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Title: Anorexic symptoms in Clara Sereni's *Casalinghitudine*

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Abstract: Structured like a cookbook, the autobiographical novel *Casalinghitudine* (1987) by Clara Sereni uses food preparation, consumption, and preservation as a narrative mechanism to reflect on the protagonist's journey towards self-awareness and gender and ethnic identity formation. The highly subjective nature of this text is immediately obvious in several ways, such as the assertive tone of the recipes through the predominance of the agent 'I' and the overall organization of the book that unusually starts with a section on baby food. Drawing on feminist and clinical theory, I discuss in the present article how Sereni uses and organizes the recipes of her autobiographical narrative in a way that suggests strong agency and an obsessive need to regain control over her personal history. This obsession over control reminds us of the reasonings given by many anorexics for their eating disorder. In Sereni's autobiographical novel *Casalinghitudine*, I maintain that food preparation, consumption, and preservation helps the narrator to eventually reaffirm her subjectivity as a mother, wife, woman, and intellectual, beyond the overwhelming influence of her father, and to reconnect with her Jewish roots.

Keywords: autobiography, food studies, eating disorders, recipes, feminist theory.

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Anorexic symptoms in Clara Sereni's *Casalinghitudine*

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Structured like a cookbook, the autobiographical novel *Casalinghitudine* (1987) by Clara Sereni uses food preparation, consumption and preservation as a narrative mechanism to reflect on the protagonist's journey towards self-awareness, and gender and ethnical identity formation. The highly subjective nature of this text is immediately obvious in several ways such as the assertive tone of the recipes through the predominance of the agent "I," and the overall organization of the book that unusually starts with a section on baby food. The growth experiences recounted here do not follow the chronological order; instead they appear as random episodes evoked by the various dishes whose recipe has previously been introduced. Family members, and important figures and episodes of twentieth-century Italian history and culture make up this disjointed reality like the ingredients of a recipe. Drawing on feminist and clinical theory, I will discuss how Sereni uses and organizes the recipes of the present autobiographical narrative in a way that suggests strong agency and an obsessive need to regain control over her personal history, which is comparable to an anorectic's attitude toward food as she "associates her relentless pursuit of thinness with power and control."¹ If "[anorexia's] most outstanding feature is powerlessness," I maintain that in *Casalinghitudine* food preparation, consumption and preservation help the narrator to reaffirm her subjectivity as a mother, wife, woman and intellectual, beyond the overwhelming influence of her father, and to reconnect with her Jewish roots.²

Due to the premature illness and death of her mother, the childhood of the autobiographical protagonist was dominated by the intimidating yet fascinating figures of Grandmother Alfonsa and Aunt Ermelinda. Although sisters, they could not be more different: Aunt Ermelinda remains in the memory of the young girl as a beautiful and elegant woman while Grandmother Alfonsa's physical unattractiveness is accentuated by her choice of dark and loose clothes. This opposition extends to their respective styles of housekeeping, and to their cooking. Echoing the traumatizing experience of the war, the dishes that Grandmother Alfonsa makes for the family of her widowed son impose on them an austere practicality. Such a limited and monotonous diet will soon provoke in young Clara the first signs of her anorexia, a form of rebellion against this lack of imagination and freedom. Later, as an adult and established cook in her own home, the autobiographical protagonist exerts her creativity and independence within the matrilineage that connects her to Grandmother Alfonsa when she deliberately uses fresh bread--instead of the stale bread her grandmother makes use of--to make the same dish: *crostini*. However, when she meets Massimo, her future husband, she resorts to her grandmother's habit of recycling leftovers, in a desperate attempt to fit into his group of friends; she tries to reinvent herself, just as she tries to reinvent her dishes, to appear acceptable to them. But, similarly to her grandmother, this practice will result only in bad cooking, a reflection of her unfinished identity search.

Given that her father had left the Jewish community, the young girl learns about her heritage and celebrates Jewish holidays thanks to Aunt Ermelinda, whose culinary talents are remarkably displayed, as an exception, for the Kippur dinner. On this occasion, the young Clara is finally allowed to indulge herself with special treats such as huge black olives, unlike the meager snack composed of unleavened bread on all the other days, symbolic of a strict upbringing with numerous constraints but also a reminder of her Jewish origins. During preparations for the festivity, aunt and niece seem to connect over the cooking of semolina gnocchi, a precious moment in which the orphan girl can again feel loved and cared for. She receives the same type of care through food sharing from her

¹ Bordo, "Anorexia Nervosa," 180.

² Bordo, "Anorexia Nervosa," 173.

stepmother with whom, however, she also shares the same absence of appetite. Instead, the relationship of the autobiographical protagonist with her father seems more tense and complex, ranging from strong disapproval to rejection to estrangement, as reflected also in her attitude towards his cooking and culinary preferences.

In her essay, “Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture,” feminist philosopher Susan Bordo refers to psychopathologies such as anorexia and bulimia as expressions and representative of the culture in which these appear. For patients of both disorders, the author continues, “the body is experienced as *alien*, as the not-self, the not-me. [...] Second, the body is experienced as *confinement* and *limitation*: a “prison,” [...] Third, the body is *the enemy*, [...] the body is the locus of *all that threatens our attempts at control*. It overtakes, it overwhelms, it erupts and disrupts.”³ In other words, both the bulimic and the anorectic are constantly at odds with their own bodies, in a desperate battle to regain control. Although this irreconcilable dichotomy between body and spirit has deep roots in our Western culture, starting with Plato and Augustine, Bordo argues that our contemporary society exerts even more pressure on its individuals by imposing a long set of expectations on them. “Nowadays,” says Michael Sacks, associate professor of psychiatry at Cornell Medical College, “people no longer feel they can control events outside themselves—how well they do in their jobs or in their personal relationships, for example—but they can control the food they eat and how far they can run. Abstinence, tests of endurance, are ways of proving their self-sufficiency.”⁴ In my reading, this theory offers an effective interpretation of the present narrative in which several key moments like the *pasta e fagioli* scene are particularly worthy of our attention. Here the protagonist refuses to follow the example and teachings of her father while she deploys her cooking as a way to accomplish her own ideal and thus assert her independence from him. After a painful break-up, the first signs of healing appear in the protagonist as an increased appetite. She then begins to dream about a hearty meal of *pasta e fagioli* that has nothing to do with her father’s insipid recipe both in terms of choice of the ingredients as well as preparation. Based solely on her culinary instinct and imagination, the protagonist eventually reinvents her father’s bland dish and manages to create something that completely satisfies her own taste:

L’unica minestra di fagioli che avessi mai visto preparare era quella che piaceva a mio padre: cannellini lessati nell’acqua con uno spicchio d’aglio e poco olio, il riso cotto a parte e aggiunto alla fine. La detestavo, mi sembra a ragione. Perciò mi consultai con Enrico che aveva più sane tradizioni familiari; mi affidai un po’ al mio istinto culinario, e soprattutto mi arrangiai con quello che avevo in casa.⁵

Such blunt criticism of her relationship with her father is intensified by the reference to her brother-in-law who presents the young woman with the menacing prospective of having to nourish herself with this dish on a regular basis if she were to leave her parents’ house. Thus, the success of her invented recipe marks the undeniable resolution and ability of the autobiographical protagonist to succeed on her own, away from the oppressive influence of her father, and her family. This moment also symbolizes the beginning of a long journey of development during which the young Clara identifies in her cooking and perfects her *modus operandi*, based on her own creativity and needs:

Che vendetta per i cannellini di mio padre, e per mio cognato che aveva minacciato: «Vai, vai a vivere da sola, tu non sai cosa significhi campare di pasta e fagioli». I fagioli divennero la mia bandiera: li ho preparati per pranzi, cene, pic-nic. Citando contenuti proteici e la sana alimentazione dei pionieri del West.

³ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 166-67.

⁴ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 172.

⁵ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 34.

Il tempo mi ha reso più economa, Tommaso e le mode salutistiche più attenta alle qualità nutritive: dai fagioli in scatola sono passata ai fagioli secchi messi a bagno il giorno prima, organizzare e programmare adesso più importante che improvvisare.⁶

In her article, “Food and Subjectivity in Clara Sereni’s *Casalinghitudine*”, Giuliana Menozzi points out the difference between the “I” of the recipes and the “I” of the narrative passages: “The latter is painfully and tentatively engaged in finding its space, in negotiating it, whereas the former shows security, assertiveness, self-confidence. [...] it is a very strong ‘I’ that presents the narrator’s recipes.”⁷ In other words, food and cooking provide the narrator with the necessary space where she becomes a self-aware subject, a transformative agent who can freely act on herself and interact with others. Unlike the impersonal tone of typical recipes where the focus is on the (success of the) interlocutor, the recipes of the present work stage the personal story of a narrator in complete control. Moreover, the versions offered for numerous recipes, in terms of ingredients, cooking techniques and even consumption, reveal an ever-changing personal history, constant growth, inventiveness and, most noteworthy, ownership of her past:

*Trito la cipolla e la faccio imbiondire nell’olio insieme al prosciutto, aggiungo i piselli e il sale. Lascio cuocere per tre o quattro minuti mescolando, poi aggiungo due bicchieri di acqua calda, e a fuoco basso porto a cottura definitiva. Ottengo una minestra abbastanza densa, che poi passo nel frullatore o nel passaverdure.
Il parmigiano è facoltativo.*⁸

The above-cited recipe for *crema di piselli* introduces the narrator’s recollection of a lunch with her father in a fancy Roman restaurant. The meal marks the first time she sees him in months after her decision to leave home to live by herself. During this meal, the daughter discovers a double identity of her father and becomes aware of the troublesome nature of her relationship with him:

Allora era possibile che avesse come una doppia vita: il grande, scintillante parlatore di cui mi si cominciava a favoleggiare, il Maestro capace di trasfondere cultura a generazioni di allievi - in casa, con me, la cultura come ricatto terroristico, la politica come aneddoto mai come scambio o confronto. Il buongustaio esigente che a casa imponeva diete monotone e cibi insipidi.⁹

The pea soup she is served during this lunch date – which she refused to touch– acquires a profound and very personal meaning. The narrator appropriates this dish by reinventing it years later. Not knowing the taste of the original dish, she chooses not to associate it with the painful memories of her relationship with her father and decides instead to cook her own version of the dish whenever she needs to nourish herself or when she wants to re-experience the enjoyable and luxurious atmosphere of the restaurant. In Clara Sereni’s text, cooking and food allow the narrator to re-position herself in relation to the other people in her life and to her past.¹⁰ Moreover, cooking is in many instances presented as a synonym for (family and personal) relationships and, as such, it changes as these relationships evolve. For example, the protagonist cooks for people with whom she seeks friendship or those she considers already close friends while, in the case of her then future in-

⁶ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 34-35.

⁷ Menozzi, “Food and Subjectivity in Clara Sereni’s *Casalinghitudine*,” 220.

⁸ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 38-39. The emphasis is mine.

⁹ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 40.

¹⁰ Gian Paolo Biasin talks about the use of food as “the cognitive tool used to outline the problematic relations among self, others, and the world (or among subject, nature, and history).” Biasin, “Italo Calvino in Mexico,” 74.

laws, their meals become even more elaborate and heavier as it becomes clear to them that she is now part of the family. Ultimately, through the caring gesture of feeding herself and others, the narrator gains independence and power, illustrated symbolically through the energetic and resolute motion of stirring and mixing the ingredients. Along these lines, Menozzi notices how “[...] the process of operation set in motion by cooking leads the narrator to re-map her world. As she traces the web of power relations in which she is inscribed, she finds a way to place herself in a stronger position. It is as if the transformations and combinations of ingredients that occur in cooking became a living metaphor for her desire to change her position vis-à-vis other people.”¹¹

Indeed, power relationships constitute a recurrent presence in the narrative fragments of *Casalinhitudine* and are usually announced through the choice of ingredients in the preceding recipes. For example, the recipes that require meat generally introduce painful memories or problematic events through which the narrator questions power relationships and gender roles. The section “Secondi piatti,” where meat is predominant, recounts confused memories about her deceased mother, disappointing love relationships, suicide attempts, and struggles with anorexia. Meat appears for the very first time on page 6, in the section dedicated to baby food. The recipe for *pappa alla carne* introduces the recollection of a particularly difficult moment in the life of the protagonist as a mother: her baby Tommaso would not stop crying day and night, and no one seems to understand why. In addition, his lack of appetite intensifies his mother’s apprehension. The narrator takes this opportunity to criticize the Catholic culture that surrounds her when she refers to the suggestion of the pediatrician that Tommaso’s illness is caused by an overly rich diet. Finally, after seeing a homeopath, the baby is introduced to a complete diet made up of whole flours, fruits and vegetables along with meat. This new and balanced diet seems to improve Tommaso’s condition and, as he starts to eat better, a new beginning unfolds for the mother as well: her story can now begin with the section on appetizers. Here, meat appears for the second time in the narrative as an ingredient for the recipe *crostini di fegato*. This liver dish recalls a rainy vacation day that the protagonist spent with her group of friends. The return of one of its members, Aldo, troubles the harmony established around a bottle of red wine and the steaming pot of liver pate. His intrusion diverts the conversation away from private matters – as the narrator would have seen fit among close friends – and in the direction of politics. This is also an undeniably patriarchal domain where gender roles are rapidly established as the men of the group are intensely involved in the debate of current political issues while the women gather quietly around the pot of liver pate. During this visit, the ideological differences among the members of the group but most importantly, between the group and Aldo are also stated through their lack of appetite as well as Aldo’s dissatisfaction with the brand of the wine they drink. He will soon re-establish his position as a leader within the group when he eventually tastes the liver/meat dish and ends up eating a large quantity of it.

David Del Principe, through an eco-feminist lens, draws a parallel in his article “Consuming Women and Animals” between women’s condition and animals used for human consumption. He also identifies power relationships within the process that transforms animals into meat and discusses how both animals and vegetables can link to femininity:

As butchers and hunters, predominantly men, for example, determine animals’ fate by killing them, they parallel the way men deny women’s rights and determine their fate in a masculinist society. In such ways, the violent act of killing animals for human consumption is associated with men and the authority of a male power structure, while meat itself, once an animal but now the victim of male oppression and violence like, for example, battered or raped women, may be considered feminized. Vegetables, however, are feminized in a different way; they reflect female stereotypes. For example,

¹¹ Menozzi, “Food and Subjectivity,” 221.

they are, as a mere accompaniment to the main course of meat, secondary nourishment, the symbolic equivalent of the 'weaker sex'.¹²

This association of meat with power/men and vegetables with the weak/women offers us a feminist interpretation of recipes in Clara Sereni's text like the *pasta e fagioli* dish as a struggle for independence and gender identity. When she decides to and succeeds in making it on her own by often feeding herself exquisite dishes containing beans, an unassuming legume that bears the derogatory nickname of "la carne dei poveri," the narrator operates a revalorization of the weak, both the lower class and women. This act of rebellion and self-assertiveness becomes even more defiant against her father, Emilio Sereni, a leading figure within the Italian Communist Party that was founded to defend the rights of the working class and women workers. The subsequent recipe, *minestra dei sette grani*, a soup made entirely of grain, vegetables and legumes, takes the discourse to the realm of femininity; it evokes new struggles of the autobiographical protagonist as a mother: when her turn comes to cook for the nursing school that her son attends, she attempts to win over the children (and Tommaso) with her cooking. She eventually manages to accomplish that for the other children, except for her son who will not share her triumph.

In the section "Secondi piatti," we find one of the most hierarchical scenes of the book, in which the figure of the father is presented as an oppressive force. Here, the antagonism between daughter and father is once again echoed in their opposite culinary tastes. As the young woman is preparing to cook for the entire family, she consults multiple cookbooks in a desperate effort to avoid her father's perpetual and condescending criticism:

Consultai tutte le guide gastronomiche che c'erano in casa, cercando di prevenire i però: tutta la mia vita, sotto lo sguardo di mio padre, diventava un immancabile però, e ogni mio atto di autonomia, di libertà, di intellettualità si scontrava con il suo furore, o con un sorriso di sufficienza. In età più verde aveva sempre già fatto, e meglio, qualunque cosa io tentassi di fare: gli studi, i rapporti sentimentali, la politica, perfino la cucina (odiavo tenacemente il sugo alla napoletana, il suo vantato e semplicissimo pezzo di bravura con il quale a tutt'oggi non mi sono ancora riconciliata).¹³

The protagonist's struggle for independence and rebellion against her father dominates her adolescent years in her parents' house. This period coincides with severe episodes of her anorexia. The narrator makes, however, a clear distinction between her absolute refusal of food ("un rifiuto del cibo radicale")¹⁴ which contradicts her passion for cooking as a venue for self-expression and creativity. Despite her diagnosis of colitis, which requires a strict diet without fatty foods, the protagonist decides to cook meat for her father and the entire family. After three unsuccessful attempts, the girl finally manages to please her father when she prepares and unconsciously follows exactly her grandmother's recipe for stuffed chicken. It is notable that the daughter chooses cooking (meat) as the ground on which to obtain her father's approval and to assert her identity as an intellectual in the public sphere ("gli studi," "la politica")¹⁵ and as a woman in the private sphere ("i rapporti sentimentali," "la cucina").¹⁶ In fact, for the narrator, these two domains - typically associated with men and femininity, respectively - are harmoniously blended in cooking. She reiterates throughout the text how this activity allows her to be imaginative, adaptable and organized; thus, cooking becomes for her synonymous to agency, change, intellect, self-reliance and energy.

¹² David Del Principe, "Consuming Women and Animals in Clara Sereni's *Casalinghitudine*," 208-209.

¹³ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 72.

¹⁴ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 70.

¹⁵ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 72.

¹⁶ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 72.

Echoing the clinical literature in the field, Bordo recognizes in anorexic symptoms an “unconscious feminist protest, involving anger at the limitations of the traditional female role, rejection of values associated with it, and fierce rebellion against allowing their futures to develop in the same direction as their mothers’ lives.”¹⁷ In *Casalinghitudine*, through the violent and visceral act of vomiting (meat) and crying – which is the outcome of the four dinners she cooks for her father and the whole family, the protagonist rejects the patriarchal order of her father; at the same time, she refuses to be enclosed in the matrilineage that ties her to her paternal grandmother and to her step-mother. In fact, the narrator immediately proclaims her uniqueness and detaches herself in this scene from her step-mother by announcing that they did not share the same passion for cooking.¹⁸ While cooking, the narrator transforms her kitchen “into a type of creative workshop,”¹⁹ a place where she can find and be herself, a complete and unique individual.

Another female figure whose model the protagonist refuses to follow is her mother-in-law. Their divergent points of view (on the way a household should be run), is evident in their cooking:

Il punto di rottura è stato sfiorato più volte quando ci ritrovavamo insieme, in vacanza per un mese, nella casa di Posticciola: la sua casa, costruita con la sua fatica e la sua inventiva, dove tutto corrisponde a criteri che non posso condividere.

A cominciare dal cibo: c’è il camino ma la carne non è mai alla brace bensì stracotta, ripassata, ricondita, riciclata. Si sta troppo a tavola, si mangia troppo, ci si occupa troppo del cibo. E sempre pastasciutta, e sughi, e salse, una cucina troppo grassa e proteica che a Massimo, a partire dalla nascita di Tommaso, ha cominciato a procurare disturbi.²⁰

Her mother-in-law’s rich and heavy cuisine appears menacing to the autobiographical protagonist; it is the adversary that a newlywed Clara must confront as she is trying to establish her authority and individuality within her new extended family. To make matters worse, both women are possessed of a strong desire to imprint their personality on everything and everyone around them, as well as on their domestic space. However, as the narrator points out, the main difference between her mother-in-law and herself is her own ability to remain rational and in control while doing that:

La casalinghitudine che tengo a bada dentro di me, relegandola in un angolo circoscritto dalla ragione, in lei è dichiarata, aggressiva, caotica, piena di risorse, pervasiva: l’apparente irrazionalità che ogni volta le fa mettere sottosopra l’intera cucina anche per le cose più semplici – pasta al burro e fettina, ad esempio – risponde ad una logica ferrea, ad un rendersi occupata e indispensabile che risuona in me con echi minacciosi.²¹

Unlike the erratic decisions that dictate her mother-in-law’s cooking, the narrator’s recipes reveal an intentional and systematic project; they are the expression of a long-time sought after (and virtually found) order and stability, guarantors of a much-needed feeling of security. The only variables allowed within this structure stem from the creativity and adaptability of the autobiographical protagonist. All this undoubtedly emerges in the section on preserves, the last of the book. In one scene, the protagonist appears like a master of ceremonies while shopping for produce at the market together with her husband and son:

¹⁷ Bordo, “Anorexia Nervosa,” 175.

¹⁸ She had done the same with her grandmother Alfonsa when modifying her recipes, as previously revealed in the narrative and discussed here.

¹⁹ Del Principe, “Consuming Women and Animals,” 206.

²⁰ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 43.

²¹ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 43.

In una mattinata ancora estiva, sul tardi, tutti e tre al mercato con chili e chili di frutta e verdura. Dirigo gli acquisti con *apparente sicurezza*, tenendo a bada un sottile senso di colpa: cosa ne farò, poi...[...] Il ripiano della cucina traballa sotto il peso dei barattoli: i colori che hanno, le irregolarità e imprecisioni che li fanno miei. Sono al sicuro, ancora per un inverno.²²

In the same scene, it becomes clear nonetheless that her confidence while supervising the work of making the preserves is only apparent. In fact, there is an ineffable feeling of the unsubstantial and illusory that constantly saps the identity search of the autobiographical protagonist throughout her journey, and that echoes the unrealistic expectations of anorectics, the implausible success of their endeavor to (re)gain control over their life by controlling their body through food ingestion: Bordo explains that “Our contemporary body-fetishism expresses [...] a *fantasy* of self-mastery in an increasingly unmanageable culture [...]”²³ As a child, in order to make up for a difficult relationship with her father and deal with the frequent changes in her life, the protagonist in *Casalinghitudine* escapes to an imaginary world where she can entertain her “*fantasie* di sparizione e onnipotenza;” later on, as a grown woman, a mother and wife, she looks for strength and stability in herself, although she deeply relies on the other people in her life along with the domestic space of her home and her daily chores.²⁴ Among these, cooking remains, above all, an indispensable opportunity for creating, changing and reinventing (herself); ultimately, her cooking constitutes a(n attempted) survival mechanism and a means to (try to) cope with her present and past:

Così le mie radici *aeree* affondano nei barattoli, nei liquori, nelle piante del terrazzo, nei maglioni e coperte con i quali vorrei irretire il mondo, nel freezer: perché nella mia vita costruita a tesserae mal tagliate, nella mia vita a mosaico (come quella di tutti, e più delle donne) la casalinghitudine è *anche* un angolino caldo.²⁵

Un angolino da modificare ogni momento, se fosse fisso sarebbe morire, le ricette solo una base per costruire ogni volta sapori nuovi, combinazioni diverse.

Reinventare unico sconfinamento possibile, reinventare per non rimasticare, reinventare per non mangiarsi il cuore. Tutto è già stato detto, tutto è già stato scritto: [...]²⁶

The novel suggestively concludes with a long quotation from one of her father's works on the food history of Southern Italy. Thus, food and cooking become the setting where father and daughter meet for one last time, now only metaphorically and with a more reconciliatory tone on the part of the narrator. She finally accepts her father's influence and acknowledges that finding her own individuality does not necessarily entail the rejection of all family ties and traditions but rather embracing and enriching them with her own personality. Such development emerges for instance in the narrator's reflection on her relationship with her in-laws as exemplified in the altered menu for the Christmas dinner:

Capii che cominciavano ad amarmi, e a considerarmi una di loro; però quel loro affetto era troppo invadente, troppo caldo, troppo protettivo, e io ci tenevo come alla vita al mio essere forte e autonoma e intellettuale e atea. Diversa.

²² Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 157. The emphasis is mine.

²³ Bordo, “Anorexia Nervosa,” 172.

²⁴ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 153. The emphasis is mine.

²⁵ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, The emphasis is mine.

²⁶ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 165.

Le loro ragioni le ho capite via via, con fatica, strada facendo. Perché la loro catena di solidarietà e di affetto non è poi tanto diversa da quell'interesse per il mondo che mi ha fatto rifiutare famiglia e coppia, per arrivare poi a capire che anche queste ne fanno parte, che per aprirsi alla chioma non è necessario tagliar via tronco e radici.

Avevano ragione. Lo so da Tommaso, per il quale la treggiorni è il grande avvenimento dell'anno, forte di calore malgrado screzi e consumismo. E lo so da me, perché quando le malattie dei patriarchi hanno incrinato il rito mi sono incaricata io del cenone: con il polpettone di tonno [her own recipe], naturalmente, ma anche con il fritto, e con tutti gli altri piatti inderogabili del solito, imm modificabile menu [of her mother-in-law].²⁷

It is noteworthy that the passage describing the death of her father introduces the section on preserves, the last of the book. Here, the narrator refers symbolically to this event as the death of her roots; also, this event almost coincides with the birth of her son Tommaso, on which occasion she becomes a root herself. To this latter biographical event, the narrator dedicates an entire section on baby food which opens the novel. This narrative choice clearly strengthens an otherwise ongoing identity search and a tentative regain of control over her life.

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²⁷ Sereni, *Casalinghitudine*, 93-94.