

ARTICLE

Embracing the Body: A Woman's Journey in *Il paese del vento* by Grazia Deledda

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SUMMARY

Through an analysis of the deep meanings associated with odors and olfactory perceptions in Grazia Deledda's *Il paese del vento* (1931), this study sheds light on complex and transgressive subtexts of the novel: Deledda's courage in dealing with issues related to women's sexuality and struggle for independence within the traditional sphere of marriage; her critique of a culture which imposes the denial of the body; and her implicit disapproval of a political atmosphere imbued with Nietzschean ideals of the *Übermensch*, at a time when the Italian dictator Mussolini was dangerously appropriating the exalted rhetoric of D'Annunzio.

KEYWORDS: Grazia Deledda – the senses – odors in literature – women's upbringing – the sense of smell in literature – Deledda and feminism

Olfactory perceptions function as critical and cognitive instruments both at a descriptive and naturalistic level, and at a metaphoric level. As authors convey meaning through the themes of clothes, colors, and/or food, they may also express their view of the world through the language of olfactory sensations. For instance, an author may use odors in an effort to lend a sense of reality to the descriptions of a particular environment or character. One fascinating question then is how the political, anthropological and cultural codes of the sense of smell might interact with literature's own system of signs and meanings.

Odors have a fundamental importance in social relations, as they influence the impressions that are given or received. For this reason, writers may use odors at the narrative level, as a means of introducing characters or describing their interactions with one another, thus assigning a specific role in the plot to olfactory perceptions. Odors also take on the function of describing characters from a social, psychological, racial, sexual, or emotional point of view.

Authors fashion odors into semiotic networks that express their opinions about the world: the presence or absence and the quality of an odor (bad/good) might reveal aspects of a writer's poetics or attitudes towards society, the other sex, the literary tradition, specific political and cultural problems or, finally, towards the message he or she intends to deliver. Deciphering the olfactory metaphors in a text enables the reader to comprehend the relationship between the author's innovations and tradition, to gauge the extent of a writer's marginalization or normativity, to measure the author's intention to represent the voice of the marginalized, and to appreciate the writer's rebellion against, or acceptance of, societal conventions. For all of these reasons, it is important to outline the perspectives suggested by olfactory messages and establish who and/or what perceives or emanates odors in a literary text, as well as when and how.¹

Il paese del vento (*The Land of the Wind*) [1931] by Grazia Deledda constitutes a perfect case study of the deep meanings (at the narrative, social and cultural levels) associated with odors and olfactory perceptions in a literary text: the analysis of the frequent olfactory metaphors in *Il paese del vento* outlines the ambiguity of the protagonist's struggle for independence through male mentorship and demonstrates Deledda's sensitivity to issues relating to women's social and sexual identity. An analysis of the olfactory metaphors also sheds light on Deledda's interest in coeval debates, such as the controversial critical reactions to Nietzsche's philosophy in Italian literary journals.

In order to understand fully the cultural implications of *Il paese del vento*, however, one needs to take into account the context that surrounded Grazia Deledda, a society that put many obstacles in the way of a woman writer, as one can gather from Deledda's words: "Il filosofo ammonisce: se tuo figlio scrive versi, correggilo e mandalo per la strada dei monti. Se lo trovi nella poesia la seconda volta, puniscilo ancora. Se va per la terza volta, lascialo in pace perché è poeta. Senza vanità anche a me è capitato così."² This essay will first provide a short overview of Deledda's Sardinian context and critical reception, to then move the focus of the analysis to the theme of the senses, especially the olfactory, in *Il paese del vento*.

Grazia Deledda: A Legendary Life is the title of a biography written by Martha King. Deledda's life was extraordinary, but not because of the abundance of external adventures. She was born in Nuoro, a small Sardinian town, in 1871. Even at the peak of her career, she had a modest, understated life when she lived in Rome (1900–36) with her husband and two children, next door to her sister. She was a devoted wife and mother. Her writing developed from disciplined working habits. Her life was extraordinary because of the tenacity with which she pursued her dreams of literary fame, notwithstanding the obstacles that destiny had put forth against her. As Kozma notes, the first obstacle was her birthplace: at the end of the nineteenth century Nuoro was a small town of about seven thousand people; the population was almost ninety percent illiterate, dedicated mostly to sheep-rearing and agriculture ("Grazia Deledda: A Life," 17). In her mostly autobiographical novel, *Il paese del vento*, Deledda refers to Nuoro as having "tutti gli aspetti, il colore e il clima di un villaggio dell'epoca del ferro" (24).³

Besides the remoteness of her birthplace from all main literary circles, another obstacle was her lack of education. According to the patriarchal culture of her time, a woman's destiny was restricted to marriage, spinsterhood or life in the convent. Girls were allowed three years of schooling, just enough to make "good wives" out of them while not wasting the family's money (Kozma, *Grazia Deledda's Eternal Adolescents*, 28–29). Grazia Deledda was granted by her parents the relative privilege of attending school for five years (King 17). After that, she simply taught herself, reading all the books she could find in the library inherited by her father from the bishop of Nuoro, Giovanni Mario de Martis, and in the library of her uncle, Don Sebastiano. Remarkably, by her teen years she had managed to read much of Verga, Capuana, D'Annunzio, Fogazzaro, Scott, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and the French Naturalists Hugo, Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola. Her readings, though extensive, were not formally directed, and lacked perspective and context. Her two brothers Santus and Andrea contributed to her literary training by arranging for her to receive magazines from continental Italy. This is how Deledda first got the idea of sending one of her short stories, "Sangue sardo" ("Sardinian Blood"), to a magazine. However, Italian was not her native language (she was surrounded by people who spoke Nuorese) and this led to many orthographic and grammatical errors (Kozma, *Grazia Deledda's Eternal Adolescents*, 30).

Her family and the townsfolk also proved to be great obstacles to her literary career. At the time, in fact, even reading novels was considered a potentially sinful activity. People in Nuoro despised Grazia Deledda for writing romantic stories, as they did not comprehend how a woman could write about such things without having actually experienced them (Fratelli 10). Women were supposed to be modest and let their male counterparts represent the family to the outside world. Grazia Deledda defied this tradition. Her self confidence is apparent in a letter to Angelo de Gubernatis: “. . .non rassomiglio punto alle altre fanciulle sarde, perché [. . .] sento tutta la modernità della vita [. . .] sono molto coraggiosa.”⁴

Bombarded by criticism, Deledda continued to write, enduring the prejudices of her family (the scandal brought by her writing threatened to destroy the reputation of the Deledda girls and their chances for a suitable marriage) and the townsfolk while dreaming of leaving Nuoro for Rome. In a letter dated 23 February 1892 to her first editor Epaminonda Provglio, Deledda describes herself as

. . .una ragazza che rimane mesi interi senza uscire di casa; settimane e settimane senza parlare ad un’anima che non sia della famiglia; rinchiusa in una casa gaia e tranquilla sì, ma nella cui via non passa nessuno, il cui orizzonte è chiuso da tristi montagne: una fanciulla che non ama, non soffre, non ha pensieri per l’avvenire, non sogni né buoni né cattivi, non amiche, non passatempi, non innamorati, nulla infine, nulla, e dimmi come può essa fare a non annoiarsi.⁵

The opportunity to leave Nuoro came unexpectedly in October 1899 when Deledda was allowed to accept an invitation to visit Maria Manca, the editor of a popular magazine, *La donna sarda* (*The Sardinian Woman*), in Cagliari. At the home of Maria Manca she met Palmiro Madesani, whom she married and with whom she finally left Nuoro for her dream destination: Rome (Kozma, “Grazia Deledda: A Life,” 34). Even in Rome, however, Deledda had to face the bitterness of many who could not stand the idea of a successful woman writer. For instance, in his novel *Suo marito* (1911), Luigi Pirandello gives a bitter account of a woman writer and her subaltern husband, supposedly a portrait of Deledda and her husband (Balducci 171).

Deledda became the only Italian woman writer of her day with a worldwide reputation, even winning the Nobel Prize in 1926. Her critical reception however was not very well established until the 1970s. Critics often accused her works of repetitiveness (Croce, Sapegno) or they simply viewed her as a typical turn-of-the-century regional writer between *Verismo* and *Decadentismo* (De Michelis, Aste, Leone). In 1972 a symposium in Cagliari (Convegno Nazionale di Studi Deleddiani) drew new attention to her linguistic strategies and anti-realistic narrative techniques (Barberi Squarotti). Later on, Dolfi (*Grazia Deledda*) discussed the psychoanalytical and sociological frame of her works. Since then, critics have explored various aspects of Deledda’s narrative, such as the mythical archetypes of Sardinian culture (De Giovanni, *Il peso dell’eros*) and the psychoanalytical implications of a syndrome of “male-arrested maturation” affecting many of her characters (Kozma, *Grazia Deledda’s Eternal Adolescents*). Heyer-Caputfirmly anchors Deledda’s work in Nietzsche’s modern philosophical discourse and Pickering-Iazzi restores a new political awareness to Deledda’s short stories written during Fascist times. In North America, a renewed interest in the Nuorese author has led to the English translations of her major novels, for instance, *Marianna Sirca* (2006), *Ashes* (2004) and *The Church of Solitude* (2002).

Some feminist critics, however, find Deledda's female characters outdated, enclosed in traditional gender roles; others read Deledda as a proto-feminist writer, because her attention to the situation of women within Sardinian society responds directly to historical and economic issues concerning women (Migiel; Hopkins; Kozma; De Giovanni).⁶ It is known, in fact, that Deledda supported women's suffrage and divorce, and in 1908 she participated with Maria Montessori in the opening ceremony of the First Congress of Italian Women in Rome, thus publicly acknowledging the Women's Movement (Pickering-Iazzi 11). Nevertheless, she denied being a feminist. Borgese, for instance, quoted Deledda: “. . . non è colpa mia – poiché non credo di essere né un femminista né un mondano—se nelle letterature moderne, quando sono in istato d'impovertimento, è necessario riconoscere che le donne fanno un po' meglio degli uomini.”⁷ Responding to a question on the value of feminism, Deledda answered briefly: “Io scrivo romanzi e novelle: quest'è la mia specialità. Trovo giusto e bene che la donna *pensi, studi e lavori*.”⁸

Even though Deledda's statements were not aggressive and openly political, this study shall demonstrate Deledda's concern over women's issues through the analysis of one of her less-studied novels, *Il paese del vento*, which was published serially in *Nuova Antologia* (January–March 1931) and then in the same year by the publisher Treves. As some of the episodes narrated in the book reflect Deledda's childhood in Sardinia, the novel is usually defined as autobiographical.⁹ It is also understood as symbolic of the crisis of an individual conscience, torn between erotic solicitations and patriarchal repression (Piromalli; Dolfi, “Introduzione”). However, *Il paese del vento* reveals more complex subtexts that confirm Deledda's courage in dealing with issues related to women's identity and sexuality. Even more transgressive is her implicit critique of a culture imbued with Nietzschean ideals of the *Übermensch*, at a time (1931) when the Italian dictator Mussolini was dangerously appropriating the exalted rhetoric of D'Annunzio.

The novel is about a young couple who decides to spend their honeymoon in a little, unspecified seaside town. Here the bride (Nina, protagonist and narrator) unexpectedly meets Gabriele, an old passion of hers, now dying of tuberculosis. The encounter brings to the surface unresolved conflicts and childhood memories. While the plot is quite straightforward, the focus of the story is Nina's complex psychology and her journey toward maturity. Having been raised in a patriarchal society and abandoned to her solitary readings and vivid imagination, Nina represses her instincts, denying the corporeal aspects of life. Nina's journey toward self-awareness and the acceptance of life in its wholeness is expressed metaphorically, in the novel, through what one could call a re-education of the senses and in particular of the sense of smell. Thus, the protagonist's perceptions, including the olfactory ones, play an important role in defining her troubled relationship with the material dimension of life.

The contrast between reality and the protagonist's imagination is represented symbolically by two male figures: on the one hand, there is the husband, a protective figure leading his still immature wife to the tangible joys of marriage and sexuality. On the other hand, there is Gabriele, the old flame (not by chance bearing the same name as Gabriele D'Annunzio) who is linked to romantic ideals, abstract intellectualism and forbidden desires. From the beginning of the novel the odors surrounding the two characters (Gabriele vs. husband) and the two opposing dimensions of Nina's life (reality vs. fantasy) are different. For instance, the aroma of flowers accompanies the newlyweds at the beginning of their honeymoon on a beautiful breezy midday (“un bel mezzogiorno ventilato, fragrante di fiori”[33]). Their destination is a little house near the sea, and the bride has prepared herself with a Florentine straw hat, just like those worn by the heroines of

Alexandre Dumas *-fils* (“simile a quelle che portavano le eroine di Alessandro Dumas figlio” [33]). The Florentine straw hat, inspired by romantic heroines, and the fragrance of flowers reveal what the protagonist knows about love: from her readings, she has learned that love is the romantic dream that can be associated only with the classic scent of roses.¹⁰ Nina does not yet know how to reconcile her abstract ideal with the reality of love in everyday life. This is made clear at the first stop of the train, when the station is almost invaded by a flock of conscripts and reality flaws Nina’s arrogant dream (“sogno presuntuoso” [34]) with the corporeal presence and herd-like odor (“odore di armento” [34]) of the young men. Nina is shocked, and the young couple’s harmony is unsettled: “Le nostre mani si sciolsero, e così parvero separarsi anche le anime nostre [. . .] mi parve di essere [. . .] schiava di una sorte equivoca, trascinata, come una schiava autentica, da un’orda di soldati, dopo una razzia guerresca”(34–5).¹¹ The narrator, with the knowledge garnered from life’s experiences, reflects upon the reasons for her reaction as a young bride, recollecting the memories of her secluded upbringing (“segregata in casa” [35]) in a patriarchal society, of her living isolated in a world of fantasy (“in un mondo fantastico” [35]) and her own denial of the body (“il mio corpo . . . non doveva esistere” [36]).¹²

The spiritual confusion derived from confinement, repression of the body and unbridled imagination is expressed with an olfactory metaphor when the narrator recalls how reading, which young Nina connects to the idea of sanctity and evasion, was an activity condemned by her mother as a sin. More specifically, Nina’s moral confusion is expressed as a sort of olfactory hallucination that mixes the imaginary aroma of sanctity (metaphorically, her avid desire for spiritual nourishment) with the real, sensuous scents of the earth in bloom (metaphorically, her emerging physical desires, and her own reading as a transgressive activity):

. . .mi abbandonavo a quello che la mia mamma considerava il piú grosso peccato: la continua avida lettura di libri non adatti alla mia età e soprattutto alla mia educazione [. . .] il sontuoso scrittoio e l’antico scaffale di noce erano pervenuti alla mia famiglia per l’eredità di un parente: un vecchio vescovo, uomo colto e studioso, morto in odore di santità. E il ricordo di lui spandeva davvero, nella camera dove io mi rifugiavo, un senso di profumo. Era, certo, l’odore della frutta appesa alle travi, e quello che veniva di fuori, dagli orti pieni di violaccicche, di maggiorana e di salvia; ma dentro di me fanciulla esercitava ad ogni modo un incantesimo speciale [. . .] Sentivo, sì, l’*odore* di santità del vescovo di famiglia, ma confondendolo troppo coi profumi della terra e della realtà circostante.¹³(43)

Nina’s first meeting with Gabriele, the ideal love of her adolescence, is connected to the “sin” of reading. Nina is caught by Gabriele in her favorite room, while reading a beautiful and rare edition of the *Martyrs* by Chateaubriand, a romantic reading that gives her “un senso d’irreale” (50) [“a sense of the unreal”], “un’impressione di sogno” (50) [“the impression of a dream”]. Nina’s reading is a form of transgressive behavior for a woman, as proved once more by her mother’s embittered comments: “. . .non era contenta davvero, mia madre, che io stessi tutto il giorno nascosta qua e là, a leggere, a fantasticare, a *far nulla*: e sarebbe stato meglio, secondo lei, che Gabriele mi avesse trovato a lavorare, a sorvegliare le domestiche” (54).¹⁴

From the beginning, the relationship between Nina and Gabriele is poisoned by her sense of guilt and neurotic denial of the flesh, which is manifest in her refusal to be seen eating by him and in her horror at seeing the sensual side of Gabriele who eats a lot, drinks, laughs, and makes fun of his

relatives.¹⁵ Nina's repressed sexuality is also evident in the almost carnal pleasure ("piacere quasi carnale" [55]) with which she touches the Fiandra tablecloth and gazes upon its woven carnations, almost perceiving their mysterious scent of nuptials ("misterioso odore di festa nuziale" [55]). Nina's sense of guilt for her passions (the passion for reading and her feelings for Gabriele) is so strong that when Gabriele offers to send her books from the continent, Nina turns him down, implicitly denying her passion for him and for reading, and by extension her very own transgressive nature: "io non ho mai studiato: non so quasi neppure scrivere e leggere" (58) ["I have never studied: I hardly know how to write and read"]. Nevertheless, Nina's senses claim their rights:

...agitata, triste ed ebbra di una passione che ancora neppure io sapevo ben definire, riuscii a scivolare fuori, nell'orto [. . .] Il profumo della maggiorana [. . .] mi fa trasalire; tutto ha qualche cosa di prensile, che mi attira verso la terra. E per terra, sull'erba nuova di ottobre, mi buttai davvero, quando una voce rispose a quella dell'anima mia. Non è una voce umana; eppure risona per volere di un uomo, e ne esprime il gemito di passione simile al mio: è il lamento di un violino.¹⁶(62)

The tangible scent of the earth, which is opposed to the imaginary one of the Fiandra tablecloth, violently arouses Nina's senses. But the nocturnal sound of Gabriele's violin is interpreted by the confused girl as a refusal of the complete union of body and soul. For her, the words expressed by the violin confirm the necessary repression of the body: "...il tuo piccolo corpo, acerbo e freddo come il ramo appena in germoglio, non mi piace. Mi piace l'anima tua vasta" (60).¹⁷

After his short visit, Gabriele starts a new life as a student on the continent. For many years, the girl awaits in vain for him: "...non leggevo più: lavoravo in casa [. . .] come per castigarmi dei miei passati vaneggiamenti [. . .] sentivo la vita che se ne andava in malinconia [. . .] senza amore, senza speranze e senza peccato" (66).¹⁸ Humbled in everyday housework, without dreams, sins, and, the reader should note, without books, Nina meets her future husband. It is significant that Nina's encounter with her husband happens in a context which is not charged with abstract fantasies and intellectualism; he is immediately identified as a tangible figure through his steps, his voice and even his odor (i.e. through the senses): "...evitavo di guardarlo [. . .] ma ne sentivo il passo lieve ed elastico, l'odore che lasciava per le scale; qualche volta la voce calda e vibrante" (66).¹⁹ Nina is conquered by a gaze that gives oneself "fino alla profondità dell'anima" (66) ["to the depths of the soul"], by his hand, "dolce ma ferma" (68) ["firm but tender"]. Slowly, through the mentorship of a new male figure, the body and the senses resurface in Nina's conscience, eventually overturning her approach to life, as the reader shall see.

However, during the honeymoon, the sudden intimacy dangerously exacerbates Nina's delicate sensitivity.²⁰ She finds herself thinking: "...il mio corpo è tuo; ma l'anima ferita no, no, è ancora mia" (72) ["my body is yours; but no, the wounded soul is not, that one is still mine"]. Thus, the child within the bride resurfaces, fantasy prevails over reality ("la bambina risal[e] a galla nella sposa, la fantasia [prende] il sopravvento sulla realtà" [73]) and her husband becomes, in Nina's eyes, almost an ogre ("orco" [71]), a master ("padrone" [72]). Once again, an olfactory perception brings Nina back to reality, helping her recognize in her husband not the ogre but the companion, the bridge between poetry and everyday life, soul and body: "...d'un tratto [. . .] sento un odore di fumo. E quest'odore di casa viva, di gente viva, profumo di famiglia, di calore, di poesia, mi richiamò in me stessa [. . .] il mio compagno accendeva il fuoco. Quando spalancò l'uscio della

camera da letto, vidi la fiamma del camino; e [...] lui mi riapparve [...] l'immagine vivente dell'amore" (74).²¹

The narrator suggests Nina's discovery of sexuality: "...l'inizio della mia vita di sposa ebbe davvero un non so che di fantastico, pur nella sua semplicità, come una delle innumerevoli piccole cose create da Dio [...] Non avevo ancora vissuto così vicino al mare, e nel suo sfondo mi sentivo piccola e fragile eppure con un respiro ampio e felice e bella" (82).²² The corporeal dimension of love, now finally experienced and enjoyed, is also expressed in the frequent allusions to the humble details of a shared intimacy. For instance, the narrator recalls the lengthy dressing up of the husband, and his looking out the window with his face covered in a white soapy beard ("viso coperto di una barba bianca di sapone" [83]). The narrator also describes husband and wife strolling together to buy toothpaste in town ("per comprare un dentifricio" [85]) and explicitly mentions the scent of carnal love: "Entrando nella nostra camera, col vassoio del caffè fra le grandi mani nodose, [Marisa] pareva fiutasse l'aria, come una belva già anziana che sente l'odor d'amore delle giovani coppie della sua razza" (82).²³

In contrast to the maid's candid naturalness, the young bride's unbridled imagination is still trying to paint reality with the colors of the ideal, as underlined by the adversative "ma" ("but") in the following passage: "Quando [Marisa] apriva le imposte [...] odore di rosa entrava con la prima aria: era il profumo dei pioppi, ma nel sentirlo io avevo l'impressione che un giardino fiabesco, con laghi, cigni, tempietti e statue, circondasse la nostra dimora" (83).²⁴ The unexpected encounter with Gabriele unsettles the young couple's fragile equilibrium, bringing back unresolved conflicts and childhood memories: "...un ricordo atavico sepolto nelle fondamenta del mio essere, mi balzò su per le vene [...] fino a colpirmi il cuore e a ottenebrarmi le idee" (79).²⁵ The narrator repeatedly underscores the sense of decay that now surrounds Gabriele, who is still a young man, but evidently ill, with a yellowish face ("viso giallognolo" [79]) and cavernous eyeholes ("occhi cavernosi"[79]). The townsfolk call him "cormorano"(86) ["cormorant"], "pipistrello" (88) ["bat"], "Cristo senza croce"(88) ["Christ without a cross"] and "spauracchio"(98) ["bogeyman"] whose yellow teeth already taste death ("denti gialli [che] già sapevano il sapore della morte" [90]), which is in full contrast with the strong health of Nina, whose teeth shine like pearls ("brillano come perle" [86]). Gabriele becomes almost an evil creature: "quell'uomo è malato, e anche cattivo" (110) ["that man is sick and also evil"]. The narrator defines Gabriele as her "ideale malato" (70) ["sick ideal"] and "fantasticheria di giovinetta provinciale" (133) ["fantasy of a provincial girl"]: on the metaphorical level, his illness is the necessary result of the mutilating dichotomy between the spirit and the body which, as this study has shown, characterized Nina's youth. This shadow from the past, however, threatens to unsettle the young woman's relationship with her husband and deviate her from the path toward maturity: when Nina secretly meets Gabriele, his hand is "fredda e secca come un artiglio"(113) ["cold and dry like a claw"] and his sick breath violates Nina's hair perhaps with the criminal intention of infecting her (117). In fact, what saves Nina from Gabriele is only the timely intervention of a neighbor: Mr Fanti, Marisa's blind and anarchic husband.

Even deprived of sight, Mr Fanti never feels lost in his path. Relying on his other senses, he handles reality better than Nina: Mr Fanti "conosce tutti i sassi della strada, tutti gli odori dei giardini" (120) ["[he] knows all the rocks on the street, all the odors of the gardens"]. After saving her from Gabriele, the blind neighbor leads a distracted Nina to a banquet, offered by the townsfolk in honor of the young couple. And it is here, at the banquet, that Nina reconciles herself completely with the material dimension of life, a reconciliation once more facilitated by a male figure (the blind

man) and expressed by olfactory metaphors or references to other humble aspects of life, for instance, food: “Il profumo delle rose, che vinceva ogni altro profumo, mi ricordò il giorno delle nostre nozze; nozze che, mi parve, questa festa doveva rinnovare e confermare” (121).²⁶ And again: “. . . l’odore delle fettuccine [. . .] mi ricordarono che ero giovine, che si era al mare e bisognava nutrirsi: infine che avevo appetito” (126).²⁷

As Dolfi notes, it is significant that the man who saves Nina and guides her back to her “coming of age” is blind, as though to signify that the real blindness is that of Nina’s conscience: “. . . la cecità vera è quella della coscienza ottenebrata dal male, [. . .] legata all’irrazionalità di un mistero nato in epoche lontane e risvegliato proprio sul discrimine della vita adulta” (“Introduzione,” 6).²⁸ The mentorship of the blind neighbor also implies, however, that a return to life in its wholeness is only possible through the overturning of Western cultural hierarchies, hierarchies that traditionally privilege sight as the most spiritual and rational of the senses, and impose the Platonic-Christian denial of the body.²⁹ This is made even clearer by the fact that the character Mr Fanti is identified as “anarchico” (77) [“anarchic”] as though to signify his distance from traditional hierarchies. At the banquet, seated next to Nina, Mr Fanti represents a protective figure and a model of physical and spiritual wholeness as he endows his eating with almost religious significance: “. . . mangiava con religioso silenzio, con casta ma tenace voluttà, piegando il viso sul piatto e nutrendosi anche dell’odore delle vivande [. . .] [E]gli era il più felice di noi tutti, solo, in contatto col suo cibo, con sé stesso, con Dio, che gli concedeva tanta grazia” (126–27).³⁰ Mr Fanti’s chaste but tenacious pleasure in enjoying even the odor of the foods, as a gift from God, is parallel to the naturalness with which his wife Marisa seemed to sniff the love scent of the young couple (82): Marisa and Mr Fanti show Nina that the joy of life is embodied in the unity of body and spirit. Nina embraces this truth, as she hears the croaking of a toad: “. . . viva sono pur io, e felice e piena di gioia come non lo sono mai stata [. . .] Mi torna in mente l’accordo del violino di Gabriele, ma questo [. . .] è un suono più spasimante e reciso; e vuole, sì, l’indefinibile, ma concretato nella felicità concessa da Dio ad ogni creatura terrena. È il rospo, che chiede amore alla sua compagna” (107).³¹

Nina’s journey towards adulthood is not yet concluded. What awaits her now is a difficult conversation with her husband, a confession that literally and physically empties the bad and proud part of herself (“la parte cattiva e orgogliosa” [135]): “Vomitai tutto il dolore, la rabbia, il veleno, i cibi e il vino altrui, ingoiati in quel giorno [. . .] quando ebbi cacciato fuori anche la bile, [mio marito], con la pazienza della prima sera di nozze, portò fuori il tappeto sudicio, poi mi fece bere un sorso d’acqua” (134).³² On that very night, Gabriele dies: Nina is now free from all her spiritual and physical poisons.³³ The conclusion of the novel is a positive one (Nina’s progression towards maturity and self-awareness) but it may indeed surprise the reader with the unpleasantness of the physical details (the vomit, the bile). This story, nevertheless, stands out as a tender parable of conjugal love, of a devotion made not only of poetry, but of soiled carpets and unpleasant intimacies. *Il paese del vento* is the exaltation of the material dimension of life, humble and yet full of joy and responsibility, in contrast to the misery brought by intellectualism and repressive ideals. Not by chance, as shown in this study, Deledda consistently contrasts the corporeal dimension of life to toxic, deceptive dreams through sensorial metaphors and other descriptive elements. For instance, on the one hand there is the tangible scent of consummated love (82), of the poplars (83), and of the food (126); on the other hand, there are the imaginary perceptions linked to Nina’s repressed desires and confused conscience, such as the family bishop’s aroma of sanctity (43) and the Fiandra tablecloth’s scent of nuptials (55). The joyful vitality of the corporeal dimension is also

symbolized through the material details of everyday's life: her husband's toiletry (83), the toothpaste shared by the new couple (85) and Nina's shining teeth (86) as opposed to Gabriele's yellow teeth (90) and contagious breath (117); the joyful and mature pleasure of eating (126) as opposed to Nina's childish refusal to eat in public (35); the promise of companionship in the humble toad's croaking (107) as opposed to the nobler sound of the violin, which delivered a message of misery (60).

Il paese del vento thus stands as Deledda's response to *La gioventù femminile* of "Azione Cattolica," which warned that "coming of age" meant that a girl was not mature enough to read Deledda's passionate stories, as they may have stimulated excessive fantasies.³⁴ With this book, Deledda is accusing precisely the false romantic ideals that, combined with a backward, paternalistic culture, corrupt a woman's upbringing and threaten to ruin her ability to build a constructive life.³⁵ In fact, as De Giovanni has argued (drawing from a distinction between feminist literature and *écriture féminine*), Deledda's attention to the details of everyday life shows a proto-feminist awareness and an alternative, feminine approach to reality.³⁶ This study has furthered the interpretation that Deledda was attentive to issues relating to women's upbringing and (repressed) sexuality. Nina's moral freedom is obtained through male guidance (her husband and the blind man) and within the traditional sphere of marriage: for this reason it is perhaps an ambiguous and limited freedom, as Fanning notes regarding *Cosima*.³⁷ The ending of *Il paese del vento*, just like *Cosima*, is not openly feminist but reveals the compromises that women had to make; it stands as a commentary on the situation of women at the time when Deledda was writing.

Thus, the narrative of *Il paese del vento* reveals an autobiographical intent (memories of Deledda's passion for Stanis Manca [Turchi 7]), a proto-feminist social awareness and also a political subtext. Deledda's strikingly modern re-evaluation of the corporeal dimension recalls De Sanctis' idea of rejecting abstract and impotent ideals ("ideali astratti e mistici, [. . .] tistici e impotenti" [290]) in order to allow a larger role to man's instinctual forces ("una più larga parte alle forze animali e naturali dell'uomo" [De Sanctis 298]). Thus, Deledda offers the reader an aesthetic different from that of Gabriele D'Annunzio, popular in Italy during her early years: for instance, "she was not distanced from her reading public by aulic prose" (Wood 7). Her immediacy and her attention to the material details of life shape the aesthetic dimension of her writing and demonstrate "the ethical desire to communicate with the reader" (Wood 7). Not coincidentally, therefore, the character Gabriele, symbol of an empty and sick ideal ("il mio ideale malato" [70]), bears the same name as Gabriele D'Annunzio.

Deledda's critique of a culture imbued with harmful ideals, at a time (1931) when Mussolini was appropriating the rhetoric of D'Annunzio and indoctrinating the Italian society with it, is provocative and transgressive: it denies the image of Deledda as an apolitical writer (Lombardi 87–96). Not coincidentally, the blind man who saves Nina and guides her back to her "coming of age" is identified as "anarchico" (77) ["anarchic"]. One episode, in fact, demonstrates Deledda's cold attitude towards the Regime. It is known that after receiving the Nobel Prize, Grazia Deledda was invited to an audience with Mussolini. After the audience, a highly placed fascist aide suggested that she might want to write in support of the Regime. She answered: "L'arte non ha politica" ["Art is not political"] (Sarale 95). Immediately afterwards, her work was ordered out of all bookstore windows and was prohibited to Fascist Party members. Deledda was informed by her editor at Treves that this censure of her work was ordered from the top.³⁸

A close reading of *Il paese del vento* also confirms Heyer-Caput's thesis (153) that Deledda questioned D'Annunzio's interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as "Superuomo," an interpretation which would become the key aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy to be filtered into Italian culture for the first two decades of the twentieth century.³⁹ According to Heyer-Caput (170), Deledda gave a narrative rendition of Nietzsche's Zarathustra in her Cristiano, the male protagonist of *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921). Tormented in his solitude, Cristiano becomes fully aware of the relationship between happiness and acceptance of the physical dimension of life. Sarina, the female protagonist of *Il segreto*, represents for him the amorous call to life, and Cristiano also recognizes that to overcome sadness "...mangiar bene bisogna, [. . .] e tener solido il corpo, del quale l'anima non è che una miserabile serva" (*Il segreto*, 999).⁴⁰ Heyer-Caput reads *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* as a call to a "return to life in its wholeness":

The return to life in its wholeness implies the overturning of the hierarchy established by Western metaphysics between consciousness and body. This is the theme of Zarathustra's discourse on "The Despisers of the Body"[. . .] The contempt for the body in Platonic-Christian morality, which culminated in its denial through ascetism, is, according to Nietzsche's analysis, a sign of profound insecurity [. . .] The result is a culture of "resentment" against earthly life and vengeful moral norms, which can only cause sickness and unhappiness in a mutilated subject [. . .] The body[. . .] encompasses the corporeal and the spiritual, the irrational and the rational (170).

Nina's journey toward self-awareness (albeit through male mentorship) is therefore strikingly similar to that of Cristiano (*Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*). The message of the two novels is parallel: an implicit critique of a culture, imbued at the time with intellectualism and repressive moral norms. Thus, Deledda should not be viewed simply as a typical turn-of-the-century regional writer between *Verismo* and *Decadentismo* (De Michelis, Aste, Leone): she captured the most diverse and contemporary cultural experiences (critical reactions to Nietzsche's philosophy, feminism and even fascism) turning them into "an existential category, into a narrative metaphor of the crisis of the modern subject" (Heyer-Caput 153). The analysis of *Il paese del vento* and its olfactory metaphors sheds light on complex and transgressive subtexts: Deledda's courage in dealing with issues related to women's sexuality and struggle for independence within the traditional sphere of marriage; her original rendition of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as a critique to a cultural context which imposes the denial of the body; and her implicit and foreboding disapproval of a political atmosphere which obscures the individual conscience while promoting false and exalted rhetorics.

NOTES

¹For a comprehensive bibliography and discussion of the sense of the smell in Italian literature and culture, see Fabbian.

²“The philosopher warns you: if your child writes poems, reprimand him and send him off to the mountains. If you catch him in poetry a second time, scold him again. The third time, leave him alone because he is a poet. Without bragging, it happened to me too.” From an interview with Grazia Deledda, June 10 1933 (“La mia vita letteraria–notizie autobiografiche,” qtd. in Schirru 76). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

³“ . . . all the characteristics, color, and climate of a village from the Iron Age.” Italian quotations from *Il paese del vento* are taken from the 1981 edition by Mondadori.

⁴*Lettere ad Angelo De Gubernatis*, 14. “. . . I am not at all like the other Sardinian girls, because [. . .] I feel all the modernity of life [. . .] I am very brave.” The letter is dated November 8, 1892.

⁵*Lettere a Epaminonda Provaglio*, 960. Translation by Kozma (“Grazia Deledda: A Life,” 25): “. . . a girl who for months at a time goes without leaving the house, week after week without talking to anyone outside the family; locked up in a happy and serene house, yes, but on whose street no one passes, whose horizon is closed off by gloomy mountains; a girl who is not in love, does not suffer, has no thoughts for the future, no dreams, whether good or bad; no friends, no pastimes, no admirers, nothing, nothing; so tell me, how can she not be bored?”

⁶For instance, Marilyn Migiel (115) finds Deledda’s characters at odds with a feminist view. Hopkins, Kozma and De Giovanni view Deledda as a proto-feminist writer.

⁷Originally in G. A. Borgese 98; “. . . it’s not my fault (since I believe I am neither a feminist nor a wordly person), if we must recognize that women do a bit better than men when things are in a state of decline in modern literature” (translation by Kozma, *Grazia Deledda’s Eternal Adolescents*, 155).

⁸“Un’inchiesta sul femminismo,” 123. “I write novels and short stories: this is my specialty. I find it well and good that women *think, study and work*” (translation by Kozma, *Grazia Deledda’s Eternal Adolescents*, 156).

⁹As Turchi asserts (7), the character Gabriele resembles Stanis Manca, a journalist with whom Deledda was infatuated before her marriage; Stanis Manca was a friend of Gabriele D’Annunzio (the idol, at the time, for many women), hence the character’s name Gabriele. Deledda, however, rejected the definition of the novel as autobiographical. In a letter to Sardus (9 August 1931) she wrote about a review in *Nuova Antologia* in ironic terms: “. . . dice che l’eroina sono io in persona, cosa che mi lusinga molto, perché a quest’ora [. . .] avrei appena una trentina d’anni” (qtd. in Ricci and Gagliardi 64); “[the review] states that I am the heroine of the book; this really flatters me, because today I would be only about thirty years old.”

¹⁰“Ci si sposò di maggio, e si partì subito dopo la cerimonia: un bel mezzogiorno ventilato, fragrante di fiori. Rose, rose, ci accompagnavano: le fanciulle le gettavano dalle loro finestre [. . .] La meta del nostro viaggio era [. . .] una casetta fra la campagna e il mare [. . .] E noi si sarebbe andati a spasso, lungo la riva del mare [. . .] Apposta io mi ero provveduta di una paglia di Firenze [. . .] simile a quelle che portavano le eroine di Alessandro Dumas figlio” (33). (“We got married in May, and left

immediately after the wedding: a beautiful breezy midday, fragrant with flowers. Roses, roses were accompanying us: the girls would throw them from the windows [. . .] Our destination was [. . .] a little house between the countryside and the sea [. . .]. And we would walk about, along the seaside [. . .] For that purpose I had prepared myself with a Florentine straw hat [. . .] just like those worn by the heroines of Alessandro Dumas-*films*). The narrator also tells us that the romantic Florentine straw hat is accompanied by a beautiful childish ribbon (“bel nastro infantile” [106]). In the narrator’s perception, romanticism is clearly linked to a childish attitude towards reality.

¹¹“As our hands divided, our souls seemed to part, too [. . .] I felt [. . .] as if I were a slave of an ambiguous destiny, dragged like a real slave by a horde of soldiers after a warlike raid.”

¹²“ . . . nata in un paese dove la donna era considerata ancora con criteri orientali, e quindi segregata in casa con l’unica missione di lavorare e procreare, avevo tutti i segni della razza: piccola, scura, diffidente e sognante, come una beduina che pur dal limite della sua tenda intravede ai confini del deserto i miraggi d’oro in un mondo fantastico [. . .] Il mio istinto, pur esso di razza, era quello di nascondermi: anche per le cose e i bisogni piú semplici. Nessuno doveva vedere la mia carne, i miei capelli sciolti; anche le mani, nascondevo. Il mio corpo, infine, non doveva esistere, per gli altri, forse neppure per me stessa: ma i sensi, appunto per questa volontaria costrizione, erano vivissimi, tutti” (35–36); (“ . . . born in a place where women were still viewed upon with oriental criteria, and therefore secluded in the house with the sole mission of doing housework and procreating, I had all the traits of my race: short, dark, distrustful and dreamy, like a Bedouin who, from the confinement of her tent, sees golden mirages at the limits of the desert, in a world of fantasy[. . .] My instinct, also coming from my race, was to hide: even for the most simple things and needs. Nobody was supposed to see my flesh, my hair down; I would hide even my hands. Sometimes, just like weak wild animals do, I would eat hiding in the corners of the house. My body, after all, was not supposed to exist for the others, perhaps not even for myself: but my senses, because of this voluntary repression, were all very much alive”).

¹³“I would surrender to what my mother considered the biggest sin: the continuous, avid reading of books not appropriate for my age or most of all my education [. . .] the sumptuous writing desk and the ancient walnut library case had been inherited by my family from a relative: an old bishop, a learned and studious man, who died in odor of sanctity. And his memory really emanated, in the room that was my refuge, something like a scent. It was of course the odor of the fruits hanging from the beams, and it was also an odor coming from outside, from the gardens full of wallflowers, marjoram and sage; but in any case it did cast a special spell on me, a young girl [. . .] Yes, I sensed the family bishop’s aroma of sanctity, but I would confuse it too much with the perfumes of the earth and of the world around me.”

¹⁴“ . . . she was not happy at all, my mother, that I would stay in hiding here and there all day, reading, daydreaming, *doing nothing*: and it would have been better, according to her, if Gabriele had found me doing some housework, keeping an eye on the servants.”

¹⁵“ . . . tutto avrei sopportato in vita mia, fuorchè farmi vedere a mangiare da Gabriele” (54); “mangiava forte, e beveva, rideva, si beffava anche dei suoi parenti” (57).

¹⁶“ . . . agitated, sad and inebriated with a passion that I myself was not able to define, I managed to slip outside, in the garden [. . .] The scent of the marjoram, awoken by the contact of the bush with

my clothes, startles me; everything has something prehensile about it, something that attracts me towards the earth. And on the earth, on the new October grass, I threw myself, when a voice answered my soul. It is not a human voice; nevertheless it resonates according to a man's will, expressing his passionate moaning, similar to mine: it is the lamentful sound of a violin."

¹⁷" . . . I do not love your small body, immature and cold like a budding branch. I love your wide-spreading soul."

¹⁸" . . . I would not read anymore: I would work at home [. . .] as if I were punishing myself for my previous ravings [. . .] I felt that my life was consuming itself in melancholy [. . .] without love, without hopes and without sin."

¹⁹"I avoided looking at him [. . .] But I would sense his light and agile step, the odor that he left on the stairs; sometimes his warm and vibrant voice."

²⁰Nina is shocked, for instance, by the presence of the conscripts on the train; by the sight of her suitcase open on the bed, with the most intimate belongings scattered here and there, in broad daylight ("aperta sul letto, e le [. . .] cose piú intime sparse qua e là, sotto la luce della finestra" [71]); and by her husband's incautious hint to their kissing and his bustling about pouring water in the washbowl, preparing soap and towels (71).

²¹" . . . suddenly [. . .] I feel the odor of burning wood. And this odor of a vibrant home, of people alive, of something warm and poetic, made me come back to myself [. . .] My companion was lighting up the fire. When he opened up the bedroom door, I saw the burning fireplace; and [. . .] he seemed to me again [. . .] the true vivid image of love."

²²" . . . the beginning of my life as a spouse had something fantastic in it, even in its simplicity, just like those innumerable little divine creations [. . .] I had not ever lived so close to the sea, and in its background I felt little and fragile and yet breathing deeply and widely, happy and beautiful."

²³"As [Marisa, the maid] would enter our bedroom, holding the coffee tray with her big bony hands, [she] seemed to sniff the air, like the old wild beast that senses the love scent of her race's young couples."

²⁴"When [Marisa] opened the windows [. . .] a scent of rose would enter with the first breeze: it was the perfume of the poplars, but it gave me the feeling of a fabulous garden surrounding our home, with lakes, swans, little temples and statues."

²⁵" . . . an ancestral memory buried within the foundations of my being, jumped up through my veins [. . .] until it hit my heart and obscured my ideas."

²⁶"The perfume of the roses, stronger than any other, reminded me of our wedding; it seemed to me that this banquet was to renew and confirm our nuptials."

²⁷" . . . the odor of fettuccine [. . .] reminded me that I was young, at the seaside and that we must nourish ourselves: lastly, that I was hungry."

²⁸" . . . the real blindness is that of a conscience obscured by evil, [. . .] tied up to the irrationality of a mystery born in a distant past and awakened right at the beginning of adulthood."

²⁹For a cultural history of the senses across cultures, see Classen, Howes, and Synnott.

³⁰“ . . . he was eating in religious silence, with chaste but tenacious pleasure, bending his face over the plate and feeding even of the odor of the foods [. . .] He was the happiest person among us, alone, in full connection with his own food, himself, and God who had given him so much grace.” Dolfi provides a comment on the association body/table: “. . . quanto fosse forte l’associazione nevrotica corpo/tavolo lo prova proprio il possesso, da parte di Gabriele, del tovagliolo di quel lontano servizio della casa paterna; il tovagliolo sottratto, mancante, rimane per alcuni anni l’unica prova tangibile di un legame intercorso tra i due giovani, assecondando un inespresso desiderio/timore [. . .] Si mostrerà insomma così la duplicità, l’ambiguità del desiderio e della stessa coscienza, che potrà guarire accettando la propria complessità, l’ipotesi dell’impuro, accogliendo, all’interno e all’esterno, il proprio essere fatalmente corpo/anima” (“Introduzione” 11).

³¹“ . . . I am alive, and happy and full of joy as never before [. . .] I remember Gabriele’s violin’s accord, but this sound now [. . .] is more agonizing and abrupt; and desires something undefinable, and yet embodied in the happiness that God gives to every earthly creature. It is the toad, asking his companion for love.”

³²“I threw up all the pain, the rage, the poison, the foods and the wine of others, that I had swallowed that day [. . .] When I threw out even the bile, with the same patience he had demonstrated on our first wedding night, [my husband] took out the soiled carpet, and then he made me drink a sip of water.”

³³“ . . . l’anima mia riaffiorò al senso della realtà; ed era una realtà luminosa, fatta di spazio, di sollievo, di gioia. Sì, anche di gioia. A costo di apparire al Fanti dura e crudele, dissi: ‘Meglio così. È la volontà di Dio’” (80); (“ . . . my soul came back to the sense of reality; and it was a reality full of light and space, relief and joy. Yes, even of joy. Even if I could sound hard and cruel to Fanti, I said: “It is for the better. It is the will of God”).

³⁴“Il passaggio alla maggiore età non consente di per sé di leggere Grazia Deledda, ricorda ‘Fiamma Viva’ nel 1926, anno del Nobel alla scrittrice sarda. E le signorine cattoliche [. . .] prima di aprire quelle pagine dense di ‘passioni ardenti’ dovranno misurare la loro propensione alla debolezza e alla fantasticheria: se è in eccesso, starne lontane” (De Giorgio 492).

³⁵As this study has shown, those abstract ideals are symbolized, for example, by Nina’s reading of the *Martyrs* by Chateaubriand during her first meeting with Gabriele (50), and by her wearing a Florentine straw hat similar to those worn by the heroines of Alessandro Dumas–*films*, during her honeymoon (106). It is also significant that Nina’s encounter with her husband (the male figure who accompanies her through her path towards maturity and the discovery of the corporeal dimension of life) happens in a context which is not charged with intellectualism (“non leggevo più: lavoravo in casa”; I would not read anymore: I would work at home” [66]).

³⁶“Il contatto con la micro economia della casa, la cura delle suppellettili, ecc., hanno stratificato nella coscienza femminile una visione dal basso, cioè una capacità deduttiva che pur non rifuggendo da costruzioni mentali astratte, ad esse arriva dopo la puntigliosa e precisa analisi del particolare [. . .] l’attenzione all’oggetto minimo, quotidiano, è dunque nella Deledda esplicativo di un approccio al reale tipicamente femminile; [. . .] affermare che l’universo sentimentale è appannaggio del femminile è antropologicamente e culturalmente corretto. Infatti, una società maschile che per millenni ha tagliato fuori la donna dagli affari dello Stato, ha demandato alla femmina, come suo

precipuo campo d'azione, il mondo privato della casa e degli affari domestici e, nel contempo, quello altrettanto privato degli affari sentimentali, di cuore” (De Giovanni, *L'ora di Lilith*, 52). Deledda's writing functions as “testimonianza di una presa di coscienza, magari profemminile, ma che comunque immette Grazia Deledda nel grande alveo della scrittura al femminile, di quel frutto dello sviluppo autodeterminante che la donna sta cercando, coscientemente, da non più di 50–60 anni” (63).

³⁷Fanning (215) notes that in *Cosima*, writing and marriage are potential means of escape, as the conclusion of the novel reveals: “I bambini, nella strada ancora bianca, giocavano al gioco dell'ambasciatore venuto a domandare una sposa; ed ella si sentiva trasportata nel loro cerchio, come la piccola sposa richiesta dall'ambasciatore per un misterioso grande personaggio” (“The children, in the still bright street, were playing the game of the ambassador who comes looking for a wife; and she felt herself transported into their midsts, like the little bride requested by the ambassador for a great and mysterious personage” (qtd. in and trans. by Fanning 215). Freedom is within the protagonist's reach, now launched into the big world after her trip to Cagliari and awaiting for her bridegroom, but it is an ambiguous freedom, because it can only be obtained through marriage (Fanning 233).

³⁸As Pickering-Iazzi observes, in the twenties and thirties the number of women writing in Italy notably increased, notwithstanding fascist ideologues who propagandized the model of the “new Woman” as simply wife and mother. Women's literature, produced during Fascism, shows, according to Pickering-Iazzi, a predilection for themes derived by women's personal, social, and political experience of daily living in a patriarchal society. It also offers a transgressive model of femininity that challenged male cultural authority (“Introduction” 1–22 and “Afterword” 101–114).

³⁹Heyer-Caput asserts that Deledda read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in its first Italian translation of 1899. Most likely, she was aware of the controversial critical reactions to Nietzsche's philosophy in Italian literary journals, in particular, the *Nuova Antologia*. Deledda, in fact, was familiar with *Nuova Antologia*, since the journal published in installments, among other novels of hers, *Cenere* in 1903 and *La via del male* in 1906 (153).

⁴⁰Transl. by Heyer-Caput 169: “. . .one must eat well [. . .] and keep the body healthy, as the soul is just its miserable servant.”

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