

THIS HEAVY SILENCE: A NOVEL BY
NICOLE MAZZARELLA. PARACLETE
PRESS (BREWSTER MA), 2005. 253 PP
HC \$21.95.

Dottie Connell, the protagonist of
Nicole Mazzarella's new novel, *This
Heavy Silence*, is not an easy woman to
like. A hard-working farmer who loves
her land above all else, Dottie doesn't
have the time or patience for other
people, kind words, or most types of
love. The challenge of raising her best
friend's orphaned daughter falls, for
years, to open her to love. But this
challenge does not fail her forever, and
it carries us to a conclusion that is of
the best sort: bittersweet.

Dottie's main cross in life seems to be
her largely self-induced isolation. When

she was young, the man she was
engaged to married someone else;
decades later, Dottie is still alone and
bitter. This is partially understandable.
She is a single woman trying to run a
farm in the 1960s and '70s, in a

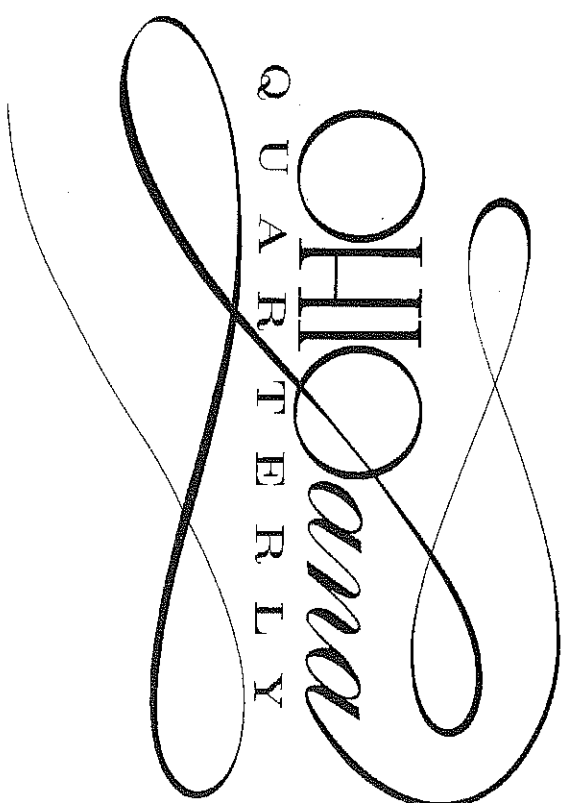
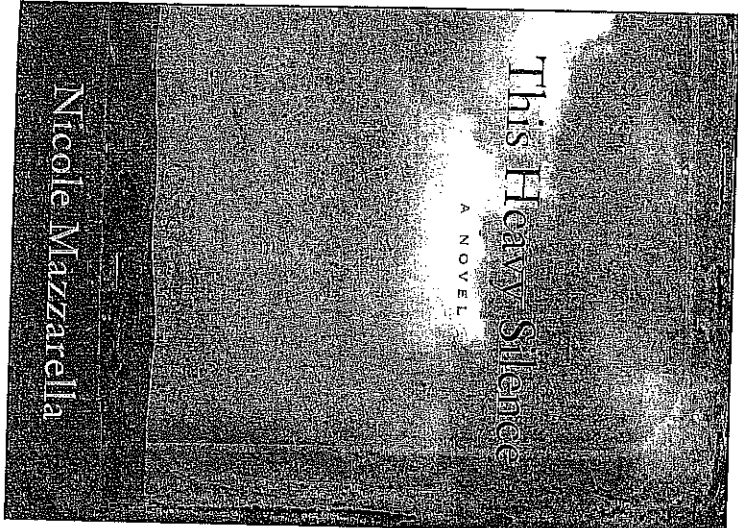
community of conservative people who
generally don't know what to do with a
strong woman. But Dottie cannot
blame her isolation wholly on her time
and place, or even her past. She has
some very good opportunities for
enriching her life, opportunities for
love that she allows to pass her by. This
is heartbreaking to witness, and a great
credit to Mazzarella, who does not give
her protagonist an easy way out of the
life she's chosen. She does not try to
save her, or spare her the pain of her
decisions. Mazzarella treats her

protagonist as an individual of
consequence. She treats her
with respect.

In *This Heavy Silence*, we get a
respectful and realistic portrait
not only of stubborn loneli-
ness, but also of farm life in
the Ohio valley. Mazzarella's
details are physical, sensory,
dead-on, and her sentences are
confident and lean. Although
sometimes her sentences
struck me as a little too lean,
and although sometimes a
particularly enigmatic line sent
me on a wild goose chase, I
admired the clean, spare prose.
The novel's sense of inevitable
loss will stay with me for a
long time.

Mazzarella is from Lexing-
ton, OH.

Rev. Hoggan



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