MIRROR IMAGES OF REMEMBRANCE
IN MARISA MADIERI'S *LA CONCHIGLIA*
AND CLAUDIO MAGRIS'S *LEI DUNQUE CAPIRÀ*:
A TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

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Summary. A kind of parallelism is noted between Marisa Madieri's short story *La conchiglia* and the novella *Lei dunque capirà* by Claudio Magris. In *La conchiglia* there is a *she* (Madieri the author) who writes in the voice of a *he* (the narrator and surviving spouse) who recalls another *she* (his deceased wife Naipuni) and their life together. A similar stratagem can be seen in *Lei dunque capirà*, though in the novella there is a *he* (Magris the author) who writes in the voice of a *she* (the narrator Eurydice) who talks about another *he* (her poet husband Orpheus) and their moments together. The lives reflected in these *immagini speculari* which mirror one another compose a kind of love song, one (the surviving spouse's hymn) a simple tender one, the other (Eurydice's song) no less devoted but more complex, knotty. Both songs are perhaps a projection of how the protagonists might have wanted to appear to the person they love. The parallel is not perfect, though in each case the projection compensates for a lost reality.

On reading Graziano Bianchi's book about Marisa Madieri and her writings,¹ I was struck by a kind of parallelism between Madieri's short story *La conchiglia* and the novella *Lei dunque capirà* by Claudio Magris. In *La conchiglia* there is a *she* (Madieri the author) who writes in the voice of a *he* (the narrator and surviving spouse) who recalls another *she* (his deceased wife Naipuni) and their life together. Bianchi writes:

dietro la magia di quei nomi introvabili, con la vita tratteggiata in momenti essenziali vissuti insieme, c'è lui visto da lei che si proietta nel dopo. È lei che scrive, è lei che registra gli istanti di un domani dove i sentimenti s'incontreranno nella stessa onda di un mare che è luce. (100)

[beyond the magic of those exotic names, with life drawn in the essential moments they experienced together, there is him seen by her projected into an after time. It is she who writes, it is she who records the moments of a tomorrow where their feelings will come together in the same wave of a sea that is light.]

¹ Graziano Bianchi, *La narrativa di Marisa Madieri*. Florence: Le Lettere, 2003.

A similar stratagem can be noted in *Lei dunque capirà*, though in the novella there is a *he* (Magris the author) who writes in the voice of a *she* (the narrator Eurydice) who talks about another *he* (her poet husband Orpheus) and their life together. So we have a *him*, Orpheus, seen by a *her*, Eurydice, seen by *him* the author. The idea that comes to mind is that of *immagini speculari*, mirror images or rather lives reflected in a mirror which mirror one another. As Magris himself has written: “I libri di Marisa Madieri sono più miei di quelli che ho scritto io; contengono di più la mia vita e il suo senso” [Marisa Madieri’s books are more mine than those I wrote myself; they contain more of my life and its meaning] (Bianchi, *La narrativa di Marisa Madieri*, 12). Perhaps the opposite also holds true, if we consider Magris’s works and Madieri’s place in them. Not images seen through a glass, darkly, imperfectly, but reflections that meet face to face, in a sea of light.

The elderly male narrator in *La conchiglia* recalls the woman he loved since childhood, who died many years earlier and whose memory he realizes he is starting to lose, despite the intensity of feeling and passion they shared. Magris has suggested that, in some ways, Naipuni is a self-portrait of Madieri, though the word “self-portrait” is not to be taken literally, of course. This is certainly not a realistic portrait, rather it is in some way a projection of a desire, of how she would have liked to be, of how she would have liked to appear in the eyes of the man she loved, and so on. The game of mirrors comes into play in that the author sees herself as a female character seen in turn through the eyes of the male character that she has invented: “Naipuni era una bambina fiera e non piangeva mai” [Naipuni was a bold little girl and she never cried] (*La conchiglia*, 240). Or:

Io non avevo occhi che per Naipuni, bella tra tutte con i suoi bianchi anelli di conchiglie tintinnanti ai polsi e alle sottili caviglie. Si muoveva ondeggiando i fianchi e le braccia, con la grazia ancor pudica di un giovane uccello al suo primo volo ma già con la ferma consapevolezza del suo esser donna. (*La conchiglia*, 246)

[I had eyes for no one but Naipuni, the most beautiful of all with her white shell bracelets jingling on her wrists and slim ankles. Swaying her hips and arms, she moved with the grace of a young bird on its first flight, still chaste yet already fully aware of being a woman.]

In *Lei dunque capirà* the mirror imaging is different. The premise of the novella is straightforward: the woman speaking has crossed over to the hereafter, depicted here as a peculiar ‘Casa di Riposo,’ but has obtained a special concession from the Director of the Rest Home to allow her hus-

band to come and take her away from there. At the last moment she decides not to go, and the resulting monologue is her explanation to the Director—the “you”, *Lei*, of the title—of her reasons for not returning with her husband. Though the author may have endowed the figure of Orpheus, the poet-spouse, with certain traits or features that pertain to him, and though he may have drawn upon certain episodes that actually occurred during his life with Madieri, the identification is, paradoxically, much more indirect and the portrait that emerges much less accurate. Similarly, the narrator of *Lei dunque capirà*, that proud, strong-willed and outspoken Eurydice, may bear some resemblance to Madieri, but not very much. The woman’s less noble, particularly unlikeable features—her high regard for herself and her tendency to be domineering or arrogant, for example—do not correspond to Madieri; Magris invented them or took his inspiration from other female figures. Likewise, as far as the figure of Orpheus is concerned, though the author and his fictional character may assuredly have many things in common, the negative traits of the poet in the novella—among them his pompous swaggering and pretentiousness—are thankfully lacking in the author. Continuing the game of mirrors, the author here views himself as a character seen in turn through the eyes of the female narrator that he has invented, but with a difference. Here the “self-portrait,” if we may call it that, is even less realistic; indeed it is the opposite of a projection of how he would have liked to be, of how he would have liked to be perceived by the woman he loved.

Although the husbands of Madieri’s Naipuni and Magris’s Eurydice face similar loss and yearning—both are left without their wives, and both long to unveil the mystery of life—their way of being in the world is very different. The elderly widower in *La conchiglia*, grieving for his departed wife Naipuni and desolate without her, feels that she has taken part of his own life with her:

La pietra delle stelle è indissolubilmente legata alla mia vita, o meglio a quella parte della mia vita che Naipuni non si è portata via. È trascorso tanto tempo dalla sua morte, che quasi non ne rammento i lineamenti. È come se il suo viso si fosse stemperato nelle cose, affidandosi ad esse. Talvolta una folata di vento tiepido mi riporta d'improvviso alla memoria l'odore della sua pelle, il volo di un uccello mi ricorda la grazia della sua giovinezza, la pioggia che mi bagna è la carezza lieve delle sue dita. (*La conchiglia*, 239-40)

[The star-gazing rock is indissolubly linked to my life, or better yet to that part of my life that Naipuni did not carry off with her. So much time has passed since her death, that I can barely recall her features. It is

as though her face has dissolved into things, commending herself to them. Sometimes a gust of warm wind suddenly brings me the memory of the scent of her skin, the flight of a bird reminds me of her youthful grace, the rain that bathes me is the light caress of her fingers.]

His mourning is resigned and solitary, a quiet, dignified sorrow that is a far cry from the posturing ranting of the poet in *Lei dunque capirà*. As the poet's wife puts it: "Da quando sono qui, per la verità, ho sentito dire che è diventato insopportabile, piagnucoloso e supponente; chiede aiuto a tutti e non ascolta nessuno e pretende che lo stiano ad ascoltare e lo ammirino solo perché non sa che pesci pigliare" [To be honest, I've heard that he has become insufferable since I've been in here, snivelling and arrogant; he asks everyone for help and doesn't listen to anybody, and he expects them to listen and admire him just because he doesn't know which way to turn] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 17).

Both men are lost without their wives, adrift. Without Naipuni, the contours of the world itself seem to change for her widowed spouse:

Ho percorso a piedi molte volte la mia piccolo patria. Conosco le sue impervie scogliere, i suoi neri vulcani, i suoi rari approdi, i suoi villaggi custoditi dai giganteschi moai dagli occhi di corallo. Mi appariva un tempo non grande ma sufficiente e perfetta. Oggi non mi basta più. Il rifugio di un tempo si è trasformato in una prigione. (*La conchiglia*, 237)

[I have travelled across my small country many times on foot. I know its unyielding cliffs, its black volcanoes, its rare harbours, its villages watched over by gigantic moai with eyes of coral. Though not large, at one time it seemed to me to be sufficient and perfect. Today it is no longer enough for me. The haven of one time has become a prison.]

Eurydice, on the other hand, believes that the reason her husband came to take her back was because he could not get along without her: "Anche lui, là fuori, da solo aveva certo avuto paura; forse per questo era venuto a riprendermi. Non per salvarmi — anche se ne era convinto, se se lo dava ad intendere nelle sue canzoni. [...] No, non era venuto per salvarmi, ma per essere salvato" [He too, alone out there, had certainly been afraid; maybe that's why he came to take me back. Not to save me—even though he was convinced of it, though his songs led you to believe that. [...] No, he hadn't come to save me, but to be saved] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 38-39).

Naipuni's presence in her husband's life shields him from the void: "Come mi appariva vasta la mia isola a quel tempo e amico l'oceano in cui mi tuffavo con Naipuni! [...] L'universo allora non era un vuoto sterminato e muto ma una dimora accogliente, piena di voci significative" [How

vast my island seemed at that time and how propitious the ocean where I swam with Naipuni! [...] The universe at that time was not a boundless, silent void but a welcoming place in which to dwell, full of meaningful voices] (*La conchiglia*, 247).

Similarly Eurydice is her husband's lifeblood, the sap that enabled him to bloom:

Ero io la sua terra perduta, la linfa della sua fioritura, della sua vita. Era venuto per riprendersi la sua terra, da dove era stato esiliato. E anche per essere di nuovo protetto da quei colpi feroci che arrivano da ogni parte e che io avevo sempre parato per lui, le frecce velenose destinate a lui che incontravano invece il mio seno, tenero nella sua mano ma forte come uno scudo rotondo a ricevere e a fermare quelle frecce, a intercettare e ad assorbire il loro veleno prima che arrivasse a lui. (*Lei dunque capirà*, 39)

[I was his lost land, the lymph of his flourishing, of his life. He had come to take back his land, from which he had been exiled. And also to be protected once again from those savage blows that come from all sides, that I had always parried for him, the poisonous arrows meant for him which instead encountered my breast, tender in his hand but resilient as a rounded shield when it came to meeting and stopping those arrows, in intercepting and absorbing their poison before it got to him.]

In this sense, both women share an identity with the *donna-scudo*, a tradition that harks back to the "screen lady" of Dante's *Vita Nuova* and reappears in the *donna-polena* (ship's figurehead) of Magris's novel *Alla cieca*. Such a figure can at times be a lifesaver, literally and figuratively. The poet's wife in *Lei dunque capirà* is the great man's shield against the world, the figurehead at the prow of his ship, the woman who has the power to save. With her, he is safe, sheltered from life's slings and arrows.

Both Naipuni's husband and Orpheus are inspired by the women they love, though in different measure. The widower, no less an artist than the poet in his own circles, is a skilled sculptor and woodcarver whose work includes sculpting the colossal statues of the ancestral spirits known as *moai*. Naipuni inspires him to industriousness, for example, in embellishing the hut they will dwell in as newlyweds: "Io, che già ero diventato un discreto artigiano, mi misi all'opera per decorare con eleganti disegni i sedili di pietra e i piani piani di appoggio per l'interno. Per Naipuni incisi un sedile così bello da sembrare un trono" [I, who had already become a fairly good craftsman, set to work decorating the stone seats and interior surfaces with elegant designs. For Naipuni I carved a seat that was so exquisite it looked like a throne] (*La conchiglia*, 247). The self-styled Muse of *Lei dunque capirà* not only inspired her poet-husband to greatness but

to hear her tell it—bearing in mind that she is a woman of considerable pride—taught him everything he knows: “Ero orgogliosa che tutti lo ammirassero e non mi importava che non sapessero che era merito mio, che lo facevo rigar dritto” [I was proud that everyone admired him and I didn’t care whether they knew that it was thanks to me, that I was the one who made him toe the line] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 16). She even goes so far as to suggest that “Senza di lui, anch’io non sarei stata niente, come lui [...]” [Without him, I too would have been nothing, like him [...]] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 40). While Naipuni’s husband takes a simple pride in his art, sculpting the *moai* out of reverence and tradition, Eurydice suggests that her man is more in love with himself and that he cherishes the sorrow that feeds and nourishes his verse. In fact, she insinuates that more than inspiring him, she actually composed his verse: “Cosa importa di chi è quel canto se parla per te, per noi [...]? Anche tante mie parole sono finite tra i tuoi canti, tra le tue rime più celebrate e ammirate da tutti, e io ne sono felice, perché sei tu che le dici e così mi ami ancora di più ...” [What does it matter whose song it is if it speaks for you, for us [...]? Even many of my words ended up in your songs, among your most celebrated verses admired by all, and I’m happy about it, because it’s you who recite them and that way you love me even more ...] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 31).

Beyond their crafts, the two artists share a fascination with the unfathomable mystery of life. To Naipuni’s husband “l’anello d’acqua che circonda la mia isola è un grande, amaro enigma [...]” [the ring of water that encircles my island is a vast, bitter enigma [...]] (*La conchiglia*, 242). The sea around him is an inscrutable unknown:

L’isola è la nostra madre e la nostra condanna. Tante volte abbiamo inviato esploratori in tutte le direzioni e i pochi che sono ritornati ci hanno riferito che nulla c’era davanti a loro se non l’oceano salato. Stagione dopo stagione, generazione dopo generazione, il nostro orizzonte è rimasto vuoto. (*La conchiglia*, 237-238)

[The island is our mother and our curse. Many times we sent explorers out in all directions and the few who returned reported that there was nothing there except the briny ocean. Season after season, generation after generation, our horizon has been empty.]

He asks himself endless questions that have no answers: “Esiste la fine del mare? Forse i manutara lo sanno. Gli uccelli, dopo aver allevato la loro nidiata, partono ogni anno verso mete sconosciute. [...] Io stesso temo che questa cintura d’acqua sia l’unica realtà e l’unico nostro destino” [Is there an end to the sea? Perhaps the manutara know the answer. The birds, after

raising their brood, take off each year toward unknown destinations. [...] I myself fear that this ring of water is the only reality and our only destiny] (*La conchiglia*, 238). His questioning extends to the veracity of the ancestral myths:

Chissà se le nostre leggende dicono il vero, se realmente discendiamo da uomini che hanno vissuto su altre terre o se siamo nati dall'uomo uccello, che celebriamo nei nostri riti. Forse un tempo eravamo tutti uccelli divini, che per un'oscura colpa sono stati puniti e privati della possibilità di abitare la libera volta celeste. (*La conchiglia*, 237)

[Who knows if our legends speak the truth, if we really descended from men who lived in other lands or if we were born of the Bird Man, whom we celebrate in our rites. Perhaps at one time we were all divine birds, who were then punished for some obscure sin and deprived of the possibility of inhabiting the infinite celestial vault.]

For Eurydice's husband a preoccupation for the "Truth" lies at the core of his verse, and is the reason she decides not to return with him: "soltanto il Vero grande e terribile è degno del canto — almeno del suo, non lo diceva ma lo pensava — e quel Vero lo si conosce soltanto dietro le porte" [only the great, horrific Truth is worthy of song—at least of his song, he didn't say it but he thought it—and that Truth can only be known behind those doors] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 48). His is not the desire of a simple man to unravel the mystery of life, but the obsessive desire of a man concerned with his own importance. His song had to tell the Truth at all costs, he used to tell her: "Lui poi smania più di tutti, perché è un poeta e la poesia, dice, deve scoprire e dire il segreto della vita, strappare il velo, sfondare le porte, toccare il fondo del mare dov'è nascosta la perla" [He's yearning to know more than anybody, because he's a poet and poetry, he says, should uncover and tell the secret of life, tear away the veil, break down the doors, reach the bottom of the sea where the pearl is hidden] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 48). That way he could "afferrare la sua lira e inalzare il canto nuovo, inaudito, il canto che dice ciò che nessuno sa" [take up his lyre and extol a new, unprecedented song, a song that tells what no one else knows] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 48). Recalling her husband's obsession with knowing the Truth, his constant questions concerning "final things"—who are we, where did we come from, where are we going?—his wanting to penetrate the mysteries and not being able to, she decides to spare herself from his never-ending questions while at the same time saving him from knowledge of the horrendous void: "Me lo vedevo, aggrappato a me, ad attendere le mie parole, i suoi occhi verdi febbrili ... e come avrei potuto dirgli che ..." [I could just see him, clinging to me, awaiting my every word, his green eyes feverish ...

and how could I tell him that ...] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 49). How could she tell him that even now that she had crossed over into the hereafter, she knew no more than he did? That the afterlife was no different than before? It would destroy him.

Remembrance plays a significant role in both narrations. Memories carry both Naipuni's husband and Eurydice back to a time when they and their spouses were together, and to the happiness they shared. The widower recalls the day he saw Naipuni gazing at her reflection in a pool of water: "Stava inginocchiata sul bordo del piccolo lago e si specchiava, con i lunghi capelli neri che ne sfioravano la superficie. Si era posta un fiore rosso all'orecchio come aveva visto fare alle ragazze più grandi" [She was kneeling at the edge of the small lake gazing at her reflection, her long black hair trailing the surface. She had placed a red flower behind her ear as she had seen the older girls do] (*La conchiglia*, 241-42). Their happy times together included swimming in the sea, just as those of Eurydice and her husband did:

Rimanevamo a lungo distesi al sole, l'uno accanto all'altra, in perfetto silenzio. Talvolta prendevo Naipuni in braccio, scalpitante e ridente, e la portavo con me dentro le acque sempre un po' fredde dell'oceano. Giocavamo spensierati come ai tempi della nostra infanzia e io le cingevo la vita, la immergevo tutta e poi l'alzavo leggera contro il cielo. Usciva tenendo gli occhi chiusi e la testa piegata all'indietro, sicché i lunghi capelli neri si distendevano lisci e grondanti sulle spalle e la pelle bruna coperta di mille gocce riluceva come l'interno madreperlaceo di una conchiglia. (*La conchiglia*, 247)

[For a long time we would lie stretched out in the sun, side by side, in perfect silence. Sometimes I would lift Naipuni, rearing and laughing, in my arms and carry her with me into those ocean waters that were always somewhat cold. We would frolic around, light-hearted as in the days of our childhood, and I would encircle her waist, submerging her all the way, and then lightly raise her up against the sky. She came up out of the water with her eyes closed and her head tilted back, her long black hair streaming sleek and wet over her shoulders, her brown skin, veiled with a thousand droplets, glistening like the pearly lining of a seashell.]

Eurydice's memories, unlike those of Naipuni's husband, are mixed. While the widower never utters a negative word about his deceased wife, Eurydice's recollections are ambivalent if not downright inconsistent. Though she proudly tells the story of their love, so intense as to spill into every aspect of their life together, including the creative process, her feelings toward her spouse waver considerably. There are happy moments, to be sure, when due to the veiled, opaque light of the Rest Home,

mi sembra di essere sul fondo del mare, dove tutto è fermo, immobile, anche il tempo. Ci piaceva tanto scendere insieme nell'acqua blucupa, subito profonda, in riva a quella nostra isola; forse solo là sotto, nella fissità di quegli istanti lunghi come secoli, siamo stati felici. (*Lei dunque capirà*, 20-21)

[I feel like I'm at the bottom of the sea, where everything is fixed, motionless, even time. We used to love to descend together into the dark blue water, abruptly deep, on the shore of that island of ours; perhaps it was only down there, in the fixity of those instants long as centuries, that we were happy.]

At once tender and merciless, she can be loving yet ruthlessly honest in her dispassionate analysis of her poet-husband and their life together. A happy life, yes, though not without its share of piques and irritations: "Lo conosco, il mio uomo, anche quando si lamenta per il mal di pancia sembra una tragedia. Anche a me talvolta dava fastidio e anzi con me non si permetteva quelle scene [...]" [I know him, that man of mine, even when he complains about a bellyache it seems like a tragedy. It annoyed me too at times and in fact with me he didn't dare make such scenes [...]] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 35). Or:

quella mania di aver sempre ragione gliel'avevo cavata da un pezzo e anche quella sua prepotenza di voler sempre ribattermi quando lo strappavo [...]. Dio come mi feriva questa sua presunzione, questa pretesa di alzare anche lui la voce, quasi a rifarmi il verso, a prendermi in giro, quanto mi esasperava [...]. (*Lei dunque capirà*, 41)

[I had cured him of that mania of his of always being right some time ago, as well as that arrogance of always wanting to refute me when I told him off [...]. God how that conceited egotism of his offended me, the need to raise his voice too, as if to mimic me, make fun of me, how he exasperated me [...].]

The man's greatness as well as his shortcomings are revealed in equal measure, his deficiencies and weaknesses unhesitatingly paraded in an account that is at once pitiless and poignant.

Overall the lives reflected in these *immagini speculari* which mirror one another compose a kind of love song, one a simple tender one, the other no less devoted but more complex, knotty. Eurydice's song in the novella is stripped of illusions and can seem almost cynical at times. Naipuni's husband sings a different story, more innocently longing for what he has lost. Both songs are perhaps sung as a projection of how the protagonists might

have wanted to appear to the person they love. In *Lei dunque capirà*, we have Eurydice projecting herself through the eyes of the man she loves:

Quando era ormai chiaro che stavo per trasferirmi nella Casa e tu passavi le ore al mio letto, mi vedevo così bella, nei tuoi occhi; mi desideravo attraverso il tuo sguardo; sapevo di essere bianca e pallida, spossata da quel veleno, ma nei tuoi occhi ero ancora bruna di sole e di mare come quando andavamo su quella nostra piccola isola, la raggiungevamo a nuoto e sbarcavamo fra lo stridere dei gabbiani, nudi e splendenti come dèi. (*Lei dunque capirà*, 32)

[When it became clear that I was about to move into the Home and you spent hours at my bedside, I saw myself so beautiful in your eyes; I was desirable through your gaze; I knew I was white and pale, drained by the poison, but in your eyes I was still tan from the sun and sea like when we would go to that little island of ours, we would swim there and land amidst the shrieking of seagulls, naked and gleaming like gods.]

In his eyes she is needed and beloved:

Per lui invece sì contavo e conto, eccome, se si è presa la briga di venir fin quaggiù e non si è arreso [...]. Ma lui mi vuole proprio bene, è innamorato come il primo giorno; ha preso una bella scuffia e non poteva stare senza di me [...]. (*Lei dunque capirà*, 10)

[To him, however, I did and still do matter, very much so, seeing as he took the trouble to come all the way down here and didn't give up [...]. But he really loves me, he is as much in love as on the first day; he fell head over heels and couldn't be without me [...].]

In *La conchiglia*, Naipuni is projected through the backward gaze of Naipuni's surviving spouse: "La vidi per un momento stagliarsi contro il cielo di un azzurro innocente — esile, bruna, mia" [For a moment I saw her outlined against a sky of innocent blue—slender, dark, mine] (*La conchiglia*, 242). The parallel is not perfect, though in each case the projection compensates for a lost reality. The mirror reflects, but it remains a mirror, as Eurydice points out: "Come dirgli che, qui dentro, a parte la luce tanto più fioca, è come là fuori? Che siamo dietro lo specchio, ma che quel retro è anch'esso uno specchio, uguale all'altro" [How could I tell him that here inside, apart from the light that is so much fainter, it's just the same as outside? That we are behind the mirror, but that the back is also a mirror, no different from the other] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 49). And again: "Siamo dall'altra parte dello specchio, che è pure uno specchio, e vediamo

solo un pallido volto, senza essere sicuri di chi sia” [We’re on the other side of the mirror, but it’s still a mirror, and all we see is a pallid face, without being certain whose it is] (*Lei dunque capirà*, 50). Perhaps the only reality lies in the moment: “Nulla era esistito prima di noi” [Nothing had existed before us] (*La conchiglia*, 247), Naipuni’s husband exults. And perhaps the mystery of life can only be heard in the music of the conch shell:

Raccolsi una conchiglia, di quelle bianche con l’interno rosato che le onde rotolando depongono sulla spiaggia, e gliela porsi, quasi a risarcirla di quanto le era stato ingiustamente tolto. Mi guardò confusa e grata, con gli occhi lucenti, lavati dal pianto. La prese e la portò subito all’orecchio, rimanendo assorta ad ascoltare la musica misteriosa imprigionata nel suo interno. (*La conchiglia*, 241)

[I picked up a conch shell, one of those white ones with the rose-pink inner lining that the rolling waves deposit on the sand, and offered it to her, almost as though to compensate her for what had been unjustly taken from her. She looked at me, confused and grateful, her eyes shining, washed by her tears. She took the shell and immediately held it to her ear, absorbed in listening to the mysterious music imprisoned within it.]

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anything. Out of pride, to hide her poverty, she had snapped that she was not hungry” (*La ballerina*, 102).

²³ “Some men quietly followed the waiter’s tray step by step, so as to make a good choice, after which they went into a corner to eat comfortably” (43).