora's voluminous robes provided the distance Calvino required to express his ideas more freely without figuratively exposing himself to open scrutiny. Perhaps Suor Teodora's character can be viewed as another manifestation of Calvino's belief that a better understanding of the world is gained when there is a degree of separation: "per essere *con* gli altri veramente, la sola via era d'essere separato dagli altri" (RR 1: 1214). Cosimo's life in the trees is a literal representation of this idea, but the theme can also be traced back to Calvino's early cinema viewing days, in which 'distance is the key word' (Re, "Calvino e il cinema" 99). But Suor Teodora's character also serves as a creative response to a problem John Barth identifies when he writes, "The more closely an author identifies with the narrator, literally or metaphorically, the less advisable it is, as a rule, to use the first-person narrative viewpoint" (77). Viewed as a strategy for pursuing an idea from an unfamiliar space, Calvino's choice of a narrating nun provides an example of how he practically applied the sentiments expressed in his 1985 essay "Mondo scritto e mondo non scritto":¹⁷⁵

credo che sempre scriviamo di qualcosa che non sappiamo: scriviamo per rendere possibile al mondo non scritto di esprimersi attraverso di noi, [...] dall'altro lato delle parole c'è qualcosa che cerca d'uscire dal silenzio, di significare attraverso il linguaggio, come battendo colpi su un muro di prigione. (S 2: 1875)

¹⁷⁵ Another even more extreme variation on these sentiments, which shows how keen Calvino was to enter territory beyond himself and his own experiences, can be found at the end of his essay "Molteplicità," the fifth of his *Lezioni americane*: "magari fosse possibile un'opera concepita al di fuori del *self*, un'opera che ci permettesse d'uscire dalla prospettiva limitata d'un io individuale, non solo per entrare in altri io simili al nostro, ma per far parlare ciò che non ha parola, l'uccello [...]. l'albero [...]. la pietra ..." (S 1: 733).

And given the previous discussion, it is not surprising to find that Suor Teodora expresses (or echoes) roughly the same idea when she states that “l’arte di scriver storie sta nel saper tirar fuori da quel nulla che si è capito della vita tutto il resto; ma finita la pagina si riprende la vita e ci s’accorge che quel che si sapeva è proprio un nulla” (RR 1: 1001).

Quite how far, or how successfully, Calvino ventures into unknown territory is another matter, for the reader never enters the cultural space of the convent through Suor Teodora’s character, nor does there appear to be any attempt to deliver a convincingly feminine point of view in either the primary or the secondary narrative. Unlike Calvino’s other famous nun, Battista, Suor Teodora does not set foot in the kitchen. On the contrary, she maintains her distance from domestic duties, spending her time shut away in her cell writing. The domestic sounds emanating from the convent kitchen remind Suor Teodora of the battlefield: “nell’acciottolio dell’acquaio mi pareva di sentir cozzare lance contro scudi e corazze, risuonare gli elmi percossi dalle pesanti spade”; or bring to mind scenes associated with the kitchen of the French army: “vedo i guerrieri in fila dinanzi alle marmitte fumanti, con un continuo sbatacchiare di gavette e tambureggiare di cucchiai” (RR 1: 992). Suor Teodora might be a nun, but her interests revolve around the traditionally masculine realms of writing and battling.

The suggestion that she has erred in some way and that a form of punishment is therefore necessary is a theme that links Suor Teodora’s character to those of Isotta and Stefania and differentiates them from Calvino’s male protagonists. As demonstrated, Isotta is punished cruelly for a seemingly minor and rather questionable transgression, although Stefania, whose adultery (?) is frequently mentioned, escapes relatively unscathed from her supposed misdemeanour. The nature of Suor Teodora’s alleged wrongdoing becomes clearer in her parting comment, which comes right at the end of the narrative and soon after she has revealed her dual identity: “Non saluto nemmeno la badessa. Già mi conoscono e sanno che dopo zuffe e abbracci e inganni ritorno sempre a questo chiostro” (RR 1: 1064). This comment also reveals that penance is something Suor Teodora/Bradamante undertakes both regularly and voluntarily, and with the exception of deceit, which is primarily Suor Teodora’s vice, it is Bradamante who ‘sins’ and Suor Teodora who atones. Nevertheless, in a novel full of uncertainties, the one thing about which the reader is left in no doubt is that Suor Teodora’s “penitenza” is to write. This is portrayed as an onerous task, “è dura, è dura” (RR 1: 1009), and one that becomes “ancora più difficile” (RR 1: 1001)—sentiments that directly

reflect Calvino's confession in his 1985 essay "Perché scrivete" that "scrivere mi costa sempre uno sforzo" (S 2: 1863).¹⁷⁶ There is also the suggestion that rather than being a form of penance, if it becomes too enjoyable and a means of escaping from the real world, the act of writing may itself take on the characteristics of "peccato, idolatria, superbia" (RR 1: 1009).

However, although there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Calvino expresses his own ideas about writing through the doubly estranging figure of a female nun, Suor Teodora's character is part of a binary, and Calvino's self-identification does not extend to her alter ego, Bradamante. This may complicate the picture, but it highlights how there may also be strategic reasons why Calvino felt the need to create a female character, or in this case characters, to fulfil certain roles in this narrative. Their very different, yet complementary, feminine natures offer strategic advantages not traditionally accessible through their male counterparts.

Despite the importance of the Calvino/Suor Teodora binary, the binary Suor Teodora/Bradamante is the crucial link between the primary and secondary narratives. Not only is she the only character to appear in both narratives, but in neither is her identity traditionally feminine. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, "a literary woman [...] is really a 'eunuch'" (9), and who could better play that role than a (supposedly) celibate nun. On the other hand, like all her warrior sisters from time immemorial, the female warrior Bradamante is a hermaphroditic figure, or the union of male and female. As both fearless warrior and "donna dai forti appetiti amorosi [...] amante a un tempo tenera e furiosa" (RR 1: 1002), she represents the union of war and love. But through her counterpart, Suor Teodora, she also likens writing to battling and allegorises the creativity of the writing process. Ricci observes that Suor Teodora "is the perfect paradigm of Calvino himself" (*Painting* 30); however, Schneider goes further, observing that the Suor Teodora/Bradamante duo is "the fullest embodiment of the authorial persona in Calvino's fiction" (97). This unlikely female duo allows the expression of all of Calvino's most important conceptual points. Although he may only identify himself with Suor Teodora's character, by assigning her a dual personality, he creates not so much his ideal woman as his ideal character: a metaphorical Galatea in the

¹⁷⁶ Calvino expresses a similar sentiment in a 1980 interview with Ludovica Ripa di Meana: "Scrivere è una gran fatica. È l'aver scritto che da soddisfazione, non l'atto di scrivere in sé" ("Se una sera" 91).

same sense that Ovid's Galatea can be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole.

The point of view in the secondary narrative is that of an omniscient narrator, and although the perspective changes it remains almost exclusively male. This possibly helps to explain why Suor Teodora manages to hide her dual identity for so long, and although the almost complete lack of a feminine perspective should of itself alert the reader that all might not be what it seems, by chapter 4, when Suor Teodora reveals her authorial status and the existence of two narrative levels, the reader has already been drawn into the story and introduced to what appear to be the principal characters: Agilulfo, Rambaldo and, to a lesser extent, Gurdulù. Not surprisingly, given the intricacies of the narrative and the many lines of enquiry it offers, protagonist status in this narrative is something about which opinion varies. Critics generally assign that role to the character or characters that best fit their own line of investigation, and even if the issue is not addressed specifically, a fundamental driver for the decision appears to be where and how the critic fits Calvino himself into the picture. As the previous discussion has revealed, there is little debate that Calvino uses Suor Teodora's character to express many of his own ideas about the writing process; he uses the opportunities offered by transvestism even if he places a very light foot in the convent himself. However, critics differ on the importance placed on the primary narrative and Suor Teodora's character. Commonly, the primary narrative is treated more as an aside to the main story and Suor Teodora is relegated to a secondary position. Others take a broader approach, acknowledging, albeit in varying degrees, that despite the two narrative levels, this is all one complex fantasy tale and Suor Teodora's role in creating the overall fiction is a fundamental feature.

Many different views have been expressed about protagonist status in *Il cavaliere inesistente* with critics variously favouring Rambaldo, Agilulfo, Bradamante and Suor Teodora. For example, Hagen writes that "l'intrigo del romanzo narra la maturazione di Rambaldo" (876), whereas Bolongaro is adamant that no "matter what Calvino says, the protagonist of the short novel remains Agilulfo" (140). The story for him is not Rambaldo's *Bildung* but that of Agilulfo, and he sees Agilulfo's character as a metaphorical representation of the author.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ For Bolongaro, in *Il cavaliere inesistente* Calvino is grappling with the question "how can an intellectual contribute to the achievement of an authentic social synthesis" (136). Bolongaro considers that, through the

McLaughlin recognises that “unlike the other two eponymous protagonists, Agilulfo is more deuteragonist than main character” (*Italo* 46). Like Hagen, he assigns the role of protagonist to Rambaldo, despite recognising that “Bradamante (strong-lover) and Teo-dora (Given to God), as their names suggest, constitute one single, more complete character than any of the male characters” (45). Schneider speaks of Bradamante as the protagonist, whereas Scrivano is uncertain whether it is Agilulfo or Suor Teodora, but considers that they are linked by the fact that both “interpretano il ruolo di un individuo senza corpo” (86).¹⁷⁸ My own opinion aligns most closely with that of Bonsaver, who recognises Suor Teodora as protagonist. He specifically comments on the elevation of the first-person narrator from the position of secondary character in the two earlier fantastic novels to that of protagonist in *Il cavaliere inesistente* (“Cities” 216). While acknowledging that the substance of the novel lies in the secondary narrative, which has its own protagonists, I consider that control lies with Suor Teodora in the primary narrative and that it is made quite clear in the text that the reader should approach her account of events with considerable scepticism. Rather than Suor Teodora’s identity being viewed as a mask for Bradamante, there is an equally convincing argument that Bradamante’s character should instead be considered Suor Teodora’s attempt to create “la proiezione del suo letterario ideale dell’io” (Berardinelli 43).¹⁷⁹

On the face of it, Suor Teodora’s situation bears strong affinities to that of Ovid’s Orpheus.¹⁸⁰ If one leaves to the side for a moment the postmodern ending of the narrative, Bradamante’s

character of Agilulfo, Calvino is addressing “the drama of writing when the author comes to terms with his or her unavoidable role as the narrative’s ultimate hero” (140).

¹⁷⁸ In his discussion of Pino Zac’s 1969 film version of *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Vito Santoro writes that Gurdulù is Agilulfo’s opposite but “Bradamante è il suo doppio: Agilulfo e Bradamante sono infatti due paladini *sui generis*, «il primo non è un uomo e il secondo è una donna», dice a un certo punto Rambaldo” (79). Santoro is quoting from the film and commenting on how the film presents the situation; by implication, a woman is equivalent to a non-existent man.

¹⁷⁹ This is a section taken from an observation Berardinelli makes about Calvino himself. The full quotation is: “Tutti i suoi eroi sono la proiezione del suo letterario ideale dell’io” (43).

¹⁸⁰ There are other mentions of Orpheus in relation to Calvino’s narratives. For example, in “Calvino’s *La memoria del mondo: The Forgotten Record of Lost Worlds*,” Hume refers to the Orpheus Eurydice story in the *Cosmicomiche* collection (96); while discussing Orpheus’ desire in the context of Žižekian fantasies, Rushing remarks that a number of the *Cosmicomiche* stories “stage desire as the force that both provokes and is provoked by the loss of the object of desire” (54). Rushing’s observation can also be applied to Suor Teodora’s act of writing; she is lamenting the loss of Agilulfo.

character can be read as Suor Teodora's metaphorical representation in writing of herself in the same way that Orpheus identifies in his song with Pygmalion. Just as Pygmalion's (Orpheus') wish is fulfilled when his statue (Galatea or Eurydice) comes to life, Bradamante (Suor Teodora) is finally rewarded with a 'real' version of her ideal; Rambaldo is the flesh and blood reincarnation of Agilulfo, the perfect knight. However, although the bones of the Orpheus-Eurydice (Pygmalion-Galatea) story are very much in evidence, the reversal of the creative roles, whereby the female character is seemingly creating her ideal male companion, is not accompanied by a reversal of power structures. At both narrative levels in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, the point of view displays a consistently masculine orientation, and the unexpected revelation of a feminine authorial hand in chapter 4 is not accompanied by any difference in presentation. The point of view remains masculine; the story unfolds primarily from the perspective of male characters; and the female characters, including Bradamante, who also makes her first appearance in chapter 4, assume the roles typically found in Calvino's writing. The plot of the primary narrative revolves around the process of writing "Il cavaliere inesistente" and clearly signals the presence of irony, or different levels of understanding; however, Suor Teodora does not include any factual traces in the secondary narrative that might link her, even with hindsight, to Bradamante. This is not true of the primary narrative, which contains a number of hints of inter-narrative connection, even if their meaning only becomes clear retrospectively. For example, after her observation that as a nun she is in no position to know about either war or "la più gran follia dei mortali, la passione amorosa," Suor Teodora disingenuously asks whether "Bradamante ne sapeva di più?" (RR 1: 1001). In contrast, with the exception of the final chapter, the secondary narrative develops quite independently of the first, making it easy to sideline issues raised by the intra-textual intervention of Suor Teodora in her fictional role of author and to look directly to the authorial hand of Calvino. Arguably, this is the approach taken by the critics who favour the pre-eminence of the secondary narrative, and the strongly masculine bias of the entire novel supports the proposition that the final revelation of the autodiegetic status of the female author should be considered just another aspect of the fantasy.

Those who suggest that Rambaldo is the real protagonist of the novel find support in Calvino's own statement in his Nota that he created Rambaldo to fulfil this role: "un giovane doveva essere il vero protagonista di questa storia. Rambaldo, paladino stendhaliano..." (RR 1: 1217). And despite Bolongaro's favouring of Agilulfo, if the novel only consisted of the secondary narrative, one could quite legitimately view the story as Rambaldo's *Bildung*. He

enters the novel in chapter 2 as a raw youth and exits in the final chapter as a seasoned paladin, clad in Agilulfo's now less than spotlessly white armour and with Bradamante ostensibly in hot pursuit. Calvino's own identification with Rambaldo is also widely recognised, which explains why opinions on protagonist status in the novel are so varied. As Schneider observes, "Calvino's persona appears to be *both* Rambaldo and Bradamante," although she illustrates her own favouring of the secondary narrative by referring to the feminine duo as Bradamante. At the same time, I consider that this double identification on the part of Calvino may shed some light on why he left the conclusion of the novel open ended. Although there are links between the two narrative levels other than the obvious Suor Teodora/Bradamante binary, they are metaphorical rather than factual and only become obvious with hindsight.¹⁸¹ I suggest that Calvino's identification with characters at both narrative levels ultimately made a definitive merger of the two stories difficult for him.

In Ricci's opinion, at the end of the novel, "Suor Teodora breaks out of the metafictional allegory and assumes her natural place in the male discourse; she becomes a woman and runs away with her image of Rambaldo" (*Painting* 54). Although recognising that Ricci's interpretation represents the Ariostan Bradamante-Ruggiero solution and is also a traditional ending for the Calvinian female character, Calvino's identification with Suor Teodora means that recuperating Suor Teodora/Bradamante to the system through union with Rambaldo would symbolise the partial silencing of Calvino's own voice. With Agilulfo absorbed into Rambaldo's character and the Suor Teodora/Bradamante pairing revealed as a single entity, Calvino's solution to this dilemma is to deliver an open-ended approach, even if the result is that he metaphorically gallops into the future chasing himself—to later emerge in *Ti con zero* as the single-celled Qfwfq perhaps?¹⁸²

I have already suggested that Calvino created Suor Teodora's character for strategic purposes, so his admission in his Nota that his creation of Bradamante was strategic merely strengthens their binary relationship. After declaring Rambaldo the true protagonist, Calvino

¹⁸¹ To give just one example, there is Besa Camprubi's comparison of Suor Teodora's love for God, a substance without form, with Bradamante's love for Agilulfo, a form without substance (134).

¹⁸² To add to the complex irony inherent in this final scene, the image of Suor Teodora/Bradamante clad in 'male' armour chasing the pure white armour-clad Rambaldo figuratively delivers the Ariostan situation. In the *Furioso*, it is Bradamante who wears the pure white armour, and even if Ruggiero does not actively pursue her, she does become his wife.

explains that “[p]er il giovane, la donna è quel che sicuramente c’è.” Hence, he created two women: Bradamante, representing “l’amore come contrasto, come guerra,” for the role of “la donna del cuore di Rambaldo” (RR 1: 1217) and Sofronia, Bradamante’s specular opposite (“l’amore come pace”), for Torrismondo. In this instance, Calvino’s explanation finds considerable support in the fact that much of what we know of Bradamante is delivered from Rambaldo’s perspective, which supports the suggestion that Calvino used authorial transvestism as a purely structural device, donning the garb of Suor Teodora without making a serious attempt to adopt a female persona. Although Suor Teodora’s duplicity is a feature of the plot, it remains difficult to credit that, as an autodiegetic narrator, she would so convincingly adopt the perspective of Rambaldo to portray herself.

The potential for deceit associated with the revelation at the beginning of chapter 4 that the narrative s/he is reading is the work of a woman is made all the easier for the reader to overlook because Suor Teodora’s alter ego, Bradamante, is introduced in the very same chapter from an emphatically masculine perspective. In a voyeuristic scenario par excellence, Rambaldo discovers that the valiant knight who came to his rescue such a short time before is a woman. This discovery takes place in circumstances that parody remorselessly the traditional revelation of a female warrior’s sex “through the removal of her helmet and the falling of her hair [...] a stock feature of medieval and Renaissance narratives” (Finucci *Lady* 241). Rambaldo spies from the reeds as the semi-naked Bradamante relieves herself in a stream, and in a complete reversal of the norms, he falls instantly in love:¹⁸³

Rambaldo non credeva ai suoi occhi. Perché quella nudità era di donna: un liscio ventre piumato d’oro, e tonde natiche di rosa, e tese lunghe gambe di fanciulla. Questa metà di fanciulla [...] si girò su se stessa, cercò un luogo accogliente, puntò un piede da una parte e l’altro dall’altra di un ruscello, piegò un poco i ginocchi, v’appoggiò le braccia dalle ferree cubitiere, protese avanti il capo e indietro il tergo, e si mise tranquilla e altera a far pipì. Era una donna

¹⁸³ This scene can be read more specifically as a parody of the scene in which Bradamante reveals her sex to Ruggiero in the *Furioso* but also, as Barengi notes, it could allude mischievously to that between “Clorinda e Tancredi nel primo canto della *Gerusalemme*” (R 1: 1363).

di armoniose lune, di piuma tenera e di fiotto gentile. Rambaldo ne fu tosto innamorato. (RR 1: 989–90)¹⁸⁴

Within the space of a few paragraphs, Rambaldo's "soccorritore sconosciuto" (RR 1: 987) is transformed from a skilful warrior into an hysterical woman. Like Isotta, only Bradamante's lower half is naked. Her top half remains encased in armour and so continues to represent her identity as a fearless warrior. However, her exposed bottom half tells another story; she has the round pink buttocks and the long legs of a vulnerable young girl. The imagery associated with this scene, which provides a graphic and quite literal illustration of gender division, also symbolically represents Bradamante's hermaphroditic status. Equally mixed imagery is associated with Bradamante's reaction on discovering Rambaldo's perfidy. Although she swears and throws her dagger at him, it is not with her normal skilful accuracy but rather with the impetuosity of an enraged housewife: "con lo scatto rabbioso della donna inviperita che tira in testa all'uomo un piatto o una spazzola o qualsiasi cosa ha per mano" (RR 1: 990).

Rambaldo's surprising discovery of Bradamante's true gender is a reminder that the discussion of cross-dressing in this novel cannot be confined to questioning the presence of authorial transvestism in the Calvino-Suor Teodora relationship: Bradamante's donning of armour is also an act of cross-dressing. But, whereas authorial transvestism involves a figurative use of the term, when Bradamante joins the ranks of Charlemagne's paladins clad in armour she is cross-dressing in a literal sense. She is a woman disguised, and as Helen Hughes states, "the 'disguise' motif is perhaps the most frequent and important" (16) of the traditional motifs of the historical romance. *Il cavaliere inesistente* can certainly not be simply classified as an historical romance. In fact, Berardinelli goes so far as to describe Calvino as a "[n]arratore anti-romanzesco," observing that "Calvino è sempre stato un narratore troppo agile e fragile per sopportare il peso di una vera e propria narrazione romanzesca"(39). Nevertheless, *Il cavaliere inesistente* does contain a number of the characteristics that define that genre. Gillian Beer states that "[r]omance is always concerned with the fulfilment of desires" (12), it "invokes the past or the socially remote [...] tends to

¹⁸⁴One of the three qualities Calvino ascribed to "Esattezza" in his *Lezioni americane* was "l'evocazione d'immagini visuali nitide, incisive, memorabili" (S 1: 677). In "Rapidità," he states that he is convinced that writing prose should be like writing poetry; "entrambi i casi è ricerca d'un espressione necessaria, unica, densa, concisa, memorabile" (S 1: 671). The juxtaposition of the lofty and the lowly in this passage (in terms of images evoked as well as language usage) increases both the comic effect and the memorability of this passage.

use and re-use well-known stories,” and is often “set in an aristocratic and idealized world” (2). Combining Beer’s observations with Hughes’s remark that the “major themes of romance are adventure and sexual love, with a narrow range of behaviour and experience being portrayed” (2), it is easy to see how *Il cavaliere inesistente* can be associated with the romance genre, for these are all recognisable features of this novel.

However, *Il cavaliere inesistente* does not fit readily into the subgenre of cross-dressing novels typically associated with the historical romance genre. While discussing popular historical romance novels that involve a cross-dressed female heroine, Lisa Fletcher notes that the “key issue for writers and readers of cross-dressing novels is the problem of the hero’s attraction to a ‘boy’” (75).¹⁸⁵ This disrupts the “binary opposition male/female, masculine/feminine and homosexual/heterosexual” (73–74), even if “the pronouncement ‘I love you’ is concomitant with the pronouncement of the heroine’s ‘true sex’” (75). The crucial difference between *Il cavaliere inesistente* and the situation Fletcher is describing is that, although Rambaldo admires the prowess of the knight who comes to his rescue and would like to get to know ‘him’ better, he only falls in love with Bradamante once her femininity is revealed. Indeed, the feature that turns this scene into farce is that Rambaldo appears to fall in love with her for the simple reason that she is a woman. Rambaldo’s parting comment to his unknown rescuer, who refuses to identify ‘himself,’ is a hostile: “Mi pagherai l’affronto, chiunque tu sia!” (RR 1: 988). But the payment Rambaldo requires once he discovers that Bradamante is a woman is her love (or perhaps it is just her body?).

Unfortunately for Rambaldo, Bradamante is not interested in a mere boy. Indeed, she is in love with Agilulfo. It is made clear, however, that this love is wrong for Bradamante; it is against her natural inclinations. Suor Teodora explains that Bradamante entered the army “per l’amore che portava verso tutto ciò che era severo, esatto, rigoroso, conforme a una regola morale” (RR 1: 1001), qualities that Agilulfo epitomises. But she adds that perhaps this yearning for severity and rigour came about as a contrast to her true nature. Without her armour, Bradamante is “una sciattona,” but once she has donned her armour and is in the saddle, her wish to be the most splendid in battle was not so much a feminine vanity as a challenge to the other paladins, pride, and a desire to show her superiority over them.

¹⁸⁵ See *Historical Romance Fiction*, Part II, “Popular Historical Romance Fiction: The Cross-Dressing Novels” (47–92). Fletcher discusses in depth three cross-dressing novels by Georgette Heyer.

Nevertheless, although Bradamante's expertise on the battlefield might pose a challenge to all paladins except Agilulfo, her love for him is doomed. For like courtly love, or the love of Pygmalion for his statue, or indeed Suor Teodora's love for God, Bradamante's love for Agilulfo can only be a sterile love. Bradamante, "donna dai forti appetiti amorosi" (RR 1: 1002), must ultimately transfer her affections to Rambaldo. However, this transfer is far more transparently designed to meet Rambaldo's narcissistic needs than any needs of Bradamante, for her love is necessary to complete his *Bildung*: "Così sempre corre il giovane verso la donna: ma è davvero amore per lei a spingerlo? o non è soprattutto di sé, ricerca d'una certezza d'esserci che solo la donna gli può dare?" (RR 1: 1003).

Of significance both here and to the broader discussion of the representation of the feminine in Calvino's narratives is the difference between what is said to arouse Rambaldo's love for Bradamante and what inspires Bradamante's love for Agilulfo. Bradamante falls in love with Agilulfo because of the 'perfect' way he performs his knightly duties. Although his perfection is symbolised by his pure white armour, in reality his armour is a mask designed to conceal the absence of physical form. Therefore, Bradamante's love for Agilulfo is inspired by his actions rather than his body, which, after all, does not exist. In contrast, Rambaldo does not fall in love with Bradamante's armour, despite her periwinkle cloak and plume, or with her prowess on the battlefield. Instead, Rambaldo falls in love with the body beneath the armour, so that Bradamante's possession of a body is a necessary prerequisite for Rambaldo's love. Nowhere is this link between the female body and love better illustrated, of course, than in the Pygmalion myth, for Galatea is loved solely for her body.

There are numerous examples of situations in which the masculine perspective dominates in the secondary narrative, which render barely credible the fiction that this is the work of a female author. Priscilla's and Sofronia's characters provide obvious examples because they both appear in the secondary narrative. Indeed, the Priscilla episode is one that seriously undermines the believability of the Suor Teodora/Bradamante binary, for Bradamante and Priscilla are rivals for Agilulfo's attention. Ignoring the obvious question of how Suor Teodora might have known what went on between Priscilla and Agilulfo, Suor Teodora's account of Priscilla's night of "paradiso" becomes all the more extraordinary once it becomes clear that she is describing an evening spent with the man she herself longed for. All the same, the scene in which Rambaldo finally achieves his heart's desire and connects, literally

and figuratively, with Bradamante remains one of the more striking examples of the prevailing masculine orientation of the novel.

When Agilulfo finally loses “la forza di volontà” (RR 1: 958) that has ensured his continuing existence, he vanishes into thin air, bequeathing his spotless white armour to Rambaldo. Clad in his mentor’s armour, Rambaldo sets out to fight the Saracens, heeding Charlemagne’s parting command: “Fa’ onore alle armi che porti” (RR 1: 1057). He acquits himself well and leaves the battlefield victorious and unscathed, his now battle-stained armour fitting him like a glove, symbolising that he now truly merits his title of paladin. Yet Rambaldo’s *Bildung* is not complete, for he has still to conquer “la donna del cuore;” Bradamante, “il cavaliere pervinca” (RR 1: 987).

As Bradamante has already made it clear that she desires Agilulfo and has no interest in the young and inexperienced Rambaldo, he only achieves his heart’s desire due to a case of mistaken identity and in circumstances that arguably amount to rape. Bradamante left Charlemagne’s camp in pursuit of Agilulfo and was pursued in turn by Rambaldo. Where her journeys took her is not explained, but she has clearly not learned of Agilulfo’s fate, for when she spies a knight in white armour on a hill, Bradamante assumes that she has finally found Agilulfo. She calls to him, and much to her delight, and in a seeming reversal of her previous experience, the white knight chases her at a gallop, laughing and saying: “Questo è il giorno che avevo sempre sognato!” (RR 1: 1059). When Rambaldo finally comes upon Bradamante, she is in an isolated grassy glade not unlike the one in which he first spied her. She has removed her armour and is lying on a mossy slope with her arms outstretched towards him. Bearing in mind that this account is written by Suor Teodora purporting to write about something that happened to herself, she is remarkably in tune with Rambaldo’s perspective and detached from her own. Suor Teodora relates that Rambaldo debates revealing his identity to Bradamante but wonders why she does not realise that something is amiss; after all, the white armour he wears is no longer pristine. Although it is no excuse for Rambaldo’s deceit, this is a valid question, since it is his immaculate armour and general perfection that attracts Bradamante to Agilulfo. It is also a question that Suor Teodora raises yet does not answer.

According to Diane Elam, “rape is the prolongation of sexual activity after the question of consent has been raised and answered negatively (even if the victim has not been given time

to speak)” (170–71). Bradamante shields her eyes “come non volesse turbare con lo sguardo l’invisibile approssimarsi, del cavaliere inesistente,” so that when he removes his armour and “si butta su di lei,” Rambaldo is well aware that Bradamante mistakenly thinks that she is making love to Agilulfo, a man who does not exist: “—Oh, sì, ne era certa!—esclama Bradamante, a occhi chiusi. —Ero sempre stata certa che sarebbe stato possibile!” But contrary to what Rambaldo expects, mere enjoyment of their sexual tryst does not compensate for his duplicity. When she finally opens her eyes and finds that she is with Rambaldo, far from loving him “per la vita” (RR 1: 1059) as he had hoped, Bradamante starts to cry and shouts at him in rage, shouting “Impostore!” (RR 1: 1060). She leaps on her horse and flees, as we learn, to the convent. Meanwhile, a bereft Rambaldo, suffering a less intense form of the madness that afflicted Ariosto’s Orlando, continues his warrior’s life and searches constantly for Bradamante.

Although *Il cavaliere inesistente* draws heavily upon the chivalric romance tradition and its Renaissance counterparts, it certainly does not strictly follow the moral traditions of those eras, introducing far more modern ideas. Unlike Sofronia, who more closely resembles the traditional female character in the chivalric romance and whose entire story revolves around her virginal status, Bradamante’s metaphorical rose was plucked long before her encounter with Rambaldo. Therefore, even in the courtly tradition, sexual connection with Bradamante gives Rambaldo neither right nor duty to claim her. Indeed, conflicts inherent in the various traditions that Calvino exploits in this narrative render the eventual revelation of the autodiegetic status of the narrator all the more difficult to accept. As just observed, Bradamante is essentially raped by Rambaldo and flees to the convent to regain “la salute dell’anima” (RR 1: 992). But Suor Teodora’s and Bradamante’s identities merge uncomfortably in the convent because meeting the textual needs of Rambaldo raises issues associated with Calvino’s personal identification, across the textual boundary and at both narrative levels, with Suor Teodora’s as well as Rambaldo’s characters.

It is made clear from the outset that Suor Teodora is no ordinary nun, for she is set apart from her fellow sisters. Although they are tasked with more mundane duties, she is given as penance the onerous task of writing “Il cavaliere inesistente,” and hindsight suggests that she is atoning for transgressions committed by her alter ego, Bradamante. Suor Teodora/Bradamante’s parting comment suggests that she comes and goes from the convent on a regular basis, which of itself militates against any permanent union with Rambaldo, but

it appears that Suor Teodora's penance is necessary because Bradamante has committed the sin of loving the wrong man: as Bolongaro explains, "[b]y telling Agilulfo's story, Suor Teodora has been commanded to work through her infatuation with him" (156). The obvious disconnection between Suor Teodora and Bradamante is that Bradamante has fled to the convent to grieve for both Rambaldo's duplicity and for the disappearance of Agilulfo, the man she desires, but in her Suor Teodora identity, she is required to see the error of her ways and transfer her love from Agilulfo to Rambaldo.

The difficulty lies in the need to resolve each narrative level in a way that allows them to merge credibly. Since the link between the two levels is the Suor Teodora/Bradamante binary, it is perhaps not surprising that it is aspects of their characterisations that most stretch the bounds of believability. Rambaldo's story fits reasonably comfortably into the chivalric tradition, but to finish it according to convention, he must win Bradamante. However, Bradamante's character has been drawn as a hybrid of chivalric and modern traditions and although Rambaldo might desire her, chase her and eventually rape her, Bradamante is no Ariostan Angelica. According to Suor Teodora, Bradamante has had many sexual partners, and they have been of her own choosing. On the face of it, Suor Teodora is handed an impossible task, because there is no discernible reason why Bradamante should transfer her love from Agilulfo to Rambaldo, who is, after all, the man who deceived her.

I consider that the real location of complete authorial power emerges clearly at this stage, which is also the point at which any suggestion is dispelled that Calvino was ever making a serious attempt to write from a feminine perspective through the character of Suor Teodora. Calvino's way of resolving uncomfortable questions that arise from combining Suor Teodora's and Bradamante's characters appears to be to simply ignore inconvenient details and to pull together the loose ends as if the problems do not exist. Thus, even when Suor Teodora reveals that she and Bradamante are the same person, no attempt is made to explain why she now realises that she is in love with Rambaldo. She merely states, "Quando venni a chiudermi qui ero disperata d'amore per Agilulfo, ora ardo per il giovane e appassionato Rambaldo" (RR 1: 1064). But as observed earlier, Calvino's identification with both Rambaldo's and Suor Teodora's characters is a feasible explanation for his rejection of the definitive conclusion that would result from unambiguously handing Rambaldo "la donna del cuore." I suggest that this rejection had little to do with Calvino's reluctance to assign a traditional female closure to Bradamante, who is ultimately revealed as a powerless Galatea

figure. Rather, it was because he was uncomfortable assigning the same fate to Suor Teodora, who is his intradiegetic alter ego and hence a fellow Pygmalionesque creator. Calvino's ingenious solution was the open-ended conclusion, for although the image of Suor Teodora/Bradamante chasing after Rambaldo implicitly completes Rambaldo's *Bildung*, the fact that she/they never catch up with him on the page means that the feminine duo never definitively becomes his possession.

Conclusion

The presence of a female protagonist in Calvino's stories does not translate into the delivery of a credible feminine perspective. Notwithstanding Bonsaver's suggestion that Calvino intended to highlight the male dependency of the middle-class Italian housewife through the two *Amori difficili* stories, both the way the stories evolve and the nature of the problems confronting Isotta and Stefania lends more credence to Felman's observation about the inability of certain men to conceive of a problem a woman might face that does not have a man at its centre. Widening the discussion to include Suor Teodora/Bradamante, the contorted reasoning processes attributed to all three female protagonists by Calvino merely supports Tong's assertion that "masculine words can express only what men *think* women feel" (154). Ostensibly, Calvino and his fictive author Suor Teodora share the authorial role in *Il cavaliere inesistente*, but there is little evidence in the novel that Calvino makes a convincing attempt to present either narrative level from a female point of view. In addition, the lack of evidence that Calvino handed Suor Teodora any degree of diegetic autonomy suggests that authorial transvestism is present in this narrative only to the extent that it is considered a structural device used by Calvino both to distance himself from autobiographical associations and to gain access to opportunities that literature traditionally associates with the feminine realm. To express the Calvino-Suor Teodora/Bradamante relationship in terms of my theoretical framework: Although Pygmalion cross-dresses as Galatea in this narrative, he does so only to exploit opportunities traditionally offered by her feminine status. Finally, in none of the three stories discussed in this chapter does Calvino relinquish his masculine perspective nor does he convincingly provide any of his Galateas with her own voice, leading me to conclude that, once again, Galatea merely echoes the views of Pygmalion, her creator.

CONCLUSION

Despite occupying a position of fundamental importance in his narratives, Calvino's female characters have attracted little detailed critical attention. Although it is clear that a number of his female characters fit comfortably into broad categories such as Bonsaver's "donna 'isterica'" and "donna-Gaia," Jeannet's "bambina," or more generic classification systems such as "Earth Mother, Amazon, Siren, Venus" (Schneider 110), there are many that firmly resist such general categorisation. Examining the representation of the feminine from within the broad parameters of the Pygmalion paradigm has provided the opportunity to conduct a far more comprehensive study of the topic. It has made it possible to include in the discussion characters that defy collectivisation and have remained largely ignored to date. Indeed, this investigation has shown how many of these, often more minor, characters reveal a great deal about Calvino's characterisation process.

Although the Pygmalion paradigm, or the creation by a male 'artist' of a feminine ideal, forms the theoretical backbone of this thesis, the discussion has ranged beyond this basic foundation. It fully utilises at both the literal and the figurative levels not only the opportunities presented by Ovid's Pygmalion myth and the stories immediately associated with it, but also those offered by recognising the significance of the myth to the *Metamorphoses* as a whole. Approaching Calvino's representation of his female characters from within this distancing umbrella, one which is ideally suited to a broad-ranging exploration of issues associated with male-female interactions, not only enabled an examination of his more idiosyncratic characters but also provided a means of addressing both the intra- and extra-textual domains.

One of the more significant extra-textual considerations is the importance of the 'artist' in the creative process. At the same time that Calvino created characters, he also actively and adeptly engaged in self-creation. Through his numerous critical essays, interviews, autobiographical contributions, prefaces and afterwords to his collections, Calvino presented to the public an image of the type of writer he most admired and then artfully created for himself a public facade to fit that same image. In a similar fashion and with considerable success, Calvino directed criticism towards those aspects of his writing that he most valued

and wished to be appreciated. Although I have drawn extensively from Calvino's non-fictional material in formulating this thesis, I have not approached his autobiographical writing uncritically, finding support for my approach from those who, like Benedetti and Francese, have highlighted some of the many ways in which Calvino manipulated both his public facade and the direction of criticism of his writing. Calvino openly declared on a number of occasions that he was not interested in creating rounded characters or in exploring "l'interiorità psicologica" (S 1: 437), and with a few notable exceptions, critics have not looked closely at either of these aspects of his writing. In contrast, I have extended the boundaries of Calvino criticism by engaging in a dialogue that embraces both of these areas. I have demonstrated that Calvino's female characters may not be well rounded but they are very purposefully crafted, and although it is self-evident that Calvino's characters lack psychological depth, this does not mean that the actions and behaviours of his characters do not have profound psychological implications.

Central to my examination is the important interpretative role played by the reader. This finds support from within the Pygmalion scenario through J.H. Miller's description of the Pygmalion myth as the literalising allegory of the trope of prosopopoeia; "prosopopoeia, Pygmalion's creative gesture, is the correct name for what author, narrator, and reader do" (49). But it is equally supported beyond the realm of allegory and metaphor through Bakhtin's recognition of the active role played by the listener/reader in the communication process (*Speech* 68–69). That Calvino's writing offers a strongly male-oriented world view is widely accepted. It is also acknowledged by the author himself: "in ciò che scrivo gratta gratta puoi sempre riconoscere il sesso maschile falloocratico patriarcale" (S 2: 2825). Because of this androcentrism, the female reader is always excluded to some degree by the Calvinian text. But although many commentators have recognised this aspect of Calvino's writing, few have actively demonstrated what it is about his texts that led them to make the observation. Nocentini is one who has gone some way to addressing this question and offers the explanation that "il motivo per cui gli aspetti di maschilismo in Calvino passano inosservati dipende probabilmente dal fatto che sono relativamente poco marcati nel contesto generale di quegli anni" ("Saio" 61). In other words, in the social, historical and cultural context in which he was writing, Calvino's texts do not present as especially chauvinistic, and since Calvino worked hard to direct attention in other directions, few have reflected upon this feature of his writing. Nevertheless, by conducting a feminist reading of these texts, I have shown how Calvino's characterisation process, with its reliance on intertextual referencing, stereotypical

forms and parodic interpretations, produces female characters that overwhelmingly reflect a masculine view of the female world.

Particularly useful for my research has been information, both of a factual and a more speculative nature, obtained from reading de' Giorgi's book *Ho visto partire il tuo treno*. Material disclosed by de' Giorgi acts as a counterweight to many 'facts' revealed by Calvino in his autobiographical essays and interviews and reminds us that Calvino's words must always be approached with caution. De' Giorgi's book has not been widely considered by critics. Nevertheless, as illustrated in Chapter One, the essence of what she communicates about the nature of her romantic relationship with Calvino and about the influences of her person she finds within his writing of that period is given considerable support by revelations in Corti's article. In angry response to Di Stefano's 2004 publication of excerpts from Calvino's letters, Alberto Asor Rosa countered: "There's a profound difference between studying the life of a writer to better understand his work and looking through the keyhole" (qtd. in Povoledo).¹⁸⁶ I was encouraged rather than covered by Asor Rosa's invective for my sole interest in the Calvino-de' Giorgi relationship has been motivated by a desire to gain a better understanding of the various factors that led to Calvino creating the type of female characters that appear in these collections. Both de' Giorgi's book and Corti's revelations were published well before the 2004 controversy erupted and deserve to be recognised as valuable contributions to Calvinian research. Indeed, far from peeping through a keyhole, it would have been particularly remiss in a study of this nature not to consider the opinions of de' Giorgi and Corti and to make use of them, both to gain an insight into the man behind the public facade and to counterbalance Calvino's own commentaries, which have typically been accorded significant weight by the critics. Accessing all available material for this research and not just accepting that Calvino's personal life was irrelevant to the discussion, or beyond the bounds of propriety, is one of the ways in which I have actively resisted attempts to direct my attention.

With few exceptions, Calvino's female characters are assigned a secondary role in his narratives, but one of my principal tasks in this thesis has been to demonstrate that secondary is not synonymous with unimportant. Paradoxically, the relative lack of emphasis Calvino

¹⁸⁶ Alberto Asor Rosa's comment was first published in the Roman daily *La Repubblica*. This translated quotation appears in Elisabetta Povoledo's August 2004 article in the *New York Times*.

placed on the role played by his female characters in his explanatory notes to these texts may simply be because they are of such fundamental importance that he merely took them for granted. For example, Calvino states quite bluntly in his Nota 1960 that he created the characters of Bradamante and Sofronia because “[p]er il giovane, la donna è quel che sicuramente c’è” (RR 1: 1217). With reference to Calvino’s entire oeuvre, Scarpa observes that it appears that “tutto quanto, vita, sviluppo, autocostruzione, voglia di raccontare, entusiasmo, slancio verso il futuro, nasce proprio dalla presenza femminile che sta come un motore immobile dietro ogni nostro pensiero e ogni nostra azione” (“Autobiografia” 309). A view that Calvino indirectly supports with the following remark made at the end of his 1980 interview with Ludovica Ripa di Meana for the magazine *L’Europeo*: “Non potrei vivere senza una donna al mio fianco. Sono solo un pezzo d’un essere bicefalo e bisessuato, che è il vero organismo biologico e pensante” (“Se una sera” 91).

Pygmalion was equally incapable of living without the companionship of a woman and resorted to crafting his ideal ‘wife’ from pieces of ivory. She was the product of his imagination rather than an attempt at classical mimesis; he had, after all, rejected the women who surrounded him. Similarly, despite Calvino’s early statement that he wanted to represent “vere figure di donna” (63), I have demonstrated that the female characters he creates in his writing are barely recognisable to the female reader. Like Raphael’s paintings of women, Calvino’s female characters are the product of his “certa Idea” (Hulse 87), and in Chapter One, I examined personal experiences, both acknowledged and unacknowledged by Calvino, that helped form his ideas about women. These include his upbringing by a mother who was studious, austere and strongly principled; his intense romantic relationship with de’ Giorgi; and the hours spent in his youth in the voyeuristic seclusion of the cinema viewing American actresses who looked and behaved in ways that were totally outside his everyday experience. But perhaps more important, or at least more transparent, in Calvino’s characterisation process is material borrowed from other writers and from the literary canon. Material derived from these sources is often quite obvious, and Calvino has actively directed attention to many of his borrowings. These include his open acknowledgement of his debt to Ariosto and the traditional fairytale, traces of Nievo’s Pisana in Viola, and the unacknowledged but unmistakable connection between Sofronia and Jocasta of the Oedipus legend. In the same way that Pygmalion’s crafting of his statue has been described as a metaphorical representation of Ovid’s creation of the *Metamorphoses*, the process of piecing together one

of Calvino's female characters can be considered a literary metaphor for the ideas underlying Kristevan intertextuality, or even Foucault's discussion on the unities of discourse.

Galatea's physical form was made from pieces of ivory, but the material itself did not make her beautiful. Her beauty was the result of Pygmalion's craftsmanship. In Barthes's terminology, Calvino created his female characters from 'semes' rather than from pieces of ivory, but the same reasoning applies, and Calvino's writing style, or craftsmanship, strongly influenced the way his characters were formed. The qualities Calvino valued in literature and strove to emulate in his own writing are clearly articulated in his five completed Millennium essays. In various ways, his characters show aspects of all these qualities, but I point particularly towards the textual evidence of his desire to produce weightless writing, or 'Leggerezza,' which is something he achieved in a large part through economy of expression and the patient search for the right word ("Rapidita," S 1: 670–71).

Although Calvino's characters are barely developed, of the few words he devotes to physical description, the majority are directed towards his female characters. Conveying his messages with weightless writing and economy of expression involved a heavy reliance on well-recognised stereotypical forms and ideas, and because these borrowings stem from a strongly patriarchal heritage, it reinforces why Calvino's ideal reader is male. Through a detailed examination of a number of his better developed female characters, I have demonstrated how Calvino ascribed particular qualities to them by simply exploiting devices such as the associations traditionally linked to certain colours, by carefully and purposefully choosing their names and by relying heavily upon literary conventions such as the general acceptance that beauty is the "secure code" (Barthes, *S/Z* 143) to support novelistic love.

In contrast to Chapter One, which departs from the image of Pygmalion, tool in hand, physically constructing his statue of his ideal woman, Chapter Two approaches Pygmalion's actions from a psychoanalytical angle and delves into Pygmalion's mind. It asks what Pygmalion's actions reveal about his attitude to women and then uses the issues exposed as a vehicle for examining Calvino's portrayal of male-female relationships within his texts. The relative lack of attention paid to the psychological in Calvino's writing meant that, for many years, the substantial psychological substratum underpinning most of Calvino's narratives remained largely overlooked. More recently, a number of critics have begun to address this omission; however, they have generally focused on Calvino's later works such as *Le*

cosmicomiche (Rushing, Spackman, Hume), *Le città invisibili* (Ricci, de Lauretis), *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (Spackman) and *Sotto il sole giaguaro* (Hume, Spackman),¹⁸⁷ and relied on the more current thinking of psychoanalysts such as Lacan, Mannoni and Slavoj Žižek. In fact, according to Spackman, “Calvino’s fictions seem to repel the kind of symptomatic reading that we associate with a Freudian hermeneutics: depthless, anti-psychologistic, and ‘light’, their meta-literary framings act as an apotropaic against psychoanalytic reading” (8). Although Spackman’s observation might be appropriate for Calvino’s later work, I have demonstrated that, far from repelling a Freudian reading, Calvino’s earlier writing almost demands it. In fact, *Gli amori difficili* and *I nostri antenati* are so profoundly Freudian that, even if he did so unconsciously, it is inconceivable that Calvino was not weaving Freud’s psychoanalytical writing into his stories in much the same way that he incorporated intertextual borrowings from sources such as Ariosto, Tasso, Nievo, myths and fairytales and the literary canon in general.

The Freudian castration complex underlies much of my discussion. I have illustrated just how extensively Calvino has incorporated the element of danger into his characterisation process and provided examples of many of the different ways in which he demonstrates that his female characters exist simply to provide an antithesis, or a reflecting device, for the existential deliberations of his typically inept and introverted male characters. Since her character personifies the castration complex, it is beyond credibility that Battista di Rondò was created without reference to Freud, even if it was never acknowledged by Calvino. Battista has long been sidelined by the critics as an unimportant secondary character; however, by adopting a feminist approach, I have drawn attention to the extensive array of stereotypes and intertextual references, presented in both a straightforward and a parodic fashion, that make up her character. Most importantly, though, I have offered new and alternative readings, not only of Battista, but of many female characters, pointing to inconsistencies and double standards inherent in their characterisations that have previously remained unrecognised and that ultimately reflect patriarchal attitudes towards women.

Battista’s character represents an extreme, but more typically, the danger a female character poses is closely linked to her desirability. Through a detailed analysis of a wide cross-section

¹⁸⁷ This is not intended as an exhaustive list of critics who have looked for the psychological in Calvino’s later works.

of texts, I have revealed how desire for an often-removed, if not completely absent, female figure provokes a range of fetishistic and narcissistic defence mechanisms in the Calvinian male as he attempts to gain control of both himself and the situation; he rarely controls the woman. Although I have relied heavily on Freud, many of the stories in *Gli amori difficili* illustrate Lacan's position, further developed from a feminist perspective by Kristeva and others, that desire is situated in absence, and female characters are frequently represented as no more than absent 'figures,' to adopt Barthes's terminology. However, I have also demonstrated that, like Pygmalion, Calvino's male characters are so focused upon their own narcissistic needs that the women they desire ultimately exist for them not as individuals in their own right, but as sex objects. Indeed, with the partial exception of Viola, desire is rarely presented as reciprocal, and no explanation is provided for why a particular female character might be attracted to the man pursuing her.

Desire of the Oedipal kind with its associated dangers is also well represented in these narratives, figuratively in the encounter between the widow and the young soldier but quite literally in Sofronia and Torrismondo's story. Although such direct references to the Oedipus story at the plot level are rare, it has long been recognised that the 'Mother,' which encompasses the "Mère terrible" and the "Bonne mère" (Frasson-Marin 358), ideas implicit in Bonsaver's term "donna-Gaia," is a female character type that appears consistently throughout Calvino's oeuvre. If only for this reason, the relative absence of Oedipal themes associated with the Generalessa's character is significant. Portrayed as a genuine mother, which is not a common figure in Calvino's writing, the Generalessa has been largely ignored by the critics. Yet despite the caricatural nature of her representation, by drawing from both Calvino's autobiographical material and views expressed by de' Giorgi, I have presented convincing evidence that there is significant autobiographical referencing included in the Generalessa's characterisation. Like Eva Mameli, the Generalessa's character offers a non-stereotypical expression of the role of mother, and it is one that cannot be simply dismissed as a parodic representation.

Even when one moves beyond the realm of Freudian analysis, Calvino's representation of female sexuality remains confused and conflicted. Although typically the Calvinian female character displays relatively modern liberal attitudes towards sex, in keeping with the male-orientated viewpoint, whether this liberality is represented as a positive or a negative trait depends entirely on the needs of the male character with which she is associated. But as I

have illustrated on a number of occasions, the situations in which credibility issues surface most clearly arise when Calvino transposes modern attitudes towards female sexuality onto a story that is based in another historical period, as happens in the trilogy. One of the most glaring contradictions, which presents in all three of the fantastic tales, is that female characters that have been represented as possessing minds of their own and having modern attitudes to sexuality, are handed very traditional closures for their stories. It is completely unconvincing to suggest that this is acceptable because the genres Calvino is emulating, albeit parodistically, expect such endings. Calvino makes full use of parody to imitate with “ironic inversion” (Hutcheon, *Theory* 6) and to repeat “with a difference” (32) and upsets many traditional attitudes and genre stereotypes in his narratives. Thus, it is one of the strongest indications of the ultimately androcentric nature of his textual delivery that he has proved himself unable to carry the process through to its logical conclusion by also ironically inverting the traditional fates of his hitherto untraditional female characters. Calvino makes it quite clear that, as tradition demands, they eventually marry, enter the convent or die, and arguably goes beyond the strict requirements of the plot to do so in the cases of Ursula and Viola.

Nevertheless, some of the most intriguing examples of the way a male-oriented world view affects the representation of female characters are to be found when Calvino purports to offer a feminine perspective by using a female protagonist. Textual evidence suggests that if Calvino were to respond to Freud’s question “What does a woman want?” (E. Jones 468), his answer would be ‘a man.’ At first glance this is not so strange; after all, most of Calvino’s male characters want a woman (“[p]er il giovane, la donna è quel che sicuramente c’è”). However, the crucial difference is that for Calvino’s male characters, although the woman is desired—even necessary—she does not provide the purpose for his existence; in fact, in accordance with the well-recognised literary trope, her danger lies in her ability to distract him from that other purpose. In contrast, if Isotta’s and Stefania’s reasoning is taken as an indication, the world for a woman revolves around a man; he is the purpose for her existence. The assumption that men sit at the centre of women’s lives is a time-honoured stereotypical perspective (Felman 18), but it is one that Calvino thoroughly reinforces by atypically casting his only two female sole protagonists in the role of wife. Although critics have often noted the humour inherent in the difficulties faced by both female protagonists, the delivery of these stories has typically received little detailed attention. In contrast, I have examined both stories in depth, and by adopting a feminist approach, I have revealed a number of crucial

differences in the way that Calvino portrays the world from a feminine as opposed to a masculine perspective. But I have also emphasised that, at least to a modern female reader, a considerable portion of the humour in these stories actually arises from the seeming impossibility for either Stefania or Isotta to displace man from the central position, for it results in reasoning that often becomes incomprehensible to the point of being laughable.

Keeping my project within the bounds of these two very different but important collections and placing the representation of the feminine at the centre of the discussion, rather than treating it as just one aspect of another line of enquiry, has resulted in a very detailed examination of a wide range of factors that affected Calvino's representation of his female characters. By questioning Calvino's stance that as secondary characters his females were not important, and by refusing to deflect my attention from the feminine in his writing, I have addressed a number of previously unexplored issues, one of the more obvious being the presence of autobiographical referencing in Calvino's female character development. However, although my analysis has laid a firm foundation, it is just a beginning. I have merely exposed how wide the possibilities for further research in this general area remain. For example, a great deal of scope remains for examining the portrayal of the feminine across Calvino's oeuvre, relying more firmly on feminist psychoanalytical techniques than this investigation has allowed. The various manifestations of the Oedipal theme in Calvino's narratives also remains a largely unexplored area. Similarly, there are many opportunities for research into the way the male gaze affects the representation of the feminine in Calvino's writing, bearing in mind Calvino's own awareness of this question as witnessed by his amusing and insightful short story "Il seno nudo," which is found in the *Palomar* collection (RR 2: 880–82). Finally, since Calvino was writing from the 1940s to the 1980s, the same years that saw tremendous changes in societal perceptions of women's role in society, it would be interesting to explore possible changes in the way Calvino's representation of the feminine evolved as his career progressed.

In conclusion, when confronted by Calvino's representation of the feminine during the reading process, I, like Winterson, frequently feel moved to proclaim: "He doesn't write about us [...] in any meaningful way" and "there are very many clues" that "he thinks of his readers as male too" ("Italo" 48). Yet, despite feeling the urge to make this pronouncement, I have a deep admiration for Calvino's immense skill as a writer. In 1981, Calvino published his essay "Perché leggere i classici" in which he gave fourteen definitions of a classic. For his

eleventh, he wrote, “Il «tuo» classico è quello che non può esserti indifferente e che ti serve per definire te stesso in rapporto e magari in contrasto con lui” (S 2: 1821). Within this definition can be found both the explanation for my tremendous attraction towards Calvino’s writing and what motivated me to write this thesis. It is impossible for me to read *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili*, or indeed many of Calvino’s other narratives, and remain indifferent. Although Calvino forces me to actively resist his male-orientated position and to define myself as a feminist reader, in my personal canon he remains, nevertheless, an author of classics.

AFTERWORD

Ovid's Galatea remained silent and while they speak, Calvino's Galateas present a very androcentric view of the world. However, others have granted Galatea a more independent voice.

George Bernard Shaw recognised some of the fundamental difficulties inherent in the Pygmalion-Galatea scenario and failed to develop the relationship between Eliza Doolittle and Professor Higgins because "sa bene che in questo caso non c'è, e non può esserci, sintonia fra creatore e creatura" (Perosa 12). In his epilogue to *Pygmalion* (1912), Shaw delivers the following tongue-in-cheek assessment of the Pygmalion-Galatea relationship: "Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable."¹⁸⁸

However, one of the most interesting and innovative speculations on what Galatea might really say if she were given the freedom to speak her mind is found in the following poem by Carol Ann Duffy.¹⁸⁹

Pygmalion's Bride

Cold, I was, like snow, like ivory,
I thought He will not touch me,
but he did.

He kissed my stone-cool lips,
I lay still
as though I'd died.
He stayed.
He thumbed my marbled eyes.

¹⁸⁸ This quotation from Shaw's epilogue can be found in Harold Bloom's Introduction to *George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion* (22).

¹⁸⁹ Carol Ann Duffy is a British poet and playwright and was appointed Britain's poet laureate in May 2009.

He spoke—
blunt endearments, what he'd do and how.
His words were terrible.
My ears were sculpture, stone-deaf, shells.
I heard the sea.
I drowned him out.
I heard him shout.

He brought me presents, polished pebbles,
little bells.
I didn't blink,
Was dumb.

He brought me pearls and necklaces and rings.
He called them *girly things*.
He ran his clammy hands along my limbs.
I didn't shrink,
played statue, shtum.

He let his fingers sink into my flesh,
he squeezed, he pressed.
I would not bruise.
He looked for marks,
for purple hearts,
for inky stars, for smudgy clues.
His nails were claws.
I showed no scratch, no scrape, no scar.
He propped me up on pillows,
jawed all night.
My heart was ice, was glass.
His voice was gravel hoarse.
He talked white black.

So I changed tack,
grew warm, like candle wax,
kissed back,
was soft, was pliable,
began to moan,
got hot, got wild,
arched, coiled, writhed,
begged for his child, and at the climax
screamed my head off—
all an act.

And haven't seen him since.

Simple as that.

APPENDIX

I nostri antenati

Commonly called the fantastic trilogy, the stories were originally published as separate books but were collected together to form the trilogy *I nostri antenati* in 1960. The 1960 edition, which was introduced by the important preface known as “Nota 1960,” followed the chronological order of the historical period in which the stories were set: “Medioevo carolingio (*Il cavaliere inesistente*), guerra contro i turchi in Boemia, 1686–88 (*Il visconte dimezzato*), Settecento illuminista e rivoluzionario (*Il barone rampante*)” (RR 1: 1391). In the eighth edition, dated December 1967, the preface became an afterword, or ‘postfazione’ and the stories were ordered chronologically as written. This order has become the definitive order and is the one followed in the English edition, *Our Ancestors*, translated by Archibald Colquhoun and first published in 1980.

Il visconte dimezzato (1952) Written in 1951 but first published in February 1952.

Il barone rampante (1957)

Il cavaliere inesistente (1959)

All references used in this study are taken from volume 1 of the 1991 Mondadori edition *Romanzi e Racconti* (RR 1).

Gli amori difficili

Loosely speaking, these thirteen stories deal with problematic love and difficulties of communication. To the extent that his work can be classified, they belong to Calvino’s ‘realist’ portfolio. Most of the stories were written during the 1950s and were first grouped together as *Gli amori difficili* in 1958, when they were published as one of the four books included under the title *I racconti*. The definitive version of *Gli amori difficili* was published in 1970 and it includes a number of stories that either did not appear in the 1958 edition, or

were not included in the section *Gli amori difficili* (these stories are indicated below with an asterisk). Though the 1970 edition of *Gli amori difficili* is divided into two parts, *Gli amori difficili* and *La vita difficile*, the current study confines itself to Part One, *Gli amori difficili*. The brief publishing history included here is intended to function only as a guide towards understanding the evolution of the definitive 1970 collection and does not represent a complete summary. For more information, see the very comprehensive Appendix, “Chronology of Calvino’s Fiction,” in Martin McLaughlin’s *Italo Calvino*.

“L’avventura di un soldato” (1949)*: First published in *Ultimo viene il corvo* 1949 and also included in the 1969 revised edition of the same volume.

“L’avventura di un bandito” (1949)*: Originally published as “Un letto di passaggio,” it appeared in *I racconti* (1958) but within the third group, *Gli idilli difficili*. It was renamed specifically for inclusion in *Gli amori difficili* 1970.

“L’avventura di una bagnante” (1951): First published in *Paragone letteratura*, August 1951.

“L’avventura di un impiegato” (1953): First published in *Paragone letteratura*, August 1953.

“L’avventura di un fotografo” (1955)*: Originally published as the non-fiction essay “La follia del mirino” in *Il Contemporaneo*, April 1955 (see S 2: 2217–20). The essay was fictionalised for inclusion in the 1970 edition.

“L’avventura di un viaggiatore” (1957): Originally published as “Una notte d’amore” (*Il Verri*, October 1958) but renamed and included in *I racconti* (1958).

“L’avventura di un lettore” (1958): First published in *Tempo presente*, August 1958.

“L’avventura di un miope” (1958).

“L’avventura di una moglie” (1958).

“L’avventura di due sposi” (1958).

“L’avventura di un poeta” (1958).

“L’avventura di uno sciatore” (1959)*: Manuscript name was “Il cappuccio da sci celeste-cielo” but it was first published as “La ragazza celeste-cielo” in *Successo*, May 1959. It was renamed “La avventura di uno sciatore” for its inclusion in *Gli amori difficili* (1970).

“L’avventura di un automobilista” (1967)*: First published as “Il guidatore notturno” in *Il Giorno*, July 1967, and republished the same year in *Ti con zero* (1967). It was renamed for inclusion in *Gli amori difficili* (1970).

Except for “L’avventura di un automobilista,” all stories were written between 1949 and 1959. However, as Lucia Re explains in “Calvino e l’enigma della fotografia,” “L’avventura di un fotografo” differs quite significantly from the 1955 article on which it is based. Although Calvino gives the impression that it was written in 1955, Re believes that it was actually written towards the end of the 1960s (115).

All references used in this study are taken from volume 2 of the 1991 Mondadori edition *Romanzi e Racconti* (RR 2) except for “L’avventura di un soldato,” which is published in volume 1, reflecting its original inclusion in the collection *Ultimo viene il corvo*.

Difficult Loves

The English language edition *Difficult Loves*, translated by William Weaver and published in slightly different formats in 1983 and 1984, differs from the definitive Italian collection published in 1970. It includes only eight of the thirteen ‘adventure’ stories. Although the English edition includes “The Adventure of a Bather,” it omits both “L’avventura di una moglie” and “L’avventura di due sposi,” both of which appeared in the original Italian anthology (1958). It also omits both “L’avventura di uno sciatore” and “L’avventura di un automobilista,” which were new additions to the 1970 Italian edition, although it does include “The Adventure of a Photographer,” which was also new in 1970. “Transit Bed,” which was renamed “L’avventura di un bandito” for the 1970 *Gli amori difficili*, is included in the English edition but in the section called “Wartime Stories.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahern, John. "Out of Montale's Cavern: A Reading of Calvino's 'Gli amori difficili.'" *Modern Language Studies* 12.1 (1982): 3–19. Print.
- Alcott, Louisa May. *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. New York: William Morrow, 1976. Print.
- Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Ariosto, Ludovico. *Orlando Furioso*. Trans. Guido Waldman. London: Oxford UP, 1974. Print.
- . *Orlando furioso*. Milano: Mondadori, 1976. Print.
- Ariosto, Ludovico, and Italo Calvino. *Orlando furioso di Ludovico Ariosto raccontato da Italo Calvino*. Torino: Einaudi, 1970. Print.
- Arslan, Antonia, and Maria Pia Pozzato. "Il rosa." *Letteratura italiana: Storia e geografica*. Ed. Alberto Asor Rosa. Vol. 3. Torino: Einaudi, 1989. 1027. Print.
- Artom, Priscilla. "Il cavaliere inesistente." *Abito e Identità*. Ed. Cristina Giorcelli. Vol. II. Roma: Edizione Associate, 1997. 11–24. Print.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. Print.
- . *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984. Print. *Theory and History of Literature* 8.
- . *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* Trans. Vern W. McGee. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986. Print.
- Balzac, Honoré de. *The Girl with the Golden Eyes*. Trans. Ellen Marriage. *Project Gutenberg*, 28 Feb. 2010. Web. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1659>>.
- Bardazzi, Giovanni. "La morale del racconto: Italo Calvino e l'avventura di uno sciatore." *Versants: Rivista Svizzera di Letterature Romanze* 48 (2004): 227–79. Print.
- Barenghi, Mario. *Calvino*. Profili di storia letteraria. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009. Print. Profili di storia letteraria.
- . *Italo Calvino, le linee e i margini*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007. Print.
- Barrett, Tracy. "The Narrator of Italo Calvino's *Il cavaliere inesistente*." *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 13.1 (1992): 57–70. Print.
- Barth, John. *Lost in the Funhouse*. London: Secker, 1969. Print.

- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill, 1981. Print.
- . *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill, 1977. Print.
- . *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill, 1975. Print.
- . *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill, 1974. Print.
- Bauer, Douglas F. "The Function of Pygmalion in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid." *Transaction and Proceedings of the American Philological Association TAPA* 93 (1962): 1–21. Print.
- Beer, Gillian. *The Romance*. London: Methuen, 1970. Print.
- Beers, William. *Women and Sacrifice: Male Narcissism and the Psychology of Religion*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992. Print.
- Ben-Porat, Ziva. "Method in Madness: Notes on the Structure of Parody, Based on MAD TV Satires." *Poetics Today* 1.1–2 (1979): 245–72. Print.
- Bencivenga, Ermanno. "Philosophy and Literature in Calvino's Tales." *Literary Philosophers*. Eds. Jorge J. E. Gracia, Carolyn Korsmeyer and Rodolphe Gasché. New York: Routledge, 2002. 205–21. Print.
- Benedetti, Carla. *Pasolini contro Calvino: Per una letteratura impura*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998. Print.
- Berardinelli, Alfonso. "Calvino moralista, ovvero, restare sani dopo la fine del mondo." *Diario* 7.9 (1991): 37–58. Print.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974. Print.
- Besa Camprubí, Carles. "Entre la pluma y la espada: Bradamante, la amazona escritora de Il cavaliere inesistente." *Femmes et guerre en Méditerranée: (XVIIIème–XXème siècles)*. Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry; Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2000. 127–41. Print.
- Bettella, Patrizia. "Fosca: the Myth of the Ugly Woman." *Gendered Contexts: New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*. Eds. Laura Benedetti, Julia L. Hairston and Silvia M. Ross. New York: Lang, 1996. 133–42. Print. *Studies in Italian Culture—Literature in History*.
- . *The Ugly Woman: Transgressive Aesthetic Models in Italian Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005. Print.
- Bezrucka, Yvonne. "The Well-Beloved: Thomas Hardy's Manifesto of 'Regional Aesthetics.'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36 (2008): 227–45. Print.

- The Bible*. Authorised King James Vers. Web. 29 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org>>.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion*. New York: Chelsea, 1988. Print.
- Bloom, Michelle E. "Pygmalionesque Delusions and Illusions of Movement: Animation from Hoffmann to Truffaut." *Comparative Literature* 52.4 (2000): 291–320. Print.
- Bolongaro, Eugenio. *Italo Calvino and the Compass of Literature*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003. Print.
- Bolton Holloway, Julia, Joan Bechtold and Constance S. Wright, eds. *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*. 1990. *Umilta*. Web. 9 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.umilta.net/equally.html>>.
- Bonsaver, Guido. "Cities of the Imagination: Traces of Italo Calvino in Jeanette Winterson's Fiction." *The Italianist* 15 (1995): 213–30. Print.
- . *Il mondo scritto: Forme e ideologia nella narrativa di Italo Calvino*. Torino: Tirrenia, 1995. Print.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961. Print.
- Boulé, Jean-Pierre. *Sartre, Self-Formation and Masculinities*. New York: Berghahn, 2005. Print.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. Print.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Ed. Michael Mason. London: Penguin, 1996. Print.
- Caesar, Ann. *Characters and Authors in Luigi Pirandello*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998. Print.
- Calvino, Italo. *The Baron in the Trees*. Trans. Archibald Colquhoun. Orlando: Harcourt, 1959. Print.
- . *Difficult Loves*. Trans. William Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt, 1984. Print.
- . *Eremita a Parigi: Pagine autobiografiche*. Milano: Mondadori, 1994. Print.
- . *Fiabe italiane*. Milano: Mondadori, 1993. Print.
- . "Introduction by the Author." Trans. Isabel Quigley. *Our Ancestors*. Trans. Archibald Colquhoun. London: Vintage, 1998. Print.
- . *I libri degli altri: Lettere 1947–1981*. Ed. Giovanni Tesio. Torino: Einaudi, 1991. Print.
- . *Mr. Palomar*. Trans. William Weaver. Orlando: Harcourt, 1985. Print.
- . "Otto domande sull'erotismo in letteratura." *Nuovi argomenti* 51–52 (1961): 21–24. Print.
- . *Our Ancestors*. Trans. Archibald Colquhoun. London: Vintage, 1998. Print.
- . "Pesci grossi, pesci piccoli." *Inventario* 3 (1950): 62–69. Print.

- . *Romanzi e racconti*. Ed. Claudio Milanini, Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falchetto. 3 vols. Milano: Mondadori, 1991. Print.
- . *Saggi: 1945–1985*. Ed. Mario Barenghi. Milano: Mondadori, 1995. Print.
- . “Se una sera d’autunno uno scrittore.” Interview by Ludovica Ripa di Meana. *L’Europeo* 17 Nov. 1980: 84–91. Print.
- . *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. Trans. Patrick Creagh. New York: Vintage Books, 1988. Print.
- . *La strada di San Giovanni*. Milano: Mondadori, 1990. Print.
- Carne-Ross, D. S. “The One and the Many: A Reading of the Orlando Furioso.” *Arion* 3.2 (1976): 146–219. Print.
- Carolan, Mary Ann McDonald. “*La monaca di Monza*: Manzoni’s Bad Girl and the Repudiation of the Imagination.” *Rivista di Studi Italiani* 19.2 (2001): 65–85. Print.
- Carter, Albert Howard. *Italo Calvino: Metamorphoses of Fantasy*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987. Print.
- Castiglione, Baldesar. *The Book of the Courtier*. Trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke. Ware: Wordsworth, 2000. Print.
- . *Il cortegiano del conte Baldesar Castiglione*. Annotato e Illustrato da Vittorio Cian. Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1894. Web. 27 Mar. 2013. <openlibrary.org/books/OL16434265M/Il_cortegiano_del conte_Baldesar_Castiglione>.
- Cavallaro, Dani. *The Mind of Italo Calvino: A Critical Exploration of His Thought and Writing*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2010. Print.
- Charleston, Beth Duncuff. “The Bikini.” New York, 2000. *Helbrunn Timeline of Art History*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Web. 5 Sept 2012. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/biki/hd_biki.htm>
- Colette. *Chéri and The Last of Chéri*. New York: Ballantine, 1982. Print.
- Corti, Maria. “Un eccezionale epistolario d’amore di Italo Calvino.” *Italo Calvino: A Writer for the Next Millennium: Atti Del Convegno Internazionale di studi di Sanremo*. 28 Nov.–1 Dec. 1996. Ed. Giorgio Bertone. Alessandria: Orso, 1998. 301–09. Print.
- Cukor, George, dir. *My Fair Lady*. Warner Bros, 1964. Film.
- Day, Martin S. *The Many Meanings of Myth*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984. Print.
- de’ Giorgi, Elsa. *Ho visto partire il tuo treno*. Milano: Leonardo, 1992. Print.

- De Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. Print.
- . *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989. Print.
- . "Reading the (Post) Modern Text: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*." *Calvino Revisited*. Ed. Franco Ricci. Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1989. 131–46. Print.
- De Lorris, Guillaume, and Jean de Meun. *The Romance of the Rose*. Trans. Charles Dahlberg. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983. Print.
- de Saint-Pierre, Jacques Bernardin Henri. *Paul and Virginie*. 1788. Web. 5 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2127>>.
- Di Stefano, Paolo. "Elsa, Italo e il conte scomparso." 4 Aug. 2004. *Corriere della sera*. Web. 21 Jan. 2013. <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2004/agosto/04/Elsa_Italo_conto_scomparso_co_9_040804011.shtml>.
- "Ideal." The Oxford English Dictionary. Print.
- Duffy, Carol Ann. *The World's Wife*. London: Picador, 1999. Print.
- Eco, Umberto. "The Frames of Comic Freedom " *Carnival!* Eds. Thomas A. Sebeok and Marcia E. Erickson. Berlin: Mouton, 1984. Print.
- . *Il nome della rosa*. Milano: Bompiani, 1980. Print.
- Elam, Diane. *Romancing the Postmodern*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Emery, Ted A. "Goldini's Pamela from Play to Libretto." *Italica* 64.4 (1987): 572–82. Print.
- Ender, Evelyne. *Sexing the Mind*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995. Print.
- Felman, Shoshana. *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993. Print.
- Ferguson, Mary Anne. *Images of Women in Literature*. 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986. Print.
- Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978. Print.
- Fink, Bruce. "Perversion." *Perversion and the Social Relation*. Ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis Foster and Slavoj Žižek. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. 38–67. Print.
- Finocchiaro Chimirri, Giovanna. *Italo Calvino tra realtà e favola*. Catania: C.U.E.C.M., 1987. Print.
- Finucci, Valeria. "The Female Masquerade: Ariosto and the Game of Desire." *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*. Eds. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz. Ewing: Princeton UP, 1994. Print.

- . *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992. Print.
- Fish, Stanley. "Just Published Minutiae Without Meaning." *The New York Times* 7 Sept 1999: A19. Print.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. Trans. Geoffrey Wall. London: Penguin, 1992. Print.
- Fletcher, Lisa. *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2008. Print.
- Flieger, Hanna. *Il rapporto varianti/costanti nella poetica di Italo Calvino: Modalità attanziali e implicazioni culturali*. Poznan-Torun: Wydawnictwo, 1994. Print.
- Fofí, Goffredo. "Presentazione." *L'avventura di uno spettatore: Italo Calvino e il cinema*. Ed. Lorenzo Pellizzari. Bergamo: Pierluigi Lubrina, 1990. Print.
- Forbes, Bryan, dir. *The Stepford Wives*. Columbia Pictures, 1975. Film.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Smith. Sheridan: Pantheon, 1972. Print.
- Fowles, John. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1969. Print.
- Francesco, Joseph. "The Refashioning of Calvino's Public Self-Image in the 1950s and Early 1960s." *The Italianist* 27.1 (2007): 125–50. Print.
- Frasson-Marin, Aurore. *Italo Calvino et l'imaginaire*. Genève: Slatkine, 1986. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Ego and the Id (1923)." Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 19. London: Hogarth, 1957. 3–68. Print.
- . "Femininity (1933)." Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 22. London: Hogarth, 1957. 111–35. Print.
- . "Fetishism (1927)." Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 21. London: Hogarth, 1957. 149–57. Print.
- . "Medusa's Head (1940 [1922])." Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 18. London: Hogarth, 1957. 273–75. Print.
- . "On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)." Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 14. London: Hogarth, 1957. 67–102. Print.

- . "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men (1910)." Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 11. London: Hogarth, 1957. 163–75. Print.
- . *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey. 24 vols. London: Hogarth, 1957. Print.
- . "The Taboo of Virginity (1918 [1917])." Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 11. London: Hogarth, 1957. 191–208. Print.
- . "The Uncanny (1919)." Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 17. London: Hogarth, 1957. 217–56. Print.
- Friedman, Miriam E. "Love and Narrative Unity in Calvino." Diss. Indiana U, 1983. Print.
- Gabriele, Tommasina. *Italo Calvino: Eros and Language*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP; London: Assoc. University Presses, 1994. Print.
- . "Literature as Education and the Near-Perfect Protagonist: Narrative Structure in *Il barone rampante*." *Stanford Review* 11 1-2 (1992): 91-102. Print.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980. Print.
- Gilbert, Lewis, dir. *Educating Rita*. Columbia Pictures, 1983. Film.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. Print.
- Gilman, Donald. "Petrarch's Sophonisba: Seduction, Sacrifice, and Patriarchal Politics." *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*. Eds. Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allan Miller and Charles Platter. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997. 111–38. Print. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies.
- Giorcelli, Cristina. "Presentazione." *Abito e Identità*. Ed. Cristina Giorcelli. Vol. II. Roma: Associate Editrice Internazionale, 1997. 5–8. Print.
- Girard, René. *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer. London: Athlone, 1987. Print.
- Glicksberg, Charles I. *The Self in Modern Literature*. University Park: Pennsylvania State U, 1963. Print.
- Goldoni, Carlo. *La Pamela*. Roma: Santa Marinella, 1994. Print. I Quid 13.

- Gray, Jonathan. *Watching with the Simpsons: Television, Parody, and Intertextuality*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Gundle, Stephen. *Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. Print.
- Hagen, Margareth. "La seduzione del cavaliere inesistente." *Romansk Forum* 16.2 (2002): 875–85. Print.
- Hardy, Thomas. *The Well-Beloved*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986. Print.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Birthmark*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia Library, 1996. Web.
- Heath, John. "The Stupor of Orpheus: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10.64–71." *The Classical Journal* 91.4 (1996): 353–70. Print.
- Hoffmann, E. T. A. *Tales of Hoffmann*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982. Print.
- Holmes, Frederick M. "The Novel, Illusion, and Reality: The Paradox of Omniscience in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 11.3 (1981): 184–98. Print.
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*. Ed. Claude Colleer Abbott. London: Oxford UP, 1935. Print.
- Hughes, Helen. *The Historical Romance*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Hulse, Clark. *The Rule of Art: Literature and Painting in the Renaissance*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990. Print.
- Hume, Kathryn. "Calvino's *La memoria del mondo*: The Forgotten Record of Lost Worlds." *Calvino Revisited*. Ed. Franco Ricci. Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1989. 85–102. Print.
- . "Sensuality and the Senses in Calvino's Fiction." *MLN* 107.1 (1992): 160–77. Print.
- Humm, Maggie. *Practicising Feminist Criticism: An Introduction*. London: Prentice-Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995. Print.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1980. Print.
- . *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- . *A Theory of Parody*. New York: Methuen, 1985. Print.
- Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Ed. Jane P. Tompkins. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980. 50–69. Print.
- Jacobs, Vivian, and Jacobs Wilhelmina. "The Color Blue: Its Use as Metaphor and Symbol." *American Speech* 33.1 (1958): 29–46. Print.

- Jankowski, Theodora A. "Good Enough to Eat: The Domestic Economy of Woman—Woman
 Eroticism in Margaret Cavendish and Andrew Marvell." *Privacy, Domesticity, and
 Women in Early Modern England*. Ed. Corinne S. Abate. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.
 83–109. Print.
- Jardine, Alice A. *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP,
 1985. Print.
- Javitch, Daniel. "The Orlando Furioso and Ovid's Revision of the Aeneid." *Comparative
 Literature* 99.5 (1984): 1023–36. Print.
- Jeannet, Angela M. *Under the Radiant Sun and the Crescent Moon: Italo Calvino's
 Storytelling*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000. Print.
- Jones, Ernest. *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*. Vol. 2. London: Hogarth Press, 1955. Print
- Jones, Roger, and Nicholas Penny. *Raphael*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1983. Print.
- Jordanova, L.J. "Naturalizing the Family: Literature and the Bio-Medical Sciences in the Late
 Eighteenth Century." *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and
 Literature*. Ed. L.J. Jordanova. London: Free Association Books, 1986. 86116. Print.
- Joshua, Essaka. *Pygmalion and Galatea: The History of a Narrative in English Literature*.
 Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. Print.
- Jung, C. G. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge-
 Kegan Paul, 1953. Print. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. 7.
- Kahn, Madeleine. *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century
 English Novel*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991. Print.
- Kaplan, Louise J. *Cultures of Fetishism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006. Print.
- . *Female Perversions: The Temptations of Madame Bovary*. London: Penguin, 1991. Print.
- Kennell, Vicki R. "Pygmalion as Narrative Bridge between the Centuries." *The Shaw Review*
 25 (2005): 73–81. Print.
- Knight, Christopher, J. "Woody Allen's Annie Hall: Galatea's Triumph over Pygmalion." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 32.3 (2004): 213–21. Print.
- Knutson, Harold C. "Andromeda." Trans. Wendy Allatson, Judith Hayward, Trista Selous.
Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes. Ed. Pierre Brunel. London:
 Routledge, 1992. 61–68. Print.
- Kofman, Sarah. *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*. Trans. Catherine
 Porter. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. Print.
- . *Freud and Fiction*. Trans. Sarah Wykes. Cambridge: Polity, 1991. Print.
- . "The Narcissistic Woman: Freud and Girard." *Diacritics* 10.3 (1980): 36–45. Print.

- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language*. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980. Print.
- . *Histoires d'amour*. Paris: Denoel, 1983. Print.
- . *Tales of Love*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1987. Print.
- Krysinski, Wladimir. "Borges, Calvino, Eco: The Philosophies of Metafiction." *Literary Philosophers: Borges, Calvino, Eco*. Eds. Jorge J. E. Gracia, Carolyn Korsmeyer and Rodolphe Gasché. New York: Routledge, 2002. 185–204. Print.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. Trans. Jacqueline Rose. Eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. London: Macmillan, 1982. Print.
- Laing, R. D. *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978. Print.
- Levin, Ira. *The Stepford Wives*. London: Bloomsbury, 2000. Print.
- Longo, Nicola. *Il peso dell'imponderabile: Lettura de Il cavaliere inesistente di Italo Calvino*. Roma: Euroma, 1995. Print.
- Mann, Thomas. *Doctor Faustus*. Trans. Michael Beddow. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Print.
- Mannoni, Octave. "I Know Well, but All the Same...." Trans. G. M. Goshgarian. *Perversion and the Social Relation*. Ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis Foster and Slavoj Zizek. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. 68–92. Print.
- Mansfield, Elizabeth C. *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis*. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 2007. Print.
- Manzoni, Alessandro. *I promessi sposi: Storia milanese del secolo XVII*. 5th ed. Torino: Einaudi, 1960. Print.
- Markey, Constance. *Italo Calvino: A Journey Toward Postmodernism*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1999. Print.
- Marshall, Gail. *Actresses on the Victorian Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.
- Marshall, Gary, dir. *Pretty Woman*. Touchstone Pictures, 1990. Film.
- Materassi, Mario. "Artificial Women, the Pygmalion Paradigm, and Faulkner's Gordon in *Mosquitoes*." *Global Faulkner. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*. Eds. Annette Trefzer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2009. 135-50. Print.
- McConnell, Kathleen. "Creating People for Popular Consumption: Echoes of Pygmalion and 'The Rape of the Lock' in *Artificial Intelligence:AI*." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40.4 (2007): 683–99. Print.

- . "Dark Angel: A Recombinant Pygmalion for the Twenty-First Century." *Gothic Studies* 4.2 (2002): 178–90. Print.
- McLaughlin, Martin. *Italo Calvino*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998. Print. Writers of Italy.
- . "La speculazione edilizia: Natura e storia in un racconto 'difficile.'" *Italo Calvino: A Writer for the Next Millennium: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi di Sanremo*. 28 Nov.–1 Dec. 1996. Ed. Giorgio Bertone. Alessandria: Orso, 1998. 205–20. Print.
- Migiel, Marilyn. "The Phantasm of Omnipotence in Calvino's Trilogy." *Modern Language Studies* 16.3 (1986): 57–68. Print.
- Migraine-George, Thérèse. "Specular Desires: Orpheus and Pygmalion as Aesthetic Paradigms in Petrarch's Rime sparse." *Comparative Literature Studies* 36.3 (1999): 226–46. Print.
- Miles, Geoffrey, ed. *Classical Mythology in English Literature: A Critical Anthology*. London: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *Versions of Pygmalion*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990. Print.
- Miller, Jane M. "Some Versions of Pygmalion." *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Charles Martindale. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. 205–14. Print.
- Mitchell, Juliet. "Introduction—1." Trans. Jacqueline Rose. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. Eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. London: Macmillan, 1982. Print.
- Modena, Letizia. "Italo Calvino e la saggistica del magma: Verso un'altra genealogia della leggerezza." *MLN* 123 (2008): 40–55. Print.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1985. Print.
- Montuori, Joseph, ed. *AviTrees.com*. Web. 3 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.avitrees.com/onomastics/names.jsp?al=snames.html>>.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989. Print.
- . "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Eds. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy. 4th ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. 746–57. Print.
- Murdoch, Iris. "On 'God' and 'Good.'" *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*. Ed. Peter Conradi. London: Chatto, 1997. Print.

- Mykyta, Larysa. "Lacan, Literature and the Look Woman in the Eye of Psychoanalysis." *SubStance* 12 2.39 (1983): 4957. Print.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Beyond Good and Evil." Trans. Helen Zimmern. *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Ed. Oscar Levy. 1964 ed. Vol. 12. New York: Russell, 1923. Print.
- Nocentini, Claudia. "Fiat Pasta: Calvino and Food." *Food in European Literature*. Ed. John Wilkins. Exeter: Intellect, 1996. Print.
- . *Italo Calvino and the Landscape of Childhood*. Leeds: Northern Universities P, 2000. Print.
- . "«Saio o bikini? Vada per l'armatura». Esplorazioni di guardaroba del Calvino degli anni '50." *Vested Voices II: Creating with Transvestism: from Bertolucci to Boccaccio*. Eds. Federica G. Pedriali and Rossella Riccobono. Ravenna: Longo, 2007. 59–65. Print.
- O'Brien, Flann. *At Swim-Two-Birds*. 1939. London: MacGibbon, 1968. Print.
- O'Sullivan, Jane. "Virtual Metamorphoses: Cosmetic and Cybernetic Revisions of Pygmalion's 'Living Doll.'" *Arethusa* 41 (2008): 133–56. Print.
- Olken, I. T. *With Pleated Eye and Garnet Wing: Symmetries of Italo Calvino*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1984. Print.
- Ovid. *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*. Trans. Mary M. Innes, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955. Print.
- Oz, Frank, dir. *The Stepford Wives*. Paramount Pictures, 2004. Film.
- Paglia, Camille. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. London: Yale UP, 1990. Print.
- Pater, Walter, and Arthur Symons. *The Renaissance*. New York: The Modern Library, [1900?]. Print.
- Pavese, Cesare. "Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno (1947)." *Saggi letterari*. Turin: Einaudi, 1968. 245–47. Print.
- Pearce, Lynne. *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*. London: Arnold, 1997. Print.
- Pedriali, Federica G. "Onnipotenziali e monacati: Manzoni, Verga, Gadda." *Vested Voices II: Creating with Transvestism: From Bertolucci to Boccaccio*. Eds. Federica G. Pedriali and Rossella Riccobono. Ravenna: Longo, 2007. 87–97. Print.
- Perella, Nicolas J. *Midday in Italian Literature: Variations on an Archetypal Theme*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979. Print.

- Perosa, Sergio. "Galatea distrugge Pigmalione." *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze lettere ed Arti* 162 (2002–2003): 1–18. Print.
- Pettigrew, Damien. "Italo Calvino: The Art of Fiction." New York, 1983. *The Paris Review*. 130. Web. 9 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2027/the-art-of-fiction-no-130-italo-calvino>>.
- Pirandello, Luigi. *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore*. Ed. Giulio Ferroni. Firenze: Giunti, 1994. Print.
- Poncelet, Albert. "St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 15. New York: Appleton, 1912. Web. 17 July 2012. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15225d.htm>>.
- Povoledo, Elisabetta. "Italian Novelist's Love Letters Turn Political." *The New York Times* 20 Aug. 2004. Web. 21 Jan. 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/20/style/20iht-calvino_ed3_html>.
- Propp, V. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. Laurence Scott. 2d ed. Austin: U of Texas P, 1968. Print.
- Re, Lucia. "Ariosto and Calvino: The Adventures of a Reader." *Ariosto Today: Contemporary Perspectives*. Eds. Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella and Roberto Fedi. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003. 211–33. Print.
- . *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Print.
- . "Calvino e il cinema: La voce, lo sguardo, la distanza." *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 20.1–2 (1999): 91–102. Print.
- . "Calvino e l'enigma della fotografia." *Italo Calvino y la Cultura de Italia*. Ed. Franca Bizzoni and Mariapia Lamberti. Ciudad de Mexico: Catedra Extraordinaria Italo Calvino, 2007. 115–28. Print.
- Reinhold, Meyer. "The Naming of Pygmalion's Animated Statue." *The Classical Journal* 66.4 (1971): 316–19. Print.
- Renga, Dana. "Looking Out: Calvino's Vision of the 'Economic Miracle.'" *Italica* 80.3 (2003): 371–88. Print.
- Ricci, Franco. *Difficult Games: A Reading of I racconti by Italo Calvino*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1990. Print.
- . "Introversion and Effacement in *I racconti* of Italo Calvino." *Italica* 63.4 (1986): 331–45. Print.

- . *Painting with Words, Writing with Pictures: Word and Image in the Work of Italo Calvino*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001. Print.
- . "The Quest for Sonship in *Le città invisibili* and 'La strada di San Giovanni' by Italo Calvino." *Forum Italica* 29.1 (1995): 52–75. Print.
- . "Silence and the Loss of Self in Italo Calvino's *Gli amori difficili*." *The Italianist* 4 (1984): 54–72. Print.
- Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded. In a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young Damsel to her parents*. 1742. *Literature Online*. Web. 9 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6124>>.
- Riggan, William. *Pícaros, Madmen, Naïfs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1981. Print.
- Rose, Jacqueline. "Introduction II." Trans. Jacqueline Rose. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. Eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. London: Macmillan, 1982. Print.
- Rushing, Robert. "What We Desire, We Shall Never Have: Calvino, Zizek, and Ovid." *Comparative Literature* 58.1 (2006): 44–58. Print.
- Salzman-Mitchell, Patricia. "A Whole out of Pieces: Pygmalion's Ivory Statue in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*." *Arethusa* 41.2 (2008): 291–311. Print.
- Sanguinetti Katz, Giuliana. "Le 'adolescenze difficili' di Italo Calvino." *Quaderni d'Italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies* 5.2 (1984): 247–61. Print.
- Santoro, Vito. *Calvino e il cinema*. Macerata: Quodlibet, 2012. Print.
- Scarpa, Domenico. "Autobiografia di una conchiglia." *Italo Calvino—Enciclopedia: arte, scienza e letteratura*. Ed. Marco Belpoliti. Milano: Marcos y Marcos, 1995. 304–17. Print. Riga 9.
- . *Italo Calvino*. Milano: Mondadori, 1999. Print.
- Schibanoff, Susan. "Taking the Gold Out of Egypt: The Art of Reading as a Woman." *Gender and Reading*. Eds. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986. 83–106. Print.
- Schneider, Marilyn. "Calvino's Erotic Metaphor and the Hermaphroditic Solution." *Stanford Italian Review* 2.1 (1981): 93–118. Print.
- Scholes, Robert, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. 40th anniv. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.

- Schweickart, Patrocínio P. "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading." *Speaking of Gender*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Routledge, 1989. 17–44. Print.
- Scola, Ettore, dir. *C'eravamo tanto amati*. Delta, 1974. Film.
- Scott, Ridley, dir. *Blade Runner*. Warner Bros, 1982. Film.
- Scrivano, Fabrizio. "Raccontare la scrittura. Italo Calvino e *Il cavaliere inesistente*." *Esperienze Letterarie* 32.2 (2007): 79–97. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ed. Ebenezer Charlton Black. New York: Ginn, 1910. Print.
- Shaw, Bernard. *Pygmalion*. London: Methuen Drama, 2008. Print.
- Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein: Complete Authorative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Johanna M. Smith. Boston: Bedford-St Martin's, 1992. Print.
- Sheriff, Mary D. *Moved By Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004. Print.
- Silverman, Kaja. "Kaspar Hauser's 'Terrible Fall' into Narrative." *New German Critique—Special Double Issue on New German Cinema* 24–25 (1981–1982): 73–93. Print.
- . *The Subject of Semiotics*. New York: Oxford UP, 1983. Print.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001. Print.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Penguin, 2002. Print.
- Spackman, Barbara. "Calvino's Non-Knowledge." *Romance Studies* 26.1 (2008): 7–19. Print.
- Spark, Muriel. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. London: Macmillan, 1961. Print.
- Stratton, Jon. *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996. Print.
- Suleiman, Susan Rubin. "Malraux's Women: A Re-vision." *Gender and Reading*. Eds. Patrocínio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986. 124–46. Print.
- Sullivan, Laura L. "Women Reading Calvino Reading Women." *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association* (1994): 156–69. Print.
- Tasso, Torquato. *Gerusalemme liberata*. Milano: Mondadori, 1979. Print.
- Thompson, Daniel V. *The Materials of Medieval Painting*. London: Allen, 1936. Print.
- Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd ed. Boulder: Westview, 2009. Print.

- Tornabuoni, Lietta. "Calvino: Il cinema inesistente." *L'avventura di uno spettatore: Italo Calvino e il cinema*. Ed. Lorenzo Pellizzari. Bergamo: Pierluigi Lubrina, 1990. 127–34. Print.
- Unsworth, Barry. *Stone Virgin*. New York: Norton, 1986. Print.
- Vidal, Gore. "I romanzi di Calvino." *Italo Calvino. Enciclopedia: Arte, Scienza e letteratura*. Ed. Marco Belpoliti. Milano: Marcos y Marcos, 1991. 136–53. Print. Riga 9.
- Vinge, Louise. *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century*. Trans. Robert Dewsnap with Lisbeth Gronlund and Nigel Reeves with Ingrid Soderberg-Reeves. Lund: Skanska Centraltryckeriet, 1967. Print.
- Vittorini, Elio. *Le due tensioni*. Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1967. Print.
- Waage, Petersen, Lene. "Calvino lettore dell'Ariosto." *Revue Romane* 26.2 (1991): 230–46. Print.
- Waters, Sandy. "The Intradiegetic Narrator in the Italian Historical Novel." *La Fusta* 15 (2007). Web. 5 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.eden.rutgers.edu/~italgs/swaters.pdf>>.
- Weiss, Beno. *Understanding Italo Calvino*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1993. Print.
- Whale, James, dir. *Frankenstein*. Universal Pictures, 1931. Film.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2003. Print.
- Winterson, Jeanette. "Italo Calvino." *The Independent Magazine* 6 Jan. 1990: 48. Print.
- . *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. 1995 Pandora Press. London: Vintage, 2001. Print.
- Woodhouse, John Robert. *Italo Calvino: A Reappraisal and an Appreciation of the Trilogy*. Hull: U of Hull, 1968. Print.
- Yavneh, Naomi. "'Dal rogo alle nozze'; Tasso's Sofronia as Martyr Manqué." *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*. Ed. Valeria Finucci. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. 270–94. Print.