

A space of his own: The male artist, space, and the fantastic in Paola Capriolo's *La spettatrice* (1995) and Laura Mancinelli's *La casa del tempo* (1993)*

Danielle Hipkins

Introduction

Italian women's writing of the fantastic, hardly regarded as a tradition, has recently begun to attract more attention, permitting the identification of a 'fantastico al femminile', which, according to Monica Farnetti, is one that may respond to the uncanny with 'una relazione empatica'.¹ The strand I intend to focus upon in this paper, however, is one closer to Farnetti's description of another female fantastic, a 'versione angosciata' that can lead to empowerment, which she links to writers from outside Italy.² Yet rather like the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English language writers identified by Gilbert and Gubar,³ and the earlier Matilde Serao,⁴ the contemporary Italian writers I discuss here use the fantastic mode as a particularly effective means of exploring anxiety about the relationship between artistic creativity and gender. I have already shown how Italian women writers of the fantastic successfully use the figure of a male reader to question the representation of women in literature.⁵ In this article it is the depiction of the male artist within the fantastic mode that I wish to explore in Paola Capriolo's *La spettatrice* and Laura Mancinelli's *La casa del tempo*.⁶

In the wake of the avalanche of definitions of the fantastic that followed Todorov's notoriously exclusive one,⁷ in which the fantastic lay on the knife-edge between the uncanny and the marvellous, I will use that proposed by Lugnani, who emphasizes the fantastic narrative's tendency to eliminate all possible paradigms that would enable the reader to interpret the cause of events in a definitive way, giving rise to a 'cognitive block'.⁸ At the same time I think that the critical emphasis on the tendency of the fantastic to invite interpretation, whilst resisting it, is an equally important one. Luigi Punzo, for example, highlights 'la natura dinamica, coinvolgente del fantastico, implicita nelle scelte che comunque si è costretti ad operare rispetto al significato da attribuire alla concatenazione dei fatti narrati'.⁹ In my analysis of these two texts I shall show how the two authors use a fantastic

that simultaneously invites and resists interpretation to question the traditional *topoi* of the fantastic canon itself.

Neither Capriolo nor Mancinelli has a declared feminist agenda, but I wish to focus on how the physical spaces, namely the theatre and a house, that dominate these two fantastic texts act as metaphors for a gendered psychical space. This psychical space is depicted critically as one in which the male artist seals himself off from his fellow-beings, not acknowledging the existence of other subjectivities, but rather imagining an idealized or demonized female Other. The space of the human psyche can be a notoriously claustrophobic one, in which characters play out their primal dramas, time after time, to the point of exasperation. It is this space that has largely dominated the male-authored fantastic canon, but these two recent texts highlight its link to an unquestioned binary depiction of female characters as helpless victims or avenging demons. In this article I wish to show how the deliberate symbolic links made by the authors between two distinct spaces, the physical and the psychical, can illuminate a third and final space: the woman writer's space within literary tradition. This focus will demonstrate that the fantastic writer's notion of her own female writing space within the literary tradition can be traced in the depiction of the male artist's physical and psychical space.

The two writers in question share a decidedly scholarly background, Mancinelli (b. 1933) as an academic medievalist and Capriolo (b. 1962) as a specialist in and translator of German literature and philosophy,¹⁰ and as such clearly have an acute awareness of the predominantly male-authored canon. In examining the use of the fantastic by female writers coming to terms with their late arrival on the literary scene, we can see how women writers use the fantastic to gain distance from, or even to move outside the spaces of the fantastic literary tradition. The extent to which they do this is closely linked to their use of literary models. It is possible to read Paola Capriolo's novel, which has been seen as a puzzling imitation of nineteenth-century Romantic literature,¹¹ as a form of pastiche, distancing itself from its literary models through the use of an ironic female narrator. However, the text, closely linked to specific literary models, privileges the power of the closed space and a traditional vision of the male artist as trapped in a space of his own obsessive making, which in turn idealizes and excludes women. Laura Mancinelli, drawing upon a more diverse range of cultural influences, both high and low, introduces a counterbalance to the older model of the male artist, by opening up the fantastic enclosure to the outside world and the male psyche to dialogue with the female – in a space of *their* own.

The intrapsychic space of the fantastic: Paola Capriolo

The fiction of Paola Capriolo is resonant with powerful spatial images of the human psyche's self-imposed prisons. The title story of her first collection of short stories *La grande Eulalia* (1988) tells the story of a young girl who falls in love with the image of a princely figure that appears in the mirror of her caravan. When an equally beautiful female companion appears alongside him Eulalia begins to metamorphose into her double and becomes a beautiful and celebrated singer. The story ends when at last she does meet the prince of her mirror outside the caravan and Eulalia returns from the rendez-vous disappointed enough to enclose herself in the caravan forever. As the image of the enchanted caravan suggests, Capriolo's fiction is dominated by the notion of the psyche as a closed space onto whose walls the figures of fantasy are projected as large and overwhelming. Ultimately the internal fantasies lead to disappointment when external experience fails to reflect them. As the archetypal literary site of the uncanny, the place where the unfamiliar is revealed within the familiar and *vice versa*, the fantastic provides the ideal mode in which to express the power of this enclosure for both genders. Within the uncanny world of the fantastic text, the images of the fantasy can slide between the character's inner world and his/her outer one, emphasizing the power they have to shape an individual's reality.

There is, nonetheless, throughout Capriolo's fiction, a marked distinction in the manner in which male and female characters respond to this physical and psychological enclosed space. Although all her characters are driven towards a search for artistic perfection in enclosure that ultimately reveals itself as death, her female characters meet this end without affecting others. If enclosure and death usually result for both men and women, male characters rarely close themselves into this world without sadistically drawing a willing victim down with them,¹² whilst female characters immerse themselves in it in a masochistic way.¹³ The work of psychoanalytical theorist Jessica Benjamin provides some clarification as to why the impact of fantasies upon the male subject may have more devastating consequences than those they have upon the female subject. The loss of the pre-Oedipal union with the mother can have an uncanny function when nostalgia for the (fantasized) lost harmony breaks out through the very denial of that nostalgia. In *The Bonds of Love* Benjamin underlines that social insistence upon the male subject's process of complete disidentification from the female, from the maternal, leads to a sadomasochistic basis for heterosexual relations, in which the male's own differentiation is futilely shored up by the oppression of the female.¹⁴ The male ego must avoid annihilation by dominating the female Other that threatens to overwhelm it. Benjamin's theory is that the inscription of male domination and female submission within society result less from human nature than from the way humans relate to one another. Her deconstruction of gender relations offers a useful

way into understanding why, to Paola Capriolo, certain configurations of gender appear 'natural'.¹⁵

In order both to resist and to imagine a return to the forbidden state of (fantasized) original undifferentiation between mother and child, the subject constantly arranges his/her own personal tableaux. In the case of the male subject this involves using women as pawns of the imagination. Victor Burgin emphasizes the inherent theatricality of the unconscious: 'that space in which fantasy stages its *mise-en-scène* of desire'.¹⁶ It is no surprise therefore to note that the trope of the theatre is typical of fantastic fiction and recurs in the work of Paola Capriolo as the ultimate expression of her professed fascination with 'mondi chiusi'.¹⁷ One work in particular is of interest in this light: *La spettatrice* provides a fascinating example of the destructive nature of the withdrawal into intrapsychic space. Vulpius is a successful actor in a comfortable provincial theatre company, who, on the opening night of the season, senses the gaze of an unidentifiable young female spectator in the stage box focused upon him alone. Vulpius begins to dedicate his performance as Sganarelle in Molière's *Don Juan* to the unswerving gaze he sees upon him night after night. Desperate to encounter this mysterious figure at closer quarters, he resolves to visit her box during an interval, only to find she has disappeared leaving a beautiful, broken watch in her place. Believing that the time shown on the broken watch, two o'clock, is an invitation to a clandestine date, Vulpius returns to the deserted theatre that night. She is not there, but Vulpius discovers instead the attraction of the deserted theatre, in which he can command light and dark by reversing the stage lighting onto the empty auditorium and its baroque ornate decoration, reveal and make invisible, control illusion. From this moment, not just his artistic life, but his entire life is driven by the search for the perfect artifice, and his hitherto admired naturalistic acting ability assumes a stylized self-awareness. He recruits his long-suffering fellow actress and girlfriend Dora secretly to participate in a series of chilling acting games in the night-time theatre, which involve her docilely dressing up in various costumes and repeating single gestures and lines as a means of pursuing his recreation of fiction. She is eventually sacrificed to his 'art' as she flees this frightening world into the cold night air and catches a fatal chill. Vulpius' former thinly veiled contempt for Dora is slowly transformed into admiration and envy. In death, she acquires a rigid perfection lacking in life which culminates in her virtuoso funereal 'performance' at which Vulpius sees himself once more the object of the *spettatrice's* attention. His last link with humanity now severed, Vulpius withdraws into his obsessive world until the acting company depart for what they feel is their well-earned holiday in the sun, leaving him to take up permanent residence in the dark, deserted theatre. The reader witnesses the lonely grand finale in which Vulpius stages his own death.

The absorbing space of fantasy – Capriolo suggests – is not only fatal to the male subject absorbed by it, but also to those (women) around him. Despite its

vague historical setting (reminiscent of Elsa Morante's *Menzogna e sortilegio*) the novel's intuition confirms the theory behind Benjamin's deconstruction of contemporary gender relations. In her later work Benjamin emphasizes the continued power of motherhood within the human psyche:

Modern disenchantment has no doubt worked to diminish the mystique surrounding procreation and motherhood. But the eclipse of this immediate sense of mystery has scarcely alleviated the dread of maternal power; it has only banished it to the darkness beyond the portals of enlightenment. There it remains alive, in the unconscious if you will, where it still serves diverse [...] fantastic purposes.¹⁸

It is easy to see how the fantastic figure of the *spettatrice* of Vulpius' theatre creeps into his rational world vision as a displaced maternal figure, promising a mother-child exclusivity: 'quanto avveniva tra loro, non ammetteva miscuglio di intimità e di distacco, non ammetteva testimoni, si sottraeva per la sua stessa essenza a qualsiasi sguardo estraneo' (*La spett.*, p. 45). This makes it possible to read the theatrical space as a psychical one. Vulpius' dramatic reaction to her (re)appearance is closely related to Benjamin's theory that present social relations do not allow for the subjectivity of the mother to be recognized: 'Unless mother's external subjectivity is registered, there is no reassurance against fantasies (her own or the child's) of her omnipotence, her seduction, or her control: the fantasies of the mother's body as overwhelming or invasive are not countered by an experience of mutual recognition' (*Like Subjects*, p. 195).

Vulpius evidently tries to displace the anxiety about his own process of disidentification from the female induced by his sighting and, more importantly, by the gaze of the *spettatrice*, in his treatment of Dora. Drawing on psychoanalytical tradition, Steven Heath underlines the anxiety caused by the female gaze: 'If the woman looks, the spectacle provokes, castration is in the air, the Medusa's head is not far off; she must not look, is absorbed herself on the side of the seen'.¹⁹ Vulpius attempts to push the female back onto the side of the seen and, in a manner reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelite model who died as a result of posing in a bathtub of cold water, Dora's role as imaginary object in Vulpius' *mise-en-scène* takes no account of her own subjectivity.²⁰ We are told: 'Grazie all'amica, attraverso di lei, per un certo tempo era riuscito a ingannare e a ingannarsi, a compiere le proprie offerte votive senza offrire se stesso' (*La spett.*, p. 142).

Benjamin does however offer an alternative model of psychical development – what she describes as the intersubjective space:

Intersubjectivity was formulated in deliberate contrast to the logic of subject and object, which predominates in Western philosophy and science. It refers to that zone of experience or theory in which the other is not merely the

object of the ego's need/drive or cognition/perception but has a separate and equivalent center of self.

Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence. This means that we have a need for recognition and that we have a capacity to recognize others in return, thus making mutual recognition possible. (*Like Subjects*, p. 30)

Benjamin claims that in the period of early development a mother-child relation can emerge through a process of mutual recognition, in which the subject recognizes that his/her own autonomy is dependent on recognizing the subjectivity of the mother figure. She maintains that the dominant model of Western parenting structures tends to hinder the development of this intersubjectivity, which leaves the individual unable to experience full autonomy. She suggests that the power imbalance in gender structures leads the female child to respond by identifying with the role of the object and annihilating all sense of self, while the male child responds by constant attempts to shore up a sense of his own subjectivity through the objectification of the Other, usually women, a process that is always already doomed to failure.

We see this pattern dramatized in Vulpius' response to his spectator – he appears to strive for a form of intersubjectivity in his desperation both to read a smile on the lips of the *spettatrice* and to return her gaze. However her disappearance confirms the eternal return of his original severance from the maternal that leaves him to vent his loss of the primary woman and his incomplete sense of self upon an Other. This dramatization explains the dynamic behind Vulpius' manipulation of Dora prior to his encounter with the *spettatrice*, an encounter that then reinforces this use of his girlfriend. The unconscious link between the two women is hinted at in his desire to 'proteggere l'una dall'altra queste due creature così diverse, lasciando che ciascuna regnasse indisturbata nella propria sfera' (*La spett.*, p. 45). By having the artificial world of the theatre increasingly define the boundaries of Vulpius' world, Capriolo powerfully conveys the imprisonment of the mind and body in the subject's own internal psychological script.

There is no doubt that Capriolo intends the work to be a 'commistione tra elemento ironico e elemento fantastico'.²¹ The irony arises partly from the self-conscious reminders that we are reading a work of fiction, which serve to conflate the narrator's identity with that of the author herself, as in this reflection on Dora's characterization:

Tutto il suo atteggiamento esprime una sana spensierata confidenza con i piaceri della vita e un'assoluta estraneità a qualsiasi aspetto morboso o complicato della medesima. Un carattere raro, forse inesistente, che tuttavia

trasposto nella sfera della finzione risulta comunissimo, per non dire banale, come se una siffatta salute costituisse la norma per gli esseri umani. (*La spett*, p. 10)

The fantastic element in *La spettatrice* lies in the mysterious presence/absence of the *spettatrice* herself; and the ‘cognitive block’ she causes arises from the reader’s inability to interpret her. Is she a hallucination of Vulpius? Is she a malign spirit? Or is she the narrator herself? One critic recognizes this bewilderment:

Alla fine viene da chiedersi se la spettatrice – ignara responsabile di tutto quel delirio intorno ad uno sguardo – sia davvero la leggiadra figurina nera più volte rincorsa da Vulpius o se non sia piuttosto la stessa autrice che nel tocco vellutato della voce narrante disegna un vorticoso gioco di specchi tra il lettore, la storia e se stessa, co-protagonista tra le righe della vicenda.²²

The book jacket of the novel seems to hint at this possibility, describing: ‘la voce della narratrice, presente al centro del libro come un ragno al centro della sua tela’, and the narrator herself emphasizes her control over Vulpius. Capriolo revises the role of the fantastic *femme fatale* – the narrated woman associated with mystery, absence, and often silence – by suggesting that this woman is narrating the tale of her own uncanny power, and thereby controlling it. Such a revision may constitute a self-reflexive comment upon the author-narrator’s own identity as both the possible *spettatrice* or *femme fatale* (Capriolo herself had been described in these terms)²³ and the narrator. This becomes clear in the latter’s discussion of the use of Vulpius to protect herself from artistic exaggeration:

In fondo devo raccontare un delirio, non delirare, e se gli altri schermi sono caduti l’uso della terza persona consente pur sempre di mantenere un salutare distacco, di dare ordine e forma al magma interiore del protagonista. Perseo non guardò nella sua realtà il volto pietrificante di Medusa, ma ne contemplò l’immagine in uno specchio, e in tal modo riuscì ad avvicinarla senza perdere se stesso; adottando una precauzione non dissimile, noi seguiremo fino al compimento la storia di Vulpius nel riflesso di una voce narrante, penetreremo le pieghe più riposte della sua anima e rimarremo però separati, in quella posizione di estraneità e onniscienza dalla quale, fuori della convenzione romanzesca, solo Dio o gli dèi possono osservare le vicissitudini umane. (*La spett*, p. 141)

The narrator, and Capriolo, defend themselves from the fatal attraction of the abyss triggered by the gaze of the *spettatrice* with ink; a female Perseus now uses a male as *her* shield to resist the power of the uncanny through art. Whilst the male artist in the text must fatally dominate or submit to women, always excluding the possibility of female agency, its female author creates and empathizes with her fictional male counterpart, but resists the Pygmalion-like temptation of confusing

reality and fiction. This may be something the female narrator can do because she is both hero and Medusa, attracted to the female (maternal) gaze, but also the bearer of it. Moreover, total collusion with the male intrapsychic space and the male-dominated literary model of the fantastic would exclude her own artistic agency as a woman. Such a use of the fantastic 'block' on interpretation, creating a figure that encompasses an old trope within a new one, suggests that Capriolo's work, rather than being a 'serializzazione della letteratura colta',²⁴ is part of a late twentieth-century dialogue with that literary tradition.

The intersubjective space of the fantastic: *La casa del tempo*

In the introduction I suggested that Mancinelli's work opened up the fantastic enclosure to the external world. However, one might ask what need there is for the fantastic mode at all in a move away from the unhealthy claustrophobia of the closed space, the prison, the labyrinth, into the fresh air of dialogue. In privileging the space of dialogue and exchange – the intersubjective in Benjamin's terms – what need is there for a mode traditionally associated with the stifling space of the psyche, illustrated so captivatingly by Capriolo in the sinister world of Vulpius' theatre? The dark underside, the bad conscience of the Enlightenment surely finds no place in a new world of 'post-feminist' gender relations? Yet, as Benjamin underlines, the intersubjective space can only develop with the intrapsychic as its counterweight – that is, with an acknowledgement of the real pull of the world of nightmares, of the dominance of those plays which persist in the individual theatre of the psyche: 'The restoration of balance between the intrapsychic and the intersubjective in the psychoanalytic process should not be construed as an adaptation that reduces fantasy to reality; rather, it is practice in the sustaining of contradiction' (*Like Subjects*, p. 47). Laura Mancinelli presents a clear example of how this contradiction may also be sustained in fiction in *La casa del tempo*, in which the walls of the metaphorical intrapsychic enclosure gradually become more porous, but do not disappear altogether.

In Mancinelli's novel the space of the male character's development is not the theatre, but a childhood house – a similarly popular trope for the resurgence of the uncanny. Mancinelli uses a Gothic literary tradition that conflates the spaces of the tomb and home (inherent in the fantastic house from Poe to Francesca Duranti) and resists it, effecting the house's transformation from the site of individual fantasy to the site of personal relations. Against his will, the male protagonist, Orlando, achieves a meaningful re-union with the maternal/female body and mind through the house. The house of the title is indeed a house preserved by time – a home well-known to Orlando in his youth. It belonged to a primary school teacher who

had acted as a surrogate mother to him when he was very young, and whom, along with his own mother, he had left to seek success away from his small Piedmont village, first as a young student, then as an artist in the city. The teacher herself encouraged him to go to a boarding middle school, because this was his only chance to gain an education. As a defence against the pain caused by the wrench away from what he loved (repeated each time he returned and had to leave again), he cut himself off completely and abandoned his teacher to a lonely life and death. This rejection of the female body, both the surrogate mother and, by implication, the real mother, manifests itself in his remembrance of the parting scene as a physical separation from the teacher's house:

Quando, uscendo dall'uscio dell'orto, ripercorse il sentiero lungo il muro della casa, senza volerlo affondò la mano nella parietaria, e sorrise al freddo contatto della pietra. Ma subito ritirò la mano e allungò il passo, perché non valeva la pena godere quel contatto rassicurante. L'indomani doveva rientrare in collegio.

Non tornò più alla casa della maestra. Non la vide mai più.²⁵

This reference to a lost physical contact with the house's 'body' echoes the process of disidentification with the maternal body supposedly required in the formation of the male subject. Like the work of Benjamin, Mancinelli's novel interrogates the effects of this disidentification process as its messy consequences catch up with her protagonist.

The novel opens with one of Orlando's infrequent returns to his village, when his car breaks down outside the house of his now-deceased teacher. The breakdown seems to coincide symbolically with a breakdown in his career as an artist – he is suffering from a painter's block. The name Orlando suggests a hero who needs to recover his senses. However this Orlando needs to recover his physical senses, as well as his mental faculties, and this earthier journey is partially explored through the protagonist's friendship with the local chef, Placido, whose culinary skill often makes Orlando as interested in what his next meal consists of as in deciphering the mystery of his teacher's life. Alongside this 'high' literary allusion to Ariosto lies the more popular cultural reference to the classic horror film trope, found for example in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, which opens with the protagonist's car breaking down outside a mysterious house.²⁶ The humorous juxtaposition of such dramatically different registers prepares the reader for what will be a light use of the Gothic. This is furthered by the author's use of the third-person narrator to maintain distance from Orlando's emotion, which allows her to step back ironically now and then with a comment or a point of view that suggests a world outside Orlando's intensity. When, for example, he berates the builders for tearing down the parietary plant he associates with his final departure from the teacher's house, she adds: 'Il capomastro Concetto continuò a guardarlo in silenzio domandandosi,

questa volta, per qual bizzarro capriccio il proprietario, un signore dall'aria distinta e perfettamente normale, volesse tenersi sulle pareti della casa tutta quella erbaccia popolata di ragni e lucertole' (*La casa*, p. 27).

However Mancinelli's use of free indirect speech does largely focus on making the reader experience almost at first hand the strange spell that the house exercises on Orlando. After he has bought it, his confusion is communicated by a series of unanswered questions: 'Ma perché l'aveva comprata? Che bisogno ne aveva? E che ne avrebbe fatto?' (*La casa*, p. 6). This man, 'nutrito di dottrine razionalistiche' (*La casa*, p. 88), is plagued by the irrationality of his action, although it soon becomes clear that there is much that is irrational in his response to his home village. As he reflects upon his return to the village, he asks himself, 'Che gliene importava infatti di quello che accadeva in paese? Da tanti anni ormai l'aveva cancellato dalla sua vita!'. However, the impression created by these questions is almost immediately belied by the fact that on being asked whether he remembers the teacher's house, he exclaims: 'Come potrei non ricordarla?' (*La casa*, p. 7). His encounter with the home is uncanny because he already knows its story, but has repressed it. The home will in fact become a great deal stranger, before Orlando recognises that he is in part responsible for its state of uncanniness. However, in order to do so, he must first recognize what is strange within himself.

The purchase of the house does seem far from a sensible idea. It is very ramshackle and part of it is legally inhabited by its former proprietor, the teacher's sister-in-law, a threatening old woman who is hardly ever seen. This stereotypical madwoman that Orlando cannot see, but hears pacing upstairs in the attic is possibly Mancinelli's playful reference to the fact that the teacher's life was not what it seemed, and that, like the nineteenth-century female authors studied by Gilbert and Gubar, she kept her passionate, sexual self hidden. Orlando's aging friend, Placido, warns Orlando to steer clear of the old woman, whom he believes poisoned the teacher. Placido plays an important role as the living mediator between Orlando and his teacher – having been in love with her, he has what to Orlando seems a mysterious knowledge of her. Initially Orlando rejects his ideas about the potentially haunted nature of the house, but is slowly reconciled to Placido's acceptance of the inexplicable incidents associated with it, which I will look at in more detail shortly. Rather than being *mistificante* in any way, however, this acceptance is strongly linked to Placido's belief in the miraculous power of the ordinary and his role as an outstanding cook in his own *osteria*.²⁷ These two elements, together with his sensitive understanding of the teacher, make him an unusual sort of male 'white witch' or wise woman figure. Indeed this is a fantastic tale that has much of the fairy-tale about its structure, with its cast of a witch (in the form of the teacher's elderly sister-in-law held responsible for the murder of Orlando's caged birds), Placido's 'white witch', a black cat, a semi-orphan child, a series of improbable coincidences, and a happy ending.

According to Gaston Bachelard, we all possess an ‘oneiric house, a house of dream memory, lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past’.²⁸ Not only do we dream this house, but it is often associated with the house in which we formulated our childhood dreams. In fact the reader discovers that it was in the teacher’s home that Orlando formulated his artistic ambitions: ‘E alla destra dell’uscio sorgeva un tempo un bellissimo lauro, il più bello del paese, intorno al quale s’erano intessuti i suoi sogni di bambino’ (*La casa*, p. 9). It is another ‘fairy-tale’ feature of Mancinelli’s plot that Orlando should be able to purchase what was his dream house in both senses of Bachelard’s term. Mancinelli imagines what happens when this conveniently nebulous past, hidden in each individual, transforms itself back into bricks and mortar and demands to be updated. Initially the house acts as a trigger of memory – chapters 2 to 5 narrate a series of happy childhood memories. The narration here is given from a child’s perspective, adding a further intertextual reference to lighten the tone of the novel. The manner of the reference to *Pinocchio*, his first childhood book, in chapter 4 reinforces the infusion of the fantastic with the more playful world of the fairy-tale and the marvellous. The child’s perception of an everyday event (forgetting to take the grazing animals home because he was so engrossed in the book *Pinocchio*) as a marvellous fable (the animals find their own way home, fed up with waiting for the *Principe*, after feasting on all the neighbouring allotments) harnesses the power of childhood wonder to add a humour that counteracts the claustrophobic potential of the intrapsychic space and its fantastic metaphor of enclosure. This is reinforced by the shift in narratorial perspective that suddenly anthropomorphizes the donkey in the manner of some children’s literature, not least of all *Pinocchio* itself:

Solo l’asino non si era allontanato dal principe, nel caso che, non si sa mai, avesse bisogno di lui.[...] Ogni tanto gli leccava una scarpa, così per fargli capire che lui c’era, era lì, e non si allontanava. [...] neanche una volta il principe aveva alzato gli occhi da quel libro per rispondere ai suoi cenni, neanche una volta. Lo credeva più amico. (*La casa*, p. 18)

As the story progresses, the fantastic house and garden, with a certain flirtatiousness, does more than restore memory – it courts the hero, revealing and dissimulating its (and its former owner’s) story. It is at once intimidating and alluring. At the sight of some birches in the garden, with prompting from Placido, Orlando remembers the teacher having put a clean pair of child’s socks on him when he had soaked his feet planting those same trees. Placido explains that the teacher herself had a child whom she had had to send away, as a single mother, to avoid scandal. She never again saw this daughter, who was brought up by an adoptive family in ignorance of her origins, though the teacher continued secretly to provide for her. Shortly after giving up the daughter, when the teacher met Orlando as a child, the intelligent youngest son of a large, poor village family, she

took him under her wing as a kind of substitute - something which he naturally did not realise at the time, whilst recognizing that her touch reminded him of his mother's.

Although there is much of the corporeal in the link between the house and the female presence,²⁹ an important element of the relationship between Orlando and the house derives from his teacher's role as intellectual guide. Of the many things that disturb him about the decaying house, 'Quei palchetti vuoti, in cui qualche pagina strappata sopravviveva come *un fantasma* dei tempi passati, erano ciò che più lo turbava nella casa di cui adesso era lui il proprietario' (*La casa*, p. 33; my italics). In fact, the sister-in-law, fearing that those books, which had meant so much to Orlando as a child, may have contained a will leaving the house to the teacher's daughter rather than to her own son, had been burning them systematically. When she dies, amongst the few books that remain Orlando finds Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, a work the teacher had stopped him reading because it was too advanced for him and which he had subsequently read and loved. Now he discovers her own writing within that text. This is not a will, but love letters, which tell of a secret, probably adulterous, affair with the father of her child and his sudden death. Her writing therefore takes a semi-palimpsestic form, typically female in so far as her writing, being forbidden, must use a male-authored text to find a reader. Whether she – dead or alive – chose this particular text as a way of communicating her story to Orlando is not clear. However, indirectly, she teaches him to read once again, to read a female-authored story, which lies enclosed within the classical text. Moreover, *The Golden Ass* itself is a text that speaks of transformation of the individual, magic and progress towards understanding – suggesting to the reader that these three crucial elements in the novel are all linked to the figure of the teacher and her story.

The external walls of the childhood house are pink, initially connoting its female associations, and later the teacher's face itself: 'guardava la casa, ma era il volto di lei che vedeva' (*La casa*, p. 136). This house comes to represent both the homes of Orlando's childhood and the absent mother-figure, the traumatic loss of whom he had repressed. Through a series of mysterious events centred around the house this lost female slowly forces the artist to see how necessary emotional well-being is to his art, expressing her voice through the body of the house. At the same time she shows how necessary he is as a 'listener' to give her own life meaning retrospectively. This is less a demand for *risarcimento*, as Placido dramatically describes it, than an *exchange*. Her exchange is a generous one. As a result of the inexplicable hold the house exerts over Orlando from the moment of his breakdown, she keeps him a temporary prisoner in the house where she was permanently and lovelessly enclosed; and on his release from this temporary physical enclosure he finds liberation from his own emotional enclosure. Orlando does not enter into this exchange easily. Whilst, on the one hand, he is determined

to preserve the house as a memorial to his teacher, infuriating the renovators with his eccentric demands to keep the pellitory plant, on the other hand, for a long time, he evades both the move into the house and the prospect of a settled homelife, rooted in his history, which such a transfer might entail. He is happy to keep the house one of time past, reluctant to make it one of time present. The novel traces his struggle to accept the ‘segnali’ the house sends him, which remind him of ‘le due donne più importanti della sua vita’ (*La casa*, p. 87). Not only must he re-encounter ‘quella infelicità da cui si era difeso dimenticando’ (*La casa*, p. 44), but, paradoxically, he is only able to move beyond that unhappiness through the recognition of his own part in the miserable life of his teacher: ‘Anche lui nella sua infantile brutalità, aveva aggiunto la sua parte di pena alla vita di quella donna, che pure aveva tanto amato’ (*La casa*, p. 119). The brutal separation from and domination of the female/maternal, necessary to the creation of the traditional male subject, is thereby acknowledged as negative, without annihilating the subject that resulted from it.

How does the house carry out this complex exchange? The fantastic function here is a series of accidents or strange coincidences, *segnali*, all of which, singly, could be explained away but whose *cumulative* impact suggests something more than casual coincidence. These events once more underline Mancinelli’s blending of ‘high’ and ‘low’ genres, as they constitute a gentle use of the horror tradition of ‘living’ houses. These signals show Orlando what he feels and needs before he is aware of that sentiment or need – or when he has forgotten about it. The first sign comes in the appearance of a rosemary plant in the very spot where he had thought, and then forgotten, about planting one. As the ‘pianta dell’amore’, this becomes a pointer to the emotional path the house will compel him to follow. When Orlando invites his brother and his wife to help him decorate the house, his brother leaves with a broken leg, convinced that somebody had caused him to fall. This fall oddly occurs at the very moment when Orlando asks himself how he can get rid of his brother. When Orlando invites a female acquaintance to stay, a rare lime-tree caterpillar falls upon her neck as she sits in the courtyard, causing a serious rash which forces her to leave. As an act of defiance towards the house, he invites friends and local villagers to a housewarming, but all their glasses shatter simultaneously as they toast the house. Not only does the house seem to wish to make its superior degree of control over the situation felt, but it also has very specific ideas about whom Orlando should bring there.

This initially seems a sinister ambition, but the play staged by the house appears to echo the closure of Orlando’s own emotional life, to play it out before him physically, to confront him with its limited dimensions. This theatre, however, is in a woman’s control. Initially Orlando is frightened by the idea of going to live in the house – it repulses him.³⁰ When he eventually does move into it, he tries to avoid real commitment to intimacy with his past and the female body in it by

seeking the company of a married relative or by establishing a bachelor's detached joviality with the local villagers. He even tries to apply the same avoidance of intimacy in his choice of female guest, to whom the coy title of 'lady-friend' could well be applied in translation. His description of her as 'coinvolgente, ma con misura' (*La casa*, p. 74) makes her the ideal companion for the cautious bachelor. There is a clear pointer to the fact that in her he seeks the lost maternal function – he looks forward to the nail filing which she may perform for him and compares it to his mother's soothing combing of his hair while looking for nits.³¹ The thwarting of Orlando's retreat into safety suggests that the house requires from him the adult sexual relationship of which the teacher herself was deprived. The reconciliation with the female must not take the form of infantile regression, but must take into account the subjectivity of the Other – ultimately for Orlando this will mean entertaining the possibility of a single mother, that is, a woman with her own ineradicable past. The house takes on the didactic qualities of its former owner as much as her maternal ones. It thereby transforms the fantastic conceit of a 'spirit of the place', a tradition in which the spirit usually asks for something for itself, for a wrong to be righted. This new kind of didactic spirit, however, rights the wrongs of the living, bringing lessons, not demands for retribution, from beyond the grave.

Although what is happening in the house is initially sinister, Mancinelli's humorous tone and blending of genres prevent the house being absorbed completely by the Gothic genre. At the same time the reader does still encounter the cognitive block of the fantastic and wonder whether the 'spell' cast over Orlando by the house is one of his own imagination or something supernatural. Thus, like Capriolo, Mancinelli tinges the fantastic physical enclosure with an edge of fear, or mystery at least, that means it can act as a metaphor for the apparently ineffable power of the intrapsychic space. The reader is encouraged to make the connection between the two spaces as a result of the mental changes the protagonist so clearly undergoes in relation to the theatre or the house. What emerges is that, like both those physical spaces, the intrapsychic space would have the individual act out a script he sometimes feels is not of his own making.

The movement from block to release that the house imposes on Orlando's social life also seems to echo a similar development within Orlando's creative life. Overwhelmed by the weight of repressed memories, he had spent a long time prior to the purchase of the house unable to paint. As his self-awareness grows regarding his emotional poverty in comparison with his teacher's courage,³² so too does his awareness of a link between that emotional block and his stunted creativity:

gli pareva anche - ma aveva riluttanza a confessarselo - che se fosse riuscito a riprendere i pennelli, e soprattutto a dipingere veramente, sarebbe riemerso dal vuoto di sentimenti e di gioia in cui viveva da tempo. Sarebbe tornato a vivere.

‘Che l’abbia comperata per questo?’ si chiese guardando la casa che gli appariva, ora, grandissima e minacciosa. (*La casa*, p. 60)

Only as he gives himself up to the designs of the house, assuming a passive attitude, does he begin to find inspiration. The ability to see, essential to the work of the figurative artist, has been restored to him with his submission to the will of the house, as his thoughts about its purchase reflect: ‘Il resto era accaduto da sé come se lui fosse stato in quella faccenda soltanto uno spettatore’ (*La casa*, p. 8). His allowing reconciliation with the female to take place within him is conveyed through his acceptance of the uncanny nature of the house. I would suggest that there is a textual (s)exchange at work in this fantastic text, whereby the writer, through her manipulation of a typically male-authored literary genre, is able to negotiate her own identity as a female writer. In this novel the degree of control that is ceded by the male protagonist to the house, the feminine presence within the text, may restore a sense of balance to the female writer herself, echoing her own control of a traditionally ‘male’ writing space.

The process of exchange is reinforced by the central importance of nature and the seasons in the novel, which in turn emphasize the cyclical patterns of existence that Orlando must also accept. His move from the city back to the country underlines less the recovery of an actual idyll than the symbolic recognition of his place in a history and a life that involves him with others. A child begins to visit the house, and it is strongly hinted that he is the teacher’s grandson, trying to find himself a father and a husband for his now widowed mother. In preparing a *merenda* for the grandson of the woman who had once provided him with physical, intellectual, and emotional sustenance, Orlando recognizes the role of interdependency hitherto excluded from the construction of his male self.

During the final stage in this process of exchange, the character must go about restoring his autonomy, whilst preserving the new relational aspect of his self. After his semi-enforced seclusion in the house, a journey of his own, in which balance with the outside world can be restored, is crucial. This is not, however, to be a journey of severance, another rejection of the power of the house/the teacher, but a journey which allows the possibility for recognition of that Other to develop, and subsequently a recognition of the self in relation to that Other. The isolation that Orlando originally imposed upon himself in order to form his adult self is revealed as lacking, based upon an absence. To enjoy a new bond, the lesson of the house is to teach a separation which prompts return. Although in the final chapters of the novel Orlando goes to Venice with the notion of escape in mind, he soon discovers a longing to return ‘home’. Yet in Venice he rediscovers his painter’s talent by shunning the glories of Canaletto’s city and painting the dark backstreet area which ‘gli sembrava adatto a lui, alla sua vita, un posto che può essere brutto, desolato, ma che si può amare’ (*La casa*, p. 133). This progress, this recognition of

possibility draws him back to what he had rejected. On his return to the house he admits this moment of recognition as a recognition of female desire:

‘Ecco’ disse mentalmente. ‘Sono qui.’

A chi parlava? Alla casa, che si ergeva silenziosa contro il cielo ancora chiaro del tramonto? o a lei, alla maestra? Guardava la casa, ma era il volto di lei che vedeva, non quello severo della sua infanzia, non quello della maestra vestita di nero, l’altro quella della fotografia, sorridente, in attesa di gioia. (*La casa*, p. 136)

The terror of enclosure is diminished when recognition of the Other is allowed to enter it. This recognition of the teacher’s subjectivity, beyond what immediately pertained to his own limited childhood vision, is what enables Orlando to feel more comfortable with both his own existence and with the house itself: ‘Sono qui’. As soon as the Other is recognized as existing beyond the self, it no longer threatens the individual with its imagined omnipotence. The hint of an ending in which Orlando will invite the teacher’s daughter and grandson to live with him, suggests that he has learnt a lesson in discovering his own subjectivity through dialogue with others. In this way Mancinelli’s novel echoes what Benjamin writes: ‘We might imagine a way to balance the fantastic register, in which self and objects can be omnipotent, with the intersubjective register, in which we recognize, feel, and symbolically represent the subjectivity of real others’ (*Like Subjects*, p. 86).

Conclusion

Considering the way in which fantastic women writers relate to literary tradition through their use of space and gender, I would argue that in the depiction of the artistic male subject in these texts, Capriolo and Mancinelli suggest why the male artist can slide into the creation of a ‘fantastic female’. Through the playful figures of the *spettatrice* and the teacher’s phantom presence, both authors suggest that the ‘fantastic female’ is a result of the traumatic separation from the female that the creation of a rigid male ego demands. Both writers hint that this problematic ‘vision’ of women lies in this originary moment of the male ego. In their respective texts the two authors foreground the difficulty of balancing ‘the fantastic register’ of the intrapsychic space with intersubjective relations. Mancinelli dramatizes the process of finding that balance successfully, whilst Capriolo knowingly narrates her protagonist’s failure to find it, as he chooses passion for a deadly fiction at the cost of his flesh and blood girlfriend’s life. Staying within the rigid boundaries of socialized gender or choosing to cross them becomes a matter of life and death in the fantastic text, literally in Vulpius’ case and artistically in Orlando’s. The cognitive block that the fantastic in the text occasions, preventing definitive

interpretation of certain events or characters, allows for the power of the intrapsychic space to register with the reader, whilst an ironic stance, whether through Mancinelli's hybrid of genres or Capriolo's self-conscious narrator, reminds the reader that it is *a* space, not the only space.

I would conclude by asking how these differing visions of the (im)permeability of psychical space, can relate to that labyrinth of the *già detto, già letto*, of that sensation of late arrival which supposedly grips literary production in the postmodern era. Paola Capriolo's use of Romantic tropes suggests a past doomed to repeat itself, in which the female author's voice must be that of the ironic and sympathetic observer. Mancinelli's new vision of gender, art, and space moves outside the claustrophobic spaces of the male-authored fantastic text and takes a critical distance from them, drawing on traditionally female tropes of romance, fairy-tale, and even children's literature to do so. This heterogeneity brings her literary achievement close to Benjamin's psychoanalytical aim to leave 'a world of fixed boundaries with uncrossable borders for a transitional territory in which the conventional opposites create movable walls and pleasurable tension' (*Like Subjects*, p.70). Of these two novels, however, it is Capriolo's that has struck a greater chord in the critical sphere. The intrapsychic enclosure of the male artist, trapped in a space of his own, is still the more compelling literary vision for our time.

Notes

* This article is based on a paper given at the SIS conference, Exeter, April 2001. I would like to thank colleagues present there for their helpful questions and encouragement.

¹ This comment refers in particular to the work of Anna Maria Ortese and was made during a paper given by Monica Farnetti (University of Florence), 'Senza angosce. Riletture del perturbante freudiano' at the conference 'The Gothic and Fantastic in Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Literature' at the Institute of Romance Studies, University of London, 9 May 2003.

² Farnetti, 'Senza angosce'. This would include writers like Else Lasker-Schüler, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Toni Morrison.

³ S. Gilbert & S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1996). The female use of the double was highlighted by these authors.

⁴ See U. Fanning, 'Angel v. Monster: Serao's Use of the Female Double', in *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History*, edited by Z. G. Barański & S. W. Vinall

(London, Macmillan, 1991), pp. 263-92, and 'Serao's Gothic Revisions: Old Tales Through New Eyes', *The Italianist*, 12 (1992), 32-41. 'It seems to me that Serao uses the Gothic to deal effectively with issues of specific significance to her as a woman writer' (p. 32).

⁵ See D. Hipkins, 'The Siren Song of the Text: Male Myth-Readings in Contemporary Italian Women's Writing', *New Comparison*, 27/28 (1999), 344-60.

⁶ P. Capriolo, *La spettatrice* (Milan, Bompiani, 1995); L. Mancinelli, *La casa del tempo* (Casale Monferrato, Piemme, 1993).

⁷ T. Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated by R. Howards (Cleveland, Case Western Reserve, 1973).

⁸ 'Anziché muovere alla ricerca d'una soluzione il fantastico le elimina via via tutte e per questa strada lascia alla fine sussistere l'evento inesplicabile come scarto irriducibile. In questo sta, ad un primo livello, la sua particolarità: non c'è paradigma di realtà (né naturale e positivo, né meraviglioso e trascendente) legittimamente capace di comprendere e

spiegare l'inesplicabile coprendo il salto logico che lo scarto comporta. Il principio di casualità è insufficiente e il pandeterminismo del meraviglioso è interdetto': L. Lugnani, 'Per una delimitazione del "genere"', in *La narrazione fantastica*, edited by R. Ceserani et al. (Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1983), pp. 37-73 (p. 64).

⁹ L. Punzo, 'Intersezioni dell'immaginario letterario', in *I piaceri dell'immaginazione. Studi sul fantastico*, edited by B. Pisapia (Rome, Bulzoni, 1984), pp. 13-35 (p. 16).

¹⁰ Paola Capriolo has published a work on Gottfried Benn, *L'assoluto artificiale. Nichilismo e mondo dell'espressione nell'opera saggistica di Gottfried Benn* (Milan, Bompiani, 1996), as well as several translations from German (including Goethe and Mann). Laura Mancinelli's publications include *Da Carlomagno a Lutero: la letteratura tedesca medievale* (Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 1996) and translations of medieval German texts.

¹¹ 'A tratti, leggendoli, si ha l'impressione di avere a che fare con la traduzione impeccabile di un ignoto, incantevole scrittore romantico, vissuto in qualche piccolo stato tedesco nella prima metà dell'Ottocento': G. Mariotti, 'Quella Gorgone in platea', *Il corriere della sera*, 19 January 1995. In fact Capriolo's novel does bear some resemblance to a short story by E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Don Juan', in *Hoffmanns Werke in Drei Bänden: Erster Band* (Berlin & Weimar, Aufbau-Verlag, 1976), although she had not read it before I sent her a copy in 1997.

¹² *La spettatrice*, 'Lettere a Luisa', pp. 107-24 in *La grande Eulalia* (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1988), *Vissi d'amore* (Milan, Bompiani, 1992), and *Un uomo di carattere* (Milan, Bompiani, 1996).

¹³ See 'La grande Eulalia', in Capriolo, *La grande Eulalia*, pp. 7-42 and *Il doppio regno* (Milan, Bompiani, 1991).

¹⁴ J. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York, Pantheon, 1988).

¹⁵ In interview with me on 30 July 1997, she said: 'Non puoi immaginarlo, quest'attrice in scena che vede un uomo, il quale la fissa, non so perché, come dire, l'idea della donna come elemento scatenante, dell'uomo come vittima di un processo di questo genere mi sembra più letterariamente credibile'.

¹⁶ V. Burgin, 'Preface' to *Formations of Fantasy*, edited by V. Burgin et al. (London & New York, Methuen, 1986), pp. 1-3 (p. 2).

¹⁷ D. Marinoni, 'Vissi d'amore, l'ultimo romanzo di Paola Capriolo alla ricerca del senso della vita', *Il mattino di Padova*, October 1992. Later in the interview, Capriolo links this passion for 'mondi chiusi' with her early experience of the theatre: 'Ho cominciato ad andare a teatro, con i miei genitori, a cinque anni, e per buona parte dell'adolescenza il teatro è stata una cosa importante. Ecco ho sempre avuto la sensazione che questa dimensione separata totalmente dalla quotidianità, dal rumore di fondo della vita, forse proprio per questo fosse qualcosa di più vero, una dimensione più reale, proprio perché più essenziale, più rigorosa; proprio perché costruita avesse in sé qualche cosa di più reale che non c'era di fuori. E credo che i miei libri siano teatrali in questo senso, cioè nel tentativo di creare degli spazi chiusi, all'interno dei quali avvengono le cose, all'interno dei quali i personaggi compiono questi loro processi di autoconsapevolezza progressiva che non potrebbe avvenire fuori del teatro'.

¹⁸ J. Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 81-82. Henceforth all references to *Like Subjects* are given in the text.

¹⁹ S. Heath, 'Difference', *Screen*, 19-iii (1978), 51-112 (p. 92).

²⁰ Elizabeth Siddall reputedly developed pneumonia after posing fully clothed in a bath as Ophelia for John Millais. See G. Daly, *Pre-Raphaelites in Love* (London, Harper Collins, 1989).

²¹ Letter to me, 23 October 1997.

²² Review of *La spettatrice*, (E.M.), *LeggereDonna*, 57, July-August, 1995.

²³ Many reviews of Capriolo's early work emphasized her mysterious looks. Paolo Isotta, for example, described her as 'una ragazza dall'apparenza fragile, una frangetta di capelli neri, grandi occhi scuri dotati di profondità e lontananze, labbra carnose', in 'Paola Capriolo scrittrice: l'ho scoperta io, un musicologo', *Il corriere della sera*, 1 April 1989.

²⁴ R. Cotroneo, 'Effetto Capriolo', *L'espresso*, 21 April 1991, p. 127.

²⁵ L. Mancinelli, *La casa del tempo* (Casale Monferrato, Edizioni Piemme, 1993), p. 25. Henceforth all references to *La casa* are given in the text.

²⁶ I would like to thank Cormac Ó Cuilleainín for this suggestion.

²⁷ A passionate belief in the restorative power of food is one that runs through Mancinelli's other fiction. L. de Renzo writes of *I dodici abati di Challant* that 'food as a metaphor for love becomes the most powerful liberating instrument of the whole novel': L. de Renzo, 'I dodici abati di Challant: The Metabolized Middle Ages', in *Gendering Italian Fiction: Feminist Revisions of Italian History*, edited by M. Marotti & G. Brooke (London, Associated University Presses, 1999), pp. 137-47 (p. 140).

²⁸ G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by M. Jolas (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969), p. 15.

²⁹ A reference that further underlines her substitution of the maternal bodily function lies in the memory of the milk his teacher used to give him (*La casa*, p. 23) and that he stopped drinking when he left the village. The rediscovery of the bowl he used to drink the milk from causes him to ask whether 'aveva rifiutato il latte perché non gli veniva porto in quella scodella? o da quelle mani? Per questo il

latte aveva cambiato sapore e non gli era più piaciuto?' (*La casa*, p. 69).

³⁰ 'La solitudine faceva parte della sua esistenza e nulla l'aveva intaccata, neppure quando s'era innamorato, più di una volta, e seriamente, credeva. Ma ora, in quella grande casa, era diverso. [...] Era l'urgere del passato, ecco, che gli dava quella strana inquietudine, quel bisogno di qualcuno, di una presenza umana' (*La casa*, p. 72).

³¹ 'Aveva proprio bisogno di lei, di quella sua amica discreta e mite, che gliela avrebbe tagliate delicatamente, tutte uguali, eliminando le fastidiose pipite, e poi limandole adagio adagio con una sua limetta sottile... Gli dava, quel limare lento e continuo, un sonnolento benessere, come quando sua madre gli passava le mani nei capelli, quand'era bambino. Un piacere per cui i discorsi si scioglievano nel silenzio, e la mente si perdeva in immagini confuse, in un lago di eccitato torpore' (*La casa*, p. 74).

³² He begins by admitting that 'quella donna ha avuto il coraggio di amare, e ha amato chi aveva scelto lei, contro tutto e tutti. [...] Non sarebbe certo contenta di me, se mi vedesse' (*La casa*, p. 56). As his self-awareness grows he describes himself as 'uno che non ha mai saputo amare' (*La casa*, p. 73).

Please address correspondence to: Danielle Hipkins, Dept of Italian, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK

© Department of Italian Studies, University of Reading and Department of Italian, University of Cambridge