

Simulated Bodies

Transforming Relationships in Capriolo's "La donna di pietra" and *Un uomo di carattere*

Amongst the early favourites of Paola Capriolo, a precocious reader, were Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and myths relating to metamorphosis.¹ These tales find particular resonance in the short story "La donna di pietra" (1988) and the novel *Un uomo di carattere* (1996) which explore the relationship between art and nature in the context of metamorphosis, merging elements of reality and fantasy. Throughout Capriolo's work are to be found influences from the classics (Shakespeare, Greek tragedy, Dante), from German philosophy and from modern writers such as Borges, Calvino, Kafka and Mann – the former two in her emphasis on extra-spatial and atemporal realities, labyrinthine perspectives and linguistic ambiguity, the latter two in her treatment of, respectively, alienation and the life-versus-art conflict. Indeed, this last theme is at the heart of Capriolo's writing, informing as it does so many of the issues her work addresses: the place of myth, the worth of aesthetic ideals, the power of music and the illusory nature of reality. The theme may derive principally from Mann, but it is recurrent in a number of other major writers including Pirandello² and Hawthorne,³ both of whom were particularly interested in the conception, role and position of the artist, and the relationship of the artist with his work.⁴ Capriolo openly recognises the part certain authors have played in her own literary formation and has said she feels especially close to Mann, as well as to the poets Gottfried Benn and Rainer Maria Rilke.⁵ To date (September 2003) she has published ten novels, two collections of short stories, numerous stories in journals and magazines and a series of essays, articles and reviews on a wide range of subjects (music, literature, philosophy, culture, contemporary society), in addition to eight translations of German novels (by Goethe, Keller, Mann, Schnitzler, Kafka, Simmel, Kleist). Her first work, *La grande Eulalia*, a collection of four short stories, was published in 1988 and attracted extremely favourable reviews in Italy. Two novels later, in 1991, she was already recognised as a promising new author possessing, as one critic noted, "il tocco intellettualmente raffinato di una colta maturità."⁶ Her books have now been translated into other languages including English, Danish, French, German, Japanese, Greek, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish, confirming her as an author of international status.

In all Capriolo's stories we read of lonely, eccentric or disturbed characters who undertake quests to find some sort of meaning in their own existence and in life itself; the search is often for perfection amidst the surrounding mediocrity.⁷ Mur, the young protagonist of "La donna di pietra", seeks to create the perfect female in statue form while Erasmus Stiler (*Un uomo di carattere*) fashions a perfectly symmetrical, controlled garden. Indeed, almost all the quests have in common some form of artistic goal (the pure art and classical beauty of sculpture, painting, music or acting,⁸ for example), and in both cases it becomes a compulsion.⁹ Yet Capriolo's

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protagonists are also drawn into relationships either as part of this process or as a diversion from it, and while the author devotes little space to characterisation or to (sexual) intimacy, physical attraction, sensuality and nakedness are not absent from her pages. In seven of the fourteen stories published to date, a man is attracted to a woman – or to his idea of one – and in two the reverse occurs¹⁰ Five of these male/female attractions (which become obsessions) are triggered by bodies (one male, four female) and in two cases these involve stone figures: Mur's sculpture, and the neoclassical statue Stiler has placed in his garden.

In both *Un uomo di carattere* and "La donna di pietra" which, perhaps pertinently, stand alone in Capriolo's fiction for the presence of the terms "donna" and "uomo" in their titles, the male protagonist is distracted from his artistic pursuit – sculpture or gardening – by a female figure or a glimpse of part of one. Relations with the women cause prospects, perspectives and philosophies to be spurned or overturned in a predominantly linear process of change, something that affects all Capriolo's protagonists from Eulalia (1988) to Gilgamesh of *Qualcosa nella notte* (2003). With "La donna di pietra" and *Un uomo di carattere* as our central focus, we will examine how and why this happens, comparing motivations, consequences and likely explanations, and then offer some thoughts as to their further significance. Furthermore, since in these two works the transformation, or metamorphosis, not only affects the protagonist but also the representation of the human, the "simulatum corpus", as Ovid terms the statue that Pygmalion fashions and which miraculously comes to life,¹¹ the essay will address not only the protagonists' uneasy relations with women but also the fluctuating relationships between the protagonists and their statues.

At this point, it is appropriate to highlight the sense of ambiguity underlining Capriolo's work, her penchant for half-light, half-hidden or fleeting impressions and figures, and the polysemic nature of her textual symbols and motifs (labyrinth, prison, theatre, mirror, music, statues, for instance). As the author herself has said of her mode of writing:

Credo che la mia sia una scrittura in cui il ruolo del lettore è molto importante, *proprio perché le storie che racconto io sono quasi sempre ambigue*, non sono mai spiegate fino in fondo. Quindi c'è sempre come un richiedere che sia il lettore a completare in qualche modo questo percorso mentale o il lasciargli la possibilità di prendere una strada piuttosto che un'altra.¹²

Furthermore, "Ci deve essere [...] una zona d'ombra, qualcosa che il narratore non sa o non comprende,"¹³ which would appear to be linked to Capriolo's *Weltanschauung* in her rejection of certainties, of indisputable knowledge.¹⁴ The detachment of the narrator, who often claims to be presenting only part of the story, or one of a number of possible stories, serves to emphasise the ambiguous and subjective nature of the realities portrayed.¹⁵ Furthermore, never are we provided with details of a protagonist's past, nor does any character ever relate the present to the past; all exist from the moment of a specific act or vision which sets the story in motion.

In the opening pages of "La donna di pietra" and *Un uomo di carattere*, we see that both protagonists inhabit an isolated place, cut off from the world. Although

their natures are quite different – Mur is a shy, young apprentice to a master stone mason, Stiler is a more mature, stubborn, philosophising engineer – both are living a quasi-monastic life encapsulating an artistic ideal whose roots lie in order, immobility and lack of human emotion. Mur’s life unfolds in an underground cave where he learns “l’arte sacra di *scolpire giardini* nel ventre della terra.”¹⁶ He sculpts not for human eyes but solely for the dead, “il corteo delle ombre lungo e dolente, che vaga senza riposo per i meandri della terra”, whose appreciation (that is, dead – or non-existent – appreciation) is to be sufficient reward (DP 44). Everything he has contact with is static, beautifully formed, perfect. Not only does it recall the myth of Plato’s Cave in that Mur and his Master only experience or believe in the shadows,¹⁷ but the situation is particularly reminiscent of that in Pirandello’s *Diana e la Tuda* where the young sculptor Sirio Dossi is the ex-pupil of his stepfather, Nonno Giuncano, Their lives revolve around statues, and their studio is a colourless environment, dominated by black and white.¹⁸ The roles and views of life of Capriolo’s old and young sculptors are, however, reversed, as we shall see.

Erasmus Stiler’s existence is bound up in the wild, overgrown garden around the villa he has inherited (“un luogo insensato”, as he describes it to his new friend Daniele Bausa, a student and dilettante artist¹⁹); he frenziedly transforms the wilderness into a geometrically ordered garden. His mission, like Mur’s, is “scolpire un giardino”: to create a controlled, static environment where trees, shrubs and flowers are kept in their place, repeatedly pruned or removed, and from which all animal life is debarred. Right from their first encounter it is clear to Bausa that Stiler is not only an eccentric recluse but also a cold and calculating creator of order and precision. Stiler’s relentless uprooting, designing and arranging are outward signs of his having sworn, as Bausa records, “un odio mortale al disordine, al caso” (UC 48). As Stiler himself affirms to his friend:

Conosco la potenza del caos, del disordine. La forma, anche lei non tarderà a scoprirlo, è una condizione innaturale, che può essere mantenuta soltanto con la forza: spontaneamente, tutto tende a ritornare all’infermità. [...] Io sono ostinato, Bausa, più ostinato di quanto possa mai esserlo un albero o un cespuglio. (UC 55)²⁰

Yet in both stories the harmony or fixity – of environment and mind – is destined to be invaded. Mur’s change of heart is occasioned by a brief visit to the nearest town where, unaccustomed to the world above, he feels assaulted by the many different colours and sounds washing over him. He takes refuge in some quieter alleys where he admires porticos and geranium-fronted houses; he also tries to imagine the secret of women’s contours under their cloaks and is fascinated:

ma sempre una qualche disarmonia veniva a turbare la sua contemplazione: le cose si muovevano, mutavano, si sottraevano all’istante perfetto in cui il caso le aveva fissate, si scuotevano di dosso quell’unità misteriosa che per un attimo aveva donato purezza alle loro immagini. (DP 46)

They are not fixed, stable and known, like his stone creations, and so symmetry and form are lost. Suddenly, he catches sight of “un bianco braccio di donna” (DP 47) exposed, in a gracious gesture, closing the shutters of an isolated house. This is the

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vision, the specific action, that sets the whole process of change in motion. Stiler's distraction from his labours is also caused by an unexpected meeting with a woman, in his case a cousin whom he had not seen since their childhood, "[un']incantevole creatura", as his housekeeper Ursula later describes her to Bausa (UC 69). Stiler subsequently engages in furtive correspondence with her, posting his letters down in the village at sunset, "una volta alla settimana, con regolare puntualità" (UC 65).

After the initial vision of, or encounter with, the female, the protagonists alter the previously single-minded course of their lives; they attempt to move towards the "new" (the female), which involves abandoning or sacrificing the "old" (the solitary, or purely male). Mur, having glimpsed the shapely female arm, no longer finds beauty in the underground garden. Like the man who escapes from Plato's Cave, he "becomes aware that he had hitherto been deceived by shadows";²¹ everything in the cave now seems rigid to him, flat, a false representation of the ideal beauty he believes he has perceived, and he neglects his stone creations, condemned as they are to "*fiorire al buio*" (DP 50, my emphasis).²² Instead, he begins to sculpt the arm in secret, is obliged to confess to his master that he has sculpted for the *living* and so broken his vow, and is expelled from the school. He moves to work in a lonely stone quarry where he gradually completes the statue. In his turn, Stiler begins to neglect his garden and starts to spruce up and "feminise" his house because of a growing attachment to his cousin and his anticipation of a further visit from her. He also begins to sit around idly for long periods, although, keen to be seen as independent in spirit, he emphatically denies to Bausa that anything has altered.

In both stories there is an analogy between woman and statue, and it is in this context that the parallel with *Diana e la Tuda* is most prominent. In "La donna di pietra", initially, Mur sees an opposition between his underground statues and the woman, and he is enchanted by the latter's *moving* beauty: "Quel gesto lo aveva sbalzato di colpo in un nuovo mondo" (DP 49), a world of magical, *fluid* forms which he now views as perfect (as opposed to the imperfection and distortion he had previously seen in movement). As he begins to sculpt her in stone, copying each part as it is gradually revealed to him, he labours hard to combat the rigidity of the stone and wrest from it a suggestion of movement, a gentle life-pulse. As soon as he has set eyes on the whole woman, however, Mur becomes so entranced with his creation that he begins to exhibit a proprietary attitude, confusing the woman more and more with her sculpted image: "gli pareva che come questa anche l'altra fosse ormai cosa sua" (DP 62). Sirio, the young sculptor of *Diana e la Tuda*, is similarly devoted to his art and to the statue of Diana that he is creating.²³ This causes the older sculptor Giuncano to reproach him: "Mangi per la tua statua, dormi per la tua statua".²⁴ The parallel with Mur, especially as the statue's artist rather than just her admirer, is striking: the "making" of another in the image of our own "need".²⁵

To complement his garden Stiler has procured a neoclassical statue – in his friend Bausa's words, "un nudo femminile le cui forme acerbe e slanciate facevano pensare ad Artemide, alla più inaccessibile fra le abitatrici dell'Olimpo" (UC 53).²⁶ The "gelida musa" of Capriolo's text, a marble greyhound at her feet but without a quiver (with which the huntress would dispense sudden death), is wholly suited, in

Bausa's view, to "[un] poeta della freddezza", as he considers Stiler to be (see UC 53, 150).²⁷ As we later learn, in Stiler's mind there is a powerful (if at first subconscious) connection between woman (his cousin Zelda) and statue. Indeed, his critically detached descriptions of Zelda when she comes to stay are more suited to a work of art than to a human being. He remarks to Bausa: "lei avrà notato la regolarità dei tratti, le proporzioni della figura..." (UC 112).²⁸ Stiler marvels at, and is uplifted by, their resemblance, seeing Zelda as the incarnation of his statue: "il fenomeno sconcertante è appunto che una donna in carne e ossa possieda la perfezione di una statua, come se Artemide fosse scesa dal piedistallo e passeggiasse su e giù per il giardino" (UC 132). Bausa, the artist-onlooker, is sceptical, recalling Stiler's earlier reaction to a perceived blemish in Zelda (hers is "una bellezza perfetta"; "peccato solo per quelle efelidi", UC 112), but he refrains from commenting further. Moreover, while Stiler assumes a happy correlation between Artemis and Zelda, Bausa, while aware of the singular similarity between them, perceives a tension. He is perhaps conscious that the worlds of statue (art, chastity, order) and woman (life, marriage plans, disorder) are rivals for Stiler's attention and incompatible. In *Diana e la Tuda*, as the two sculptors and the model Tuda compare the previously completed statues with the girl, it is the opposition that dominates for Nonno Giuncano and Tuda, but for Sirio it is the connection or bond. Giuncano points out that the model, unlike the statues, is alive, moving, vital; seeing one deriving directly from the other, Sirio exclaims: "Il miracolo di Pigmalione" (DT 21). Stiler and Sirio both focus on a naked but cool Diana-Artemis whilst Mur is looking rather for a naked and responsive Aphrodite – as, indeed, Tuda would wish to be seen.

Both Mur and Stiler, like Ovid's Pygmalion, desire their statue to be a flesh-and-blood creature. Mur, however, takes this a step further. Having completed his representation of the woman, on impulse he sculpts a replica of himself, a mate for the female statue. He makes their hands touch and lovingly contemplates the two stone arms which, as he sees it, "dolcemente digradavano l'una verso l'altra, e incontrandosi si intrecciavano in un nodo insolubile" (DP 62). Merging himself with the male statue, he hopes that the woman will now come and claim him, taking him into the mysterious dark of her home. Yet the woman's eventual reaction to Mur's work is rather different, as we shall see.

Although both Mur and Stiler feel oppressed in their old worlds, despite their blinkered attitudes they also experience a sense of guilt as they begin to move away from Cave and Garden. The young sculptor, watched over by his Master and thus ill at ease, steals away at night to proceed with his obsessional sculpting despite imagining, or intuiting, that he will suffer an act of revenge for his defection. Wholly cut off from society, from relations with women, he is perhaps anxious to experience what he has never known: some form of human recognition or reward. Stiler also feels a prisoner in his home and even appears to blame his statue: "lanciò alla bianca Artemide uno sguardo risentito" (UC 80). He confesses his dilemma to Bausa who responds: "mi toccava ancora assistere al bizzarro spettacolo di un eremita insofferente della propria caverna ma incapace di separarsene" (UC 90, my emphasis; see also 54). Yet, as Giovanni Palmieri observes, "la metamorfosi produce inevitabilmente i suoi frutti".²⁹

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Stiler guiltily abandons his “cave” for two months and goes off to visit Zelda in the city.

What is conveyed strongly in both these stories is a gender imbalance, with the male using – or attempting to use – the female. Stiler sees himself as a man of character, someone who is in control. Citing the phrase of a Greek philosopher, he maintains that “il carattere è il destino dell’uomo”, character, for him, signifying firmness rather than a set of characteristics. And thus, “un uomo di carattere ottiene sempre la donna che ha scelto, se la scelta è il prodotto di un calcolo ponderato e non di un futile capriccio” (UC 78–79). Destiny is in his hands, he believes; it never enters his head that Zelda may not acquiesce to his wishes. Mur, too, appears to focus all his attention on the statue, forming her, perfecting her and endeavouring in this way to please, and influence, the woman.

In both cases, the female initially appears compliant. When Mur has sculpted the woman’s arm, he glances over to her house and, holding his breath, sees the arm tantalisingly open the shutters and reveal little by little the woman’s face, neck, shoulder and a hint of breast. She stares at him, and he believes her eyes are inviting. From here on, even more absorbed, Mur labours for a tangible, earthly reward, that is, to see more of the woman, and he senses her encouragement, if not complicity, in his actions. The fact that she starts leaving him a flower each morning seems indeed to confirm her appreciation. When Zelda, accompanied by her mother, comes to stay at Stiler’s villa, she in turn is flattered by the neat Z-shape of red flowers the engineer has planted in front of his statue as a token to her, although she finds the statue itself intimidating: “Non le pare che abbia qualcosa di ostile, di minaccioso?” (UC 126), she asks Bausa, perhaps sensing it is seeking to “occupy” her. As a result of this proximity, Stiler, almost alone among Capriolo’s protagonists, has a real opportunity to develop a close relationship with a member of the opposite sex,³⁰ and initially he and Zelda appear to be making progress.

Yet Mur and Stiler, just like Pirandello’s Sirio, fail to read certain warning signs and are therefore headed for trouble. When Mur makes his very first timid move towards the woman (or rather, towards her extended arm, the only part that is visible), he ignores the fact that the arm brusquely retreats and closes the shutters. Blind to this signal, he simply continues his alternate looking and sculpting. Characteristic of many of Capriolo’s protagonists (the prisoner of “Il gigante”, Cara of *Il doppio regno*, Walter’s exotic lady in *Il nocchiero*, the “spettatrice” who watches Vulpus, the aesthete of *Una di loro*, Zelda, at first), the woman does not have a name, knowledge of which may be seen as a first step towards possession. Mur never learns it nor are words ever exchanged, perhaps revealing the idea of the inadequacy, inferiority or irrelevance of language that pervades Capriolo’s fiction, also expressed in the works of Rilke and Heidegger, among others.³¹ Furthermore, as Mur progresses with his gradual creation of bodily perfection the flowers stop, although Mur does not heed this more explicitly negative sign either, to his later cost.³² Instead he returns, furtively, to the underground cave and steals two diamonds from the unfinished sculpture of a deer so as to give his woman eyes that sparkle. Not only is he trying to flatter her (and his artistry) even more; he is also perhaps anticipating being the object of her dazzling gaze. Mur’s woman’s apparent

withdrawal of favour is non-verbal and ignored. Tuda's protest at Sirio's total disregard for her welfare and comfort (he subjects her to inhumanly long modelling sessions) may, on the other hand, be verbal and very direct ("Sono di carne, oh!" DT 10), but it is similarly ignored. The young sculptor is obsessed with capturing her in a gesture and preserving it for eternity. Despite Giuncanò's remark that this amounts to death and Tuda's insistence that she is a living, moving being, he is unmoved; he merely remarks to her, heartlessly: "Ma che c'entri tu?, come sei, viva? Dev'esser lei, la statua, non tu. – Marmo: la sua materia: non la tua carne" (DT 23). Right from the start it is patent that he is only using her for an artistic objective, as Tuda herself reluctantly recognises: "Io dovrò allora servire soltanto per la tua statua?" (DT 38); and again, in the second act, with her rhetorical "Debbo essere soltanto una statua, io, sua?" (DT 48).

As Stiler develops his relationship with Zelda, the Z-shape of flowers seems to reflect his state or Zelda's fate: they droop and become diseased. Yet just like Mur, he fails to read what the flowers are telling him and simply carries out zealous disinfestations and replantings. The flowers repeatedly blacken, however, to the point where he is forced to recognise his failure: "Ormai è davvero finita [...] non resta che estirpare le piante" (UC 156), though he is perhaps referring beyond the flowers to his whole attempt at reconciling life with Zelda and garden.³³ Yet has Stiler planted the flowers for Artemis or for Zelda? In his mind, as we have indicated, the two are one. Bausa and Zelda see it differently. Even when Bausa knew nothing of a woman in Stiler's life and could only imagine that her name began with Z,³⁴ he felt that the show of flowers was displeasing to "il simulacro di Artemide" who, of course, disdained love and feminine adornment. To his mind "la dea di marmo chinava sull'aiuola uno sguardo freddo e remoto" (UC 56, 64). Zelda, too, feels hostility, as we have noted. For Stiler there is no conflict; for the women, as Bausa recognises, there is. In *Diana e la Tuda* it is the model herself who droops: not free to balance her physical and emotional well-being, she begins to waste away, stops posing for Sirio and, to his consternation, disappears. As Tuda later explains: "Mi prendeva tutta per la sua statua: essere io, là – viva – e non essere nulla!" (DT 89), precisely what Stiler and (especially) Mur are guilty of.³⁵

The male-female union, then, is not to be. As Capriolo's two protagonists move towards their hoped-for climax, it proves instead to be one of disappointment, decomposition and isolation. The morning after Mur has created the two statues, an Adonis for his Venus, he finds they have been rudely separated: "le braccia che univano le due figure erano state troncate a colpi netti, precisi" (DP 63), with his male statue cast aside into a corner. The spell has been broken, the mysterious link between stone and life, woman and her image, the ephemeral and the eternal, destroyed; nothing is left for him here next to his rejected sculpture, the "simulacro di vita", as it is termed. Mur bitterly repents breaking his vow and seeking "altro sguardo che quello dei morti" (DP 63), that is, wanting live, human eyes to gaze on his creations; he wrenches out the jewelled eyes he had lovingly chiselled into the face and makes his lonely way back to the cave, to his dark, lifeless world.

As he returns to his lodgings one evening, Bausa reflects on developments between Stiler and Zelda, noting pointedly: "La relazione dei due cugini [...] aveva

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subito un profondo mutamento: non si basava piú, come all'inizio, sull'*ignoranza* reciproca, ma sulla reciproca *incomprensione*" (UC 146–47, my emphases). Stiler, the previously resolute absolutist, is a changed man: "Ormai si lasciava governare da lei in tutte le cose [...], e man mano che questa metamorfosi si compiva, l'atteggiamento di Zeta diventava piú gaio e affettuoso" (UC 147). At first, Stiler continues his vigilant work on the garden, but the calm does not last because of his new distraction. He openly wrestles with his desire to be free from his self-imposed duty towards the garden, perhaps even by taking Zelda away to live in the city, and he claims his own freedom to choose. He seems quite unaware of having previously affirmed precisely the opposite, that duty came before personal satisfaction (see UC 85, 153). Showing how much he has changed, Stiler now feels that the essence of things is disorder rather than the opposite, and he grows increasingly morose and taciturn.

And thus, suddenly aware of how rebellious his garden has become, Stiler swings abruptly back to his previous belief in duty and order, and Zelda and her mother leave, disheartened, hurt. This is his choice, at least; the unfortunate Mur was not permitted one. Stiler's compromise in inviting Zelda to stay and therefore paying less attention to the garden and more to the house and his guests (thereby acting not only for the good of others but also, indirectly but not unimportantly, for his changed self as well), has led ultimately to his downfall or double loss. Not only has he gradually abandoned his garden, but neither has he opted for married life in the city with Zelda and in the end, the engineer dispassionately dismisses the "real" and continues to strive for the perfection which lies in stillness. The transformation we see in *Un uomo di carattere*, which has appropriately been termed a "metamorfico e metaforico romanzo"³⁶, is from a situation in which Stiler dominates the garden to one where *it* rules *him*.

Sirio is a less passive protagonist. He frantically seeks out Tuda for his own selfish ends, marries her so as to allow himself to complete his statue and tries to continue with his work, wholly unconcerned about how Tuda occupies herself when she is not posing for him. Despite her obvious suffering, he does not repent his actions, to the extent where in the final scene he flings himself on Tuda to prevent her from hurting his statue ("Non la toccare o ti uccido!" UC 91) and is himself killed by Giuncano who springs forward to save Tuda. Capriolo's protagonists, like Sirio, are both guilty of narcissism: the statue represents the idealised form, the projection of the artist's vision, jealously guarded. In Stiler's case, furthermore, the garden is his "objective correlative", a projection of his deepest, most characteristic (ordered) self.

The distinction between "ignoranza" and "incomprensione", mentioned above, is relevant to all these Pygmalion tales. The period of ignorance is filled with the subjective, idealised vision of the "other" and while ignorance dominates, creation is possible. Yet the end of ignorance brings disenchantment: the period of knowledge and incomprehension focuses on the fact that the subjective, idealised visions of the protagonists never materialise; or if they do, they never cohere. As Pirandello also showed, our knowledge of "otherness" is only ever partial. The other – the female – remains irrefutably other.

Let us now examine the transformations more closely in an attempt to interpret the shifting relations and perspectives in the light of the protagonists' all-consuming art-life conflict. In both *Un uomo di carattere* and "La donna di pietra", it is opposites that have attracted. Mur is taken in by graceful movement when all he has previously known is static, statuesque. He loses his living woman, however, since *she* rejects *him*. In Stiler's case, it is Zelda's indolence and disorderly nature that attract him to her (as well as her classical beauty), as Bausa recognises,³⁷ and yet in time, *he* rejects *her* as he is unable to overcome his deeper need for order which he sees as a male characteristic. Both Mur and Stiler find their women "mobili", or capricious, and impossible to fathom. Mur does not understand why the woman removes her presumed affections so cruelly and he has no friend with whom to discuss this, no witness to comment on his choice, behaviour or character. Stiler neither understands nor approves of Zelda's nature, even from the beginning, and although he has a friend in whom to confide, he adopts a preaching position with him rather than one of exchange. When Zelda and her mother fail to fix a date for their arrival, he makes the arrogant comment: "Sono così... disordinate... Come tutte le donne, del resto: c'è una radicale tendenza all'approssimazione nell'indole femminile" (UC 94). Mur, living a monk-like existence, has had no opportunity to discover anything of the nature of women. Yet Stiler's contact has been of little avail, and his chauvinistic tendencies are borne out by subsequent statements to his friend where there can be no mistaking his patronising attitude: "Con le donne", he tells Bausa, "occorre fermezza nella strategia, ma una certa condiscendenza nella tattica. Vanno blandite e insieme corrette, proprio come i bambini" (UC 121). But can, or will, Zelda be corrected? The letters S (Stiler) and Z (Zelda) are, in fact, a reversed mirror image, just as their characters, Bausa notes, are opposite and complementary: "Il suo carattere [di Zeta] sembrava forgiato a bella posta per produrre con quello del cugino un salutare contrasto, ne compensava le manchevolezze, ne bilanciava le virtù e i difetti con virtù e difetti opposti" (UC 117). At a certain moment, however, the statue of Artemis is seen to split the letter Z: "Il sole era ormai lontano dallo zenit, e l'ombra di Artemide si allungava sull'aiuola intersecando la grande zeta" (UC 74). This is symbolic of the statue's power to sever the human, S and Z, as the live woman in "La donna di pietra" physically severs the two stone statues, sculptor and model. In both stories the opposites have attracted but are not – or are not permitted – to fuse.

Like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, both "La donna di pietra" and *Un uomo di carattere* expose the problems of trying to reconcile or appease art and nature. In Mur's story, passion, or infatuation with nature in the form of the female, is shown to be useful to art for inspiration until "nature" is offended. Clearly seeing the opposition between his lifeless statues and the live woman, he sculpts a new statue which, in his mind, is one with the woman and in honour of her (as was Stiler's intention with the red flowers). Mur's ulterior motive, however, is not only representation but also courtship. He intends his model to be attracted to his work and thus accept his person, being joined to him, flesh cleaving to flesh; this he attempts, or tries to force, by creating his own likeness and joining the two statues, perhaps reflecting Frazer's observations on primitive, or "sympathetic" magic.³⁸ Mur

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is proud of his work, just like the artist of Hawthorne's "The Prophetic Pictures", and fully expects the "magic" to work.³⁹ While going his own way instead of obeying the Master may give Mur temporary excitement, it subsequently propels him to crisis as the woman destroys his creation: his desire is not enough for success and any kisses he may have bestowed on his statue, or secret prayer he may have made, are ineffectual. Unlike the story of Ovid's Pygmalion or *The Winter's Tale*, there is no miracle; his primitive magic does not work.⁴⁰ The real woman rejects the lovingly fashioned replicas and severs them. Why should she be recreated and shaped to the will of another? Why should she be courted without her explicit consent? Perhaps she rejects the male in scorn as his is too sudden and presumptuous a "courtship"; she can no longer retain an element of mystery for him since she is fully exposed, solidified into marble, every part of her already known and caressed. Or perhaps she is embarrassed that he has seen into her heart and thus resents him? The woman herself does not speak; we can only interpret her actions which may, indeed, speak louder. Furthermore, the description of the statue as Mur bade farewell to it, "donna senza sguardo" (DP 64), applies equally well to the woman herself: she has actively removed her gaze (and her favour) and is, as far as Mur is concerned, blind, hard and unyielding, a matching, though unresponsive, "woman of stone".

Stiler seeks to dominate nature: nature as both garden and woman, nature to be tamed or controlled, while the house is his male realm, stark and in disarray, until the imminent arrival of his two guests. Living on his own he can be as hermit-like as he chooses, yet living in society involves social behaviour, norms; it is often precisely a refusal of these norms that spurs Capriolo's characters on in their search for something deeper, something beyond normal existence. And so he prepares a more homely environment for the woman he has chosen. Bausa is well aware of the engineer's design to merge Zelda with Artemis (see UC 128), yet he considers it odd that Zelda's aversion is concentrated on Artemis, as if she were indeed jealous of her twin, "la gemella di marmo" (UC 128). He does not see Artemis as a threat to Zelda, but on the contrary, with the evidence of Zelda's increasing influence over Stiler before him, her inner strength and her dislike of the controlled garden and its classical statue, it is Artemis for whom Bausa feels apprehensive; he fears she may be neglected and lose her marble shine, being consigned to a place of dust and cobwebs: "E per quanto fossi affascinato dalla giovane donna, mi sentivo indotto a prendere contro di lei le parti di quella dea la cui algida figura mi era parsa un tempo così estranea" (UC 134). Indeed, since Stiler is spending time trying to please Zelda, to secure or consolidate her affections, living creatures begin to return to his garden: birds clutter the trees and moles upset his tidy flowerbeds. Bausa acknowledges to himself the woman's responsibility for this, feeling that when she plays the piano Stiler had bought for her amusement, her music spreads "come una rosea nebbia sentimentale sulla geometria rigorosa delle aiuole fino ad avvolgere tutto, persino la statua di Artemide" (UC 149-50).⁴¹ The woman of flesh and blood, rosy and seemingly malleable, has invaded, and is perhaps claiming a hold over, the cold, Spartan realm of the stone goddess. Another explanation, however, may be that Artemis, no longer revered and resentful of Stiler's attentions to Zelda, ceases to

unleash her power over animal nature, showing *her* wilful dominance, *her* hold over him and what he has, until now, devotedly nurtured.

Stiler's disillusionment follows since he elects to ignore the person or personality of Zelda, fusing or confusing her in his mind with his statue, and he is dismayed to discover that the woman has a mind of her own: Zelda refuses to be submerged by Artemis. There can be no miracle here either, and as in "La donna di pietra" and *Diana e la Tuda*, the woman – or nature – shows that she feels slighted by the attention given to her rival and will not conform to, or be moulded in, the male image of her (UC 129).⁴² The perceptive Bausa observes, although not without sympathy for his friend, that Stiler's mistake was to replace the chaste statue of Artemis, the icy marble goddess, with a real, live woman, "una divinità piú propizia e accessibile" (UC 158), which echoes the paradox of accessibility that Mur encountered with his lady. Indeed, Bausa later comes to believe that Zelda, whom he had initially seen as Artemis's rival, is rather her accomplice since the garden, because of Zelda's presence, is permitted to regain control and begin to return to its primitive formlessness,⁴³ which causes Stiler such distress and impels him to revert to his former nature or love (see UC 161).

Yet could there be more to the women's withdrawal of favour or refusal to conform? Perhaps Mur's model, like the rebellious and vociferous Tuda, is not only affronted by the sculptor's devotion to, and enthusiasm for, the statue; she also resents or rejects the fact that a sculptor can reproduce – or even improve on – nature. While Sirio perfects his statue, "in line with his prioritization of form over life", Tuda, on the contrary, goes into decline; she had fallen in love with him, but he can only think of his statue, and thus her person becomes of secondary importance.⁴⁴ Tuda's feelings, however, are mixed: she is also proud of the stone figure. Returning after an absence, she points at the half-finished statue, at its eyes which she sees as her own, crying possessively "Lui me li ha presi e glieli ha dati: guardala" (DT 84). The same is true of the position of the statue's hand: it is tightly closed now, in pain, like hers, not open as he had originally sculpted it. The statue, then, can only be her and no one else. She even believes that the statue has a will of its own: "Non è piú quella che lui voleva fare! – Sono io ora là, capisci?"⁴⁵ Whilst Stiler's live lady retreats mainly because Stiler changes his mind, she appears irritated, in her turn, by the engineer's attentions to the marble woman (and her controlled environment), a work of art, static, unchanging and perfect. In both of Capriolo's stories the courted women fail to recognise themselves in the subjectively idealised representations of them. Therefore, what the male projects on the female (pure form) insults her since it is not her and is deemed superior (by the male). The statue not only symbolises male possession of the female; it also represents his total misunderstanding of her, as being.

In both Capriolo's stories and in Pirandello's play, we see not just a conflict between the man and nature (woman) but also between one man and another, between two opposing philosophies or perceptions of life. In "La donna di pietra", the master sculptor favours the dark cave of subterranean statues (still, sounded and measured), harking back, perhaps, to a pre-humanistic world where art is not, as yet, attributed to any particular craftsman – it is the product and not the producer that is

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all-important. The Master, the last remaining member of the “antica scuola”, tells his pupil that he must never seek recompense for his work among the living but that he will attain “la gloria suprema” if he remains faithful to their art, sculpting solely – and anonymously – for the dead (DP 43), that is, not for the eyes of the living. The apprentice, on the other hand, chooses the world of light (that is, of discovery and movement), perhaps paralleling the revolution that humanism brought, where art’s function is to please both patron and the individual creator who is named and recognised for his art. Mur indeed covets the woman’s favour and imagines her secretly (and lovingly) observing him work. The Master sculpts for posterity (or rather, anteriority), Mur for the here and now. In *Un uomo di carattere*, a clear-thinking but inflexible philosopher/engineer, concerned with a precise, mathematical art, is contrasted with a dilettante artist, one who is creative, less rigid and much less disciplined. Bausa soon recognises Stiler as his opposite, often comparing himself with him, “come per meglio coglierne la natura si paragona una cosa con il suo opposto” (UC 38); he believes that they appreciate each other precisely because of “la stessa antitesi delle nostre nature” (UC 39). Erasmo Stiler, the stylish humanist as his name might suggest, imposing his humanness or style on nature, is the rational intellectual, a stranger to the area and a busy man, while the carefree artist and liberal thinker, Daniele Bausa, is familiar with the village environment and has little to occupy him. Stiler holds theoretical beliefs on human nature and expects people to conform to them (as he expects Zelda to conform to his image of her as Artemis), while Bausa is the empirical observer, more prepared to adapt and adjust; he, indeed, will steer a middle course abhorrent to Stiler and all Capriolo’s inflexible protagonists.⁴⁶ Similarly, in *Diana e la Tuda* the two males are in opposition but with old Nonno Giuncano, quite unlike Mur’s frail Master, advocating movement to preserve life; for him, turning Tuda into a statue means death for her. For his protégé Sirio, on the other hand, life is fleeting and needs to be fixed in stone to endure for all eternity. Referring to Tuda, Giuncano cries: “Vita, vita!” to which Sirio adds, pointedly, “che passa” (DT 23). When Giuncano later reprimands Sirio for making Tuda suffer so badly, the younger man claims he wanted her to be turned into something above all the suffering, both his and hers. Giuncano is unconvinced:

GIUNCANO. Tu?

SIRIO. Se ci metto tutta la mia vita, e quella degli altri...

GIUNCANO. Uccidendola?

SIRIO. No, anzi, perché non muoia piú.

GIUNCANO. E muoia intanto per sempre? (DT 90)

Art and life cannot co-exist. With her focus on metamorphosis, Capriolo shows how individuals are so often blinkered, fettered, driven along narrow channels, possibly even by the gods, by the force of destiny, since her protagonists tend to see themselves as victims, denying the possibility of choice; they earnestly believe they have no option but to follow a particular course out of a sense of duty, obsession, or other compulsion, and in this they seemingly abandon not only rationality but also

sensibility. The characters use or try to manipulate others, as they themselves are trapped or manipulated by the force/s dominating them and are too proud or obsessed to listen to any voice of reason (represented by the blind beggar for Mur; by Bausa for Stiler). Sirio is a prime case in point, using Tuda with no thought for her as a person, deaf to all attempts to reason with him; as Giuncano resignedly tells Tuda: “Ma l’artista, cara, crede suo diritto approfittarsi di tutto” (DT 87).⁴⁷ Mur deserts his Master in selfish determination to move on, unwilling to acknowledge any personal responsibility or alternative course: “egli seguiva il cammino che per lui era stato tracciato, docilmente, come i pianeti seguono le loro orbite” (DP 53). Stiler, too, follows rigidly “il cammino intrapreso” (UC 13; see also 20, 33, 59, 62), initially as far as the garden is concerned and then with regard to Zelda. Mur, however, had sensed he would be subjected to reprisal, whilst Stiler thinks the garden/nature is taking revenge on him by removing her affections. Although remaining on their own in Cave or Garden would be far safer than risking retribution or the disillusionment of the world beyond, there appears to be no alternative course for the protagonists, caught up as they are in the inexorable process of metamorphosis, the instrument of “destino”. The sense of compulsion, then, is shown to be the natural life force, effectively undermining any reasoned position.⁴⁸

The theme of metamorphosis allows Capriolo, like Ovid and Kafka before her (although with different emphases), to portray the problems of changing identity and the necessarily fragile and fluid nature of relationships. It emerges clearly that events, real and imagined, tend not to change her characters absolutely, but rather they bring out certain previously latent or masked (conscious or otherwise) traits. Solodow, in his attempt to understand Ovidian metamorphosis – which is generally imposed on a character – considers it useful to see it as “a kind of art”, that is, the result is a form (stone, tree, etc) that tends to share the properties of a work of art, characterised by fixity and permanence.⁴⁹ This is certainly true of the end of many of Capriolo’s protagonists. Yet in another way they also resemble Kafka’s characters in that they express, to a greater or lesser extent, a certain bewilderment at, or distance from, the worlds they inhabit and so seek an escape. Cara, the female protagonist of *Il doppio regno*, flees from the uncertain world of human emotion to the protective and ritualised existence she finds in a remote hotel. The actor Vulpius in *La spettatrice* retreats from the world of flux and false masks to the still-life forms and true masks of the theatre. The starting point for both Mur and Stiler is a place of retreat from the world into the isolated world of art form, and the search for female presence (which “intrudes” and distracts) is either in exchange for (Mur), or to complement (Stiler), this existence. For Mur, the statue is a means to approach the woman; for Stiler (and Sirio), the statue is the woman. Mur rejects the safe underground environment of the cave in favour of the promise of a world of light and human warmth. Stiler tries to move from the tightly controlled environment of his remote garden into the more liberal (and therefore uncontrollable) human domain. It is curiosity that leads them astray, as it does Hawthorne’s characters, and they leave their womanless cave-gardens for knowledge and desire of woman – or of a woman who should be a mirror of them in all but her sex.

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Like all Capriolo's protagonists, they are shown glimpses of the idealised, the impossible, the unattainable, and it is the search for this ideal that is the motivating force as they strive, experiencing varying degrees of conflict, to exist in a new dimension.⁵⁰ With their artistic inclinations, however, and with hindsight, Mur and Stiler arrive at the belief that perfection – or fulfilment – had resided in the solitary life they had once experienced but not appreciated in their place of refuge. The stories appear to show that it is better (or perhaps safer) to remain in one's Garden of Eden or Cave of shadows without knowledge of Eve or of the outside world, than to experience the consequent emotional turmoil of mismatched human relationships or of female "mobilità". Sheltered in his cave, Mur had voiced his belief that those who place their trust in life as opposed to art are foolish, since life is full of imperfections and change. While it was a fragile belief at this point since nothing had occurred to challenge it (he had had no contact with the outside reality), he is suitably vindicated. Although for Mur the world above is bright, as it is for the man who fled Plato's Cave, it is shown to be false rather than representing pure philosophy and enlightenment⁵¹ or "the sun of truth".⁵² Stiler, too, is a fierce believer in duty and an opponent of freedom until he is attracted to, and diverted by, Zelda. Indeed, when he first speaks, in the abstract, about admitting a female presence into one's life – or garden – he rejects Bausa's attempt to understand his theories through an allusion to Eve: "Per esempio, un Eden senza Eva sarebbe addirittura inconcepibile", Bausa reasons. For Stiler, his friend could not have chosen a more unfortunate example and he retorts "E magari giudica altrettanto inconcepibile un Eden senza serpente", entreating him to leave the holy scriptures out of their discussion (UC 74–75). However, much later on it is the very sight of a huge worm that jolts Stiler into action. Passing the statue of Artemis (his "other woman" or her representative as Nature), the engineer suddenly stops and stares at her in horror: "un lungo verme bruno si arrampicava lentamente sul ventre della dea" (UC 171). Nature – or her wild side – is reasserting herself; the perfect Artemis is losing her shine, as Bausa had feared. This allusion to the worm, or serpent, as a symbol of the original fall, underlining the biblical parallel, symbolises the intrusion of sin (that is, human nature and unpredictability) and disorder into the perfectly ordered Garden. Given the choice, however, Stiler might have settled for Mur's artistic cave-garden with its trees in white marble and its bejewelled flowerbeds, the "immobile fioritura" (DP 43), one that is permanent, unchanging and totally controlled, while Mur would have welcomed the chance of living in Stiler's world with a female sculpture come to life.⁵³

Paradoxically, then, as Ovid shows, the "simulated body" as art "can only strive towards an (unattainable) imitation of nature", but nevertheless, art surpasses nature since the statue, or simulation, can be more beautiful and enduring than the woman, a mere mortal; thus it is generally art which defines and creates our notions of reality.⁵⁴ Reality, indeed, is always the result of interpretation, and giving the interpretation a form (which art does) is to make a "statue" of the subjective (which is also nature). Capriolo takes a similar position to Ovid: in her stories, art is certainly shown to imitate nature, and yet there is no doubt that art is regarded as being superior. In "La donna di pietra", Mur attempts to create a stone copy of the

woman yet the woman, like Tuda, appears to feel used, if not of inferior worth, as we have shown. While it seems clear in *Un uomo di carattere* that Stiler had acquired the statue of Artemis since it reminded him of a distant memory of his cousin (art imitating nature), he wishes Zelda to be more like his statue (nature to submit to art). However, while Ovid uses art to make sense of experience, Capriolo shows more a contraposition between art and life. It finds expression in the characters' search for their ideal which can only be found in something static, in some form of art (as Sirio believes, though more violently and explicitly), or something timeless or eternally repeated.

And so the characters succeed or fail according to whether their quests are single-purpose or dual-purpose: single (art) or involving another human being (life). It is not possible, as Pirandello and Hawthorne also show, to devote oneself half-heartedly to art; it must be at the centre of one's existence. This is the principal reason, although it must be remembered that Mur and Stiler would also have needed a totally receptive, passive or submissive female for any hope of such an outcome. Bausa may be pleased for Stiler and Zelda as they explore their relationship (engaging, in his words, in "complesse alchimie intellettuali" and "una lotta bizzarra" UC 125), but he is uninspired by it, eventually referring to it as "un'insipida storia d'amore" (UC 148). There is no comparison. Art – or having an artistic goal in life – is far more worthy and there should be no compromise for those who want something more than a mediocre kind of life. As Stiler increasingly bends to comply with Zelda's wishes, Bausa notes with dismay, "l'ingegnere stava trasformandosi, dalla fiera figura senza sfondo [...] in un uomo *normale*", heading for "quella preziosa serenità raggiungibile soltanto con un'esistenza *mediocre*" (UC 150, my emphases).⁵⁵ Stiler, indeed, shows that he is resigned to defeat in the garden so long as he is pursuing Zelda and is obliged to accept that he cannot control or manage both garden and woman. All Capriolo's protagonists perceive the inadequacy of everyday life or a sensible existence (in both "senses"). As their creator has said: "Sono persone cui questo mondo, il mondo della loro vita quotidiana non basta. In fondo hanno tutti questo in comune. Perché altrimenti non si spingerebbero a cercare, cercano sempre qualcos'altro. Un altro mondo, un'altra dimensione."⁵⁶ Normality, in all its forms and guises, is something all abhor and steer consciously away from. Yet rather than a simple portrayal of human failure to come to terms with life, more crucially we see a recognition of the need in human beings for something beyond, and the remote possibility of achieving this, in – or because of – human terms.⁵⁷

In each case, then, Art proves to be the supreme reality, as it is for Sirio/Pirandello, because artefacts are eternal, unlike human life which is fluid and fleeting until "fixed" by death. Pirandello's idealism, however, is bound up with his pessimism. His "vision of an ideal world" represents, as Doug Thompson states, "a philosophical rather than a social response to what he sees as the inevitable tragedy of human existence". For Pirandello, the world is so devoid of meaning that the only meaning (and thus comfort) is a writer's "total absorption in his creation of an ideal world".⁵⁸ Hawthorne's stance is somewhat different. A "sharp critic of society" in both essay and fiction, he took his view of the artist from both

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philosophy and observations of real life and held to religious or ethical precepts.⁵⁹ Capriolo's position is far closer to that of Pirandello; her overtly philosophical approach (and total absorption) informs and inspires her entire opus. It is clear from her pages that Art, via Artemis, will bring fulfilment and cannot be found in – and is seen as being wholly remote from and incompatible with – human relationships in an everyday world diverted by constantly changing trends and ephemeral pursuits; reality, for her protagonists, is that which is not – or is less – transient. Mur and Stiler both serve the higher goal of art until the human intervenes and compels and propels in a different direction, which results in the statues being abandoned, Mur's wilfully damaged, Stiler's tarnished. Mur may undertake his process of change consciously, yet he is not aware of the development itself or its possibly harmful consequences. Stiler's is a rather different case of awareness: his is more a refusal to *allow* the possibility of change in himself. He prefers to praise qualities such as rigidity and inflexibility rather than suffer any thought of tolerance or compromise, even when these abstract concepts have become meaningless in any practical sense. Bausa contemplates Stiler's failure, recalling his friend's thoughts on duty, "la necessità di sacrificare qualsiasi armonia e personale completezza per poter dare armonia e completezza alle cose che ci sono affidate" (UC 176); that is, creating a garden (Eden) or statue (Eve) which involves a determined fight against movement and growth. And as in the Genesis story, the garden is intended to be the earthly paradise, a place one does not leave with impunity. Mur's model's cleaving is not the kind the young sculptor had in mind (she separates rather than joins), and he mourns his loss of unquestioned peace; he can only conclude that loneliness exists everywhere, both above and below ground, that is, in movement and stillness, in ignorance and knowledge, in life as in death. Sirio, too, valued art over life, wanting to suck the life out of his model and showing sadistic as well as self-destructive impulses.⁶⁰ The statue and what it represents is in all cases deemed superior to the live woman, the artificial to the real, the male ideal to the female desire.

Both Capriolo's protagonists reveal their desire to engage in a human relationship and yet both are wholly insensitive to the woman; they are restrained, devoid of passion (Stiler especially) and treat her as object, ornament, indeed, as statue. Sirio, not even interested in a relationship with the woman, is particularly guilty of this treatment. All are firmly entrenched in a patriarchal culture in which the male is the subject and creator, and the female is the object and model. The transformations of both Mur's woman and Zelda have much in common with that of Tuda, and in these stories female identity/subjectivity, as Günsberg states in connection with Pirandello, is absent: "In an object position, the resulting female 'identity' is no more than a construct, an extension, of male identity/subjectivity".⁶¹ Mur's woman is not even given a voice with which to state or stake her own subjectivity and Zelda is simply Z for some time before her real name is used. In each case the female identity, like that of Tuda, is "written/sculpted by a male subject, a dynamic against which she unconsciously protests", and for which she suffers.⁶² Both Mur and Stiler attempt to honour the woman, but in honouring her they wish to claim and mould her; neither woman accepts the "honour". In

Mur's case, it is as if his woman, like Tuda, is being transformed from warm, vital flesh and blood into cold, lifeless stone. Perhaps she would rather be a live woman for some time than a stone statue for all time; that is, admired and loved as her self on earth rather than admired for her eternal representation? Just as for Kirkegaard live thought was superior to writing and for Wittgenstein there was little danger in forgetting what one has understood, so the woman reacts as if trying to fix an emotion and recording her image in stone are inferior to living the emotion and remembering the person in the (artist's) mind.⁶³

As far as gender in Capriolo's work as a whole is concerned, we find a range of male and female protagonists as both subject and object of desire, appearing to suggest some sort of equality (of need and purpose) between the sexes, a lack of bias. Capriolo, indeed, is uncomfortable with gender-based interpretations of her writing and finds it acutely frustrating when her work is classed in terms of her gender as author. Denial of a feminist viewpoint is one thing, and certainly her prerogative, yet a gender bias, or imbalance, is present in her tales. The male protagonists in "La donna di pietra" and *Un uomo di carattere* (and also in "Lettere a Luisa", *Vissi d'amore* and *La spettatrice*) reveal decidedly arrogant and exploitative views of women (while attracted to them or to parts of them), whereas their female counterparts do not express (verbally at least) the same sort of opinions about men (Adele and Dora are submissive sufferers). And yet the females in *Un uomo di carattere* and especially in "La donna di pietra", as well as those in *Il doppio regno*, show themselves to be strong. Whether this is a refusal to submit to the male or a fear of losing to another woman or of being submerged by another identity, Zelda will not conform,⁶⁴ and Mur's model, like Cara, rejects the male: unlike Tuda, she does not accept the role of victim. The principal feminist dimension to the issue of gender relations is, as we have seen, the focus on male incomprehension of the female. In reality, however, the author does not see men and women as perceiving the world in a radically different way, and furthermore, the fundamental truths explored in her fiction deliberately exclude (or do not centre on) gender. Capriolo chooses more often a male attracted to a female, rather than the other way round, predominantly for reasons of practical credibility:

Credo che questo tema della fascinazione per l'immagine sia letterariamente molto piú possibile, se vogliamo dire cosí, come fascinazione da parte di un uomo nei riguardi di un'immagine femminile. [...] è una questione, come posso dire, di credibilit  interna che mi porta spesso a scegliere personaggi maschili per questo tipo di meccanismo che sarebbe piú difficile immaginare invertito, anche se nella realt  credo che possa funzionare benissimo.

("Un altro mondo" 324)

Far more concerned with abstract, philosophical and artistic considerations,⁶⁵ Capriolo focuses on the mechanics and effects of an attraction or compulsion, whether lived out by, or directed at, male or female. What most interests her is the inner nature of each character, his or her psychological make-up and the way in which each fits like a cog in a mechanism and yet also drives that mechanism.⁶⁶ Particularly important to Capriolo as a writer is the idea of art as transcendence of

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form as an absolute, and she has stated that towards the end of her essay on Gottfried Benn, she tried to draw attention to “quella tensione ‘antirealistica’” which she shares with the poet.⁶⁷ The majority of Capriolo’s protagonists fear or are beset by doubts about relationships, bonds or everyday contact with other human beings as individuals. They demonstrate a Pirandellian inability or unwillingness to communicate, often misinterpret the words or actions of another and fail repeatedly to comprehend the opposite sex, whether male or female. This is primarily, as Capriolo affirms, because they are different, separate, indeed lone(ly), individuals.⁶⁸ In her fiction there are no happy couples, families, close relationships or communities, partly since the author avoids portraying aspects of an everyday reality, happy or otherwise, but mostly because she centres on the individual, on his or her quest and questioning of reality.⁶⁹

To what extent do the relationships transform the characters? Through her choice of title for the two stories under discussion, the *woman* of stone, and the *man* of character, Paola Capriolo appears to be offering different emphases. In the short story, the woman is the dramatic pivot because of the effect she and her stone copy have on the man. In the novel the man is central; his character is tested, both by the woman and by his male friend, and deemed deficient. Yet both stories portray the metamorphosis of sculptor or gardener as he moves, or shifts his attention, from inert stone to flesh and back. And in both stories the term “simulacro” is used to describe the statues or women, implying that in both cases the artist focuses on the representation, the substitute, instead of the actual – as if, indeed, we can never know the world outside us, only our interpretation of it.⁷⁰ Mur wishes to breathe life into his statue; Stiler tries to live with the incarnation of his. Whichever way the transformation is effected or attempted, neither works. The pursuit of a vision of perfection provides a goal, a directing principle, but it demands a heavy price involving isolation and the rejection of relationships. Or is it, rather, that the glimpse of the woman attracts while the whole disappoints? Stiler and Mur both fail to bring their statues to life, whereas one exceptionally strong male character, Vulpius of *La spettatrice*, finds fulfilment in the reverse process, reducing both his live woman and himself into statues, a death mask or perfect still life.⁷¹ Sirio, too, had hoped for a stasis similar to that achieved by Vulpius; he had endeavoured to transform “the living, sensual Tuda into the dead, chaste marble statue of Diana”, that is, to “transmute life into form”, and in the process had caused a living healthy girl to turn anorexic and listless.⁷² In “La donna di pietra” and *Un uomo di carattere*, as in virtually all Capriolo’s fiction, there is no happy ending or triumph, no common ground between beholder and beheld, desirer and desired.⁷³ As with Pirandello (though unlike Greek tragedy) there is no catharsis,⁷⁴ and solitude – or lives destroyed – is the only possible outcome. Both protagonists turn from controlling the garden or sculpture, seeking precision, symmetry and harmony, to wanting to control woman – Mur’s maiden or Stiler’s spinster – and both fail, their creations and characters destroyed: Mur loses his “maturity”, Stiler his “style”. They have attempted to leave an ordered Paradise or Garden of Eden (their joy before the fall, precipitated, in Adam’s mind, by Eve) for a disordered reality of the world beyond the Garden and have suffered

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for their “disobedience”. Disillusioned, Mur returns to his cave of shadows, the “*mondo immobile, pago di se stesso e della sua perfezione nascosta*” (DP my emphasis) whereas Stiler returns to his ideal of candidly cultivating his garden, in Voltaire’s best of all possible worlds.⁷⁵

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Notes

- ¹ See Gillian Ania, “‘Un altro mondo’: Interview with Paola Capriolo,” *The Italianist* 18 (1998): 309–10.
- ² Pirandello explored the position and function of art and the alienation of the artist in many of his plays, including *Diana e la Tuda* (1927), *Come tu mi vuoi* (1930), *Trovarsi* (1932), *Quando si è qualcuno* (1933) and the posthumous *I giganti della montagna* (1938).
- ³ The artist appears in several of Hawthorne’s short stories and in three of his four novels: for example, “The Prophetic Pictures” (1837), “The Artist of the Beautiful” (1844), “Drowne’s Wooden Image” (1846) and *The Marble Faun* (1860), whose original title was *Transformation*. See Nancy Bentley, *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1995) 40. For a full discussion of the artist in Hawthorne’s work, see Millicent Bell, *Hawthorne’s View of the Artist* (New York: State University of New York, 1962).
- ⁴ Whilst it is true that the concerns of art are comparatively few and recur endlessly from century to century and from culture to culture, and thus similarity of themes in itself is no revelation, certain resonances from these writers, conscious or otherwise, will be explored to illustrate and illuminate the discussion.
- ⁵ Paola Capriolo, “Ho scelto Mann: Tazio e il professore: come restare fedeli a un capolavoro,” *Corriere della Sera* 7 aprile 1991.
- ⁶ Gabriella Ziani, “Metamorfosi alberghiana,” *L’Indice* giugno 1991: 8. For a full account of Capriolo’s literary works, see Gillian Ania, Introduction to *The Dual Realm*, trans. Gillian Ania and Doug Thompson (Market Harborough: Troubador, 2000) x–xvi.
- ⁷ In Pirandello we may note a similar concern with the process or search, as well as with German philosophy. See Oscar Büdel, *Pirandello* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1966) 16, 38.
- ⁸ Eulalia of “La grande Eulalia” (from the collection *La grande Eulalia*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988) seeks perfection in the world of human beauty; Adele and the prisoner (“Il gigante” and “Lettere a Luisa”, two overlapping stories from *La grande Eulalia*) in the world of music, through the faultless execution of a sonata; Scarpia (*Vissi d’amore*, Milano: Bompiani, 1992) and Vulpius (*La spettatrice*, Milano: Bompiani, 1995) in repetition of the perfect gesture or act, though with different emphases; and the nameless protagonist of *Con i miei mille occhi* (Milano: Bompiani, 1997) in continually painting the same subject.
- ⁹ This is also true of Hawthorne’s characters: we see the obsession of a painter in “The Prophetic Pictures”, a craftsman in “The Artist of the Beautiful”, a woodcarver in “Drowne’s Wooden Image” and a sculptor in *The Marble Faun*. Of these works, Capriolo is familiar with *The Marble Faun*, having read it as a child and again as an adult, although

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- only after writing “La donna di pietra” (personal communication, 8 Apr. 2002).
- 10 In the remaining five stories, two protagonists shun all relationships, one is in love with his own image and – rare exceptions to the single protagonist device – two protagonists team up with a friend. (The 1991 collection of short stories for children is excluded from my analyses.)
- 11 In the original version of the Pygmalion story (by Philostephanus of Cyrene, pupil or friend of Callimachus), now lost, Pygmalion is an iconophile king who makes love to a statue of Aphrodite; in Ovid, Pygmalion is the sculptor and the ivory statue a woman (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10: 243–97). See Joseph B. Solodow, *The World of Ovid’s Metamorphoses* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 215–17. Capriolo, as we have noted, is fascinated by the theme of metamorphosis and Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* is one of the novels she has translated. As she recently affirmed (in personal communication, 8 Apr. 2002), “il mito di Pigmalione è ben radicato nella nostra cultura.” Not only does her cultural awareness of, and personal interest in, this theme colour her writing, but she frequently chooses to use the word “metamorfofi” to describe the various changes of state, as well as using related terms such as “mutamento” and “trasformazione”, further emphasising the theme’s centrality.
- 12 Ania, “Un altro mondo” 313, my emphasis.
- 13 Personal communication, 27 Dec. 1996.
- 14 See author’s preface to *The Dual Realm* vii.
- 15 Through this we glean a sense of the paradox of language – that it can falsify and invent in order to reveal. See, for example, “La grande Eulalia” 7; *La spettatrice* 7, 10.
- 16 “La donna di pietra” (in *La grande Eulalia*) 43, my emphasis; all further references to this story are abbreviated to DP.
- 17 The prisoners in the Cave, their faces turned permanently to the back wall, with a fire, a screen, men and objects behind them, can only see the shadows projected on this wall. Plato, *The Republic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), Part VII, Book VII, 316–25. As Bertrand Russell states, the world is like this cave in which “we see only shadows of the realities in the bright world above”, an idea anticipated by Empedocles. See Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Routledge, 1991) 74.
- 18 Capriolo was not familiar with the play when she wrote these two works; she has since read it (2003).
- 19 *Un uomo di carattere* (Milano: Bompiani, 1996) 12; all further references to this work are abbreviated to UC in the text.
- 20 Stiler’s obsession with order dominates his actions and his words. It causes him, for example, to praise Bausa for creating order and form through his drawings: “Lei crea, caro Bausa, crea immagini e forme, crea, a modo suo, ordine dal disordine” (UC 59).
- 21 Russell 140.
- 22 We may note in “La donna di pietra” the linguistic links between the two arts (sculpture and creating a classical garden) with the references to “sculpting a garden” and to statues “flowering in the dark” (see DP 43, 50).

- 23 Sirio has been described as a sort of Hippolytus, worshipping a chaste Artemis. See Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, "The Myth of Diana and Hippolytus in Pirandello's play *Diana e la Tuda*," *Yearbook of the Society for Pirandello Studies* 11 (1991): 54.
- 24 Pirandello, *Diana e la Tuda* (Milano: Mondadori, 1951) 17; all further references to this play are abbreviated to DT.
- 25 Mur, as the actual sculptor, finds his roots in Ovid's Pygmalion; Stiler, as admirer rather than sculptor, finds his more in Philostephanus (see note 11).
- 26 Artemis/Diana, traditionally considered the daughter of Zeus and Leto and twin sister of Apollo, settled in Arcadia and lived chastely, engaging in the (male) pleasures of hunting. When glimpsed bathing by Actaeon – an image also conjured up in Capriolo's novel *Una di loro* (Milano: Bompiani, 2001) – she is enraged, promptly turns him into a stag and sets her hounds on him. The aspect of revenge by means of animals is relevant to what happens to Stiler, as we shall see.
- 27 Capriolo has explained this term as follows: "Stiler fa della freddezza, del distacco, dell'esclusione di ogni abbandono, il principio ispiratore della sua arte, cioè del suo giardino" (personal communication, 26 Sept. 2003).
- 28 On first meeting Zelda, Bausa had described her in similar terms: "Il volto era rigorosamente ovale, i lineamenti minuti possedevano una classica regolarità" (UC 108).
- 29 Giovanni Palmieri, "Il grande albero nietzchiano nel giardino narrativo di Paola Capriolo," *Autografo* Anno XIII, 34 (gennaio-giugno 1997): 67.
- 30 Cara (of *Il doppio regno*, Milano, Bompiani, 1991) and Vulpius (*La spettatrice*) shut themselves off from human contact (Vulpius has a girlfriend, Dora, but is heartless and cold with her); Walter (*Il nocchiero*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1989) and Adele ("Il gigante") fail to make contact with the object of their passions (both are married but emotionally detached from their spouses); and Scarpia is denied further meetings with Tosca in *Vissi d'amore*.
- 31 Annelies Van den Bogaert in her paper "Paola Capriolo: un'eco dal Paradiso ovvero un cammino della lingua verso il silenzio musicale", refers, for example, to Heidegger's *Unterwegs zur sprache* (Stuttgart: Omnitypie, 1986) 21, and to Rilke's *Uren en Beelden*, ed. M. Van Vossole (Antwerp: Mercator-Plantijn, 1984). "Gruppo 62" Conference, University of Hull, February 2001.
- 32 See below for a possible explanation of the woman's act.
- 33 When Zelda has left and Stiler is again able to devote himself fully to his garden, the red flowers signal their approval, standing proud and erect once more: the competition has been removed.
- 34 Bausa always thinks of her as Zeta, even after he learns her real name.
- 35 The artist in Poe's short story "The Oval Portrait" has a similar effect on his subject: he refuses to notice how the long sessions and lack of light "withered the health and the spirits of his bride who pined visibly to all but him." When the painting is finally finished he looks up, proudly: "the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought", crying out aloud, "This is indeed Life itself", but his beloved has quietly expired. See *Complete Poems and Stories of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,

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1946), I, 383. As Bell notes (80), the artist fails to observe that his model's life is passing into his masterpiece.

36 Palmieri 76.

37 Bausa is aware that it is doubtless Zelda's freckles, "il fascino dell'imperfezione" (UC 129), combined with her beauty, which serve to intensify Stiler's feelings.

38 Sympathetic magic takes two principal forms which Mur appears to conflate or extend: according to the "Law of Similarity" the perpetrator of such magic believes that like produces like, that is, he can achieve a desired effect by imitating it; according to the "Law of Contact" the sorcerer believes that things that have been joined must remain so ever afterwards, that whatever he does to a material object will have the same effect on the person with whom the object is or was in contact. See James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1993) 11–12, 37–38.

39 The artist in "The Prophetic Pictures" identifies strongly with his work but does *not* intend or expect an effect, far less the dire consequences that ensue: husband and wife grow increasingly like their portraits, a process that gradually destroys their happiness.

40 The transformation in Hawthorne's novel *The Marble Faun* is not of a magical nature and relates to the character Donatello, seen as a "living statue": he is often referred to as a faun because of his resemblance to the marble faun of Praxiteles in a Roman sculpture gallery and for his carefree, non-intellectual nature: "Donatello might have figured perfectly as the marble faun, miraculously softened into flesh and blood"; *The Marble Faun or the Romance of Monte Beni* (New York and London: Signet, 1961) 15. The story relates his transformation from carefree and spirited to a being who gains "intellectual power and moral sense" (274) which is reflected in the second bust the sculptor Kenyon produces of him. In Hawthorne's short story "Drowne's Wooden Image", on the other hand, there is magic at work since the woodcarver discovers, to his astonishment, that the beautiful female figure he has fashioned out of solid oak comes alive because of his love.

41 In this context it should be remembered that Artemis is also represented in mythology as a musician goddess who sings with the Muses and the Graces.

42 There are also parallels here with Pirandello's *Trovarsi* where the actress Donata Genzi claims that her spectators see in her only one part, or "ciò che siamo solo in quel momento... – eppure ecco che quell'atto d'un momento – compiuto – c'imprigiona, ci ferma lì..." Luigi Pirandello, *Trovarsi* (Milano: Mondadori, 1955) 127. Towards the end of Act II Donata, protesting at feeling used by the artist Elj, opts for her stage life rather than a real-life experience of their love: "Bisogna che la dia alla fine qualche cosa la vita, la dia, la dia... – io ho dato tutto me stessa... sempre, senza mai pensare a me... – e vedermi trattata come se non dovessi sentir nulla, come se fossi di marmo..." (166–67, my emphasis). Mur, too, only falls for one aspect of the woman, and she appears to realise that he has immobilised her in that action.

43 The geometrical structures the gardener has imposed gradually break down and return to their former state of chaos; see Giulio Nascimbeni, "Zeta, o le affinità mancate," *Corriere della Sera* 21 marzo 1996: 32. See also Palmieri 67, 76.

44 See Maggie Günsberg, "Hysteria as Theatre: Pirandello's hysterical women," *Yearbook of the Society for Pirandello Studies* 12 (1992): 45.

- 45 After Sirio's death, Tuda even feels that she has lost her own identity: "Io che ora sono così: niente... piú niente" (DT 92).
- 46 Early on Stiler had told Bausa that he was looking for a way out of his impasse between garden and Zelda, yet adding, absurdly, "io non cerco un compromesso, cerco una soluzione" (UC 92). Baron Scarpia of *Vissi d'amore* expresses the same idea with regard to himself and Tosca: there can be no "mezze misure", no "compromesso insoddisfacente" (*Vissi d'amore* 115–16).
- 47 Capriolo has agreed on the parallels between Mur and Nonno Giuncano, accepting also that both "La donna di pietra" and *Diana e la Tuda* deal with "l'idea della forma come qualche cosa che irrigidisce, che pietrifica la vita." However, she feels that the fundamental causes are different: "Per il mio Mur è la forma artistica che pietrifica la vita" whilst in *Diana e la Tuda* it is "la persona come forma che uccide la vita." Interview, Milan, 8 Sept. 2003.
- 48 Walter and Vulpius follow similar thought processes. See *Il nocchiero* 134–35 and *La spettatrice* 127, 142, 165.
- 49 Solodow 203, 207.
- 50 Adele ("Il gigante") pushes herself beyond the limits of physical and emotional endurance to perfect her performance; Walter (*Il nocchiero*), doggedly pursues the exotic Carmen, and his persistence leads to his death; Scarpia (*Vissi d'amore*) seeks to recapture for all eternity a moment with Tosca but waits in vain and is instead killed by her.
- 51 Plato 320–21, 325.
- 52 Russell 144.
- 53 Capriolo's amused reaction to these conjectures was: "Hai ragione! Ciascuno è nel paradiso destinato all'altro!" Interview, Milan, 8 Sept. 2003.
- 54 See Solodow 210–23.
- 55 As Zelda offers to accompany Stiler to attend to his car (he has signalled it needs attention, thereby indirectly declaring his intention to leave with her), there is no thought in Bausa's mind of anything romantic, merely a "tête-à-tête meccanico" (UC 168).
- 56 Ania, "Un altro mondo" 318.
- 57 When the young actress Eulalia gazes into the mirror, she seeks something beyond reality to compensate for the mediocre nature of the reality she has so far experienced. Cara believes in admiring the beauty of the symbols in the library books in the hotel instead of seeking meanings, which is "un'attività degna di spiriti mediocri" (*Il doppio regno* 61). Scarpia is disdainful of Tosca's relationship with Cavaradossi: "Senza dubbio, ebbe con lei soltanto commerci mediocri" (*Vissi d'amore* 99).
- 58 Doug Thompson, *An Introduction to Pirandello's Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (Hull, Department of Italian: University of Hull, 1987) 10.
- 59 See Bell 3–5.
- 60 See Sanguinetti Katz 55.
- 61 Maggie Günsberg, *Patriarchal Representations: Gender and Discourse in Pirandello's Theatre* (Oxford: Berg, 1994) 39.
- 62 Günsberg, "Hysteria as Theatre" 45.

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- 63 See Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato banished the artists. Based upon the Romanes Lecture 1976* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 23.
- 64 Zelda's independent spirit is apparent from her first appearance, described by Stiler's housekeeper, Ursula. As she tells Bausa, the elegantly attired lady got out of her shiny car "dal lato del guidatore, sicché bisognò arrendersi all'evidenza e riconoscere che proprio lei, circostanza a quei tempi quasi incredibile, aveva condotto l'automobile fin lassù" (UC 69).
- 65 See Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing 1860–1994* (London: Athlone Press, 1995) 270.
- 66 See Ania, "Un altro mondo" 313.
- 67 Personal communication, 27 Dec. 1996. See Capriolo, *L'assoluto artificiale: Nichilismo e mondo dell'espressione nella opera saggistica di Gottfried Benn* (Milan: Bompiani, 1996) 93–98, where she speaks of art and reality, the writer's role and the function of art; also Capriolo, "Calvino bocciato dai letterati col cuore in mano," *Corriere della Sera* 9 gennaio 1998.
- 68 See Ania, "Un altro mondo" 324–25.
- 69 While family groupings are found (Adele, Eugenio and their son Ottaviano; Walter and Linda; the aunt and niece in *Il sogno dell'agnello*), they are not happy ones and the emphasis is always on the individual.
- 70 Illusions of this nature, or "simulacri", feature recurrently in Capriolo's work. See *Vissi d'amore* 18; *Con i miei mille occhi* 58; *Qualcosa nella notte* (Milan: Mondadori, 2003) 144.
- 71 To Vulpius, his companion Dora is more beautiful in death than in life and he sees the disorder of her actions as having been stilled in "un'immagine [...] scolpita nel marmo di un monumento funebre" (*La spettatrice* 134, my emphasis), which reinforces his conviction that stillness is superior to movement (as Mur and Stiler had initially believed), the internal to the external world, death to life. As Dora lies dying, what is enacted before his eyes is "una trasformazione miracolosa" (*La spettatrice* 134), the opposite process of what Mur hoped of his lovingly sculpted statue. Later, in his deserted theatre at night, Vulpius prepares his own sacrificial altar, thinking of Dora as a lifeless statue. He lies down on his altar table, folding his arms meekly. "Così rimane, supino, immobile, così intende rimanere, finché quel corpo ribelle si faccia pietra e le statue lo accolgano nella loro vittoriosa comunità" (*La spettatrice* 168, my emphasis).
- 72 Günsberg, *Patriarchal Representations* 37.
- 73 The only exception occurs in the mythically based *Con i miei mille occhi*.
- 74 Pirandello's last play, *I giganti della montagna* (1938), is an exception to this. Only here is there a hint of a "way out of the impasse" between Form and Life, as art is given the function of "redeeming man from the moulds and semblances life imposes upon him"; see Büdel 45.
- 75 Stiler had told Bausa quite early on that one must have a goal in life: "Caro Bausa, noi dobbiamo coltivare il nostro giardino" (UC 86), and this, in essence, is what he does.