

DONNA: WOMEN IN ITALIAN CULTURE

Ada Testaferri, ed. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions Inc., University of Toronto Italian Studies 7, 1989

Santo L. Aricò

This volume is a selection of twenty-three essays that were originally presented at York University in February 1987 as part of an International Symposium on Women in Italian Studies. The collection deals with the works of women authors, the historical background to the movement of formal feminism in contemporary Italy, and women as characters in literary works written by men. In its totality, it offers to modern readers an overview of a hitherto neglected aspect of Italian letters.

The first major section is entitled *Women as Agents of Change* and emphasizes their impact in the postmodern world both in literature and political life; three of the articles, by Judith Adler Hellman, Linda Hutcheon and Hohn Picchione, relate specifically to the appearance of feminism in recent Italian cultural history.

The remaining essays in the first part highlight the aesthetic contributions of women writers – either through an overview of their productivity or an explication of particular works. Bice Mortara Garavelli examines Maria Corti's position of importance; Jen Weinstein distinguishes three types of male figures in Natalia Ginzburg's works.

Rocco Capozzi concentrates on Elsa Morante's fiction and connects her final novel, *Aracoeli*, to autobiographical truth. Laura Pietropaolo scrutinizes the genesis of Liliana Cavani's *Night Porter* and explores the role of sexuality in the film, and William Anselmi analyses the utopian discourse in Fiora Vincenti's two novels *Utopia per flauto solo* and *Le due signore*.

Deborah Heller's structural study of Anna Banti's *Artemesia* accentuates the dynamic interchange between protagonist and author-narrator and the subsequent thematic rejection of despair; Ada Testaferri's examination of *La Madre* supports her belief that love, which represents a dominant theme in the literary vision of Grazia Deledda overwhelms and isolates its victims. Anne Urbancic's es-

say on Annie Vivanti's "L'Invasore" explores the reasons for the continuing popularity of this play, while Fiora Basanese underscores the autobiographical fidelity of Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna*. Lucienne Kroha advocates that the Marchesa Colombi's *Un matrimonio in provincia* prefigures the importance of gender considerations, not by attacking bourgeois institutions directly, but in a complex mediation between literary conventions and the writer's experience.

While Antonio Franceschetti investigates the lesser known writer Francesca Manzoni's eighteenth-century tragedy, *Esther*, both Paola Malpezzi Price and Sara Adler indicate the Petrarchan tradition in the sixteenth-century poets Chiara Matraini and Isabella Di Morra.

Marguerite Waller's essay on sexual difference in Dante's *Commedia* introduces the concluding section of this volume, *Images of Women in Italian Literature*, followed by Laurie Detenbeck's analysis of the female characters in Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena's *La Calandria*. Maristella de Panizza Lorch discusses the importance of humor in Macchiavelli's *Mandragola*; Domenico Pietropaolo describes Judith as the *femme fatale* of the baroque stage in Federico Della Valle's tragedy *Iudit*.

Anthony Verna's exploratory study of two significant Leopardi poems from the *Aspasia* cycle examines the poet's concept of love and its corollary view of women. S. Bernard Chandler emphasizes Manzoni's originality in deriving universal meaning from the humble character of Lucia Mondella in *I Promessi Sposi*, and Mauro Buccheri's conclusion accentuates the theme of maternal regeneration as a utopic force in Pirandello's *La nuova colonia*.

This volume of essays represents a welcome addition to the growing number of critical works dealing with the importance of women writers in Italy. In 1978, Anna Nozzoli's penetrating study *Tabù e coscienza: la condizione femminile nella letteratura italiana del Novecento* offered insight into the contributions of Italian women to literature in the twentieth century. Sandra Petrignani's recent *Firmato donna. Una donna un secolo* (1986) analyses the relationship between Italian women and key problems in the modern era, while Paola Blelloch's *Quel Mondo dei quanti e*

della stoffe (1987) defines the various themes in the works of modern women writers in Italy. The most recent issue of *Italica* (1988) is entitled *Women's Voices* and contains articles on feminist literature of the 1970s, and on Elsa Morante and Gina Lagorio. The present collection, *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, continues the attempt to publicize the creativity of Italian women writers and stands as one of the first attempts to do so in North America.

THE MERIDIAN ANTHOLOGY OF EARLY WOMEN WRITERS: British Literary Women from Aphra Behn to Maria Edgeworth 1660-1800

Katharine M. Rogers & William McCarthy, eds. New York & Scarborough, Ont.: New American Library, 1987

THE SIGN OF ANGELICA: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800

Janet Todd. London: Virago Press, 1989

Ann B. Shteir

The last five years have seen a tremendous flowering in our knowledge about women writers and women's writing in the eighteenth century. One important publication, for example, the *Biographical Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800* (ed. Janet Todd, 1985), contains information about more than 300 British women writers and 200 American women writers from that period; of the British women writers, 100 date from before the mid-eighteenth century, and over 200 of them were actively writing and publishing after 1760. Their numbers, and the array of female expression and creativity they represent, are startling, even to readers of women's literature and other women's studies buffs. There is a treasure-trove of writing by women from eighteenth-century England waiting to be explored and interpreted.

Katharine Rogers is one of the early pioneers in publicizing women's writing during this period. She has published the