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RE-EXAMINING FEMALE DESIRE:
INHERITANCE LAW, COLONIALISM, AND FOLKLORE
IN GRAZIA DELEDDA'S "LA VOLPE"

Grazia Deledda's short story "La volpe"—published in 1912 as part of the collection *Chiaroscuro*—has been largely ignored by critics. The story engages in a compelling inter-textual dialogue with Giovanni Verga's canonical novella "La lupa" (published thirty-two years earlier). While Verga's novella has been celebrated for its sensitivity to psychological and socio-economic issues, Deledda's short story, as we shall see, is complex and sophisticated in its treatment of similar issues. Yet, rather than an imitation of Verga's "veristic" style and thematics (of which Deledda is often accused), "La volpe" constitutes an important "feminist" revision of Verga's problematic *femme fatale*.¹

The lack of critical attention given to "La volpe" makes sense when one considers scholars' underestimation of Deledda's work as a whole. This underestimation can be partially attributed to the tendency to read Deledda's use of folkloric themes, characters, and language as trite, outdated, and even at odds with feminist theory.² Feminist critics find many of Deledda's female characters problematic in that the folkloric elements of the text seem to oversimplify their controversial actions and behaviour (e.g. murder, incest, and desire for material wealth) by assigning them to traditional gender roles within larger folk notions of destiny, religion, and nature.³ As a result, the female characters seem not only psychologically "primitive" and morally corrupt, but irrevocably downtrodden and lacking in autonomy. It is this misinterpretation that has most likely led to what a recent anthology of Italian women writers describes as the lack of appeal that Deledda's female protagonists hold for many feminist critics since feminist criticism tends to favor female characters that "celebrate autonomy" (Miguel 115).

Yet, in fact, many of Deledda's female protagonists are autonomous in what they plan to achieve, but these plans for autonomy are ultimately thwarted by the oppressive societies in which they live. This autonomy is

not at odds with Deledda's folkloric style but rather is directly reflected by it. As a result one might say that Deledda's folkloric style acts as a highly political strategy in the realm of the representation of gender re-alignment. My study will show that "La volpe", a deceptively simple tale of rural Sardinian life, is not a trite oversimplification of the female protagonist as victim of a morally fatalistic universe as the folkloric aspects of the text might suggest. Rather, it is a highly complex and even modern portrayal of the female protagonist's aggression and hostility which stem directly from her sexual repression, which is, in turn, the necessary means of economic autonomy. Therefore, it can be said that Deledda not only meets Verga's canonical benchmark by virtue of the psychological and socio-economic complexity of her examination of female oppression, but more importantly begs her own terms of interpretation beyond the confines of Verga's "verismo" (to which Deledda herself denied allegiance). Rather, Deledda deserves to be read as a proto-feminist writer whose proto-feminism rests in her clever use of locally colourful and timeless folkloric systems.⁴

"La volpe" begins with a passage that is characteristic of the folkloric "style" of many of Deledda's texts: "Erano tornate le lunghe e tiepide sere di maggio e ziu Tomas sedeva di nuovo, come l'anno prima, come dieci anni prima, nel cortiletto aperto davanti alla sua cassetta che era come l'ultimo acino d'un grappolo di piccole costruzioni nerastre addossate alla crosta grigia di un monte" ["The long warm nights of May had returned and ziu Tomas sat once again, as the year before, as ten years before, in the open courtyard in front of his little house that was like the last grape of a bunch of little black dwellings leaning up against the gray shell of the mountain"] (201-202).⁵ This image discloses a world that is as intimately connected to nature as it is grounded in local mythology:

Solo l'odore dell'erba, alla sera, gli ricordava i pascoli fra cui aveva trascorso la maggior parte della sua vita, e quando la luna sorgeva dal mare lontano, grande e dorata come il sole, e i monti della costa, neri sul cielo d'argento, e tutta la grande vallata e il semicerchio fantastico delle montagne davanti e a destra dell'orizzonte si coprivono di veli scintillanti e di zone d'ombra e di luce che davan l'illusione di foreste e laghi lontani, egli pensava a cose puerili, ai morti, a Lusbè il diavolo che conduce al pascolo le anime dannate tramutate in cinghiali; e se la luna si nascondeva dietro qualche nuvola egli pensava sul serio alle sette vacche figliate che il pianeta andato in quel momento a cena si divorava tranquillamente nel suo nascondiglio. (201-202)

[The smell of the grass in the evening made him think of the fields where he had spent most of his life, and when the moon, big and golden like

the sun, rose from the far-away sea, and the coastal mountains were black on the silver sky, and the entire valley and magical semi-circle of the mountains that lie before and to the right of the horizon became shadowed by starry veils and spaces of shade and light that gave the illusion of forests and far-away lakes, he thought of childish things from when he was young, of the dead, and of Lusbé the devil who leads the damned souls, transformed into wild boars, to the field; and if the moon was covered by clouds he thought with great seriousness of the seven calving cows whom the planet, having gone to dine in that very moment, slowly devoured in its hiding place.]

While this charming pastoral imagery is partially responsible for Deledda's aesthetic appeal, it also evokes a stagnant world of archaic ritual and custom that fosters traditional gender roles and unchanging systems of patriarchal power in many of Deledda's texts.

Yet, Deledda's genius lies in the almost perverse way she constructs this charming folkloric world only to undermine it with these same elements. That is, Deledda seems to use the folkloric elements of the story only to steer the reader away from a simplistic and archaic folkloric reading.⁶

We see Deledda's clever manipulation of folkloric figures of speech in the story's central metaphor of "la volpe", or "the fox". The metaphor functions on the narrative level as the excuse that the female protagonist, Zana, creates in order to convince the doctor to give her the poison to kill her lover's wife. Referring to local sayings, she tells the doctor that the poison is for "la volpe [che] ci ruba gli agnellini appena nati" ["the fox [that] steals the new-born lambs"] (212).⁷ It is revealed in the final scene of the story that "la volpe" is actually a cunning metaphor that gestures at Zia Lenarda, the wife of Zana's lover. Zana indirectly compares the woman, who is much older than either Jacu or Zana, to a "vecchia volpe," or "old fox," who has "stolen" the younger Jacu from Zana (219). It is not until the final scene of the story that the doctor finally solves this riddle and confronts Zana with her own pun: " 'Una volpe! Una volpe!' " [" 'A fox! A fox!' "] (219).

This metaphor of the "volpe" also serves to invoke the provincial world of the characters as it constitutes a charming and locally colourful proverb that is typical of those that circulate throughout agro-pastoral communities. Characteristic of folkloric forms of expression, the proverb reflects the local rural culture of the text through its use of animal and pastoral lore. The metaphor of "la volpe" or "the fox" also establishes the theme of jealousy—a traditional theme of folkloristic narrative—in that the verb "ruba" suggests that Zana is jealous because the old woman "steals" her lover.

Yet, this kind of traditional, one-dimensional reading of the “volpe” metaphor is problematic in the way that it both oversimplifies Zana’s predicament in the story and characterizes her as morally fallible. With great indignation, even Zana herself dismisses Jacu’s similar “reading” of her plan to murder his wife as stemming from a motive as banal as jealousy: “‘Sono forse gelosa di tua moglie, *io?* Di quella vecchia cornacchia, di quella vecchia volpe?’ ” [“ ‘You think I am jealous of your wife, *me?* Of that old crow, of that old fox?’ ”] (219). In fact, Zana’s story of “la volpe” is anything but simplistic.

Rather than a trivial rural saying, the proverb is a crafty and complex pun that Zana resourcefully constructs to conceal her plan to murder Jacu’s wife. Zana—not the old wife—is the true “fox” in Machiavellian terms, and her daring plan implies that besides cunning she has also the quality that Machiavelli attributes to the lion: courage. The story’s economic subtext—that of Zana’s potential inheritance of her grandfather’s fortune—affirms that Zana’s plan to kill “la volpe” is not motivated by simple jealousy, but rather by her desire for financial independence. That is, at the same time that the text gestures at the verb “*rubà*” [“steals”] and its potential signification of romantic “disinheritance”, it seems to do so only to dismiss that reading as the text ultimately reveals the verb’s more pertinent connotation of economic disinheritance. Therefore, the pun undermines the fatalism attributed to the female sex in the myth of the “sette vacche figliate” also a folkloric saying.

Deledda encourages this more subtle economic interpretation in the telling scene in which Zia Lenarda tells the doctor—who is romantically interested in Zana—that Zana refuses to entertain any of her interested suitors’ advances because none of her suitors are as rich as she is, or rather as she will be when she inherits her grandfather’s fortune:

‘Conoscete ziu Tomas Acchittu?’

Chi non conosceva gli Acchittu?

‘Persino a Nuoro se ne sa la fama, conforto mio! C’è piu d’un laureato che vuol sposare Zana.’

‘Sì, è bella. Non l’avevo mai veduta.’

‘Non esce quasi mai; ma non c’è bisogno che esca, per l’anima mia! La rosa odora anche dentro la casa. E vengono gli stranieri da tutte le parti, persino Nuoro, sì e passano per vederla.’

‘Ma è forse andato il banditore in giro per annunciare la sua bellezza?’

‘Non è questo, per l’anima mia! È che il vecchio è ricco che non sa quanto ha. Terreni quanto il regno di Spagna, e dicono, più di ventimila scudi nascosti in una sua *tanca*. Zana solo sa il posto.

Ecco perché lei non vuole neanche don Juacchinu che è nobile ma non

tanto ricco.' (205-6)

['Do you know uncle Tomas Acchittu?'

Who didn't know the Achittu's?

'Even in Nuoro they are famous! There is many a graduate that wants to marry Zana.'

'Yes, she is pretty. I had never seen her.'

'She never goes out; but there's no need, by my old soul! The perfume of the rose is just as sweet in the home. And the foreigners come from all over, even Nuoro, to see her.'

'Is it possible that the town crier has spread word of her beauty?'

'Oh dear, it's not that! It's that the old man is so rich he doesn't know how much he has. As much land as the King of Spain, and they say more than twenty thousand *scudi* hidden in his *tanca*. Only Zana knows the place. That's why she doesn't want even Juacchinu who is noble, but not so rich.')

By marrying Jacu, who also stands to inherit a considerable fortune (that of Zia Lenarda), Zana can hope that her grandfather's money will not fall entirely into the hands of her husband. As a result, she turns away all the other suitors like " 'don Juacchinu che è nobile ma non tanto ricco' " [" 'don Juacchinu who is noble but not so rich.' "].⁸

Like Zana's proverb/pun about "la volpe", the simplistic quality of the old woman's folkloristic proverb—" 'la rosa odora anche dentro la casa' " [" 'the perfume of the rose is just as sweet in the home' "]— also conceals the actual complexity of Zana's predicament. While Zana's proverb mainly reveals her *economic* desire, the old woman's proverb points to Zana's *sexual* desire. On the primary level of signification the old woman's proverb communicates to the doctor that despite Zana's self-imposed exile in her grandfather's house, the beautiful or "rose"-like Zana still attracts suitors. Yet, her proverb might also be read as a metaphor of sexual desire that has been relegated to a restrictive domestic space. Therefore, "la rosa odora anche in casa" is not just a banal country saying about a young girl's beauty, but a potent symbol of sexual repression— or what Deledda intuitively as sexual repression even without the knowledge of an explicitly "technical" psychoanalytic vocabulary. Other figures of speech that suggest this same double signification (folkloric-psychoanalytic) punctuate the story. Other examples include a simile so deceptively simple as "i suoi occhi splendevano d'un fulgore profondo, come d'una fiamma lontana che brillasse in una notte di tenebre giù in fondo a un bosco" ["her eyes shone with an underlying brilliance like a flame far-way in a gloomy night and deep in a forest"] (214). Both figures of speech point to a notion of psychic depth

and the idea that some of the protagonist's motives are to be found buried in her subconscious.

These tropes of sexual desire are directly connected with the question of Zana's inheritance as they suggest the extreme measures that Zana as a woman in turn-of-the-century Sardinia is forced to take as a result of her economically precarious situation. Sexual and economic repression become one in Deledda's story as the text reveals the dilemma in which Zana finds herself regarding the conflict between legal inheritance and rural social customs. That is, while the law regarding women's inheritance in Italy at the turn-of-the-century granted women the right to familial inheritance, social custom often dictated the opposite (Casanova 123; Calvi 134). Although technically a woman in Zana's position would be eligible to inherit family property and money (as provided by the Pisanelli law of January 1866), the reality was that women would often renounce their inheritance rights in a kind of gesture at preserving patriarchal tradition. Even if a woman did retain her inheritance rights, both law and social custom dictated that her husband would become administrator of her property (De Giorgio 334). To further complicate the issue, local custom regarding inheritance in agrarian societies often differed quite dramatically from that in urban areas. Since land was often the terms of inheritance, agrarian families often resorted to granting "la dote", or dowry, to eligible daughters rather than risk dispersing family land into the hands of the husbands of the female members (Casanova 123-124; Calvi 11; 128-129). Therefore, in either case inheritance for women at this time was a "no-win" situation.

The text highlights the complexity of the historical situation by suggesting that Zana will inherit her grandfather's money and land at the same time that it leaves various ends untied regarding that inheritance. Rather than explicitly say that Zana will "inherit" the grandfather's money, the servant says that "Zana solo sa il posto" ["Only Zana knows its place"]. As a result, the story suggests that there are other factors that may prevent Zana from obtaining her grandfather's money and land so easily. While the lack of reference to other family members suggests that Zana is indeed her grandfather's only eligible heir, we know that social custom in rural societies tended to disinherit women from the patriarchal fortune—which often consisted of land—so as to retain the land in the family. In which case, it is possible that Zana would still receive a dowry. In order to receive that dowry, however, she would need to become engaged before her grandfather dies so that her dowry is not threatened by the potential claim of a next of kin to the entire sum of the grandfather's fortune (Calvi 124-129). The text encourages this latter reading as the story begins with the discov-

ery of her grandfather's waning health, thereby explaining Zana's urgency regarding the need to resolve the "problem" of Jacu's marriage to Zia Lenarda. In fact, the text implies that Zana may not even plan to marry, but she must at least be engaged if she hopes to receive a dowry. Zana's proverb about "la volpe" directly engages this problem of local inheritance custom as the oral nature of the proverb seems to stage an implicit resistance to the "orality" of local inheritance custom—the *unwritten* local "law" which proves to be the real source of Zana's economic problems. Just as Zana's pun about the fox makes its point indirectly, so does local inheritance custom. Both systems of communication assume authority through oral and indirect expression. The story contrasts this form of communication which is attributed to the rural society of the text with the 1) written and 2) direct expression of the doctor's bourgeois culture, which is seen in the letter he writes for Zia Lenarda, as well as in the prescriptions, and the books with which he surrounds himself.

While many scholars argue that Deledda's stories are unhistorical, her attention in this story to the situation of women regarding inheritance suggests that we reconsider her work as actually responding directly to concrete historical and economic issues concerning women.⁹ That is not, however, to deny the timeless qualities of the agrarian societies Deledda represents. Rather, one might say that Deledda draws an ironic contrast between the archaic nature of the provincial society in which the female characters live and the complexity and contemporary nature of these women's desires. That is, there seems to be a malignant continuity between the timeless wisdom of proverbs of this archaic society and the stubbornly anti-woman rationale that still characterizes the treatment of women in the new Italy.

But as we have seen Zana has a rather unorthodox and even perverse way of redirecting the meaning of timeless proverbs to suit her own particular historical predicament. Indeed from her point of view—and the text's—more important than the question of how Zana will inherit her grandfather's money (inheritance as opposed to dowry) is *whom* she will marry, since her husband will inevitably have the right to administer her possessions (Casanova 146-147; De Giorgio 334). Ironically, if Zana wishes to retain a modicum of financial independence and dignity, it is essential that she marry Jacu who is already rich by virtue of being married to the wealthy Zia Lenarda and therefore poses less of a threat to her own administration of her fortune.

We can infer from the text that as a direct consequence of her Machiavellian need to marry Jacu—who is away on military duty and a married man— Zana must temporarily repress her sexual instinct. Not

only does Zana refuse the advances of her suitors—particularly those of the doctor—but she never even leaves her grandfather's house (as the servant tells the doctor, "non esce quasi mai."). As a result, her sexual existence and political development into a wife and mother according to the patriarchal order are thwarted and replaced, in a kind of compromise with patriarchy, by her domestic duty as caretaker in her grandfather's home. In fact, Zana first appears in the story through the point of view of the doctor, who is on his way to check on Zana's grandfather. When the doctor sees Zana, she avoids his gaze and returns to her work in the kitchen, reassuming her position as caretaker: "Vedendolo, ella rientrò nella cucina, prese un lume e si piegò sulle ginocchia davanti alla stuoia del nonno mentre Zia Lenarda correva a prendere dalla stanza interna una seggiolina dipinta per offrirla al dottore" ["Seeing him, she went back in the kitchen, took a candle and knelt before the grandfather's mat while Zia Lenarda ran to get an old painted chair from the other room to offer to the doctor"] (204). The contrast of her domestic position "davanti alla stuoia del nonno" ["before the grandfather's mat"] with the amorous/sexual gaze of the doctor establishes the tension throughout the story between domestic duty and sexual desire.

Zana's denial of sexual satisfaction for the sake of economic security is a perfect case study of Freud's theory of sexual repression in which the "pleasure principle" is transformed into the "reality principle" (Freud *Civilization* 26). Freud defines this transformation as the unconscious repression of the "id," or "libidinal instinct," by the "ego" and "super ego," or "self-preservation instinct" (Freud *Inhibitions* 76). Herbert Marcuse's Marxist reading of Freud in *Eros and Civilization* poignantly redefines this transformation as the change in instinctual values from "immediate satisfaction" to "delayed satisfaction," from "pleasure" to "the restraint of pleasure," from "play" to "work," from "receptiveness" to "productiveness," and from "absence of repression" to "security" (76).

Zana's temporary deferral of sexual gratification works against the patriarchal system by working within it. But at what costs? Zana resembles other Deleddian female protagonists, such as Marianna Sirca and Cosima, in that her means of empowerment ironically hinge upon her marginalization in her grandfather's house.¹⁰ According to Freud the consequences of the repression of sexual instincts include, but are not limited to, hostility, aggression, anxiety, and ambivalence—all four of which perfectly characterize Zana's peculiar behaviour in the story.¹¹ For example, the first time Zana meets the doctor, she is so defensive and hostile that the intimidated doctor finally leaves: "La sua bocca era così sdegnosa che l'uomo se ne andò via quasi intimidito" ["Her mouth was so scornful that the man left almost

intimidated"] (205). Contemporary criticism has, in fact, examined the way Freud applied his theory of hostility and sexual repression to women. Freud claimed that female hostility was actually just a reflection of innate aggression which social customs naturally tended to repress in women (Freeman 244-245). Freud argued that often a woman's hostility is the result of her frustration as she is relegated to the background and made to be dependent on her husband's own sexual desires (Freud *Civilization* 59). Zana's self-induced sexual repression and resulting hostility interestingly subverts Freud's theory in that Zana imposes sexual repression upon herself as a means of stepping out from her subordinate position. In which case, in her attempt to possess some kind of agency in order to escape societal oppression, she ends up oppressing herself more. Or does she? Is this a better solution than merely acquiescing to the fate of her sex?

Returning to the image of Zana's "bocca sdegnosa," or "scornful mouth," we see that it is an image that reappears throughout the story, including the first physical description of her:

...gli parve di non aver mai veduto un viso più bello e più enigmatico: un pò largo sulla fronte coperta fin sulle sopracciglia, una più alta dell'altra, da due bande di capelli neri e lucenti, finiva in un mento sottile e sporgente: gli zigomi lisci proiettavano un po' d'ombra sulle guance rientranti, e i denti bianchissimi, serati, davano alcunchè di crudele alla bocca sdegnosa, mentre i grandi occhi neri erano pieni di tristezza d'un languore profondo. (204)

[...it seemed that he had never seen a face more beautiful or enigmatic: a little long in the forehead that was covered from the eyebrows up, one higher than the other, with two locks of black shiny hair. It ended in a subtle chin that stuck out a bit: the sleek cheekbones protruded a little from the shadow of the indented cheeks, and her white, sharp teeth gave an air of cruelty to her scornful mouth, while her black eyes were weak and full of sadness.]

In addition to the image of her "bocca sdegnosa," the "zigomi lisci," "capelli neri," " mento sottile e sporgente," and "i denti bianchissimi serati" all depict Zana as a kind of fierce, wild animal. Therefore, not only in terms of her cleverness, but also as seen in her physical attributes, she—and not Jacu's wife—is the real "fox". Or is she? Deledda's imagery deliberately plays with the tradition of the *femme fatale*, where female sexuality is portrayed as aggressive and often associated with wild animals. Yet, the text suggests that Zana's animalistic aggression and "fox"-like duplicity are not reflective of an innate moral flaw, but rather of a neurosis that devel-

ops as the result of her social and economic frustration as a young, single female attempting to secure some kind of economic independence in rural turn-of-the-century Sardinia.

The depiction of Zana as this kind of wild animal or "volpe" recalls Verga's highly sexual and aggressive Pina, who is referred to as "La Lupa" or "The She-wolf" in the short story by the same name. Similar to Deledda's depiction of Zana, Verga constructs Pina's animalistic or wolf-like sexuality in folkloric terms:

Era alta, magra; aveva soltanto un seno fermo e vigoroso da bruna e pure non era più giovane; era pallida come se avesse sempre adosso la malaria, e su quel pallore due occhi grandi così, e delle labbra fresche e rosse, che vi mangiavano. (197)

[She was tall, thin; she had the firm and vigorous breasts of the olive-skinned—and yet she was no longer young; she was pale, as if always plagued by malaria, and in that pallor, two enormous eyes like this, and fresh red lips which devoured you.] (3)

Pina or "La Lupa" is at once the protagonist of Verga's short story and of the local story within Verga's story. Characteristic of folkloric tales, Pina's symbolic name precedes her in the text, for from the beginning of the short story she is referred to as "la Lupa" by both the narrator and townspeople. Verga uses the demonstrative technique of oral narrative to emphasize the way "La Lupa" is inextricably tied up with town legend. As if telling the story to a crowd, the narrator emphasizes her "due occhi grandi così" ["two big eyes like this"] (197).¹² As a result there is the sense that "La Lupa" has been the "La Lupa"—overly sexual and highly aggressive—for an indefinite amount of time.

Ironically, twentieth century feminist criticism might be inclined to re-read *La Lupa's* behaviour as a direct result of her difficult economic and sexual predicament as a single mother in a restrictive society in which it is not acceptable for women to have sexual relations outside of marriage. The story, however, does not totally support such a reading (tempting as it may be) in the way that Deledda's story invites a more empathetic reading. Whereas Deledda's story contains that key scene between the doctor and his servant in which the issues of inheritance, marriage, and sexual repression are all brought to the reader's attention (and hence act as permission to re-evaluate the causes of Zana's behaviour), Verga's story does not present the details of Pina's single motherhood in any significant way. In fact, Pina's role as single mother seems to function in the story only as a way to set up her perverse behaviour as a mother who is interested in her daugh-

ter's fiancé. Nor do there seem to be any economic hardships attached to her role as single mother. Pina has her husband's money and a house of her own. As for any implications of sexual repression that may be tied to her being a single mother in a restrictive society, the story is quite clear that she has never repressed her sexual desires—even before the onset of her desire for Nanni. While some of her problematic behaviour is presented as being a result of her economic and sexual frustrations, the story never distinguishes between these frustrations that are specific to particular situations and moral flaws which precede such social conditions. Her behaviour up to the point of her problems with Nanni can be read only as some kind of moral and predetermined character flaw, and not as sexually or economically determined. Therefore, whereas Deledda sets up “La Volpe” so that we are to infer that Zana becomes hostile and “fox”-like as a result of specific events (the issue of inheritance and her marriage), Pina's “wolf”-like aggressivity is not a result of specific circumstances. Rather, she enters the story as a sexually ravenous, and morally and spiritually corrupt woman, and it is suggested that she has always been so:

Al villaggio la chiamavano *la Lupa* perché non era sazia giammai—di nulla. Le donne si facevano la croce quando la vedevano passare, sola come una cagnaccia, con quell' andare randagio e sospettoso della lupa affamata; ella si spolpava i loro figliuoli e i loro mariti in un batter d'occhio, con le sue labbra rosse, e se li tirava dietro alla gonnella solamente a guardarli con quegli occhi da satanasso, fossero stati davanti all'altare di Santa Agrippina. Per fortuna *la Lupa* non veniva mai in chiesa né a Pasqua, né a Natale, né per ascoltar la messa, né per confessarsi—Padre Angiolino di Santa Maria di Gesù, un vero servo di Dio, aveva persa l'anima per lei. (197)

[In the village they called her the She-wolf, because she never had enough—of anything. The women made the sign of the cross when they saw her pass, alone as a wild bitch, prowling about suspiciously like a famished wolf; with her red lips she sucked the blood of their sons and husbands in a flash, and pulled them behind her skirt with a single glance of those devilish eyes, even if they were before the altar of Saint Agrippina. Fortunately, the She-wolf never went to church, not at Easter, not at Christmas, not to hear Mass, not for confession—Father Angiolino of Saint Mary of Jesus, a true servant of God, had lost his soul on account of her.] (3)

The narrator begins to tell the story of Pina's interaction with Nanni—what would seem to be the origin of her sexual desire and consequential repression—by referring to Pina as “la Lupa,” and as such condemns her even before she has done anything to deserve the problematic name:

Una volta *La Lupa* si innamorò di un bel ragazzo che era tornato da soldato, e mieteva il fieno con lei nelle chiuse del notaro, ma proprio quello che si dice innamorarsi, sentirsene ardere le carni sotto al fustagno del corpetto, e provare, fissandolo negli occhi, la sete che si ha nelle ore calde di giugno, in fondo alla pianura. (197)

[One day the She-wolf fell in love with a handsome young man who had just returned from the service and was mowing hay with her in the fields of the notary and she fell in love in the strongest sense of the word, feeling the flesh afire beneath her clothes; and staring him in the eyes, she suffered the thirst one has in the hot hours of June, deep in the plain.] (3-4)

Zana's own hostility is evident not only in the text's "fox" imagery, but like Pina's "wolf" behaviour, it is evident in every one of her social interactions in the story. The scene with Zana and the old women of the town at the "tosatura" is particularly revealing. Zana's curt speech, hostility, and malicious curses show her mounting anxiety: "Zana allora si stizzì. 'Mala fata vi guidi, lasciatemi in pace'" ["Zana became irritated. Damn you all, leave me alone"] (215). In turn, the women's reactions to her strange behaviour confirm its inappropriateness: "Allegra, Zana!" ["Cheer up, Zana!"] (205).

In the final scene with Jacu, she is equally hostile and even seems to intimidate Jacu—who is suddenly quiet—just as she intimidates the doctor: "L'uomo, forse intento a vuotar la lana, taceva; ella riprese, esasperata con voce di odio: 'Sono forse gelosa di tua moglie? Di quella vecchia cornacchia, di quella vecchia volpe? ...Ma tutto finirà...e presto...'" ["The man perhaps wanting to empty the wool, became quiet; exasperated and with a voice full of hate, she began to speak again: 'I am jealous of your wife, me? Of that old crow, that old fox?...But this will all end ...and soon...'" (219). Not only is Zana angry, but she is "exasperated" with a voice now resembling a "gemito," or "groan" (218). The ellipses evoke her momentary descent into a kind of hysteria. Hysteria, according to Freud, is the most extreme symptom of sexual repression (Freud *Inhibitions* 25).

While these scenes with the other women are telling, Zana's hostility is most evident in her interactions with the doctor. Her hostility toward the doctor is quite a mystery in the story since the doctor seems to have done nothing to warrant it. For example, when the doctor visits her grandfather a second time to check his health, he asks Zana quite routinely, "Ebbene, come andiamo?" ["So, how are you doing?"] (207). Yet, Zana responds to this neutral question with scorn: "Bene lo vede' disse Zana non senza un lieve accento di disprezzo" ["'Good as you can see,' said Zana not with-

out a light hint of scorn"] (216). In another scene, perhaps the most crucial scene in the story, the doctor advises Zana to change her grandfather's diet and Zana responds aggressively, almost snarling like a wild animal, as the image of her "bocca...sdegnosa" suggests:

'Il vecchio è denutrito...' disse esitando, 'e tu pure, mi pare...Avreste tutti e due bisogno di una cura ricostituente...Se potete...'

Ella capì subito.

'Tutto possiamo!'

La sua bocca era così sdegnosa che l'uomo se ne andò via quasi intimidito. (205)

['The old man is malnourished....,' he said hesitating. 'And you too it seems...You both need a better diet ...if you are able..'

She understood immediately.

'We are able to do everything!'

Her mouth was so contemptuous that the man left almost intimidated.]

We might use Freudian theory of repression and hostility to understand Zana's increased hostility toward the doctor as a particular target. Since the doctor represents the romantic/sexual narrative of the story as he desires Zana and engages her in flirtatious conversation, thereby reawakening the sexual instinct repressed within her, he naturally receives the brunt of her hostility (Freud *Complete Works* 46).

As for the question of murder which lies at the heart of the story, the text suggests that it is the culmination of Zana's hostility and aggression. Her sense of "self-preservation" that is evident in her plan to murder Zia Lenarda is not so much a reaction to the perceived "danger" of her *biological* safety—as Freud would have it—as it is to the endangerment of her social, sexual, and mental safety. There may also be an allegorical dimension to the planned murder of the "legitimate" wife, who would then be replaced by the wild "fox". The murder seems to be a figure of a deadly threat to the economic order of patriarchy itself.

It is fitting that the question of murder is revealed at the "tosatura," the agrarian ritualistic celebration of the fleecing of the sheep. Like the folkloric figures of speech in the text, the "tosatura" is at once the site of rural Sardinian society's local customs and of the culmination of Zana's sexual repression. It is at the "tosatura" that Zana raises the issue of her "penitenza" or "penitence": "Ti giuro...I corvi mi tocchino...se egli mi ha toccato neppure la mano. So io perché gli faccio buon viso...È per il nostro bene...Ma finirà questa penitenza...finirà...e presto..." ["I swear to you or may the crows poke my eyes out...if he even touched my hand. I put

on a good face for our good...But this penitence...will all be over...and soon..." (219). By using a metaphor that reflects local ritual (Catholic and agrarian in nature), Zana indirectly correlates her act of penitence, or "penitenza," as the sacrifice of sexual pleasure, or more specifically as her resistance to the doctor's "touch".

Critic Anna Dolfi speaks of the role of "touch," or "le délire de toucher," in Deledda's works. Dolfi examines Freud's theory of "taboo" and applies it to restrictions of sexual pleasure in Deledda's stories in order to understand her characters' sexual repression as deriving from "la conflittualità tra desiderio e divieti" ["the conflict between desire and prohibitions"] that the characters' societies produce (*Grazia Deledda* 96-99). Applying Dolfi's theory to "La volpe", we can better understand the origins of Zana's sexual repression and consequently her strange behaviour. The rural community of the text—a primarily taboo-based society—prohibits a woman's sexual gratification outside the organized system of marriage. Even simple conversation with a man without the presence of a chaperon provokes the disapproval of the community. For example, when the doctor follows Zana behind the fountain at the "tosatura", the father of Jacu, disgusted by Zana's behaviour, incites the others to condemn her: "La nipote di Tomas Acchittu, la vedete? Voleva star sola con l'uomo; se fosse mia figlia le metterei la nuca sotto i calcagni" ["Do you see the granddaughter of Tomas Acchittu? She wanted to be alone with that man; if she were my daughter I would put her neck under my heels"] (216). While this dimension of Deledda's text is undeniable, sexual repression in the story has, as we have seen, a self-willed and historical dimension linked to the protagonist's specific social and economic situation, and to her rather "perverse" Machiavellian resourcefulness.

Deledda contrasts Zana's "sacrifice" of touch with the "tosatura"—the more apparent narrative of sacrifice in the story:

All'ombra d'un sovero Jacu, il servo, gli amici, tosavan le pecore stendendole, ben legate, su una larga pietra come sopra un'ara per un sacrificio; i cani si rincorrevano fra l'erba, gli uccelli fischiarono sulla quercia; un vecchio rassomigliante al profeta Elia raccoglieva la lana entro un sacco e intorno i fiori dell'asfodelo e i gigli selvatici curvati dal vento odoroso pareva si spingessero in avanti curiosi di veder anch'essi ciò che succedeva in mezzo a quel gruppo d'uomini curvi con le cesoje in mano. (215)

[In the shade of a tree Jacu, the servant, the friends, shaved the sheep and lay them out, tying them well on a large rock as on an altar for sacrifice; the dogs chased one another on the grass, the birds whistled on the oak tree; an old man resembling the profet Elijah collected the wool in a sack

as all around them the flowers of the *asfodelo* and the wild lilies bent by the wind seemed to lean forward, curious also they to see what was happening in the center of that group of men bent over with the shears in their hands.]

By making this contrast, Deledda brings into a common space two very different issues: the economic and agro-pastoral sphere as represented by Zia Lenarda and Jacu's "tosatura" and the sphere of individual sexual desire as represented by Zana's "penitenza". Deledda's story asks us to consider how these two spheres are related. Where do they meet with respect to the notion of "sacrifice"?

The archaic world of "sacrifice" that the "tosatura" evokes— as a cooperative act of labour for the collective good (which is embedded in the biblical tradition of animal sacrifice, as suggested by the references to "il vecchio rassomigliante al profeta Elia" ["the old man resembling the profet Elia"])— is not the same type of "sacrifice" that Deledda ascribes to Zana. While the "sacrifice" of the "tosatura" parallels the "sacrifice" that the female members of this archaic community perform for the good of the family, church, and community, Zana's "sacrifice" of sexual pleasure is a direct consequence of her plans to work *against* the social structure by manipulating the system of marriage. Therefore, her "sacrifice" works toward her own interests in the end as it seeks to achieve economic independence from her future husband.

One might say that in her clever, "fox"-like plan to marry Jacu, Zana works *within* the patriarchal system of marriage in order to challenge the social custom of her times in which the female is a kind of commodity or "object of exchange", as termed by Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 148; 478) . Rather than that which is "exchanged" or commodified within the realm of patriarchal gain, or the "tosatura", Zana attempts to assume an active economic role.

In the same way, we might reconsider the notion of taboo in Deledda's stories as not only indicative of sexual propriety, but of class "propriety" as well. That is, the taboo against speaking to the doctor, or any strange man without a chaperone, is enforced in this society in order to forestall the transgression of sexual mores and maintain the patriarchal system, but it is quite possibly also enforced to avoid the trespassing of class divisions, for the doctor is the epitome of the bourgeois outsider.

Returning to the scene where Zana snaps "Tutto possiamo!" ["We are capable of everything!"] in response to the doctor's medical recommendations, we can begin to see the way the sexual and socio-economic spaces also come together in the form of Zana's hostility. Not only is her hostili-

ty toward the doctor symptomatic of her sexual repression, but it is indicative of an insidious disdain of the bourgeois outsider that the doctor represents. Throughout the story, the doctor is known only as “il dottore”, a title that identifies him by his middle-class profession, which stands in stark contrast to the agro-pastoral class of Zana, her grandfather, Jacu, and the others. Moreover, the doctor’s urban origins are immediately noted by Zana and Zia Lenarda and, consequently, he is marked as an outsider at the same time that he is aligned with the industrial colonizers: “quel beffulanu del dottore di città...che si crede il medico del re di Spagna” [“that fool the city doctor...that thinks he is the doctor of the King of Spain”] (202). Zana’s hostility interestingly begins before she even meets the doctor, even just upon hearing him described as the doctor “della città” in this scene: ““Zia Lenarda, egli è obbligato a venire. Egli prende venti lire al giorno!” disse Zana fieramente” [“Zia Lenarda, he must come. He gets 20 lire a day!” said Zana proudly”] (202). It is significant that Zana refers to the doctor’s salary—the economic divide between her own class and his bourgeois one—since disparity in material wealth constitutes the very basis of class struggle.

Yet, even “normal” Marxist correlations between material wealth and class do not hold up in this story. Instead, Deledda deliberately inverts the two so that the agro-pastoral class is the wealthy class whereas the bourgeois class is the poor one. That is, we learn immediately that both Zia Lenarda and Zana’s grandfather own “terreni quanto il Re di Spagna” [“as much land as the King of Spain”] in addition to the money that Zana’s grandfather keeps buried in these *tancas*, or large plots of land. The doctor, on the other hand, having “vuotata la borsa” [“emptied his purse”] and sold his own land, moves to the rural town after realizing that one can not buy “l’amore, la fortuna, il piacere” [“love, fortune, pleasure”] (209). The scene in which the doctor is reading leisurely in his study emphasizes Zana’s contrasting lack of leisure and desperate dependence on money.

This undoing or reversal of the normal relationship between class and wealth is intrinsically tied up with Zana’s decision to wait for Jacu, refuse all other suitors, and thereby repress her sexual instincts. After all, the main reason she wants to marry Jacu is because he is just as rich as she is, while the doctor is poorer. But Deledda also suggests that by marrying Jacu, Zana will be able to maintain the *imbalance* of material wealth between the two classes.

Therefore, might we say that Zana is a political character? If so, is she consciously political? In terms of *class* politics, she does not appear to have a conscious political project. Instead, the text suggests that her own eco-

nomic security is her primary reason for wanting to marry Jacu and murder his wife. The class politics that are evident in her decision, however, are alluded to by the text. Therefore, one might read her political actions not so much as overtly political, but as motivated by what Federic Jameson calls the “political unconscious”: an unconscious social work that is nevertheless potentially effective.¹³ Yet, if hers is a kind of “unconscious” political work, it is important to note that Zana’s sexual repression (as a key element of her project) is not a kind of “absurd” unhistorical and instinctive allegiance to her clan, as Dolfi suggests of Deledda’s characters in general, but rather an unconscious response to a contemporary and actively enforced taboo regarding class.¹⁴

Or is her class disdain, like her decision to marry Jacu, not unconscious at all, but rather similar to her response to the taboo of sexual propriety: a very pragmatic survival tactic for one who does not wish to be marginalized? As a result, what would amount to a rational decision to uphold the class taboo is made by Zana not so much out of an active political interest as out of a very private desire to ensure that her own project of autonomy progresses smoothly. If Zana were to marry the doctor, a bourgeois outsider, she would not only risk losing her money to him, but more importantly she would become a social pariah. Upholding the class taboo is a necessary means to marrying one of its enforcers: Jacu.¹⁵

Herbert Marcuse’s insightful reading of Freud expands the connection made between sexual repression and the restrictions of one’s civilization in Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* by including the notion of class struggle. Marcuse claims that “the conflict between sexuality and civilization unfolds with this development of economic ‘domination’, whereas Freud limits the connection between civilization and repression to a social one and blatantly rejects the notion that desire for property is the root of aggression” (Freud *Civilization* 71).

We can apply Marcuse’s theories of repression to the struggle between the bourgeois class and the agro-pastoral class as represented by the conflict between the doctor and Zana against the backdrop of the history of Italian colonialism in nineteenth-century Sardinia. The history of Sardinia at this time was a history of oppression by bourgeois outsiders who came from mainland Italy and other European countries. During the period of industrialization in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Italy, these bourgeois outsiders monopolized much of the local land, razing Sardinian forests in order to support the construction of the new Italian railroad and burning large plots in order to produce carbon and ash to send home to Italian factories.¹⁶ As a result, they greatly contributed to the agro-pastoral

class's already unbearable poverty. Deledda alludes to the local people's disinheritance of their land in the first part of the story when Zia Lenarda criticizes the doctor's colleague's purchase of local land with local money:

'Il nostro dottore è partito: è andato per due mesi in continente per studiare le malattie d'orecchi, perché dice lui che tutti diventan sordi quando si tratta di pagargli il fitto dei suoi pascoli...quasi che questi non li abbia comprati coi denari del paese, la giustizia lo incanti!' (202)

['Our doctor is gone: he went to the continent for two months to study ear diseases because he says that everyone becomes deaf when it comes time to pay him the rent for his land... as if he didn't buy the land with the town's money, may justice get him!']

Maria Giacobbe Harder speaks about the "certo sdegnoso disprezzo" ["certain contemptuous scorn"] that characterized the attitude of the descendents of the "re pastori" ["aristocrats of agro-pastoral class"] toward the "nuova *élite* costituita dalla sparuta borghesia" ["new borghese elite"] in late nineteenth-century Sardinia.¹⁷ This scorn, of course, is very similar to Zana's own hostile behavior toward the doctor in the story.

As a result of this economic colonization of Sardinia by bourgeois outsiders, and what was known as "zustissia" or "la concreta organizzazione repressiva della legge imposta dal di fuori" ["the concrete repressive organization of the law imposed by outsiders"], many armed resistances were organized among the agro-pastoral class. It was not before long, however, that these armed confrontations evolved into more passive and insidious forms of subversion through the "individuale 'regolamento di conti'," or "individual keeping of score."¹⁸

It might be said that Zana's own small-scale, insidious rebellion in the form of marrying Jacu and refusing the advances of the doctor is very much her own sort of "regolamento di conti". Moreover, it seems that Deledda herself engages in a kind of textual "subversion" in her depiction of Zana's "regolamento di conti". The folkloric figures of speech that Deledda employs to depict Zana's subversion work to mask the doctor's "reading" of Zana's plan at the same time they mask the public's reading of what is for the time a polemic treatment of the "woman question". In 1912 Italy—before the Suffrage but a good deal after the climactic period of Sardinian resistance—it is perhaps less dangerous to stage such a violent allegory of gender re-alignment through the platform of colonial resistance than through that of gender itself.¹⁹ On the level of the text itself, Zana's own scandalous project for gender re-alignment is temporarily hidden from the doctor by her use of the local proverb "la volpe [che] ci ruba

gli agnellini appena nati.” A city dweller and, therefore, an outsider to this rural community, the doctor “reads” Zana’s agro-pastoral proverb incorrectly. Obviously unfamiliar in any intimate way with this means of communication, the doctor interprets the proverb literally and as a result fails to detect Zana’s real motive for asking for the poison. In fact, the doctor’s confrontation with Zana at the end of the story coincides with his eventual deciphering of her trope. Like Zia Lenarda’s and Zana’s use of the Sardinian dialect (“beffulanu”), Zana’s local proverb locates the conflict between the doctor and Zana as that between “insider” and “outsider”. Just as dialect is often used as a form of resistance by colonized peoples because of its ability to resist in a somewhat non-confrontational way, the proverb of the “volpe” is used by Deledda for its performance of a more passive and insidious form of resistance.²⁰

By drawing this parallel between Zana and the agro-pastoral class rebellion, Deledda not only suggests Zana’s role as victim, but more importantly as “rebel”.²¹ The text suggests that Zana’s inheritance or dowry (or whatever means of acquiring this money the text has in mind) will consist of money from her grandfather’s lootings during his days as a bandit. The servant tells the doctor that Zana’s grandfather participated in “più d’una grassazione nel tempo dei tempi” [“more than one looting way back in the time”] when “più di un pastore tornava a casa con la bisaccia colma da una parte di formaggio e dall’altra di posate e monete d’oro” [“when more than one shepherd came home with a lump of cheese and silverware and gold.”] (206). Both Maria Giacobbe-Harder and Susan Briziarelli speak of the historical phenomenon of “banditismo”—the agro-pastoral class’s practice of looting the transported goods of the bourgeois “outsiders” and industrial colonizers. “Banditismo”—the epitome of the local “regolamento dei conti”—is a form of resistance that attacks the system by working within it. By this definition we see the way that the text parallels “banditismo” and Zana’s project of gender alignment which works within the system of marriage in order to work against it.

Briziarelli suggests that by aligning the female characters with these “criminal” figures Deledda makes a problematic statement about the female characters’ moral culpability and hence Deledda’s own “anxiety” toward issues of gender. Yet, in this case a moral reading is exactly what we do not want to do as readers, or else we comply with the very patriarchal order that the story seeks to expose. The text’s suggestion of Zana’s lack of choices within her restrictive society steers us away from completely condemning her at the same time that it discourages us from completely excusing her. That is, at times the text seems to justify Zana’s behaviour as her

own form of “justice,” given that the figures of the “banditi” function in the text more as local heroes rather than criminals.²² We see this validation of “banditismo” in the servant’s story in which she romanticizes the history of “banditismo” as she looks back on it with nostalgia: “Il vecchio dicono (salva sia l’anima mia, io non nego né affermo) ha preso più d’una grassazione nel tempo dei tempi, quando i dragoni non erano svelti come i carabinieri adesso” [“They say the old man (save my soul, I neither deny nor confirm) took part in more than one looting in the time of all times, when the dragons weren’t as quick as the police today”](206). Like these unlikely “heroes” of Sardinian colonialism, Zana is very much the “heroine” of the story despite her problematic behaviour. These favourable aspects of the narrative, however, never culminate in Zana’s total exemption since the majority of the story focuses on the disturbing manifestations of Zana’s behaviour. Moreover, the text maintains an emotional distance from Zana by using a strict third person narrative without point of view. As a result, we are never allowed to totally sympathize with Zana. The most ambiguous and crucial scene in the story, the ending, neither rescues Zana nor condemns her.²³ Rather at the same time that the text suggests that her scandalous plot disrupts the tranquility of this archaic and unchanging world, it locates her back within this world of ritual and animals: “Uh! Una volpe, una volpe!” E i due amanti balzaron fuori dalla capanna, storditi, mentre giù la comitiva cessava di cantare e le donne guardavano qua e là e i cani abbaiano come se davvero passasse la volpe” [“Oh! A fox, a fox!” Shocked, the two lovers jumped out of the cabin while down below the group stopped singing and the women looked here and there, and the dogs barked as if a fox had really passed”] (219). The servant’s refusal to make any moral judgement (“salva anima mia, io non nego né affermo”) [“save my soul, I neither deny nor confirm”] seems to embody Deledda’s own position toward Zana as one that wishes to understand and expose the factor causing Zana’s behaviour. While the text validates the autonomy of her project it does not necessarily excuse her from murder.

Yet, this refusal to make any moral judgement is not evidence of Deledda’s “anxiety” regarding gender roles. Susan Briziarelli criticizes Deledda for the way her characters waver between typically female and typically masculine roles, such as between the passive domestic daughter/wife role and the outlaw/rebel role. She argues that Deledda’s female characters tend to identify more with men than women, and points out that the men that these female protagonists choose to identify with are criminals, thereby dismissing the value of the female characters’ own gender transgressions in the marriage system. Yet, as we have seen in “La volpe” Deledda does

not seek to judge her characters as much as understand them and validate their autonomy. Moreover, Briziarelli argues that the lack of female solidarity in Deledda's works, which she claims is given less importance by Deledda than is given to the class and political work that the characters perform, is a sign of the characters' ambivalence rather than autonomy, and "anxiety" on Deledda's part. I believe, on the other hand, that just as hostility and aggression are consequences of Zana's sexual repression, so is Zana's ambivalence. Freud names ambivalence as one of the major symptoms of sexual repression (Freud *Inhibitions* 16-39; 72). In the story Zana's ambivalence manifests itself in the way that she wavers between the passive, obedient female as the ideal granddaughter/caretaker, and the *femme fatale* or morally corrupt, sexual "volpe". She alternates between avoiding the doctor's gaze and meeting it unabashedly. At times she seems to flirt with the doctor, but then she immediately changes gears and becomes hostile and cold. We see this erratic behaviour when the narrator notes how Zana sits passively "con le mani intrecciate sulle ginocchia" ["her hands folded on her lap"], and then within seconds becomes angry and aggressive: "Zana allora si stizzì. 'Mala fata vi guidi, lasciatemi in pace...'" ["Zana then became irritated. 'Damn you! Leave me alone..'"] (215). Then, just seconds later, her mood changes again as she flirts with the doctor: "le donne battevano i gomiti sui fianchi di Zana, accennandole il dottore, ed ella a un tratto, cambiato umore, si mise a scherzare con lui" ["the women poked Zana's side with their elbows, motioning at the doctor, and all of a sudden her mood changed and she began to joke with him"] (216).

This change in Zana's behaviour occurs almost always during her interactions with the doctor, as would be expected since the doctor is the one who reawakens sexual desire in Zana as he communicates his own desire to her. Unlike the strange behaviour of "La Lupa," Zana's hostility is evoked by specific circumstances and people. Freud defines ambivalence as the manifestation of the conflict between conscious and unconscious desires, or between the *super ego* and *id* when the ego fails to mediate (Freud *Inhibitions* 16-39; 72). Zana's ambivalence seems to stem from the conflict of a multitude of unconscious and conscious needs and desires, namely her desire for financial autonomy, her desire for sexual satisfaction, the need to obtain the poison to kill Zia Lenarda, her dislike of the doctor as the incarnate reminder of her desire to be with Jacu and her unconscious disdain of the doctor as the bourgeois outsider. The text articulates this conflict of desires in the following passage: "sempre la stessa storia; ella lo lusingava e lo respingeva, e tra l'ingenuo e il perfido domandava la stessa cosa: un veleno" ["always the same story; she flattered him and rejected

him, and between sincerity and deceit she asked always the same thing: the poison"] (217). Therefore, Zana's ambivalence is not so much a sign of her weakness or ambiguity regarding female roles as it is of the frustration of her project of economic autonomy.

By the same token, we may respond to Briziarelli's critique of the apparent lack of "female solidarity" in Deledda's works. In "La volpe" this critique would apply to the fact that Zana kills Zia Lenarda and in doing so seems to destroy the possibility of a joint female project of autonomy.²⁴ But we must ask why it is that she plans to murder Zia Lenarda rather than Jacu. The reason is, quite simply, because she can not marry Zia Lenarda, and it seems that in this particular society in order for a female to have economic independence and, yet, not risk being socially excluded as a spinster or morally loose woman, or on the other hand sexually repressed, she must marry.²⁵ Is there really any opportunity for female solidarity in this kind of society any way? The women in this society are pawns in the system of marriage both in terms of their social status and in their lack of legal and locally determined rights to material wealth. While Zia Lenarda is wealthy and Zana potentially so, they cannot marry one another. Yet, as unmarried women they would most likely become social outcasts, sexually repressed, and insane. On the other hand, as married women, there is always the risk of losing that fortune to their husbands. These women need to improve their own situations first before they begin to think of working as a group. Therefore, at this point female autonomy means individual "regolamento di conto" or small-scale resistance rather than an overt collective effort.

Some critics—such as Briziarelli—associate this failure with Deledda's tendency to align her female characters with the anti-colonial project of the "banditi" (28). Yet, why does this connection necessarily suggest a lack of autonomy on the women's part? The narrative of anti-colonial rebellion in the text is all about achieving autonomy by subverting the established order. While the text suggests a connection between Zana's project and the anti-colonial project of the "banditi", Zana's own economic independence is the project of primary importance in the text. Her participation in the class resistance—conscious or not—seems to be only a necessary means to her own project.

In conclusion, it seems that while Zana's predicament is not ideal, her cunning and ambitious plot is woven to carve a space for herself within her oppressive society. The text suggests that at least by choosing whom she marries and manipulating the system so that she can retain control over her money, she imagines relative autonomy, and the possibility of autonomy is certainly better than nothing at all. In fact, the relativity of Deledda's

female protagonists' projects of resistance seems to be the key component in re-evaluating their "feminist" importance. As twenty-first century readers, we ironically tend to prefer *la Lupa's* direct attack on the patriarchal system and her outright refusal to repress her destructive sexual desire. And yet, *la Lupa's* "project" for autonomy predictably ends in what the text suggests to be a kind of suicide. While Deledda's story suggests that Zana's plan is also possibly thwarted in the end by the doctor, as the "fox" is out-"foxed" when the doctor exposes Zana's secret passion for Jacu to the gaze of the community, the text asks us to think twice before condemning Zana's plan. While her plan for autonomy remains only that—a plan—it is nevertheless a small step towards the actualization of autonomy. Her inability to realize this autonomy is no reflection upon the weakness or ambivalence of the female character, but rather upon the oppressive patriarchal society in which she lives. The same holds true for her lack of female solidarity; individual resistance is the best Zana can do given her circumstances. The act of consciousness evident in the text's representation of imagined autonomy and project to understand the obstructions to this autonomy is validated by the text as nevertheless effective by virtue of its potential. After all, consciousness is the first phase of all political change.

If there is fatalism in Deledda, it is not fatalism like that of Verga's "*La lupa*," in which the female character is morally corrupt *before* she is then corrupted by economic and sexual circumstances. Rather, in Deledda economic fatalism decidedly determines moral fatalism. Moreover, unlike in Verga, whatever fatalism there is at work in the story is placed in check with the female character's relative autonomy so that even the term "fatalism" becomes questionable. Therefore, can one even use the term "fatalism" at all? In light of this question and others, the need to re-examine Deledda's female protagonists as complex and autonomous characters deserving not only of feminist criticism, but of criticism unprejudiced by "veristic" standards is all the more evident.

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NOTES

¹By the same token one might re-evaluate the critical tendency to read Deledda's work within the category of "regionalism" which more often than not acts as a diminutive category that prohibits more original readings of Deledda.

²For more on the way others have criticized her language as banal and outdated, see Bice Garavelli's article "*La lingua di Grazia Deledda*". While Maria

Giocobbe Harder notes Deledda's "non-modernità" (*Grazia Deledda* 114), both her work and Garavelli's ultimately validate Deledda's works. An example of a critic that deems Deledda's work as limited by her psychological "primitivism" is Aldo Borlenghi (Abete *Grazia Deledda* 53-57).

³Typical of this kind of traditional—and very problematic—reading are Luigi Falchi's *L'opera di Grazia Deledda*, and Helen Elizabeth Hauri's book, *Fato e religiosità*. Less traditional, but still engaged in reading Deledda's characters as products of a morally fatalistic universe, is Neria De Giovanni's *Religiosità and Fatalismo*.

⁴The same argument might be made for Deledda's contemporaries such as the Sicilian writer Maria Messina, who is also traditionally read as a disciple of Verga. Messina raises many of the same themes as Deledda, such as the socio-economic constraints placed on women in turn-of-the-century Italy.

⁵All translations of "La volpe" are my own.

⁶For information on Deledda's research and writings on Sardinian folklore see Lynn Gunzberg's "Ruralism, Folklore, and Grazia Deledda's Novels". Gunzberg also argues that Regionalism is important to the way one reads Deledda since Deledda's original appeal rests on her regionalist style. Deledda's academic work on folklore attests not only to the degree of sophistication of her use of folklore in the story, but to her complicated manipulation of folklore systems.

⁷Examples of Sardinian proverbs concerning foxes and lambs abound in Salvatore Loi's *Proverbi Sardi*.

⁸As a result Zana resembles other Deleddian female protagonists such as Marianna Sirca (*Marianna Sirca*, 1915) who chooses not to marry in order to preserve her economic independence.

⁹For an example of this argument see Gunzberg (118; 120-1). While the argument that Deledda is unhistorical is often accompanied by a favourable reading of what is seen as the "timeless" qualities of her work, this argument is also used as an implicit criticism of her lack of social and economic interests, especially since Verga (her standard of criticism) is found to be sensitive to socio-economic issues.

¹⁰As in "La volpe" *Marianna Sirca* and *Cosima* suggest that this "choice", although less than ideal, is perhaps these characters, only way of preserving economic independence. But like "La volpe," the texts ask: at what costs to these characters' mental health is this choice made? Certainly, *Marianna Sirca* and *Cosima* present a more ideal picture of female autonomy in that these female protagonists maintain autonomy outside marriage at least temporarily. Neither Marianna nor Cosima has reached the extreme state of neurosis that Zana has, and therefore seem more in control of themselves, or "padrona di sè", the motto of Marianna. Marianna and Cosima, however, are not in the same financially precarious predicament as Zana. *Marianna Sirca* begins after the question of Marianna's inheritance or dowry has already been resolved: "Marianna Sirca, dopo la morte di un suo ricco zio prete, del quale aveva ereditato il patrimonio, era andata a pas-

sare alcuni giorni in campagna...” [“Marianna Sirca, after the death of a rich uncle of hers, a priest, had gone to spend a few days in the country...”] (1). While neither actually reaches such an extreme state of neurosis as Zana, both do exhibit similar symptoms of anxiety as a result of other issues surrounding their autonomy. The texts suggest that despite the initial edenic period of autonomy, there are problems when these women actually choose to marry. Either they risk losing control over their money (as in Marianna’s case) or their societies inevitably place pressure on them to marry at the risk of becoming a social outcast (in both novels).

¹¹The references to Freud’s theory of repression is to be found in numerous works. This footnote, therefore, does not claim to be a complete list of references, but only an example of some works that deal with the issue of anxiety and its symptoms: *Civilization and Its Discontents* 59; 64; 69; 71-72; 78-82; *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* 23-28; 55; *Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XIII 64; *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 348-351.

¹²Since this sense of the oral narrative is neglected in most English translations of the short story, I have provided my own translation of this particular passage.

¹³In the article “Woman as Outlaw”, Susan Briziarelli suggests using Jameson’s theory to read Deledda’s characters’ political intimations.

¹⁴The passage of interest is the following: “Caduti i tabù, o attenuati comunque, in una dimensione storica non più rigida, isolata, compatta, come quella della Sardegna primitiva e arcaica, le restrizioni, gli eroici sacrifici a cui i personaggi continuano a sottoporsi non possono apparire che obbedienza assurda a una legge interna forzosamente costrittiva, riformulazione di una psicosi nervosa, di una radicalizzazione introiettata, ineliminabile ormai, di un divieto schematizzato e divenuto inscindibile struttura della mente....Il tabù, come manifestazione tipica, precisa, di una cultura primitiva che ha cessato da tempo la sua funzione è divenuto un retaggio mnemonico, una mera ritualità della psiche, il sintomo di una fissazione, quasi si fosse creata una sorta di malattia del tabù” (*Grazia Deledda* 141).

¹⁵The text calls attention to the doctor’s position as “outsider” when the doctor speaks to Jacu in the local dialect and Jacu responds in Italian so as to purposefully marginalize him (214).

¹⁶See Neria De Giovanni’s *Come leggere Canne al Vento* for more information on this topic (8). These plots of land or “tancas” used to belong to the “re pastori” and were then bought by the bourgeois industrial colonizers that came to the island.

¹⁷Giacobbe Harder describes the “ricco pastore che fa una vita rude ma ha bestime, terre, e denaro” (9-10).

¹⁸Giacobbe Harder notes that the Sardinian term “zustissia” does not mean “giustizia” as one might think, but the exact opposite. “Zustissia” is an ironic term that refers to the repressive organization of the law from outside (i.e. colonialism). Instead “giustizia” in the Sardinian dialect would be expressed as “su zustu” (33-34).

¹⁹While colonialism in Sardinian had taken place for centuries (in both economic and administrative forms) by 1912 (the year of publication of "La volpe"), it is believed that the modern form of "banditismo" did not arise until mid-18th century. In 1868 the famous "Su connottu" revolt took place which was a kind of public expression of economic and social "malessere" on the part of the local peoples. Moreover, at the turn of the century many articles and books were published on the phenomenon of "banditismo" in Sardinia. About the same time various journals, such as *L'Unione Sarda* and *La Nuova Sardegna*, were founded and devoted to these contemporary political issues. Therefore, while it seems that the topic of economic and political injustice in Sardinia (and the resulting resistance in the form of "banditismo" and outright revolt) was already a publicly debated issue in 1912 Italy, I would venture to say that public consciousness and discussion of female independence (especially in rural areas such as Nuoro, Sardinia) were not as common and/or widely socially acceptable—especially in the form of such a violent allegory as Deledda's in which a single woman plans murder in order to maintain independence. Therefore, while there was a "resistance" of its own coming into being on the proto-feminist front, it was not that of a violent and physically devious resistance as was the resistance happening on the anti-colonial front (in the form of banditry and revolt), and would therefore almost certainly be more shocking if represented through a engendered appeal. For more information on the political situation at the time of the publication of Deledda's works see Neria De Giovanni's *Come leggere Canne al Vento* and Maria Giacobbe Harder's *Grazia Deledda*.

²⁰In *Grazia Deledda*, Giacobbe Harder speaks of the written nature of the local dialect and "codice arcaico non scritto ma ben articolato e regolato da precise norme giuridiche." She notes that at the heart of this unwritten code ("questo linguaggio allusivo") lies a kind of "sentenziosità" (32).

²¹For a discussion of Deledda's heroines as "rebels" see Briziarelli (27-31). Briziarelli looks at "banditismo" in *Cosima* and *La chiesa della solitudine*. Marianna Sirca also engages the phenomenon of "banditismo" in the love affair between Marianna and the bandit Simone Sole.

²²See Giacobbe Harder's reference to "bandits of honor": "... 'banditi d'onore' si fa difensore contro l'ingiustizia in quel contesto e nei casi specifici della sua amministrazione dell'altra legge, quella imposta, che non sa proteggerlo, anzi non lo rispetta, ferendolo spesso proprio nella sua così profonda esigenza e netta concezione del giusto e dell'inguisto" (33).

²³It is important to point out that Freud's theory of repression is not meant to excuse an individual from acts such as murder, but rather to understand the factors that may have caused it. I am simply using Freud's theory of repression to understand Zana's controversial behaviour, and not to suggest any moral judgement on Deledda's part.

²⁴Maria Messina also presents this same problem of the lack of female solidarity in the individual woman's project for autonomy. Yet, like Deledda, she encourages us to consider that perhaps it is the only solution for any autonomy given the socio-economic circumstances.

²⁵The text suggests that as an unmarried woman, Zana is somewhat of an outcast (as we see in her lack of interaction with the other women at the "tosatura"). On the other hand, when she flirts with the doctor, she is condemned by the male characters.

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