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Rewriting Myths through Life Writings in
Marina Warner's Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the fictionalized life writings which are engrafted upon four of Marina Warner's novels through the *mise en abîme* technique called "metabiography". These novels are *In a Dark Wood* (1977), *The Lost Father* (1988), *Indigo; or Mapping the Waters* (1992) and *The Leto Bundle* (2000). Across this body of work, the evolution of metabiography in the postmodern novel is traced as it gradually turns from the theme of biographical research and its difficulties into the inclusion of different types of life writings within the very structure of these novels. Most importantly, it will be argued that a parallel comes to the fore between the textual exposure of life writing mechanisms and the taken-for-granted ideas or myths surrounding it. In other words, once the biographer's research methods and artistic writing techniques are fictionally uncovered, the alleged detachment and factuality of the genre are destroyed.

Moreover, Warner's metabiography presents such a thematic and structural variety that other types of myths are deconstructed; either by (re)positioning the latter within their socio-historical circumstances, or by identifying their correspondences with different trends of literary theory and criticism. Warner's own concerns as a cultural historian provide the guiding principle to the typology of themes expanded by her fiction. The most recurrent ones are Catholicism, female iconography and its role in the subjection of women as well as post-colonial issues. Warner's engrafted life writings will thus be categorized and studied in relation to the variety of themes demystified: religious, folkloric, gender and ethnic/racial. The denomination of myths will be applied to the latter due to their nature as prejudiced ideas and generalizations.

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Introduction

Marina Warner is mostly known as a cultural historian through her works on female imagery and fairy tales. She is also a renowned novelist and mythographer, studying and re-writing sociocultural, religious and gender myths, both within her fiction and non-fiction. Warner was born in 1946, daughter to an English bookshop keeper and an Italian mother, brought up in Cairo then Brussels before moving to England. Her mother experienced Italian fascism while her father was the proud descendant of an ancestry of English colonizers. Such a rich multicultural identity deeply influenced Warner's consciousness/conscience as a historian and novelist, impinging on the themes and structure of her works. Writing a new novel approximately every decade since 1977, Warner-consciously or unconsciously- made sure that most of her fiction and non-fiction were written in alternation because of the correspondences between their themes. Indeed, Warner's cultural histories, based on meticulous research and precise documentation, are given, in her novels, a fictional continuation or "postscripts" (Tredell 36) "I like pursuing a dual search, at several levels of inquiry, historical and imaginative. It is like a treasure hunt" (Zabus, "Yarn" 528). Fiction allows Warner a wider, more imaginative scope for her analyses and themes. Explaining the relationship between her fiction and non-fiction, Warner clarifies that "there should be no difference between the enterprise of imaginative writing and the enterprise of biography or essays" (Tredell 35). In other words, both "enterprises" usually rely on very similar narrative strategies and require the use of creativity and imagination in their composition. Four novels are going to be focused upon in the course of my research; a synopsis of each will help clarify the rationale behind my choice of these particular novels and my omission of *The Skating Party* (1982).

In Warner's first novel, *In a Dark Wood*¹ (1977), Gabriel, a modern English Jesuit priest, is in the process of editing the diaries and writing the biography of another: Andrew Da Rocha and his seventeenth-century mission in China. The parallel between the two priests in their intellectualized vision of religion and their repressed homosexuality provides an interesting insight into the nature of biographical research and its inevitable subjectivity. Gabriel is later sent by the Church on an inquisition mission to southern Italy in order to investigate the miraculous apparition of the Virgin Mary to three little girls.

The Lost Father (1988), Warner's third novel, is also situated in southern Italy and is related to Warner's mother's origins and history. Anna, an English museum curator, is trying to reconstruct her Italian grandfather Davide's memoir through his diaries and her own mother's memories. By historicizing Davide's life and fictionally reconstructing the duel he supposedly fought to save his sister's honour, Anna perpetuates his myth as a powerful father figure. She also attempts to respond to her own desire to recover a lost family history and a sense of belonging.

In *Indigo; or Mapping the Waters* (1992), a postmodern, feminist and postcolonial parody of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623), fictional leaps between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries introduce a variety of locations and characters from Sycorax's everyday life in pre-colonial Caribbean, to the first contact with Kit the English colonizer and, three decades later, his descendants in post-colonial London. The novel traces the lives of these different generations and reflects the destructive effects of colonization and slavery on both sides of the Atlantic. Like most of Warner's novels, however, it ends on a hopeful and reconciliatory note: Caliban and Miranda's wedding.

The Leto Bundle (2000), on the other hand, is more explicitly mythological than the other novels, displaying such fantastical characters as a talking she-wolf and a time-travelling goddess named Leto who gives birth to human hatchlings. Leto's never-ending journey of survival from ancient to modern times, striving to find home and shelter, reflects universal, timeless themes of displacement, exile, social rejection and maternal self-sacrifice. The parallel lives of a Victorian scholar, a female

¹ The title of this novel will be abbreviated to *Dark Wood* from now on.

academic and a pop singer intertwine and separate as they interact with the goddess in her different shapes, turning her into an icon for the “wretched of the earth”, a resurrected Virgin Mary.

This study analyses the structural functions of Warner’s mixture of fiction and life writing, especially as the self-reflexivity and *mise en abîme* of letters or diary extracts uncovers the hidden side of biographical procedures. These self-reflexive biographical subtexts will be designated as “metabiography”; their built-in structure within Warner’s novels will be equated with the horticultural engrafting of shoots upon different varieties of trees:

Engrafting ... a term in gardening, which signifies the taking [of] a shoot from one tree, and inserting it into another, so that they may closely unite, and form one trunk ... The great aim of this useful art is, to propagate any curious sorts of fruit-trees, to insure the growth of similar kinds, which cannot be effected by any other method ... [the grafted shoot] may be rather said to take root in the tree it is grafted, than to unite with it. (Willich 229)

The term “engrafting” is my personal coinage for the *mise en abîme* technique which will be referred to and studied in the first chapter as the thread connecting biography to fiction and giving birth to metabiography. Literally, the concept of “engrafting” belongs to horticultural terminology and implies permanently attaching a vital element taken from one tree to another. With the aim of perpetuating a particular or “curious sorts” of fruit, the latter uses the tree on which it is grafted as “soil” and source of nourishment and growth. Interestingly enough, when applied to Warner’s novels, this process figuratively embodies the juxtaposition of types of life writing and fiction, which occurs on two levels: thematic and textual or visual. Warner’s novels contain diaries undergoing editing, memoirs being written, letters, and chronicles, which continually interact with, and infuse the narrative structure, its themes and characterization. The fact that Warner systematically relies upon this engrafting strategy invites reader and critic to trace² a significant pattern and function

² Tracing is used in the double sense of locating and drawing.

within her works. Engrafting not only facilitates the mixture of different genres within her fiction, but also highlights the hybridity of life writing itself.

In “Fictional Metabiographies and Metaautobiographies: Towards a Definition, Typology and Analysis of Self-Reflexive Hybrid Metagenres”, Ansgar Nünning positions this generic hybridity along with self-reflexivity as postmodern trends in history, fiction and life writing, which reflect the “crisis in representation” and questions the textual reconstructions of the past “more and more novels not only cross the boundaries between fact and fiction, they also tend to blur genre distinctions. As a result, an increasing number of postmodernist novels seem to resist generic classification all together, or at least test the limits of it” (Nünning 195).

However, it would be necessary to tackle the question of the metamorphoses these genres may undergo at their mutual contact and the extent to which they keep their respective original formats. Another relevant consideration would be to relate the figurative to the literal purpose of “engrafting” as a process. Does it seek to “perpetuate” and revive particular types of life writing through a fictional boost? Can fiction be a source of evolution and “growth” for diaries or memoirs simply by extending their generic limits and exposing their internal processes? Thematically speaking, the two genres actually exchange their themes: fiction tackles biographical research while the types of life writings included are fictionalized, or at least in part. Visually, the latter infiltrate novels through discreet or more explicit forms of textual transition or alternation between the main narrative and “engrafted” memoirs and diaries, resulting in the formation of numerous textual layers which I categorized as first and second-level texts. First-level text is the “implied author” and uses third-person narration which describes events and characters and advances the plot. More diverse, second-level text usually relies on first-person point of view and is made up of myriad types of life writing such as chronicles, letters, memoirs, diaries and even emails. In *Indigo* and *The Lost Father*, letters and diaries in particular are included in their original format and constitute the principal form of metabiography. Second-level text also participates in the plot development, enriching the structure of the novel and providing the reader with access to the characters’ hidden thoughts or unconfessed desires.

The transition from one level to the other is carried out mainly through free indirect speech which is an important constituent of metabiography. This narrative mode is often associated with first-person narration and was defined as “self-narrated monologue” (Herman 29) by *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. Because of the continuity between the narrator’s and character’s utterances or thoughts, free indirect speech ensures the fluidity of discourse and uninterrupted fluctuations between a variety of “consciousnesses”. It is also an effective technique to melodramatically express characters’ emotions, fantasies and internal struggles, and a sense of immediacy achieved through the structural preservation of such features of direct speech as exclamations and interjections (Herman 26).

The first chapter will explore the different “grafting” techniques as well as their relation to the nature of particular types of life writing, especially memoirs and diaries, in Warner’s metabiographical fiction. The innovative rationale behind the different grafting processes will be studied through relevant memoirs, letters and diaries extracts within her four novels. The aesthetic and ethical purposes of grafting will then be tackled and their specific role in uncovering such life writing myths as factualism and objectivity will be investigated. In addition to that, the thematic and structural roles of such metabiographical texts need to be defined and analysed, as well as the religio-cultural, postcolonial and feminist issues uncovered by the resulting multiplicity of voices and perspectives. As Tobias Doring, a Shakespearean and postcolonial critic, phrases it “our present [is] shaped by the past while the past is, in turn, continuously reshaped through present re-interpretations” (“Hyphen” n.pag.). Indeed, the Caribbean colonial past, Italian fascism and other historical moments are in a constant dialectic with present-day perspectives of younger and modern generations. The latter in *The Lost Father* and *Dark Wood* strive to reconstruct their identities and understand present circumstances by exploring/researching their ancestors’ past through letters, diaries and so forth. As such, these novels particularly reinforce the interrelatedness of history with fiction

Influenced by Roland Barthes and his deconstruction of sociocultural Bourgeois mythology, Warner’s mythography in “both enterprises” concerns itself with the study of the material circumstances from which myths and beliefs stemmed. Indeed, she relies on a deep analysis of the historical conditions and political motives

which will help uncover the myths most relevant to her stance as a feminist novelist and cultural historian. By re-positioning those myths within history, Warner also rewrites them by modernizing their setting and changing their perspective as in the short stories “Ariadne after Naxos” and “Now You See Me” in which ancient Greek or biblical male protagonists are replaced by modern female narrators.

Thus Warner’s novels are a complex medley of characters’ thoughts and parallel lives reflected in a multitude of textual levels which can at times be confusing. In *Dark Wood*, for example, the personal memories of the biographer are structurally blended with his narration of the events related to the Jesuit mission in China and the diaries of his biographee. These three levels of texts are brought together by the religious and political themes they share despite the three centuries separating the biographer from his subject. So, instead of the allegedly unbiased unique voice of an omniscient narrator, the different perspectives of the biographer, the biographee and their entourage provide a more comprehensive portrait of their life and times.

Such an interesting pattern is made conspicuous by a series of structural appendages which I grouped under the label of “life writings” and which result in a mixture of genres within Warner’s fiction. Life writing can be a theme, that of a biographer or historian attempting to come to terms with their own past by reconstructing someone else’s life, or a structure like letters, diaries and emails which are textually included within the narrative.

There have been many attempts at defining and positioning life writing as a genre by theorists like Ira Bruce Nadel, Liz Stanley and others. But the most important concern with Warner’s “life writings” is that, being included in a novel, they are fictional(ized). Allen Hibbard identified this trend in postmodern fiction as “novels that in some way or another respond to the conventions of biography, or trace the journeys of biographers” (29). Warner’s fictional works self-reflexively introduce the themes and structure of life writing along with a continual reworking of myths. In *The Lost Father*, the female protagonist tries to reconstruct her southern Italian grandfather’s memoir while deconstructing myths about Catholicism and southern Italian women. In *Indigo*, along the lines of a parody of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, letters, memoirs and epitaphs are included in their original format and

deconstruct colonial and patriarchal myths. Thus the re-writing of literary and cultural canons of the past is a commonplace strategy, especially in Warner's *Indigo* (Connor 166). All these novelistic manifestations are linked to post-modernism; its loss of faith in official versions of history and in language as a transparent medium of representation. However, Warner's novels are historical fictions which confer a second wind of factuality on the life writing extracts, a "reworking of realism" (Head 229). Treating gender and ethnic issues in a mythical and historical guise, *The Leto Bundle*, for instance, exposes such marginalised members of society as exiled and stateless persons through annals, chronicles and emails. This deconstruction is achieved by the incorporation of the Leto myth within realistic environments and fictionalized historical events. As a result, the genealogical victimization perpetuated upon different generations and strata of society due to gender, colour or class differences is exposed through the continuing interplay of various temporal spaces, of history and fiction.

In terms of gender discrimination, Warner's non-fictional works also present a history of the prejudice inherent to the iconography and symbolism of the female body as well as an analysis of the evolution of representations of women's moral and physical characteristics in society and religion. The latter are commented upon in more detail in *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976) and *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (1981).

Most importantly, such discriminations and mystifications are achieved through a "projection/rejection" process or "othering" discourse which Warner describes as "produced by precise historical circumstances". Warner characterises such "stories" as "self-protecting", and describes how they "can sometimes be totally interpenetrated with hostility". She then explains that "people structure strangers to ward them off, to expel them" (Fraser 366,371).

This notion of "othering" is predominant in all of Warner's novels and culminates in *The Leto Bundle* which turns out to be a bundle indeed, made up of various silenced and oppressed members of society. The latter are given textual and thematic space by having their lives told, described, confessed, either by them or by their entourage. So Warner's metabiography resorts to a "de-othering" process, an attempt at comprehending and grasping a different culture or view. This study thus

represents not only an enquiry into the nature of fact and fiction, history and myth, but also a way of getting the balance of power relations right through the exposure of the myriad ulterior motives underlying the myth-making strategies of grand narratives of history and literature.

This thesis also seeks to investigate the structural and thematic effects of the incorporation of a variety of life writings within Warner's four novels, a genre mixture which is enriched by the self-reflexivity of life writing strategies and procedures. Consequently, the concept of "metabiography" as self-reflexive biographical research is brought to the fore and raises the following questions: how can metabiography be defined specifically in relation to Warner's fiction? How can the evolution of metabiography from a self-reflexive theme to an in-built structure be traced? What kind of intellectual background can be established through the theories of life writing ranging from the second half of the twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first?

The most prominent examples of metabiography either expose the protagonist in the process of writing a biography or memoir, and/or include extracts of life writings which are textually incorporated in their original format. This visual genre mixture inspired me with the concept of "engrafting" as the *mise en abîme* of fictionalized letters, diaries, biographies and so forth within the narratives. So how does Warner's "engrafting" function as a strategy? First, in relation to life writing theory, the self-reflexivity of biographical procedures fictionally violates the biographer's professional confidentiality by exposing the weaknesses and pretences of his/her craft, such as objectivity and accuracy in reporting past events. Second, in relation to Warner's fiction, metabiography is deeply intertwined with the themes of the novels and helps uncover and support their socio-political concerns, ranging from colonialism and post-colonialism in *Indigo* to gender issues in *The Lost Father*. How can this structural and thematic exposure be theorized as a strategy?

The deconstruction theories of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes will function as points of departure for the definition of what are exposed by metabiography as untruths or "myths" specific to Warner's narratives. Derrida and Barthes re-locate such myths as signifiers both within the text and within history. What are the implications of this terminology for Warner's metabiography and what

type of deconstruction may be adapted to its myths? How may these be positioned in relation to particular trends of literary theory?

In the course of my research, I gradually became aware of the fact that the metabiographical aspects of Warner's novels have mostly been ignored by critics and theorists who concentrated on feminist, post-colonialist, mythological and mythographical readings in their essays and reviews. In terms of structure, the notion of a secular form of "Typology" according to which particular events and characters were constantly reiterated in different shapes through time and space was also repeatedly pointed out (Coupe, *Marina* 52). This analytical gap as well as most critics' failure to link the binary, tide-like movement – in the sense of ebb and flow movements – within Warner's novels to the concept of re-writing past lives prompted me to bring this important notion of metabiography to the fore. I felt there was a clear need to focus on this particular combination as an alternative strategy of re-thinking issues of religion, folklore, gender and race.

Another important insight brought by research is the link between my concept of metabiography and psychoanalysis. Many theoretical and critical studies of life writing, especially biography and autobiography, have pointed out the centrality and great influence of Freudian psychoanalysis to the genre's main thematic and structural areas of study. There is constant correlation between psychoanalytical case *histories* and the writing of biography, especially in relation to the problematic mixture of fact and fiction and the narrative challenges of their composition. Freud himself wrote biographies (Leonardo da Vinci's for instance) and has linked life writing to psychoanalysis as "he believed that certain psychoanalytical concepts were applicable to life writing about creative beings ... the "unconscious" ... provided an entire new province for biographical research" (Edel, *Writing Lives* 142). Freud also comments on other aspects of the genre such as the importance of childhood to the understanding of the subject's adult character and motivations in Strachey's biography of Queen Victoria (Marcus 128). He also expresses his views on "the problem of 'hero-worship' inherent in the [life writing] genre, with its concomitant but suppressed desire to devalue greatness, to find the feet of clay and the rattling skeleton in the cupboard" (Holmes 18). In other words, Freud explains that some biographers' admiring focus on subjects with great achievements conceals in reality

an unconscious desire to demean and debase the latter. In addition, he is taken as a reference in relation to life writing by theorists and practitioners such as Edelman, whose imagery and terminology in *Writing Lives* is steeped in psychoanalysis like the concept of “transference” or what he terms “literary biography” as a tool to the understanding and portrayal of the biographical subject.

Psychoanalysis being concerned with retrospection, an “inward journey” (Marcus 79), and the inescapably linguistic interpretation of the past, Freud’s case histories are, in Linda Anderson’s words, “experiments in life writing”, while Freud himself is described as “a short story writer” (*Autobiography* 59). In fact, both analyst and patient at once provide facts and create fictions based on “memory and narration” (Borch-Jacobsen 60) so there are inevitably two versions: the life as remembered/told by the patient versus the analyst’s “plot of an analysis” (Marcus 810), his/her own version of the patient’s narrative/story-telling (“the story of the story”). My primary focus has been on the pertinent case history of Bertha Pappenheim, more commonly known as “Anna O.,” who was diagnosed and treated for hysteria by Joseph Breuer between 1880 and 1882. In the 1895 case history, Breuer describes how the patient gradually regained mental and physical health over her two-year therapy thanks to what she termed the “talking cure” (*Studies on Hysteria*). What is at stake in this and other psychoanalytical case histories is the relationship between scientific and private knowledge, past and present, narrative and subject, patient’s and analyst’s “stories”. Although the case was co-authored in *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud never treated the patient himself but only obtained second-hand information from his fiancée and Breuer who had been meeting the patient regularly during her treatment. In the light of the additional biographical information gathered about the case since 1953, it has turned out that Freud knew Breuer had failed to treat Bertha but still encouraged him to publish her case history on which he projected his own theory and understanding of hysteria. Both Breuer and Freud had relied on Bertha’s case for their construction of the myth of origin of psychoanalysis.

However, “one always returned to Freud, for after all, he had invented a therapeutic method which explored the *narrative* that a life might be – identity as autobiography” (Elizabeth Wilson in Marcus 213). Identity as narrative implies

linguistic and structural organization, that is fictionality and thus untruth. “By pursuing a narratological problem into non-literary realms, we discover to what extent the case-history ... is ultimately allied to the fictional ... [this] indicates a problem in the theory of fiction: when you leave fiction you discover fictions.” (Culler 203) As a result, the patient narrates his/her life (his)story, his/her autobiography, which is re-interpreted and re-written by the analyst, who becomes in turn his/her biographer. By fictionalizing the patient’s autobiography and commenting on it in the process, Freud takes on the role of a metabiographer. His remark in one of his letters may be linked to that role: “Anyone who writes a biography is committed to lies, concealments, hypocrisy, flattery and even to hiding his[/her] own lack of understanding, for biographical truth does not exist, and if it did we could not use it” (*The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Arnold Zweig* 127). It is in this sense ironic that while acknowledging the impossibility to attain biographical truth, Freud himself has encouraged Breuer to mystify the case-history of “Anna O.” and re-appropriate it by manipulating psychoanalytic history and chronology and position himself and Breuer as pioneers of the theory on hysteria. It goes without saying that patients themselves may falsify their own narratives/identities. In relation to that, Marcus remarks on

the complexity of autobiographical “truth” in psychoanalysis ... Freud’s discovery (or assumption) that patients “lie” is turned to advantage. The fictions which patients manufacture are perceived as enabling the truth of the therapeutic effect and the operation of the unconscious is only seen in the fictions which we invent in order to represent the unconscious. (201)

However, Freud’s metabiography serves only to create/construct myths within “the unreal, derealized universe of psychoanalysis, where interpretation passes for reality and fiction is taken for truth” (Borch-Jacobsen 47). In that regard, Freud may also be considered as a mythologizer.

My research has also concentrated on questioning the objectivity and factualism of life writing while at the same time exploring the postmodern and

feminist issues relevant to the genre. The first half of the thesis will develop my statement about the formal and thematic influence of Warner's fictionalized life writings by engaging with the theories of Virginia Woolf, Nadel and Stanley among other life writing theorists. Stanley, for instance, explains how feminist life writings cross "conventional boundaries of genres" (65) through the mixture of fact and fiction. Another feminist "departure ... from biographic convention" is called "'intellectual autobiography', focussing on factors involved in the genesis and development of the writer's understanding and interpretation of the biographical subject ... that is, it focuses upon biographical processes, rather than the product of these alone" (136). In other words, (auto)biography turns into a metabiographical exploration of life writing and its mechanisms. Stanley also emphasizes the "anti-spotlight approach" (249) through which she strives to position the biographee in his/her social environment in a way similar to Warner's method of re-positioning persons and events in their historical context.

Woolf, on the other hand, wrote three fictional biographies, *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), *Flush: A Biography* (1933) and *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940). Concerned with the balance between fact and fiction, she has always refused to be limited by factuality in her quest for biographical truth. Stanley takes as an earlier example of metabiography Woolf's *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn* (1906) in which a fictional female biographer and her female biographee represent women's voices never represented or "preserved" before (161). Woolf herself wonders about the appropriate use of facts and the definition of a life, a doubtfulness which makes her resort to fiction and the satire of conventional biographical methods "[h]ow can one deal with facts – so many and so many and so many? Or ought one, as I incline, to be purely fictitious. And what is a life?" (*Letters* n. pag.) In *Orlando*, for example, the hardships linked to the writing of a biography are dramatized and the laws of the genre openly transgressed, which, in Nadel's words, turns this work into "a metabiography" (141). Nadel defines metabiography as a genre in which "biographers locate themselves as a character within the text" (qtd. in Stanley 136) which explains "the general move [in the twentieth century] to self-conscious fictions and narrators [which made] biography ... more aware of how it tells its story ... [while recognizing] the impossibility of ever achieving the unity or completeness of

self former biographies presented” (185-86). He then interestingly described James’s *The Aspern Papers* (139) as a fictional investigation of biographical procedures and hardships, a description which drew my attention to this novella as an apt and early illustration of the concept of metabiography. In “Lives without Theory”, David Ellis explains

Popular though biography has become, there has yet been no comparable interest in how it ‘works’ ... the tendency [of the twentieth century] has been rather to write books that ... initiate the reader into the behind-the-scenes secrets of the craft of biography without attempting a sustained analysis of any element which might be described as fundamental. (2)

This lack of any in-depth poetics of biographical writing is an obsolete idea since life writing theory has developed considerably in the last thirty years. Most importantly, the poststructuralist and postmodern deconstruction of self, fact and history as stable and truthful reflections of reality has influenced the theoretical definitions of biography as well its ethical, historical and representational concerns.

What is most interesting in that regard is the way the view of biography develops towards less and less certainty about the extent to which its aspirations as a genre are realistic. Sanford Pinsker states that “competing notions of what constitutes a legitimate ‘biography’ make a steady and whole view of a life, any life, nearly impossible” (191). For example, in A. S. Byatt’s *The Biographer’s Tale*, a postgraduate student desperately looks for biographical material related to a famous biographer but never succeeds in reconstructing his subject’s life. In spite of the *mise en abîme* of the material found and studied by the biographer, the subject’s life is not any easier to grasp. James’s *The Aspern Papers* and Byatt’s *The Biographer’s Tale* highlight the relatedness of particular fictional themes such as the difficulty of biographical research and the limitations of textual reconstructions of the past with both history and life writing theory. In fact, the self-reflexivity of such texts, whether thematic (James) or structural (Byatt), at once uncovers and deconstructs the conventions of biographical research and underpins their significance as

metabiographical works.

James and Byatt also rely on different text-levels which are produced by the combination of first-person narration and free indirect speech. Through their shared aim of exposing biographical processes, these works reflect an evolution in the formal and thematic conventions of fiction and life writing to the point of generic deconstruction. Allen Hibbard links these two novels as belonging to the same trend of novels which result from what Richard Holmes describes as the way “the boundaries between fact and fiction have become controversial and perilous” (16), boundaries which are also crossed by Warner. Indeed, the latter shows a deep interest in the reconstruction of the past through her historical fictions, “trying to find historical paradigms for contemporary situations” (*On Histories* 11). Byatt brings together the two aims of Warner’s metabiography in her discussion of the motives behind writing historical novels. Indeed, she comments on the “[a]esthetics of re-inventing, of combining real and imaginary human beings” and “the aesthetic need to write coloured and metaphorical language, to keep past literatures alive and singing, connecting the pleasure of writing to the pleasure of reading.” This is relevant to Warner’s lyricism and her fictionalized medieval chronicles, annals and Victorian diaries. Byatt then complements the aesthetic with the ethical, or “the political desire to write the histories of the marginalised, the forgotten, the unrecorded” (*On Histories* 10-11) by re-imagining and re-inventing such histories the way metabiographical narratives in *Indigo* and *The Lost Father* do with a number of neglected cultures and social classes.

The second half of the thesis aims to explore the purposes of Warner’s metabiography and the aesthetic and ethical uses to which it is put. For example, the juxtaposition of narration with the father’s diary in *The Lost Father* provides aesthetic variety and an enriching plurality of voices. Choosing biographical research as a theme also gives insight into its ethics like the immorality of privacy invasion.

In that regard, this thesis strives to show the structural and thematic importance of metabiography as a myth-deconstruction and reconstruction or mythopoeic tool in Warner’s fiction. What type of link may be established between particular literary theories and the nature of the myths exposed? I will explore the different types of feminisms and postcolonial theories in order to (re)locate Warner’s metabiographical

myths within their religious, cultural and social spheres. I will also examine the (de)mystifying implications of fictionalizing specific histories and/or geographies such as World War One in fascist southern Italy and the seventeenth century in the Caribbean.

I started investigating Warner's novels because they are under-represented in spite of their fictionalization of important episodes of history and their invaluable participation in a tradition of historical and postmodern fiction. I chose these works in relation to their novelistic conventions: the subtle pattern of spatiotemporal shifts between past and present, historical and fictionalized reality, which results in an interesting narrative and textual layering. I focus on their mythological dimension as well as their metafictionality and self-reflexivity, thematic and structural elements which provide rich insights into history and life writing theory and criticism.

In a Dark Wood dramatizes life writing procedures and difficulties through Gabriel's research and composition of another Jesuit's biography, and raises the problematic issues of authenticity, objectivity and empathy related to the genre. Da Rocha's diaries are included as a "second-level" text and their fictionalization exposes the mechanisms of editing and selection. Even Gabriel's report on the Virgin's apparitions reflects the investigative techniques of biographical fact-gathering and analysis. These issues are tackled in the first chapter while the third one focuses upon the novel's deconstruction of religious and gender myths and most importantly the myth of the Jesuit missionaries.

The Skating Party, Warner's second novel, has been omitted from this thesis mainly because of the absence of engrafted life writings. The opposition between art and life which is tackled in this novel may be studied as a life writing issue, but it is applied to painting and academic research. In relation to that, Warner explains in *Joan of Arc* how the disorder of life is given structure and form through art but not necessarily making it a more faithful representation of reality. *The Skating Party* also reflects the back and forth structure of secular typology that makes the other novels pertinent to my research, as Homer's *Iliad* is reiterated in the present of a modern English family.

The Lost Father raises similar issues to *Dark Wood*, with an increased focus on the centrality and tension of the fact versus fiction dichotomy and the representability

of the past through present perspectives in biographical writing. Davide's diaries are also included as a "second-level" text and are complemented by Rosa's diary-like discourse which adds a feminist psychoanalytic dimension to the novel. A variety of religious, gender, folkloric and socio-political myths are deconstructed and analyzed in the third and fourth chapters.

Indigo tackles life writing issues through the lens of colonial and postcolonial (hi)stories, namely the colonizer's letters and the missionary's memoirs which are included as a "second-level" text and deconstruct colonial and imperialistic myths. Sycorax's speeches are associated with Leto's in feminized versions of autobiography which cross generic boundaries and replace the discourses of marginalized women in their socio-historical contexts. *The Leto Bundle* adds the postmodern sense of fragmentation and combines ancient chronicles and emails in a structural pell-mell which deconstructs gender and class myths. The analysis of these two novels is concentrated in the fourth chapter.

I soon came to realize that there is continuity between the exposure of biographical research and material in these novels and the demystification of life writing mechanisms. One of these is the dependence on the subject's status as a paragon for the biography or memoir to be acknowledged as part of the life writing canon. In relation to the postmodern English novel, Steven Connor explains that "with the growing interest in journals, familiar documents and ... 'history from below' or unofficial history ... there is still a sense in which private lives ... are only historical once they attain a certain degree of typicality or exemplary significance" (129). Ironically, Warner's characters usually being the exact opposite of exemplarity as homosexuals, prostitutes and exiles, what kind of subversive authority can they acquire for the genre of metabiography? This is an important issue which I felt required a serious amount of consideration. In addition to that, history and "private lives" raise similar questions about the (im)possibility of recovering the past, its mutual relation with the present, as well as fact manipulation and the use of narrative devices for their composition. I thus went on to explore the rationale behind the combination of the genres of fiction and life writing and catalogued two possibilities: aesthetic and ethical, a task which promised valuable insights into Warner's motives as a novelist and historian.

After that, I came to note the interrelatedness between religious writings and issues of sexuality and gender roles. Warner mentioned “how highly charged Christendom is with repressed eroticism” (Coupe, “Marina” 11) and there seemed to be such a pattern underlying Jesuit fathers’ diaries and medieval monks’ chronicles. As most of these life writing extracts have generally been analysed by postcolonial and feminist critics in relation to postmodern issues of representation and parodic revision, their interaction with fiction and the deconstructive potential of this interaction merit serious investigation. For example, *Indigo* has provoked many an artist and critic, not only because the time of its publication coincided with the rise of postcolonial studies, but also because it relies on a canonical literary text (Shakespeare’s *Tempest*) in its feminist rewriting. As Warner has always been described as a historian and mythographer, I wanted to explore a different meaning of myth as a prejudiced or received idea, a “human [self-]deception” on the one hand, and the genre of life writing as a form of historical record and a “covert life-myth” (Edel, *Writing* 17), both contextualized in her fiction. The last part of the thesis analyses colonial and ethnic myths through close textual analysis of *Indigo* and *The Lost Father* as historical (re)contextualizations which are the most appropriate deconstructive tools for the investigation of this genre mixture in the postmodern and historical novel.

As my research progressed, I came to note the strong link between Warner’s fictionalized metabiography and a variety of postcolonial and first and second-wave feminist critics. I engage with the feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, in addition to Adrienne Rich, bell hooks, Katharine Mackinnon, Andrea Dworkin and Gillian Howie in an attempt to define and contextualize patriarchal systems and strategies within specific cultural and literary (con)texts.

Indeed, patriarchy was defined in different ways by feminists and usually adapted to a variety of theoretical frameworks and perspectives. For example, Simone de Beauvoir, who was part of the first generation of French feminists and political activists, referred to socialist and existentialist philosophies. She later had tremendous influence on Julia Kristeva in her Marxist considerations of a “social revolution based on class as well as gender [and] her emphasis on the construction of

femininity” in the field of linguistics. Hélène Cixous took a more “romanticized vision of the female body” (Moi 98) as the ‘site’ of a feminine eroticism-in-writing.

De Beauvoir explains that “[p]atriarchy relies on the myth of woman’s essential immanence³ and her otherness in constructing male subjectivity” (De Beauvoir 1263). In other words, women are always constructed in hierarchical opposition to a male normative identity. Kristeva adds that patriarchy as a “sociosymbolic contract” is “far from being that of equal men, [as it] is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences” in which women are disadvantaged and appointed specific roles “to maintain ... and perpetuate this ... contract as mothers, wives” (“Women’s Time” 868). In the context of Kristevan socialism and linguistics, “sociosymbolic” is the combination of patriarchal social norms and of “language as the fundamental social bond” from which women have been rejected.

Men are supported by a number of patriarchal scientific, religious and social theories such as anthropological assertions that the male brain is bigger and thus intellectually superior to the female one (Broca n.p.). Christianity also depicted Eve as the source of Original Sin and the cause of the subsequent suffering of women. Economics privileges men over women in the system of production by making domestic chores an unpaid job (Ebert 20)⁴ while Freudian psychoanalysis viewed women as “sub-men, castrated men” (Kristeva 866). All these systems of thought reinforce and further legitimize male superiority and the consequent oppression of women.

In the context of the Anglo-American feminism of the late seventies and eighties, Adrienne Rich attacked heteronormativity as an insidious institution of patriarchy. Providing a punctilious “cataloguing” of the various manifestations of patriarchy in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”, Rich further explains “[it is] not a simple maintenance of inequality and property possession, but a pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to control of consciousness” (1596). bell hooks, on the other hand, incorporated issues of race

³ In the context of de Beauvoir’s book, female immanence means stagnation as opposed to male transcendence. Both are patriarchal constructs.

⁴ Ebert added: “the domestic economy-the ‘production of life,’ specifically subsistence goods and human life-is subsumed under the privileged, profit-making production of commodities in terms of wage labor-the ‘production of things’-while domestic labor is literally ‘de-valued’ as non-wage labor.”

with those of gender, thus helping to construct Black feminism and postmodernism while exposing the exclusivity of a previously dominant white, middle-class, heterosexual and privileged first and second-wave feminism. More contemporary definitions draw attention to patriarchy's strategic weakening of women's unity and generational continuity by being "built upon the symbolic and real severance of productive matrilinear relations" (Howie; Tauchert 55).

Patriarchy is an insidiously fierce, though controlled and organized socio-political power. It will be studied in this chapter as regulating men's relationship to, and view of, women within specific spatio-temporal conditions, ranging from seventeenth-century Caribbean islands to (pre-)fascist southern Italy. Such different contexts are thematically and structurally linked by the life writings engrafted upon the narrative. These textual engraftings expose a variety of patriarchal attitudes and a heterogeneous imagery of the feminine which will be analysed and deconstructed within the framework of social constructivism as exemplified by de Beauvoir's well-known declaration "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"(1262). According to the previous theory:

Things in the world – selves, texts, bodies, behaviours – are the products of ongoing social processes of interaction, and thus do not have fixed or inherent meanings. Entities are always dynamic, always in process; their identities change over time as they establish new relations with various other elements in the social scene. (Kolodny 2046)

In other words, the notions of "womanliness" and "femininity" which constrict women to limited functions and behaviors are not natural but constructed generalizations which, by being associated with biological sex, are 'normalized' in order to serve men's specific interests and needs.

It is important at this point to highlight existing criticism on Warner's fiction, which varies widely and mostly focuses on mythology and mythography and the link between myth and history as well as on feminist, post-colonial and postmodern issues. Laurence Coupe, mythographer and most prolific Warnerian critic,

concentrates, in a comprehensive and comparative analysis of all Warner's fictional and non-fictional corpus (entitled *Marina Warner*), on her most recurrent analytical strategy, namely the retelling and reconstruction of religious and secular myths. Coupe's analytical method emphasizes the importance of myth as a pattern underlying Warner's novels in addition to expanding the reader's culture and knowledge of all sorts of classical, religious and pagan myths. Second, it widens the scope and understanding of Warner's fiction by exploring the possibilities of meanings contained within myths and their endless potential. Warner explains that "[m]yths convey values and expectations which are always evolving, in the process of being formed, but – and this is fortunate – never set so hard they cannot be changed again" (qtd. in Coupe 14). So Warner's continuous reinterpretation and rewriting of myths reflect their narrative constructedness and their consequent adaptability to different contexts, authors and readers.

In his article, "The Comedy of Terrors", Coupe relates Warner's "(re)historicizing" of myths to Barthes's techniques as a myth critic. He explains how Warner does not just expose history as the "repressed content" of myths. While Barthes oversimplifies the meaning of myth to a "falsity", Warner relies on New Historicism and "the power of ... documentation" (Coupe 52) to reposition myths within their material circumstances and allow the reconstruction of more accurate alternatives.

As to the relationship of myth to history, Warner explains to David Dabydeen, a Guyanese-born novelist and critic, in a 1992 interview, that "[m]yth almost always has a very deep hinterland of quite practical, legal and economic circumstances" (Dabydeen 119), a "hinterland" in which Warner positions different myths in order to clarify and demystify them. Doring reinforces Barthes's and Warner's views of the constructedness of particular myths which are taken for granted and naturalised as universal and immutable "historical determinations" and should be "questioned and changed" ("Hyphen" n.pag.).

However, my research is not concerned with ancient myths as such but rather with their definition as stories, fables and false beliefs; myths in the Barthesian sense, those in which ideologies hide and whose historical constructedness needs to be uncovered. Many of the latter are commented upon and analyzed by critics of *Indigo*.

For instance, Steven Connor focuses on *Indigo* as a rewriting of *The Tempest* in terms of re-historicising it and re-contextualizing its “relations of power” (187). In relation to that, Connor points out the “myth of origin” or “myth of creation” (of the British Empire), explaining *Indigo*’s aim is to “secularize the mythical ... insist on what is already *there* before the creation of myth” (190), that is the Caribbean history and culture erased by colonial historians. In “Rewriting the Narratives of Shame”, for example, Kate Chedgzoy, a Renaissance literature specialist, identifies the epitaph dedicated to the English pioneer as the “icon of the imperial power of [Miranda’s] family ... the colonizing text” and comments on the “de-composition of its meaning” (94-5) or mythical power after being destroyed by a hurricane. The interrelatedness of history and colonial mythology is thus brought to the fore and is implicitly associated with life writings and the possibilities of myth deconstruction in Warnerian novels.

As to post-colonial and feminist issues, Caroline Cakebread, Eileen William-Wanquet and Doring analyse *Indigo* as the most obvious example of myth deconstruction, especially in relation to gender, race and “ownership of history” (Chillington Rutter). Indeed, these critics mainly focus on the novel’s power to re-establish the doubly victimized Caribbean and feminine identity through the retelling of Caribbean folklore, myth and fairy tales, allowing previously silent subjects to express themselves. Coupe also explains how the change from an exclusively masculine perspective to a feminine one reflects the “intimate connection” between patriarchy and imperialism (76). In this regard, Chantal Zabus, another Warnerian postcolonial and feminist critic, points out the novel’s “gynocentric thrust” by explaining how in “peeling off the layered patterns (of male/colonizer voices) Warner recovers those deeper blueprints and thus redrafts history from [a] feminine perspective” (“Mingling” 123-25).

Jennifer Sparrow’s “Stratégicréolité: Caliban and Miranda after empire” and Cao Li’s “The Colours of Fiction”, two more recent articles about *Indigo*, explain how Warner replaces the father’s plot with his daughter’s or ‘herstory’ (Li 73) thus motivating many other feminist rewritings and parodies which attempt to destroy exclusionary essentializations of femininity and race. Zabus also adds the notion of change and transformation through “female memory” and storytelling as

metamorphing male versions of history into “daughterly tales” (“Mingling” 122,125) of pre-patriarchal times. However, by associating history/language/literature with masculinity and myth/dialect/orature with femininity, Zabus is herself in risk of falling into simplistic ethnocentric essentializations. In “Finding a Different sentence”, Julie Sanders further explains the limitations of phonocentric dichotomies “to read *Indigo* in terms of these strict binaries would be to oversimplify the complicated and subtle operations of textuality in the novel” (138). Indeed, such male texts as Kit’s letters are not necessarily printed or “authenticated”, storytelling is not always reliable and female forms of writing exist like Sycorax’s scratchings on trees. Sanders’ analysis is relevant to my research in that she links forms of life writing in the novel as different aspects and tools of the mythology of colonialism or what she calls “the historical record of colonialism: we have Sir Christopher ‘Kit’ Everard’s [letter]⁵” narrating “his imperial quest to Liamuiga, his letters home to his fiancée Rebecca, and the marble tablet that records his exploits in the cemetery” (136). Sanders thus highlights Warner’s visual imitation (or “contamination”) and deconstruction of life writing and literary canons. More interestingly, Doring describes Père Labat’s memoirs as “Liamuiga’s early history, as it has been perpetuated in colonial myth-making ... colonial romance ... a false narrative” (“Hyphen” n.pag.). In this case, life writings are considered as the myth-making tools of colonization while being relegated to the “lower” literary category of “romance.” Furthermore, Sanders adds that letters do not constitute as solid a colonial source as printed history but rather defines Kit’s letters as “texts ... the raw materials of the discipline (history), and the feminocentric stance [which] ensures that as patriarchal authorities they appear fragile and flawed”(136,138). This comment confirms the instability of colonial life writings as objective and factual records when deconstructed by post-colonial feminist narratives. On the other hand, Sanders makes a pertinent remark which further nuances the perspective of feminism in *Indigo* “Warner often appears proactive in silencing ... her reclaimed protagonist” (147). This is due to the association of silence with peace/liberation rather than with oppression. In Sycorax’s case, taking away her voice is aimed at not letting her

⁵ Kit’s letter is described as a “journal” by Sparrow (125) which I do not agree with because the text presents the formal conventions of letters such as its being written to a specific correspondent.

dominate other female voices. Sanders thus inverts Warner's feminist enterprise of retrieving female voices, showing it in a less radical light.

In "Visitations from the Past", Eveline Kilian, a gender studies specialist, alludes to the pervasive "patriarchal discourse" and gender stereotypes reflected by *The Lost Father* and its structure (63). For example, the recurring theme of finding love/hope in a disintegrated world de-mythologizes Warner's position from an "explicitly feminist stance" as a historian/novelist whose re-writing and re-shaping of the past is limited by her own internalized heterosexual and patriarchal values. Most of Warner's novels respond "to a specific contemporary need for traditional types of stability in a world of crumbling securities and values" (Kilian 66) like marriage and reconciliation. So Warner only partially deconstructs gender myths while perpetuating and nourishing others.

In "Retrieval of Unheard Voices", Richard Todd, a specialist in postmodern British fiction, also analyses Warner's feminism in its retrieval of marginalized subjects' voices but does not reduce it to the simplistic strategy of replacing one discourse by another. Rather, he defines her fiction as "an augmentation of a total discourse" (Todd 99) and moves past the novel's alleged aim to destroy male domination of most modes of representation towards a more balanced and inclusive relationship between genders. Through her postmodernist transformation of "icons of patriarchal" and "Western literary tradition" (Todd, "Retrieval" 99-100), Warner re-rights the balance between masculine and feminine "voices" by providing a textual space for each while demystifying such literary canons as sports' literature and travel writing. Still, Todd does not lose sight of the fact that Warner's retrieved voices remain "invented" ("Silenced Voices" 198), highlighting their imaginative nature and the impossibility of making "the subaltern speak" again.

According to Marta Sofia Lopez, a specialist in postcolonial and women's literature, "Sir Kit's letters and documents" do not represent the totality of history or culture, as only official, "controlled ... law-abiding"(Warner, "Family Bonds" 202) versions are preserved while "local history" is obliterated and left unremembered (Lopez 218). So Warner's fiction is an "alternative history" (Cakebread 223) and a renewed vision of the future, mainly reflected in her fictional reconstructions of history.

However, Chedgzoy is realistic about the impossibility of retrieving the true original voices or lives of the indigenous populations “*Indigo* does not presume to offer access to the ‘authentic’ experience of colonised native women; rather, it self-consciously represents a white author’s textualisation of black women’s voices” (124). This self-conscious “textualisation” is obvious, for example, in the similar language used by temporally separated native female forebears and their modern descendants as well as in the recurring theme of storytelling and the *mise en abîme* of fairy tales. Moreover, these life writings are called “pseudo-historical” (“Histories” 141) by Connor because they are imagined parodies of real documents but they still efficiently deconstruct particular types of myths, especially as they are interpreted by a postmodern reader.

Other attempts at positioning Warner’s fiction consider the extent to which she adheres to postmodern trends, namely the postmodern “crisis of representation” in historical novels and “historiographic metafiction” (Kilian; Wanquet) which display an acute awareness of the constructedness of both history and fiction. Kilian’s and Wanquet’s articles thus position Warner’s fiction within a novelistic tradition which may account for the recurrence of engrafted life writing forms and themes; “a general tendency in contemporary literature to challenge the distinction between fact and fiction, to stress the relative nature of our knowledge of the world and of the past, and to emphasize our subjective and personal grasp of reality” (Kilian 60). In other words, history’s narrative techniques find their equivalent in those of life writing due to the impossibility of reconstructing/retrieving the past as a material occurrence other than through its texts. Since texts are always mediated through a particular perspective which reflects the historian/biographer’s values and beliefs, objectivity is impossible. It is also the metafictionality of Warner’s fiction, pointing to its own inadequacies as a representational tool for silenced voices (Propst 333), as well as Hutcheon’s concept of “historiographic metafiction” which brought the notion of “metabiography” to the fore in this thesis as an alternative mode of representation.

Warner’s fiction also differs from other English postmodernist authors through its reliance on canonical art and mythology instead of “peripheral or sub-literary genres such as Gothic horror, pornography and the lower arts” (Zabus, “Mingling” 120). She uses her position of privilege and knowledge of the traditional canons as a

point of departure for social and political “re-visioning” like her parody of *The Tempest*. In relation to that, Lopez considers *Indigo* as an extension of the Western canon despite its postmodern “reflection on conventional representations of the past”, because of its plot development towards closure and resolution and the dependence of its structure on that of the original play “despite its revisionist standpoint, this novel is still complicit with European metanarratives of progress ... however self-consciously and ironically Warner’s novel comments on Shakespeare’s text, it still shows an inability to reject its model” (215-17,220). Warner is undoubtedly “the daughter of the Empire”, inevitably and unconsciously infusing her fiction with Western white values and structures.

Also in relation to postmodern issues of history as “conventional representation of the past,” Kilian analyses the life writing genre through her comment on the ambiguous interaction between the present and the past. She provides a few pertinent examples from *Dark Wood* and *The Lost Father* like the influence of the present state of mind of both Gabriel and Anna on their understanding of their subjects’ past lives, both turning into a “subjective perceiver who brings a specific context to a historical document” (Kilian 56-57) and provides his/her (Gabriel/Anna) own version of events and people. In this regard, Lisa Propst also comments on the documents in *The Leto Bundle* in terms of reflecting the needs and desires of the people who record them. As a result, a thematic affinity is brought to light between these novels and life writing theory, especially in relation to the reader’s subjective invasion of the biographer/biographee dyad.

The structure of Warner’s novels is also widely analysed, especially in relation to typology, textual collage and the multiplicity of voices. Sir James Fraser, a Scottish anthropologist, analyses the “scriptural pattern” or “typology” according to which stories of the past keep being recapitulated and materialized into new forms in the present, as is the case in the Old and New Testaments. This principle is secularized in Warner’s fiction, clarified as a “recapitulation in an actual form of the promise of the past.” She explains this further in an interview with Lisa Hopkins as “prefiguration: in fact all my novels are ... all structured in the way that we were taught *the* text, the Gospels, were structured ... So that ... everything returns again” (89). Doring also insists on the centrality of the “dialectical relationship between then

and now” (“Hyphen” n.pag.) to Warner’s fiction, for past histories and stories can be manipulated and re-told, either by historians or biographers, in a way that suits particular ideological purposes in the present, thus perpetuating all sorts of myths, while the present is itself determined by the past.

The terms “juxtaposition” or collage applied to the structure of metabiography are used by Daniela Corona and Todd to describe Warner’s multiculturalism, multiple time frames and the “juxtaposition of forms” (156-58) or genres as “interruptive forces” like life writings, constantly invading her fiction. In addition to that, two critics’ use of the term “graft” inspire a metaphor for this *mise en abîme* of life writings. For example, Zabus applies it to the juxtaposition of two theoretical trends in *Indigo* (feminism and postcolonialism), while Corona points out that “through letters, diaries, papers, *The Lost Father* ... grafts onto the novel structural models, linguistic elements and thematic motives belonging to the entire folk area, with proverbs, songs, rituals ... fables” (156). This remark reflects the function of diaries and memoirs in *The Lost Father*, which re-locate and re-historicize events, people (women and peasants) and a popular culture ignored, primitivized and silenced by official history, thus functioning as folkloric and socio-political myth deconstructing tools. In addition to defining folklore, Corona also focuses on Italian immigrants and the ethnic mythology they internalized about themselves in a racially-prejudiced America (157-58) so it is also through the deconstruction of this mythology that Warner’s novels aim to revalue these subaltern cultures and social categories.

Zabus and Todd associate *Indigo* with *The Lost Father* as fictional explorations of Warner’s “family histories [and] imaginary homelands” (Zabus, “Mingling” 121), and of their “historical and cultural backgrounds” (Todd 103). In an interview with Zabus, Warner explains that she wanted to destroy some (English?) mythical conceptions of southern Italy “as a benighted place of poverty and cruelty and a kind of emptiness,” to re-right/re-write its history and shed light on its social problems (“Spinning” 520). In parallel, Warner acknowledges her attempt to demythologize the Caribbean culture as well, namely the myths of chaos, sorcery and ruthlessness surrounding it “I did want to give voice to the ordinariness of the culture that had been crushed ... to show that it was a practical, working society, not a place of voodoo magic and cannibals There exists the possibility of a material sympathy

that we can have with the Other” (Dabydeen 122). These thematic explorations and demythologizations of particular cultures add a socio-politically committed or “*engagé*” dimension to Warner’s novels. For it is by demythologizing these cultures and their inhabitants that she also helps retrieve the voices of the weak and the oppressed and those neglected by “official history” or its destructive internalization. Doring also explains the necessity for Warner to impose herself as a female historian/novelist by deconstructing the myths expanded by her imperialist ancestors and re-inventing her own, a doubly inscribed mythopoeia which adds an interesting and richer dimension to male history and literature.

In this regard, “engrafted” life writings may be compared to active acts of remembering different eras and locations, trends and cultures (Meneglado 218). In relation to *The Lost Father*, Warner adds “that’s the enterprise, to fight forgetfulness – and fascism, the way fascism is about forgetfulness, about telling a story which obscures the story, always insists on covering it over with another” (Hopkins 90). Warner thus links the act of remembering – through fiction and fictional life writings – with the destruction of such myths of the past as those created under totalitarian and imperialistic regimes.

Other narrative techniques and structural particularities in Warner’s fiction and metabiography have been commented upon. Robert Fraser, for instance, considered how Warner resorts to a “colour-blind” point of view and narration as a solution to racial and gender discrimination (374). Such a view has its limitations in Warner’s repetitive authorial interventions which are discernible especially in third-person narration. This was perceived by Maitland as a lack of authorial commitment while Warner described this lack of authorial presence as a “dispersal of subjectivity” which leads to a “polyphony of various voices” (Meneglado 226-27). This is a polyphony which, at times signals a “creative engagement” with the ‘other woman’ (Chedzoy 124), but sometimes turns into a confusing cacophony when the narrative levels intermingle too closely to be differentiated. Warner’s view of the novel may account for this generic experimentation as she explains to Tredell that the novel “often demands that the writer enter another personality.” This explains Warner’s choice of a form of narration which facilitates both the narrator’s and reader’s imaginative immersion in the self of different characters and the recovery of

previously unheard voices.

But is there any practical relationship between Warner and life writing, biography in particular, which could explain her reliance on this genre within her fiction? It would be interesting to point out that Warner wrote a fictional biography which Michael Gasster termed “popular biography” in his review of *The Dragon Empress: The Life and Times of Tz’u-his, Empress Dowager of China, 1835-1908* (1972). Gasster considers the importance of the difficult but necessary “exact knowledge of the subject” prior to the writing of a biography and deplores the “unprofessional” conjecturing in *The Dragon Empress*. So this review criticizes Warner as a biographer in her attempt at reflecting the personality of an unknown nineteenth-century Chinese empress. On the other hand, Warner’s “ability to re-imagine a scene” (437), as phrased by Anne Llewellyn Barstow, either in her portrayal of Tz’u-his or Joan of Arc, is a precious asset to her creative and egalitarian rewriting of history, especially in relation to gender and ethnicity.

It is crucial at this point to specify that life writings have been mentioned by Kilian, Lopez and Sanders, among others, only as incentives for studying other themes, such as reality, time, and representation, and have thus been overlooked as texts in their own right. For example, threnodies, epitaphs and even emails constitute metabiographical subtexts. Indeed, Zabus comments on the final threnody and history of Leto “which is made of fragments from papyri, annals and archives ... and other bits, very much like her bundle, which, however, contains the basic, necessarily impure ingredients of great civilizations” (*Leto* 126). However, the obvious recurrence of annals and chronicles fails to prompt Zabus to further investigate the metabiographical function of these life writing forms. Alex Clark also mentioned “fragments ... medieval petitions and chronicles, 19th century memoirs,” but only to consider their narrative characteristics as “too complicated” and a “clutter” (n.p.).

In *The Lost Father*, Zabus only considers the structure of “novel-within-the-novel,” failing to shed more light on the specificity of the memoirs and diaries engrafted upon the story. Although the role of Anna as, not only a narrator, but also a biographer writing her grandfather’s memoirs is implicitly acknowledged as “the seer and re-creator of true stories of false memories” (Zabus, “Mingling” 121-22), Zabus does not comment on Warner’s concern with biographical representations of the past

and their translation into a temporally and culturally remote context.

The use of emails, although ignored by criticism, posits the postmodern status of Warner's novel and the up-to-datedness of the life writings she relies on; a progressive structural thread which genealogically traverses her metabiographical fiction. In "Mingling and Metamorphing", Zabus mentions the emails in *The Leto Bundle* as "a passionate exchange ... which reveals Warner's technophilia (as opposed to ... Murdoch's or Fowles's technophobia)" (126). She also re-invents a postmodern form of life writing in *Tempests after Shakespeare* by calling Ariel's and Sycorax's oral life stories "hag-iographies" because they complement Miranda's story in their reification of the woman's role in Caribbean history and its aftermath. This verbal dismemberment of the original noun parodies hagiography which conventionally narrates the life stories of saints by subverting its model subjects into "hags" or witches, in addition to being orally "told" not written.

Life writing themes, like the biographer's degree of empathy with his/her subject and the fictionality of reconstructing the past, are present in some criticism. For example, Kilian expands on Gabriel's "subjective historical reading" (Kilian 57) and interpretation of Andrew Da Rocha's life while Todd explains that Gabriel is "re-enacting what [the seventeenth-century Jesuit mission] represents in his own century" ("Marina" 6-7). Kilian also considers diaries in light of New Historicism and "the textuality of history" and makes it clear that "imaginative refashioning or invention" as well as narrative techniques are necessary components of writing a memoir (58-59). She then defines *The Lost Father* as "[an] examination of the manifold links between fact and fiction in the writing of a biography and family history, and their respective share in creating a meaningful vision of 'reality'." In other words, fact and fiction no longer function as opposites but rather complement one another in providing a coherent and intelligible version of (a) life.

The thematic and structural richness of Warner's fiction has triggered much critical discussion of historical and mythological reconstruction, of postcolonial and feminist concerns. This is revealing in terms of the different periods in which she wrote her novels and their adherence to the issues of their time. However, it is the very issues of postmodern fragmentation and the fictionality of historical records of the past which should have opened possibilities for covering the biographical

dimensions of Warner's novels, especially historical ones, and the deconstruction of a variety of myths, cultures and histories in the process.

In terms of methodology, I develop and define the concepts of "metabiography" and "metabiographical fiction" and focus on developing the concept of "engrafting" inspired by horticultural terminology in the first part of the thesis. My critical priority is to investigate the consequences of this engrafted metabiography as it interacts with and influences the genres of fiction and life writing at once. I consider two possible reasons behind the engrafting strategy; structural/aesthetic and thematic/ethical. The latter in particular paves the way for the deconstruction of context-specific socio-political myths. Stanley's definition of the "mystifications" contained within (auto)biography as the series of "knowledges" contingent on their speaker's viewpoint and socio-cultural and political milieu (251) also establishes metabiography as a myth-making or mythopoeic tool.

In light of these life writing theories and literary examples of metabiography, I attempt to establish the same link between the structure and themes of Warner's fictional life writings and the strategic reconstruction of different types of myths within her novels. Although my definition of myth takes as its starting point Barthes' theory in *Mythologies*, I later derive my deconstructive method from social constructivism, Derrida's deconstruction theory as well as Warner's own method. Derrida did not believe in fixed truth or meaning ("Logos") and thus continually strove to destabilize ethnocentric binary oppositions in his deconstructive reading like black/white and savage/civilised. Focusing on the internal mechanisms of the text and its signifiers, Derrida thus exposed "violent hierarchies" which he then reversed by showing the instability of their meaning. But unlike Derrida, Warner does not stop at "the double binds" and tensions that are articulated in the text" (Derrida, *Norton Anthology* 1683), referring to the latter's internal mechanisms and contradictions, but re-positions apparently "naturalized" ideas within their historical circumstances instead, a technique which helps identify the external ideological elements lying behind the creation of such ideas. I locate this demystifying stance within the life writings engrafted upon Warner's novels by carrying out a close textual analysis of edited diaries, letters and chronicles and the resulting complex structure. The deconstructed meanings and oppositions are spotted in the gaps and

inconsistencies within the discourses of diaries or letters, complemented by a thorough study of their historical and material circumstances for a more political and context-specific dimension. Such an investigation also helps me expose Warner's fictionalization processes and the realistic themes emphasized as a result. I then undertake a close examination of Warner's fictionalized autobiographies, *The Lost Father* and *Indigo*, to demonstrate how engrafted metabiography functions as a deconstructive tool through the re-presenting/re-membering of subaltern and unprivileged cultures like rural southern Italy and the pre-colonial tribal Caribbean. In addition to that, Leon Edel's notion of the "covert myth", "the figure under the carpet" in *Writing Lives* (161) provides a metaphor which is pertinent to what I am seeking to explore through the literary psychology of Warner's characters, what their words, dreams, images and slips of the pen/tongue reveal about their hidden desires, their inner selves such as the erotic motifs and symbolisms Davide uses in his diary and the chivalric imagery in Anna's memoir. As mythography implies replacing fossilized and prejudiced ideas with "new" socio-historically-based ones, I critically look into Warner's own mythopoeia as she instils her own myths as a white Creole and privileged female historian. Does she fall in the trap of reversed ethnocentrism or rather succeed in universalizing the past re-imagined by her metabiographical extracts?

In the second part of the thesis, I concentrate on establishing thematic links between what I define as religious and pagan/folkloric myths in Warner's fiction. Most importantly, my cultural and religious distance from Catholicism and the Bible allows me to read the latter critically in my identification of its gender myths and its sexual connotations. This is especially interesting in relation to the awe commonly generated by Christian iconography and which Warner elaborates upon in her work about the lingering symbolic power of the Virgin Mary.

In relation to the notion of folklore, I have felt it to be a more precise denomination than merely "cultural" because of the specificity of the customs and belief systems pertaining to the Caribbean and to southern Italy at specific points in time. I was later confirmed in my belief by Corona's comment on the "folk category ... [as] the identification of a cultural heritage specific to ethnic minorities" (150). Although this definition concentrates on southern Italian rural culture in *The Lost*

Father, it may be applied to the pre-colonial Caribbean culture in *Indigo*. I thus attempt to show that Warner's fictionalized autobiographies revive neglected cultures by destroying the mythology surrounding them.

In the course of my investigations, I have noticed that the constant linking all these myths is gender discrimination and derogatory representations of the female. So after I engage in a brief dialogue with a variety of feminist theories and their definitions of patriarchy, I attempt to reflect the specificity of Warner's feminism in its reuniting of different categories of women through space and time. I also attempt to supplement my feminist mythography with a colonial and ethnic one through the variety of historical and socio-cultural backgrounds offered by Warner's fiction without falling into the trap of mystifying or discriminating against specific members of society.

However, this same variety proves problematic because of the disparity of its cultures and timeframes. Regarding gender myths, I engage with Alison Stone's concept of "women's genealogy" (Stone 92) to develop a unified stance among such different women's experiences from Greek antiquity to the Caribbean and southern Italy, without essentializing or reducing their cultural particularities. But I did not want my analysis to be limited to second-wave feminism's female status as a victim, which is exemplified by the theories of some second-wave feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon. I try instead to reflect the strategies of female empowerment and subversive strategies through fictionalized (self-) representations of women's lives.

Finally, I will explore the thematic links between women and other minorities oppressed for their ethnic origins or social class in my definition of colonial and racial myths and their association with gender myths in the final part of the thesis. Warner comments as follows "there's a way in which the alienness of women is similar to foreignness" (Hopkins 92). This comment itself is echoed by Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic notion of foreignness in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), which she equates with otherness and this paves the way for my analysis of the different colonial and racial encounters reflected in and deconstructed by Warner's metabiography.

The first chapter of this thesis will start by introducing the concept of

metabiography as it is defined by different life writing theories going as far back as Woolf in order to provide some theoretical background and a starting point to my developing definition. It will focus on the thematic and structural aspects of metabiography, namely the fictional treatment of biographical research and the *mise en abîme* of different types of life writing within works of fiction. An overview of life writing theories and the intellectual background of metabiography will help theoretically position Warner's metabiography and its evolution through her novels in terms of adhering to, or questioning what I will have established as metabiographical conventions. Finally, I will question to what degree all these life writing types are related in their inherent exposure of the "untruths" or myths of biographical research; does objective fact really exist and can it be captured by writing a life?

The second chapter will be exploring "engrafting" as a concept which encapsulates the different types of life writing and reflects their impact on the structure and motifs of Warner's novels. I will then examine the life writing myths which are specific to Warner's metabiography and study the relatedness of its deconstructive techniques to those of Derrida and Barthes in particular. It then moves to the exploration of the aesthetic aims both in theory and in practice in Warner's metabiography and questions their relation to the ethical motives behind engrafting as a strategy of indirect socio-political criticism. Finally, this chapter investigates the reasons behind the rise and evolution of metabiography, asking why it has evolved from a theme into a structure.

The third chapter will proceed to an internal textual deconstruction of two important types of myths: religious (mostly Roman Catholic) and what I choose to define as folkloric myths. The first part of the chapter examines Warner's fictional metabiography with its religious ambiguities in *Dark Wood* and *The Lost Father*, then takes as a reference her non-fictional work about the Virgin Mary, *Alone of All her Sex*. Indeed, I analyse the extent to which the former uncovers the processes and ideologies underlying religious writings. In the second part of the chapter, I argue that Warner's multi-ethnic and multicultural metabiography stems from the

novelist's political commitment to revive neglected cultures by fictionally re-positioning them within history.

The fourth chapter will be establishing a link between literary theory and the types of myths unraveled by Warner's metabiography. In practical terms, I will define and position these myths in relation to postcolonial theory. The first part of the chapter will focus on the post-colonial deconstruction of gender and patriarchal myths in *Indigo* and *The Leto Bundle* and question the extent to which metabiographical techniques uncover or sustain them. In the second part of the chapter, colonial, social and ethnic myths will be exposed by being re-positioned within their historical and material circumstances, thus relying on historical records as elements external to the text in my deconstructive strategy. I argue that particular belief systems serve as a foundation to the historical discourses disseminated by imperialism, colonization and Fascism, in *Indigo* and *The Lost Father* in particular. I will then consider the way the alternative discourses of women and minorities recovered by Warner's metabiography tend to construct a genealogy of the "Other" that will ensure thematic and structural continuity within Warner's fiction.

Chapter One: Metabiography and Myth

At this time I had a recurrent dream of a man trapped in a glass bottle, itself roughly formed in the shape of a man. Sometimes it was blue, sometimes green, sometimes clear with a yellowish cast and flaws in the glass. This man was and was not myself. I was also the observer of the events of the dream. (Byatt, *Biographer's Tale* 29)

When the biographer lets the reader into the most intimate parts of his/her biographical craft through fiction, the conventions of life writing are exposed and expanded to a more self-conscious genre: metabiography. This concept was defined by Nadel as a genre in which “biographers ... locate themselves as a character within the text.” In other words, the biographical mechanisms of life writing are witnessed from within as well as from without the text thanks to the double perspective of the biographer as a participant narrator and, in postmodern and historical fiction, the *mise en abîme* technique of biographies, diaries, letters and memoirs.

As Bernard Crick explained in his biography of George Orwell, the biographer has “to show how [s/he] reaches his[/her] conclusions, not to pretend to omniscience; and [s/he] should share things that are moot, problematic and uncertain with the reader”(xxiv). So the biographer should put in evidence the processes of his/her findings including the difficulties of research, of ensuring coherence and of the necessity of speculation. S/he would thus self-reflexively acknowledge the limitations of his/her objectivity and internal knowledge of the biographee. As a consequence, different kinds of thematic and structural myths related to life writing will be deconstructed.

Metabiography has acquired a renewed importance within postmodern and historical fiction and most conspicuously in Warner's novels. The most striking and original aspect of Warner's metabiography is related to its myth-breaking as well as

myth-making strategies. In this chapter, I will first provide an overview of the life writing theory and practice of the last forty years within which I will position the evolution of fictional and non-fictional metabiography.

Second, I will demonstrate how Warner's fictional metabiography fits into the genre and adds original dimensions to the concept in terms of myth deconstruction, especially in relation to life writing as well as cultural and socio-political myths. Finally, I will examine the rationale of Warner's experimentation with the demythologizing effects of metabiographical fiction as an important addition to the genre.

Metabiography: Intellectual Background

We have reached a moment in literary history when time and circumstance summon biography to declare itself and its principles.... it has suffered, through three centuries, from a lack of definition, a laxity of method.... biography has lacked the courage to discover bolder ways of human reconstruction. Our times certainly provide wider latitudes.... There exists, I am sorry to say, no criticism of biography worthy of the name.... Up to the present, biography has been an art little aware of itself. (Edel, *Writing Lives* 23, 31-2)

While Leon Edel's *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (1984) provides a generalized poetics of biography, more thorough biographical criticism had already been developing within the context of early twentieth-century biography such as Harold Nicolson's *The Development of English Biography* (1929) and André Maurois' *Aspects of Biography* (1927) (Edel 38), in parallel with the progress of human sciences like anthropology and Freudian psychology. Edel himself is in fact so influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis in particular that he emphasizes its importance to life writing throughout his book, profusely relying, consciously or unconsciously, on its terminology by using such terms as "transference", "alter ego"

and “life pattern”. While drawing attention to the shortcomings and oversights of previous biographers, especially regarding the ambiguous relationship between biographer and subject, Edel states his own “*principia*” (26), insisting upon the importance of psychology to the understanding of the subject’s personality and the necessary balance between involvement and detachment for the biographer “[t]he best, I think, that a biographer can do is to cultivate his awareness and to recognize the constant threat that ‘involvement’ represents to his objectivity. He may then work a little less blindly and ignorantly”(63). Edel’s realization through the issue of “transference” that every biography is, unconsciously and unintentionally, the biographer’s life story, an autobiography in disguise, paves the way for an increasingly (self-)conscious type of biographical writing.

Also encouraging experiment in biography, Edel quotes Lytton Strachey’s prefatory biographical “advice” at length with regards to what would, through *Eminent Victorians* (1918), set the tone for the advent of “New Biography” and “psychobiography”. Characterized by its reaction against the Victorian conventions of biographical writing, this type of biography should attempt, in Strachey’s words, to carefully select, capture “fragments of the truth” , and “lay bare the facts . . . as he [the biographer] understands them” (*Eminent* 10). In other words, he favors brevity and the biographer’s imaginative interpretation over the accumulation of “uninterpreted” (Strachey, “New History” 20) facts, at times going as far as to provide the reader with - the narrative illusion of accessing - the subject’s interior monologues. As a result, the ambiguous relationship between fact and fiction as well as biographer and biographee is highlighted, and biography’s pretension of totality and objectivity is destroyed. At a time when Victorian biography and its unquestioned factual authority was agonizing, Strachey implied the need to probe, pierce and *finish* it with “the torch of the imagination” (“New History” 21), a penetrating exploration made possible by “dramatising the conflict . . . between art and biography” (Marcus 108), by thematizing the biographical enterprise and processes. What Strachey’s biographical innovations allow, without totally destroying the importance of factuality and moral detachment, is the coming closer of biography and the novel, especially in terms of narrative techniques. Edel explains

“what I am proposing is that the biographer borrow some of the techniques of fiction without lapsing into fiction”(202).

In parallel, Virginia Woolf has recreated the relation between fact and fiction and deconstructed the history versus fiction binary opposition through her fictional biographies, her comments on the “New Biography” and her concept of the “creative fact”. Woolf indeed calls for a careful mixture of fact and fiction in the writing of biography and strives to “deflate the pretensions of the form” (Anderson 91), a difficult task she undertakes in *Orlando: A Biography* (1928). This pioneering work dramatizes and satirizes the conventional metaphors linked to Victorian biography such as memorials, “monstrous erection[s]”, veils and draperies which reflect such duties of biographers as decorum, truth-telling and fact-accumulation (Marcus 121-22). Woolf also chooses a living subject for her “biography”, Vita Sackville-West, stretches her lifespan to three hundred years and transforms her gender from a man to a woman (Marcus 117) thus mocking the basic principles of the biographical genre. *Orlando* is, in Edel’s words, “a fable for biographers” (192), a fictional theorizing of a “freer kind of biography ... cut loose from facts” (206).

On the other hand, in “The Necessary Ignorance of a Biographer”, John Worthen, a D.H. Laurence biographer, proclaims the failure of the concise “New Biography” (what he calls “a post-nineteenth-century biography” (234)), and the “increasing” force, between the seventies and the nineties, of the omniscient, lengthy, “definitive and comprehensive” (228) Victorian biography. He associates this failure with the unfading need, on the part of both biographers and readers, for a narrative consistency which camouflages biographical gaps and ignorance, what I term the illusion of seamlessness. In *Biography: Writing Lives*, Catherine N. Parke also deplores the same failure but blames the biographers, especially self-proclaimed Stracheans and Freudians who overindulge in “heavy-handed iconoclasm and crude gossip” or simplistic and ill-advised use of psychology (28). The latter produce poor quality biographies which distort the life and the genre. The question is whether Victorian biography and its values have ever truly disappeared or been “vanquished”. Most importantly, if the “New Biography” has failed to shed the burden of the Victorian one in literary and “real-life” biographies, has it been attempting to do so through metabiography and fictionalization by being more honest and exposing its

limitations? Worthen praises at some point Claire Tomalin's biographical "courage and good sense" (242) through her metabiographical comments in Ellen Ternan's life, honestly acknowledging the limitations and possible wrongness of her speculative account "[t]his chapter has tried to make some sense of the known facts ... and suggested a simple outline of a narrative to fit them ... Some or all of this may be wrong" (241-42). However, the need for coherence and for the illusion of factual authority is inexhaustible, turning fictionalized metabiography into "New Biography's" disguised weapon, "attacking [it] in unexpected places ... fall[ing] upon the flank ... [to] shoot a sudden ... searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined" (Strachey vii).

Still, all champions of "New Biography" have deconstructed the binary oppositions on which life writings and auto/biographical paradigms are founded, namely fact versus fiction, detachment versus involvement, and appearance versus reality, purporting that the self and life of the subject are not stable and fixed entities awaiting revelation. In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams comments on the necessary destruction of these oppositions because they are unrealistic and limit the possibilities of life writings:

the extreme negative definition of 'fiction' (or of 'myth') – an account of 'what did not (really) happen' – depends, evidently, on a pseudo-positive isolation of the contrasting definition, 'fact'. Both these definitions leave out the range of propositions and modulations involved in any understanding of reality ... a definition which denies the overlap and 'community' between so-called fictional and non-fictional prose ... the actual multiplicity of writing. (146-9)

An awareness of these fake and "artificial categories" would legitimize and facilitate the generic crossings of auto/biographies and pave the way for a richer and more varied range of fictionalized auto/biography and other types of life writings. In *Biography: a Brief History*, Nigel Hamilton sums up the various new directions taken by biography since the Sixties in terms of transcending "traditional boundaries" (215): chronology and the fame of the biographee were no longer

prerogatives, and, most importantly, fictional biographies such as Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) opened up the genre to "the multiplicity of possible versions of a life." (219) The biographical pretence of a single and definitive viewpoint was now in ruins.

Feminism also played a role in such generic crossings by women auto/biographers while exposing the marginalization and scarcity of women's life writings, especially autobiographies, diaries, letters and journals, from an "androcentric" (Marcus 1) life writing tradition and criticism. In *Autobiography*, Linda Anderson explains "[a]s with other genres, it was not that women did not produce [such] writing but that it was deemed to be unimportant, crude or illegitimate, to fail to live up to the necessary test of 'great writing'" (81). As a result, generic differentiations between biography and autobiography, especially in relation to issues of (self-) representation and objectivity/subjectivity, were deconstructed:

Very recently – and the impetus has come primarily from feminist critics – the inadequacy of this conceptual divide has been clearly revealed ... showing how autobiography and biography function together. Recounting one's own life almost inevitably entails writing the life of an other or others; writing the life of another must surely entail the biographer's identifications with his or her subject, whether these are made explicit or not. (Marcus 273-4)

One "inadequacy" leading to another, many women's auto/biographies like Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Colette's *Sido* put the factuality of life writing into question and included fiction in their works so these

women autobiographers subvert the 'autobiographical pact' by including problematic or ambiguous signals which trouble rather than confirm the distinction between autobiography and fiction ... The 'fictional' can become the space for ... the trying-out of potentialities and possibilities...or it can be a way of suggesting how much fiction is involved in all self-representations. (Marcus 280)

These continual crossings of generic conventions paved the way for metabiography as a theme/structure, a self-conscious text which comments on itself. This metabiographical trend starts by narrating and dramatizing the difficulties of biographical research, “the biographer’s struggle to gain access to the archive [making] excellent ... material for fiction” (Batchelor 7) as in Henry James’s *The Aspern Papers*. The trend witnesses another generic crossing, when life writing processes, “uninterpreted” biographical material and biographical sketches interfere and are “engrafted” upon novels as in A.S. Byatt’s *Possession*.

A historical and intellectual overview of life writing may provide the background for this evolution of metabiography towards a greater degree of self-consciousness. The late 1960s and 70s marked an increase in biographical and autobiographical criticism and theory, and in the publication of biographies and autobiographies by and about women which were influenced and revalued by second-wave feminism. In fact, the genre witnessed a stronger interest in recreating its own poetics in the absence of a female life writing tradition recognized by male critics and publishers. One of the first biographies in this genre was Diane Johnson’s *The True History of the First Mrs Meredith and Other Lesser Lives*, published in 1972 and followed by other biographies of unconventional, racially and socially “thwarted lives, lives cut short, lives miraculous in their unapplauded achievement” (Heilbrun 26). May Sarton’s *Journal of a Solitude*, published in 1973, was, in Carolyn G. Heilbrun’s words, the first female autobiography to truthfully and honestly express what had been forbidden to women “anger, together with the open admission of the desire for power and control over one’s life” (12-3). So instead of a lady-like submissiveness and acceptance of oppression, women auto/biographers found an outlet for their repressed anger, a new voice to express their ambitions and desires through their own auto/biographical narratives and histories. These women’s marginalized lives/selves allowed them to build a tradition of their own and to reconcile their private and public lives, gradually destroying internalized myths of a self/less, anonymous femininity.

The “‘confessional’ text of autobiographical self-revelation” was a dominant form in the seventies, mainly initiated by feminist theorists like Kate Millet, and which constituted a new form of autobiography. The latter presented a new structure

combining, in Rita Felski's words, a "close record of daily life" with the "thematics of feminist liberation and self-discovery", that is a narration of personal life interwoven with a theoretical exploration of feminist issues and female subjectivity, of "an underlying buried self" (qtd. in Marcus 280) Although the idea of a fixed self waiting to be uncovered is essentialistic due to the uninterrupted fluidity of confession and the constant evolution of the self, Millet's *Flying* (1974) and *Sita* (1977) may be considered among early signs of metabiography as self-conscious texts. Besides the stream-of-consciousness inherent to the confessional form, there is a "commentary on the efficacy of her journal project as a means of recording 'reality'" (Marcus 279-80), so she acknowledges the inaccuracy and excessive subjectivity of her autobiographical text.

Mary G. Mason analyzed four women's autobiographies from the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries by Julian, Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish and Anne Bradstreet. These women found an outlet for their subjectivity in self-identification through alterity, either that of their renowned husbands or God and Christ, which Mason considered a typically feminine life writing strategy of self-inscription. The latter does not diminish the woman's sense of identity while marking a conspicuous difference with men's autobiographies by including and accepting "otherness". Carolyn Heilbrun follows up on Mason's concept of female self-identification through a "relation to the chosen other" (24) but only to deplore the inability of female autobiographers to express themselves without that "other". She relates this inability to the fact that women auto/biographers never feel "entitled" to any credit for their personal achievements, having internalized the myth of their unworthiness as subjects. They consider themselves as "unwomanly" (Heilbrun 31) exceptions rather than models thus providing no tradition or narrative for the following generations. However, Heilbrun falls into essentialism at some point by associating passion with the female mind and describing the male one as "coldly cerebral" (16).

In "Convention versus Self-Revelation", Jill Conway studied five Progressive Era female autobiographies in the US and found another common pattern, a gap between the "narrative flatness" of autobiographies and the unpublished diaries and letters which reflected their struggles, their exciting real-life accomplishments (Heilbrun 24). Conway explains that these women's autobiographies construct a

persona that fits male-dominated socio-political and literary standards in order to be published, at the expense of truth and the possibility of acquiring a more authoritative voice (Heilbrun 24-5).

Heilbrun suggests new ways of writing women's lives in the light of the latest achievements and discoveries of feminism, namely the uncovering of false representations of femininity and gender roles, and the revival of the psychoanalytic framework. What is important is that the female persona reflected in the auto/biographies be truthfully described even if it does not fit the standards of womanliness established by men and the sham (mostly fictional) lives provided by convention, society and literature such as passivity, nurturance and discretion. New lives had to be written in which women were not represented only in relation to men or any other allegedly superior being, as established by Nancy Chodorow's notion of the female relational self or "self-in-relation", formed through her internalization and interpretation of her relationships with (m)others (Chodorow 137). This notion of a relational identity, and thus relational autobiography, as inherent only to women is later deconstructed by Paul John Eakin in his article "Relational Selves, Relational Lives: The Story of the Story" through his assertion that both male and female selves and their autobiographies are relational (66-7). As a result, Eakin opens new possibilities for the interpretation of autobiography by destroying the binary oppositions resulting from a gendered view of the genre, such as male individualism and narration versus female relationality and fragmentation (74). Moreover, his explanation of "the story of the story" (70-1) as the genesis of another person's biography within "collaborative autobiographies" of the eighties (73) is later supplemented by Gunnthorun Gudmundsdóttir's own analysis of the "mise-en-abîme" of a parent or parents' biography within the narrator's autobiography and reflect it as "a significant strand in recent life-writing" (183). These relational autobiographies of the eighties and nineties signal the democratization of what used to be considered a women's prerogative in Mason's comparative analysis in "The Other Voice". Both critics have referred to this nuanced version of metabiography in which, biography being engrafted upon autobiography, the focus is not so much on the life of the subject or the narrator as on their mutual relationship and its effects on the auto/biographer. As in Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude* (1988), the

autobiographical turns into a continuous comment on the biographical and allows for experimentation with the objectivity and chronology of biography (Gudmundsdóttir 211).

This type of metabiography is subtly fictionalized in Marina Warner's *The Lost Father*. In the latter novel, Anna's memoir of her mother/grandfather plays an important role in the construction of her self, identity and personal life story, while Davide's diary is enmeshed in a constant dialectical relation with the life of his wife and sisters. This concept of "story of the story" was previously commented upon in relation to biography by Edel in *Writing Lives*, in which he encourages the publication of separate books related to the biographical quest itself, an autobiography of the biographer that would prevent the latter's life "to intrude in their particular narrative of the life they have researched" (110). He gives the example of A.J.A. Symons' *The Quest for Corvo: An Experiment in Biography* (1934) as a successful combination of the story of biographical "sleuthing" (111) with that of the life itself. Edel himself cannot resist the temptation to tell his own biographer's tale, a glimpse of some "phases of one biographer's work" (215). "The story of the story" interestingly turns into metabiographical comments about the craft of biography, the research journeys and composition difficulties, even the detailed methodology behind the "Genesis of a Chapter" of Henry James's life (Edel 237-47).

In fact, Edel's suggestion had not fallen on deaf ears for, as reflected in Anne Thwaite's "Starting Again" (207) and Robert Skidelsky's biographical journey in "Confessions of a Long-Distance Biographer", the eighties and nineties were characterized by an increased focus on the biographer and on biography as the life of the biographer instead of the subject, also called "literature of 'quest'" (215). Skidelsky adds that "Biographies were becoming franker, and biographers were becoming more self-conscious about their craft" (24). Indeed, there followed many enchanting stories devoted to the biographical "hunt" for its own sake such as Richard Holmes's *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (1985), in which he defines this type of work as "this mongrel book.... It is difficult to give its genealogy, being part pure-bred biography, part travel, part autobiography, together with a bad dash of Baskerville Hound.... people and places, and my own diaries and reflections, have shaped the creature as much as any literary texts" (Holmes 277).

The book tells the lives of four subjects (Stevenson, Wollstonecraft, Shelley and Nadar) and analyzes some of their literary works, integrating these into the vividly-described landscapes, adventures and travels of the biographer. In addition, instances of biographical theory and detective-like investigation are illustrated with personal experience, especially the “love affair” (Holmes 66) between biographer and subject. This rich structural and thematic combination is punctuated with Holmes’s frank subjectivity, reckless emotionalism and a series of romantic descriptions. Andrew Motion’s “Breaking In” (1992), in addition to Mark Bostridge’s *Lives for Sale: Biographers’ Tales* (2004) and Hermione Lee’s *Body Parts* (2005) constitute additional examples of the genre. Whether through the first-person (Bostridge) or third-person (Lee) narration of biographers’ ‘sagas’, these works waver between humour and tragedy in their depiction of the lot of difficulties and obstacles (en)countering both biographers and biographees. Such works as these help prevent the confusion between the story of the biographer and the life of his/her subject by building romanticized structural boundaries and fictionalized life writing theories. Besides, the biographer’s story is more accessible, does not pretend objectivity, and can still didactically enlighten some aspects of the biographical craft “[t]he quest is easier to describe than the subject of the quest” (Edel 110). Although such stories have been marginalized from life writing as a genre, and such “quests have most often been relegated to places outside the biography” (Hibbard 22), the very existence of such compilations constitutes in itself a trend which reflects the readiness for the increased transparency and modesty of metabiography. Derrida’s and Barthes’s “Death of the Author” articles have also influenced the way these theorists compose their own autobiographies and biographies in which the very existence of the biographical subject as well as the conventional form and structure of the genre are constantly questioned, deconstructed and deferred. But has the biographer ever died or disappeared from his/her text? In *Biography: A Brief History*, Hamilton confirms that, untouched by the violent attack of these French deconstructionists, biography has continued on its merry way as it has always “accepted the instability of definitive factual ‘truth’ where people are concerned.” (209) Barbara Caine also points out the influence of Barthes’s poststructuralist ideas on the genre in terms of the ‘death’ of the (stable) self which makes questions about

biographies and individual lives seem redundant. She then wittily draws attention to his Michelet biography to reinforce the evidence of the undying need for writing about, and understanding lives (Caine 22). But is not metabiography rather about the renaissance of the biographer as shown by the aforementioned biographers' tales?

The deconstruction of the oral versus written binary opposition was also favoured by second-wave feminism and the publication of "transcripts of oral testimonies" relating to marginalized lives flourished (Marcus 281). Such an evolution is important to the concept of metabiography in its reliance on free indirect speech and second-person narration which provide the illusion of orality and immediacy through narrative fluidity. There is a "growing affinity between auto/biography and oral history" (Marcus 274), especially in relation to working-class and colonial life stories being retrieved in the mid-eighties. In "Inventing the Truth", Richard Holmes explains that only people with great achievements are chosen by biographers "[i]t is pulled, unnaturally perhaps, out of the orbit of the ordinary, the average, the everyday lives that most of us lead and need to understand" (18). In Marina Warner's fictional metabiography, all subjects and biographers are ordinary, wretched, fallible and fallen. Leto's and Sycorax's oral speeches, for example, can be considered as feminist autobiographies, a (self-) representation of those who cannot write because they are analphabetic, possessing a different system of signification. However, it is necessary to note that orality should not be categorized as the exclusive mark of "feminine" discourse, since other women characters in Warner's fiction reflect the written wor(l)d: Anna is a memoirist in *The Lost Father* and Dr. Fernly an academician in *The Leto Bundle*. Still, Parke has pointed out the importance of autobiography and autobiographical genres to both women and oppressed peoples as a suitable tool for self-expression and the validation of their status/ identity as opposed to the way they are represented by patriarchal and dominant discourses (32-4). Warner's metabiography thus allows ordinary and marginalized subjects and auto/biographers to express themselves through fictional alternatives.

The advent of "personal criticism" at the beginning of the nineties and its combination of autobiography with feminist theory was also an important step towards metabiography as it marked a move towards (a need for) self-reflexivity

through autobiography¹. In fact, Liz Stanley explains in relation to feminist researchers and critics that, since “all knowledge is autobiographically-located” (“Feminist Autobiography” 210), their theoretical writings need to be contextualized within their subjective sphere of knowledge and experience (Marcus 287). Among the proponents of this trend, Mary Ann Caws in *Women of Bloomsbury* (1990) encourages criticism as a dialogue between the critic and her women readers (Marcus 285). So it was no longer controversial to explore the critic’s selfhood, to deconstruct his/her authority by accessing the processes of criticism. According to Caine, even historians have done their bit in what she terms “ego-histoire” [ego-history] (84) as the combination of their autobiography and the story of their research. Such a move towards subjectivity and the doubting of the universalistic claims of criticism could also be applied to the evolution of life writing theory, especially in relation to the biographer’s alleged detachment and objective portrayal of his/her subject and the democratization of the former’s previously hierarchical relationship to both subject and reader.

In 1993, in *French Autobiography*, Michael Sheringham interestingly links the developing views of narrative to those of autobiography “any moves towards a rehabilitation of narrative’s mimetic, heuristic or pragmatic functions are likely to support comparable shifts in the way autobiography is regarded” (23). In other words, if the narrative’s referentiality is put into doubt by postmodernism and post-structuralism, leading to an increased reliance on self-reflexive narratives, it follows logically that a development of metabiographical auto/biography will parallel that of metafictionality. As these controversial aspects of life writing will impose themselves, a need for metabiography will slowly develop “[i]f biography is to have a future, it has to face up to the problems it has inherited” (Holmes 20). Such “problems” are rooted in the very nature of biography: the endless tension between imaginative re-creation and “the ideal of a permanent, historical, and objective document” (Holmes 20). However, as Holmes questions the possibility of biographical authenticity in “Inventing the Truth” (17-18), he does so in a positive light, not considering the biographical constructedness of life as a fatality but as a literary form with “epic possibilities”(24). Combining the “art of human

¹ Edel’s *Writing Lives* is an early and interesting example of “personal criticism”.

understanding” with the inevitable but enriching mixture of truth and invention, biography thus legitimizes metabiography, a more “honest” form that does not make any pretence, but rather exposes the lack of biographical factuality.

In *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing*, Gudmundsdóttir focuses on Western autobiographical texts of the last thirty years and mentions a “vogue for memoirs and non-fiction ... especially in Britain” (2) and a renewed belief in referentiality since the nineties (Sheringham/Eakin). This is linked to the *secondary effects* of postmodernism² and the need in the last decade of the twenty-first century for a link, narrative or other, with reality and the outside world. Despite its controversial aspects, referentiality also allows the generic distinction between fictional and non-fictional life writing and its renewed popularity may indicate the chronicle of a death foretold for fictional metabiography.

In her analysis of the various fictional techniques reflected in autobiographical works, Gudmundsdóttir refers to an “autobiographical text where the autobiographer deals actively with the problematics of the writing process itself” (5), especially objectivity and the inextricable relation between life and narrative conventions and devices. Gudmundsdóttir thus provides interesting insights into metabiography in which the autobiographers compose a life story while at the same time commenting on its problematic “formulation” (85). Such metabiographical comments consequently offer to the auto/biographer an additional dimension for self-expression, echoing “personal criticism”, and “can move biography to a different level” of experimentation through a mixture of objective (historical) and subjective (memory) knowledge. On the other hand, despite the recurrent doubts and preoccupations of recent life writing studies about “narrative [as] intrinsic to knowledge” (Gudmundsdóttir 96), the former remains nonetheless necessary for the expression of life and identity. Interestingly, when discussing the different levels of experimentation in life writing, Gudmundsdóttir considers autobiography as a “hybrid” and highly experimental genre while relegating biography to a “positivist genre, with many unexamined assumptions at its core”, taking the examples of Julian

² Gudmundsdóttir and Hamilton’s works reflect a strong distrust in postmodernism and post-structuralism in relation to biography and autobiography.

Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*³ and A.S. Byatt's *Possession*. (184-85) She then refers to a pertinent but under-exploited notion by Phyllis Frus McCord that "autobiographies are frequently 'meta-autobiographical', telling the story of how the text has come into existence" (220-21). In "Biography in Autobiography", Gudmundsdóttir has also referred to the metabiographical *mise en abîme* of diaries and letters in real life autobiographies (201), metabiography as a structure, but this "historical approach to biography" (206) does not preclude the partial, "fictional or reinvented element" (Holmes 17) from emerging in these documents.

By attempting to illuminate the compatibility of the fictional and autobiographical modes in recent autobiographical writings (263), it is obvious that Gudmundsdóttir goes beyond poststructuralist doubts about language and representation to reach an acceptance of fiction as intrinsic to autobiography, and by extension to other types of life writing "fiction is not a negative term in autobiography, it does not diminish autobiography's truth-value, or [its] referential aspects." (273) Fiction is then defined in terms of devices and structure rather than in the sense of invention and imagination. Such an assertion in turn opens up life writing theory to the experimental and hybrid potential of fictional auto/biographies, letters, memoirs and diaries included in novels over the last thirty years as in Warner's metabiography. These postmodern crossings of genre boundaries mark a return to referentiality but not to positivist thinking through more flexible structures, the acknowledgment of the plurality of life versions and the difficulty of representing the past.

In his analysis of the boom of biography and the increasing interest in the depiction of real lives from the 1990s on, Hamilton carefully 'listens' to previous biographers prophecies about the destiny of the genre. In *The Development of English Biography*, for instance, Nicholson foresees that the form/genre might in the future "wander off into the imaginative ... the open fields of fiction. The fictional form will be given to biography." (155-56) In fact, Hamilton goes as far as to state that biography has so increased in scope through its multiplicity of forms and themes that it has become more important than fiction, "stealing back from traditional

³ Liz Stanley in 1992 and Nigel Hamilton, fifteen years later, consider Barnes's work as one of the most important examples of the mixture of fact and fiction in biography since Woolf's *Orlando*.

novelists the very meat and much of the purpose of their art.” (238-39) Such a reversal in the status of fiction forced novelists, in Hamilton’s words, “to adapt by *co-opting* biographical facts and experiences for fictionalized versions of real lives.” (239) This reaction brings Warner’s metabiography to the fore as a survival strategy in the face of the ever-growing importance of biography as a “mass search for self.” (Hamilton 238) A search that has continued throughout the third millennium within which weblogs or “online diaries”⁴ and other electronic means of auto/biographical expression have been mushrooming in Western culture, in addition to the influential broadening of biography or the “biographical turn” within the humanities and social sciences (Caine 1). Warner’s *The Leto Bundle* is in that regard up-to-date in its fictionalization of emails. Still, Hamilton deplures,

the term ‘biography’ remain[s] today so limited in its definition, and the history of biography as a basic feature of Western civilization [is] neglected and marginalized at most universities in the world ... In an age in which individual human identity has become the focus of so much discussion, and reality TV and blogging so dominate Western culture, how is it possible to go on ignoring biography’s long history and its current *significance* in the West? (280)

This concern about the need to reposition and redefine biography as an important aspect of modern history and culture highlights its continual progress, in parallel to other types of print and mass media, in the synchronic and diachronic analysis of individuals and societies, especially previously neglected ones (Caine 1). Caine has also mentioned two pertinent changes in biographical practice in relation to history since the 1970s. First, the increased attention to the context and entourage of the biographical subject, linked to a similar growing concern with the history of women and oppressed groups, is reflected in group biographies and “microhistories” (Caine 111). In “Biography: The Past has a Great Future”, Holmes notes “[t]he ‘monolithic’ single Life is giving way to biographies of groups ... of ‘spots of time’ (micro

⁴ Both Hamilton (279) and Anderson (123) refer to weblogs as the latest development of auto/biography.

biographies), or of collective movements in art, literature or science” (qtd. in Caine 103).

The second important addition to biography is the metabiographical comments or “reflections” (Caine 121) included in recent biographies, especially those about little-known individuals such as Linda Colley’s *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (2007), usually to fill in the gaps of their undocumented lives. Caine explains that

in many of these works, the story of the search, the ways in which an understanding of the subject has been obtained and the issues involved in attempting to construct the life are incorporated into the text so that the biographer or the microhistorian is present throughout, explaining his or her approach and methods. (114)

Postmodern biography has broadened the horizons of both life writing and fiction thanks to their generic “cross-fertilization” (Hamilton 284), valuing non-fictional as much as fictional life writing, besides its acknowledgment of the impossibility of representing reality objectively, which only adds to the liveliness of the debates surrounding it and to its vitality as a twenty-first century genre. In that regard, fictional metabiography is yet to know its apogee.

Marina Warner: A Multifaceted Metabiography

Warner’s four novels, published in the last thirty years of the twentieth century, present prominent postmodern features such as the parody of canonical texts as well as postcolonial and feminist concerns. But, most importantly, it is Warner’s interest in the past, history and their relationship to the present which influences both the structure and content of her fiction; each novel wavering between different spatial and temporal contexts in a constant dialectic. This past/present dichotomy takes the shape of time shifts which are in turn strongly connected to the structural and

thematic incorporation or *mise en abîme* of diaries, letters, chronicles and memoirs within the novels. This incorporation stems from Warner's need to reconstitute and understand the past, whether her own personal history or that of other cultures or peoples, by analysing it through the lenses of the present. These characteristics constitute metabiography which uncovers and takes into consideration different types of life writing and the processes leading to their creation. It would also be important to note the autobiographical dimension of Warner's fiction in relation to the novelist's own origins and her family's colonial history. But what reasons or principles may explain Warner's incorporation of different types of life writing within her novels? The most conspicuous effects of this *mise en abîme* are the fragmented appearance and narratorial variety of the Warnerian text, but what is the link to life writing?

According to Hayden White in his article "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" "[w]e make sense of the real world by imposing on it the formal coherency that we customarily associate with the products of writers of fiction" (1552) as well as biography and autobiography. Reality as expressed earlier in this chapter is confused, chaotic and illogical, with humanity's sense of fragmentation increasing in the postmodern era. The ordering power of fictive devices inherent to life writing can help readers and biographers to turn the discontinuity of life into a sort of continuity (through fact arrangement for example), no matter how artificial, and to make sense of their lives through the coherence of others'. As Warner presents the reader with fragments and bits of diaries and biographies incorporated within the narrative, her metabiographical fragmentation may well be considered as a new tool reflecting reality more efficiently. It is a new form of realism which does not impose beginnings, middles and ends on reality in the Aristotelian fashion but rather presents events *in-medias-res*, interrupting them or shifting between different time perspectives as if following the sinuous workings of the mind or the processes of human memory.

Structurally speaking, a greater number and variety of levels of texts co-exist in Warner's metabiography. The "first-level text" or narration uses God-like, omniscient third-person point of view in most novels. There are relevant examples in *Dark Wood* which focuses on Gabriel's biographical research as well as on the

workings of his inner self in parallel with the narration of his life “[w]hen Gabriel walked into the room ... Jerome stood up and ... indicated the table ... He was half a head taller than his brother, and his thick hair had kept its dark colour ... while Jerome’s greying curls were swept back” (*Wood* 5-6) With the addition of the descriptive mode, this type of narration provides even more information about the biographers and their entourage than first-person narration such as striking physical traits or hidden thoughts “the smile stayed with him and caused the priest a spasm, not of pain, but of pleasure in pain, for the smile passed straight through his hard hide of lonely self-absorption ... he was using Nanny’s formal name ... to conceal ... his curiosity” (*Wood* 14). In this instance, Gabriel’s “spasm” of homosexual attraction towards Oliver, a seraphic harpsichord tuner, is a shameful, sinful state any priest would inevitably repress. Behind his apparent coldness, Gabriel has difficulties in controlling his impulses. The reader can thus have access to information the biographer would probably never divulge or acknowledge – even to him/herself – in case of first-person narration. Through a god-like omniscience, the narrator presents the reader with a more or less complete image of the biographer’s ambiguities and complexities, bestowing more power upon him/her (the reader) by allowing him/her to constitute his/her own judgment. S/he can nevertheless influence him/her through a biased description, which keeps most controlling narratorial power in the narrator’s rather than the biographer’s hands.

In other instances such as *The Lost Father*, the author resorts to the alternation of third and second-person narration. Anna is a present-day English museum curator looking for the lost legendary (hi)story of a supposedly heroic grandfather. The novel transports the reader through many levels of narration and a multitude of narrators into different periods dating back to the beginnings of the twentieth century in southern Italy “Fantina came to a standstill ... She searched the road ahead for the approaching shadow of her father ... [spacing] You were disappointed not to see him, but not yet unhappy that he had not returned. Your father never let you down” (*The Lost Father* 158). The alternation of objective and subjective points of view in the previous quotation allows the narrator to vary the focus on the characters thus enriching the perspective of the text. Fantina’s outward attitude as a child towards the belated return of her father is described by the narrator. Then, the same Fantina, as an

adult this time, is addressed directly by her daughter Anna who is more knowledgeable about her mother's true feelings because she has the possibility to verify their accuracy straight from "her mother's mouth", an opportunity which is conventionally impossible for most biographers.

There is a similarity with Gabriel when he addresses his biographee, taking him as a witness to his own story, although he can never verify its accuracy "[w]as it on a night like this in 1685, Andrew, when you sat on the plains of Tartary beside the Emperor ... ? It was April then too, or was it May?" (*Dark Wood* 39) In both *The Lost Father* and *Dark Wood*, the protagonists are thus self-consciously engaged in biographical processes and research about subjects who are genetically, professionally or spiritually related to them. This fact again underlines the necessity and importance of empathy and "appreciation" (Nettels 110) of the biographer towards his/her subject thus deconstructing the detached biographer's myth. In that regard, Allen Hibbard adds:

The enterprise of writing biography necessarily involves two distinct, yet related, narrative strands: the story of the subject and the story of the biographer coming to know, structure and recreate the life of the subject. Through the process, the relationship between biographer and subject becomes particularly tight, producing intense identification. (19)

So the biographer's quest for truth about his/her subject makes him/her delve into the deepest recesses of the biographee's soul, thus creating affinities or revealing similarities which bring the two closer, especially thanks to empathy.

First-level text can also alternate third-person narration and free indirect speech as in the example of *Indigo* whose plot fluctuates between different types of histories and narrators during the colonization of the Caribbean Islands. As a post-colonial rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, this novel explores the neglected history and heritage of English imperialism. When, at the end of *Indigo*, Miranda's cold-hearted cousin Xanthe drowns, she triggers a sort of telepathic conversation with Sycorax, the living-dead witch:

Sycorax deciphers Xanthe's cry, she shakes her head softly ... This voice had once been full and strong and solid before it cracked open ... And Sycorax thinks, I would have loved her better, Oh my daughter, if I had not wanted more and more from her ... The drowning voice she hears was making that same mistake ... Sycorax remembers, I was blinded to Ariel's needs. (*Indigo* 374)

Free indirect speech allows a particular structural fluidity in the text; the narrator's descriptive comments and Sycorax's internal monologue of wistful regrets about her failure at loving her daughter melt into one another to form an uninterrupted flow of liquid meanings. A flow which, as it advances the plot, develops the theme of epiphanic drowning and continues to transmit and reconstruct the characters' thoughts and buried truths. Sycorax and Xanthe, in their parallel states of suspension between life and death, realize they never actually knew how to love the persons to whom they meant the most.

The following is an extract from Anna's grandfather's diary in *The Lost Father*. At the crucial moment of "setting sail" to America, Davide Pittagora's diary bears a touching testimony to the Italian immigrants of the first decade of the twentieth century:

Re D'ITALIA, 3 April

We have sailed – can there be another sight under heaven as magnificent as the Bay of Naples? ... It made my heart heavy to set sail! But I stood by the rail ... An unutterable melancholy overcame me. (*Father* 146)

There is a sort of linguistic suspension as the repetition of the verb "sail" reflects the speaker's desire to linger in his home country, to delay the fatal moment of departure. Davide's rhetorical question betrays his growing nostalgia reinforced by a romantic terminology; "heaven", "magnificent", "unutterable"; that of a poet at heart. The diary thus reflects the feelings of sadness, even despair, which a

southern Italian patriarch such as Davide would never openly acknowledge. Indeed, the head of the family should avoid any display of emotion or weakness in front of the sisters and wife he is taking care of on the long journey to America. His only discreet reaction was to stand “by the rail”, hiding his “melancholy”.

In *The Leto Bundle*, the fictional biography of a goddess is gradually constituted by intermingling historical records, chronicles and annals narrating the circumstances of her life. Emails, a modern form of the letter, are also an interesting prototype of metabiography and are mainly concerned with the discovery of the bundle of Leto and its role in the reconstitution of her story:

Subject: Re: Archives: Help!
Date: Thurs, 28 May 199– 02:11:38 +0100
From: kim.mcquy<hswu@lattice.onlyconnect.com>
To: Hortense Fernly<h.fernly@natmus.ac.alb>

Dear Dr Fernly looked at the boxes of papers after school today
would welcome a steer :- thought you said there was writing *on*
the Mummy wrappings – that the bundle was made of them.
(*Bundle 82*)

Interestingly enough, these emails not only advance the story but also trace the biographical and investigative reasoning of the two correspondents and reflect the evolution of their relationship towards more and more intimacy. The naming process at the beginning of each email, for example, moves from the formal “Dear Mr McQuay” and “Dr Fernly” (*Bundle 72*) to “Hello Hortense”(101) then to the more affectionate pet-names of “Hetty” and “Kim” (127).

Equally important are the combined third-person narration and free indirect speech sentences inserted in square brackets, immediately following or in the middle of emails. These metabiographical comments mark a change of speaker as the actions and thoughts of the correspondents, in parallel with the writing process, are described by the narrator. Even the deleted sentences or unsent emails are exposed to the reader, letting him/her into the very mechanisms of composing an email, a letter or any kind of epistolary life writing:

[Hortense Fernly stopped. Really I am going along with him far too much. Why? Because I'm bored?] ... **Kim, I know Buddhism is fashionable especially among health food shoppers.** [She struck this. Instead she wrote:] **Are you saying she came back under another form?** [She didn't send this e-mail]. (*Bundle* 126-27)

The first quotation interrupts the email thus reflecting Hortense's hesitating attitude towards Kim due to a lack of trust in his visionary claims. The second quotation proves that Hortense does not want to sound rude or haughty by judging Kim's view or generalizing about Buddhism and so resorts to a more politically-correct formula. Depending on the reader's interpretation, these bracketed additions may then divulge more information about the true nature of the characters.

These examples of metabiographical *mise en abîme* also expose and uncover the formats of these different kinds of life writing. The latter are either textually separated from narration by the clear-cut divisions and indentation of their pattern as with some of the letters and diaries or in some cases divided by chapters, the beginning of each extract of memoir for example indicating the exact location and year of the events "[f]rom *The Duel/Rupe*, 1911" (*Father* 58). In other cases, these life writing types can be structurally and thematically interwoven with the first-level text as is the case with biography in *Dark Wood*. Da Rocha's diaries, which Gabriel is translating and editing into a manuscript of his own composition, are usually brought about by such introductory verbs as "remembered" or "thought." The diaries are placed within double quotation marks while Gabriel's manuscript uses single ones.

Sometimes, particular memories, objects, feelings or sensations can literally conjure up the biographer's research and perform a textual transition to the second-level text "[i]n his brain there took place a sudden implosion of time and circumstance and an exquisite sensation, sweet and toothsome as honey, overwhelmed him ... Gabriel sensed Andrew da Rocha brushing past him in the night" (*Dark Wood* 39). On the heath near his house, at night, the priest is experiencing a sort of a biographer's epiphany through his physical senses, as if time and space have vanished and allowed him to get in touch with his biographee:

He smiled to himself. And he laid a burning coal on my lips ... so I should write the truth Not quite, for I'm not writing revelation, but close. This experience is the essence of good writing, this closeness Was it on a night like this in 1685, Andrew, when you sat on the plains of Tartary beside the Emperor K'ang-hsi after a day's hunting? ... Gabriel remembered the diary: the emperor had summoned Andrew to his side. (*Dark Wood* 39)

This stream-of-consciousness relies on free indirect speech which allows a textual smoothness in the transition between Gabriel's thoughts and da Rocha's story. It is an effective technique to melodramatically express the biographer's emotions, especially towards the subject, without disturbing the continuity of the different levels of texts. However, the relationships between the two levels depend on the type of life writing in question. The letters and diaries for example not only participate in advancing the plot of the novels, they also help enlighten the reader on certain aspects of the events or attitudes of particular characters, not always made obvious by narration. This second function has to do with myth deconstruction and will be further analysed in chapters three and four.

As a consequence, the reader is given more importance and proactivity through his/her reconstruction of these textual traces of the past. Indeed, the reader's interpretative power is trusted while more freedom is allowed to his/her understanding. S/he him/herself turns into a sort of biographer, editing and collating the information s/he's provided with. However, this same reader is usually helped to order his/her ideas through a "chronology" (*Bundle* 406) or "principal events in the life of Andrew da Rocha, S.J." (*Dark Wood* 247) at the end of each novel. *Indigo* and *The Lost Father* start instead with a list of the "principal characters" with their kinships and the periods they belong to, in addition to a rudimentary map which helps visually locate the events. Todd comments on these additions as

lists of *dramatis personae* and ... chorographic representations [of] a habitus that works much as does an epigraph ... *The Lost Father* is prefaced by a map of 'Ninfania' that corresponds to Apulia on the 'real' Italian peninsula: *Indigo* is prefaced by a map of the imaginary Caribbean island of Liamuiga ... a fantasy island adorned with a feminized topography. ("Marina" 13-14)

So the reader's understanding is visually guided by these signposts and by the ideologies lying behind them. A second consequence of Warner's *mise en abîme* of diaries and letters is the growing intimacy between the reader and the biographee. Such closeness modifies the metabiographical equation as the reader no longer needs the mediation of the biographer to access the personality of the subject. However, other types of metabiography do not provide as much reader-biographee intimacy as the chronicles and annals in *The Leto Bundle*. The former are defined as a "register of events in order of time ... a characteristic form in medieval history and biography" (Winslow 13) while annals are defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a narrative of events written year by year." The following quotation is an extract from a chronicle found in the bundle of Leto, translated and commented upon by Hereward Meeks, a fictional nineteenth-century historian and biographer "[m]ay this chronicle that I, Barnabas ... have set down, bear witness to the blessed life of this pure child, who herself testified to the faith through her travails and through them has surely gained the martyr's crown in paradise" (*Bundle* 112). Barnabas is a monk from the year 1200 who narrates the events of the arrival of Leto to the citadel he lives in and the circumstances that allow her to be considered as a saint. The chronicler also imaginatively reconstructs the dialogues between the characters, breathing a new vital force into an otherwise outdated historical document.

More importantly, as Leto is sanctified as a saint and martyr, the stories narrated about her turn into hagiographies, another medieval form of life writing whose main aim "was to provide evidence supporting the subject's canonization" (Hoberman 110). Being written in the fashion of these ancient forms of recording people's lives, either using third or first-person narration, these metabiographical texts revive and resurrect this particular category of life writing. Second, they help arrange and clarify the events of the first-level text that is the circumstances of Leto's life and her elusive memory and identity over the ages.

The Leto Bundle may also be considered as a demystification of hagiographies as a life writing genre. What makes a person or saint worthier of canonization than others? What kind of standards are followed and are they always respected? As hagiographies tell the stories of saints and martyrs, when the latter are resurrected

and start speaking for themselves, their speech materializes into a posthumous autobiographical rectification of this type of life writing. When Leto, goddess and saint, thinks and speaks, her words are in italics, follow no grammatical rules and do not use any kind of punctuation except for spacing, which may account for a pause in speech. Leto's words rather look like timeless scraps of some sort of diary or personal record which reflect her deepest feelings and her own vision of life. Warner thus revalues oral speech in a Derridean fashion:

*I loosen her and cool her maybe then fortune'll give me something
in return it's a fair trade I say to fate with a big grin showing my
teeth like a wolf defending herself so you can't tell if it's a smile or
really a snarl just to show I'm no pushover you have to look
fate in the eye not give in without squaring up to her (Bundle 279)*

Having just experienced the horrors of war and exile, unwillingly given away a son for adoption and nearly lost a daughter, then working hard to earn a living, Leto is not embittered but rather strengthened by the hardships of fate. The metaphor of the wolf's ambiguous "grin" portrays the saintly resilience of a woman hardened by sacrifices. Metabiography thus carries out a postmodern parody and demystification of chronicles and hagiographies, imitating them and undermining their authority by exposing such underlying mechanisms as the variety of their narrators, mediators and commentators from Saint Jerome to Meeks to Hortense then Kim (as a reader). Some metafictional comments doubt the objectivity and even the authorship of the "hagiographer", which opens new possibilities for generic modernization through increased transparency:

The passages which follow offer an excellent example of the classical rhetorical device , preterition ... but the writer here, self-identified as a monk and hagiographer, must be amusing himself in full awareness of his double game; unless, and this is not to be set aside lightly, this section was interpolated by another, mischievous author. (*Bundle 145*)

Biography and memoir also constitute other types of life writing incorporated within Warner's novels, through which she goes even further in her metabiographical exposing of biographical procedures, especially in *Dark Wood*. In addition to mentioning in detail the different tasks and steps related to the editing of Da Rocha's diary such as "collating and arranging the immense range of material" (8) or reasoning and speculating about his subject's attitude "Gabriel knew, and so he suspected did Andrew himself" (*Dark Wood* 122), the actual drafts, revisions and corrections are literally exposed through the *mise en abîme* technique. This familiarizes the reader with the minute organisation of biographical composition on the one hand, and with the context of the diary on the other hand:

Gabriel was ... continuing to make notes ... setting down the ideas in neatly indented lists ... He had now reached Topic C ...
'1. Arrival of new Fathers strengthens China mission ...
2. But. They are French ...
3. Andrew feels bound to his king.' (*Dark Wood* 159-60)

The reader can thus access the biographer's brainstorming and methods of clustering his ideas and, at the same time, independently make sense of the unprocessed themes before they are actually interpreted and included within Gabriel's final manuscript. A similar kind of metabiographical comment is made by Woolf in *A Writer's Diary* in relation to her life of Roger Fry "[s]uppose I make a break after H's death. A separate paragraph quoting what R. himself said. Then a break. Then begin definitely with the first meeting ... Then give facts in his letters to his mother ... Or shall I make a scene here [?]" (116-17). This is an instance of non-fictional exposure of biographical method, a precise and detailed one in terms of organizing material into narrative form.

In *The Lost Father*, Warner's metabiography exposes through first-person point of view the hardships of composing someone else's memoir. In terms of representing the past, Anna has difficulties grasping the mentality of her grandfather, a 1920s southern Italian patriarch, herself a modern Englishwoman with the shadow of

an accent in her mother's tongue as her only link to her origins. Anna's temporal and geographic distance from her biographee makes it impossible to recover her family history without the interference of her own creativity and perspective.

The complex relationship between fact and fiction is also tackled, especially in relation to the impetus for Anna's memoir: a duel supposedly fought by her grandfather and which turns out to be a legend, a myth. The question that keeps tormenting the biographer is whether she should keep the mythical version or rectify it with an uncertain truth, knowing that the memoir is in all cases partly imagined "where did the duel idea come from in the first place? I thought it was *true*. I took it as something that had happened. God, I've been trying to write a memoir, based on *fact*, not a teen romance" (*Father* 274). In addition to being openly declared as such (that is imagined), the incorporated memoir is alternatively commented upon by both biographer (Anna) and biographee (the mother Fantina) in terms of writing techniques such as diction, and interrupted by other types of life writing and viewpoints such as the father's diaries, a mosaic of text-levels:

‘I'll put that in,’ I said, opening my current scarlet and black Flying Eagle notebook, the sixth since I started putting together an imaginary memoir of my southern Italian mother ... I went on reading to you. I'd filled two notebooks with a draft of the early part, The Duel, and I was trying to weave that story together with other memories of your childhood, of the Mussolini years and your father's last day. (*Father* 4)

The acts of opening her notebook, of "putting in" her mother's memories and reading extracts to her are metabiographical in themselves. Anna then reveals the name of the story and its historical and personal background. She also discloses her methodical assembling of themes and important stages, in addition to the crucial help of her mother as a first-hand source with the accuracy of fact-gathering. The different levels of text and rich multiple character narration thus interact and strive to provide as comprehensive a portrait of the father as possible.

Thematically speaking, the second-level text or metabiography allows for the

deconstruction of a multitude of cultural and socio-political myths through the uncovering of life writing procedures and techniques. The process of writing about, incorporating and commenting upon past lives in Warner's novels is thus self-referential as it lays bare the different phases and difficulties of the genre by fictionalizing them as well as exposing life writing myths such as its so-called objectivity and the biographer's supposed detachment from his/her biographee. For example, a close relationship or even kinship between biographer and subject may impair his/her objectivity while editing the latter's diaries. In *Dark Wood*, Gabriel constantly identifies with his subject "Gabriel was deeply moved by his subject's pleas, and it became impossible for him to avoid applying them to himself" (16). The biographer shares the same repressed feelings with his biographee, especially his loss of faith and suspected homosexuality.

In terms of the metabiographical or second-level text deconstruction of socio-political myths, the letters in *Indigo* expose the imperialistic motives underlying the dominant narratives of Western history which "contain"⁵ the small narratives of the Caribbean natives:

Dear Cousin,
How should I begin to describe to you the many enchantments of this isle? ... its marvellous bounty, its plentiful springs and well-watered pastures ... where gay birds fly and the trees bear abundantly! ... a stout stockade I am causing to be built. Though these measures are not due to necessity, as the people here are glad to be of service to us and treat us with courtesy ... they count many simple things great wonders. (151-52)

One cannot help but focus on the terminology of idealization dominating the letter, the Edenic descriptive language ("enchantments", "bounty") mingled with love words and the identification with Cadmus, the Phoenician prince who founded the city of Thebes (Graves 195). The colonizer insidiously endows himself with a missionary action by using religious and patriotic rhetoric as a justification for

⁵ This verb is used both in the sense of "include" and "control".

invasion “we can further the walls of Christendom on this isle”, “I set my foot ... on this fair land in the name of the King” (*Indigo* 151-53). In addition to that, a Westernized nomenclature is imposed on nature through the scientific classification of its flora and the renaming of particular places on the island, replacing their original Caribbean names (Liamuiga, Oualie) by English appellations (Belmont, Everhope). Finally, there is an obvious simplifying and infantilizing of the natives (“they are like to children”) which literally and linguistically eliminates any obstacles or problems that may hamper the task and the discourse of the colonizer. The contrast between the content of these letters and the reality of greed, murder, rape, dehumanization and ruthless looting described in the first-level text demystifies what has long been taken for granted as the benefits of imperialism and colonization.

Equally deconstructed is the myth of the southern Italian local community and Diaspora as ignorant and backward, destroyed through the diaries of Davide in *The Lost Father*. Besides the fact that the father himself is a lawyer and an educated man, his recounting of his family’s life under the dictatorship of Mussolini and the hardships of their trip to America in the 1920s participates in changing the prejudiced ideas shared by Americans about these people. Robert F. Foerster comments on the nature and consequences of preconceived opinions against Italian immigrants:

No one can follow the fortunes of the Italians abroad without being struck by a sort of contempt in which they are often held ... such ... opinions originate in the laborer’s resentment of competition or in the citizen’s easy association of objectionable or misunderstood personal attributes with the idea of the foreigner. (vii)

However, Davide sounds arrogant in his desire to demarcate himself from his own people thanks to his superior physical attributes and his profession. He seems to have internalized the very racist notions he is criticizing, namely “insignificance” and lack of education:

[The Americans] distinguish us from the northerners because we

are short and hairy and analphabetic. No matter – they will soon see that I at least am none of these ... we seem an inconsiderable people, easily disregarded ... Yet I feel myself so far from this insignificance that it makes my head ache to consider their ignorance. (*Father* 146)

As a conclusion, Warner's metabiography establishes a more transparent text, bringing closer biographers, readers and subjects and exploring life writing's behind-the-scenes processes from the most complex to the most rudimentary tasks. Warner's metabiography also provides more variety by reviving many life writing types such as chronicles and annals and widening the thematic perspectives and structural horizons of fiction. It also deconstructs a multitude of myths and prejudices by restoring the voices of the previously speechless pariahs such as homosexual priests and exiled goddesses. This hybrid metabiography which experiments with a sophisticated, richer mixture of genres, text levels, narrators and points of view, mainly resorts to *mise en abîme* or "engrafting". In *Writing Lives*, Edel has already suggested such an "experiment in 'point of view' ... [a] three-dimensional quality" (203) which results from this multiplicity of perspectives through the inclusion of diaries, memoirs and letters in parallel with the characters' and biographers' stream-of-consciousness. Fiction is no longer the bugbear of life writings thanks to its creative contribution to the revived realistic horizons of both genres. In the next chapter, this technique will be further analyzed and its aesthetic and ethical rationale explored specifically in relation to metabiographical extracts in Warner's novels.

Chapter Two:

Engrafting Poetics and Metabiographical Fictions

“Engrafting” in Marina Warner’s Novels: Processes and Rationale

One shared quality between all of Warner’s novels is their reliance on, and inspiration from historical and contemporary facts and events. She herself states that “[e]ven the most fantasy novels have got to be rooted in some kind of plausible structure” (Hopkins 86). This particular characteristic makes Warner’s fiction similar to the genres of history and life writing, which are considered by many critics to be based on facts (Nadel; Stanley). However, these genres necessarily involve fictional techniques which their linguistic reconstruction of a person’s or a particular community’s life requires. Nünning explains that Byatt’s *Biographer’s Tale* for example expresses “the constructivist view that biography (and history are) a subjective and constructive process which does not reproduce the past but is only an intellectual construct” (197). So events are by necessity fictionalized when they are turned into textual “historical representation” (qtd. in Nünning 208).

As a consequence, the “engrafting” of biographical extracts upon novels which already contain some factual realities makes the concept seem natural, not by any means contrived or artificial. Indeed, these extracts include partly-true events which add to their overall authenticity while diminishing their answerability to the strict rules of the genre to which they originally belong. For example, the diaries edited by Gabriel in *Dark Wood* are about the Jesuit mission in China, a prominent episode of both Christian and Chinese history which actually took place in the seventeenth century. The bibliography at the end of the same novel dutifully provides the sources which inspired its events, also declaring Andrew da Rocha’s life circumstances as

“historically authentic”, even though the priest “and his Diaries are imagined” (*Dark Wood* 249). In this sense, Warner, also a historian, partially keeps her fidelity to the demands of factualism while seeking to demonstrate the artificiality of life writing’s generic requirements through a mock-bibliography and a fictional imitation of diary editing.

Another example is provided by the socio-political circumstances the engrafted memoirs are reconstructing around Davide and his family, the main characters-cum-biographees in *The Lost Father*. Indeed, Mussolinian southern Italy and Italian imperialism during the first decades of the twentieth century form the background to the characters’ political conversations and attitudes. Moreover, the artificiality of (hi)storytelling is occasionally put to the fore as in the following quotation about one of Davide’s daughters :

[Lucia’s] talent for rhetoric: ‘Latest News from Tripoli’, in the early days of the campaign, imitated the radio bulletins to give an account of an engagement in which a company of Italian bersalieri ... had fought valiantly for the glory of the patria and the Leader. Lucia did not invest the words she wrote down with any felt belief; she had overheard and she reproduced. She took on the colours of others readily, like a space on which a brilliant shadow falls from a Venetian glass. (*Father* 15)

The metaphor of “Venetian glass” aptly describes Lucia’s talent for the innocent mimicry of political propaganda whose subtleties and underpinning implications a child cannot grasp. Chronicles and annals originating in conventional models for telling the stories of legendary ancient and medieval battles or martyrs are also engrafted on the main story in *The Leto Bundle*. Equally in *Indigo*, letters and epitaphs related to English Imperialism and colonization of the Caribbean are submitted to this same technique.

However, there can be instances in which confusion reigns unless a clear difference is made between the main narrative and the engrafted biographical and historical texts. The main narrative is the first-level text, the main plot or series of events which advance and develop the story’s action. In *Dark Wood*, the tumultuous

lives of Gabriel and Jerome are structured around editing techniques, biographical concerns and the engrafted diaries of Andrew da Rocha. Free indirect speech constitutes the most recurrent engrafting strategy due to a form which allows a continuous flow of voices and characters, seldom interrupted by punctuation which would conventionally separate the different perspectives and the two genres from one another. In *The Lost Father*, Davide's sister's voice and those of other women sometimes mingle in a medley of gossiping, pleas and prayers, putting the reader's visual and interpretative discernment to the test as to who says what. In the following quotation, a tragicomic logic of the least of two evils is applied to immoral women and spinsters:

She'd heard her mother talking with her cousins ... A mother of twelve, just had another still-born ... the cord was around his neck, marks of sinfulness ... But all the messages that the parliaments of women busily exchanged ... stuck at one figure ... a special kind of other woman ... Rosalba was never ever going to be one of them; never, never ... – she winced at this, 'Please, no' – but pressed on rather than be ... the woman-who-had-never-had-a-man ... Old maid. No. Above all, Lady, she entreated Mother of God on earth, I will do anything ... but please please don't let nothing happen to me. (*Father* 68-69)

The repetition of such words as “never” and “please” increases not only the dramatic emotionality but also the immediacy of the metabiographical text. These different points of view are the more invaluable because of their engraftment upon Anna's memoir and the rich insights of multiple character narration they afford. Every thought, every sigh of every personage is recorded and valued. Although Warner's “intrusive” characterization in *Dark Wood* has been criticized by Jessica Griffin, the advantages offered by her “fictional narrator” in *The Lost Father* make up for Warner's alleged narratorial flaws:

The intrusive and occasionally condescending voice of the author as omniscient narrator, which throughout the first novel [*Dark*

Wood] breaks in to reveal and explain the characters' thoughts and motives rather than revealing them through their own words and actions, in the latest novel [*The Lost Father*] has been replaced by the voice of a fictional narrator, through whom both the world in which she lives, as well as the world about which she writes, are seen, and whose humour and understanding of her characters contribute much to the success of the novel. (n. pag.)

The previous quotation makes it clear that Warner's previous reliance upon an intrusive type of narration may prove inefficient. Instead of leaving room for the character's voice and the reader's own interpretations, Warner's first novels overanalyze, even judge her characters *à outrance*. But the presence of Anna as a fictional "voice", together with the shifts in narration types in *The Lost Father*, strike a more original note. Indeed, these narratorial techniques provide the reader with an increased, more dispersed accessibility to the characters' psyches.

The change of narrator also signals a transition between third-person engrafted life writings and Anna's first and second-person meta-memoir. The meta-memoir includes her personal reflections about different biographical processes and memory-related objects such as photographs. Anna also frequently addresses Fantina through second-person narration, as if to validate the accuracy of her facts straight from her mother's mouth. In addition to that, the mother-daughter exchanges, even the most casual ones, epitomize the differences between two generations of displaced femaleness like their opposed reactions to the chaotic littering in present day Ninfania¹:

When we returned together ... in the late Fifties, there was litter in the streets of southern Italy ... that had changed the appearance of your childhood home, where nothing was ever discarded ... I didn't mind the new litter in Italy; trash in cities makes me feel comfortable, as increasingly its absence from the street indicates money. (*Father* 90)

Fantina, a conservative Italian woman uprooted from Italy to England, is shocked by

¹ Fictional southern Italian city.

“ice cream wrappers and sweet papers and carrier bags and plastic bags strewn about” her previously immaculate native land. Meanwhile, Anna, only half-Italian and brought up in a consumerist London, sees litter as “historical specimens” (*Father* 90-91). The latter is an ironic echo to her grandfather’s childhood passion for archaeology and such relics as old coins.

Griffin then praises the variety of spatiotemporal perspectives; those of early twentieth-century southern Italy and America as well as the memoirist’s ongoing biographical research in the London of 1985:

‘My father used to bring us ice cream,’ you told me then, for the first time, ‘When we were all asleep ...’ Rosa saw no one from her hideaway in the dark arch of their carriage door ... She got to the other side ... and again hugged the shadows ... In the morning, you’d never be quite sure if you hadn’t dreamed of his presence in your bedroom ... Rosa too woke up the next day unsure whether she had walked in the street below in a dream. (*Father* 92-94)

The previous quotation exemplifies how two characters, Fantina and her aunt Rosa, separated by time (twenty years) and space, are brought closely together through the fluid alternation of second and third-person narrations and their juxtaposition with free indirect speech. In addition to that, the thematic similarities of sleeplessness and dreams, with their share of secrecy and excitement, build invisible bridges between the two contexts. There is also a disturbing contrast between two opposed sets of forbidden pleasures; the scene of the innocent childish joy of eating ice cream in the middle of the night and the murkier excitement of an adolescent sneaking out to a tryst.

In other cases, transition from the main narrative is usually achieved through visual devices which divide the novel into a series of extracts. These divisions can take the shape of a symbol, the title of a memoir “[f]rom *How We Played: A Family Memoir* by Sir ‘Ant’ Everard” (*Indigo* 151), or a diary entry “[f]rom the diary of Davide Pittagora/ *Bay of Naples, 2 April 1913.*” (*Lost Father* 144)

Thematic transitions may also intervene; these can be achieved through a change of perspective or a particular utterance which implicitly announces the interruption of a diary or the beginning of a memoir. As an instance, Gabriel's casual physical gestures during his reading and editing of diaries announce the return of the main narrative "Gabriel pursed his lips", "At this point Gabriel rubbed his eyes", "Gabriel pushed the diary away from him" (*Dark Wood* 63, 69, 224).

Equally important are the instances when the language used in some life writing extracts is so elegantly elevated and metaphorical that they themselves turn into a sort of mini-novel within the main narrative. For example, Anna's memoir in *The Lost Father* is drenched in literariness and motifs, sometimes verging on Romantic stereotypes:

Larks were singing out over the field to the west and the air stirred in the wisteria clusters, blowing their honey about the countryside; now and then crickets started up their sibilance in chorus, as if a conductor were bringing them on cue, and the pigeons ... billed dozily in the dovecotes. (7)

Anna's memoir, as demonstrated by the previous quotation, can be very poetic. Indeed, the latter is a sensual description of nature and of its components; birds, insects and plants. Warner speculates on her own tendency towards the lyrical as deriving from her mixed Italian origins and her French school education "my native love of metaphor the long, singing line, the sensuous overkill rather than the English tradition of close-lipped irony and lean syntax" ("Rich Pickings" 31). Anna, also half English and half-Italian, turns into Warner's fictional persona, whose linguistic and cultural taste is engrafted upon the memoir.

Equally important is the fact that the focus of the memoir is not only limited to the subject's personal life but also extends to the history and social circumstances s/he belongs to. In *The Lost Father*, the cultural practices, social problems and political issues of southern Italy during Davide's lifetime are as important as his personal growth and maturation. The historical and the factual seem to naturally infuse into the fictionality of the memoir and to provide an authentic background to

the more intimate family moments.

Among the fictional techniques used in the imaginative building of the memoir, there is multiple character narration, continually wavering between male and female perspectives personified in Davide/Tommaso and Rosa/Caterina. There are also recurrent flash forward allusions that establish an atmosphere of suspense and expectation, such as the brief mentioning of a “scar where the bullet had entered” (*Father* 77), letting the reader wonder as to the circumstances which lead to that event. Characterization also complements the descriptive and metaphorical passages by revealing the characters’ complexities and ambiguities. For example, Davide reacts negatively to Tommaso’s revelations of a “superior” knowledge of women and sex, and, in a curious blend of disgust and envy, thinks of ending their friendship, but “[t]o change allegiances now could cut across Davide’s voiceless but ingrained idea of manhood ... Davide’s sense of justice was too sharp to avoid him for no reason except that the knowledge [Tommaso] had passed on to him had got under his guard and into his secret places” (*Father* 29). Omniscient narration poeticizes Davide’s internalization of such patriarchal values as the vital preservation of (a constructed image of) virility while simultaneously betraying his unconscious fear of a threatening female sexual “appetite” (*Father* 28).

Second-person narration is also used in characterization “[h]er heart emptied itself out, you could have tolled her and she would have sounded hollow and cracked” (*Father* 86). This example describes Rosa’s muddled state at the sight of her “lover”, using a narrative device which provides greater immediacy and drama to her emotions. Indeed, this technique modifies the narrative flow by changing the perspective of the text, including an imagined reader who directly witnesses, empathizes with, or “tests” the character’s metaphorical emptiness. It also promotes a sort of collusion between narrator (Anna/Warner) and reader (Fantina/imagined reader) through shared knowledge of, and expanded access to Rosa’s hidden emotional plight.

Warner’s decision to engraft a memoir upon her novel may be explained by the fact that other types of life writing such as autobiographies were usually confined to the male sphere and excluded women as private, unimportant subjects “women’s autobiography has long been beset by problems of ... generic acceptance into a

canon dominated by male practitioners and theorists” (Sanders 946). Warner could possibly have chosen the memoir because of its marginalized status as a genre, especially compared to the status of autobiography. As such, the former gives voice to silenced and ordinary people, not only to famous individuals with great achievements. Helen M. Buss explains:

Memoirs have often been seen by literary critics as incomplete and superficial autobiographies and by historiographers as “inaccurate, overly personal histories” (Billson). This situation was changing by the end of the 20th century, as critics began to see the subversive and revisionary possibilities of the genre for those who feel excluded from mainstream culture and its generic expressions. (Buss 595)²

But what makes a person’s life worth telling? A duel, as in *The Lost Father*, is more romantic and exciting than a political riot of apparently wider interest. Although this legendary event triggers Anna’s desire to write the memoirs of her grandfather, her subsequent discoveries gradually displace her perspective on the value of certain things, such as the importance of telling the truth about the past. There is also room for the socio-political context of southern Italy whose history is retrospectively retrieved from conventionally neglected rural areas.

In addition to that, other recurrent narrative techniques facilitate the “engrafting” process, such as the mixing of free indirect speech with dialogues or the alternation of the simple past with the past perfect . These devices allow the reader to differentiate the subject’s internal memories and thoughts from Anna’s external narration and characterization. For example, there is a tense shift when Davide is reminiscing about his childhood “[t]he antiquity of the land where he was born ... expanded the stretch of his memory far beyond the circumscribed round of his life. As a boy, he had liked to scrape around in the fields; he had eavesdropped when the whereabouts of discoveries were discussed” (*Father* 71). In another instance, a mother-daughter conversation about the clitoris and female desire blends the

² Buss is citing Marcus Billson, “The Memoir: New Perspectives on a Forgotten Genre”, *Genre* 10 (1977): 259-82.

mother's speech in brackets with Rosalba's free indirect speech, both unified by third-person narration:

She dropped her voice even lower, 'girls, they develop a thing, like a man's but smaller, invisible, a little sticky-up mushroom-like thing, that makes them want men all the time ... That's how it is. With them ... Not with you ... ' She extracted her hand from her daughter's ... Rosalba ... wanted to tell her, Please, I have one of those sticky-up mushroom things, Mamma ... so you are lying to me. (*Father* 24-25)

Another important consideration is how Warner extends or revises the generic conventions of memoirs, defined as a mixture of "personal history and narrative" (Benstock 25). In this sense, Anna does not fulfill all the conditions of a memoirist: she is not as involved in the history as her mother is, and neither can she be a faithful witness to the father's sexual awakening and adolescent erotic dreams, only providing second-hand or imaginatively reconstructed information. In Warner's metabiography then, a memoirist does not necessarily need to be a direct witness of events. Anna relies on Fantina as a primary source of information, engrafting in the meantime her own self-conscious refurbishing and literary polishing of facts or gaps upon the mother's memory "his granddaughter, Fantina's child, will close her eyes tight and imagine him for all her worth; she will fill notebooks with these imaginings and her mother's memories of him and of life both with him and without him" (*Father* 141). However, Warner's mosaic of temporal lapses can at times be confusing as the arrangement of Anna's memoir is circular instead of linear, revolving around the climactic duel which has an impact on the life of every individual of every generation.

In *Dark Wood*, another type of life writing is engrafted upon the novel: Andrew da Rocha's diaries, which are in turn translated and edited by a modern day fellow priest. Diaries of a life writing type narrate everyday intimate details as well as a personal vision of the diarist's times. They can also be used as material for writing memoirs. Accordingly, da Rocha's diaries can be said to combine the public and the

personal in recounting the diarist's private and historical experiences. The circumstances of seventeenth-century China as well as the emperor's life and attitude are described. Da Rocha's own developing self is portrayed, together with his views and various reactions to his entourage. A relevant example would be the following description of a hunt in which the priest takes part:

Since the emperor has united the whole of China under his control, he undertakes these hunts in order to keep his army exercised; he does not like his garrisons to stand idle, tasting the voluptuous pleasures of peace. He himself is admirably abstemious and frugal in his tastes, so each year he organizes a three-month hunting expedition north of the Great Wall in order to train the army, and also to warn the ever-turbulent Tartars of his mighty presence ... For this is the fashion of hunting in China ... Though I took no part in the killing ... I felt the thrill of the chase ... Fear pricked my neck and my shoulders and my head throbbed. (*Dark Wood* 64-65)

This is an account of how, as devised by the Chinese emperor, hunting is turned into army training. In addition to describing the character of the latter, a detailed analysis of da Rocha's feelings and sensations is also carried on. In spite of the incompatibility of the savage killing with his religious pacifism, the priest experiences a mixture of "fear" and "thrill". His diary then uncovers the man behind the persona, a man who can be excited by hunting like any other. The words describing the emperor such as "admirably" and "mighty" also reflect the biased view of the diarist. This brings about the issue of objectivity which is not required in diaries due to their function: expressing a person's subjectivity and personal thoughts. In addition to that, as the story is edited by Gabriel, the particular arrangement and selection of events may come to reflect his own perspective, like an editor's biography, in parallel to that of his subject. Indeed, Gabriel's organization of the diaries' content into a specific pattern, whether chronologically or by interrelated themes, is centered around what he considers as important. For example, the priest concentrates on the argument between da Rocha and Pernet over the Christian tolerance for Chinese religious philosophy, allowing a major section of the diary treating that theme to "engraft" itself on the main narrative. But what the editor

dismisses as unimportant may also reveal information about him such as his perfunctory treatment of the accusations of homosexuality repeatedly directed at his subject. Here is a pertinent example of the priest's diary, structurally and thematically engrafted upon the reality and thoughts of Gabriel, in which the diction clearly betrays unconscious homosexual desire:

‘A well-favoured young man with round cheeks and a complexion so white and so delicate that I thought he must be a woman ...’ Gabriel's eyes darkened, and the fresh face of the young Lama overlapped, like a second screen printed over the first, with the face of his dream ... laughing on his horse ... and holding up his reins with a graceful but firm gesture of his hands. (*Dark Wood* 127)

Such adjectives as “delicate”, “fresh”, “graceful” are usually applied to a young woman so the diarist's ambiguous description has so many disturbing affinities with the editor's own experience as a repressed homosexual, that their mutual visions of the “Lama” and Oliver literally overlap. In this instance, the myth of objectivity in relation to diary editing is exposed. In addition to that, fiction is engrafted upon the diaries themselves in *Dark Wood* because, while events and personages existed in real life, their thoughts and dialogues are imaginatively reconstructed.

It is interesting at this point to note the way Woolf, herself a diarist, depicts the difference between fact and fiction in life writing. She makes an analogy between “granite” and “truth” in terms of their dependable solidity, then between “rainbow” and “personality” (Woolf, “New Biography” 229) as unquantifiable and unstable. In *Writing Lives*, Edel provides an interesting echo to Woolf's metaphors “they [biographers] think too little about art and talk too much about objective fact as if facts were as hard as bricks or stones. In biography they have never been as hard as that: they are always as soft as flesh, and as yielding” (214). Similarly, diaries in *The Lost Father* engraft hard facts upon the fictional diarist's viewpoint, consequently “welding” these apparently paradoxical concepts. For example, Davide's discourse reflects the confident desires of Italian immigrants before they are crushed by the

realities and disillusion of the American “Open Door” policy:

Bay of Naples, 2 April 1913
the modern El Dorado ... I fear that the separation will cause you much pain ... famine or glut ... that is what we must suffer in Ninfania ... In America, there will be a middle way, and we will set our feet on it with courage ... There will be hardship ... but I will face [it] with steadfastness ... Papà Sandro ... can now afford to pay our passage ... preserve us from the wild beasts’ den below, where children and animals teem like mealy worms in a fisherman’s can ... many illnesses become scourges of these transatlantic crossings ... We are among thousands in flight from the land of the olive ... – most on board are peasants – I have seen only a handful of men of liberal education and profession like myself. (*Father* 144-45)

The use of the denomination “El Dorado” reinforces the sense of the pursuit of illusion and the false promises of the so-called land of opportunities. Moreover, there is an artificiality to Davide’s idealistic speech, reflected in the repetition of the modal “will” and such highly moral – though obsolete – values as “courage” and “steadfastness.” The contradiction with reality is highlighted by the ghastly, primitive conditions on the steamer as expressed by the comparison to “beasts” and “worms”, in addition to anecdotes about the illnesses on board and the poor background of the majority of these immigrants. The spiritual convictions of the father are implicit in the use of such guilt-laden words as “scourges” and the religious undertones alluding to The Flood. What is also interesting in Davide’s diary is the use of second-person narration. By addressing his wife as a potential reader and empathizing with her grief and apprehensions, Davide “engrafts” the female perspective upon the patriarch’s diary. The conventions of this type of life writing are thus redefined, making it more similar to the epistolary form as a written “substitute for an oral conversation” (Bray 551) rather than a monologue.

Letters then “bring the absent closer, making them ... present to each other” (Bray 551). Indeed, many letters are engrafted upon Warner’s novels but hardly any are regular correspondences as most tend to be written by the same sender, like Kit

Everard in *Indigo*. However, there is the exception of the emails exchanged between Kim and Hortense in *The Leto Bundle*, even though some of these remain unanswered. It is important to consider the engrafted narratorial interventions through square brackets and free indirect speech that add to the self-reflexivity of the texts and literally penetrate the characters' most repressed thoughts "[I must not get involved, Hortense said to herself, as she pressed down on the backspace delete key to remove her last sentence.] ... [now it was Kim's turn to strike out a line]" (*Bundle* 303-4). Last but not least, diary-like extracts are also engrafted on the text of *The Leto Bundle*, with italics and indentation as the only visible forms of punctuation. Curiously enough, such first-person fragments voiced by Leto are reminiscent, in both senses of resembling and suggesting past memories, of Sycorax's address to Ariel and Anna's to her mother. Women's voices, using informal tones and styles, are engrafted by Warner through types of life writings that blur all generic boundaries. It is through such underground stylistic conventions that Warner's female perspectives insidiously infiltrate the traditionally male discourse.

Engrafting life writings upon fiction is a device which has multiple consequences upon/within Warner's novels and outlining the similarities between her historical fiction and life writing as genres is a crucial step towards defining such effects. First, both are mixtures of fact and fiction as analyzed in chapter one, particularly in relation to the notions of "authorized fictions" (Stanley) and "creative fact" (Woolf). Second, the two genres also share the common purpose of retrieving and reinventing the past in an attempt at deepening the understanding of previous experiences. Moreover, they preserve the latter from forgetfulness and rely on memory and its mechanisms. Commenting on *The Lost Father* and *Indigo*, two examples of historical fiction, Warner explains how "both are about a history that's gainsaid ... I feel that I'm still fighting the same forgetfulness, although they're different" (Hopkins 90).

By fictionalizing memoirs and diaries along with the real events they contain, engrafting allows the narrator more freedom from the restrictions of auto/biographical works "fiction allows for a good deal more play and latitude than does biography." The narrator/biographer is no longer responsible for historical inaccuracies so there is no need to be reliable, objective or even truthful. S/he can

also “imaginatively portray a character’s thoughts, even adopting the first-person or employing a stream-of-consciousness narrative” (Hibbard 20), as in Davide’s diaries (*Father*) and Sycorax’s internal monologues (*Indigo*).

The engrafting of different types of life writing types also has re-organizing effects upon Warner’s fiction. In that sense, metabiography is a form of indirect criticism or, in Griffin’s words, a satire of historical novels (n. pag.) which reflect an absence of chronological order and linearity as plots keep going back and forth between different periods. This concept of time is expressed in *Indigo*:

They did not know time as a straight line that can be interrupted, even broken ... as a linear continuum ... but the indigenous islanders could conceive differently of the time and space they occupied, and see it as a churn or bowl, in which substances and essences were tumbled and mixed, always returning, now emerging into personal form, now submerged into the mass in the continuous present tense of existence. (121-22)

The “churn” metaphor describing seething time is reminiscent of the bulk of material available to a biographer or a memoirist. Following the latter’s linguistic attempt at selection and organization, the resulting type of life writing represents both the subject as an individual and as a member of a particular society at a particular period.

In *The Lost Father*, on the other hand, the different stages of Davide’s life focus upon the duel through constant allusions to his headaches as well as flashbacks and flashforwards. The different periods are presented in episodes, alternating the father’s adolescence and adulthood with those of his female relatives. Only frugal explanations are provided in the first half of the novel, even though it is the event at the very origin of the memoir, the “scar where the bullet had entered”, “[y]our father did what was expected. When the moment came ... it wasn’t really in his nature at all to pick a fight with anyone” (*Father* 77, 93). Sporadic remarks of this kind build up mystery and suspense as to what happened (or is going to happen), increasing the reader’s expectation and centering his/her attention on a single event.

Paradoxically, engrafting also reflects the disruptive effects of life writings on fiction, namely through narrative and narratorial confusion. In some instances, the

voices of biographers blend with those of narrators and subjects, making it difficult for the reader to find his/her bearings in time or space. Those different levels of texts have been criticized as confusing “clutter” (Clark n. pag.) but there is an interesting explanation for that technique. Indeed, Warner provides fragments of life writing types, scraps and extracts of memoirs and diaries which are similar in their fragmentation to post-modern notions of reality, memory and self. As such, there is no pretence of providing any artificial fictional coherence to the outside world “[t]hat is how the great chronicles of civilisation are made: from fragments” (*Bundle* 181).

In “Authorizing the Autobiographical”, Shari Benstock refers to “the fissures of female discontinuity” (20) in relation to women’s life writing. This is widely exemplified in Warner’s engrafted life writings through the constant shifts of narration which create a visual and thematic “discontinuity” as opposed to the fluidity of free indirect speech. Engrafting could be seen as a “feminine” attitude or strategy – though it is important to note that these kinds of essentialized ideas about women are culturally specific and should not be generalized – because it reflects the fragmented female self; torn between male representations and the reality of women’s hidden fears, motivations and desires. Benstock also explains how women are “more aware of their ‘otherness’” (16), a characteristic which causes additional considerations of gender to intercept their life writing discourse.

In relation to that, engrafting is linked to the lack of a female tradition of biography and autobiography. In “Virginia Woolf and ‘The Proper Writing of Lives’”, Julia Briggs explains:

Women were confined to roles whose most characteristic activities and experiences were often considered too trivial for fiction, let alone for biography, defined in terms of ‘the lives of great men’. Living mainly at home ... shopping or reading, young middle-class women were virtually invisible, as they went about their ‘curious silent unrepresented life’.... The obscure that remained unrecorded ... lived out, unconsidered and unvalued in the shadows. (247)

Such a lack is due to the long history of oppression and silencing undergone by

women who then found it hard to retrieve their faith in the importance of telling their lives. The resort to fiction may be accounted for by women writers' achievements not corresponding to the conventions established by mainstream life writing and needing to be magnified by, or, in this context, hidden behind fictionalization. As Stanley explains in *The Auto/biographical I*, the female engrafting of fiction upon life writing "enabled women to make directly referential claims for the female self" without seeming as 'mutinous' or menacing to the established order as the "immediate referentiality of women's autobiographies" or diaries (59). Stanley then refers to three women novelists who played with the boundaries between fiction and fact in life writing in the early twentieth century: Woolf in *Orlando*, Gertrude Stein in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Colette in *Sido*. These challenging treatments of the genre(s) consequently retrieved the importance of the female self "who thereby became a woman of importance, of study, of interest, as did the seemingly ordinary facts of her life" (Stanley 59). Warner thus compensates for this female invisibility, not only through subversive forms of oral and written life writings by powerful witches and goddesses, but also through her insistence, especially in *The Lost Father*, on the putatively trivial facts of women's domestic and emotional lives.

Warner's engrafting also has an innovatively ludic way of "teaching" history to lay readers, the enjoyment being complemented by Warner's sophisticated use of language, one which exposes her multi-cultural knowledge through linguistic prowess and mythological and literate references. Some critics deplored the latter as "a gratuitous display of erudition" (Griffin n. pag.), but why should Warner not strive to revive sophisticated language the way other women novelists like Byatt do? In that sense, she would be helping to revive memoirs and diaries by increasing their literariness and elevating their generic status. The aim of this technique is not limited to a mere embellishment of her fiction for Warner sees "lyricism as a language of release, rebellion, self-affirmation" ("Rich Pickings" 31). Poetic language thus functions as a tool for political re-righting, aesthetically building its way through the surface of male and canon-dominated life writing types.

Ethics and Aesthetics Behind Engrafting Strategies

Fragmented life writings engrafted upon fiction can be ‘aesthetically pleasing’, in the sense of providing a textually pleasurable reading experience through various thematic and structural devices. They also implicitly carry an ethical or political message which is usually “incorporated into [the] narrative structure” of metabiography (Nünning 200).

Aesthetically speaking, fragments of letters and diaries textually embellish Warner’s plots by offering an appealing three-dimensional insight into action and characters’ thoughts. This effect is achieved mainly through the alternation of narrators, particularly shifting from third to second-person narration. These shifts usually create a sort of dialogue, juxtaposing two or more views of the same event. A thematic resonance crosses the different perspectives of past and present by weaving them into a mosaic or “patchwork” effect (Byatt, *Biographer’s Tale* 264). One interesting example is related to Davide’s last, almost incestuous remains of consciousness after being shot in the duel. Immediately following the young patriarch’s afterimages is Anna’s discourse about female sexual desire:

He’d declared his sisters his own ... he was plunged into a blood-pudding world ... Then there came through the total eclipse splinters of colour ... at last he recognized them ... their dresses flared transparent like the petals of sweet peas. Or was it their faces, opening like flowers with honey in their throats? ... It was only when I was seventeen, and beginning to understand a bit about sex and the madness of it, how it ambushes you and then hungers inside you, springing on you again just when you least want it. (*Father* 137-38)

The fact that Davide describes his sisters in terms of transparency, flowers, “opening” and honey sweetness charges his poetic thinking with a disturbing

eroticism. By juxtaposing Anna's *terre à terre*, spontaneous and straightforward speech about "sex", Warner foregrounds the conservative and religious sexual repression reflected in male discourse and internalized by many women. Anna's liberated discourse thus paradoxically brings to mind a previous conversation between Rosa and Caterina (Davide's sisters) as teenagers, dissimulating the crudeness of female masturbation behind ethereal, poeticized descriptions which allude to the phallic presence of trees "[o]h, I'm giddy, I'm giddy. I'm spinning ... Do like me, and you'll spin too, and you'll see trees, flowing past dark, tall, with trailing hair" (*Father* 32).

Moreover, visual gaps or "breaks" resulting from the alternation of different levels of metabiographical texts and subtexts provide for a more pleasant reading. They allow readers to pause and ponder upon significant moments or characters, either retrospectively or prospectively. This characteristic is more conspicuous in *The Lost Father*, divided into two different periods of the past: 1910s and 1930s, while the diaries in *Dark Wood* are more intricately engrafted within the main narrative "folds". Thanks to this clear division, the reader can freely meander through narrative temporal paths and reconstruct the story according to his/her own understanding and interpretation. For example, past memories are usually triggered by Davide's headaches, melting into his present aching sensations and feelings:

His head hurt ... The worst of it was that his headaches made him so angry ... He would groan when he realized, afterwards, how he had raged at [his wife] ... He put his head in his hands ... Maria Filippa had placed a dish on the table ... Davide would have appreciated the baking, if his head hadn't maddened him. But all of a sudden, he pushed the plate ... "These biscuits were for somebody else ... " There was [his wife] ... in horror ... at his outburst ... He remembered the feel of her tears ... and covered his eyes ... in shame for all those years ago when he had provoked such outrage in her. (*Father* 123-25)

In the previous quotation, Davide's headache revives the memory of a fight he has with his wife, unjustly accusing her of adultery over a dish of freshly-baked biscuits. The two moments are distinguished by the use of different tenses; the simple

past for Davide's 'present' insights and the past perfect used for the narration of his impulsive reaction in the past. This internal engrafting then marks a crucial retrospective awareness of a previous self, not only for the reader, but also for the subject of the memoir.

Sometimes, pauses in Warner's novels are reminiscent of the moments of "tragic relief" conventionally pertaining to drama. When narrating one of the key moments of the memoir in *The Lost Father*, Anna alternates moments of increasing tension with the serenity of mother-daughter casual conversations over photographs of the past. The engrafting thus downplays the gravity of the duel, its male barbarism countered by feminine waves of untroubled, civil conversation.

In "Retrieval of Unheard Voices", Todd establishes the autobiographical inspiration for the fictional elements in *The Lost Father* and *Indigo*:

The Lost Father can be grouped more readily with *Indigo* ... each continues the family chronicle, yet on a much more autobiographical basis than hitherto ... Warner does not so much work at the relationships within her immediate family as explore the historical and cultural backgrounds of that family. (102-3)

This exploration turns out to be aesthetically motivated by being textually enjoyable and intriguing to the reader. Such an experience, in the fashion of illustrated travel guides to unknown destinations, invites an aesthetic (re)discovery of the countries described within Warner's fiction. Indeed, beauty can be located in different cultural and geographic aspects such as folklore, mourning customs and even the topography of fictionalized locations corresponding to existing places both in southern Italy and the Caribbean. For instance, Davide lists the Greek and Roman myths attached to his native land:

In the provinces of southern Italy, Ninfania and its neighbours, lie most of the ancient entries into the underworld: the fields of flowers where Proserpina was snatched to be Pluto's bride below, and malarial Lake Avernus, afloat in a mist humming with mosquitoes near Virgil's point of descent; the grottoes of Mercury,

where he halted to attach his wings on returning to the upper air,
gaped clammy, toothed with stalactites, near Castellana.
(*Father* 128)

Even the language adapts to convey the gloominess of these “underworld” myths through a motif of menacing but fascinating land features such as “mist”, “grottoes”, “gaped” and “stalactites.” However, the association of such ancient myths, at once disturbing and appealing, with Davide’s city bestows a touch of grace and authenticity upon it.

An aesthetic motive may also be found in extracts of operatic songs engrafted upon memoirs in *The Lost Father* and in exalted descriptions of seventeenth-century Chinese emperors hunting on the plains of Tartary in *Dark Wood*. Beauty may equally be glimpsed in the chronicles of a self-sacrificing goddess, the turmoil she goes through being transcribed on a mummy’s bandages:

A choking pain rose in her throat ... anger and fear scorching her cheeks and neck as she clasped the girl child in her arms, lying alongside her son. Consciousness came and went; she was drifting in and out of this place.... Water. Her tongue swelled against her palate ... she was dreaming, ablaze with wanting to drink ... to plunge into cool dark water and merge into its flow ... her dress was stiff with stains, from the birth, from the struggle, from the flight. Again, pools of fresh water formed and smiled at her, calling to her with a sound of flutes and pipes and bells – to slip down and dance in their depths, to be washed clean. (*Bundle* 158-59)

The previous chronicle describes the suffering of Leto’s birth-giving after she is chased from the citadel where she used to live. The highly metaphorical language of this ancient form of life writing conjures up sensuous images in the mind of the reader while highlighting such elements of nature as water in its purifying power and preternatural symbiosis with the half-conscious goddess.

The recurrence of metaphors within all of Warner’s life writing fragments also adds a poetic, more appealing quality to the narrative. For instance, there are discreet

but constant descriptions of reflections of light and sunlight, of shadows and darkness, especially in *Dark Wood* and *The Lost Father*. Most of these metaphors are spatially linked to southern Italy “[a] ladder of light fell precisely aslant the chip-marble floor from the jalousied windows” (*Dark Wood* 173), “the quadrant of striped sunlight” (*Father* 131). Such images reflect a representation of the past as it discreetly sheds light on, and blends with the present, thus deconstructing the opposition of light and dark.

The recurrent inclusion of Italian and Latin words in italics in engrafted life writings also bestows a form of authenticity by re-contextualizing the information provided within its historical and geographical environment as in “*pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris*” [“you are dust, and unto dust you shall return”], “*libeccio*” [southwesterly wind] (*Father* 111, 156). The authenticity of these verbal antiquities as faithful reproductions of the original language becomes aesthetically pleasing.

However, there are instances when the aesthetic purposes of metabiographical engrafting cannot be dissociated from ethical ones. Indeed, Warner usually resorts to what Woolf called “the aesthetic effects of truth” (qtd. in Briggs 252) or a series of subtle thematic and visual contradictions between the different levels of texts as a form of indirect criticism. For example, in *The Lost Father*, the speech delivered by the fictional version of Mussolini is engrafted through free indirect speech upon Davide’s memoir along with anecdotes that contradict or deny his promises as a political leader:

The Leader, so he told his people, had lifted this distempered fog, this old corruption of Italy, and shone a bright blazing torch into the darkness of the bosses’ law, sweetening it as if it were a malarial swamp ... was purifying the system; he was scouring the channels of their old faith; he was the surgeon removing the decaying parts.... ‘I believe in ... violent action against the old ways. They brought poverty and degradation to the people of my country! I believe my violence will cure their ills! Heroic surgery.... I am that heroic surgeon!.... only strong measures will bring the new world into being!’ (115-16)

This speech strongly echoes another pertinent extract “[s]he came, shyly; her

knees under the hem of her dress seemed huge, like boles, for her limbs were emaciated with rickets and sallow from malaria” (*Father* 111). The little girl, sent by her grandmother to offer a cockerel in exchange for Davide’s services as a lawyer, suffers from diseases which are associated with poverty and poor living conditions. This anecdote is in total contrast with the imagery of light, purity and healing used in the Leader’s speech. The artificiality of political discourse is also reflected in such words as “bright”, “blazing”, “sweetening” and “scouring” being juxtaposed with nauseating allusions to decay, dirt and illness. Warner then uses irony as a form of indirect criticism of fascism as a faulty political and economic system through an apparently casual description of a sick child. She also relies on symbolism through the central duel between Tommaso and Davide which stands for an allegory of the deadly conflict between fascism and socialism.

In *Dark Wood*, da Rocha’s engrafted diaries implicitly denounce the manipulation of historical facts by Christian biblical scholars. Through the inclusion of extracts in their original format, historical constructions are uncovered. Occasionally, seemingly innocent but ironical statements show how history can be transformed and moulded in order to suit the purposes of a particular creed:

Pernet had to provide strong historical evidence to support his claim ... He and two colleagues ... conflated several famous “lawgivers” to arrive at a single historical personage ... It therefore became imperative for the Figurists to reconcile Chinese and Biblical chronology. (Footnote: ... Pernet and followers not defeated by discrepancy ... Pernet declared firmly, ‘We know, from the certain proofs of scientific enquiry ... – no problem ... ’) ... Gabriel laughed. (*Dark Wood* 163-64)

It is crucial to note the textual “signs” of indirect criticism in the previous quotations, first, through the use of brackets indicating a footnote by the editor, adding to the contrast provided by the concluding informal remark “no problem” and the narratorial description of Gabriel’s reaction. The reader comes to understand that what is disguised as “strong historical evidence” and correlation of events is in reality a conflation of stories and personages intended to influence and convince

Christian and Chinese authorities of a ‘constructed’ truth. Warner’s exposing of biographical procedures by engrafting editing techniques as well as the diaries themselves turns out to have a strong ethical purpose. Indeed, this metabiographical demystification allows for a parallel form of subtler criticism of taboo issues.

Speaking of taboos, it is worth considering the way some “auto/biographers”, namely in memoirs, come to edit and select the contents of their diaries to make them more “acceptable” when the former are published. In relation to that, Woolf implicitly comments upon this aspect of life writing through a description of her own diaries as “scribble ... I may brew a tiny ingot out of it – in my memoirs” (“Diary” n. pag.). Diaries are then messy notes which merely serve as material for a more “refined”, thoughtful version preciously encapsulated in memoirs. It is a more appropriate version, less shocking or disturbing to the reader and consequently achieves an ethical purpose through political correctness. However, as such meticulous portraits and lives tend to have an abundance of censored aspects, there are more myths to be uncovered and deconstructed.

Warner’s focus on two historical and historic moments and the myths attached to them also harbors an ethical motive. Letters in *Indigo*, for instance, uncover the violence of English colonialism while memoirs in *The Lost Father* implicitly criticize Fascism in southern Italy “as the novel is above all a form in which crossing borders, entering new territories, trespassing and fence-mending can help make up new identities, the history of the Caribbean can teach us ... about the past and metaphorically about the future” (Warner, “Rich Pickings” 31-32).

Engrafting as Demythologization of Life Writing Conventions

The engrafting strategy in Warner's fiction uncovers a multitude of life writing myths. The most important is the myth of objectivity and factualism. As a first instance, in *The Lost Father*, Anna deconstructs the generic conventions of the memoir through a self-conscious, metafictional listing of its components or a 'meta-memoir' commentary "his granddaughter ... will close her eyes tight and imagine him for all her worth; she will fill notebooks with these imaginings and her mother's memories of him and of life both with him and without him" (141). Anna then uncovers various mechanisms behind the memoir, deconstructing as a consequence the myth of factualism related to the genre as a type of "personal history" (Woolf qtd. in Benstock 25). While the latter should mainly rely on memory and facts of the past, it turns out to be equally inspired by the memoirist's imagination. Anna's memoir is filtered through her own myths, values and desires, not only as a writer but also as a liberated Englishwoman and a museum curator. Anna's Italian origins amount to the remains of an accent in her mother's English "I could hear a catch in your voice, under the vibrating r's, the echo of your first language" (*Father* 3), and to a few fantasies and romantic legends:

I saw him in ... damascened armour, like the Saint George of Carpaccio and Uccello.... Oh, the duellist in the chivalrous literature ... continues the practice of knight errantry, shielding damsels and offering all varmints – and infernal monsters – just vengeance. To me, the calcareous landscape of the south, gaping with the cave lairs of dragons, was the natural backdrop of the avenger's exploits. I saw your father against it, tilting with the beast, while the sister he was fighting for stood by.... For the princess in the richly diapered full-skirted dress at the side of the duel is far too maidenly to cheer when the lance pierces her defamer and stitches his tongue to the floor of his fiery gullet and thence twists through to his blackguard's heart. (*Father* 136)

Such hints as “I saw him”, “To me”, “I saw your father” clearly betray the invading presence of the memoirist’s subjective ‘eye/I’ through her mythified view of the past. Indeed, the narrator continually drifts from real-life events, carried away by stereotyped images of brave heroes, dragons and damsels in distress. It is important to note the juxtaposition of the revenge metaphor which relocates the duel in its historical context of nineteenth-century Naples (*Father* 140). The previous quotation also represents one of Anna’s self-reflexive extracts in which she makes comments about herself or the memoir. These passages thematically and structurally reflect aspects of her subjectivity as well as ornaments of her artistic imagination, often giving away more information about her than about Fantina or Davide.

The inclusion of riddles within the memoir also reflects Anna’s artistic arrangement of events as well as her vicarious Italian childhood:

As they trudged back, disappointed at their father’s continued absence, Lucia commanded Fantina, ‘Answer me this one ...’
“Everyone goes to church
With his hat in his hand
Except me.
Who am I?”
‘I don’t know. You know I never know any of the answers to riddles.’ Fantina was beginning to moan. ‘I’m a dead man, a dead man,’ sang out Lucia. (159-60)

Designed to make the narrative more exciting and pleasurable to the reader, engrafting this particular riddle creates an ominous suspense, a sort of ‘tragic relief’ before the climactic death of the father. These scraps of childish, innocent exchanges thus constitute a sort of still before the tempest. Equally important, second-person narration and free indirect speech in engrafted types of life writing provide for a more conspicuous inclusion of the reader in metabiographical narration and interpretation. Instead of a conventionally distancing omniscient narrator, the reader becomes more active and involved by being let into the biographer’s thoughts during his/her editing of his/her subject’s diary as in *Dark Wood* “[t]hat’s clumsy, he thought. He looked at the original ... Revise it, he decided, and made a mark in the

margin of his manuscript to remind himself” (*Dark Wood* 62). The previous is a detailed description of the biographer’s methodology when in doubt about a turn of phrase. In addition to free indirect speech, the original version of the sentence to be translated is included. Consequently, what would normally be inaccessible to the reader, such as the biographer’s previous versions and alterations, is engrafted upon the main narrative. As Stanley pertinently points out in relation to metabiography “the aim ... is to enable more people than just one, the auto/biographer, to analytically engage with the auto/biographical investigative approach” (254). Hence, instead of a representation of the subject/biographee’s life as such, metabiography focuses on life writing methodology, uncovering in the process the difficulties that the “reconstruction” of the past entails (Nünning 203). By allowing the reader to form his/her own judgment, engrafted metabiographical extracts also break the myth of a single indisputable version of a person’s life.

In relation to that, the omniscient single narrator is replaced by Warner’s multiple character narration and more inclusive characterization. The allegedly unbiased unique voice of a third or first-person narrator is replaced by various perspectives which provide a more comprehensive, richer auto/biographical portrait. All kinds of voices, male or female, canonical or minor, find a space of expression in Warner’s engrafted life writings. The female discourse, for instance, is reflected in mother-daughter or sisters’ dialogues through the alternation of second and first-person narration which increases the discourse’s immediacy and dramatic effect. This type of exchange is closely linked to the female transmission of personal and cultural experience. Through their immediacy, these engrafted extracts escape and challenge the conventions of life writing by being informally “told”, using italics or free indirect speech. Their narrators are dead (Sycorax) or exiled foster mothers and time-travelling goddesses (Leto) who provide what Ansgar Nünning describes as “the continuity of the past in the present” (200) in addition to the therapeutic effects of communication. For instance, Leto’s discourses share some thematic similarities with diaries like introspection, the revelation of the diarist’s thoughts and the recording of his/her present actions or surrounding events, and they are also structurally “episodic” (Cottam 268). Such speeches make Leto in Zabuz’ terms “the prototypical female keeper and transmitter” (136) of knowledge, intimate thoughts and (hi)stories.

Leto's speech travels across time and space, informing and soothing, an antidote to doubt and fear, both in the heart of her children and that of other exiled listeners.

The accuracy of fact in life writing is another myth destroyed mainly by the acknowledgment of the fallibility of the auto/biographer's memory. In *The Lost Father*, Anna's main source is doubted "today, nobody remembers ... You don't: I'm still trying to piece it together from your scraps of memory" (137). Anna questions the reliability and truth of the resulting memoir, both its facts and fictions.

Memory, being made of "scraps", is fragmented, thus "disabling" the memoirist and her source from providing the unified story this type of life writing is presumed to offer. Anna's memory appears to be an extension of her mother's who sometimes needs her help to remember some family memories or proverbs "[h]ow true that saying is, Men never ... how does it go?" (*Father* 140) It becomes clear from the previous example that female transmission of memory is sometimes essentialized as oral by Warner. While the fallacy and inexactitude of the life writing myth of "graph" or written record is destroyed, considering the way human memory can be treacherous, knowledge transmission between different generations of women is not limited to these oral manifestations. Indeed, Anna is *writing* a memoir through the transmitted memories of her mother and aunts, just as other women characters in Warner's novels paint and scratch on trees.

The constructivist view of life writing is also highlighted by uncovering the memoir as Anna's "intellectual construct" (Nünning 197) and not a truthful representation of her family's past. Life writing myths of referentiality are consequently further deconstructed by Anna's metabiographical or "meta-memoir" comments on the difficulties of memoir writing.

In addition to that, the concept of the subject or biographee as a coherent and stable self is uncovered in *The Lost Father* through the parallel of public legend and private reality in Davide's life. The romantic image reflected in Anna's memoir of her grandfather as a brave duellist is contrasted with that of a down-to-earth rebellious law student accidentally shot during a riot. In *Dark Wood*, da Rocha's diaries uncover the double identity of a priest as a repressed homosexual. These metabiographical portraits foreground a multiplicity of selves and destroy the myth of the biographee as a fixed, unified entity.

As a conclusion, engrafting strategies and their effects are closely related to metabiographical structure and themes. The concern in Warner's fiction with time and memory as well as her characters' constant attempts at coming to terms with their past pave the way for a multitude of thematic and structural alternations. Spatiotemporal distinctions between past and present are blurred and narrators of all kinds engage in unpredictable dialogues, digressions and asides. Even the barriers separating readers, subjects, diarists and memoirists are destroyed as each can interfere, directly or indirectly, in life writing mechanisms and their resulting narratives. Moreover, Warner's engrafting preserves its aesthetics through the pleasure of reading thus retaining fiction's most primordial aim: entertainment.

It would also be important to consider the mythopoeia induced by the metabiographical demythologization of life writing processes. Indeed, the inclusion of the reader in the latter as an indirect participant, among other additions to the genre, increases the myth-making potential of engrafted life writing types. But whether it is about myth construction or deconstruction, such myths need to be defined and analyzed in accordance with the religious and cultural ideologies nourishing them as well as the types of literary criticisms they are related to such as post-colonialism and feminism. The next chapter will focus upon the Christian and folkloric myths deconstructed by Warner's metabiography.

Chapter Three:

Mythography of Religion and Folklore

(Noah must have taken more than a single pair of beasts of each species ... But then anyone can see God's foresight has its shortcomings, and his providence has always seemed to me quite rash. No one would even consider a match with the offspring of such thoughtless husbandry ...) I will never again think indulgently of the divine ruler and bear the evils he allows to roam the earth.... if there is a God he is a brute, a bully, with a mailed fist to crush the blameless, and that limp bleeding thing they hang up in the churches nothing but a lie to mask his cruelties. Does he know, can he really know, of our human sufferings? (*Father* 145,168)

The above quotation is an extract from an early twentieth-century Catholic southern Italian immigrant's diary. Behind what seems like the passing blasphemy of an angry father whose newborn son has just died, Christian biblical stories and dogmas are openly criticized and questioned. Engrafted life writings, such as the previous diary within Warner's *The Lost Father*, are often provocative and self-reflexive in the sense of pointing to particular themes which drive the reader to engage in critically interpretative processes with the narrative. These themes or "myths" may be taken-for-granted religious ideas or generalizations instilled by the Christian bible and hagiographies, or prejudiced assumptions about particular pagan cultures and their customs. Margaret Anne Doody explains that "to be able to name something as myth serves as a magical de-mystification, robbing the story or image of its centrality or transcendence" (104). Indeed, Warner's metabiography of engrafted diaries and memoirs, in addition to types of historical records like chronicles and annals, even fairy tales, present and deconstruct these myths. The latter often serve as justifications for different forms of injustice against minorities or vulnerable members of society. Those who cannot always speak for themselves range

from women to immigrants, colonized and exiled communities; the “Other.”¹ All these have been silenced and marginalized from white middle-class and male-dominated history and literature because of their ill-understood differences and complexities perceived as disturbing, hard to grasp, and thus unacceptable. The reader’s task is then to decipher the incongruities and contradictions of these dominant narratives depending on his/her personal references as well as the collective patterns of understanding acquired through his/her reading experience. S/he has to locate what Warner’s metabiography is protesting against or denouncing from under the textual surface and carry out his/her own critical questioning. Warner’s fictionalized life writings are strategically engrafted upon her novels to expose and deconstruct the patriarchal and gender mythopoeia subtly implanted by/within male discourses. More importantly, the practice of writing auto/biography in the real world used to be reserved for men as subjects with important accomplishments in their lives as well as a coherent understanding of the latter. Women’s diaries and journals, on the other hand, were considered too “random, private, passive, and incoherent” to be published and preserved for posterity, let alone be taken as models (Sanders 946). In “Women’s lives: the Unmapped Country”, Lyndall Gordon rectifies such a false idea:

No life is too meager, too bound by domestic limits, to be grounds for search.... The hidden aspects of women’s lives – in fact, all lives of the obscure – may require ... more transgressive experiment if we are to answer [the following] question ... what unrealized possibilities lie unnoticed behind the silence of women’s lives in the outback of history ... the standard records of the past? I had to transgress the established form of biography to devise an eclectic form which fused genres of letter, diary, oral history, public history, and dream, in order to give expression to the limited lives of women.... Women’s lives deviate from the set stories of traditional biography. (96)

Warner’s concept of patriarchy highlights the mechanisms underlying such an

¹ In “Authorizing the Autobiographical”, Benstock defines “the Other” as “those who occupy positions of internal exclusion within the culture ... women, blacks, Jews, homosexuals, and others who exist on the margins of society”, 16.

unfair and restrictive but strategic labeling of women as “passive” and “incoherent”, while her fictionalized metabiography provides the experimental ground for expressing what Woolf terms in the first chapter of *The Voyage Out* as the “lower waters” (qtd. in Gordon 93) or unknown side of women’s lives. The aim of Warner’s metabiographical engraftings is the “eclectic” textual and symbolic re-presenting of the femaleness “under cover” within each fictionalized diary and letter and even in “dreams” and laments of the deceased. They also aim to correct distorted images of femininity in order to redress the wrongs such unfair portrayals have been inflicting upon women for centuries.

This chapter will first focus upon the religious and folkloric category of myths which are grouped in terms of adherence to either Christian or pagan precepts. Equally associated with specific spatiotemporal locations like southern Italy or the Caribbean, the folkloric/pagan myths add a cultural and historical nuance to the religious dimension. In her article about *The Lost Father*, Corona provides different definitions of folklore:

The definition ... given by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1960) ... relates to: ‘traditions, customs and superstitions of uncultured classes in civilised nations’ (1846) and to aspects of ‘the European peasantry [which] were to be found also among primitive peoples in all parts of the world ... the folk category as ... the identification of a cultural heritage specific to the ethnic minorities ... comprehends folk-tales, popular stories, legends, local traditions, riddles, proverbs.’ (150)

Folklore is thus associated with “minorities” and “primitive peoples”, a connection which adds up to the political considerations of such an ideological “inferiorization” (Corona 149) and marginalization performed by dominant Western definitions. Folkloric and religious myths will first be identified and historicized through relevant examples mainly from Warner’s *The Lost Father*, *Dark Wood* and *The Leto Bundle*. Second, the deconstructive strategies of metabiography, as well as New Historicism, related to these myths will be thoroughly analysed.

It is necessary to first analyse the quotation introducing this chapter and in which Davide is bringing Noah's story to a down-to-earth level. Through his own seafaring experience to the land of freedom, inspired by the sounds of animals coming from the lower decks, Davide undermines divine "foresight" and reduces it to the practicalities of animals and food resources management.² In this way, by re-positioning biblical stories in their material context, by anthropomorphizing God as a "bully" and dehumanizing/demeaning Jesus as a "limp bleeding thing", the diarist divests Christianity of its powerful ideological hold, particularly on himself. This quotation thus brings to the fore the interrelatedness between myth typology and such structural deconstructive techniques as the use of brackets, repetition and rhetorical questions "[d]oes he know, can he really know, of our human sufferings?" (*Father* 168)

In *The Mermaids in The Basement* (1993), Warner's collection of short stories rewriting a variety of male-centred religious myths, the story of Genesis is again focussed upon in "Full Fathom Five." Also relying on free indirect speech, brackets and repetition, Noah's daughter-in-law is addressing her drowned father after the Flood.³ Warner's alternation of first and second-person narration on that occasion is reminiscent of Anna's personal thoughts as they are combined with her address to her mother in *The Lost Father*. In the short story, the combination of the female perspective with the comic reworking of Noah's drunken episode⁴ reflects how Warner's demystifying strategies uncover an implicit reference to male masturbation in the original story. In the following quotation, one of Noah's sons and his wife catch the father while:

Ahead of me, he went stiff ... so I ... looked round his shoulder.
Under a tree, sprawled like the old winos we used to see under the

² The protagonist might not have read Genesis closely enough as God was actually very practical in his commands to Noah, especially in relation to food: "And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals" (6:21). This is a criticism of people who misinterpret the bible.

³ Addressing a dead person can be a sort of biographical rendering of that person's life but that form is still to be explored.

⁴ The original text is as follows: "After the flood, Noah began to cultivate the ground, and he planted a vineyard. One day he drank some wine he had made, and he became drunk and lay naked inside his tent. Ham...saw that his father was naked and went outside and told his brothers" (Genesis 9: 20-22).

bridge by the river before the Flood ... Father was spread-eagled; he grunted and huffed through his open mouth, a little smirk playing in the corner of his stained lips ... James clapped his hand over my eyes ... Father pulled at himself blissfully. Then I began to laugh really loudly, and James tried to haul me away with him, and when I wouldn't come, he ran away. But for Father, it was too late ... At first a smile played lasciviously on his face ... The response was fleeting, because then his other eye flew open, his hands came up and covered his face. He said, 'My God', scrambling, but still fuddled. (Warner, "Full Fathom Five" 193)

The key themes of sinful auto-eroticism and public humiliation, indecency and voyeurism ("looked", "see", "eyes") are effectively juxtaposed by Warner's narrator with the prophet's previous descriptions as a self-righteous patriarch and renowned judge. Uncovering the full humanity of Noah as a "lascivious" old "wino" indulging in solitary pleasure then serves the purpose of deconstructing this biblical myth and destroying its authority in a similar way to Davide's diary.

This kind of demystification can also be studied through a close exploration of a variety of other themes such as folklore, gender and patriarchy. Although the primary purpose of this chapter is to pave the way for an effective mythography of Warner's metabiography, mythopoeia still remains an inherent part of the deconstructive process and should also be taken into consideration.

Metabiographical and Historical Myth-Deconstruction

Religious Myths

Most religious myths in Warner's fiction belong to different branches of Christian theology while Warner mentions a profuse reliance in her works upon a secular form of "typology" (Coupe, "The Comedy of Terrors" 52). This is reflected in the intricate web of thematic correspondences and echoes within her metabiography as well as the time shifts, especially in relation to characterization, for

most characters have past personae whose present counterparts are trying to come to terms with their history. Accordingly, Warner's plots, like her protagonists, constantly move back and forth between different timelines. There is also a conspicuous thematic recurrence of saints' stories, descriptions of religious paintings and allusions to Christian iconography. Warner's fictional editors and diarists are systematically linked to religious faith and practice in some way or another. In *Dark Wood*, for example, both Gabriel and his subject are Jesuit priests while in *The Lost Father*, Catholic influences of the Italian South are deeply imprinted on Fantina's and Anna's imaginary memoirs and memories. The latter novel is the richest example of both religious and folkloric myths:

Through letters, diaries, papers, it reconstructs with imaginative power the cultural and ritual universe of a rural village whose characters are subjected to the crisis that caused emigration. It is a book that grafts onto the novel ... thematic motives belonging to the entire folk area, with ... traditions and fables. A text in which ... the lives of the Christian saints, merge with the biblical stories ... All these processes of hybridism and cultural overlapping require juxtapositions of time perspectives ... the "simultaneous" presence of a multiplicity of "voices." (Corona 155-56)

But how can religious myths be defined and located within Warner's engrafted life writings and historical records? Religious myths can be defined from a variety of perspectives. They can be Christian dogmas and principles instilled by Christian institutions, texts, and such representatives as priests, saints and missionaries. Interestingly in *The Lost Father*, many religious myths are presented through children's viewpoints. The following, as quoted in Anna's memoirs, is Caterina's speech after hearing the truth about sexual intercourse and birth-giving. The young girl's shock, reflected in her stutter and repetition of "soul", originates in her acquired habit of defining sexuality through the lens of religion:

God couldn't possibly have organised things like that. I wasn't born like caca, out of Mamma's bottom ... It's revolting ... I'm not an animal, I'm, I'm a ... soul, I've got a soul, inside, and it makes us different, that's what the priest says, and I believe him. I'm not natural, not like animals. (*Father* 55)

The child systematically associates sex with sin and moral corruption. However, Caterina's brutal but naïve reaction is an excellent technique to uncover the insidiousness of Christian teachings. This metabiographical extract reflects the way this religion represents the genitals, how it equates "natural" with "animal" in the sense of being base and remote from religious spirituality. Religion in a way denies human sexual needs and desires by demonizing and demeaning them. The way children are indoctrinated and made unable to accept other *truths*, even the most basic biological explanation of human reproduction and childbirth, is enough evidence of the dominating power of this type of religious myth.

It is also important to note that, as Caterina and Rosa are girls, religious myths, especially in relation to the Virgin Mary, are deeply intertwined with gender concerns in Warner's metabiography. Warner explains in an interview with Richard Kearney:

There is an inter-reaction between images of Mary and changing patterns of thought about men and women ... the definition of what is the proper function of a woman gives us an idea, by extension, of what we think about men, and how men think about themselves because very often it is they who wish women to be obedient or keep their sexuality under a certain control. (95)

Indeed, the founding principle uniting all these myths, the man versus woman thread that traverses most diaries and memoirs, is misogyny and the containment of an allegedly demonic female sexuality. The latter is portrayed as evil and unnatural, corrupting men's morality and damaging women's "nature in its essence", assumed to be pure and innocent (*Father* 117). These influential religious considerations are deeply connected with the myth of the "original sin" developed by Augustine, a theologian of the fourth century who greatly influenced Christian thought. In *Alone*

of *All her Sex* (1976), Warner expounds on the myths related to the Virgin Mary, their male instigators, and their impact on women's fate from the most remote ages to the present day. In *The Lost Father*, southern Italian men at the beginning of the twentieth century have been portraying women as prone to sexual depravity when they are unsupervised or uncontrolled by male authority. Women are thus reduced to the status of minors who need to be contained, while men unburden themselves of unacknowledged sexual fantasies which they then violently project onto their female counterparts. At the sight of a wall fresco portraying a group of women worshipping a phallus, a deeply shocked adolescent Davide exclaims to his friend "[t]his is what happens when women are left to their own devices" (*Father* 25). In other words, a liberated woman who gives rein to her sexual fantasies is unacceptable in a patriarchal society. In "Mingling and Metamorphing", Zabrus describes the incident as "[w]hile visiting some excavations in 1909 Rupe, Davide and his friend see a wall-to-wall frieze of bare-bottomed nymphs in a lewd orgy with animals suckling at their breasts ... which harks back to the pre-patriarchal past of Italy" (122). So there was a time when women were not yet submitted to the scrutinizing and judgmental view of men. It might have been a time of harmony, later re-interpreted as perversion by patriarchy. In another article about Warner's *The Lost Father*, Coupe further comments on the wall frieze episode by comparing opposed but complementary patriarchal views:

His friend savours the spectacle, believing it to indicate the true state of the female ... Davide ... is perturbed by the 'sacred mysteries' depicted ... he cannot reconcile the sight with the reverence which he has been brought up to feel for women, and finds it hard to countenance the idea of their innate wantonness. Tomasso embodies the machismo of the Ninfanian culture in his view of the female as driven entirely by carnal impulses; Davide embodies the chivalric aspect, dedicated to the cult of the Virgin Mary. ("Marina" 57-58)

Both crude "machismo" and romantic "chivalry" reflect constructed views of women as wanton and in need of male authority, but "like women, men also are

constructed by patriarchal ideology” (Eakin 66) to fit into roles that do not necessarily reflect their individual identity.

In *Dark Wood*, women’s representations in the Jesuit ideology are fictionalized and expressed through speeches reported by the editor of Andrew da Rocha’s diaries:

‘Woman threatens us perpetually’, wrote one Jesuit. ‘Neither the youth nor the adult, nor the old man, nor the wise nor the brave nor even the saint is ever safe from woman, this universal enemy ...’ St Francis Xavier exhorted his men never to speak to a woman alone in private unless he were confessing her *in extremis*. (*Dark Wood* 165-66)

The prejudiced association of women with concupiscence and sin in Jesuit beliefs is exposed by metabiographical second-level text (da Rocha’s diary) and free indirect speech. This is called “the myth of Eve” according to which women represent a danger and a threat to men’s moral integrity. In the same interview with Kearney, Warner comments “I realised that the enchantment of Mary ... was actually predicated on an idea of the human as sinful ... in particular, of the ordinary woman so peculiarly and inevitably sinful ... in her flesh itself ... we were all Eves” (95). But the warnings voiced by these apostles and missionary saints are in reality images and ideas created to justify and hide their (these religious men’s) own desires and temptation by women. As they cannot accept their own physical weaknesses, they project the blame onto women who are then generalized and essentialized as dangerous sexual predators, a “universal enemy.” However, the real danger actually lies in these Jesuits’ own unacknowledged and repressed sexual impulses.

As a result, the necessity of physically and intellectually constricting women to the “safer” domestic spheres of marriage and motherhood is successfully legitimized, not only by their own husbands but also, as in *The Lost Father*, by patriarchal fascist and Catholic ideologies:

One sphere of life where fascist policy and catholic belief could coincide was the role of the sexes. Catholicism held that birth

control and abortion were unnatural and offensive to God, and implied that woman's role should be that of wife and mother. Mussolini was happy to ban contraception and to encourage women to have children ... The Duce's concern was to raise the population dramatically and so provide soldiers for his armies and colonists for the new Italian Empire. (Robson 106)

The previous historical quotation from Mark Robson's *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism* explains the intertwined patriarchal, religious and imperialistic motives behind the construction and preservation of myths about women as "nurturing" and "caring", rather than 'carnal' creatures. Mussolini declared that work "distracts from reproduction ... and foments independence and the accompanying physical-moral styles contrary to birthing" (qtd. in De Grazia 168). The double victimization of these women's socially conservative menfolk and the politico-religious "Battle for Births" is further demystified by De Grazia:

Mussolini's regime stood for returning women to home and hearth ... It was indeed the apparent normalness of the constraints on women that made them all the more mystifying, insidious, and demeaning.... the regime's attitude towards women ... condemned all the social practices customarily connected with the emancipation of women – from the vote and female participation in the labor force to family planning. (De Grazia 1-2)

Both the "Duce" and the Catholic Church openly joined to regulate women's fertility and to confirm stereotypes which tend to justify the moral and physical subordination of women to men's will. Indeed, the banning of contraception and abortion symbolically stands for the denial of an independent female subjectivity having control over her own sexuality and physiological needs. Even biologists and social commentators joined in the patriarchal chorus by associating women's inferiority with their "reproductive organs" and supporting "a politics of gender designed to contain female desires exceeding the boundaries established to maintain patriarchal relations of power" (Pickering-Iazzi 31-2) such as male privilege and

female subordination. So a self-willed woman attempting to escape these appointed roles would threaten well-established images of docility and self-sacrificing devotion to male needs which lie at the foundation of these various patriarchal ideologies.

In the following quotation, Warner accurately describes the psychological anguish undergone by men when confronted with images of female eroticism at odds with their internalized constructions of ideal femininity:

Did his mother have these women's hands? His sisters their mouths? He could not go on with this dumb-show in his fantasy, could not even imagine ... or found the imagining intolerable, and flung it from him in horror, then in howling mirth ... At home [women] served and glided, bent and fetched indoors ... collected water and filled the jugs ... they quenched the thirst of their menfolk, or laundered the linens ... folded and unfolded ... his women belonged to the shadowy depths of the shuttered rooms of a tamed interior, a chest ... for goods to lie in ... it couldn't be true, it couldn't possibly be true. Women would never do such things. (*Father* 27)

Following the previously-mentioned discovery of the erotic frescoes depicting a liberated female sexuality, Davide experiences ambivalent feelings of buried desire and "horror." He tries to ward off the shocking painted alternatives to what he has internalized as socially-accepted women's roles thanks to a litany of domestic activities that reassures his patriarchal psyche. The association of the words "indoors", "shuttered", "tamed interior" and "chest" with a sequence of housework actions conveys ideas of selfless, tame automatons whose sole aim is the gratification of the male "Master." Women's physical constriction thus reflects their psychological containment which becomes more a matter of domestication than mere domesticity. As the following example illustrates, Davide's mother talks about her adolescent daughter thus "she can't gallivant about like a girl, showing herself off in bars. It's not the custom.... You'll have to act like a woman soon" (*Father* 59). This quotation echoes Judith Butler's notion of "performativity" in relation to performing appointed roles of femininity (25).

Religious myths can also be found in legends and stories of saints or hagiographies which perpetuate taken-for-granted ideas and false precepts. While the stories of virgin martyrs abound in *The Lost Father*, Warner's fictional strategies help to demystify their latent content "Davide noted how she [Rosa] truly recalled the virgin martyrs he had dreamed of, with her Easter cake as emblem, like the twin mound of her breasts St Agatha bears on a dish in heaven" (45-46). Saint Agatha was a chaste martyr who was barbarously tortured after rejecting the sexual proposals of the "Provost of Sicily" (de Varagine n.p.). Davide's dream-visions of *his* women as saints reflect the mythical Christian association of women's virginity with purity and holiness:

In his mind's eye, he gave his mother's and his sisters' features to the women he told himself he must prefer, the tender and enraptured virgins of the holy images the priest sometimes handed out on feast days. In his mother busying about the kitchen, he recognized St Praxedes mopping up the blood springing from the martyred Romans' wounds; in St Lucy, who offers between finger and thumb a stalk flowering with her own eyes, he discovered the comforting figure of his sister Cati with a sprig of rosemary to lay down among the freshly-ironed laundry. (*Father* 28)

Davide's thoughts of "cake", "mounds" and "breasts" portray his own internalized sexual fantasies about "tender", "enraptured" in an orgasm-like state, but still chaste, martyrs, the kind of women he desires. These incestuous reflections are just as perverse as other male fantasies, although hidden behind religious morality. There is also a patriarchal dimension, juxtaposing such signs of domesticity as "kitchen", "mopping" and "laundry", with femaleness as inherently inseparable attributes. It would be important to note the cultural and geographic specificity of the stories of Saints Agatha and Lucy which take place in Sicily, as well as the Roman Saint Praxedes. Referring to these same saints in *Alone of All Her Sex*, Warner again draws particular attention to the consequences of the Christian identification of women with the assumed dangers of sexuality:

In Christian hagiography, the sadomasochistic content of the paeans to male and female martyrs is startling.... But the particular focus on women's torn and broken flesh reveals the psychological obsession of the religion with sexual sin, and the tortures that pile up one upon the other with pornographic repetitiousness underline the identification of the female with the perils of sexual contact ... as they defend their virtue, the female martyrs of the Christian calendar are assaulted in any number of ingenious and often sexual ways.... Agatha's breasts are cut off. (71)

Warner thus perceptively dismantles the historical context of hagiographies and frees her text and women's image from the grip of ingrained ideological lies spread by male-voiced religion. As shown by Saint Agatha's example, torture of female martyrs by cutting off their breasts or burning them naked takes a "sadomasochistic", even "pornographic", turn as it is specifically the female body, its genitals and erogenous zones, which are targeted and abused. Accordingly, Warner's novels and short stories put the emphasis on the "obsession of religion with sexual sin", unveiling the erotically charged content of some religious stories by emphasizing particularly sensual episodes and rewriting them from a female perspective as in the apocryphal story of "Susannah and the Elders" which is reworked and renamed by Warner as "Now You See Me." Originally, the story is about two old men who blackmail a Hebrew woman after she refuses to let them take advantage of her sexually. This modernized version of Susannah brings to light the taboo issues of male voyeurism and perversity by pushing the limits of explicitness to a detailed description of a rape attempt by her husband's colleagues:

You're a splendid woman, Susannah, they want to feast on you because you're beautiful ... I ran, I began dressing myself; Dierek slid the door and watched. Saldieri passed behind him ... He held me from behind and began to move against me with scissor-like sawing of his legs, one hand shoving under my waistband ... They are reducing you, Susannah ... You have made me nothing by your watching ... No! And I bit down on the arm pinning me against the quivering body of the man clamped around me and kicked at his legs behind and stopped him. (Warner, "Now You See Me" 130-31)

Through a textual mixture of first and second-person narration alternating Susannah's humiliated thoughts and physical reactions, the violent pornography of the scene is disturbingly reported. Shocked at the reduction of her body by the male gaze and subsequent rape, the female narrator then exclaims "[y]ou have made me nothing by your watching." The destruction of the female body's privacy is synonymous with the destruction of its integrity and individuality in the visual/visceral access to its interior. In *Intercourse*, Dworkin adds "there is nothing personal left to her ... no sovereignty over herself, no self ... the point of entry into her, is what she is reduced to in this cruel magic act of metaphysical decomposition"(89). The original religious myth and the objectifying effects of male voyeurism are deconstructed by the recovered voice of the victimized woman who provides the story with a fresh female perspective. Similarly, Warner's metabiography contains numerous erotic descriptions intertwined with religious references, especially within Anna's memoirs in *The Lost Father*:

For it was in such fashion that lovers talked, Rosa knew, from the Mass on certain feast days: King Solomon became languid with love as he searched up and down for his beloved, whose breasts were like a young doe and her belly a heap of wheat ... she had no clear idea, in spite of the expert descriptions she provided for Cati in their vigils. The Virgin bent her head to the dove in pictures of the Annunciation, and it pierced her through the ear, bringing her the Word that was life itself, down into her womb; that was what Rosa wanted, Tommaso's mouth next to her ear, until she, like the woman with her lover in the doorway, would wriggle and gasp. (93)

Rosa's experience of love and desire is deeply embedded in her religious education. She makes a special reference to "The Song of Songs", one of the "Wisdom books of the Bible", described by Warner as "remarkable for its undisguised sexuality" (125). After the previous religious associations of sexuality with sin, the contradictory nature of a supposedly austere Catholic Christianity is here unmasked through the sexual explicitness of its *Holy Scriptures* "languid with love", "breasts ... like a young doe", "her belly a heap of wheat." The metaphors

associating the woman's body with female deer and plants are more reminiscent of the sensuality of Metaphysical and Romantic poetry than of conventional biblical stories. Warner's fascination with Christian iconography, especially the sexual ambiguity of some paintings, is also emphasized through her characters' naive interpretations of the latter. Rosa reacts to, and identifies with the image of the dove as it "pierced [the Virgin] through the ear, bringing ... life ... down into her womb." The latter image clearly refers to a tenderer version of the coitus, its erotic overtones deeply affecting the young girl's sexual awakening and her vision of physical love.

Another pertinent example is that of Rosa's first sexual experience with Tommaso, her brother's best friend. After brutal foreplay and fondling, at odds with her imaginary romantic trysts, a jumble of religious references and contradictory thoughts is triggered inside the young Catholic woman's mind:

how to her the priests' talk was cant, and she'd defy all for love of him ... his sweet milk ... he had given her the most intense pleasure ... she turned her mind in pity to the heroines who had suffered atrocious torments to keep their bud for the eternal bridegroom ... the most excellent act of selflessness for a virgin was to surrender up her state? ... what greater obeisance to Love itself than to part with all? ... Suddenly, she found herself shivering.... There entered her mind a memory of the feast day of the Madonna.... Rosa thought of the Madonna, and thanked her, thanked her with a welling passion of gratitude ... that Tommaso had not taken advantage of her total willingness and that she was still intact.... Then, remembering, she almost gagged at ... the raw acid smell of his seed. Nothing but a beast. (*Father* 100-2)

The previous extract from Anna's memoir is another example of the metabiographical deconstruction of religious myths. The thematic thread running through Rosa's guilt-laden reasoning is chastity and its association with purity and integrity. At first confident and self-important, she openly undermines Catholic speech as "cant" and ridicules the efforts of virgin martyrs who sacrificed their lives to preserve their virginity for Christ, "the eternal bridegroom." Indeed, emboldened by long-awaited access to sexual pleasure, Rosa inverts the logic of religious chastity for the sake of "Love", capitalized like "God." However, this brief moment of

triumphant religious myth-destruction is interrupted by memories of the Madonna; the ultimate symbol of female “intactness”, having wiped the original sin thanks to her “virginal conception” (*Alone* 73). Rosa’s thinking suddenly takes a moralistic detour, transforming her lover’s “sweet milk” into the disgusting, “raw acid ... seed” of a “beast” which has almost tainted her body and soul. The repetition of “Madonna” and “thanked her” transforms the rebellious stream-of-consciousness into prayer and litany. This extract then reflects the insidious power and deeply-embedded hold of internalized religious myths, especially over women.

Strategies of Patriarchy and Feminine Resistance

In *The Lost Father*, the patriarchal political and social tendencies of the time are mainly reflected by Anna’s memoir. Written in the third-person, this self-consciously fictional memoir is narrated by a temporally and geographically displaced woman. This is a fictionalized version of what Eakin has termed “collaborative autobiography” because it is co-authored by Anna, as well as her mother and grandfather, both participants in the historical and personal events reported. Indeed, the biographer, a modern English divorcée of southern Italian descent, has chosen to “construct ... an imaginary memoir of her mother’s background and life” (*Father* 1), one which is structurally engrafted upon Anna’s own life in the present. Attracted by the family legend of a duelling ancestor, she ornaments and romances the historical past, making room for her own and other women’s often subversive perspectives. Still, the manifestations of patriarchal practices and their impact on women are inevitably woven into both Anna’s own discourse and her metabiographical reconstruction of her mother’s memories.

Confinement, both literal and metaphorical, sums up the situation of Anna’s version of Italian women during fascism “domestic space, furnishings, and clothing [as] symbols of confinement and social marginalization ... narrate intimate dramas of entrapment wherein attributes of women’s difference have been repressed” (Pickering-Iazzi 54). Due to their gender and their closeness to sexual maturation,

Rosa and Cati, for example, are not welcome in bars or cafés and not allowed outdoors except to go to church or attend special events like their village's seasonal *Passeggiata* [stroll] or fascist parades. Domestic chores and their corresponding metaphors continually permeate the memoir, even though domesticity is not always portrayed negatively. Such chores as washing gloves, cooking tips, sewing, measuring techniques, expanding tight shoes, patching and so forth (*Father* 193) turn into occasions for female oral and manual transmissions of knowledge, a "female record of cloth" (Zabus, "Power" 146) and "attributes of ... difference" from one generation to another, a difference expressed in terms of female creativity, practicality and craftsmanship. As such, apparently ungratifying activities actually reinforce female bonding, especially mother-daughter communication, and training in skills and responsibilities which would prepare these women for adult life and "stitch[...] together a women's genealogy"(Zabus, "Power" 146). Domesticity thus reflects a private female sphere, undisturbed by invasive masculinity, enriched by metaphorical means of self-expression like baking and knitting. Confinement is no longer perceived in terms of boundaries which curb female freedom but as a space of preserved intimacy. The "shuttered interiors" provide a soothing and relaxing darkness, the right breeding ground for these women's fertile imaginations, protected from the ills of a gnawing dictatorship.

Like a hidden force, the female voice is transmitted through Rosa's perspective which is further empowered by her textual domination of Anna's memoir, alternating crocheting with storytelling and such fantasies of female heroism as the story of La Carmellina. It is the story of a self-sacrificing woman who weaves a prickly pear dress to save her lover who has been transformed into a bird by a witch. While narrating the story, Rosa still "laughed all by herself in the cool dark room.... sighed, smilingly, as she dipped and looped and drew out the thread herself ... What then? Rosalba stopped crocheting" (*Father* 64-66). Rosa's seclusion is thus propitious for all sorts of entertaining activities, her manual work complementing the intellectual one. Another example is the pastry-cook mentally giving shape to her lover by imaginatively manipulating dough that is metaphorically making up her own mind, taking her destiny (and the man of her choice) in hand. Zabus adds that "The woman-potter, like the weaver, seems to find a common origin in prepatriarchal, gynocentric

societies” (“Power” 146). The type of confinement required by these crafts is thus synonymous with concentration and care, allowing these women to mould and materialize their subjectivity into objects, stories or recipes, leaving their daughters with an important symbolic heritage.

Marriage is also associated with confinement and is the only prospect for these women. This theme shows through in mother-daughter conversations about a southern Italian woman’s only reward, protection and aspiration in life being a husband. Such patriarchal authority embodied in father and husband keeps these women as eternal minors “it was a man’s duty to ... protect them until the right husband came along who would replace the father in her life” (*Father* 13). As a result, Italian women, especially in rural areas, are uneducated, illiterate housewives for whom marriage and motherhood are the most important sociopolitical roles to be undertaken. Another consequence is that spinsterhood is “stigmatized” as “deviant, parasitical, and antipatriotic” (De Grazia 70), worse than illegitimate sex. In *The Lost Father*, Rosa describes the spinster in the following terms “that nothing, that unbeing, that sump of ribaldry and pity and contempt” (69). Italian motherhood, on the other hand, was identified by the fascist regime with “the Catholic cult [of] the Mother of God ... the Virgin’s chastity, the joyous birth of Jesus, and the ... sacrifice of her only son ... the self-abnegating example of the Madonna” (De Grazia 70-71).

The main motivation behind these measures was to keep women dependent on male authority and ignorant, not only about what was outside their safely “shuttered” interiors. These housewives were equally kept in a “blackout on sex information” due to state intervention and the support of religion and patriarchal tradition in the campaign encouraging higher fertility rates in the fascist era (De Grazia 56-57). Knowing nothing about their own bodies means these women have no control over them. By constricting them to spatially limited and intellectually limiting domestic roles, men lead women to believe in no other alternatives for personal gratification or spiritual fulfillment, subsequently accusing them of being ‘naturally’ inadequate for work or achievements outside the home. “Mussolini’s ‘civilization of labor’ belittled women’s professional abilities and vocational skills not only in the eyes of ... men but in the view of women themselves” (De Grazia 168). Even Davide’s wife thinks to herself “I couldn’t contradict my Davide, I’m an ignorant woman” while she secretly

condones her sister-in-law's political action in the unions of early twentieth-century America. She addresses "the politically engagée" (Todd, "Marina" 12) Rosa through free indirect speech and second-person narration which intensify the effect of a textual feminine communion and bonding, unmediated by the male voice or perspective "I wanted to come with you ... I wanted to stand by you" (*Father* 180).

There are also ideological implications for "the embrace of interior settings" for southern Italian women, especially peasants, namely those of sanitizing patriarchal fascist (his)tory through the positioning of these women as "systematically inert and passive or peripheral existential witnesses of history"(Best 17,19). Warner's metabiography thus attempts to re-inscribe this effaced femininity by re-inserting its multiplicity of stories, lives and voices through the interstices of traditional male discourses, namely the official versions of the history of Italy.

Equally important, by displaying similar thematic characteristics to other Italian fictional and non-fictional works which give voice to oppressed Italian women during Fascism such as Romana Petri's novel *Alle Case Venie* and Nuto Revelli's oral histories in *L'annello forte*, Warner's *The Lost Father* also leaves the imprint of her own voice upon the anti-fascist Italian literary tradition in English.

In *The Lost Father*, illiteracy and domesticity are constructed by these male discourses as integral constituents of women's "essence." Davide's diaries are engrafted on two occasions upon Anna's memoirs: the immigration of the family to the United States and the circumstances of their lives there. In the following extract, he expresses his patriarchal views in relation to his wife and daughters in particular, and to women in general:

But for women – and women going out to work – it's different, especially in this city, with all its temptations. Pino doesn't understand there must be limits, and naturally, he doesn't know how to control Rosa. It's not his fault, she comes trailing trouble (he doesn't know how much!), but he lacks firmness. Rosa shames him, in my view, and he does not notice. (*Father* 188)

In his desire to protect his women, Davide unconsciously strives to control

them by keeping them ignorant and inexperienced, in a child-like state of dependence. One of the binary oppositions constructed by Italian patriarchy to justify this containment of the female intellect is that of innocent country women versus corrupt “city girls”, also reflected in the memoir extracts reporting Davide’s thoughts:

Danger to women was specially acute. The things they could learn could damage their nature in its essence. Knowledge was not a womanly way of life. That was one of the aspects of America he didn’t like.... The women knew too much; they weren’t protected from ugliness.... those city girls were like old women, they talked dirty, and they thought dirty. (*Father* 117-18)

Peasant housewives, on the other hand, are mystified as women “in the raw”, pure, unsophisticated, “uncouth” by nature because of their – legitimized – cloistered existence.⁵ These “country vs. city” or “cosmopolitanism vs. traditionalism” oppositions were part of the “gender technology of Fascism [which] saw signs of urban feminine modernity as counter to the government’s campaign for ‘ruralising’ and ‘maternalising’ the nation” (Best 29). Northern Italian cities as well as New York, personified as the emancipated female (and thus anti-fascist), have often been equated with immorality and decadence which Davide generalizes as “knowledge” and then associates with “danger”, “ugliness” and “dirt[iness].” He tells his sister Rosa “[y]ou’ll never make a city woman, thank God ... My sisters belong here, he told himself fiercely, like almonds, like cherries, like the percoco, which blends the sweetness of the almond and the apricot together, much better than those whores” (*Father* 46). Such a poetic comparison of his womenfolk to different types of fruit and their “sweetness” is an antipode to the blunt denomination of “whores.” While betraying a disturbing, almost incestuous eroticization of country girls and an obsessive association between experience and an active sex life (prostitution), Davide’s fruit metaphors also refer to his sisters’ reassuring rootedness in the

⁵ The backward rural southern areas of Italy are themselves economically and politically isolated from the industrialized northern areas.

conservative south which makes them unfit to live in the tainted cities.

Indeed, experience of the outside world, acquisition of social skills as well as intellectual and sexual maturation are deemed unfeminine by the southern Italian patriarch who reserves the power and privilege of this “knowledge” to the dominating male sphere “[h]e could talk, circulate, explore outside, in a way forbidden to her. He could bring her news” (*Father* 22). Italian patriarchal tradition even encouraged “boys ... to acquire a sexual education from prostitutes or from frank talk with older men. But for most girls, repression seems to have compounded the private inhibitions of parents and tutors. At best ... ignorance fed the romantic insouciance of well-protected girls” (De Grazia 56).

Crucially, the city versus country woman opposition also reflected the interweaving of gender with social issues for Italian women who were separated by sharp, geographically-bound class distinctions:

Fascist propaganda manufactured two female images. One was the donna-crisi [crisis woman] ... cosmopolitan, urbane, skinny, hysterical, decadent, and sterile. The other was the donna-madre [mother-woman] ... national, rural, floridly robust, tranquil, and prolific. These contrasting figures ... bore on class-based fertility differentials and social inequalities ... Middle-class women saw numerous children as an embarrassment: they further confirmed the otherness and bestiality of the lower orders ... that the “rich” had few children ... caused resentment not only against the wealthy but also against a regime that tolerated such inequalities of burdens and means. (De Grazia 73)

However, within the same memoir, Rosa subverts naturalized patriarchal images of female chastity and purity by contradicting them, first through auto-eroticism:

The need Rosa felt, the gap opening inside her, where a longing for something other than what lay within her sights sat in occupation, banging her drum and marking out a new rhythm and new steps for Rosa’s spinning wants, calling down the corridors of Rosa’s body to her innermost inguinal life, till her blood rang to the beat. (*Father* 60)

Rosa's "spinning" is a metaphor for female masturbation and orgasm. Such words and expressions as "opening", "banging her drum", "calling down the corridors of [her] body", "innermost" and "inguinal" describe what resembles a liberating Cixous-like *écriture féminine* in its championing of feminine bodily desires and sexual needs. Such physical wants have been mystified by Freud, especially in his work *The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person* (1926) in which, borrowing the phrase of an African explorer, he states "[w]e know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent' for psychology" (212). As a result, women's sexuality is portrayed as mysterious and impenetrable, as dangerous and unknown as an unexplored virgin jungle, and it continues to fascinate and puzzle all over the ages. In this particular case, feminine sexual desire and pleasure are denied and repudiated as sinful by southern Italian Catholic and patriarchal social codes. Through Anna's inset description within her grandfather's memoir, the primitive animality of Rosa's sensual experience is brought to light; its relentless calls for gratification and promise of imminent pleasure "mark[ing] out" a disruptive feminine rhythm. This bodily musicality violently strikes male censorship and its so-called rationality, breaking them apart to make room for its unrestrained power.

Second, Rosa's tryst with her brother's best friend and the consequent open expression of her passionate grief at the failure of their relationship firmly establish her sinful reputation in her village "the devil that fastens itself on a woman and wears her out with longing, had sunk its claws deep into Rosa ... Such heat in young women was a dangerous evil." Patriarchal mythopoeia of female desire as inherently bestial, evil and immoral strategically builds metaphors of a devil-like "state of possession", "malady", "like someone in a trance" (*Father* 127-30).

This association of female desire/sexuality with the supernatural phenomenon of possession is rooted in Catholic culture, especially in Italian rural areas where it is influenced by pagan superstitions and rituals. In his article "Catholic culture", Jeff Pratt describes Ernesto De Martino's view in *Sud e magia* that

there has been a dialectic between the Church and non-Christian conceptions ... magical practices [which] show a fundamental continuity with central parts of Catholic theology, for example with the rite of exorcism which is part of baptism ... Through baptism, all human beings have both a natural and a spiritual birth, which leads eventually to the possibility of sin. (133)

In the context of southern Italy, patriarchy thus uses the confluence of Catholic ideology and Italian peasant culture in a constant attempt to demonize female eroticism. Pratt adds “[the Church’s] general notions about ... morality were ... structured by gender ... For women ... a complex of beliefs around virginity ... created ... a problematic construction of women’s sexuality ... Teachings on morality have long focused primarily on the control of sexuality” (133-34). Interestingly, Paola Flippucci describes a form of possession called “Tarantism”, a trance-like dance allegedly caused by the imagined bite of a “mythical spider” (tarantula), to which she provides an anthropological explanation:

The ‘dance’ is neither a physiological reaction to spider bites, nor a psychological disorder, but a culturally specific, symbolically coherent response to personal crises, particularly those arising from the onset of puberty and the control of erotic desire in the context of southern peasant society’s regulation of sexuality and marriage. (63)

So “control” and “regulation” of eroticism and desire are the main impulses behind the emphatic religious concern with chastity as well as with the justifications for repression and its link to moral goodness.

The association of women and female eroticism with possession by the devil can be also found in historical records which take the shape of fictional chronicles by the monk and hagiographer Saint Jerome in *The Leto Bundle*. Although allegedly reported by a man, the text reconstructs the voice of Leto’s nurse, who displays a deep understanding of male sexism and its cunning feminization of the devil:

[Some men] avoid looking a woman in the eye. They're scared of a devil who, they've been told, lives curled up in the veins of a woman and can slither out and milk a man silently, invisibly, emptying him out until he becomes that woman's slave. She'll then eat all his money, his lands, his children, oh yes, she's altogether insatiable, is this devil, who comes with webbed claws and forked tail and bat's wings and a pretty face with a little dewy mouth hiding her sharp teeth. All disguise, all illusion, all mischief. This devil has many names, and I've heard men ... bring her up ... She's very dangerous to you, not to them. For these men go quickly on to the attack, claiming the attack came first from you; they appeal to this devil to cover their worst savagery. (*Bundle* 146)

There is a strong connotation of cannibalism in this quotation "milk", "emptying", "eat", "insatiable" accompanied by the typical teratology of devilishness like the "claws", "tail" and "sharp teeth." In reality, the description reflects male anxiety about women's beauty and erotic power. In other words, female sexual organs have the capacity to literally and metaphorically *absorb* maleness, thus making men vulnerable and powerless. The feminist Dworkin explains:

Men have admitted some form of sexual possession of themselves by women ... when they can characterize the women as ... evil and carnal ... the key to the possession ... is that the woman herself is magical and evil; through wickedness and magic she exerts illegitimate (therefore magical; therefore wicked; therefore originating in Satan) power over men. (75-76)

The danger of demonizing femaleness, fitting it into such negative and reductive roles, is to make it possible for men to legitimize their oppressive retaliation "claiming the attack came first from you; they appeal to this devil to cover their worst savagery." Moreover, such censorship of female sexual awakening and the negative imagery attached to it are inevitably internalized by these women to the extent of denying their sensations and desires, guiltily referring to their own genitals

as “dirty places” (*Father* 64) or their sexual needs as “the snake inside me” (*Bundle* 146).

Davide’s diaries also reflect this patriarchal vision of female desire through his views of Rosa, often expressed in dashes and brackets in repeated digressions. He thus disapprovingly describes his sister as follows “her head is full of follies ... I do not understand her, my own sister”, “one of those girls he had to protect from their own compulsions”, “wilful” with “a heat in her that burns too fiercely ... It is not altogether feminine”, “ – only the powers above can know where she inherited her delinquency, her heat, her perversity – ” (*Father* 147-48,124,167,188). This is another example of the male essentialization of sexually-active women (there is a constant repetition of “heat”) possessing a will of their own and listening to their bodily needs, which render them crazy, evil and, most importantly, unfeminine “[t]he threat of insanity, loss of self-control and irrationality ... are common labels pinned to women who subvert patriarchal convention” (Best 27). In “Discorso Dell’ Ascensione” [“Speech of the Ascension”], Mussolini describes “sentimentality ... as typical of ‘the female element ... whose sex often introduces into serious things its incorrigible mark of frivolity’” (qtd. in De Grazia 44). Even fascist eugenics in Italy supported a patriarchal “biological politics” by stating that women are “weak and imperfect in their generative apparatuses, intoxicated by voluptuary poisons ... their nervous and glandular systems in a state of imbalance because of emotional reasons” (Pende 233).

As a result, so-called scientific truths are in reality disguised stratagems which aim to deprive feminine actions of all credibility, seriousness and meaning. Rosa, for example, is divested of her femininity and reason because she fails to match the criteria of submissiveness, self-denial and chastity strategically associated with goodness and morality by religion and patriarchy. In reality, her very resistance to the brutality of these institutions’ symbolic invasion of her body and mind threatens male authority; men’s power of containment is thoroughly defeated by the counter-force of female sexuality, self-will and emotion.

Davide’s incapacity to attract “cosmopolitan ladies, ladies of elegance and city manners” the way his friend Tommaso does, has triggered his furious outburst during the Easter Day family lunch. Maddened by his friend’s wish to turn his countryside

sisters into city girls, Davide hurtfully tells Rosa she can never be as refined as these “ladies”, instinctively taking his jealousy out on her (*Father* 46). This is an example of unconscious male rivalry in which women are used and objectified as either tokens of virility (city girls) or emotional buffers (Rosa).

Textually speaking, Anna’s memoir extracts fill the gaps in Davide’s diaries with the voices of his womenfolk, creating a rich variety of perspectives. Free indirect speech plays an important role in these metabiographical extracts by allowing the reader access to female characters’ secret thoughts while exposing the muzzling force of patriarchy. This type of speech becomes symbolic of the female voice through its textual intrusion on, and disruption of the masculine conventions of authority in narratorial discourse. One example is the discrepancy between Rosa’s outer silence and her inner outspokenness:

Rosalba wanted to say to him, ‘I love you....I love you.’ She felt choking in her throat ... She said only, ‘Thank you.’ ... She could think of nothing more to say, because she wanted to say so much and it was all forbidden. She wanted to ask ... she would have liked to ask ... She would so like to speak to him of all that was inside her. But her jaw had locked, as if she had been bitten by an animal that kills its prey by robbing it of the ability to eat or hunt, pant or lick, or even howl. (*Father* 86)

The previous quotation portrays the symbolic patriarchal muzzles and bans which silence women like a curse or poison “choking ... forbidden ... jaw ... locked”. Rosa textually makes five attempts at speaking “all that was inside her” but the censorship on female speech is more powerful, too insidiously internalized to be easily vanquished, inevitably followed by deep frustration. Women are like “prey” enduring the ruthless patriarchal ‘law of nature’, their need for expression as vital as food. However, it is through her silences that Rosa speaks; thanks to Anna’s memoir, the female voice is no longer silenced due to metabiographical access to the unsaid.

Warner’s metabiographical deconstruction takes a more challenging turn when Davide’s diaries are scrutinized, invaded from the inside by an exclusively female readership: his wife and daughters. In “This Sex Which is not One”, Luce Irigaray

confines visual pleasure to the male erotic sphere but reading as the visual scrutiny of a text can also be gratifying for women:

The predominance of the visual ... is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies ... her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation. (364)

In the quotation that follows, the woman is no longer the object of male observation but the observing eye, reading, watching, judging and guiding the perspective of the text. Traditional gender roles are thus reversed and exposed as social constructs contingent on the “sex” of the author/reader. By reading the patriarch’s diaries, his women turn into authors, rewriting his life story and re-shaping his personality:

In death, Davide was enshrined ... transformed by prayer into an icon, he was more deeply imbued with the sacred mana of paternal power than ever the man ... had been when he was alive ... the man Davide had been spoke too clearly in the diaries. He allowed his weaknesses and his tics and gaps to show, he left a record of infringements on his authority, his entries stirred uneasy memories of feints successfully used to circumvent his power ... The gradual withdrawal from hearing him speak through his diary set a limit on the rebellion of Davide’s women; they offered his memory worship, but found that in order to continue doing so, they must not examine him – the person inside the image of the father – too closely. (*Father* 192)

The father is deified in death, idealized through such terms as “enshrined”, “icon” and “sacred mana.” These expressions function performatively by engraving the characteristics of “paternal power” and patriarchal “authority” upon the image of the father, turning him into a divine, supernatural power; unquestioned and blindly worshipped. However, the hidden processes of the power of patriarchy are uncovered

at the first opportunity of liberation Davide's women encounter after his death: the total transparency and vulnerability of the man behind the patriarch reflected in his diaries. Contradictions, ambiguities as well as confusion and uncertainty constitute as many breaches in the previously solid image of the father-cum-patriarch. As a result, even the female strategies to counter male power are made visible to their own perpetrators. Davide's diaries turn into a "record of infringements" and "feints successfully used to circumvent [male] power", an engraved memorial to small, undetected female victories and subversions.

In spite of this, these women's very uneasiness with their own liberation, even the slightest reference to it as a prospect, either in the diaries or in their own minds, uncovers the unfathomable powers of internalized patriarchy. Indeed, the latter makes for efficient self-censorship and self-denial as Davide's wife and daughters refuse to be freed, preferring to stay intellectually and emotionally captive to his mighty presence-in-absence. The best technique for them is to not scrutinize or "examine" his written self too much or "too closely" as too much intimacy would be dangerous, would make them face truths they may not be ready for as patriarchal women "[t]he sensibilities of conventional people' demanded that the male subject be portrayed in such a way that he continued to command respect within his family" (Briggs 247).

But can this conscious neglect of their own needs be the result of the force of habit or has such a lifelong patriarchal oppression numbed their rebelliousness, made it latent to the point of being forgotten? Or does not the fact that it is a chosen rather than an imposed solution paradoxically reflect female will-power? But a new female self would equally entail taking action and such responsibilities as the necessity to define and accept one's femininity, de-essentialize it by exorcizing reductive male perspectives. Although not initially made with Warner's novel in mind, Betty Friedan's comments on such reluctance are applicable to Davide's women's as

the terror of growing up ... as women were not permitted to grow before ... the terror of freedom to decide her own life, with no one to order which path she will take, the freedom and the necessity to take paths women before were not able to take ... simply refusing ... to face the question of their own identity. (Friedan 76)

However, Rosa's political activism in the United States is an example of liberation from the oppressing labels of femininity as weak, passive and ignorant, having found and imposed her own subjectivity and personality. Politics is then no longer the prerogative of the male sphere "all Rosa's power of dreaming, that power which she had feared would burn her up, had turned into practical and outgoing energy. It was a kind of miracle" (*Father* 180). Unlike Rosa, Davide's wife and daughters refuse to achieve such a liberating maturation by ignoring particular realities of his life and character. Among such (better) ignored truths is the fact that a father is also a man, a human being with his own weaknesses, sexual preferences and impulses. Davide's mythical image and fatherly aura are then more acceptable than reality, so the preservation of his authority and positive image depends on the haziness, the secrecy and mystery surrounding his thoughts and actions "Imma waved her hand at the pile of her father's diaries. 'Those were the old days. It's all different now. Look at the films, at Gary Cooper! At Bing Crosby!'" (*Father* 191) Symbolically waving away the truth that may be uncovered by his diaries, Imma's dismissive gesture re-freezes the patriarch within his past mould. In the years following their return from America, more than ever before, this younger generation of southern Italian women needed new male heroes and found renewed father figures in the mythical and charismatic American icons of the thirties.

But while Davide's diaries de-essentialize the stereotype of the insensitive, emotionless patriarch, the incongruities in his diaries undermine his sincere attempts at open-mindedness towards women. Aware of the contradictions of his menfolk concerning women's sexuality, Davide still strives in his youth to distance himself from what he considers excessive and disturbing in other men's conversations "[he] struggled to hold on to his differences with them, to keep doubting their words and their experience" (*Father* 28). Indeed, Davide prefers to cling to his own reassuring images of femininity mostly represented by his saint-like mother and sisters, as his male friends cling to their images of an uncontrollable, sexually-depraved femaleness.

Davide proudly recounts that as he gets older and raises his own family, he likes having daughters and rejects the prevalent mindset favoring male descendants:

He discovered that unlike some of his friends, he needed [Maria Filipa's] strength far more than he desired another male on the family tree. He enjoyed announcing his contempt for other fathers who lamented the births of daughters; in America, he informed them, dowries had been abolished, and it was considered more useful even among some families of the Italian community – as well as cheaper – to bring up girls. Girls were half the trouble boys were, of course. Except in one respect. (*Father* 13)

Davide naively thinks he is more open-minded than his friends simply because he can acknowledge the support and “strength” of his wife and boldly scorn fathers who “lament the birth of daughters.” However, his appreciation of female descendants turns out to be based on the wrong reasons. First, Davide’s desire to be “different”, showing off his originality (“enjoyed announcing”), uncovers an unconscious male competitiveness that uses *his* women as victorious trophies. Second, he starts by considering the materialistic and practical rather than emotional considerations for bringing up girls such as their being “useful” and “cheaper” than boys. He then praises them for being “half the trouble boys were”, referring to a naturalized female submissiveness made easier by their physical and mental confinement. In addition to that, by maintaining the same indisputable necessity to control their sexuality in the final omission – “Except in one respect” – it is clear that Davide has internalized patriarchal values too deeply to be aware of them.

However, while Davide is continually rejected by the male world because of his gentleness, he empathizes with his womenfolk so successfully that he comes to accept his own emotionality and what he considers his feminine side, which

became visible and eloquent to Davide in his exclusion from the conference between the other older men and Tommaso. He noted his mother’s fluttering glances across at her daughters, and he winced, as the understanding pierced him that the men were oblivious to him ... almost assuming his mother’s shape ... His mother was aching at the evidence before them both; her ache transmitted itself through her flesh like a smell, and he absorbed it. (*Father* 44-45)

Through a sort of animal-like telepathic communication, chemical reactions and signs exchanged with his mother, Davide's affinities with femaleness are experienced with pain and reluctance at first. Excluded from men's world by not taking part in political conversations, he is consequently silenced and ignored. However, it is through this very speechlessness and invisibility that Davide accesses the women's world. He notices and understands female body language, physically fusing with his mother through their simultaneous observations and thus experiences a symbolic metamorphosis into a woman. Interestingly, this section of the novel is called "The Snail Hunt", conveying images of hermaphroditism, physically and emotionally understanding both male and female spheres. Later in the novel, Davide goes as far as to express the desire to be female in one of his diaries' entries:

From the diary of Davide Pittagora

Re D'Italia, 8 April 1913

[...]When I see you, my own beloved wife, with your eyes hollowed by our son's appetite, I sometimes wish I could change places with you.... I would become the shipboard fool ... if I spoke aloud my thoughts.... I sometimes felt that I might be able to admit the unspeakable, that the desire I felt, that the dream I nourished of a lady to love ... contained a dream of something I might become through her and with her, perhaps like her. Beh! Enough of this. It's foolishness, and we men are fortune's darlings, not to bear children in sorrow and live in subjection all our livelong days. Yet if you, my darling, read me one day, perhaps you will appreciate my yearning to reach some resemblance to you. In your souls, you are more true to the soul itself – we men are beasts beside you. (*Father* 165-66)

Secrecy is a major component of the diary because this form of life writing is not supposed to be read by someone other than the diarist him/herself. The previous extract is, then, a different attempt at deconstructing patriarchal ideology by showing that a man can secretly desire to be, or to resemble, a woman while outwardly displaying a typical patriarchal attitude. This is a sort of containment of the female self through the "absorption" of its characteristics. It is relevant to draw a parallel at

this point with another of Warner's novels, *Indigo*, in which a mythological Caribbean sea monster called Manjiku swallows women in his desire to become one. One of the main reasons for wanting to be a woman is their birth-giving power (*Indigo* 154). Still, Davide rebukes himself for his ambivalent and unmanly thoughts, attempting to distance himself from his own desires or secret self "I would become the shipboard fool ... if I spoke aloud my thoughts ... Enough of this. It's foolishness!" While he, at the same time, sensitively expresses his "desire" and "dream" of love as "of something I might become through her and with her, perhaps like her." He then provides a typically patriarchal perspective on giving birth, one which echoes the Catholic mythology of women's deserved physical sufferings in menstruation and procreation. Warner explains how, in the fifth century, women were considered by Augustine and the "Fathers of the Church" to be indirectly responsible for the Fall:

Eve, cursed to bear children rather than blessed with motherhood ... In ... childbirth, the closeness of woman to all that is vile, lowly, corruptible, and material was epitomized; in the "curse" of menstruation, she lay closer to the beasts.... Because of the curse of Eve in Eden, the idea of woman's subjection was bound up in Christian thought with her role as mother and as temptress. (*Alone* 58)

Although Davide shows such conflicting responses to patriarchal ideologies, he keeps being overwhelmed by his inherent sensitivity. Quite unusually for a diary, he addresses his wife directly, molding his account to her reader's expectations as he explains his view of women as pure and not enslaved by "bestly" desires "if you, my darling, read me one day, perhaps you will appreciate my yearning to reach some resemblance to you." But does he really? Is it because he assumes that women are purer than men? Virginity represents purity because it is seen as the "natural" and original state of the female body by Christianity (*Alone* 73). If they are pure, why should they still be punished through the physical sufferings of child-bearing and menstruation? Such ambivalence in defining and establishing women's identity and

status betrays through Davide's diary the inconsistencies of a patriarchal ideology which desires the very characteristics of femininity it condemns.

However, as the situation of Warner's female characters and of other southern Italian women during the fascist era demonstrates, they should not be essentialized only as victims. They not only wittingly exploit their domestic space, turning confinement into an impetus for creativity, but some of them also later become politically-engaged in America, like Rosa who marches in protests against the fictionalized trials of Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti and takes part in union strikes at the garments factory in which she works. Todd explains the importance of such a fictional continuity in the support network of mothers, daughters and maids as "the all-female *complicity* between the Pittagora daughters ... [which] culminates in the relationship between the half-sisters Miranda and Xanthe ... and Serafine ("Marina" 5). Thinking about the memoir, Fantina entreatingly asks Anna to "write something nice about our mother, darling, won't you? I want you to be sure to do that. She wasn't a brilliant woman ... but she always kept us nice, and did everything she could ... She did it all by herself" (*Father* 257).

The "Other" Face of Religion

What Warner challengingly brings to light in such cultural histories as *Alone of All her Sex*, she equally denounces through her metabiographical fiction. In *Dark Wood*, forms of politicized religious mythopoeia are also uncovered. For instance, Gabriel's footnote and remarks as a biographer-cum-editor, often placed in brackets, expose the cunning and underhanded schemes of so-called biblical historians. Described through reconstructed speech, the latter are in the process of manipulating dates and concordances to suit their logic and personal version of truth; making the Chinese "Book of Changes" chronologically succeed the biblical Flood:

Pernet had to provide strong historical evidence to support his claim that the Book of Changes contained the Ancient Law. He and two colleagues in China, enthusiastic “Figurists”, conflated several famous “lawgivers” to arrive at a single historical personage ... It therefore became imperative for the Figurists to reconcile Chinese and Biblical chronology. (Footnote: Chinese tradition ascribed Book of Changes to legendary date ... before Flood ... But Pernet and followers not defeated by discrepancy ... Pernet declared firmly, “We know, from the certain proofs of scientific inquiry that the whole world was drowned in 3152 BC ... – no problem”). (*Dark Wood* 163-64)

The previous is an example of how some representatives of religious institutions like the Jesuit missionaries use their knowledge to manipulate history and people. Through the biographer’s satirical comments in brackets such as “no problem”, religious mythopoeia is ridiculed and exposed. Although the reader is actively included in the text, information is still mediated by the biographer’s personal views and reconstructed version of the past. As a result, the reader has a limited metabiographical access to the original documents and the editor’s biographical authority is preserved.

Through Andrew da Rocha’s diaries, myths about the Jesuit missionaries in China in the seventeenth century are also uncovered. It is crucial to note on this occasion the bibliography Warner exposes at the end of the novel. The latter lists the historical books she relied upon, thus showing the reader the factual accuracy of some fictionalized events. How would Warner use metabiography to achieve a critical missiology through one particular mission in the past? This is usually achieved by highlighting the almost constant discrepancy between what a priest is supposed to be and what he is or feels in reality. Some myths specifically related to Andrew and the ambivalence of his feelings about sociocultural and personal circumstances are gradually revealed throughout Gabriel’s translation (and reading) of the diaries “Andrew [’s] ... account of his life as a missionary was one of the most thorough and revealing ever written by a Jesuit” (*Dark Wood* 7). The contrast between appearances and truth is the most conspicuous aspect of metabiography:

The Jesuit missionary in Peking continually reproached himself in his diaries for allowing the style of life of a Chinese mandarin, which he led when he was in the Emperor[’s] favour, to seduce him into a Chinese way of thought. This was of its very nature inimical to the worship of a personal God. Andrew often cried out in pain and prayer for help from God, begging Him ... to guide His servant out of the abyss. The Jesuits had acquired magnificence, power, wealth, and Andrew was ashamed, although he often wore a hair shirt next to his skin under the silken robes and furs sent to him by the emperor. (*Dark Wood* 15)

Andrew and other Jesuits adjust to Chinese customs and rank-related privileges such as luxurious clothing, “trains of servants, litters to carry them about the streets” (*Dark Wood* 15). Although the Jesuits’ open-mindedness and flexibility earns them the attention and acceptance they need for the success of their mission, these Chinese social practices are contrary to the precepts of an ascetic life. Even missionaries of different faiths attack them, accusing them of “betraying [Christ] in satin” (*Dark Wood* 16). Andrew’s diary is reported by Gabriel through third-person narration and a free indirect speech which preserves the capital letters to “God” and related pronouns; “Him” and “His”, as well as words belonging to religious terminology “seduce”, “inimical”, “servant” and “abyss.” This type of metabiographical passage juxtaposes the myth of the success of the Jesuit mission with the hidden reality of their moral dilemma, in the same way as Andrew himself wears his guilt-laden “hair shirt under the silken robes and furs.”

The diary thus turns into a confessional, an outlet for the desperate priest’s hidden thoughts, for the cries of “pain”, “prayer for help” and “begging” of Andrew’s weaker self. Both Gabriel and the reader then access the Jesuit’s split personality as a priest:

Da Rocha felt such attacks keenly, and although he reported to his superior ... the high comedy of the friars’ antics, he confided serious doubts to his diary. The boundary between priest and mandarin in himself was being worn down, and he prayed in torment for help to shore it up again. (*Dark Wood* 16)

As a result, the myth of the unfailing priest is deconstructed by reflecting him as an unreliable man, with weaknesses and doubts, not only in relation to his faith but also to his sexual identity. Indeed, there is an interesting parallel between the biographer and his biographee in their unacknowledged homosexuality and its incidence on their already faltering and disillusioned Christian faith. These two extremely taboo issues participate in portraying the two priests from a different perspective, adding new dimensions to their personalities and personae and making Warner's metabiographical characterization richer and more realistic.

Other myths are related to the hypocrisies and dangers of the missionaries' ethnocentrism. In their firm belief that Christianity is a superior religion, missionaries condemn all other faiths as pagan and primitive. In *Dark Wood*, "The Jesuits only became court astronomers in order to convert the Chinese to Christianity" (31). Following only their ulterior motives, they never actually accept or even respect the Confucian religion but only pretend to accept its precepts. It is in this sense ironic that these missionaries should need to resort to long-term deception in order to spread their faith and preach their morality. During his biographical "itemizing of events", Gabriel concentrates on what becomes a displaced biographee: Joachim Pernet. The latter's study and interpretation of Chinese classics "in the light of Christian moral philosophy" is expounded in detail:

Pernet argued that the Chinese in antiquity had known the one true God, and that their knowledge of Him had been expounded in the Classics. These however had been damaged ... and the texts had become distorted, especially by the commentaries that had later been attached to them ... 'The great and wise Emperor ... would never have permitted our holy religion to take root in his dominions if he had entertained the least doubt that the fundamental maxims of the Christian religion ... were contrary to those of the ancient Chinese' ... Pernet argued that all passages from the I Ching that were tinged with polytheism or pantheism could be eliminated because they were later accretions that adulterated the original, and the pristine text of the Book of Changes could be reconstituted, whereupon it would appear a Christian book. (*Dark Wood* 162-63)

The previous extract is increasingly shocking as the priest's manipulation of Chinese texts and minds is becoming clearer. Although Pernet seems more open to Chinese Classics than Andrew, discussing them freely with the emperor, he is in reality applying his own Western knowledge to their interpretation and dismissing all other Chinese and Buddhist commentaries and additions as invalid, "fundamental misapprehension". Then Pernet methodically "reconstitutes" the evidence so that the purified, original version of the "Book of Changes" can be reworked and made to "appear a Christian book." This very attempt at culturally swallowing – or homogenizing, by suppressing the distinctiveness – in different religious books is a telling example of ethnocentrism. As a result, the myths about the Jesuits in China, hiding their manipulative conversion methods behind a fake openness, are uncovered. The issue of the morality of all missionaries is at stake in this case because one should be able to willingly choose a religion, not be tricked into it, let alone having it forcefully supplanted by other peoples' religious beliefs.

There are other ways in which missionaries' religious practices and beliefs are criticized through metabiography. In *Dark Wood*, the editor of da Rocha's diaries reacts critically to the notion of Christian martyrdom propounded by his fellow priest:

Gabriel compressed his dry lips together in repugnance at the bearing of Andrew's thought. The missionary stressed the martyrdom of the China mission ... Gabriel rebelled against the relish with which Andrew recounted the outrages and torments suffered by the priests, and the joyous manner in which he used them as bait for missionaries to China, arguing that a priest who merely died in the way to the East should be counted amongst the martyrs ... All this to attract greater numbers of missionaries, he thought. He found repellent the strong tradition of martyrdom within the Society to which he belonged. He was suspicious of the urge to immolate oneself, and too world-weary to tolerate fanaticism of any kind ... privately he doubted whether the thirst for the glory of a gory death was sent by God. (69-70)

The use of free indirect speech and of such words as "repugnance", "rebelled", "repellent", "suspicious" and "doubted", reflects Gabriel's strong disagreement with

the Jesuits' code of martyrdom. The description of his physical reactions highlights the visceral frankness of his views "compressing his dry lips together". What da Rocha and Christianity in general mystify as an honorable sacrifice to the glory of God, Gabriel denounces in terms of "fanaticism" and as sinful greed; "thirst" and "avid appetite for death", "the fascination with torture that he glimpsed in ... Andrew da Rocha's diaries." Physical suffering *per se* becomes pleasurable, a reward sought for its own sake. In this regard, the terminology of attractiveness and enjoyment is profuse "relish", "joyous", "bait", "urge." Such masochistic attitudes are at odds with religious asceticism which is characterized by an austere and chaste lifestyle. Violent martyrdom as a source of ecstatic pleasure-in-pain is thus believed to "fan ... rather than extinguish ... the flames of desire" (*Dark Wood* 70) because it reinforces and satisfies the priests' equivocal yearning for suffering.

In addition to that, through a thematic and structural time shift, one of Gabriel's childhood memories unravels the latent perversions underlying Christian acts of martyrdom, including the Crucifixion. Gabriel remembers how, after Sunday school, he and his brother decide to imitate the martyrs' sufferings they heard in stories told by the minister's wife. The two children take off their clothes and beat each other with a twig till they cry themselves to sleep. As a result, the unconscious of the subjective biographer is exposed as he recollects the ambiguous pleasure he felt at the beating:

Gabriel could not exorcize it, and Andrew da Rocha's naive thirst for pain and death unsettled in him once more the deposit of anxiety that had lain still in him so long.... Half a century later, Gabriel felt the memory grip him again. Shame, shame mixed with excitement held him fast.... It still troubled him, far, far more than the sin ... required. And Gabriel knew the reason, though he tried to push it out of his mind: the perversion he sensed in this childish imitation of Christ told him something important about his faith, something he didn't want to face. It stirred doubts about the idea of the Passion of Christ Himself. (*Dark Wood* 71-73)

The previous quotation first betrays the diaries' psychological influence upon the editor who is supposed to be emotionally detached from his/her biographical

research. Gabriel's subjectivity is laid bare through the metaphor of "unsettled ... deposit of anxiety" and by such emotions as "shame", "excitement" and confusion. He is catapulted by da Rocha's commentaries towards his childhood, "gripped" by its share of guilt and unsolved moral struggles. Most importantly, these metabiographical processes deconstruct the "Passion⁶ of Christ" and hagiographies as glorifications of a violent death. These religious texts thus create the myth of the ideal demise for every saint or prophet. Religious myths are also perpetuated by religious feasts, especially those dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Many of these celebrations take place in southern Italy thus adding a folkloric dimension to the myths through their cultural specificity. In *The Lost Father*, Anna's memoir undergoes a structural and thematic time shift when it describes Rosa's visual recollection:

There entered her mind a memory of the feast day of the Madonna della Bruna ... the men shouting and sobbing around the towering carnival float with the Madonna swaying at its apex ... Rosa ... wanted her to protest the hectic fury all around her ... as ... the volunteers ... grew more obstreperous ... and the crowd pressed up ... after three turns around the piazza they at last reached the platform in the middle ... put down the skewed tower ... The priest ... then gave the word, and with a roar, knives unsheathed, the ... crowd rushed the dais and slashed at the wood of the Virgin's triumphal car and, shouting aloud, carried it off in fragments; she continued to look upon it all unmoved from her perch, and someone came back glorying in his spoils ... with splinters for each of the family and a chunk the size of a brick for himself ... Franco put his in his mouth and chewed it up, he was teething at the time. But Rosa accepted hers, as an amulet. (101-2)

The memory is triggered by Rosa's sexual fantasizing about her encounter with her lover, in an association of eroticism and religion similar to Gabriel's previous cogitation about martyrdom in *Dark Wood*. The procession for the feast of the Madonna consists in turning the statue of the Virgin Mary three times around the

⁶ Story of Christ's suffering and death. This term also refers to other martyrs' stories, namely Saint Felicity and Saint Perpetua.

piazza [square], the men carrying it loudly crying and “shouting” in the process. These ritualistic practices, which look more like pagan idolatry, take on a barbaric turn as the crowd tears the procession “car” to pieces. The terminology of violence is prominent in such phrases as “hectic fury”, “with a roar”, “knives unsheathed”, “rushed”, “slashed”, “in fragments.” The metabiographical demystification of religious feasts and processions is further highlighted by irony. The Virgin’s wooden perch, supposedly a symbol of love and forgiveness, whips up sins like greed and fetishism instead “someone ... glorying in his spoils ... a chunk the size of a brick for himself.” In addition to that, the teething baby simply chews the holy piece of wood it is naively given. These ironic instances ridicule the Christian religion by demystifying its symbols, reducing them to their worldly, materialistic function, devoid of any significance.

In *Dark Wood*, the visions of the Virgin Mary are demystified through the Inquisition-like report of Gabriel. The Jesuit priest, who values intellect over feelings in relation to religion and faith, methodically shells the outer layers of the lay fascination with this kind of supernatural occurrence. Indeed, Warner explains the importance of such visions as a form of direct contact with the divine (*Alone* 302) and thus a revival of Christian faith. But Gabriel’s New Historical pragmatism makes him analyze the social circumstances of the visionary as an illegitimate child and thus as a pariah within a conservative society:

‘I believe that the young girl ... is the victim of delusions ... I should like to make plain certain features of her position which in my belief invalidate her visions ... ‘1. Maria Pia is the illegitimate daughter of a local priest, who has since been removed...Her mother consequently nurses a morbid grievance against the Church ... It is my considered opinion that this explains the strictures against the laxity of the clergy that Maria Pia has heard from the Virgin ... ‘2. Illegitimacy brands the mother and the child in a small village like Selinunte. They are cast out, and live on the margins of respectable society, not at its centre.’ (*Dark Wood* 203)

With an almost surgical precision, Gabriel demonstrates the socio-political motives behind the testimonies to the Virgin’s apparitions. After collecting facts and

material as a professional biographer would, the priest divests his report of the slightest trace of emotionalism in order to prove the veracity and logic of his discoveries and conclusions. The latter explain Maria's vision as a displaced form of anger against the hypocrisy of her father (a priest) and the institution he represents. Gabriel also considers the visionary's improved social status after a successful attempt at attracting attention and acquiring a greater sense of belonging to the structure of her village.

Religious myths can also take the shape of allegories which set examples of morality, of deserved punishments or rewarded loyalty. However, the original purpose of these stories can sometimes be corrupted by a storyteller's ulterior motives. In a different form of life writing engrafted upon Warner's novel *Indigo*, a colonizer's letter included in his *Family Memoir* makes vicious use of specific biblical stories. The latter's displaced context in the Caribbean islands at the time of English colonialism perpetrates wrong ideas about the colonized population:

The world is open to them, they can wander abroad at liberty until they discover those skills of civility to settle a land and make it their own. The Good Book has taught us their image, they must be outcasts with the mark of Cain upon them, Ishmaels for whom the savage wilderness is home till they come to know the wisdom of the Lord. (*Indigo* 201)

This is a letter sent by Kit Everard, one of the first colonizers of the Caribbean islands, to his would-be father-in-law and sponsor in England. Kit describes his victory against the islanders' rebellious "attack", or, in reality, their rightful attempt to re-possess their native land. The colonizer uses the biblical figure of the outcast like Cain who disobeys divine will and is banished or Ishmael's eternal exile in the woods. These religious references participate in portraying the Caribbean natives as primitive people and asocial pariahs, lacking "civility" and prone to betrayal. Such well-wrought mythopoeia demonizes the "Other", implicitly legitimizing his/her ill-treatment through invasion and racism.

It should also be noted that *How We Played: A Family Memoir* written by the

descendant of the first English settlers, is a collection of letters tracing the major developments of the imperialistic enterprise. Warner chose to engraft and include the epistolary parts of the memoir in order to uncover the exclusive perspective of the colonizer and allow it to be imaginatively supplemented by other views and visions. The analysis of the post-colonial mythography related to Warner's fictional strategy will be further developed in chapter four.

Folkloric Myths

As Warner considers southern Italy an under-explored region⁷, she strives to destroy stereotyped ideas of, and thus revive, this “repudiated culture” (Zabus, “Mingling” 119) mainly through its religious folklore. With its own local share of saints and miracles, this fictional version of Apulia not only triggers the reader's curiosity and fascination, but also gives a realistic and historical grounding to the novel itself. Corona expands on the idea of “repudiated culture” by explaining how fictional explorations of folklore in *The Lost Father* turn into “a means of transmission of cultural contexts (namely rural-Mediterranean) which have become subaltern and marginal ... circumstances to which official history hasn't given the deserved space”(146, 148).

In contrast with religious myths, folkloric ones are a combination of pagan beliefs or superstitions and culturally-specific stories. In Warner's metabiography, they are always linked to a particular country or city, “blend[ing] with the history of a people and a community, and giv[ing] it a certain perspective on its origins and destiny” (*Alone* 224). These folkloric myths are deeply connected with southern Italian and Caribbean locations at specific periods of time, functioning as a fictional and autobiographical revival of these neglected cultures. In relation to this, Zabus explains:

⁷ Warner explains to Tredell: “a part of Europe which ... I felt from an early age needed to be explained.”(31)

The Lost Father and *Indigo* are twinned family histories, which required Warner ‘to sit in judgment on [her]self’ ... Taking this as banner, Warner explores two of her ‘imaginary homelands’, Puglia, where her mother was raised during the Fascist years ... and ... the Caribbean, where the Warners, on her father’s side, were planters and slave-owners. (“Mingling” 121)

In *The Lost Father*, these myths are textually located within Anna’s memoirs and her grandfather’s diaries, culturally specific to the rural region of southern Italy, in the fictional “Ninfaia.” They can take the form of prejudiced ideas about natural or coincidental happenings that stem from unreasonable fears and anxieties such as superstitions or misconstrued religious precepts. These usually unfounded thoughts originate in southern Italian women’s social and political situation under the “Catholic-inspired cult of domesticity” and the fascist rule. Women, especially in rural areas, were denied education and important job positions as “the fascist state favored men at the expense of women in the ... labor market ... and society at large ... women’s procreative role now potentially defined every aspect of their social being. Thus ... their exclusion from politics ... from the entire public sphere” (De Grazia 5, 44).

Because of an inferior socio-political status that was imposed by the political regime’s misogynous and patriarchal “pronatalist policies”, women’s role was limited to procreation and domestic activities. Such traditional gender roles and the superiority of men had to be re-established after the socio-economic transformations incurred by World War One, namely female labor. ⁸ Rimma Tsvasman adds that “Italian mothers of all classes were made to feel incompetent ... dependent” (n. pag.). So having internalized these “roles”, female peasants come to reflect in *The Lost Father* “a distilling juxtaposition of faith and superstition” (Todd, “Marina” 12) in the protection of their family members:

⁸ In “Women under Italian Fascism”, De Grand explains: “There was a massive substitution of female for male labour between 1915 and 1918 to meet the demands of a lengthy war.” (949)

It fell to the women to surround the family with barriers against harm, to keep a thorough observance of the laws of luck: never to talk of death was the cardinal rule ... never to destroy a spider's web, or crush its maker (drowning was all right), never to put your hat down on a bed, or death would mistake the next sleeper for his own ... always to say three Hail Marys if an owl cried in the day; and so on and so forth through a most intricate catechism ... Gestures of propitiation also helped to beguile this Fate from noticing an undeserved excess of happiness she might want to redress; it was necessary to place offerings at crossroad shrines, to fill the vases before the Madonnas at the corners of streets ... Maria Filippa performed an assiduous series of gestures to snatch days of tranquility out of her talons ... daily flirted and flattered faceless destiny. (11)

In the previous quotation, the repetition of “never” and “always” for the enumeration of superstitious dos and don'ts reflects these women's obsession with Fate and luck. But why should the task of protecting the family, especially husbands and sons, be specifically female? Southern Italian women's sphere being circumscribed to domestic and religious activities while their menfolk worked or emigrated, they devote more time and energy to such matters, vesting their identity in the male-related roles of wife, daughter and mother. So these women take to a male-protection mission which gives more significance to their lives within a sexist political atmosphere which constantly undermines their role as independent women and human beings. It is clear that such actions as destroying spider webs or not putting one's hat on a bed, performed to avoid so-called mishaps, have no scientific explanation or logical foundation. The narratorial intervention through the use of brackets not only gives more precision as to the appropriate killing method for a spider, but also highlights the irony of the act “(drowning was all right).” Also important, the mixture of superstitious acts with religious incantations such as “Hail Marys ... catechism ... Madonnas” is used to uncover the influence of ancient pagan rites on Catholicism in Italian rural areas. Instead of condemning such practices, religion thus complements superstitious rituals. This is deeply related to the “religious history of the South” in which De Martino “focused on practices marginal to official Catholicism, which he saw as ‘relics’ of former belief and ritual systems

... Their continuation in the present ... exposed the ‘internal limits’ ... of high Catholicism” (qtd. in Filippucci 61). Such “non-rational forms of knowledge” or “laws of luck” played an important role in the peasants’ personal or economic and political crises, helping them deal with loss, poverty and social inequality (Filippucci 65) at a time when religion no longer sufficed. Finally, the fact that “Fate” is at once feminized and demonized, with “her raptor’s wings” and “her talons”, keeps up the misogynous mythopoeia of the female as gratuitously evil. These folkloric myths represent southern Italian women in two different ways; either as ignorant, mistaking faith for its outward rituals, or as vain, needing to be seduced and flattered to avert their spite. Other examples of superstitions metabiographically deconstructed by Anna’s memoir are the “Evil Eye” and the “gates of sleep” (*Father* 60, 158). The latter are believed to foretell the future:

When you were eight, you had only heard of people with such powers of foresight ... Your mother spoke of the twin gates of sleep, the one made of ivory through which false dreams stream to trick the sleeper with false fears and, worse, false hopes. But the other entrance to the realm of sleep, the Gate of Horn, opens to release shades who always tell the truth when they appear in dreams. The problem is, said Maria Filippa to her daughters ... that most people can’t tell which gate their dreams have used. Not until things turn out as they must. Only a few seers, gifted with a third eye, can distinguish them at the time of dreaming. (*Father* 158-59)

The previous speech alternates Anna’s second-person address to her mother and Maria Filippa’s free indirect speech addressed to her own daughters. The power of “foresight” in dreams, of the “third eye”, is strongly linked to superstitions, especially those pertaining to death. The manner in which folkloric myths are perpetuated is thus metabiographically uncovered through Anna’s authorial interventions. The mother-daughter transmission of knowledge permeates the paragraph, whether it takes place within the fictionalized southern Italian female community or beyond it, between Anna and her own mother.

The local myths denouncing the economic and social conditions of that area

under fascism were also transmitted by maternal word of mouth and informed by a tradition of anti-fascist Italian literature. Warner explains:

A marginal foreigner ... Southern Italy belongs in a despised category ... a part of Europe which ... I felt from an early age needed to be explained ... this wasn't the Italy of romance, or the Italy of sophistication, of the Renaissance ... This was the Italy of Carlo Levi, this was where Christ stopped. (Tredell 31)

Anna's memoir thus exposes and explores myths as a woman, daughter and as a novelist. In the previous quotation, she (Warner) acknowledges her need to explore the culture of southern Italy in particular. In her attempt at un-marginalizing those rural areas and their inhabitants in *The Lost Father*, Warner's metabiographical fiction seeks to restore their historical importance. Also important in this respect is Warner's method of deconstructing folkloric myths by re-positioning what seems "inevitable and symbolic" within its socioeconomic context. For example, the "reflex of misogyny" (Tredell 39) is internalized by southern Italian women and filters through their portrayal of the female as inherently evil (as with "Fate").

In *Dark Wood*, visions of the Virgin Mary are linked to the geographical context of Sicily:

Ecstatic falls ... flourish in areas where local identity and autonomy are being eroded; poor, backward areas sliding back into an even more primitive form of existence because the revolution in contemporary living is leaving them behind. Claims to an active spiritual experience attempt to redress the loss and give importance to a place and a people who are steadily losing position ... this provides a model for the situation of: a. Selinunte ... it is losing its young men to the bigger cities and consequently dwindling in size, wealth and influence. (204)

Gabriel is here explaining the interrelatedness between poverty in the village of Selinunte and the miraculous apparitions of the Virgin as an economic booster. This

type of analysis is reminiscent of anti-fascist Italian literature and its desire to retrieve the centrality of southern Italian rural areas by contextualizing the causes and effects of their marginalization.

Folkloric myths are intertwined not only with these socio-political issues but also with gender concerns. In the following extract from *The Lost Father*, the Italian fairy tale of “La Carmellina” whose storyteller(s), heroine and villainess are all female is told by Rosa and included within Anna’s memoir through the *mise en abîme* technique:

As she dipped the hook into the web, looped the stitch, drew out the thread, augmented the next stitch ... and repeated the process, sitting in the cool dark room, she considered feats of courage and cleverness. Inside her she felt a power she could never manage to express; it was trapped inside her like water under the ground and she was the only one with the dowser’s twigs who knew where it lay and could bring it to the surface. She thought again of the clever pastry-cook who baked her man to her liking, and of La Carmellina, who lost her true love [to] the sorceress Zenaida [who] changed him into a songbird.... So Rosalba dipped the hook, looped the stitch, drew out the thread, and laughed all by herself in the cool dark room.... What then? Rosalba stopped crocheting.... Had Rosalba, no, Carmellina broken the spell? (*Father* 63-6)

Rosa herself identifies and empathizes with the female protagonist of the fairy tale who personifies every young southern Italian woman’s fantasies of love and empowerment. Being physically and morally secluded, constantly kept indoors, the latter’s lives are usually confined to such domestic tasks as knitting and baking. While telling the story to herself, Rosa’s thoughts and interaction with the events are thus textually interwoven with her knitting movements. In case the story’s ending encounters a narrative *cul-de-sac*, the “crocheting” itself comes to a temporary halt. The folkloric myths uncovered by the young woman fantasizing about La Carmellina’s courage and willpower denounce the social pressures of a patriarchal society upon its womenfolk. Women are not inherently weak, they are contained, disempowered and reduced to social helplessness by men, religion and politics. They can be in love but only within the strict boundaries set by their gender.

By metamorphosing the only nameless man in the story into a vulnerable bird who needs saving, the female self gains supernatural powers, its perspective is broadened and new dimensions are added to it. Indeed, the simile of underground water as a hidden force as well as the metaphor of the pastry-cook giving shape to her lover are images of an empowered woman, making up her own mind and taking her destiny in hand. The use of digressive questions in brackets confuses the reader as to the identity of the storyteller; whether it is Rosa or Anna herself who is wondering “(what was [Zenaida] underneath? A donkey? A goat? Her feet felt sharp and heavy and round; her toes like horn.)” This blend of narrators reinforces the female stance in its oral and manual (knitting/baking) transmission of knowledge and experience from one woman to the other. At some point, Rosa turns from a narrator to a spectator of the heroine’s ordeals as the story materialises in front of her eyes “Carmellina’s calvary ... of which Rosa followed every moment” (*Father* 64-65).

Another important comment should be made about the reader’s implication in the fairy tale. Such metabiographical phrases as “You could tell”, “What then?”, and anachronistic comments as “like the pilgrims who drag their tongues along the ground during the Tomb ritual before Easter” or “she knew how much bosses love flattery and crawling” (*Father* 64-66), seem incongruous in a supposedly timeless fairy tale. These comments bestow immediacy and an oral quality upon the storytelling, thus establishing a closer relationship to the reader by inviting his/her views and participation.

Finally, a series of questions present the reader with alternative endings to the story, inviting participation again. The names of the tale’s characters are taken over by those of Rosa’s entourage: the lover becomes Tommaso, Carmellina turns into Rosa, then this is rectified in a conversational manner and with oral-like spontaneity “Rosalba, no, Carmellina.” Caterina then takes Zenaida’s dress and role as Rosa’s rival. The final “What then?” not only concerns the tale but also what is going to happen in Rosa’s own life and relationship with Tommaso. Like a refrain, the series of “what then” provides a frame to the end of the story which is never divulged to the reader as suspense is maintained. As a consequence, a sort of double *mise en abîme* is achieved: Carmellina’s story is included within Anna’s memoir as they constitute parallel plots, one imaginary and magical, the other more realistic, while sharing the

same themes: love, female self-sacrifice and rivalry. They are both included in turn within Warner's novel.

Other instances of gender-related folkloric myths deconstructed by Anna's memoirs include southern Italian virginity rituals and chastity codes "[i]n some of the harsh villages of the hinterland, the sheets of the bridal night were still unfurled on the morning after; the spots on them displayed heraldically from the balcony of the house)" (*Father* 67). This barbaric custom of displaying the bride's blood spots as a proud testimony to her purity again uncovers the important outreach of morality on the female body. In close connection to this, Warner comments on another folkloric practice:

[What] crushes women in the Catholic cult of purity is its connection with beauty ... in Catholic countries ... this extraordinary paradox between the cult of women's purity – guardianship of daughters, seclusion of women ... and the afternoon procession when men watch women and comment on their physical attributes ... the *passeggiata* in Italy: these are Mediterranean customs, which have grown up and flourished in Catholic cultures. The sexuality of woman is her identity. It is therefore watched, assessed, praised or despised. (Kearney 98)

Warner explains the collusion between patriarchal Mediterranean cultures and Catholicism in the containment of the female body and the reduction of the woman to a sexual object to be hidden and then contemplated at will. Rosa's frustration at the moment of the *passeggiata* [*walk*] thus reflects women's painful internalization of these sexist cultural and religious beauty standards.

Warner's metabiography is historicized when it uncovers such mysterious customs as mourning rituals and the "sombre" apparel of married women, clothing female bodies in a deadly darkness which keeps shrouding them in a silent and anonymous uniformity, like forgotten ghosts of the past:

A single death in the family charred them all, turning young and

old into sable-winged crow-women.... Davide recognised his own people in the mourners of the tomb wall-paintings, women ... in a chorus line to send off the dead with exuberant and noisy rites. Keening by the side of the corpse, the professional *nacarena* still howled her tale of the deceased ... knitting up into the web of the dirge the separate individuals of the community ... through the pulled blinds from the house marked with black crosses and hung with newly dyed banners of death; women's voices, giving birth to the eternal soul. (*Father* 74)

As described above, the most conspicuous signs of death and mourning are displayed by women wearing black clothing and “howling” dirges. This type of oral transmission of the past of a deceased person is a characteristic of female (hi)storytelling, constantly crosscut by references to weaving “spinning it out from scraps ... then delivering it bound and knotted into a customary warp of praise ... knitting up into the web ... The mourner's story patterned the life ... so that ... shortcomings were obliterated by the larger ... design.” The most symbolic of domestic chores thus turns into a metaphor for controlling fate, “weaving” stories and constructing myths that preserve respectability in the fashion of biographical mythopoeia. Through their role as professional mourners, these customs also reflect the importance of women's voices and tales to southern Italian peasants as the former provide cement bonds within the community by making people's life stories equal, bound by the invisible thread of “a democracy of death” (*Father* 74).

In relation to this type of professional mourning, Ernesto De Martino, an Italian ethnologist, studied the peasant culture and folklore of the Italian South in the 1940s and 50s by positioning their customs within specific socio-economic circumstances. De Martino's study

linked the practice of ritualized funeral weeping, traceable to classical times, in contemporary Southern Italy to the extreme material deprivation of the peasants ... Constantly aware ‘of the limited efficacy of human action’ ... the peasants had a fragile sense of self, in danger of ‘floundering’ at times of crisis, like the death of kin. This condition of psychological misery particularly affected women, who were even more oppressed than men in this

socio-economic context. Ritualized weeping was a technique to alleviate self-destructive impulses unleashed by grief, containing psychological collapse. (Filippucci 61)

So De Martino not only links the existence of such mourning customs to their historical origins but also to the social conditions and gender of their practitioners. By exposing such folkloric myths, Warner thus uncovers often neglected minorities and their history of oppression and resistance.

Duelling customs in the Italian south are also an important part of its folklore and at the core of Anna's memoir. As this practice gradually evolves through history, it only retains its mythical dimension:

In my teenage eye, my duelling grandfather levelled his pistol, narrowed his smouldering eyes over the sights and pressed ... Davide would appear to me dressed in frock coat and high collar ... standing sideways, poised, his shooting hand flung outwards like a single arm of the crucified Christ ... or else I saw him in ribbed and finned and damascened armour, like the St Georges of Carpaccio and Uccello ... Oh, the duelist ... continues the practice of knight errantry, shielding damsels and offering all varmints – and infernal monsters – just vengeance. To me, the calcareous landscape of the south, gaping with the cave lairs of dragons, was the natural backdrop of the avenger's exploits. I saw your father against it; tilting with the beast, while the sister he was fighting for stood by. (*Father* 136)

The previous is a first-person narration extract which represents Anna's metabiographical comments and autobiographical additions. These textual shifts in time, place and person rhythmically punctuate the memoir and expand its themes. In this case, the narrator presents a variety of epic and heroic backgrounds to the story of Davide who is first imagined as an elegant dandy, then a crucified Christ, before turning into a dragon-killing saint as portrayed by Italian Renaissance paintings. The narrator thus acknowledges the invasion of her mind's eye and perspective by "chivalrous" literature and iconography, in addition to her personal fascination with duels and revenge themes. Anna's subjectivity is constantly emphasized by such

phrases as “In my teenage eye”, “Oh, the duelist” and the repetition of “to me” and “I saw.” Through these biased descriptions, Davide is mythologized, idealized as a hero, even sanctified as a martyr; uncovering in the process the inner mechanisms of mythopoeia in Anna’s memoir. The female memoirist’s vision of the Italian south and its topography is influenced by her romantic, stereotyped fantasies of knights, “damsels” and “dragons.” She then addresses her mother using second-person narration, picturing her (Anna’s) dreamy visions of a heroic Italian grandfather. The memoir is thus no longer only about Davide, but extends beyond him to Anna’s own internalized myths. Todd explains that “[t]he point Warner seems to be making here is that male myths ... are often constructed, that is dissected and reassembled, by women as well as men, although the precise nature of the women’s roles varies according to the age in which they live” (“Marina” 12). So Anna’s cultural and temporal distance from the event participates in embellishing what would otherwise be a common occurrence in Fantina’s time. This example of folkloric myth uncovers the deep emotional involvement related to this kind of memoir writing and the effects of the memoirist’s unconscious desires on her perspective and judgment. It is also interesting to point out Anna’s comment on the evolution of the duel phenomenon from history to myth:

The Lombards brought trial by combat to Italy ... But somewhere down the years the outcome of the duel no longer proved the innocence of the victor or the wrongdoing of the loser. Duelling became an end in itself, the only way to expiate a wrong in honour, and set aside the consequence ... it did not matter who the victor was. The duel was the thing.... Today, nobody remembers what the slander was in the first place. You don’t: I’m still trying to piece it together from your scraps of memory. (*Father* 136-37)

Anna explains how the duel has gradually lost its original purpose along with its historical significance. It is no longer a means of performing acts of justice but has become a means of entertainment, “an end in itself.” Duelling has been converted into a way of making amends for all types of wrongdoings and its outcome has become unimportant. In the case of Davide’s duel, it is the reason why the memoir is

written in the first place; a legend whose origins have been forgotten and in need for reconstruction. The parallel between the mythification of this ancestral practice and that of Anna's grandfather is obvious.

Folkloric myths in Warner's metabiography also encompass those pertaining to Caribbean culture. In *Indigo*, the letter sent by Gillian to her daughter Xanthe mentions the Caribbean notion of "*sangay* ... a word from the ancient island vocabulary, meaning a kind of "preternatural insight and power" (Li 82). This is a folkloric myth denoting the sixth sense, an almost magical power. On the one hand, *sangay* is mysteriously associated with the witch Sycorax and with Seraphine, both Caribbean female storytellers. On the other hand, it characterizes a necessary quality for the colonial game of Flinders.⁹ Not only does it provide a continuum between the past and the present of English-Caribbean histories, it also resuscitates a pre-Creole vocabulary as well as a "repressed local history" and its share of "native oral wisdom and tradition" (Lopez 218).

As a summary, Warner keeps trying to centralize such peripheral areas as the Caribbean and southern Italy through the deconstruction of folkloric myths pertaining to those areas within engrafted memoirs and letters. Fictionally repairing the wrongs of regionalism and colonialism, she succeeds in reviving these particular cultures while retaining the universal and unifying quality of storytelling and stories (Zabus, "Spinning" 520).

Coupe comments on the importance of preserving cultures in *The Lost Father* which

in part a documentation of the malign influence on the country of the dictator ... bears witness to the gradual destruction of a way of life, the erosion of principles of conduct, the subversion of shared values ... Davide Pittagora walks among the 'ruins' of a culture, trying desperately to find meaning ... In the context of the supremacy of the false, fascist father, Davide sees his world collapsing around him. Yet still he clings to his understanding of traditional lore, as he seeks to protect his wife and daughters from the squalor and brutality of the regime ... Nor had his earlier

⁹ Imaginary game invented by Warner, very similar to cricket and baseball, it functions as an allegory for English imperialism.

attempt at emigration to the States inspired him to consider that the old Italy might be better replaced by a bustling, brash culture of commerce. (“Marina” 53-55)

The Lost Father turns into a fictional documentary, sensitizing readers to the morally perverting effects of Fascism on Italian values and culture, reflected in such words as “malign”, “erosion”, and “subversion.” The result is a “way of life” in “ruins”, reminiscent of the impact of English colonialism which also irrevocably deviated and corrupted the Caribbean course of life. As a truthful and loving father, Davide is seeking to protect his women along with southern Italian culture and its “old ways” by preserving its “lore” and traditions, bestowing meaning upon its past and identity in the face of a ruthless dictatorship of forgetfulness. Anna has the same impulse a few decades later, “desperate to connect to a tradition, and to affirm some sort of continuity” (Coupe 57) with her memory of a country she has never known.

It is also crucial to point out the constant female powerful presences and rich perspectives within *The Lost Father* and *Indigo*. Always siding with the neglected “Other”, Warner’s feminized worlds play an important role in re-imposing matriarchal orders, even as fictional alternatives. The next chapter will expand on this theme through a theoretical positioning of gender, ethnic and racial myths within Warner’s metabiography.

Chapter Four:

Voices of the Dead: Metabiographical Traces of the Oppressed

As soon as they begin to speak, at the same time as they're taught their names, they can be taught that their territory is black.... Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. Don't move, you might fall.... And so we have internalized this horror of the dark. (Cixous 349)

The notion of darkness as addressed by Hélène Cixous takes into consideration different perspectives of, and pertinent associations with, the concept of blackness. The latter may first be defined as chromatically synonymous with unidentifiable danger, evil, even madness as demonstrated, for instance, by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The novel is an exploration of the 'dark continent' of Africa; that of the Congo's inhabitants and dense jungle. But it is also a journey into the recesses of the unconscious and its latent savagery, embodied by Kurtz's "unspeakable rites", in the degeneration of morality and civilization; "the black of the jungle for Conrad is the dark of the sleeping unconscious for Freud" (Karl 125).

Darkness also stands for a disturbing strangeness and foreignness usually experienced in the encounter with culturally, geographically, and socially different or remote people. Foreignness is disturbing because it is usually unintelligible, unknown to the Western mind; it belongs to a different "socio-symbolic contract" or order (Kristeva, "Women" 868). So instead of attempting to understand this strangeness and encourage reciprocally equal relationships, the foreign(er) is marginalized, made into an "other", "an unessential, negatively characterized object" as opposed to the familiar, the normative 'self' (Hegel 542).

Julia Kristeva is, like Cixous, a major figure of the French feminism of the seventies, both of them developing Lacan's thoughts and revealing a concern for "the specific problems raised by women's relation to writing and language" (Moi 97).

Kristeva explains through Freud's concept of "the uncanny" in psychoanalysis how foreignness or "otherness ... lies *within* the self" and the latter projects all his/her own fears and darkneses such as destructive violence, sexual perversion or anguish of death, "outward onto others" as an ontological survival strategy. In other words, each person's unconscious desires or repressed impulses are brought to the surface at the moment of the encounter with the other and 'fastened' on him/her in an attempt to preserve one's individuality and sense of identity:

Foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided ... the ... self ... projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien *double*, uncanny and demoniacal ... into which it expels the share of destruction it cannot contain. (Kristeva 181, 183-4)

This brutal process of "otherizing" and "demonizing" can affect different groups of people; women, social and racial minorities who lost or never had a voice of their own, either in life, history, or in literature "all the oppressed, woman ... the slave, the servant, the indigent, all who depend upon the caprices of a master" (De Beauvoir 1270). The "Master" is in this context the person or group which considers their own values and systems as universal and superior. The first consequence of "otherizing" is that these minorities may inspire fear or scorn because of the systematic mythification of their identities by such ideologies as patriarchy and racism. It is important to point out that the material explored in this chapter is wider than simply biography, and will include considerations of other types of historical and quasi-historical writing.

In the colonial Caribbean context, it is the native female islander's sexuality which is reflected as primitive and attractive at once, although not blessed by the Christian God, the only way to "true" salvation and morality. This constructionist theory can then also be applied to racism, which justifies other forms of oppression based on the mythified ethnic or racial background of the oppressed.

bell hooks' definition in "Postmodern Blackness" is pertinent in this case, first because of its focus on stereotypes or ethnic and racial "myths" associated with

blackness and the need to deconstruct such essentialist notions. Second, hooks herself being at the same time black and a woman, reflects black women's double burden of sexist patriarchy within their own community and the colonialist perception emanating from mainstream white male culture and from other feminists:

Colonial imperialist paradigms ... represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy. This discourse created the idea of the "primitive" and promoted the notion of an "authentic" experience, seeing as "natural" those expressions of [blackness] which conformed to a pre-existing pattern or stereotype. (2514)

In *Indigo*, for example, the colonizer's "genteel" letters to his fiancée or his patron either include female islanders within the sexless denomination of "natives" or portray them as "lovely" and "temperate" despite their "savage" customs and "heathen" way of life, "[t]he natives are amenable for all their savage state.... I know them to be human creatures made in God's image too, the womenfolk most lovely and most temperate (for the most part)" (152,201). The addition in brackets expresses more than the colonizer would want to disclose; namely the cruel physical torture inflicted upon Sycorax and his sexual intercourse with another "native" (Ariel) and the child she bears him as a result. These women, however, are never allowed to speak for, or about, themselves lest they expose that same colonizer's barbaric sexual and economic exploitation revealed by the narrative preceding the engrafted letters. The former describe how, on the first colonial encounter, both Sycorax's tree and body are put on fire, then extinguished by the English invaders who "threw a coat over her and put out the flames; she was half asphyxiated and could not speak even if they had been able to understand her." After that, they carry on their colonialist agenda "[t]hese women aren't our enemies ... they can help us. They may teach us the secrets of the isle – decipher its noises for us – guide us to its treasures" (*Indigo* 132, 13).

As a result, in addition to being silenced, these Caribbean female natives are doubly colonized by being portrayed as sexually and spiritually accessible to the

“penetrating” forces of English civilization and Christianity. In reality, these myths are used to satisfy male and European-centred exotic curiosity and arrogance by symbolically, literally and textually smothering the female voice. It is precisely these textual silences and omissions, when the white masculine perspective leaves no space for the native feminine, which make the latter conspicuous by its absence. Such gaps reveal the male colonizer’s text’s failure to mention anything other than the very characteristics which further implant patriarchal and imperialistic “domesticated”¹ ideals of the female native.

What Warner achieves in *Indigo* is imposing “the power of Sycorax and the centrality of Miranda ... [are] complementary [as] one challenges imperialism and the other challenges patriarchy, the novel [thus] demonstrates the intimate connection between those forces” (Coupe 76). *Indigo* also succeeds in “keep[ing] alive the memory of Sycorax and the female history that lies behind male myths of cultural self-origination” (Connor 194) such as the allegedly fateful discovery of the Caribbean and the building of its colonies.

It would be interesting to note at this point another race and gender-related hierarchical opposition established by the white male colonizer/patriarch between black and white women. This additional strategy of devaluation and erasure is an example of “racist/sexist iconography that depicts white women as innocent and therefore desirable and black woman as controlling-domineering therefore undesirable” (hooks, “Male Heroes” 557). Rebecca, Kit’s English wife-to-be, is addressed in his letters with such virginal denominations as “dear golden head”, “sweet lady”² and described as finding gratification in the simplest domestic tasks. Most importantly, she is carefully kept ignorant of such tainting truths as the infidelity of her beloved (*Indigo* 151,207). However, despite being considered superior to unruly black women, the reality for this submissive white woman is that she is merely a commodity in the financial arrangement between her father (Kit’s patron) and her would-be-husband. Rebecca is unwittingly a colonized woman herself, another Shakespearean Miranda who never utters a single word in the whole

¹ The idea of the “domesticated Other” created by the imperialist enterprise is further explained in Spivak’s article “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” in *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, 904.

² These denominations are also reminiscent of Catholic prayers to the Virgin Mary as in “Hail Mary of Gold” and “O Sweet Lady Mary”.

novel. In addition to that, the name of “Rebecca” has two interesting connections. The first is historical as “Lady Rebecca” was the baptising name of Pocahontas, another example of an Amerindian woman who never tells her own version of the story. The second connection is biblical: in Genesis, Isaac’s wife Rebecca “conceived twins”, one was “white” and the other “red”, a telling parallel to Ariel’s half-English, half-Arawak baby Roukoubé (“Red Bear Cub”) (Hulme 145). The latter is a symbol of the taboo of miscegenation resulting from the colonization of the Caribbean woman’s body whose subjectivity is supplanted by Kit’s seed/story.

Another consequence of “otherizing” is the “control of consciousness” or the psychological internalization of such a falsely attributed “pattern or stereotype” which leads to self-denial and self-loathing. Kathleen Barry explains how women keep

internalizing the values of the colonizer and actively participating in carrying out the colonization of one’s self and one’s sex ... Male identification is the act whereby women place men above women, including themselves, in credibility, status, and importance in most situations, regardless of the comparative quality the women may bring to the situation. (172)

Interestingly, Barry’s definition can also be applied to ethnic and racial minorities in terms of the “colonization” of their minds by white Western values and the consequent alienation from their own integrity and self-esteem. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said explains that “[a]lmost all colonial schemes begin with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, ‘equal’, and fit” (96). In other words, the colonized are thought of as unfit to govern themselves or know their own interests because of their alleged inferiority. For example, Aylin Atilla explains that “Superstitious beliefs of the natives are frequently mentioned by European settlers in order to emphasize the superiority of the European culture” (5), a superiority that comes to be internalized by the “natives” themselves.

Internalization is defined by the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* as “the acceptance or absorption, especially of a way of behaving or thinking

as [one's] own, often from repeated experience, so that it becomes a natural and important part of [one's] character." Another term for internalization is "introjection" or the "naturalization" of the other's feelings, desires, points of view and so forth, "transposing" external perceptions inside oneself to the point of identifying with them and suppressing one's own internal perceptions. This process is associated with still another one; "projection", which is the attribution of repressed, rejected or unacknowledged qualities and desires in oneself, to another person one dislikes. The racist, for example, "projects his/her own faults and ... inclinations onto the group s/he hates" (Sarup 33), considering it to be the polar opposition of his/her own. It gives him/her "real targets for hatreds [s/he] might otherwise expend on [him/herself]" (Young Bruehl 32). This is all about "the idealization of the self [being] dependent on a devalorization of a debased Other" (Samuels 108). This is reminiscent of the previously mentioned Kristevan theory of the "foreignness within" in *Strangers to Ourselves* (181).

This is one of the many consequences of imperialist colonization which Warner isolates in two examples in her novels: *Indigo*'s seventeenth-century English colonization of the Caribbean islands and that of Abyssinia and Libya in 1911 and 1935 by fascist Italy in *The Lost Father*. The "otherizing" of the natives incurred by these historical events, then by immigration of southern Italians to America, is also exposed. Such mythical generalizations are deeply rooted in the white male psyche like Platonic essences which are unchangeable and eternal and serve to justify the necessity of containment and control of a "potential counterforce" (Rich 1596). Through such mythopoeic discourses as literature, science, religion and psychoanalysis, the white Western male subject is thus recurrently defined against the woman and the non-white as object and as "other." In the introduction to *Orientalism*, Edward Said provides a further explanation of Eurocentrism:

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-

European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness ... In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand. (7)

Myths of the “Orient”, the Caribbean and southern Italy, reflected through Warner’s engrafted diaries and letters as undisputed “essences”, are in reality partial perspectives of complex cultural conditions, a mixture of fact and fiction, of “empirical reality [and] a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections” (Said 8). How can these myths be deconstructed through these same life writings?

In this chapter, gender and race-related myths will be analysed and the processes of their making will serve the purpose of their unmaking through the metabiographical stories of Warner’s female and male characters. Indeed, secret desires, frustration and suffering like those caused by motherhood, exile and other social pressures are revealed. Racial, ethnic, and colonial mythology will also unfold through letters, chronicles, emails and laments of dead or resuscitated mothers in *Indigo* and *The Leto Bundle*.

Voices of the Reincarnated and “Anonymous Females”

Warner’s metabiographical exploration of patriarchal myths in southern Italy is complemented by her subsequent fictional focus on Caribbean and English colonial history. In *Indigo*, Warner restores the female point of view to *The Tempest*, a Shakespearean story whose perspective is exclusively male. As Jennifer Sparrow explains:

Warner ... who [has] returned to *The Tempest* in order to displace the racially-based Prospero/Caliban binary through the character of Miranda.... [In] *Indigo* ... restores the woman's part to the drama of the New World by giving voice to Miranda and Sycorax. In an interview, Warner says of *Indigo*, "Shakespeare was writing the father's plot. Prospero works out the plot for his daughter. Prospero's wife is conspicuously absent ... So I tried to write the daughter's plot, to take the story from the other side and show how the daughter extricates herself from the father's plot." (120-22)

However, as most of Warner's female characters are mainly revenants, witches and divinities, conventional histories overlook their presences and thus constitute incomplete and inadequate portraits of the past. So by relying upon unconventional types of life writing, Warner provides metabiographical versions of silenced but resilient women, braving all obstacles including death. These feminine versions are present in *Indigo* but also in *The Leto Bundle*, a novel of a wider mythological and spatio-temporal scope going as far back as ancient and medieval times. As Leto magically traverses time and changes names (Leto, Lattice, Ella, Nellie) looking for a home to save her children, Sycorax, a foster mother, is resurrected "in[to] an altered form" after a brutal death and brings about "a kind of salvation" to her descendants (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 33). The main link between the two novels in this context is what Julia Kristeva calls

myths of resurrection which, in all religious beliefs, perpetuate the vestige of an anterior or concomitant maternal cult, right up to its most recent elaboration, Christianity, in which the body of the Virgin Mother does not die but moves from one spatiality to another within the same time via dormition ... or via assumption. ("Women's Time" 862)

More specifically, Warner resorts to free indirect speech and italics to restore the voices of these self-sacrificing penitent mothers who, emboldened by fate and love, transform into heroines by upturning traditional gender roles and images of femininity. Sycorax and Leto respectively address the daughter and son they have

lost or given away for adoption. Whether written in italics in unpunctuated passages (Leto), or in free indirect speech (Sycorax) engrafted throughout the novels, these first-person textual presences stand out as the voices of femininity. These are discursively resuscitated and are “posthumous threat(s)” (Hulme 131) of witchcraft and divine revenge whose spells and curses are dreaded by all. Such female discourses are subversive because they function textually and thematically as a counter-current to white male historical (written) records and their concomitant myths.

Among these, colonial myths narrate the beginnings or foundation of empires and cities. These discourses are replete with omissions, presenting only partial truths which usually aim at justifying the colonizers’ displacement of the natives, their unequal treatment and violent dispossession. In relation to the British empire, Hulme singles out the “epic myth of origin for the emerging imperial nation” and explains that letters, among other types of (life) writings, “constitute that epic” (90), one which still ignores the original history and culture of the Caribbean. In *Indigo*, the charter sent from the King of England to Kit Everard (205-6) is the fictionalized version of the “Text of Grant” sent on September thirteenth 1625 (“in the first year of our reign”) and included in *Sir Thomas Warner: Pioneer of the West Indies, a Chronicle of His Family by Aucher Warner* (28-33). This chronicle tells the story of Marina Warner’s ancestor who settled the colony of Saint Christopher on the island of Saint Kitts (inspired the name of the fictional colonizer), the first English colony in the Caribbean. The two letters written by Kit are imagined but still inspired by reality for Thomas Warner secured the patronage of “James Hay, Earl of Carlisle” (33). Kit’s letters also imitate the conventional themes and form of explorers’ epistles from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries such as Christopher Columbus’s. These letters constitute part of the official “grand narratives” and major references of European colonial history.

So while one history is being made, another is gradually unmade by being submitted to Eurocentric standards of “civilization”. Coupe explains “[a]s the white settlers fulfilled the destiny which they identified with history – or, more exactly, ‘History’ with a capital H – they rewrote the myth of those who became subject to them ... convinced of their God-given right to force it into their own model of

civilization” (“Marina” 73).

Two major strands are recurrent in these letters, both historical and fictionalized: the colonial enterprise as part of divine will; the legal right of monarchs, and the systematic demonizing or infantilizing of the natives to legitimize their expropriation. Ironically, the colonizer and letter writer is called “Kit” which is short for Christopher, suggesting an analogy with Christopher Columbus. These letters are strategically engrafted by Warner and juxtaposed with the fictionally narrated events of Caribbean history, outlining the first contact between the islanders and the English, then the first battle that officially establishes the colony on Caribbean territory.

It is important to note that these letters are extracts from *How We Played: A Family Memoir* written by Sir Anthony Everard, one of the proud descendants of the first colonizer. This memoir bestows authenticity upon the epistles while the latter achieve a sense of immediacy. These letters are used as evidence documenting the official version of (hi)story. Interestingly, the memoir also belongs to a male tradition of English sports literature such as cricket, as in C.L.R. James’s *Beyond a Boundary*³, which Warner parodies by inventing the game of “Flinders”, a grotesque re-staging of the colonial invasion (Warner, “Rich Pickings” 31). She describes this fictional game as perpetuating the myth of the British Empire because it “ritualizes and orchestrates the old relations of power and conquest” (Fraser 367). So the distorting mimicry of the European literary and non-literary canon has many important effects, some of which are explained by Linda Hutcheon:

Intertextual parody of canonical ... European classics is one mode of appropriating and reformulating – with significant change – the dominant white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Eurocentric culture ... As Said has been arguing, there is a relation of mutual interdependence of the histories of the dominated and the dominators. (130)

³ C.L.R. James was a Creole historian and cricket player who wrote a first-person account of the history of cricket.

In other words, by parodying these types of traditionally male “grand narratives” of history and juxtaposing them with her own imaginatively reconstructed version of the story of the (female) “dominated”, Warner’s metabiographical extracts expose the partiality of the former while filling the gaps left by their textual omissions:

History is conveyed through story-telling, pointing to a deficiency in colonial history and providing the reparatory tale. Thus Warner gives voice to the daughterly tales and pays tribute to the storytellers of the Caribbean as well as the pre-Gutenberg, oral culture of women. (Zabus, “Mingling” 122)

Warner’s strategy is thus necessary because male records are always preserved and disseminated while female culture and history simply fade away. Ironically, the only poetic remains of the Shakespearean canon in *Indigo* are Ariel’s mysterious songs, preserved by the novel because the androgynous spirit has been feminized and historicized as an Arawak and thus given more centrality as a character.

The main difference between Kit’s two letters is that one is addressed to his patron and father-in-law, the other to his would-be wife Rebecca. As a result, the colonizer’s persona is carefully constructed to adapt itself to the gender and status of its addressee. What these letters have in common is their contrast with the reality of their (reconstructed) circumstances which reinforces their ironic effect and exposes their author’s critical agenda.

The first letter, addressed to Rebecca, immediately follows two pertinent events. These narratives in-between the letters connect the gaps left by historical records. First, the violent initial encounter between colonizer and natives entails a physical attack on the island, injuring its female inhabitants then holding them hostage. Second, there is an episode of male masturbation disturbingly punctuated by prayer through a mixture of first and third-person narration. This narratorial technique ensures the immediacy of Kit’s prayer and emphasizes its synchronicity with masturbation. The continuous flow of narration and prayer through free indirect speech gradually accelerates the event towards its climax, finally alienating the

reader from the alleged holiness of prayer:

Kit Everard was praying, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I'll not want.' I want, he thought, I want, I want her still, but I subdued my want. He turned over on the ground ... and squeezed himself. Dear Lord God ... help me not become today a murderer and a ravisher.... I shall do no evil.... thou art with me; thy rod and staff shall comfort me. He was holding himself rhythmically now.... Give me your rod, he implored.... He groaned at his blasphemy.... 'Lord.... save me from this place, from the magic in it.' With a series of short spasms, he ceased, and lying back quietly now ... he wiped his hand on the ground.... I shall found a garden in these Western Isles, he swore.... The fruit was still not in his grasp, but he would reach it.... he could baptise the maiden, they could be saved together ... his heathen maiden ... he would cherish her beneath the fruit-laden tree. (*Indigo* 149-50)

This is not the first instance of the combination of sexuality and prayer in a desperate attempt at self-reassuring redemption in Warner's novels⁴ but its impact on the metabiographical extract that follows it is important. The terminology of this kind of sexuality, sublimated as it is by religious transcendence, is reminiscent of female saints' descriptions of their visions and the psychosomatic "ecstasies" they experience as a result. Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux writes "I felt myself suddenly wounded by a shaft of fire so ardent that I thought to die of it ... Ah, what a fire, what sweetness" (West 139). Saint Teresa of Avila's phraseology is even riper in sexual suggestiveness:

I saw an angel close by me ... I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed ... to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain that I could not wish to be rid of it. (West 100)

⁴ In *The Lost Father*, Caterina prays to protect herself from the sin of masturbation.

There is a disturbing ambiguity in these extracts, a mixture of erotic sensuality and inviolable devoutness. Phallic and rigid objects such as “shaft” and “spear” pierce and inflame these saints’ bodies/texts in a way similar to Kit’s imagery of “rod” and “staff.” Vita Sackville-West explains in *The Eagle and The Dove* “the love of Christ ... the ecstasy of surrender to the heavenly Bridegroom, such as we find in Thérèse de Lisieux ... [some] cynically attribute it to a psychological, neuropathic cause from which sex, however innocently and unawaredly, is not absent” (29). Sackville-West later links these “fits” to “erotomania” or “extreme sexual passion”:

The purest possible desire for devotion to an ideal image ... combined with a human longing for dependence, guidance, and protection which it naturally seeks in the most powerful conception known to it ... the overwhelming God. Such a control relieves the fearful soul of vacillation and even of responsibility; problems are handed over into a stronger keeping. (141)

Textually speaking, free indirect speech allows the reader to access Kit’s secret thoughts while third-person narration describes his actions. Far from being a saint, Kit is an intruder and a ravisher who relinquishes his responsibility for the persecution of Caribbean islanders to God’s power and protection. While Sackville-West’s saints passionately yearn for the love of God and Christ, Kit yearns for lust and material possessions. Moreover, despite the sexual terminology used in the trances, the prayer of both “Thérèses” retains a poetic and holy quality; while Kit’s mundane requests desecrate his invocations.

As his erotic desire is expressed in terms of “want” and “fruit”, his terminology also betrays feelings of guilt, loaded as it is with self-contradicting statements and acts. Then Kit’s prayer takes on a sexual turn, especially with the repetition of the verb “I want” and its confusing double meaning of greed and lust regarding the island and Ariel. The expression “thy rod” becomes suggestive of the phallic symbol and the motif of a renewed “garden of Eden” has gruesome associations with sexual and moral rape. Kit tries to conjure up divine guidance

while committing the very sacrilege he disguises as noble restraint.

The binary opposition of “magic”/“heathen” versus Christian baptism and salvation serves the purpose of handing the responsibility over to God’s protection while justifying the ravishing of the female body/land. Hulme provides a pertinent explanation for this “central regulating mechanism of colonial discourse” as “a psychic process – involving repression and projection – and an ideological process – whereby the success of the projection confirms the need for the community to defend itself against the projected threat, thereby closing the circle and perpetuating it” (85). The “projected threat” in this case is the alleged “magic” of the island and the prejudiced idea of a sexually-charged primitiveness attributed to Ariel as a female native. In this regard, Dworkin links sexuality to racism through the notion of “dirt” “[r]acially-degraded ... women ... are also devalued as dirt ... sexualized as dirty; desired as dirty.... Racist ideology spells out how the degraded race is filthy and intensely sexed, dirty and sensual, contaminating” (203). So the racist colonizer is unconsciously driven by and attracted to sexual impulses which he strives to suppress in himself and abhors in the colonized other. When such an internal conflict goes hand in hand with imperialistic stakes, forms of sexual violence are perpetrated on the native female body. MacKinnon is less radical than Dworkin in her attempt to define sexual violence and rape in legal terms, rather than dismiss all forms of heterosexual intercourse as an act of violent sexual penetration. MacKinnon’s following definition is applicable to the colonizer’s assault on the native woman/island “[i]n feminist analysis, a rape is not an isolated event or moral transgression or individual interchange gone wrong but an act of terrorism and torture within a systemic context of group subjection, like lynching” (MacKinnon 172). Kit’s “want” to possess the island (while dispossessing its inhabitants) and the exotic female in order to materialize his Edenic dream of luxuriance and “heathen hoydens” uncovers the ambiguities and duplicity of a “sexual imperialism” (Chedgzoy 124) which seeks to demean and subordinate Caribbean women.

Kit’s prayer and seemingly benign ambitions are tainted with his primitive “groaning” and rhythmic movements, climaxing in the down-to-earth wiping of his semen-stained hand on the ground in an initial metaphorical “seeding” of the island. There is then a telling parallel between the mechanical principles of prayer and those

of masturbation in their ritualistically repetitive gestures followed by spiritual or physical release and well-being. This analogy not only deconstructs the body versus soul hierarchical opposition, but uncovers the artificiality of religious invocations which lose their symbolic power when they are taken out of their conventional context.

Another disturbing metaphor of colonization as an enforced sexual act is extended in *The Lost Father*:

The Leader proclaimed that Italy was his woman, and he would cajole and swear until she yielded to him in her entirety; there was direction and might and other strong meat in his wooing, as well as sweet flattery and heady enrapturement as the big round head thrust forward over the balcony in the Piazza Venezia and roared, strong jaws jutting, spraying the crowd with bursts of his own gunfire, cramming them with promises of pleasure and power under his expert caresses.... the voice exploded from the trumpets ... printing the Leader's features in spectral wrinkles ... like a gigantic shadow arching over the body of the land whose reciprocating passion he demanded.... (He told his journalists privately that no woman had ever resisted him – his force always overcame them in the end). (204-5)

The description of the Leader's metaphorical beastly coercion of a feminized land for the sake of imperial expansion becomes more and more literal as ambiguous verbs pertaining to male sexuality and insemination, mixing seduction with a rapist's threats, add up in the text "the big round head thrust forward", "roared", "jutting" and "spraying" then "exploded". It is the reflection of what Mussolini is doing politically, economically and ideologically to African colonies, enforcing his fascism upon them after having subdued *his* Italian women "[h]istorically, this is Mussolini himself, the brutal 'father' who wins over the women of the nation ... [a] savage exaggeration of the existing machismo of a patriarchal culture" (Coupe 54, 60).

Another Mussolinian figure, Kit's patriarchal and imperialistic ambitions are more conspicuous in the second letter in *Indigo*. Introduced by the textual formalities of explorers' literature, the colonizer's letter re-names the island

“Everhope” thus re-appropriating Caribbean space and also time through the expression “Year of Our Lord 1619.” This letter increases the ironical effect of contrast with reality in its passionate idealization of the island full of “enchantments”, its exaggeratedly lyrical descriptions of “shining surf”, “marvelous bounty” and “gay birds”, destined to please his “dear golden head” through decorous and flowery language. In reality, the so-called heroic and virtuous pioneer is adapting and adjusting the cruel reality of colonization to – what he thinks of as – the naive and *pure* mind of his cousin and wife-to-be Rebecca. He also frames the letter with an account of; “our safe passage and happy issue of our venture”, a manipulative storytelling technique of embellishment and idealization through omission also used with children. Romantic love phrases also abound in Kit’s letter:

How I have longed to have you in my arms.... [to be] worthy of your high esteem....[You are] as soft as the lock of hair I keep with me always.... [With] your lively discernment.... Companion of my heart ... the Lord must incline his will when such a one as you petitions him.... [I hope] to be worthy of your hand. (*Indigo* 151-53)

The stark contrast of this prudish flattery with the brutality of the previous masturbation episode in his burning desire for Ariel further exposes the debased truth behind the image of the noble, chaste pioneer and husband-to-be.

Kit’s exalted discourse then climaxes into mythological references to “Cadmus when he sowed the Theban field,” (*Indigo* 153) comparing his colonizing enterprise to the heroic act of founding a city. He then addresses Rebecca again in a seventeenth-century poetic tone but, instead of appealing for her love, he invites her to share his conquest “[f]ly here to stand by my side, sweet lady, for we can further the walls of Christendom on this isle in goodly state. Then shall my happiness be complete” (*Indigo* 153). This total erasure of Caribbean history and its local religious beliefs evokes the strong link between colonialism and Christianity “a militant Christianity associated with a medieval colonialism” (Hulme 84), a Eurocentric ideology going as far back as the Crusades.

After detailing the flora of the island to Rebecca, Kit describes the “natives”, knowingly refraining from specifying their gender. There is no mention of a sensual “heathen maiden” or a carbonized “ugly hag” (*Indigo* 150, 141); these female presences are utterly de-sexualized by the generalizing label of race:

The natives who abide here practise this art [indigo dyeing] most skillfully... The natives are amenable for all their savage state, and impart their wisdom to us in exchange for fribbling items: a mere hairpin will set them to an ecstasy of delight, for they are like to children and have no metals.... a stout stockade I am causing to be built. Though these measures are not due to necessity, as the people here are glad to be of service to us and treat us with courtesy in which not a little deference is admixed, for as I say they count many simple things great wonders: my fine paste shoe buckles ... inspired much clicking of teeth and clucking of tongues. (*Indigo* 152-53)

The adjectives used by the colonizer confirm the myth of the “noble savage.”⁵ For instance, “amenable” in this context means that these islanders are ready to be influenced, empty vessels to be filled with Western *wisdom*, as if they have no culture of their own in “all their savage state.” The patronizing English colonizer thus posits himself as civilized and cultured while demeaning and infantilizing the “natives” in such a way as to reflect their alleged inferiority and ignorance. Traced as far back as the fifth century B.C. Herodotus and his “investigation of Greece’s ‘barbarian’ neighbours ... This discourse [of savagery] was hegemonic in the sense that it provided a popular vocabulary for constituting ‘otherness’ and was based on ‘psychic projection’” (Hulme 21). Although at the same time inferring that the “Others” do have knowledge and skills, they are still inferior to those of the colonizer which they “treat ... with ... deference.” In addition to being discredited as humans endowed with reason, the “natives” are further silenced by having their language reduced to unintelligible “clicking” and “clucking” sounds.

The letter writer completely overlooks the native female bravery and resistance

⁵ The concept of the “noble savage” is an ethnocentric Western idealization of indigenous populations as being inherently docile and good by “nature”.

to his attack and denies his own desire for “tense intimacy” (Connor 193) with the very woman he considers a “heathen” and a “savage.” Indeed, the crossing of cultural boundaries through “miscegenation” and its “unholy” consequences has always been a taboo, even in Warner’s own family:

The story of Indian and Philip Warner⁶ and of the unspoken blood knot that bound colonizer and colonized, master and slave, brother and brother, became the inspiration for *Indigo*. Through “convenient acts of memory and sins of omission ... the story of miscegenation in the early colonies is never told.” (qtd. in Sparrow 122)

These strategic omissions or “effacement[s] in disclosure” are described by Gayatri Spivak as “epistemic violence ... the ... obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity ... in the contest of colonial production, the [Other] has no history and cannot speak, the ... female [Other] is even more deeply in shadow” (“The Subaltern” 2115,2120,2125). Warner’s engrafted letters thus “sketch ‘the itinerary of the trace’ that the silenced [Other] has left ... mark the sites where the s/he was effaced, and ... delineate the discourses that did the effacing” (Spivak, “The Subaltern” 2113). More specifically, “traces” of the story of the colonized female Other are to be found in Kit’s discursive mythification of the colonial enterprise as unhampered by any resistance or danger, romanticizing and embellishing a barbaric invasion justified by religion, patriotism, and a sheer superiority of means “apart from the few native people as I say, there is no one here to give us hindrance in our enterprise” (*Indigo* 153). As a result, the colonialist and ethnocentric myth-making mechanism is set into motion, writing ‘His’ history while ignoring that of the natives and of the women in particular.

Another discursive “trace” in Kit’s letter is the alleged courteousness of his relationships with “the natives”, in contradiction with the initial attack and the subsequent building of a “stout stockade.” The addition of the phrase “though these measures are not due to necessity” is a detail which reflects Kit’s unacknowledged

⁶ Half-brothers, one of Creole, the other of English descent.

anguish as to the fulfillment of his hidden colonizing agenda.

This second letter follows another violent episode of fighting and bloodshed on a bigger scale than the first attack, which eventually implants Kit's colony on the Caribbean island after nearly decimating its inhabitants. Kit's letter is a mythopoeic discourse which relies on various strategies to sublimate the English invasion. First, the persona constructed by Kit is that of a good Christian citizen and pioneer who strives to prove worthy of patronage by counting his achievements on the island. Second, the letter uses an imagery of darkness and light from its very beginning "mighty Saturn threw his sinister shadow heavy upon me ... and many ... grievous events had combined to cloud my spirits that now are light as a summer breeze again" (*Indigo* 199). This biblical Manichean motif serves the purpose of demonizing the islanders, turning them into "fiendish" enemies while mythifying the image of the colonizer as a valiant protector of "God's kingdom." The initial gloominess of the situation thus heightens the "light of the righteous"⁷ effect of the colonizer's final victory:

We had intelligence that our neighbours in this land were embarked upon a most fiendish and treacherous Enterprise.... A villainous raid upon the Stockade ... would have robbed us of all we have assured thus far by the Grace of God. Such however is the mighty Providence that guides us, we were adverted in due time withal and haply able to forestall the deadly peril to our settlement, that is still but a mewling infant scarce able to totter on bandy legs. After fierce and bloody struggles ... alas, we were able to declare the day ours and the Battle of Sloop's Bight a chapter in the history of God's kingdom come.... Your lordship will smile I trust at the progress your loving son is making for the Company.... I expect to double the yield of Tobacco ... but I am sensible that you desire us to put more land under the cane, this sugar trade being the more profitable at home. (*Indigo* 199-201)

Third, flattery supplements Kit's discourse and allows him to juggle religious legitimacy, historical authority and economic considerations "[y]our Lordship will

⁷ "The righteous are like a light shining brightly; the wicked are like a lamp flickering out." (Proverbs 13:9)

smile I trust at the progress your loving son is making for the Company; to whom we are beholden for our wherewithal and our signal progress in this land”(Indigo 201). Most importantly, this letter comes after Warner’s account of how Ariel unwittingly betrays her tribe’s intention to retaliate:

He was suspicious of her welcome, her sudden ardour, her newfound tongue to kiss and to speak. Then he understood ... she was bidding farewell.... He had it then, as clear as a map of well-charted route unfolded on the captain’s table, what lay in store for him and the settlement. (Indigo 186-87)

It is precisely because of the primordial role of his female lover in uncovering the attack that Kit’s omission becomes conspicuous, especially when he *anonymizes* Ariel as “intelligence” and uses a telling passive voice “we were adverted in due time”. The female story is also further contained by/within “mighty Providence” or the “textual trope rooted in the essentially narrative paradigm of Christianity” according to which many English colonists believed that the discovery and possession of these islands was their “manifest destiny” (Hulme 97,104-5). So Kit’s rationalisations serve two mythifying purposes: circumventing the taboo issue of miscegenation and imputing the colonial enterprise to divine decree.

However, Kit later abandons the racial generalization of “natives” for the more specific “women” and “womenfolk” in the following quotation:

We gave our permission that the women should gather up the dead and give them burial according to the fashion of this people – ‘tis said they strip the flesh and griddle it for a delicacy beforetimes, but I for one do not give this credence. I know them to be human creatures made in God’s image too. (Indigo 201)

Even while denying the idea of cannibalism and so *generously* accommodating these people into his concept of “God’s image”, the viciously gory description it provides

still reflects Kit's deep anguish and implicitly justifies his invasion. Hulme claims that cannibalism was only wishful thinking on the part of some European explorers, as it has never been accurately proved either by scientific or historical means as an established social practice (79). So the analysis of these two metabiographical extracts demonstrates that the colonizer either effaces or essentializes the islanders, male or female, depending on the purpose, and on the addressee, of his letters.

Kit's strategic construction of colonial history also includes the denial of his relationship with Ariel for, should that affair be brought to light, his credibility as a devoted pioneer and loyal fiancé would be irretrievably destroyed "Kit could not tell [Rebecca] how he had managed to win such a victory against the local savages. It was a unique triumph in the annals of attempted colonisation in the Americas: he had been extraordinarily well-prepared for their attack" (*Indigo* 207). The continual use of prejudiced generalizations such as "savages" turns into a complementary "dispossession from individuality, identity, and belonging" as well as humanity (Dworkin 211).

But Kit is not the only participant in the colonial history-making process and Ariel, like a Caribbean Pocahontas, is enmeshed in another colonizer's version of her own life and subjectivity. A priest called "Père Labat" writes a memoir about the colony and the islanders, a form of travel writing that is an integral part of colonial discourse. Labat is a historical character cited in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* as a "Dominican missionary" who wrote *The Memoirs of Père Labat* between 1694 and 1705 and *Nouveau Voyage aux Isles de l'Amérique* in 1724.⁸ Père Labat in *Indigo* and Saint Jerome in *The Leto Bundle* both existed as authoritative historians strongly connected to Christianity. Is Warner using them to bestow a mock-authenticity upon her metabiography? In a postmodern fashion, she is rather undermining the authority of history as an objective record of events by uncovering its artificiality and selectivity thanks to fictionalization. Warner explains in "Between the Colonist and the Creole":

⁸ "Labat" entry in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* introduces him as a "Dominican missionary ... From 1694 to 1705, he was active in the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe in the lesser (French) Antilles, first as a priest then as procurator, superior, and finally as apostolic prefect ... His accounts of foreign countries were sincere, candid, and objective, but often diffuse." (276-7)

Père Labat ... wrote in his *magnum opus* that he once met Indian Warner's mother, the Governor's ancient first wife ... the story of her son's life and adventures are ... complex ... and a good history needs to be done of this period.... the way that I was ... not told this story, points to the edginess English Empire families felt about ... the translations of one culture into another that happened even while the hierarchical blueprint denied they could. (202-3)

The officially denied story of the fictionalized "Governor's wife" impersonated by Ariel is thus engrafted upon Labat's historical memoirs in which he describes his encounter with "Mme. Ouveuarde" who was "one of the oldest creatures on the island [and] had been the mistress of the first English Governor of St. Kitts" (92). Ironically, the description of this woman as old, wrinkled and "bent" is more reminiscent of the physical appearance of Sycorax after she was burnt by the colonizers than Ariel. "Mme. Ouveuarde" had been sent to the island of Dominica after Warner's death and was, in Labat's words, "held in esteem by the Caribs" because of her age and not her previous "relations with this man" (92). This last remark betrays the "edginess" of the priest about miscegenation, an issue to be explored in the parallel with the fictional Ariel. The former story is ironically transmitted by Serafine, a female Caribbean servant to the Everard family for generations down to the 1980s, showing how the colonizer's discourse comes to be internalized by the colonized and taken for granted as truth:

There's another story with a happy ending they know, not just from Serafine; it's traditional in their family, and in the history books in which the Everards have a mention. How the first Kit Everard won the love of an islander and how she saved him and his brave band of pioneers. It's come down through the years this story. From first-hand sources, authenticated. Serafine knows it; all her family ... they passed it on. Long ago ... a French missionary priest ... wrote one of the first comprehensive travel books about the new world of the islands, chronicling the natives ... (as far as he could).... He reported that he had met a survivor from the heroic days, an ancient Indian hag, he said.... She could not speak, indeed, it was said she had not spoken for decades.... she was a famous character: the concubine of Kit Everard, she had redeemed the savagery of her people. (*Indigo* 224-25)

Supported by the unquestionable legitimacy of “history books” and by the allegedly “authenticated” missionaries’ writings as “first-hand sources”, the official version of Ariel’s betrayal of her own people for the sake of Kit Everard is reminiscent of that of Pocahontas. The latter’s behaviour was mythically motivated by love and “her recognition of the superiority of English culture” (Hulme 141) but there is no extant writing by Pocahontas, nor is her own version ever included in such reports as those written by Captain John Smith or any other white male colonist of early seventeenth-century Virginia. Hulme explains

The story of Pocahontas and John Smith [was] a blank space which has not been allowed to remain empty... Around this skeletal narrative has grown a vast body of material – novels, poetry, history books, comics, plays, paintings – that constitute what can only be called the myth of Pocahontas.... None of Pocahontas’s words have come down to us directly, so we have no immediate access at all to what she might have thought of the strange pattern of events in which she was caught up. (138,141,146-47)

In a pertinent parallel, Ariel is described by Labat in the following terms “she could not speak ... she had not spoken for decades ... She was the last person living to speak the language of the native islanders ... she could no longer use her tongue” (*Indigo* 225-26). The use of the terminology of speech and the repetition of the verb “speak” constitute attempts to give Ariel her voice back for she has never been able to confirm or contradict Père Labat’s version of her life story as the redeemer “of the savagery of her people.” This exemplifies the suppression of the native female voice, textually and symbolically replaced by the stifling white male Christian chronicler’s. The loss of one’s mother tongue means the loss of one’s culture and history due to the absence of female oral transmission and legacy. Ariel can only “now and then ... rasp out a harsh fragment of a song”, songs which are appended in the colonizer’s version, probably because they are unintelligible to him, or so they seem “[t]he juice of the green melon is sweet/ The yellow is sweeter, I know,/ And there’s a fruit that’s still riper./ I can’t tell you its name,/ I won’t show you its face,/ or I shan’t ever eat it

no more, no more” (*Indigo* 226). Engrafted by Warner on the male text, Ariel’s sensual songs are subversive because of their very impermeability to conventional interpretations. Her poem also reflects native knowledge of the island’s flora and the fear of losing both to the colonizer’s exploitative intentions.

Labat’s metabiographical memoir is made of two parts: the first is reported by a third-person narrator and the second is quoted as the priest’s original text. This extract is preceded by a remark about how storytellers “adapt” their stories to their audience, in the sense of selecting and manipulating facts to serve the author’s imperialist, misogynist and racist interests and ideologies. It is also punctuated by Warner’s ironic “traces”, thematic and structural.

Père Labat’s short biography in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* reads as follows “[h]e was a perceptive observer with many interests. His accounts of foreign countries were sincere, candid, and objective, but often diffuse” (277). Warner imitates and parodies this type of male canonical writing, often including additional comments, usually in brackets, such as “chronicling ... (as far as he could)”, “(He gave examples ... for he was a scholar of the age of the Enlightenment and frankly admired the arts of the native peoples of the islands.)” and “according to the observant father” (*Indigo* 225). These additions by the narrator are clearly meant to mock and undermine the authority of the priest’s narrative by exposing its subjectivity and limitations as only one version of history and not an objective record of real events. Warner also satirically describes the colonial enterprise and its pioneers as “brave” and “heroic”, parodying a colonialist topos which has always typically provided a romanticized, embellished vision of the colonial past, effacing its barbarism and arrogance.

It is important to note at this point the parallel with the chronicles written about Leto in *The Leto Bundle*. For example, “the Chronicle of Barnabas” provides a different version of her story, trying to convey the truth about the circumstances of Leto’s childhood “[m]ay this chronicle that I, Barnabas, once gatekeeper of the Shrine of the Fount, have set down, bear witness to the blessed life of this pure child” (*Bundle* 112). Unlike the humble gatekeeper, Père Labat mythifies Ariel’s story because of his authoritative position as a clergyman and a representative of French colonialism. In other words, the truthfulness of these chronicles depends on the

ulterior motives and socio-political status of their (male) authors who would often mystify the life stories of native female poets and saints.

But Père Labat's chronicle is not always reported by another narrator, for the second part of the metabiographical extract, engrafted in single brackets, relies on the missionary's first-person narration in imitation of a first-hand source, providing more details in Labat's own words:

The rumour was that she had lived in a wild state, before the islands were properly civilised. 'Mme Verard,' he wrote, 'for so they called her, in order to pay her that honour due to her staunchness and fidelity (though the union had never been blessed in God's sight), had heard among her people that they planned to fall upon the settlers and massacre them in their beds ... out of the great love she bore the founder of the island, Sir Christopher Everard, and on behalf of the lovechild she had borne him, she raised the alarm ... These great events took place in the year of Our Lord 1620 ... 'Mme Verard was in her hundredth year ... when I was fortunate enough to take in mine the hand that proved the loyal instrument of God's will for this pagan place ... Her example proves the nobility of soul the native can possess when tutored in the ways of godliness and truth. She was a lamp of truth to her people.' (*Indigo* 225-26)

As noted previously, one of the tropes of colonialist ideology is the dichotomy of civilization versus savagery and colonization is justified by its so-called civilising impact and its improvement of the "wild" life of the natives. Père Labat confidently reports mere rumours as a foundation to his discourse, even in his original memoirs⁹, further undermining his status as a reliable historian. In addition to that, his exaggerations and lyricism such as "out of the great love she bore the founder of the island" and "the lovechild" further undermine the veracity of his story and reflect a narrow, condescending perspective only meant to emphasize the glory of imperialism. But while Pocahontas was baptized as "Lady Rebecca", Ariel is named "Mme Verard", similar to the actual "Mme. Ouveuarde" and an abbreviation of the

⁹ Such expressions as "so they said" are used in the description of "Mme. Ouveuarde" in the memoirs (92).

colonizer's name; "Everad", besides being labelled as Kit's "concubine." Changing her name is considered as "an honour" but it is rather a curse, a disgrace that ignores and erases her language, her origins, her story. Moreover, demeaning sexual connotations are attached to Ariel's categorization as a "concubine", that is an illegitimate female companion whose status is socially inferior to that of a wife. Not only is she portrayed as a sexual object, Ariel's naming and her relationship with Kit also carry negative notions of immorality and illicitness; their union is "not blessed in God's sight", thus belittling Kit's shared responsibilities as a lover and father. As a result, Ariel is fitted by the religious patriarch and colonist into two contradictory roles as whore and angel, a Virgin Mary and a Magdalene, in his view the only alternatives for a woman's existence. In relation to that double role, Zabus describes Ariel as "the woman 'split in two' (*Indigo* 152) ... By having frank sexual relations with Kit, Ariel incarnates both the sacrosanct Algonquian Princess Pocahontas and the lustful Indian squaw, her darker sister" ("Mingling" 124). Ariel's whorish monstrosity is only compensated for by her betrayal of her own "savage" people. As "the instrument of God's will", she turns into a saviour after being "tutored in the ways of godliness and truth", that is, Christianized. As a native woman, she can only be morally good or "noble" by adopting Eurocentric religious and social standards even though most of the barbarities of colonization were committed (and excused) in the name of God and Christianity. In this regard, Ariel fits into what Hulme calls "the myth of the treacherous native", created by the European colonists' projection of their own duplicitous intentions (qtd. in Zabus 90).

Interestingly, Ariel's French name is also reminiscent of seventeenth-century French female fairy tale storytellers, a tradition of oral literature later transcribed and re-appropriated by male authors. No longer a "lamp of truth" because of her silence, Ariel's sporadic singing only mirrors the darkness of colonialism, of its lies, false stories, romanticized and perverted, perpetually indoctrinated in the future generations. Julie Sanders also suggests that Ariel's name may be "an embedded pun ... on 'truth' (veracity, vérité)" (139), which is ironic considering that the truth about her female consciousness will never be known or taken into consideration.

Unlike Ariel, another female consciousness whose speech cannot be ignored survives in an unusual form. After the battle which finally subdues the natives to the

colonizer's force, Sycorax, Ariel's foster mother, undergoes a process of life-in-death, buried but still expressing herself through retrospective contemplation. She sighs and continually breathes out a telepathic lament:

– Oh airs and winds, you bring me stories from the living ... you speak to me of pain ... you, oh bright sun of the zenith and green glittering star, HEAR ME! I once governed you [for so she thinks] and you did as I wanted ... HEAR ME NOW, now that I only hear groans ... Ariel is captive again ... and does not speak. Turn back your currents in their course ... pull back the tide and send the sun, the moon, and the stars spinning in the churn of the heavens – so that we can return to the time before this time. (*Indigo* 212)

In this metabiographical extract, Sycorax's language is lyrical and commandingly conjures the natural elements, her words in capital letters emphasizing the compelling power of her matriarchal voice; "HEAR ME!" They also ironically echo the official letter/charter sent by the King of England which performatively bestows upon Kit the patriarchal power to rule the island he has conquered "KNOW THEREFORE that the said ... Christopher Everard may be encouraged and the better enabled with the more ample maintenance and authority to effect the same" (*Indigo* 206).

However, Warner makes sure Sycorax is human(ized) and not a real witch through her addition in brackets "[for so she thinks]". Nostalgically yearning for a bygone past of harmony, the living-dead woman attempts to keep her voice loud enough to compensate for Ariel's silencing by the oppression of colonialism. Sycorax's is a poetic female voice, expressing itself in a confessional assessment of the present situation of the island as being "full of noises", of "pain ... groans ... rails." Invoking mythological figures and gods, the matriarch wants to abjure her magical powers in the hope "that we can return to the time before this time ... I would no longer change men into beasts as I did, and then find myself unable to change them back into men" (*Indigo* 212-13). However, there is an ambiguity in Sycorax's wish between real and magical metamorphosis. Asserting her female power through eroticism and using a voluptuously written (body) language, the

“witch” remembers how much she had enjoyed her erotic power over male islanders when she was younger “[h]ow they would rootle, lap and snuffle at her! How they would stamp and whinny when she made them wait for her.... Like a jaguar ... like a snake ... like the determined cavey ... and one would sometimes let out a raucous shriek, like a parrot in flight” (*Indigo* 111). As Sycorax faces the impossibility of resurrecting the pre-colonial past or repairing the wrongs of the present, memories of her sexual domination of men help her regain self-confidence and hope. Now a shrivelled hag, she can hardly inspire humane treatment or compassion in the colonizer’s heart, let alone kindle his desire.

In the post-colonial present, three hundred and fifty years after the first landfall on the Caribbean island, Sycorax is still speaking but also listening to “a chorus of voices”, the voices of dead and resurrected female presences:

The cry battered against her eardrums ... the cry was carried on the wind, ravelled up with other sounds ... she had to draw herself together to listen and part them. There was so much longing in the first piercing voice that had roused her it recalled to her sharply for a moment something long ago. O my daughter, Sycorax whispered ... Longing swelled the other cries which she began to comb out of the sleeves of sounds that ... made her vibrate beneath the earth like a small hollow instrument, like the banged taut skin of a drum. (*Indigo* 370)

In this metabiographical medley of different generations of women’s love confessions, personal regrets and political plans, like the Fates of Greek mythology, Sycorax is “combing out” the different threads woven by other female voices. There is a textual alternation between Sycorax the witch-mother (first person), Xanthe the repentant wife (second-person) and Atala the reformist politician (first-person) “Xanthe’s voice cut through, under Atala’s, crying out”, “like interference on the waves” (*Indigo* 374-76).

Like a drum, Sycorax unwittingly resonates to “the clamour” of cries, of “the island’s noises.” At other times, her voice reaches through in free indirect speech, with regrets about her failure to bond with, and understand her adoptive daughter

Ariel. They have been torn apart by colonization, further estranged from each other by “the red child she [Ariel] bore” (*Indigo* 374). This is what Zabus describes as the interruption of the “sisterly continuum” [and] “matriarchal prehistory” which she also calls:

parentectomy, the strategic severance of the young from their biological or surrogate family, which traverses the fabric of Warner’s later novels. Such a shift coincides with the move, in women’s fiction of the 1980s, away from biological motherhood for female relationships to metaphors of sisterhood, friendship and of surrogate motherhood. (“Mingling” 121)

Like a sister-prophetess, Sycorax is also transmitting and interpreting the “traffic of messages on the wind”, their unheard pleas “Sycorax deciphers Xanthe’s cry.” Xanthe, one of the female descendants of the English colonizers, is carrying on their mission in the present by exploiting the Caribbean island through the tourist industry. But a terrorist attack on the parliament aimed at freeing the local government from the evil of capitalism changes everyone’s destiny. Xanthe, habitually materialistic and cold, drowns while trying to join her husband:

She would try to show him love, she swore it.... It was part of her yearning now to ... save him ... from the arsonists and terrorists who threatened him.... What else would the island do without entrepreneurs, people like her and Sy? They were prepared to invest and work.... ‘God, I swear I’ll never be mean again to Sy or anyone else’ ... The resolve of Xanthe was heard by the old woman.... Only at the very last minute, when so much was coming apart around Xanthe, did [she] ... become vulnerable to love. (*Indigo* 371-74)

As she slips away into the deep waters, this female neo-colonialist finds redemption in love, not money or gold. Another woman’s voice joins in “the babble on the air”, that of Atala Seacole, a native Caribbean educated in England. She is a

political activist bearing the name of black female empowerment “([a]nd they nicknamed us Seacole to mock us, but we wear our blackness as a badge of pride)” (*Indigo* 376). Atala’s speech takes the form of a listing in dashes; her language is not as poetic as Sycorax’s or Xanthe’s but politicized and precise with down-to-earth data and statistics “[a]t a rough reckoning eighty per cent of the food served in the tourist industry in the two islands that make up this country is imported ... – Sixty-five per cent of this food is thrown away by the hotels ... – But you explain to me how that is nourishing our people” (*Indigo* 372). Atala is thus analyzing the current socio-economic situation of post-colonial Caribbean islands in her attempt to improve their standard of living and decrease dependence on importation and foreign investment. She reflects another type of female power besides love and eroticism; political expertise and practicality.

Reunited again through Warner’s metabiography, these living, dead, or soon-to-be-dead female voices gather again and recover their strength “[s]ea changes never come to stillness for some among the dead; they can speak and move in the water, and make themselves heard, like the voices that pass through Sycorax” (*Indigo* 376). Warner herself concludes how “Sycorax embodies the island, even though her voice is imprisoned and muffled, she survives in an altered form to bring about the defeat of [neo-colonialism] and an almost happy ending – at least one filled with hope and reconciliation” (“Rich Pickings” 33).

Leto’s own voice may also have been intercepted by Sycorax, her life a spatio-temporal succession of sufferings caused not only by her gender and race but also by her social class. Warner explains in relation to the *Bundle* in an interview with Rob Irving “strangers can come in the form of invaders, but she [Leto] is not invading, she’s a woman struggling for survival ... she turns up as a myth of threats, a myth of invasion, a myth of the alien in different parts of history at different times” (n. pag.). So it is fear of the unknown, of the danger associated with the idea of the “alien”, which triggers the mythopoeia that denigrates strangers and social rejects and further justifies their oppression.

The biographical fragments of Leto’s life make her story more accessible to the mass of ordinary believers. The chronicles, annals, manuscripts and bandage inscriptions called the “Letoniast’s Mythography” are compared to the “Infancy

Gospel” (*Bundle* 34) which favours anecdotes and sensationalism over biblical language. This marks a democratization of mythology that allows Warner to include and demystify the experiences of fragile and ordinary women oppressed because of their ethnic or social differences. Leto is similar to Ariel in her marginalization and forced exile, abandoned to a foster family when she was a child, but for different reasons. Leto is given away by her own father, a gender-related habit of patriarchy which has been normalized by its perpetrators; “the child he left in our keeping, laughing that she was the pledge of his good faith”, a “surety for his trade” (*Bundle* 78, 109). The woman is thus constantly commodified, exchanged between men, appointed a market value as a daughter, a wife or a prostitute. Reduced to a male possession, she is deprived of her humanity and subjecthood, stuck in the economic politics of patriarchy through time and space. According to Saint Jerome’s chronicle, when Cunmar the ruler of a citadel in which she is abandoned decides to marry her, his son justifies his refusal by calling Leto

merchandise – not much better than a slave ... who belongs nowhere.... a used bargaining counter, a soiled chit of exchange that has been passed from one hand to another.... everything has its place and her place is not by your side.... This woman has no history.... It’s her lack of ... status, rank, family ties, belonging ... a cast-off.... She is impure, by birth, by upbringing. (*Bundle* 150, 152-53)

Cunmar belongs to royal nobility while Leto is a foundling who “learn[ed] the livelihood of maids and seamstresses and laundresses” (*Leto* 147). There is thus a disturbing parallel between rootless women of lower social status and commodities in Cunmar’s hierarchical court. Just like tradable objects, they can be used, re-used, and even disposed of. They do not enjoy the protection of a fixed owner or identity, and possess only a no man’s land status between slave and beast. However, Leto is provided with textual space to express herself sporadically through a series of diary-like metabiographical extracts. The latter are engrafted upon the narrative and quote her thoughts and feelings which are transcribed in italics. Unconventionally punctuated only by spacing between the sentences, they also bestow an oral quality

upon Leto's inner speech.

Kim, a young activist from Tirzah who has been adopted and brought to Albion¹⁰, is the male counterpart to Sycorax. Indeed, not only is he a visionary who strives to integrate new definitions of hybrid identities in Albion, he is also a prophet who actually hears Leto's and her biographers' monologues through a sort of interstellar telepathy. This "[i]ntimacy at long range, whisperings from galactic distances" (*Bundle* 327) sounds like a mystical vision of the immateriality of the internet:

Kim heard her whispering from the screen.... Kim heard Leto from behind the monitor as he worked on the ... website through the night.... the closer Leto came, the less she seemed to speak to him directly. She was travelling nearer, moving towards him, into his zone of time and space, and yet – it felt as if she was dispersing, her signals breaking up under interference from so much that he'd been hearing, like bands of data from a radio probe bringing him news that he could not yet decipher. (*Bundle* 233-34, 241-42)

Leto is also believed to be Kim's lost mother. However, mothering is no longer merely a question of protection and nourishment but, in times of hardships and war, of abandonment and sacrifice. Leto's metabiographical passages deconstruct myths of motherhood by reflecting the unconventional dimensions of an allegedly unconditional love and nurturing instinct. Leto sometimes gets bored of the twins "*sometimes, I have to admit to you ... I liked being on my own*", she feels trapped, condemned to "an interminable destiny of maternity" (*Bundle* 225,233). She is also alienated from her own role as a mother, considering her children as a yoke she has to bear "she found herself assailed by this puzzling antagonism to the ties that bound her to these children, who struck her, sometimes, as complete strangers.... the children she had struggled so long to guard and nourish, had been hung around her neck" (*Bundle* 246-47).

Leto is again heard by Kim saying "*Maybe I should let them go ... Maybe they*

¹⁰ Fictional equivalents of Sarajevo and England respectively.

would flourish ... maybe I should give up the children. Maybe I was preventing them from thriving” (Bundle 234). Despite the hesitation, obvious in the repetition of the word “maybe” introducing Leto’s every thought, she is determined to follow her plan and gives her son Phoebus up for adoption. Free indirect speech later reflects Leto’s deepest thoughts of self-hatred “[t]o herself, she was thinking, They know now what I am, an infection, a criminal, a parasite, a woman who sells her own child to keep alive” (Bundle 322). But Leto’s mothering does not stop at her own children in her resilient quest for survival. During a siege in Tirzah, she literally nurses a female doctor weakened by inanition:

Ella ... shifted away from the hot, rough lips ... It was a miracle that ... with her flap breasts ... [she] could offer a drop of moisture to this young woman. But as the doctor’s dry, hot mouth sucked, Ella felt the faint familiar tingle of her milk rising from somewhere under her heart. (Bundle 270)

Later, she gives a soothing massage to a lonely female rock singer “Ella ... began to knead the muscles of Gramercy’s nape, digging in with strong cool fingers ... Points of fire flared in [her] flesh under Ella’s fingers ... she dug herself in more deeply ... she heard with increasing awe the grunts she made as Ella pummelled her” (Bundle 277-78). These physical contacts bring to mind the primitive fusional mother-child relationship as well as what Zabus previously described as a shift “away from biological motherhood for female relationships to metaphors of sisterhood, friendship and of surrogate motherhood” (“Mingling” 122). It is also a form of homo-eroticism in women’s relationships, vindicated by Rich as a liberating alternative to oppressive heterosexuality. However, Leto’s seeming acts of kindness are never free from ulterior motives. While massaging the rock singer, she thinks of the reward this lucky but lonely woman can give her in return:

maybe this young singer will bring us luck she feels lucky like fate sings through her every day and gives her pretty shoes and necklaces and flowers and dresses but her body was twisted up

*and scalding hot not with fever of the flesh something else burning
her from inside she all alone here maybe that bothers her I
loosen her and cool her maybe then fortune'll give me something in
return (Bundle 279)*

As a homeless immigrant and a woman, Leto's life is conditioned by instinctive survival and she is bound to cheap labour and violent rape-cum-prostitution in a Sarajevo-like war-stricken city in order to provide food and medicines for her remaining daughter Phoebe. The little girl has been the victim of a chemical bomb which has flayed her skin in a way reminiscent of Napalm during the Vietnam War, making her mother's life even more difficult. Leto's subsequent metabiographical extract describes a rare moment of mother-daughter bonding after they are both transferred to Enoch (a fictional equivalent to London) for Phoebe's skin grafting operation:

*She is beginning to grow, Ella nodded to herself ... It isn't just that
she's putting on weight ... but I can tell it's not only that she has
had her first period ... and I was glad I kissed her and she let me
kiss her with a kind of softness she hasn't shown before because she
was glad too though it means we have to guard now against
other dangers not yet not yet (Bundle 299)*

The other "danger" to which women are subjected is closely intertwined with their commodification and victimization by patriarchy: rape and other forms of sexual violence. This is touched upon in another metabiographical instance in the novel; the more modern exchange of emails between Kim and Hortense Fernly, a museum curator and historian studying a mysterious bundle of relics, ancient artefacts and mummy wrappings. The emails are structurally and thematically pertinent, especially when the characters indirectly discuss life writing issues. First, Kim compares the past to a "scaffold for fantasy" (*Bundle 331*) which means that the mixture of fact and imagination is necessary to biographically reconstruct a life because, as Hetty adds in one of her emails, "history is a very old man, and ... old

men forget” (*Bundle* 119).

Another life writing issue is about the subjective selection/editing of past events, depending on the motives and personal beliefs of the biographer. Hereward Meeks, for instance, is a Victorian historian looking only for elements in Leto’s past which confirm biblical truths. His suppression of what he deems “corrupt”, that is morally or religiously unacceptable, results in the manipulation of history and the creation of partial and biased versions. In relation to this, Hortense explains in another email:

Kim, just a PS, really ... Meeks was one of those eminent muscular Christian Victorians who wanted every document of the past to confirm the truth of the Bible, and when they didn’t, he tossed them aside. If it doesn’t fit, chuck it ... It’s a lesson to us. I found a note Meeks left in the box saying the text was ‘so corrupt it was better hidden than published’! He used old-fashioned standards of editorial purity to suppress a picture that challenged his rosy vision of the past. (*Bundle* 120)

The emails also make the characters’ repressed thoughts and feelings accessible to the reader through deleted sentences throughout the exchange. More importantly, Nick Bentley explains how “the new textual form of e-mail [may] provide material ... to explore the construction of virtual identities in cyberspace” (9). As a result, Hortense is portrayed as a hesitant and pragmatic woman while Kim is an impulsive and emotional ecstatic.

Subject: Re: Plans
Date: Mon, 6 July 199– 09:13:45 +0100
From: Hortense Fernlyh.fernly@natmus.ac.alb
To: kim.mcquyhswu@lattice.onlyconnect.com

...I think the main reason that I’m so interested in your relation to the bundle, is that you’re openly making use of the past in the interests of the present.
[I must not get involved, Hortense said to herself, as she pressed

down on the backspace delete key to remove her last sentence.]
Hetty

Subject: Re: re: Leto's return AND film!
Date: Wed, 8 July 1999 21:24:35 +0100
From: kim.mcquy<hswu@lattice.onlyconnect.com>
To: Hortense Fernlyh.fernly@natmus.ac.alb

Hetty ... I understood what she's been telling me about how she inhabited this other form how she turned herself into well – ink – don't you remember – she shifts shape from one creature to another when she's raped and the god pursues her until she turns on him all legs and tentacles and . . . squirts him Yess! ... – what do you think?

You could COME AWAY WITH ME! [now it was Kim's turn to strike out a line.]

:-) :-) :-) :-) :-) :-)

your kim (*Bundle* 303-4)

Kim's email describes Leto's rape by Zeus, a common theme in Greek mythology. In this instance, rape is associated with female metamorphosis as a form of physical and psychological resistance. Leto rather acts on/with her body in order to deal with and resist the destructive impact of rape. In her escape from Zeus, she is transformed into a bird, then a fish and finally a squid. The idea of the squid is not only associated with pressure and powerful suction ("all legs and tentacles") but also with mystery and eroticism, in the same fashion as jellyfish and Cixous's Medusa symbolize female sexuality. More interestingly, she "squirts him", reversing male ejaculation and turning it against him (or inside him). Ink also represents female writing and self-expression as Leto's story is transcribed on the mummy's bandages to reach the present and to be heard by the public. As Zabus notes, "*The Leto Bundle* reaffirms Warner's conviction that many episodes of rape and forced insemination lie at the foundation of cultures and nations. Hierogamy or the rape by a god is precisely how Leto's story begins" ("Mingling" 125). In the following extract, Lisa G. Propst explains how, through Leto's powerful reactivity, Warner nuances many feminists' conventional approaches to "sexual abuse":

Warner explores the issue of sexual violence in terms of being, paradoxically, a potential catalyst for women's self-empowerment. Rather than depict women as helpless victims of sexual violence, Warner portrays women actively responding to violation through new forms of creativity and self expression. In this way, Warner opposes stereotypical associations between female sexuality, victimhood, and passivity. ("Bloody Chambers" 126)

Leto's previous metabiographical speech mentions the dangers of rape to begin with because Phoebe has just had her first period and reached sexual maturity. The exclusivity of menstruation to the female sphere and its role in mother-daughter transmission of knowledge establishes a parallel to other cases of female bonding in Warner's novels. In her article "On the Genealogy of Women", Stone explains how "femininity is historically constructed in multiple, shifting, ways, its fluctuations in meaning registering changes in social relations of power" (91). So how does this apply to the different generations of women in Warner's metabiography?

Domesticity, motherhood, and protection from the threat of rape and other dangers of the outside world, besides female eroticism, constitute a variety of experiences which posit femininity as a constant battle for survival in patriarchal societies throughout history and mythology. Among the positive aspects of this female resistance are solidarity and mutual compassion, namely what Rich calls the "great unwritten story [of] the cathexis between mother and daughter" (qtd. in Zabus, "Power of Sycorax" 145). It is a "genealogy of women" ranging from Leto and Phoebe in their victimization associated with gender, class and ethnic origins to that of Sycorax and Ariel during Caribbean colonization, finally reaching Maria Filippa and her daughters during Fascism in southern Italy. In a touching sentence which echoes Sycorax's free indirect life-in-death speech, Leto says "[o]h my daughter, thought Ella, Now I'm leaning on your arm, now it's you who's tugging me out of the past" (*Bundle* 322). As a consequence, these heroines' patterns of resistance are never essentialized because their experiences retain their variety while still being connected by genealogical links, and they acquire different meanings in accordance with the socio-political and historical environments in which they take place. As Stone points out:

Genealogically, we can understand women as a social group, yet not as united by common characteristics but, rather, infinitely varying while entangled together historically.... All women are thus located within chains of reinterpretation that bring them into complex filiations with one another.... [forming] historical patterns of interpretation of femininity. (Stone 92-93)

As a conclusion, Leto's metabiographical speeches throughout the novel resemble the diary of a goddess, deconstructing myths of unconditional motherly love and exposing the vulnerability of a woman, an ex-goddess nostalgic for her lost supernatural powers. *The Leto Bundle* thus finishes in a chorus of female voices in the same way as *Indigo*, either affectionately addressing their descendants or declaiming politically engaged discourses (Gramercy/Atala Seacole). By re-staging the ending of a previous novel, Warner also builds up a textual and thematic genealogy throughout her works.

'Strange Fish' and Guineas: Of Troubled Ethnicities

This section of chapter four will focus on "otherizing" in the spatio-temporal contexts of English colonization in the Caribbean and the fascist invasion of Africa which will be studied as ideological and political spaces within which various negative prejudices and stereotypes are constructed. In a different context from colonization, American racial discrimination against Italian immigrants in *The Lost Father* will constitute an addition in terms of ethnically-based mythopoeia and the rationale behind it. Although historically and geographically remote from one another, these fictionalized realities are genealogically united by patterns of discrimination based on colour and ethnic origins. Such realities also reflect the spatiotemporal evolution of imperialistic and racist discourses from the beginnings of English colonization to twentieth-century Italian immigration to America.

As previously noted, colonizers, whether of the seventeenth-century Caribbean or the Ethiopia of 1935, have always justified their violent imperialistic intrusions by the allegedly negative characteristics of the indigenous populations which are in reality (super)imposed and projected upon them. These characteristics include their innate evil, tendencies towards treason, cannibalism, bestial sexuality and so forth. In relation to that, Hulme explains that

Underlying the idea of colonial discourse ... is the presumption that during the colonial period large parts of the Non-European world were produced for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions ... and kinds of writing and imagery, normally separated out into the discrete areas of military strategy, political order, social reform, imaginative literature, personal memoir and so on. (2)

So both English and Italian fascist colonial discourses are “produced”, “fabricated” by Europeans for other Europeans. In other words, they are not based on truth or the totality of colonial experience but exclusively on the colonizer’s prejudices and ready-made expectations. For example, Kit’s colonial discourse in *Indigo* systematically demonizes the Caribbean islanders and distorts the motives of their battle to regain their island, thus implying the necessity of punishing and disciplining them. However, the allegedly gratuitous attacks on the part of the islanders are in reality the outcome of a series of English acts of ill-faith and lack of reciprocity. The third-person narrative preceding the metabiographical extract then fills in the colonist’s textual and historical gap by imaginatively re-constructing the Caribbean perspective:

The indigenous islanders grew more anxious at the bustle of the settlement, at its expansion. Did the new ship mean that the strangers were planning to sail on, after the harvest, as had been agreed? ... The rest of the growing colony was left behind, so the islanders accepted that the settlers had no intention of fulfilling the terms of the treaty and leaving. Though it grated on their code of hospitality, the island hosts then decided there were to be no more

gifts of food or drink, no more counselling or mapping, no more lending of labour, or advice. (*Indigo* 177-78)

So the islanders are much more consistent and civilised than their guests give them credit for being. Indeed, they follow “codes”, agreements and “treaties” in dealing with strangers. Moreover, their attitude has been benevolent and helpful to the settlers, as long as the latter’s stay was understood to be temporary. In *Colonial Encounters*, Hulme tries to recover the true story behind the colonial one:

Even the most cursory of structural analyses would reveal common features in almost all the early reports: initial native hospitality – especially supply of food; growing misunderstandings; and then violent conflict, perceived by the Europeans as ‘treachery’. There seems little doubt that ... the turning point [for the islanders] was always the realization that their ‘guests’ had come to stay. (131)

In light of the previous quotation, what is presented as history and truthful experience is in reality a web of interpretations and wishful thinking on the part of the colonizers. The latter strive to conceal invasion and expropriation behind claims of the natives’ unpredictability and primitiveness “the topic of land is dissimulated by the topic of savagery, this move being characteristic of all narratives of the colonial encounter” (Hulme 3). Another colonialist strategy linked to land dispossession through the obliteration of its original history and culture is explained by Connor as

The myth of the colonised land as tabula rasa, an empty field of possibility, where men may start anew ... sustained by the erasure of the history that is always already in place in the colonised land. This is often an erasure of the fact of violence; though the erasure is always an act of violence in itself. (189-90)

Indigo parodies another protagonist of *The Tempest*; a native who is captured

and enslaved by Kit (following the trope of man-eating fish): Caliban or “a strange fish!”(II.ii.27); “Legg’d like a man! And his fins like arms!”(II.ii.34). Caliban is impersonated by Warner’s Dulé, Sycorax’s adoptive son. Not only used as a foil to Kit’s bravery, he also undergoes further humiliation as the leader of the native “attack”:

Their captain (for so I must term him – though their forces understand no battle order and hurl themselves pell-mell on us like mere animals who must quench their parched throats with blood), a certain youth who is called Dulay to his people, with a trick of the eye that makes him seem to look at you and yet not see you (and other tricks beside ... this same swart creature) ... we apprehended as he fled from our justice. By due process of law we have sentenced him to be slit in the hamstrings to be an example to those who would follow him and make him a hero to the people.... I would have had this Dulay hanged but that he might in death prove a beacon to this same rabble.... Our men fear his witchcraft. (*Indigo* 200)

Kit’s discourse is inspired by a section of the original “Text of Grant” which was omitted by Warner in the fictional charter “[a]nd all such as shall disobey, to chastise correct and punish according to their fault and demeritt. And also with force and strong hande to repress and annoy all such as shall in hostile manner attempt or go about to encounter the said Thomas Warner” (30). This text condones, even encourages the forceful chastisement of “all such as shall” attempt to interfere with the colonial enterprise or authority, including the native islanders. This relative notion of justice is echoed in Kit’s fictionalized speech as it relies upon the “characteristic devices of ethnocentric rhetoric, especially the value-laden terminology” (Hulme 48) which ascribes another aggravating series of negative denominations to these people and justifies the punitive measures taken against them. The latter’s attacks are denigrated as random (“Nought but a rabble”), their nature is associated with bestiality, cannibalism, and witchcraft, while their blackness is a physical monstrosity. All these attributes complete the colonial portrait drawn to the King and to the rest of the European world, not only vilifying but also undermining

any sense of organizational skills, be they martial or social, in these native societies. Ironically, it is Kit's so-called "justice" and the very punishment he reserves for the "evil" islanders while dehumanising them and even condoning slavery ("the slaveships that are plying these waters most usefully"), which most reflect savage cruelty and inhumanity. Warner also provides an interesting insight into the skilful ethnocentric logic used by Kit to stave off his guilt:

He needed to think that he had been well-intentioned.... her people knew only sensual gratification, he knew, not the higher principle of love between man and woman. So he persuaded himself, for it made his own sin less grievous.... For she and the other natives of these isles lived at a time before sin, it seemed to him, a happy time, but inferior in intelligence and humanity to the enlightened ideals of his kind. (*Indigo* 186)

By way of simplistic syllogisms and binary oppositions, Kit re-rights the moral balance and keeps his conscience almost intact, thanks to claims of "his kind's" superior "intelligence and humanity." On the other hand, the omniscient narrator reveals the sense of guilt pushing Kit to "persuade himself" that his actions have been justifiable and inevitable.

But again, Warner's fictionally re-constructed Caribbean narrative contradicts Kit's stereotypes and his legitimizing of the decimation of these people. Their so-called "pell mell" attack follows the dishonouring of the treaty by the settlers and is carefully orchestrated beforehand "[a]t the meetings called in different villages, some proposed a raid ... others planned to murder the guards ... discuss[ing] the best strategy, they suggested slow, persistent attrition ... until the islanders had accumulated at least twenty guns" (*Indigo* 178). Even during battle, the islanders' strategic creativity is highlighted:

The first survivors ... were met ... by a waiting group of islanders, men and women, ready to re-arm them.... The old men, past the age of warfare, were dressed in fronds of palm and banana.... They sang

and stamped and danced on the earth ... to make the warriors laugh at their travesty and forget the nearness of the dead. So they tried to revive their warlike spirits, while the women rubbed and slapped their heavy limbs. (*Indigo*193)

Kit's colonialist mythifying continues about the necessity and benefits of slavery, including African slaves in the dehumanising process. Like beasts of burden, the latter are reduced to their physical ability to perform agricultural tasks with no consideration for their feelings or their will "[t]he African is as strong as a ploughox, each man can do the work in this clime of two or three of men like us.... the Negroes most apt to its cultivation [that of sugar cane]. (It is a most irksome toil for others)" (*Indigo* 201-2). In relation to these degrading assumptions, Suzanne Moore explains that "the reduction of people to bodies, of complex histories to animal physicalities, is ... at the core of racism" (Moore 53).

Kit's discourse then gradually turns into that of a patronizing Prospero, both "colonial historian[s]" (Hulme 125) who provide their own version of history and vision of the natives, leaving no room for other perspectives. Caliban's is a double burden; he is an African-born black bred by a Caribbean mother:

The aforesaid captain I shall endeavour to keep beside me as my bondsman; hobbled, and under my eye, he cannot do me injury. He has a mordant wit, 'tis plain, and it diverts me to teach him our language as he serves me. He has already learned how to curse. Some of our men call him 'cannibal', seeking to undo the power of his monstrousness by naming it, like to conjuring. 'Tis to my mind a false notion, and I prefer the lisping usage of the children, Caliban. (*Indigo* 201)

In addition to deforming Dulé physically, leaving him "hobbled" and as helpless as a captive animal, Kit proceeds to deforming his name to "cannibal" then "Caliban", the commonest of mythical threats (anthropophagy) constructed by colonial discourse about non-Europeans and non-whites. The term "Caliban" denotes ethnic origins as explained by Hulme:

Metathesis of ‘canibal’, that first ethnic name noted by Europeans in the New World, and which serves to root those New World references in the Caribbean, that crucible of the early colonial ventures and ground of the historically archetypal meeting of cultures ... he is, as his name suggests, a ‘cannibal’ as that figure had taken shape in colonial discourse: ugly, devilish, ignorant; gullible and treacherous – according to the Europeans’ descriptions of him. (107-8)

The echo with the Shakespearean Caliban and his “monstrousness” is ironical because it is Kit who dehumanizes Dulé in the first place by atrophying his body, culture and dignity “[d]iscursively ... Caliban is the monster all the characters make him out to be” (Hulme 108). Kit’s humiliating behaviour goes as far as to use Dulé for his personal entertainment, turning him into a court fool, a buffoon “[h]e has a mordant wit ... it diverts me.” Caliban’s alternative discourse of resistance functions by deforming the master’s language into a crude and coarse one, even though Kit stills finds it amusing. So the master justifies the subjection and enslavement of Caliban by constantly vilifying him with reference to colonial myths of threat and invasion. As the leader of the natives, his humiliation reflects a very effective “psychology of domination” (Hulme 297) and is thus insisted upon by Kit in his letter as the just reprisal and best political strategy to impose his own rule and order on Dulé’s potential followers “to be an example to those who would follow him and make him a hero to the people.... I keep their captain before them for a show of mastery. And I shall have him flogged in their sight when I perceive dissension to our wise governance” (*Indigo* 200-1). Little by little, the colonizer’s myths envelop reality and replace it, while the image of the defeated islanders as “dangerous” and “contumelious” conspirators is taken for granted.

It is interesting at this point to note the way Kit’s discourse betrays his desire to expropriate these people, ironically projecting his imperialistic motives and intentions upon them “[t]his policy is most politick, for many leave the island daily ... for other parts and thus confirm our powers here: the world is open to them, they can wander abroad at liberty until they discover those skills of civility to settle a land

and make it their own” (*Indigo* 201). Hulme comments on this kind of colonial statement “[t]his is the wish-fulfilment of the European colonist: his natural superiority voluntarily recognized” (132). As a result, not only are the natives dispossessed of their land, they become outcasts and are ultimately forced to leave. Colonization thus turns into a “skill of civility” (*Indigo* 201), a positive attribute to be yearned for and deserved, as opposed to the supposed barbarity of defending one’s property and land.

Official letters also constitute colonial discourse like the charter sent by the “King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland”; an “epistle” in the form of a “painted scroll.” It is a performative charter defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “a written grant by the sovereign or legislative power of a country, by which a body such as a borough, company ... is created or its rights and privileges defined.” In this case, it is the fictionalized imitation of a historical document in which an English ruler literally bestows governing powers upon the colonizer, King Charles in the original text and King James in the novel. Engrafted upon the novel, the king’s letter follows the description of Sycorax’s burial and newly-acquired powers in death. Structurally speaking, the letter is preceded and followed by a blank line as the only distinction between letter and narration. As the parody of an official document, it inverts the name of the original island (“Saint Christopher”) into that of the fictional colonizer and the name of the original colonizer (“Thomas Warner”) into that of the fictional island. It is ripe with political cant and royal artificial formalities “by the grace of God ... Defender of the Faith etc.”¹¹, “we have been credibly informed by our well-beloved subject the right honourable Lord Clovelly.” However, this important document is subversively trivialized by being absorbed within the structure of Warner’s post-colonial narration/narrative, while it is introduced in the original book as “Text of Grant”(28).

The letter declares the “discovery” of the islands which have already been named “Saint Thomas’s” by Christopher Columbus, renamed by Kit as “Everhope”, then declared as “error” and rectified by Warner as the native “Liamuiga” and “Oualie” (*Indigo* 205). Textually and literally appropriated, these islands undergo the

¹¹ The formalities in the original text are kept by Warner.

ultimate act of cultural colonization. The elegant diction is immediately followed by such (pejorative) words as “savages” and “heathen people”, so casually used to describe the islanders that it becomes grotesque and shocking to the modern reader. Assuming without any doubt that these people have no social skills or faith of their own serves the colonial enterprise by establishing their underdeveloped state, thus legitimizing the confiscation of their land “these said islands are possessed and inhabited *only* [emphasis added] by the aforementioned savages and heathen people, and are not, nor at the time of the discovery were, in the possession or under the government of any Christian Prince, state or potentate” (*Indigo* 205-6).

The insidious justification for colonization is based on the hierarchical opposition of Christianity/civilization versus heathenism/savagery. In other words, unless these islanders are to be civilized Christians, they can have no right to possess or rule their own land. By patronizing the natives and undermining their beliefs and values, the colonizer seems superior in knowledge and morality and thus more entitled to a God-given right to rule “[he] ... made entry into the said islands for and on behalf of our dear Father in heaven, and hath since with the consent and good liking of the natives made some beginning of a plantation and colony ... of an hopeful trade there.... in so hopeful a work” (*Indigo* 206). This crusade-style statement is ironic as it follows the narrative describing casualties in the battle between settlers and natives as well as the letter addressed to the same king about the natives’ deceitfulness and conspiracies. So the islanders’ violent response clearly contradicts the colonizer’s pretence of consent on their part, a consent which has rather been forced upon them through the technological superiority of guns and metal.

The performative function of the charter takes effect with the phrase “*KNOW THEREFORE*”, capitalized by Warner in the novel, visually distinguished from the rest of the text as if loudly and insistently listing and informing (the reader) about the powers and privileges bestowed upon Kit:

We do command the said Christopher Everard to be possessed of the said Islands and all our loving subjects under him: and of our especial great and certain knowledge have given and granted unto

the said ... during our pleasure custody of the aforesaid Islands and of every creature, man, woman and child upon them together with full power and authority for us and in our name and as our Lieutenant to govern rule and order all. In witness thereof We have caused these our letters to be made patent. (*Indigo* 206)

In an embellished language and ornamented writing style, the colonizer is thus granted possession and full power over the island and its inhabitants by the king. Warner summarized the original charter by preserving such phrases as “full power and authority” and “govern rule and order all.” This letter embellishes an illegitimate authority, a “custody” justified by divine right and allegiance to the monarchy. It is important at this point to comment on the painting accompanying the King’s letter for the colonial mythopoeia it reflects:

an Englishman stood waist-deep in an ocean ... drawing a galleon ... as if it were a child’s toy boat; he was pulling it towards a pair of islands, like pease puddings, smoking from their rounded summits on the pretty dish of the sea, garnished with sea creatures.... Tiny natives in their feathered headdresses and skirts besported themselves on the water’s edge, far more ostentatiously than Kit knew them to do. He was that Englishman, these were his islands. (*Indigo* 206-7)

The painting is an allegory of colonization: the colonizer is represented as a giant holding a ship in his superiority like a “child’s toy boat”, like a god playing with the destinies of the islanders. The latter are then described as “tiny ... in their feathered headdresses and skirts.” Compared to the might of the colonizer, the natives are powerless, insignificant creatures, unworthy of authority or independence. The fact that they are depicted as merely fooling around, their culture and customs reduced to grotesque and chaotic gesticulations, is an undoubted sign in the colonizer’s eyes that they (the natives) desperately need the civilizing and regulating power of the English. On the other hand, the description of the islands is reminiscent of female breasts “a pair [of] rounded summits on the pretty dish of the sea.” It can apply to female natives or the islands’ feminine shape, or else to the

concept of nature as female/virgin, all available for conquest. This comparison brings to mind the story of Saint Agatha (previously cited in *The Lost Father*) who had her breasts cut off and put in a tray as a punishment for refusing to renounce her faith. In this light, colonization with its concomitant exploitative plantations may thus stand for the rape and torture of the island's female body¹². As Todd points out in relation to one of the Caribbean islands "Liamuiga is adorned with a feminized topography of creeks, oyster beds and salt ponds, and violated by its English colonizers in 1619" ("Retrieval"103). Moreover, there is an almost erotic effect to the letter's performative transformation of the status of Kit from settler to governor. As with Davide's diaries in *The Lost Father*, the metabiographical act of reading the King's letter has an ambiguous effect on Kit as "the charter made a pretty picture. The perusal of it swelled his heart with joy; he found he had to read it twice, and the pleasure of its proclamation left him flushed from top to toe" (*Indigo* 207). Reading turns into visual and psychological caressing, touching, feeling more closely, and has similar effects to foreplay "swelled ... pleasure ... flushed." The charter materializes the sexual reunion of colonizer and colony: a symbolic miscegenation.

But the metabiographical reading experience of another person's biography or diary can have other dimensions as shown by the example of Miranda. Both a "daughter of the empire" and a Creole Englishwoman, she reads her ancestors' epitaphs during a visit to the isles three hundred and fifty years after Kit's first landfall. A female reader belonging to both sides of the story, she is conscious of the legacy of slavery and colonialism. As with the southern Italian patriarch's diaries read by his wife and daughters, the act of reading is here deconstructive in itself. An epitaph is a "funerary inscription commemorating the deceased" and a "brief characterization of a life" (Taylor 303). As commemoration requires remembering with respect, it inevitably mystifies and embellishes the deceased person's reputation. This "grave writing" thus portrays only the positive aspects of the subject such as his/her past feats and best qualities:

¹² In *The Geometry of Love*, Margaret Visser comments: "It is probable that ... early Christian virgins executed for their faith were, in fact, first raped" (qtd. in Irving n. pag.).

Wound in trailing pumpkin vine, there was a granite slab in memory of her grandmother, Estelle Desjours, set against the low wall round the graveyard: ‘Gathered up in her 35th year.’... And near the church door, under a fretwork canopy, lay the marble memorial to Sir Kit himself:

First read then weep when thou art hereby taught
That Everard lies interréd here, one that bought
With loss of Noble blood Illustrious Name
Of a Commander Great in Acts of Fame:
Trained from his youth in Arms, his courage bold
Attempted brave Exploits, and uncontrolled
by Fortune’s fiercest Frowns, he still gave forth
Large Narratives of Military worth.
Unsluice your briny floods, what! Can ye keep
Your eyes from tears and see the marble weep?
Burst out for shame: or if ye find no vent
For tears, yet stay, and see the stones relent. (*Indigo* 316-17)

There is a noticeable difference between the two epitaphs: the one dedicated to Miranda’s native grandmother is unnamed, concise and simply “set against the low wall.” Such a rudimentary grave keeps this native woman anonymous, hardly receiving any recognition, her only past feat being her early death. This epitaph thus contrasts starkly with the memorial to the English grandfather which is longer, more poetic and placed “under a fretwork canopy”; a more luxurious decor. It is a lament, an elegy in honor of a pioneer urging, even commanding readers to “weep” for the death of Kit. Words and phrases of praise also highlight the mythology of colonial glory “Noble”, “illustrious”, “Great Acts of Fame”, “courage bold”, “brave exploits” and “Large Narratives of Military worth.” Ironically, the reality of the other versions of history; the ‘small’ narratives of the colonized, is always at odds.

Another irony is that the white male colonizer’s narrative does not withstand the island’s hurricane as the “sarcophagus” is smashed by the church bell, broken in two, with a few words erased in the process “Weep ... blood ... in Arms ... uncontrolled ... Narratives of ... shame ... ,’ and [Miranda] tracing the fissure with her finger, read it aloud to Xanthe, who laughed” (*Indigo*, 317). Hulme provides two interesting explanations for the hurricane, either as “an attribute of native savagery ... attacking ... the marks of civility” (99-100) embodied in Kit’s memorial, or as “God’s

message” (98) avenging the oppressed by shedding light on the truth of colonization. Chedgzoy comments on this episode in the following terms:

Symbolically, the island has already inscribed its own insurgent power across the colonising text; a recent hurricane has split the memorial asunder, making of it a very different testament to the effects of history.... The resonant cadences of the verse are reduced to verbal rubble, fragmentary phrases hinting at horrors which language can barely convey. The poem’s warning that a failure to mourn will make the ‘marble weep’ ... is enacted by this decomposition of its meaning; yet the new message clearly implies that the cause for grief ... [are] the terrible consequences of [Kit’s] ‘brave Exploits’ for the natives ... none of whom, except Sycorax, are privileged enough to be buried in this churchyard. (94-95)

Indeed, the colonizer’s poem contains double-edged words and phrases which carry out the deconstructive process from within the text, turning a rhyming elegy into a scrambled cry of pain, a series of blanks and silences which loudly denounce the “horrors” of colonization. Kit’s epitaph/myth thus undergoes the very fragmentation and effacement it has previously imposed on female and non-white texts. As a consequence, the truth behind glorified official versions and “superficial understandings of ‘recorded history’” (Sanders 137) is exposed as the shameful guilt-ridden story of bloodshed and destruction it really is, with tears which should be shed for the natives instead. This proves that no historical text is indefinitely fixed as a fact so that a tribute to the glory of the past can be “cracked [and] ‘re-written’ ... into an indictment of the colonial project” (Sanders 137).

However, the power of neocolonialism stifles history again when Xanthe strives to reconstruct the colonial myth by symbolically restoring the grandeur of the broken marble through tourist propaganda “I’m going to want an ace of postcards ... so pull your finger out.... But watch it, I don’t want nothing newfangled or polemical, the visitors wouldn’t like it” (*Indigo* 317). Indeed, the savagery of a demystified colonialism is not picturesque enough for Goldie (one of Xanthe’s nicknames) and therefore needs to be adorned and glossed over once again.

Colonial myths embellishing invasion and legitimizing racism are equally

important in *The Lost Father*, although they belong to a different space-time: Italy's "grandezza, a drive for colonies" (Evans 26) which included the colonization of Libya and Abyssinia (Ethiopia) by fascist forces between 1911 and 1935. In *Italian Fascism*, Philip Morgan explains that "Fascism was imperialist ... [it] consistently had as its declared aim a general commitment to realising the grandeur of Italy, specifically through the foundation of an empire ... under its rule Italy would at last be recognised as a major power" (131). In accordance with its imperialistic project, Italian Fascism constructed myths about the African indigenous populations in a similar way to the English imperialism mentioned earlier:

Mussolini had shown racist tendencies in his colonial policies, particularly at the time of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. He claimed that Italians were 'Aryans of a Mediterranean type' and stressed the superiority of his country's culture and racial superiority over African tribalism. He recognized a need, even a duty, to impose Italian civilisation on the native populations of Libya and Abyssinia. (Evans 139)

The unequal division of populations into races – Aryan and its African "Others" – and the assumption that the first is pure, civilised and culturally superior to the second, is part of the rhetoric of colonization. Such rhetoric is based on the hierarchical oppositions of white/cultured versus non-white/tribal and was meant to justify the Italian fascist civilizing mission in Libya and Abyssinia. Paola Filippucci comments on one of the origins of this rhetoric in relation to Italian fascist colonization:

The physical branch of anthropology was ... drawn upon to present Mussolini's colonial and expansionistic aims in the Mediterranean ... as practical applications of the findings of pure science.... The work of physical anthropologists was enlisted to demonstrate the superiority of the (invented) 'pure Italic/Mediterranean race' over foreigners (notably Black Africans).... This racist framework coloured studies of the indigenous people of Fascist Italy's new African colonies. (60)

So, in addition to a racist anthropology and an allegedly “pure science”, Mussolini’s own claims as well as “the Manifesto of Racial scientists” and the “Race Law” (introduced in 1938) further supported a Nazi-style ethnocentric mythology of so-called racial purity which tabooed miscegenation and justified colonization in the Mediterranean. This mythology is reflected metabiographically in Anna’s memoirs, first when Davide’s mother exclaims about Italian soldiers fighting in Libya:

There will be nothing for you. What dreams these fools dream. Black gold! Red dust rather! Yellow sand rather! ... But there, in black Africa ... what do they know? ... he has big ideas about the Future of Italy too.... He’ll get killed by one of those wild men, no better than animals!.... until those savages come and take your head to make a goblet out of it and your finger bones for a fetish.
(*Father* 35)

The southern Italian housewife uncovers the dangerous disillusion behind the military glory of war in a climatically challenging area. In parallel, she exposes the colonial myths of cannibalism and savagery implanted in the European mind about Africa and its inhabitants. The latter are described as ruthless murderers, untouched by reason or humanity, in addition to providing sordid details about their cannibalistic practices. It is the more ironic when the speaker herself subsequently loses control and is compared by the narrator to a “struggling cat whose claws frightened” Davide.

Later, Rosa’s reconstructed perspective of the same war through state propaganda is further developed as follows:

She thought of Africa ... with greedy excitement.... She would be ... watching ... a parade of half-naked girls with bracelets round their legs, whirling to a drummer’s flying hands, while a group of handsome grinning soldiers stood by. These images came to her from the metal engravings of the conquest of Libya which had

appeared in the illustrated journals.... all of Africa – Libya, Somalia, Eritrea alike – beat out a rhythm of adventure and spoils and heroism. The pictures showed her overseers standing by ant-files of ‘natives’ doubled over as they hacked the roads of progress.... A gang of black workers wearing white loincloths faced the camera gravely, looking as if it were something they might be given to eat.... she had seen a village ... where ... Italian mothers with babies on their laps – were sitting in the sun on chairs, just like at home. (*Father* 88)

So the propaganda of Italian fascist imperialism is disseminated through “metal engravings”, “illustrated journals” and “pictures” which glorify colonization as “adventure” and “heroism”, visually supporting its ideological mythopoeia of Africa and implying the necessary expansion of the Italian empire. The African colonies and their inhabitants are portrayed as primitive; either regulated by the power of Italian smiling soldiers or humanized by images of nurturing mothers. Such stereotypes and generalizations of African natives are also created in order to reinforce the Italian population’s confidence in the superiority of their own civilisation compared to “half-naked” Libyans and Abyssinians wearing “white loincloths” and hungry looks. The Italian fascist civilizing enterprise is justified by the notion of the ineluctable social and technological progress of humanity from which African colonies are ‘deprived’. In reality, dehumanised “ant-files” of tamed and cheerless natives are building roads and bridges while colonizers relax in the sun and enjoy the comforts of their newly-acquired “home”. However, even the allegedly comfortable life promised to Italian emigrants, also used to justify colonization, proves itself a myth “[e]xisting colonies were failing to attract the millions of potential emigrants beloved of fascist propaganda, and were proving unrewarding to the few thousand who actually settled there” (Blinkhorn 46).

The war in Abyssinia, in particular, was promoted by Mussolini as a necessity, to “bring civilisation to a barbaric country ... unworthy of taking its place amongst civilised people.” He added in March 1934:

There is no question of territorial conquests ... but a natural expansion which ought to lead to a collaboration between Italy and the people of Africa ... Italy can above all civilise Africa and her

position in the Mediterranean gives her the right and imposes this duty on her. (Evans 178)

Although the myth of a crucial and unavoidable Italian fascist civilising mission in Abyssinia is perpetuated, there is a nuanced reference to “natural expansion” and “collaboration” between the two populations. This type of imperialistic discourse is more insidious because it denies “conquest” and forced expropriation and creates the illusion of equality between a colonizer and a colonized who would be cooperating in a joint project. Moreover, using Italy’s position in the Mediterranean as a double-binding “right [and] duty” to civilize complements fascist imperialistic constructs. The invasion of Abyssinia is further mythified in Anna’s memoir:

Italian troops were set for victory in the empire.... The news was out: Addis Ababa had fallen.... The King in person was to greet the champions of the Fatherland, to heap in praise the aviators who dropped fire from the clouds ... to garland the warriors of the Fatherland. The native army was on the run under the divine and elemental fury of the conquerors. In their white nightshirts, waving their matchstick spears, they were yielding perforce before the might of the unconquered fasces. Soon, the fruits of civilisation would be theirs.... there were ... photographs of aeroplanes dropping fire out of the sky onto a landscape of mountains where tiny figures could be made out, running. (210)

There is a profuse use of political cant in the previous description in addition to the idealization, even deification of Italian colonialism “champions ... warriors of the Fatherland”, “dropped fire from the clouds”, “the divine and elemental fury”, “the might of the unconquered.” On the other hand, “the native army” with rudimentary clothes and weapons are reduced to helpless “ants”, insignificant “tiny figures” reminiscent of the description of Caribbean islanders in the painting accompanying the King’s charter in *Indigo*. In reality, “The fruits of civilisation” are the barbarism and cruelty of war, the discursive embellishment of an ugly truth: the deaths of many Abyssinians (Ethiopians), the inhumane use of mustard gas and flame throwers and the victory of fascism, supported by the King and encouraged by the

neutrality of other European countries. The Eurocentric aim of this colonial war, besides imperial prestige, is to transform the barbarian “Other” into a civilised one through a different form of forced “collaboration” as shown in the following memoir extract:

The Leader was dreaming of changing every Abyssinian into an Italian. The big strong hands of the soldiers advancing into Ethiopia and claiming it as Abyssinia, part of the new empire of Rome, were encircling every little black face, thrusting the flag into the women’s and children’s hands; they were colonising by the spit of the guns and the kiss of the invader, the bullet and the bed; these were the arms of the new crusaders, taking possession. (*Father* 201)

Anna’s memoir subtly demystifies colonial myths through the double meaning of words and their latent brutality “big strong hands”, “encircling”, “thrusting”, and “arms” while colonial reality is embellished with such glorifying expressions as “the new empire” and “the new crusaders.” In addition to that, synecdoche expresses the dual violence of murder and rape associated with a fascist colonization which thus forces the most vulnerable members of the population to surrender to its ‘penetrating’ invasion “spit of the guns”/“bullet” and “kiss”/“bed.”

During the war in Ethiopia, Franco, Davide’s brother, stages an opera allegorising fascist imperial expansion into the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, “designed to justify and glorify the invasion” (Coupe 54). Outraged by “too comical” (Coupe 54) an analogy, the audience claims “[o]ur Abyssinians are not Negroes ... not like Americans. Our Negroes are different” (*Father* 232). This discourse reflects Italy’s competitive ambitions for imperial privilege and its concomitant racism and subjection of indigenous populations. Such a frivolous statement usurps identity from Abyssinians and African Americans by reducing their history and culture to skin color shades. Indeed, the two are homogenized then compared like war prizes, vaunted like newly-acquired possessions, as if one form of racism could outrival the other.

All these various imperialistic discourses, although spatially, temporally, and

culturally remote from each other, share similarities and differences. Both English and Italian fascist imperial propaganda, whether in explorers' letters or national newspapers, include notions of the superiority of their culture and race and the need for their geographical and civilizing expansion. By limiting identity to the opposition of a powerful "us" versus an inferior "them", such imperial narratives display a paternalistic attitude towards colonized nations, infantilizing their inhabitants and leaving no room for their voices or resistance. However, while Kit constantly attempts to legitimize his violent behavior and to deny the issue of miscegenation, whose reality destroys the notion of racial purity lying at the heart of imperialistic discourses, Mussolini's speeches expose violence and rape as the necessary tools of empire. As a result, English imperialism displaces and gradually alienates the Caribbean Other while the Italian fascist brutally absorbs and contains her/him through the false notion of "collaboration".

However, Italian fascist imperialism did not benefit all Italians, some of whom were neglected by their own country and subjected to racist myths both as southerners and as immigrants. For Fascism never solved the most pressing of its domestic issues, that of the severe economic gap between north and south:

Rural poverty was just as widespread as ever, particularly in the south. This poverty was worsened by the USA's decision to stop virtually all further immigration. In the first two decades of the century 200,000 Italians, mainly southerners, had emigrated to the USA each year. With this escape route from rural poverty closed, more Italians left the countryside for the towns and cities to find work and a better standard of living ... [Mussolini's] policies brought much more benefit to large landowners than to poor and landless peasants. Such peasants needed enough land to support their families. (Robson 103)

Fascism was decidedly on the side of the richer Italians as its ruralizing policy of the South only benefited landowners while exacerbating the peasants' socio-economic problems. The latter's only "escape route" was immigration, either to northern cities or to America. Gabriella Gribaudo adds that "the Fascist regime

contributed not only to halting political and economic development, but also to remodeling the image of the South on old stereotypes,” (80) such as backwardness and ignorance.

In Anna’s memoir, Davide’s father criticizes the Italian government’s neglect of the South in favour of imperialism in Africa, giving the example of the ever delayed construction of an aqueduct despite severe water shortages “who cares? No, forget it. Forget those godforsaken southerners, those peasants. Let’s go, let’s cover ourselves in glory – in Africa” (*Father* 43). At the origin of this discrepancy are the myths and prejudices shared by both sides of Italy. Northerners despise the South because of its social problems and so-called backwardness “[h]is gaze ... spoke only of the generic, accumulated ills of the Noonday of Italy, of violence and crime, poverty, disease, ignorance, and superstition.... ‘You peasants understand nothing.’” Southerners, on the other hand, despise the North because the latter have no history of their own “[i]t mattered to him that the people of the south were of ancient lineage ... I’m a Greek.... Men from the north do not share our ancestry” (*Father* 70, 72). The idea of the Greeks as a superior and creative “race” with a glorious history makes up for the present poverty and self-loathing of Davide’s region but still perpetuates myths of racial superiority. As Gribaudo explains:

The idea and therefore the identity of the South of Italy ... has been moulded through its dialogue with the North.... North and South have interpreted each other through ... pre-existing stereotypes.... The South ... is a metaphor which refers to an imaginary and mythical entity.... The region’s identity was...based on negation, on what it lacked.... apart from the abstract references to its Greek and Roman past.... The South was excluded from ... history. (72-73)

Thus the South has always been mythified by the North which stressed its flaws in terms of “what it lacked”; bourgeois values and refinement, wealth and technological progress. Consequently, the prejudices about southern areas, aside from economic and social stagnation, further isolated and de-historicized them. Even the physical features of southerners are not spared from regional scorn, but Davide is tall, an unusual but “a most distinguished thing in a man.... an American giant....

such stature was princely among the dwarfish and swarthy southerners. And so manly” (*Father* 8). Smallness and darkness of skin in a man thus become synonymous with lack of virility and refinement. The representation of the ideal man as internalized by the southern Italian psyche is that of an American or a Northern European, “princely”, almost deified and worshipped by women. But there is another origin to these prejudices: the “positivist theories on race” such as Alfredo Niceforo’s “who used the then current terms ‘Aryans’ (*Ari*) and.... dark Mediterraneans” and conflates the former with strong maleness, the second with weak femaleness (Gribaudo 77). So this parallel between racial superiority and maleness establishes a gendering of race which reflects the combined racism and sexism of its instigators.

Even within the south itself, internal distinctions based on local customs are made, each area considering itself superior to the other, “the vendettas, the feuds, the bloody score – these ways were for barbarians, for people like Sicilians, or Neapolitans, people whose own blood was all mixed up with Spaniards’. Cruel people, not like the Ninfanians” (*Father* 115). The analogy with the cruelty of Spaniards is a reference to the fifteenth-century Spanish Inquisition and its persecution of Greek Orthodox Christians in the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily.

However, southern Italian people’s mythification is further carried on when they immigrate to the United States, fleeing the harsh conditions in their country, some of which are explained by Castiglione as follows:

Submerged in their proliferation, impoverished by the decline of agriculture, and discouraged by the unjust distribution of taxes between the north and the south, to these people emigration offers the only relief, and they desert the land which produces in abundance the good things of the earth, for which there is little demand. (56)

Anna’s fictionalized memoir only further confirms the social, economic and political circumstances which had favoured immigration “[w]hen Davide sails for New York ... in ... 1913, cholera will have been streaking through ... Naples once again ... there will have been riots, and there is little flour ... medical supplies are failing, and the

steamships are filling up fast” (*Father* 143). In addition to cholera plagues, the famine and poverty caused by the agricultural crisis, southern Italian areas underwent political turmoil and instability. Such circumstances forced the peasants to leave the country in their quest for better living conditions.

Davide’s diaries, written at the moment of their passage through the “Open Door”, reflect the myth of the “backward” Italian southerner and the self-loathing resulting from its internalization. In addition to the difficulties of the sea crossing, the illnesses and the squalor, Davide self-scathingly adds up the list of prejudiced ideas projected by the Americans upon Italian immigrants:

Most on board are peasants – I have seen only a handful of men of liberal education and profession like myself (Sandro says this will stand me in good stead with the Americans). They reckon all southerners like ourselves are a separate and inferior race from the Italians of the North. Of course they are right there – in one way ... Sandro warns me that they distinguish us from the northerners because we are short and hairy and analphabetic ... they will soon see that I at least am none of these. But I note, on the deck and down below ... that we seem an inconsiderable people, easily disregarded, though so numerous and so noisy. We are like the small coin easily forgotten when money loses value.... like doits, like groats. Yet I feel myself so far from this insignificance that it makes my head ache to consider their ignorance. (*Father* 145-46)

Considering himself an exception to the other immigrants who are mostly unskilled peasants, Davide realizes the privileged status his education and profession as a lawyer will provide him in the U.S. The division of Italy into a developed North and a backward South is a notion which would inevitably reach the Americans who “reckon” southerners are all inferior because of such ‘unflattering’ physical traits as “shortness” and “hairiness” in addition to their illiteracy.¹³ Being short and hairy is not only associated with different racial or ethnic origins, but also with primitiveness and bestiality. As to illiteracy, it is often associated with a lack of intelligence. These

¹³ Castiglione explains that although it diminished, “illiteracy remains a characteristic disadvantage of the Italian immigrants, especially those from southern Italy. The difference of intellectual conditions between the north and south of Italy is the result of long years of misgovernment and neglect in the provinces of southern Italy... (but it can’t) be affirmed to be a characteristic of Italian immigration alone...” (61-2)

combined characteristics turn into incapacitating lacunae which consign southerners to racial inferiority. Davide himself confirms and internalizes the prejudices against his people “[o]f course they are right there – in one way.” As a result, his self-loathing makes him value his ‘superior’ qualities while scorning and demeaning his own people “I at least am none of these ... I feel myself so far from this insignificance ... their ignorance.” Davide already starts “noting” other southerners through Americans’ eyes by describing the former as “noisy” and “numerous”, annoying and conspicuous, but still unworthy of attention, as worthless as “doits” and “groats.” Davide’s diaries are a more reliable first-hand source because they metabiographically expose the southern Italian immigrant’s intimate feelings and thoughts that would not/cannot be imaginatively included in Anna’s memoir, itself based on Fantina’s memories. These diaries also testify to the dangerous effects of internalization on the diarist’s self-esteem and identity.

Franco, Davide’s brother, also experiences self-loathing, having internalised a series of ethnic slurs against Italian-Americans “[e]yeties, a Bunch of Wops. Guineas are cowards, right? Dagoes are dagger-happy, right? Quick to draw when the enemy’s back’s turned. No foreign labor here” (*Father* 213). Such words summarize American mythopoeia about Italians as non-white “Others”, *naturally* prone to cowardice and treason (mainly in relation to their alliance with Germany in the First World War), which is used to justify racism, the “Closed Door” policy and job discrimination. The following quotation positions this mythification of Italian immigrants within its socio-economic context:

No one can follow the fortunes of the Italians abroad without being struck by a sort of contempt in which they are often held. “Dago”, “gringo” ... “macaroni” – how long the list of epithets might be! ... Whether such names and such opinions originate in the laborer’s resentment of competition or in the citizen’s easy association of objectionable or misunderstood personal attributes with the idea of the foreigner. (Foerster vii)

Such derogatory expressions as “gringo” and “macaroni” are based solely on

prejudiced assumptions about Italian immigrants and abounded in American everyday language at the time. Not only are these “epithets” shallow and demeaning, reflecting the intense hatred directed at these people, but they were observed and justified by Italians themselves. Such “dislike” is first due to the fact that immigrants have different customs and habits which contrast with their host environment. As a result, negative generalizations are projected upon all Italians, conflating particular flaws with their foreignness. Second, American labourers resent them for taking their jobs and accepting the most irksome toils such as “the construction of the subterranean train network” described by Davide as “a wasteland ... pits of hell ... the black hole in the rock, the hellish roar of drills ... the men bent like slaves to the yoke ... treated as pieces of machinery” (*Father* 187-88). As a consequence, Italian workers lower the wages of labour and create unfair competition with American labourers, so it is the latter’s ignorance and fear of joblessness which are the real impetuses behind the racist discrimination against Italian immigrants. A foreman explains to Davide:

Italians make the best workers, for laziness isn’t part of their nature ... that is why so many businesses here set up barriers against them. ‘No Foreign Labor’, that sign I know so well, is inspired by fear. Fear that Italians will accomplish things better, more quickly, with more artistry and despatch ... we have to hold onto the ground already gained. (*Father* 187)

In addition to providing cheap labor, Italian immigrants are also good at their jobs: creative, quick and efficient, which increases the resentment of American labourers. However, such menial tasks further alienate the Italian labourer who cannot adjust to this new environment, turned into a machine “furnishing only brute force and no special interest ... in the work ... he remains always a stranger” (68-69). This sense of foreignness and the disillusion with the American dream myth as well as the material hardships of Italian immigration are thus captured by Anna’s memoir through the imaginatively reconstructed conversations with other immigrants and Davide’s thoughts in free indirect speech “New York, back in the Tens and Twenties

... [Davide] remember[ed] the contempt in which he and his fellow Italians had been held. Little they knew, he thought.”(Father 70)

A major cause behind social alienation, racism takes many shapes like intimidation and gratuitous brutality. Imma, one of Davide’s daughters, recalls a violent episode reflecting American labourers’ hostility towards Italian immigrants, destined to ingrain fear and humiliation in them:

Her father had brought back such moments to her in his diaries.... They were walking together... when the man shoved in front of Papà and stood up against him, saying, ‘Where did ya get that suit, dago?’ ... Papà lifted his hand with his cane ... Imma screamed and hung on to his jacket.... Papà was tongue-tied ... stammering English in his terrible accent, trying to get past. The man squared up more bullishly... Her mother ... now reached them.... ‘Scram,lady, before we make ya.’.... Davide resisted, he faced the man ... he looked all wrong in his best suit ... watching to pounce ... as the man’s huge lowering face seemed to grow bigger and more ogreish ... ‘You guineas’ll knife a man in the back, won’t ya? Comes easy to ya, right?’ Davide struggled out of his trance ... and stepped sideways, choking out in his stumbling, thick accent, ‘In Italy we do not fight when there are ladies present,’.... The man muscled up again and pushed him in the chest ... Maria Filippa begged him to turn back. They did so at last, with the fleeing voice behind them, which, in spite of her terror that it would bore into their backs until they dropped out of view, did not come any closer. (Father 218-19)

The act of reading the father’s diaries revives his daughter’s own memories, memories that might have been inhibited by Davide for their harshness and negative impact on his ego and self-esteem. Having put on their best clothes for a walk in the streets of New York, the family is molested by American dockers. One can note again the use of such ethnic slurs as “dago” and “guineas” which essentialize Italians as thieves and traitors. The violent intimidation “the man shoved ... squared up more bullishly” transforms the attackers into “ogres”, monsters who “muscled up ... and pushed him in the chest.” These men are trying to provoke a fight that would justify their insults. Through Imma’s perspective, Davide’s elegance and ‘thick’ accent are incongruous in this American slum and add to his hesitation, “tongue-tied ...

stammering ... choking ... stumbling.” The whole situation is intensified by the presence of female witnesses he is supposed to protect like he did for his sister back in Ninfania, and which forces him to capitulate and not respond to provocation. Imma compares the impact of the dockers’ “fleering” insults to that of bullets that are lodged in their mind like the one in Davide’s head after the duel, a disturbing metaphor for the brutality of internalisation and self-loathing. Willard Price describes and deconstructs American prejudices as they are fed by ignorance and the media:

The first phrases of English [an Italian] learns are usually the American curses.... The Italian is decidedly unmoral in thought, but he is not so immoral and criminal in action as yellow journalism would have us suppose. Police experts state that [it] is more a matter of newspaper imagination than of fact. There is much lower percentage of criminality, immorality ... among the Italians than among many other immigrant races. (107)

It is interesting to note that Italian immigrants themselves formed prejudiced ideas and myths about native Americans, mainly through the “yellow press.”¹⁴ Enrico C. Sartorio lists some of the reasons behind this reversed racism:

In these articles ... American men are superficial, weak, ridiculous; American women are vain ... and everything else is termed “Americanate,” ... their chief mistake is that they generalize ... Where does the fault lie? In prejudice and indifference, and in the spirit of patronage. (188)

Media generalizations, American conservatism and feelings of superiority thus exclude Italian immigrants and lead to the formation of a negative mythopoeia and resentment on both sides. As a result, the possibility for mutuality or feelings of empathy is destroyed in a vicious circle of myths.

Whether directed at people because of their sex, ethnicity, colour or class, discrimination follows the same psychic process of projection and introjection.

¹⁴ Cheap American and Italian local newspapers.

Myths are a-temporal, constructed and subtly created to vilify various minority groups through time and space, from Caribbean women and black Africans in the seventeenth century to Ethiopians and southern Italian immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century, subsequently justifying the containment and punishment of a genealogy of “Others.” It is through engrafted memoirs, diaries, epitaphs and letters within Warner’s novels that different forms of sexist, imperialistic and racist mythopoeia are exposed, re-contextualized and deconstructed.

Conclusion

Marina Warner's fictional metabiography provides a new kind of realism in its exposure through fiction of biographical research and its internal mechanisms. Engrafting the genres of fiction and life writing, her novels display a variety of textual levels moving fluidly from one perspective to the other through free indirect speech and multiple character narration. Engrafting as a technique emphasizes the hybridity of both Warner's fiction and of life writing types in general. Such a structural, thematic and temporal layering is an experimental "reworking of realism" (Head 221) because it has come to reflect the very fragmentation of reality itself and allow for different perspectives, however imagined. The usually silenced can speak, from homosexual priests to southern Italian peasants, immigrants and exiled single mothers. By relying on the characterization of such marginalized people and spaces, a fictional and real space is provided for their voices and the deconstruction of the myths and ideologies surrounding them. Warner's metabiography has thus deconstructed the binary opposition of realism versus experimentalism. Many examples of biographical "experiments" of this kind have existed since the late nineteenth century, such as James's *The Aspern Papers*, and throughout the twentieth century, including Woolf's *Orlando*, A.S. Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale* and Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*. Although most of Warner's biographers and biographees are fictional, her metabiography still uncovers and questions important life writing concerns in the same way as non-fictional metabiography.

My own 'metabiographical' project in this thesis has been to analyze the productive "engraftment" of fiction and life writing in order to explore the contribution of Warner's works to fictional metabiography in particular and to life writing in general. I have relied on multi-disciplinary research as well as the life writing theory of the last thirty years and demonstrated how these theoretical perspectives have inspired my formulation of "metabiography" and of life writing myths which are analyzed through a combination of the deconstruction theories of

Derrida, Barthes and Warner. The latter help examine particular concepts and terminologies deeply related to Warner's metabiographical texts and closely dissect their internal inconsistencies, contradictions and ambiguities. My deconstructive strategy also takes on a New Historical direction in the analysis of historical fiction and no longer limits itself to the metabiographical extracts as narratives in and for themselves. This mainly consists in re-positioning fictionalized events and characters within their extra-textual socio-historical contexts and using their mutual convergences and divergences as tools in the deconstructive process.

What has mostly become clear over the course of this work are the myths and false assumptions exposed and challenged by Warner, namely the limitations of biographical textuality as a truthful representation of the subject's "essence" and of the outside world and the biographer's so-called objectivity and detachment. Not least important is the increasing self-consciousness or attention of biography to its form and literariness rather than its content. At first, the story of the biographer becomes as important as that of the subject with its discoveries, journeys and myriad quandaries. After that, the reader's access to biographical research is given another dimension through the inclusion or *mise en abîme* of material and documentation in their original form. This structural exposure can be interpreted as a postmodern imitation of different types of life writing, "the postmodern biographer's more playful relationship with his[/her] audience." (Hamilton 250) In that light, biographical conventions like factuality, referentiality and chronological progress are seen to be founded on false assumptions and myths. Warner's metabiography also betrays such unacknowledged characteristics as the biographer's empathy with his/her subject and the former's constant presence in, and interference with the narrative. Warner's is a more varied and transparent text which not only uncovers the reasoning and methodological tasks preceding the composition of life writings but also their outcome as a finished "text product". This type of fictional metabiography thus challenges the mythical omniscience and authority of the biographer, revealing his/her presence within the narrative and bringing the biographee's own words into view. As a consequence, the relations of authority between biographers and subjects are reconfigured, while the reader's own interpretative access to the hidden aspects of the genre increases the creative potential of life writing. The notion of mythopoeia

is also established by the inclusion of the reader as an indirect participant who increases the myth-making potential of engrafted life writing types through her/his expectations and prejudices.

The gradual destruction of these conventions runs parallel to the destruction of myriad other myths inherent to the heterogeneous gender, ethnic and socio-political contexts of her novels. Warner's metabiography turns into an efficient myth-deconstruction tool, uncovering the mythology and mythopoeia underlying ethnocentric "metanarratives" and patriarchal discourses. Historically and geographically remote events are unified in the process, moving from the Jesuit mission in China to English colonization in the Caribbean and Italian Fascism, and infusing life into previously neglected historical, religious and folkloric *tableaux*. The types of prejudice directed at people because of their sex, ethnicity, colour or class are exposed through engrafted memoirs, diaries, epitaphs and letters within Warner's novels which deconstruct such a sexist, classist and racialist mythopoeia. By re-positioning these myths within their respective histories, such derogatory images are shown to vilify various minority groups through time and space, subsequently justifying the containment of a genealogy of "Others." This pattern unifies, and draws equal attention to Warner's four novels thanks to the various engrafted fictionalized diaries and memoirs which deconstruct the myth of the foreigner and the exile and put into perspective the impact of patriarchy, Fascism and Catholicism on women. Engrafted letters and epitaphs also nuance the different types of colonialist, religious and racialist discourses which lie at the foundation of Imperialism and provide an original insight into postcolonial and feminist theories and issues.

Metabiography in Warner's four novels has also contributed an aesthetic dimension in the sense of embellishing the novel through literariness and lyricism, a sophisticated diction, and aesthetic relief or "aesthetic delight, a rich cultural patterning" (Williams 23) through stylistic and spatiotemporal variety. The use of uncommon words, complex jargon and literate mythological and historical references widen the novels' cultural and linguistic horizons and challenge the reader's intellect, in addition to enhancing and nuancing the beauty of the narrative. Some reviewers like Jason Cowley have criticized Warner's style as "elitist" in the sense of not being

open to any reader's enjoyment which is at odds with the aim of my thesis in doing justice to the plenitude of literary, ideological and cultural prowess in Warner's universalistic corpus. Indeed, the multi-faceted, versatile role played by Warner's metabiography and metabiographical extracts reaches further than the boundaries of the life writing as a genre per se and expands to socio-political issues. For example, Warner's focus on women, their historical and symbolic representations through time and space, the influence of such imagery upon their status, are elements which transpire, albeit fictionally, through the letters, diaries and memoirs written by or about women.

Warner has also aesthetically revived such life writing types as chronicles and annals, although they have lost their topicality. The generic revival of these historical discourses may help to contextualize and restore the importance of particular periods in history and the way they are portrayed. These "engraftings" widen the thematic perspectives and structural horizons of fiction, especially through a sophisticated, richer mixture of genres, text levels, narrators and points of view. Through its focus on life writings as a genre for its own sake, as a fully-fledged textual addition with its internal rules and patterns, this thesis sheds an original light on Warner's fiction.

In addition, engrafting strategies are closely related to metabiographical structures and themes. The concern with time and memory in Warner's fiction, as well as her characters' constant attempts at coming to terms with their past has paved the way for a multitude of thematic and structural alternations between past and present and between narrators of all kinds. Some dialogues or exchanges are endowed with a specifically feminine bonding and communitarian quality similar to that of recent "group biographies" (Caine 61), especially in terms of knowledge transmission between female generations. As a result, Warner's metabiography reinstates the importance of female presence/speech, especially through the motif of women reading men's diaries or epitaphs as a strategy for re-appropriating male writing and textuality. Metabiography is also Warner's best option for the indirect deconstruction of authoritative and powerful religious, mainly Catholic, myths internalized by men and women through centuries of oppression and indoctrination. Folkloric myths within engrafted memoirs and letters centralize the stories and people of such peripheral areas as the Caribbean and southern Italy, reviving

particular cultures while retaining the universal dimension of human values like motherhood, family, love and loss.

Warner's metabiography is a parallel phenomenon to non-fictional types of metabiography, mainly contributing to the deconstruction of social, ethnic and gender myths while fictionalizing postmodern life writing concerns about the ultimate knowability of the past. Metabiography in that sense is deeply linked to the postmodern concern with the past and the renaissance of historical fiction among contemporary female novelists like Warner whose aim is to clearly establish a more general link between life writing and history. With the return to referentiality and non-fiction in the few last decades, this kind of experimentation has successfully shown the concreteness and political productivity of fictionalization. Warner's fictional metabiography has been the literary harbinger of the *fin de siècle* "biographical turn", the (fictional) chronicle of a 'birth' foretold.

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