

## Ancestral Mothers, Feminine Icons, and Black Madonnas in the Works of Susan Caperna Lloyd

Elisabetta Marino  
University of Rome "Tor Vergata"  
([marino@lettere.uniroma2.it](mailto:marino@lettere.uniroma2.it))

Born in California and raised in Oregon, Susan Caperna Lloyd is a documentary maker, a photographer, and a non-fiction writer. In 1983 she first visited Terracina, the coastal town in Southern Latium her Italian ancestors on her father's side originally came from. On that occasion, she also travelled further south to Sicily, a land she felt profoundly and almost inexplicably drawn to, and where, on Good Friday, she witnessed *i Misteri* (the Mysteries), an evocative procession held in Trapani. Nineteen life-size statues representing the stations of the Cross paraded through the streets of the city for 24 hours, carried on heavy platforms (*ceti*) by male porters only (*portatori*). This experience proved momentous in Caperna Lloyd's personal development and artistic career: she went back to Sicily two more times during the Holy Week before publishing *No Pictures in My Grave: A Spiritual Journey to Sicily* (1992), a travel memoir which, actually, followed the release of both an award-winning documentary, *Processione: A Sicilian Easter* (1989), and a short story entitled "No Pictures in My Grave: A Woman's Journey in Sicily" (1991), whose description of *i Misteri* would be included in her volume. The Mysteries are yet again featured in the last of her artistic endeavours: the still unpublished *Crucifixion of Lucy Reyes: Holy Week Folk Rituals of Sacrifice, Fertility, and Power*, where the writer's horizon widens to embrace the entire *Hispanidad*, namely Spain, some parts of the Americas, the Philippines, and Sicily; as Donald Cosentino has argued, in fact, the religious rituals in Trapani were brought over by the Andalusians, when the Spanish ruled the island (Cosentino, 1991: 443).

The eye-centricity of Caperna Lloyd's output cannot possibly pass unnoticed: it is palpable in her documentary film and rather pronounced even in her narratives. Indeed, her texts are

consistently complemented with pictures which, as Giorgia Maria Carola Alù has observed, never serve “a simple illustrative and reportage purpose” (Alù, 2003: 159); quite the opposite, they forcefully aim at exposing what words fail to grasp or encompass, while exploring the obscure and often overlooked facets of cultural and social phenomena. Furthermore, the artist’s intention to acknowledge and illuminate the hidden crevices of reality is perceptibly coupled with “a complicated feminist search in which personal story, myth, and history overlap” (Giunta, 2004: 770), to quote Edvige Giunta’s remark on Caperna Lloyd’s memoir, which could be easily extended to most of her works. Accordingly, far from merely signifying the author’s nostalgia or curiosity for her remote roots, her repeated travels to Sicily during the Holy Week have actually prompted her to undertake a quest for her identity, as both an Italian American and a woman<sup>1</sup>.

As this essay sets out to elucidate, through the materials gathered first of all in Sicily, but also in the former Spanish colonial empire, Susan Caperna Lloyd has succeeded in crafting empowering narratives of awakening and personal (as well as communal) transformation, in which female figures cease to dwell in the margins, thus finally gaining both the visibility and the agency they have been traditionally denied in patriarchal societies. In the present analysis, special emphasis will be placed on the strategic part played by powerful feminine icons, ancestral mothers, and black Madonnas, perceived as alternative paradigms of womanhood, capable of challenging (and eventually replacing) the customary portrayal of women as meek and domestic angels, constrained in their ancillary functions as selfless nurturers and *matres dolorosae*, sorrowful mothers.

*Processione: A Sicilian Easter* begins with two contrasting shots, exemplifying the stereotypical roles assigned according to conventional gender norms and expectations: while an elderly man freely roams the streets of Trapani, his female counterpart, almost trapped indoors, can only peer out of the window<sup>2</sup>. Even though both men and women are interviewed in the documentary, a friend of the artist’s, Gian Carlo Decimo, emerges as the real protagonist: he is entrusted with outlining the history of *i Misteri*, while highlighting the importance every citizen attaches to the event. Conversely, as Edvige Giunta has also underlined (Giunta, 2002: 98), her travel memoir and short story are indisputably woman-centred narratives, focused not just on the Mysteries –

---

<sup>1</sup> In the words of Valentina Seffer, “the author’s writing conjugates her physical journey and her inward journey” (Seffer, 2015: 100); as Seffer continues, “*No Pictures in My Grave* falls into the category of the ‘narrative of awakening’ in which readers can witness the evolution and self-assertion of the protagonist” (Seffer, 2015: 133).

<sup>2</sup> In *No Pictures in My Grave*, Caperna Lloyd quotes an Italian saying: “The woman at the window, the man on the road” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 111).

depicted in the volume as “really a man’s event” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 10) – but on the author and her progress. In truth, in *No Pictures in My Grave*, the procession acts as a trigger: once aware of women’s invisibility “in a society where, [she] was fast discovering, [their] proper place was at home” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 7), Susan Caperna Lloyd eagerly embarks on a mission to uncover the ancient goddesses whose cult and power had been submerged under the flood of Christianity, with its male-dominated hierarchies and rituals.

*No Pictures in My Grave* is dedicated to the artist’s mother, but written in memory of Carolina, her grandmother, a recurring figure in the volume who serves to reconnect the author with her ethnic background, as Fred Gardaphé has observed<sup>3</sup>. The narrative opens with a picture of Carolina (who, at last, emerges from anonymity, albeit surrounded by her children), and with a fictional letter addressed to her, identified as “a grieving Madonna and a long-suffering mother” (Caperna Lloyd 1992: ix). Not even death could release her from her duties as nurturer to the male members of her family: in fact, Susan’s father had placed a photo of himself with his only son into her coffin, so that she could continue to care for them, even from the afterlife. Thus rejecting a deeply ingrained tradition of female self-effacement and sacrifice, the artist refuses to follow in Carolina’s steps: in her effort to attain self-determination and independence, she hopes to “rise up and be free” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: ix) when her time comes, with no one to be responsible for, no pictures in her grave.

In the first chapter, “Processione”, the artist is confronted with the difficulty in taking active part in the procession on account of her gender. Her husband Tom and her son Sky are both granted the possibility to participate: the former is invited to perform the key function of *bilancino*, the most important among the sixteen porters of each *ceto*, while the latter is requested to carry a pillow with some holy medallions on it. On the contrary, Susan’s aspirations are thoroughly frustrated: she is only allowed to join the other women that follow the last of the platforms, bearing *la Madonna*, and that, due to “their placement at the end of the procession, [do] not seem to be a real part of it” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 14). Nonetheless, as Mary Jo Bona has pointed out, the initial sections of her travel memoir also enable Caperna Lloyd to “revise the mater dolorosa role written into the script of an Italian woman’s life” (Bona, 2010: 57). Indeed, the statues of Our Lady she observes parading through Trapani and Marsala are strikingly different from the icons of

---

<sup>3</sup> According to Fred Gardaphé, “a significant difference between second- and third-generation writers [...] is the presence of a grandparent figure who serves to reconnect the protagonist to a past out of which the protagonist fashions an ethnic identity” (Gardaphé 1996: 120).

purity she had grown up with, characterized by their “modest blue robes and sweet, ivory-colored faces” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 3): they are black Madonnas, endowed with strength, majesty, and power. According to Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, “Black Madonnas may be considered a metaphor for a memory of the time when the earth was believed to be the body of a woman and all creatures were equal” (Chiavola Birnbaum, 1993: 3). Their unusual hue (ranging from tawny to pitch black) is reminiscent of the various shades of the soil and, therefore, connected with fertility and regeneration; moreover, it recalls the colour of the Dark Mother, the mythical goddess belonging to a time before history, when no hierarchical relations based on gender, race, and class disrupted communal harmony. As Mary Beth Moser has argued, the dark Madonnas worshipped across the globe are intimately associated with “the ‘other’ Mary” (Moser, 2008: 6), Mary Magdalene, as well as with ancient and powerful deities such as Isis, the black Goddess Artemis of Ephesus, Demeter, Cybele (the Great Mother of the Gods), Hera, Vitulia, Mefiti (who could dispel evil spirits), Inanna, and even the Hindu Kali<sup>4</sup>, another primordial mother, the emblem of destruction and renewal<sup>5</sup>.

The syncretic and unifying nature of the black Madonna, bridging differences and solving tensions, is also emphasized by Susan Caperna Lloyd when, immediately after describing the Marsala Madonna as “dark and angry”<sup>6</sup> (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 3), she equates her with Demeter<sup>7</sup>, given the “wild and passionate” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 3) demeanour they both exhibit. In her attempt to redress wrongs and undermine any gender-related asymmetry, the artist even suggests that Christ may be “another version of Persephone” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 3) since, in ancient Greek, one of her names actually meant *saviour*. The Demeter-Persephone myth also strengthens the bond between Caperna Lloyd’s quest for empowering female models and the investigation of her family’s past<sup>8</sup>. In *No Pictures in My Grave*, her grandmother Carolina, like many other Italian Americans, is often viewed as a mournful Persephone, a traveller between two worlds whose resurrection from the Underworld has never been permitted. In fact, Carolina had been separated

---

<sup>4</sup> Susan Caperna Lloyd has also written an article on the dark Goddess Kali, viewed as “the female aspect of God” (Caperna Lloyd, 2016); as she elucidates, Kali can purify her worshippers by absorbing both their fears and anger.

<sup>5</sup> For further information on black Madonnas and their connection with the Italian American communities across the US, see also Elisabetta Marino, “The Black Madonna in the Italian American artistic Imagination”, pp. 38-43.

<sup>6</sup> In her 1991 short story, the Madonna of Trapani was also portrayed as “dark, Moorish-looking” (Caperna Lloyd, 1991: 250). In truth, she only wears a black mantle, while her complexion is pale.

<sup>7</sup> As Marguerite Rigoglioso has pointed out, “Demeter was originally considered to be a Virgin Mother” (Rigoglioso, 2010: 102).

<sup>8</sup> According to Alison D. Goeller, Persephone “becomes [...] a particularly appropriate symbol for the Italian American woman who travels in order to reconnect with her ancestral heritage, to discover a new identity, and to recover what perhaps had been lost in the acculturation of her mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, in a way reversing their emigration” (Goeller, 2003: 76).

from her mother since 1922, when she had left for the US never to return: hence, in the author's words "the two had never been reunited" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 14).

The ostensibly androcentric experience of the procession in Trapani is, therefore, challenged by the "dark-faced Madonna" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 5), who "escap[es] the confines of the church" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 7) (corresponding to women's domestic sphere) to actively search for her child, just like Demeter. Caperna Lloyd seems at pains to bring the vernacular interpretation of the biblical events to the forefront, thus uncovering the local folkloristic variants that have long been suppressed by patriarchal institutions. Consequently, as one of the porters points out, "the *processione* is not really the story of Christ's death. It is about his Mother, Mary" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 10), who finally regains a central place and proper visibility. This epiphanic moment marks the beginning of the artist's physical and spiritual journey aimed at understanding and recovering the power of the black Madonna, "that power that Carolina and so many women had lost or relinquished" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 28) and that, perhaps, could be restored by visiting "the places where the old deities like Demeter had once lived" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 28)<sup>9</sup>.

Her pilgrimage starts at the Levanzo Cave. In the darkness of the cavern, she barely distinguishes "a black form" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 41), who resembles "a stylized version of the terra-cottas [she] had seen of Persephone and Demeter" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 41) or even "the black-shrouded *Madonna Addolorata*" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 41) of Trapani. She also identifies another goddess on the wall, a "large female figure" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 41) painted red, "the Palaeolithic color for menstrual blood and fertility" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 41). Since her pursuit has just begun, however, the ancient mothers are still elusive and partially concealed from her gaze: eloquently enough, Susan tries to take a picture of them, only to realize, later on, she had forgotten to load her camera. Yet, the first stage of her journey stirs important reflections on gender inequalities and the obscurity of women, forced to adopt a passive stance they had never assumed in prehistoric times: "Why was there now such a division between male and female? [...] the old goddesses had been powerful and active, suggesting that women then had been, too" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 32).

The second city she visits is Enna where, according to the myth, Persephone had been abducted by Pluto and Demeter was supposedly buried. The artist gathers that, in one of the most

---

<sup>9</sup> See also Elisabetta Marino, "Searching for Identity: *No Pictures in My Grave: A Spiritual Journey in Sicily* by Susan Caperna Lloyd", in *BAS/British and American Studies*, XXIII, 2018, pp. 97-104. This essay mainly focuses on Caperna Lloyd's search for identity, as both a woman and an Italian American writer.

prominent churches, the statue of Demeter holding her daughter had been worshipped for centuries, only to be replaced by the Virgin Mary and her child when the Pope had been informed of that sacrilegious violation. Nevertheless, as Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum maintains, “folklore can challenge hegemonic culture” (Chiavola Birnbaum, 1993: 14); as the custodian of the church reveals, to him (as well as to many other believers), the remarkable continuity between two potent female icons cannot be interrupted: in truth, the one may actually stand for the other, “it is the same thing” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 55).

While looking for ancestral deities, Caperna Lloyd also encounters two alternative models of contemporary womanhood: Lucia and Clara. The mother of one of her Italian friends, Lucia struggles to teach her those “domestic skills” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 63) the artist has always had a strong aversion to, due to their close connection with female subservience and patriarchal control<sup>10</sup>. Even Carla is deeply involved in the preparation of culinary delicacies, albeit in a completely different way: she runs her own popular restaurant, where unchaperoned women can enjoy a meal without being stared at or, worse, publicly censored for their bold and improper behaviour. Fully educated, Carla lives a fulfilled and independent life; she has two children, a new partner, and an African “assistant” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 156) – not simply a maid – as a helper. Carla has also managed to penetrate the invisible barrier that prevents women from carrying the platforms during *i Misteri*: indeed, more than once, she has surprisingly joined the male porters in shouldering a *ceto*. At this point of the narrative, however, Caperna Lloyd experiences an identity crisis, stemming from what Theodora Patrona has interpreted as “her inability to cope with the load of her multiple tasks” (Patrona, 2017: 86) – mother, artist, daughter, wife, and self-reliant woman, to name a few. As Caperna Lloyd states, “I felt caught between these women [Lucia and Carla]; I was not one, nor was I the other” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 86).

Following two difficult years back in Oregon (characterized by feelings of inner fragmentation, anguish, and alienation), Caperna Lloyd eventually decides to go back to Sicily in order to resume her search for dark mothers and self-empowerment. Only, this time, she is meaningfully on her own, unaccompanied by friends or relatives. Hosted by her acquaintances, the Amoroso family, Susan is initially enveloped in their “protective cocoon” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 111), which is both soothing and stifling. Compared to an harem, the household is first described as a “make-believe world of dolls, gauzy curtains, knick-knacks, and costume jewellery”

---

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, just like Lucia, Susan’s grandmother Carolina “rarely left the kitchen post to sit down” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 11).

(Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 95), where she herself is seemingly turned into a doll, just like the other young female inmates, wearing “pink velour pajamas embroidered with *primo amore* across the chest” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 95). Their childish and dutiful attitude however, is actually deceptive and misleading. As Theodora Patrona has elucidated, even the Amoroso ladies somehow retain “the primitive strength and resilience of the goddess, whose sketch Susan saw in the Levanzo cave” (Patrona, 2017: 90-91): their playful and mischievous songs, laced with sexual innuendoes, convey subversive messages, while acting as an effective “channel for vernacular beliefs” (Chiavola Birnbaum, 1993: 49). As Susan notices, “like Carolina, these women showed a hidden darkness when they were merry. The targets were always their husbands, whom they seemed to view as boys” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 98).

Before travelling to Syracuse and its surrounding areas, the artist has the possibility to see the *Madonna dei Trapani*, a delicate, white marble statue which, originally, was a black Madonna, carved in ebony. Regrettably, the miracle-working dark mother had suspiciously vanished from the Church of the Annunciation, and had been then replaced with a more conventional version of the Holy Virgin, whose reassuring immaculate colour reflected the patriarchal ideal of simple and submissive femininity. The forced invisibility of neglected goddesses is yet again emphasized by Caperna Lloyd in Palazzolo where, at last, she succeeds in seeing the *Santoni*, the bas-reliefs of Demeter that are carefully preserved – or, better, hidden – into “odd-looking little wooden houses” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 116), mock representations of the domestic sphere: “I couldn’t help but think how these locked-up deities were metaphors for Sicilian women in general and for my own experiences in Trapani” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 119). Once in Tindari, she visits the sanctuary of the black Madonna that strikes her as “stern and fearsome” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 138): “she was not sorrowing or distraught. Nor was she sweet or demure. She just *was*, exuding power and self-assurance” (Caperna Lloyd 1992: 139). Associated with “the mysteries of regeneration” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 139) and identified as “both Attis and Cybele, both Demeter and Persephone” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 139), the black Madonna also reminds the artist of her brave grandmother, whose “primitive strength in [her] blood” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 140) had been weakened by male oppression and the loss of her cultural roots. Caperna Lloyd’s visit to Tindari proves crucial to her spiritual development; as she remarks, “ultimately, with this Madonna and my journey to Sicily, I seemed to look into the uncharted world of my own soul. I left the sanctuary and, with the other pilgrims, felt strengthened” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 141).

The last stop of her pilgrimage is the little town of San Biagio Platani, near Agrigento, where, as Carla informs her, women are unusually in charge of the Easter celebrations. Far from being housebound and isolated, they provocatively subvert the traditional female occupation of cooking by transforming it into a symbolic ceremony of collective empowerment. Together, they bake beautiful bread ornaments in different shapes, which are used to decorate both the inside of their houses and public spaces. Their bread ceases to be the emblem of the Last Supper and Christ's sufferings and sacrifice, and becomes a blissful offering for a nurturing ancestral Mother. Mesmerized in front of one of the San Biagio women, lifting a bread chalice to inspect it for cracks, Susan feels as if she "was watching a priestess in an ancient fertility rite. Her bread offering [is] like the ritual cakes the women [...] brought to the old sanctuaries of Demeter and Persephone" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 170). Before leaving the town, she is given an allegorical gift: a bread butterfly, signifying both her inner transformation carried out through her journey, and her newly-acquired freedom.

Finally released from the protective invisibility of her cocoon, the artist can conclude her pilgrimage where it all began, in Trapani, during the *processione*, thus following a circular route that, in Mary Jo Bona's words, is "distinctly female" (Bona, 2010: 57). Once regained her own *potenza* – a feminine noun in Italian, as underlined in the narrative (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 175) –, Susan Caperna Lloyd can manage to write an alternative ending to her previous story of gender-based exclusion: no longer an overlooked observer, she is unexpectedly invited to carry one of the platforms. In what she perceives as "an androgynous blend of strength and grace" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 181), any form of sex discrimination is eventually overcome and forgotten. Accepted "as an equal" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 182) by the group of porters, she dances and shares her energy with them, as if they were all "floating on some primal sea" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 184); in the end, after recovering "the lost part of [her]self" (188), the artist "become[s] the Goddess [she] had sought" (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 188).

If the black and white illustrations featured in *No Pictures in My Grave* mainly aimed at increasing the visibility of both female characters and ancestral mothers (thus complementing the narrative and enhancing its meaning), in *The Crucifixion of Lucy Reyes* the vivid photographs taken by Susan Caperna Lloyd in Spain, the Philippines, Mexico, New Mexico, Arizona, Guatemala, and Sicily, over a thirty-year period, unquestionably play a central part: indeed, they take up more than half of an outstandingly visual and eye-centric volume, where text and image are juxtaposed. Starting from the charismatic figure of Lucy Reyes and her ritual crucifixion, the artist has the

possibility to expand on the Holy Week celebrations across *Hispanidad*, thus highlighting their connection with ancient fertility rites, while further elaborating on her search for powerful feminine icons.

As Susan reiterates in her *Introduction* to *The Crucifixion*, given her Catholic upbringing, she “had imbibed the gendered understanding that women were the repository of suffering” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 7), trapped in their established role as passive and grieving Madonnas<sup>11</sup>. Conversely, as already explored in her travel memoir, the dark and awe-inspiring statue of Our Lady parading during *i Misteri* prompted her to begin her Sicilian pilgrimage which, over the years, has stretched its boundaries to include distant lands, first of all the district of Kapitangan, in the Bulacan province (the Philippines<sup>12</sup>) where, in 1988, the artist met twenty-eight-year-old Lucy Reyes. As anthropologist Peter J. Bräunlein reports, since her childhood Lucy had been “a rebellious and headstrong person” (Bräunlein, 2009: 898), who often opposed to her family’s expectations. Her repeated illnesses were associated with states of unconsciousness and trance in which, apparently, she connected with Santo Niño, the infant Jesus. As Caperna Lloyd relates in her volume, when Lucy was an adolescent, she had been so sick that everybody thought she would die: yet, Santo Niño had miraculously restored her to health and even endowed her with extraordinary healing powers. In order to retain her gift, the girl had vowed to re-enact the passion of Christ for fifteen years (until she turned thirty-three), by carrying a heavy cross during the procession on Good Friday, before being literally nailed to it, for three hours.

The transgressive and provocative representation of a female Jesus, openly defying the patriarchal structure of Christianity, cannot pass undetected; as readers are informed, Lucy is even surrounded by twelve devoted “adopted mothers” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 14), corresponding to the apostles. What is even more remarkable and controversial, however, is that her yearly crucifixion is not coupled with grief and pain – traditionally, women’s lot –: when nails are driven into her hands and feet, Lucy never bleeds nor does she sacrifice herself to purify mankind from the stain of sin. Quite the opposite, she willingly and joyfully performs a ritual of self-empowerment to preserve and revive her capacity as a healer, for the benefit of her fellow-creatures in need.

---

<sup>11</sup> As she continues, women “were passive and devoted mothers and Madonnas: the ones who stood by and watched and prayed” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 7).

<sup>12</sup> The writer also emphasizes the striking qualities of Filipino women: “there is something inordinately powerful about Filipino women. They run for government. They run the family, even if it means being a nurse in California. It is a matriarchal culture” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 7).

By delving into vernacular traditions, while integrating Catholicism, pre-Christian beliefs, and other mythologies and religions, Susan Caperna Lloyd demonstrates that all the Holy Week ceremonies and processions she has witnessed “resonate with a story about fertility older than Christ” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 8): they are “about death and renewal, winter and spring. The fear of scarcity, and the hope for a restoration of abundance and healing” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 8). Accordingly, her volume is organized following the prescribed eight stages of ancient agricultural rites of regeneration which, as expected, bear a close resemblance to Lent and Easter celebrations: *Fasting, Lamentation, Pilgrimage, Purification, Bloodletting, Scapegoat, Ritual Combat, and Death and Resurrection*. Just to quote a few insightful examples, the tears shed by the Virgin Mary for her lost son, “symboliz[e] water, ensuring fertility” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 29); flagellation recalls the blood offerings to the Great Mother and the other deities to guarantee the fecundity of the soil (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 89-90); the cross may be interpreted as a symbolic tree of life (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 136).

As well as fostering religious syncretism, Caperna Lloyd underscores the importance of the “union of opposites, male and female” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 144), as intimately intertwined with “true community fertility” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 144). Hence, Lucy, the female Jesus, maintains her womanly prerogatives even during the Passion: although she wears the robes of Christ during the Holy Week, on Good Friday, she reveals “a sensuous skirt worn underneath her costume” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 111). Likewise, her male attendants who nail her to the cross seem “the most feminine” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 136) during the three hours of Lucy’s crucifixion, tenderly offering her water, while embracing her feet and legs<sup>13</sup>. As Susan Caperna Lloyd seems to suggest, collective harmony and prosperity can be achieved only when the balance between the sexes is safeguarded, and when both men and women become equally visible.

Like *No Pictures in My Grave*, also *The Crucifixion of Lucy Reyes* ends with a poignant image of inclusion. About to leave, the artist bids farewell to Lucy, who asks her to stay and join her twelve mothers. Had she remained in the Philippines, back in 1988, her wide and all-encompassing research on ancestral mothers would have followed different paths, and readers would be possibly deprived of the thought-provoking literary endeavours analyzed in this essay. Nonetheless, as

---

<sup>13</sup> In one of the pictures included in the volume, featuring Christ on the cross during the Yaqui Holy Week in Hermosillo (Mexico), Jesus surprisingly wears a light blue skirt, “signifying fertility, healing, and a union of opposites” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 144), as the author explains in the photo caption. In *No Pictures in My Grave*, while describing the procession in Trapani, Caperna Lloyd also focuses the readers’ attention on “Christ’s flowing, feminine robes, which billowed out underneath the cross” (Caperna Lloyd, 1992: 9).

Susan Caperna Lloyd writes in the very last line of *The Crucifixion of Lucy Reyes*, “perhaps there is still time to join her, the healer of Bulacan” (Caperna Lloyd, 2017: 146): perhaps, she will go back to the Philippines, to compose another chapter of her story.

### Works Cited

- Alù, G.M.C., *Beyond the Observation of the ‘Traveller’: the Other and the Self in the Writings of Anglo-Sicilian Women (1848-1910)*, PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2003.
- Bona, M.J., *By the Breath of Their Mouths: Narratives of Resistance in Italian America*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2010.
- Bräunlein, P.J., “Negotiating Charisma: The Social Dimension of Philippine Crucifixion Rituals”, in *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 37, 2009, pp. 892-917.
- Caperna Lloyd, S., *Processione: A Sicilian Easter* (A Documentary Film), VHS, University of California Extension Media Library, 1989 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgt\\_moanNlk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgt_moanNlk)).
- Caperna Lloyd, S., “No Picture in My Grave: A Woman’s Journey in Sicily”, in *Italian Americana*, 9 (2), 1991, pp. 245-267.
- Caperna Lloyd, S., *No Pictures in My Grave: A Spiritual Journey in Sicily*, San Francisco, Mercury House, 1992.
- Caperna Lloyd, S., “The Goddess: Discovering Divinity in Dissolution”, in *Hinduism Today*, July-September 2016 (<https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=5707>).
- Caperna Lloyd, S., *The Crucifixion of Lucy Reyes: Holy Week Folk Rituals of Sacrifice, Fertility, and Power. Spain, Sicily, The Americas, The Philippines*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2017.
- Chiavola Birnbaum, L. *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion and Politics in Italy*, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1993.
- Cosentino, D., “Processione: A Sicilian Easter. Film Review”, in *Western Folklore*, 50 (4), 1991, pp. 443-444.
- Gardaphé, F., *Italian Signs, American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1996.

- Giunta, E., *Writing with an Accent. Contemporary Italian American Women Authors*, New York, Palgrave, 2002.
- Giunta, E., "Persephone's Daughters", in *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 33, 2004, pp. 767-786.
- Goeller, A.D., "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women and Italy", in *MELUS*, 28 (3), pp. 73-90.
- Marino, E. "The Black Madonna in the Italian American Artistic Imagination", in *Acta Neophilologica*, 50 (1-2), 2017, pp. 37-56.
- Marino, E., "Searching for Identity: *No Pictures in My Grave: A Spiritual Journey in Sicily* by Susan Caperna Lloyd", in *BAS/British and American Studies*, XXIII, 2018, pp. 97-104.
- Moser, M.B., *Honoring Darkness. Exploring the Power of Black Madonnas in Italy*, Vashon Island, Washington, Dea Madre Publishing, 2008.
- Patrona, T.D., *Return Narratives: Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017.
- Rigoglioso, M., *Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.
- Seffer, V., *Identity on the Threshold: The Myth of Persephone in Italian American Women's Memoirs*. Phd Thesis, The University of Sydney, 2015.