EMBROIDERED STORIES
Interpreting Women’s Domestic Needlework from the Italian Diaspora

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Il corredo: Loss and Continuity in an Italian American Family

—Jo Ann Cavallo

"Your grandmother had a corredo for you, linens and things," my father mentioned over dinner a few months after my grandmother’s death in 1976. "It’s somewhere in the old house, but who knows where?" Although I would have liked to know more, I didn’t press my father to search for it because I realized he was reluctant to return to the vacant house. During my childhood the Cavallo family used to gather at my grandparents’ home in Vaux Hall, New Jersey, by noon every Sunday for “dinner” and spend the rest of the afternoon together. Unfailingly seated around the table were my father’s siblings, Ange and Fred, who lived with their parents, along with their brother Frank and his wife, Minnie, who, like my parents, had moved to a nearby town. Although we continued the tradition after my aunt Ange and my grandfather died earlier in the decade, with my grandmother’s passing the family fabric became unwoven. The house remained empty as my uncle Fred moved into the apartment of his lady-friend. My parents moved down the shore, and soon the relation among the three brothers was reduced to Christmas cards and occasional phone calls.

Besides, from what I had gathered, a corredo seemed no more than an antiquated custom requiring brides to supply such mundane items as bedsheets and dish towels. Coming of age in the 1970s, my high-school friends and I had pushed for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, cheered for tennis champion Billie Jean King, and subscribed to Ms. magazine. The idea of a trousseau or a hope chest evoked a past in which women were confined to domestic spaces and lacked equal rights and opportunities in the outside world. Like Virgil’s warrior maiden Camilla, we were not trained to handle Minerva’s distaff and wool basket, but to stand up to arms in battle and to race against the wind.

While growing up, I had no inkling of the fundamental role that biancheria had traditionally played in the lives of women since ancient times. Nor
could I have imagined that, decades later, while teaching Columbia University's Literature Humanities course, I would come across so many examples of exceptional female characters from classical Greek and Roman literature skilled in the art of needlework. Turning to the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Aeneid, I find Helen weaving a robe depicting the momentous struggles between Trojans and Achaeans, Penelope at the loom creating and unraveling Laius's funeral shroud in order to impede her remarriage, and Andromache giving Aeneas's son Ascanius robes she had woven herself as both a testament to her love for Hector and the only surviving material gifts from their fallen city. Even the most revered Olympian goddesses stake claim to the art, whether it be Aphrodite appearing to Helen in the guise of a woolmaker (Iliad 3) or Minerva herself, goddess not only of wisdom and warfare but also of weaving, descending to earth for her famed contest against the defiant and inimitable Arachne (Metamorphoses 6). Herodotus, in fact, considered women and needlework so closely connected in his ancient Greek culture that, when depicting Egypt as a land in which all gender customs were reversed, he remarked that there it was the man who stayed at home and did the weaving (Histories, Book 2). These associations did not mean, however, that the gentler sex was unfit for other tasks. Indeed, in Aristophanes's Lysistrata, the plucky female heroine explains how the world would be better off if run by women who would govern the state in the same fashion that they treated wool. But as a teenager I knew nothing of such models.

A few years passed before my father mentioned the subject of my corrido again. He was compelled to visit the old house after he was notified that it had been burglarized, and he mentioned that he would use the occasion to pick up some of his belongings and look for those linens my grandmother had wanted me to have. By then I was majoring in Italian in college, and I understood that a corrido consisted of needlework pieces handcrafted with patience and precision by young women who intended to use them later in life as they fulfilled their roles as wives and mothers. Although I had forgotten about my father's previous mention of a corrido, I was suddenly anxious to see my grandmother's handiwork. I viewed it as a gift that represented my family's heritage and that I could in turn pass on to the next generation when the time came.

As my father left to meet his older brothers at the empty family home, it occurred to me that, although I could vaguely envision a canister with skeins of yarn somewhere in the house, I did not remember ever seeing my grandmother doing needlework. Nor had I ever seen her at work on her old-fashioned Singer sewing machine, even though I knew she made dresses for herself and Aunt Ange. Perhaps that was because we mostly visited her on Sundays, when she and my aunt were busy in the kitchen. We
sometimes arrived in time to see them rolling dough or cutting gnocchi on a wide wooden pasta board. Around Easter time she would make a dish we called “beets-a-gain,” which, as I was later told, corresponded to “pizza piena,” because it was in fact a “meat pie,” full of meat, egg, and cheese. In the afternoon we would gather in the parlor or on the front porch if the weather permitted. When friends or relatives came to visit, my grandmother would sometimes comment on their news by saying: “The bed you make is the bed you lie in.” When she said phrases in Italian, or perhaps in dialect, I would jot them down in my little blue notebook. The first words in the list were “Doze belle,” my improvised spelling for the Italian phrase “tu sei bella,” meaning “you are beautiful,” as indeed all grandchildren are in their nonna’s eyes. In my family’s case, I was the only grandchild. Of my father’s three siblings, neither Ange nor Fred had married, and Frank’s marriage did not bring me any cousins.

The hope chest was nowhere to be found, my father reported upon returning, undoubtedly gone the way of the antique figurines, cameos, coins, and other missing valuables. This news triggered in me not only a sense of loss, but also a desire to know more about the needlework that comprised the corrodo. My father could only recall that my grandmother liked to crochet.
whereas my aunt had preferred embroidery. It then occurred to me that the corredo must have been originally intended for my aunt if she ever were to marry. I remembered sitting on her lap as she sang old American tunes like “How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?” and “All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth.” Aunt Ange, really Angelina, had lived at home and worked in a factory in nearby Maplewood until her retirement, duly commemorated with a Helvetia ladies watch. It is not clear to me whether this customary retirement gift is meant to demonstrate a company’s appreciation for the time spent in its service or to inaugurate the free time available after years of labor, but in my aunt’s case it marked time’s inexorability, since she suffered a stroke and died shortly thereafter. I was given Aunt Ange’s watch, along with her diamond ring, as a keepsake, but I never wore either for fear of losing them. Now, however, it seemed that I had lost her corredo even before coming into possession of it. Why had I never thought to seek it out before it was too late?

My sadness over the missing trousseau laid bare a deeper regret of not knowing more about my Italian family. I should have asked my grandmother to tell me what she remembered—the experiences of her youth, the life story of her own parents, her recipe for the zeppoli she made on St. Joseph’s Day, her incantations against headaches that proved uncannily effective. I had filled in only a few pages of my ambitiously titled “Italian-English dictionary,” but I would have been able to cover the notebook with her sayings and proverbs. Like Perceval at the palace of the Fisher King, I had lost access to the Grail by having failed to pose the vital questions. Any subsequent bits of knowledge to be gained would necessarily have to take the form of a quest.

During junior year abroad in Italy the following year, I traveled to my grandparents’ birthplace of Montefalcione, a beautiful hill town of a few thousand inhabitants near Avellino, in the Campania region. My grandparents themselves had returned there only once, for a week, to sell a plot of land my grandfather had inherited from his parents, but after that my grandmother had continued to correspond with three elderly unmarried sisters from the town. When I wrote them that I would be stopping to see Montefalcione while traveling during Easter break, they invited me to stay with them for the holiday. My gracious hosts, whether out of concern for my safety or their reputation, did not let me leave the house to explore the town unless in their company or in that of the trusted Gennarino, a cousin many-times-removed. Luckily, Gennarino was happy to take on the role of tour guide to his American cousin, showing me not only Montefalcione and its surroundings, but driving as far as Caserta for a picnic on Pasquetta, the holiday celebrated the day after Easter that young people generally spend with their friends. Gennarino also introduced me to a distant uncle and
aunt named Carmenuccio and Pasqualina, although I didn’t quite understand how they were related to me.

While in Montefalcone I also found that the town’s patron saint was Saint Anthony of Padua, which helped to explain why this figure was so important to my grandparents. In fact, each year on the last Sunday of August the community of Montefalconese immigrants would celebrate his feast day. Our family used to walk to the nearby church where we waited in line to pin dollars on his statue and then received bread blessed by the priest. Although the Vaux Hall feast was not famous like the one in Boston’s North End, it was the big event of the year in the neighborhood and always ended with a display of fireworks. In Montefalcone, my hosts took me to the Sanctuary of Saint Anthony, which we reached by passing through a twelfth-century gate marking the entrance to the medieval part of town. Perhaps because it was Holy Week, every day they brought me to mass, which was attended almost exclusively by women.

When Montefalcone was one of the towns hit by a massive earthquake on November 23, 1980, Gennarino came to stay for a time with relatives of his on a nearby street in Vaux Hall. He joked that when zio Carmenuccio and zia Pasqualina learned of his trip, they wanted to give him a big cheese to take as a wedding present because they thought he was coming to propose to me. My grandparents’ birthplace no longer seemed so far away. Nevertheless, no one from the town had been able to provide me with any further information about our family.

Thanks to a genealogy search, I found out that my grandmother Mary, really Armida, came to New York in 1897 at the age of four with her parents and siblings, while my grandfather James, really Vincenzo, was born in 1890 and set out for America on his own at the age of sixteen. From a visit to my uncle Frank, born in 1917, I learned that my grandfather had lived in Boston before moving to New Jersey and that he would never eat polenta because it had been served so relentlessly during his long journey across the Atlantic. My uncle also related other pieces of family history, such as the existence of an older sister who died of diphtheria as a child. His living room was graced by his woodworking and by doilies that my late aunt Minnie had crocheted.

It was only when my teaching and research as a university professor led me back to Italy in the late 1990s that I began to glimpse the astounding range of traditional handiwork created by women in every region of the country. While tracking down l’opera dei pupi (puppet theater) across Sicily, I saw many examples of punto antico, intricate drawn thread work. A woman selling curtains embellished with this style of counted-thread embroidery in Palma di Montechiaro, near Agrigento, explained that each piece required several weeks to complete. While directing Columbia’s summer program in
Scandiano, in the province of Reggio Emilia, I learned about Ars Canusina, a stylized embroidery that the psychiatrist Maria del Rio developed in the early 1900s as a healing therapy, using designs inspired by ornamental motifs from the time of the countess Matilde di Canossa (1046–1115). Accompanying students to an opera at the Arena in Verona, I was drawn to il pizzo di Verona, exquisite Veronese crocheted lace, displayed in storefront windows. It seemed that every place I visited had a specialized form of needlepoint. Regretting the disappearance of my corredo, I would have purchased some handcrafted centrini (centerpieces) if they hadn’t been so costly.

During a visit to Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara I purchased instead a poster that featured women weaving. It is a detail taken from the upper-level fresco representing the month of March in the palace’s Sala dei Mesi. Excluded from the reproduction is the central scene depicting an armed Minerva riding a chariot as well as the group of philosophers standing to her right in various poses of reading and discussing, presumably the liberal arts that are under her protection. The print captures instead the group of females to Minerva’s left, comprised of the three Fates handling thread in the foreground and about thirty young textile workers gathered around a large loom. The sense of continuity between the symbolic space of the goddesses determining human destiny and the labor of the industrious women creating textiles is striking. If it were not for the title of “Le Parche” under the print, one could mistake the Parcae for the mortal weavers above them, dressed as they are in the same clothing, their delicate faces conveying the same expression of quiet concentration. Wasn’t weaving, after all, a metaphor for life itself? But could threads ever be reconnected once they were broken?

My uncle Fred eventually returned to the family home where he spent his final years. After he passed away in 2002, my father and my uncle Frank finally decided to put the house up for sale. They were selling it “as is” and leaving the task of clearing it out to the new owner, perhaps to avoid digging up painful memories. When I told my father that I wanted to visit the house one last time, he gave me the key and told me to check whether there was anything that I would like to have.

As I drove up to the house, I saw that the brick steps leading to the front porch were cracked and sagging, the yellow window shades were pulled down, and the porch that once welcomed visitors with its trellis of climbing roses and green wicker chairs was now empty, except for a stray cat on the worn-out doormat. Across the street there was a plot of land large enough to build another house, but my grandfather had reserved it for growing vegetables that supplied the family’s needs—tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, zucchini, beans, and the like—as well as tobacco that he both rolled into cigars.
and smoked in his pipe. When I was very young, he would pick basil and crumble it in his hand, releasing its fragrance for me to savor. As could be expected, the once-vigorous garden had given way to a field of overgrown weeds with some trash haphazardly strewn about. Nor was there any sign of the immense fig tree whose fruit we used to pick from my aunt's upstairs bedroom window or the grape arbor that my grandfather had constructed behind the house. It was hard to believe that the backyard had once been bustling with rabbits, chickens, pigeons, and even a pig.

The changes wrought by time outside the house stood in stark contrast to the extreme state of preservation within. Entering through the front door was like stepping back into my childhood. Although almost three decades had passed since my grandmother's death, everything appeared as pristine as she had left it, from the Persian rugs to the crystal chandeliers. Uncle Frank and Aunt Minnie's 1951 wedding photo stood on the fireplace mantle in the parlor along with my father's 1953 high-school senior portrait and my 1959 baby picture. In the dining room were the china closet, buffet, credenza, and table we had never sat at and that still looked new even though a sticker underneath the table had the date of 1928. There were complete...
sets of dishes, including one they had accumulated piece by piece through the promotional offer of a local cinema, and fancy glassware of all sizes. The kitchen, with its Formica-top table and shiny vinyl chairs popular in the 1950s, looked as though it had never been used.

It was in the downstairs basement kitchen, after all, that we had eaten all that macaroni. I recognized the porcelain-top farm table and the mixed dishware in the pantry that bore the nicks and chips of decades ago. The player piano, already out of tune when I was growing up, stood silently along the wall. The rest of the downstairs was dedicated to my grandfather's workshop, which was lined with every kind of tool imaginable. A master craftsman, he had made most of what he needed by hand, from copper funnels he used in wine-making and massive wooden spoons for the pasta pot to an outdoor swing and sandbox for his granddaughter. On the wall above his workbench hung a framed group photo of about forty-five men of all ages, some holding bocce balls. There my grandfather stood smiling next to a large banner that read Fratellanza S. Antonio, fondata 1914. Small print identified the occasion as the Brotherhood of Saint Anthony's twenty-fifth anniversary outing, July 1939.

Before heading back upstairs, I peeked into the wine cellar. Mason jars filled with homemade tomato sauce and peppers formed neat rows across the cabinet shelves. The wine press stood in the back corner along with the barrels, and gallon jugs of red wine lined the floor. My grandfather used to send me into that little room to fetch a bottle of wine before sitting down to Sunday dinner, and he would inevitably reward my efforts by pouring a bit of it into my glass of lemon soda.

When I ventured into the attic, I was surprised to find a baby carriage, crib, tricycle, rocking horse, games, and dolls galore—a reminder that I had lived with my parents in the house until I was almost three. I wound up the handle of a painted metal jack-in-the-box from before the era of plastic, and the notes still rang out the familiar tune of "Pop! Goes the Weasel." A huge cardboard box contained an assortment of stuffed animals, including a giraffe that was taller than me when I'd won it at the Seaside Heights boardwalk. Another box contained beautiful 1950s-style dresses that only my slender-waisted mother, Jacqueline, could have fit into. I set these aside to show my ten-year-old daughter Cristina. Army clothes that belonged to my father, Joseph, in the next box would be of interest to my eight-year-old son Alberto, who was obsessed with G. I. Joe action figures and comic books at the time.

With some hesitation, I ventured beyond our section of the attic and opened a trunk that contained Uncle Fred's army clothes from World War II and brightly colored copriletti, bedcovers, that he had brought back from
Italy upon his return. From various papers tucked away to the side I learned that he had been inducted into the army in February 1942 and that by 1945 he had reenlisted and served as a staff sergeant in Livorno, Tuscany. The tags on his trunk and travel bag showed that he had returned home on the steamship *Vulcania* at the end of 1947. Along with a stack of postcards and letters he had sent to my grandmother from Italy were two letters from a certain Francesca mailed from Florence to his Vaux Hall address in December 1947 and January 1948. The first letter, in Italian, was the response to a postcard he had sent from Naples just before his departure, while the second one, in English, began by expressing joy at having already received two letters of his from New Jersey. She continued: “If it is true, an immense distance separates us, but it is equally true that when two persons love each other as tenderly as we do there exists no obstacles. [...] In your second letter you ask me if there is any way to come to the States. I shall ask in the apposite places and then let you know all about it.” Had I come close to having an Italian aunt? I would never know. My father said that his brother had never spoken about his years in Italy. The window into my uncle’s past closed back shut at the end of that letter.

Taken aback by the unexpected revelation, I wondered whether it was right to unlock memories of a past that did not belong to me. Perhaps it was out of a sense of respect that my father and Uncle Frank had decided to leave the house untouched. Could I continue to search for my identity through family history without invading their privacy? Or did I risk replaying the part of Pandora, who out of curiosity unleashed a host of plagues and sorrows upon the world? Uncertain whether to go on, I watched particles of dust linger in the air before settling back down on worn, broken chairs and other household objects once deemed too precious to discard and now abandoned to their fate. It was getting late in the afternoon. As the sunlight began to fade, pieces of furniture and racks of clothes cast long shadows into recesses that the bare light bulb suspended above me was hardly equipped to illuminate.

I felt compelled to continue for a little longer while some light still entered from the windows. The next set of boxes belonged to my aunt Ange. There was mostly clothing, pocketbooks, hats, and shoes. One fancy black dress with pastel flowers had the price tag on it from Macy’s in Newark, indicating that she had never worn it. Was it that the right occasion had never arisen or that she suffered the stroke prior to the event for which she’d bought it? She had never worn a wedding dress, either, I thought, remembering a conversation that occurred a few months after she died. It was a Sunday, and friends of my grandmother had paid her a visit while we were sitting in the parlor. The television had been shut off indefinitely as a sign of mourning,
so perhaps I was more attentive to their dialogue than I would have been otherwise. They told her about the death of a fellow named Anthony whose last name I didn't recognize. My grandmother clearly knew him, though, and she began to talk with her friends about how young he was, like Ange, about how strange fate is, and that if Ange had agreed to marry him, they would have died at the same age. I didn't have the heart to inquire about the broken romance with either my grandmother or my father, who was twenty-four years younger than Angelina and had considered her more of a second mother than a sister.

I decided not to open any more boxes. In any case, by this time there were very few left and the sun had already begun to set. Before turning to make my way out from the labyrinth in the impending darkness, though, my eyes fell upon a large trunk pushed against the wall. Kneeling under the sloping roof, I pulled the trunk toward me a little and lifted the lid. The next moment I found myself looking upon a stack of crocheted doilies, potholders, placemats, and tablecloths, along with embroidered bath towels, dish towels, handkerchiefs, nightgowns, bedsheets, and pillowcases. There was a drawn thread tablecloth, napkins, and doilies in a matching style. Underneath all of the handcrafted biancheria were Millford sheets and pillowcases, plus yards and yards of folded muslin fabric. As I stared blurry-eyed at what I knew to be il corredo, I wondered why I hadn't been looking for it all along. Or perhaps I had been doing just that without consciously acknowledging it. Whichever it was on my part, I thanked the Fates for bringing my grandmother and aunt close to me again, not only as the female relatives who had nurtured me during my childhood, but as part of a group of Italian American women who had carried their traditional skills and life-enriching crafts with them from the old land of their mothers to the new land of their daughters.

That day I drove home with my corredo. The next week, with the consent of my father and uncle, I hired a moving company and returned to Vaux Hall for as many pieces of furniture as could reasonably fit in my smaller house. My own previous furniture was brought to the curbside so that passers-by could help themselves to it. My children and I then brought life to the many family possessions that we welcomed into our home, eating daily on the porcelain-top farm table and making fresh orange juice with the old-fashioned manual juicer. We placed the crocheted tablecloth over my grandparents' dining-room table and doilies on the rest of the furniture. In my upstairs bedroom, I began using the heavy copriletto in winter and the crocheted bedspread in the spring. The art may have been lost in our family, I thought, but at least I was blessed to have the artifacts.

It would not be totally accurate, though, to say that needlework was no longer a pastime of the women in our family. A couple years later, when my
daughter was in seventh grade, she spontaneously expressed a desire to take up crocheting. Despite my skepticism that it would be too difficult to learn on her own, she insisted on taking out instructional manuals from the local library and received further assistance in mastering the basic stitches from my mother, whose specialty is Afghan blankets. What I had assumed was a passing whim became one of my daughter’s preferred pastimes, resulting in an array of blankets, scarves, hats, and sweaters for family members, friends, and favorite teachers. To be more precise, then, what was missing from our modern family was knowledge of the intricate stitches used by Italian American immigrant women like my grandmother.

Yet the Fates don’t only spin, measure, and cut single threads; they weave them together in unforeseen patterns. During the summers my children and I spent in Scandiano, our lives had become entwined with that of our neighbor, Franca Iotti. When I brought my teenage daughter and son back with me to the town while on a research leave in the fall of 2006, Franca spent many evenings sharing her traditions and pastimes with us. After dinner we sometimes played the card game *briscola* or sang folk songs like “*Quel mazzolin di fiori*” (“That Little Bunch of Flowers”). Thanks to Franca’s impromptu cooking lessons, Alberto became the designated expert in
gnocco fritto, rectangles of rolled dough deep-fried in lard, and Cristina perfected the technique of making fresh pasta with a meter-long rolling pin. As Christmastime approached, we gathered around Franca's kitchen table along with her mother, Erminia, and other neighborhood women to form cappellelli (Emilian-style tortellini). As it turned out, Franca and her mother were also adept in the art of crochet, or l'uncinetto in Italian, and their homes were decorated with examples of their work.

Franca was always willing to answer our many questions about her experience as a young girl growing up in a farming family, and she happily obliged us when we asked about the assembling of a corredo. This custom, she explained, allowed young women to put their talent on display in works that would subsequently personalize their living space. It was especially vital to those brides who moved in with their husband's families under a patriarchal system, since it would have allowed them to surround themselves with things they truly owned. Franca herself had learned to crochet from her grandmother and mother when she was nine or ten years old and then practiced various techniques of needlework and sewing in intermediate school where three years of domestic economy courses were compulsory. In the evening the women of the family, sometimes in the company of their neighbors, would crochet or embroider together. "We could never have our hands idle," she recalled, "so when we finished one project we started another." By the time Franca married in 1972, she had a sizable corredo that she had accumulated over the years with the contribution of her grandmother and her aunts. She had especially enjoyed embroidering designs and flowers, such as colorful daisies and violets, on dish towels, bath towels, aprons, and linen napkins. In the years immediately following her marriage, however, Franca noticed that the young women around her no longer put together a corredo. Needlework fell into disuse, except for a few specialists who have retained the art. Like many other rich cultural traditions that had once characterized Italian and Italian American life, this one had fallen by the wayside, a victim not only of a shifting attitude toward gender roles but also of an increasingly media-driven, fast-paced consumer society on both sides of the Atlantic.

The evolution in bedsheets, however, suggested that at least some of the changes were determined by sheer practical aspects. When Franca's mother was young, sheets were made by first weaving flax on a loom and then sewing together the squares of linen. For Franca's bedsheets, however, her mother had purchased the linen and her aunt had embellished the borders. Both kinds were customarily washed in the open air twice a year, spring and fall, with a huge pail of boiling water and ashes, and their robust quality allowed them to repeatedly withstand this rigorous manner of manual washing. Around the 1970s, Franca told us, people started buying colored bedsheets that came
ready-made in stores. Her nephew and his wife, for example, would never use a white-linen bedsheet and she wouldn’t even think of giving them one as a gift. In fact, Franca herself had definitively put away the sheets from her corredo and used only the store-bought variety because they were lighter, softer, and easy to wash weekly in the washing machine. In this case it would be hard to deny that innovations brought by modernity had increased comfort and lessened the burden of domestic chores.

I was touched when Franca responded to my daughter’s fascination with the art by giving her several doilies. Mamma Erminia generously added some of her crocheted potholders as well. It didn’t occur to me that Cristina could actually learn those intricate patterns, however, until she surprised us at Christmas with a crocheted centrino that resembled some of the needlework in my corredo. As she later explained, one afternoon as she was scrutinizing a crocheted piece trying to unravel the mystery of its stitch, Franca volunteered to teach her the pattern. In this way, the chain that Nonna Armida had woven in America so long ago was picked up and continued through the stitching of her great-granddaughter while back on Italian soil.

Domestic needlework, as I am reminded whenever I teach the Literature Humanities syllabus, is not only an Italian and Italian American tradition, but an ancient art used by women of the Mediterranean and beyond throughout the centuries to express themselves creatively, lending meaning to their daily lives. Whenever I read about Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Ramsey knitting socks for the boy staying at the lighthouse or using her green shawl to cover a boar’s skull on the wall that frightened her daughter at bedtime (To the Lighthouse), I can connect this archetypical female character to the lived experience of the women in my own family. Looking around my home, I have to acknowledge that the Fates truly are women with thread in their hands. While some strands are cut away and forever lost, others can be pulled back into the fabric and combined with new ones that are being constantly woven into the tapestry of our lives.