



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Italian Women Poets of the Twentieth Century by Catherine O'Brien

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democracy, built on Fascism and supported economically by the United States; and the social organization of Western Europe as a whole. The analysis then moves to a discussion of how Fo utilizes the genre of farce to accomplish his goals.

This edition accomplishes its objectives in a straightforward and intelligent manner. The information serving as background is well selected and presented clearly and precisely. Students of Italian or theater students with reading knowledge of Italian are provided with enough of a comprehensive view — historical, political, legal, and theatrical — to fully appreciate Fo's play, both in its specific context, concerning the Pinelli incident in its time and place, as well as in its broader context as a work of political theater with an extraordinary potential to be translated, adapted, and appreciated all over the world. The selection of words in the vocabulary and of the idioms explained in the notes are appropriate for the level targeted, making this edition very usable as a classroom text.

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Catherine O'Brien. *Italian Women Poets of the Twentieth Century*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996. Pp. 310.

Catherine O'Brien, who lectures in the Department of Italian at University College in Cork, has previously co-edited (with Alessandro Gentili) a volume of contemporary Italian poetry, *The Green Flame* [Dublin, 1987]. This new anthology, as the title states, focuses on Italian women poets. It contains a selection of each poet's work in Italian and in English translation preceded by a lengthy introductory essay. Poets included are: Antonia Pozzi (1912–1938), Daria Menicanti (1914–1995), Margherita Guidacci (1921–1992), Biagia Marniti (b.1921), Maria Luisa Spaziani (b.1921), Amelia Rosselli (1930–1996), Alda Merini (b.1931), Jolanda Insana (b.1937), Biancamaria Frabotta (b.1946), Vivian Lamarque (b.1946), and Patrizia Valduga (b.1953). Regrettable are the absences of Ain Zara Magno, Giovanna Sicari, and Giulia Niccolai. Poets who lived between the two centuries, but who wrote well into the Novecento, were also excluded: Sibilla Aleramo, Ada Negri, and Amalia Guglielminetti. All in all, however, this anthology may be considered an outstanding selection of Italian women poets writing in the twentieth century. (Other recent collections of Italian women writers are: *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, ed. Rinaldina Russell [Westport, 1997]; *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, ed. Laura Anna Stortoni [New York, 1997]; and *Twentieth Century Italian Women Writers*, ed. Alba Amoia [Carbondale, 1996]. Also of interest is a selection of essays, *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. Maria Ornella Marotti [University Park, PA, 1996].)

Since *Italian Women Poets* most definitely helps to fill the troubling gaps of previous collections, it is very welcome. Among the most practical tools of this volume are the introductory essays. Each poet is well presented and properly situated so that the reader may appreciate her background and her uniqueness. The introductions are remarkable achievements for they allow us to discover writers who are virtually unknown outside of Italy. Catherine O'Brien interviewed Alda Merini and Amelia Rosselli, and fragments from these conversations are included in the volume, thus considerably enriching our knowledge. We learn that some of the writers were part of major literary movements or were distinctly marked by their association with particular voices: Antonia Pozzi worked with Antonio Banfi while enrolled at the University of Milan in the thirties, and she befriended Luciano Anceschi, Enzo Paci, Vittorio Sereni, and many others. Biagia Marniti studied and was encouraged by Ungaretti. Maria Luisa Spaziani was very close intellectually and personally to Montale. Yet other poets such as Daria Menicanti, Margherita Guidacci, and Amelia Rosselli do not fall

easily into any single category. They seem to retain their own peculiar poetic identities. Menicanti is strongly tied to the city of Milano; her poetry tells of her incomparable rapport with the Lombard metropolis: "Tutto questo che ad altri forse è pena / angoscioso rifiuto, / quando mi eri lontana, / città di case, ospite cara, / a me sempre è mancato / doluto per tutte le vene." Rosselli and Jolanda Insana have both forged an unusual "multilinguistic" style. Insana writes in Italian though she borrows words from Greek, Latin, and Sicilian: "m'infrastocchio in angiporti e non mi smielo." This type of procedure, we may add, has roots in Dante, Folengo, and Gadda. Rosselli, on the other hand, writes in Italian, English, and French, and she intermingles foreign syntactical structures as well as individual words. We learn that poets of the more recent generation, such as Patrizia Valduga, have returned to the classic forms of early Italian poetry (e.g., the sonnet). There are many surprises and stimuli in this wonderful compendium. The difficulty afforded by specific poems is overcome by the translations, which are generally faithful to the literal meaning of the text. An example may be seen in O'Brien's transposition of a fragment from Jolanda Insana's "Fendenti fonici:"

scialate-scialate
 rattoppatori di cenci raccattonati
 prima o poi arriva il giubileo mengaldo
 che depone croce de profundis et de sanctis
 enjoy yourselves, enjoy yourselves
 menders of picked up rags
 sooner or later the mengaldo jubilee will arrive
 for the deposition of croce de profundis and de sanctis

(O'Brien explains terms that a non-Italian reader may not understand, such as "mengaldo," "croce," and "de sanctis.")

There are, however, a few renderings that ought to be revised in future editions. For example, in Maria Luisa Spaziani's "La Via Crucis," "fulminato" is rendered as "ravaged" instead of "thunder-struck"; and the translation of the poem's last two lines adds an ambiguity lacking in the original: "E forse oscuramente anche sentiva / che non soltanto il Cristo delle icone / il passo sterminato delle tenebre / lo varca in nostro nome" / becomes "And perhaps he also felt obscurely / that not only the Christ of the icons / passes over the threshold / into the endless darkness in our name." Since the object of the verb "varca" is "il passo sterminato delle tenebre," the translation should read: "Not only Christ . . . passes over the threshold of endless darkness in our name." The fourth line of Antonia Pozzi's "Fine" ("E m'imbarca") becomes "And I embark" as opposed to "it embarks me," (that is, it takes me on board). The first stanza of Patrizia Valduga's sonnet, "A me creduta esangue, non veduta" is syntactically rearranged, which results in more of a rewriting than a translation. This could be confusing to an aspiring linguistic neophyte, even though it is an intriguing exercise: "A me creduta esangue, non veduta, / un'oncia di coraggio, una manciata / di ragione scovata e già perduta / lo dica qui dei vati la brigata, / di astrologi e indovini, il ciel il aiuta," becomes "A handful of reason unearthed — / an ounce of courage: not noticed, / considered lifeless, already lost — / let the company of bards, astrologers and prophets / say it here. . . ." At other times words are added in the translation. In Margherita Guidacci's "Anniversario con agavi" we read "la breve festa nuziale / al sole e al vento, celebrata da sciame / d'api d'oro — poi, subito, la morte." The English reads: "the short nuptial banquet / in the sun and in the wind, celebrated by swarms / of golden bees — then, suddenly death *appears*" (emphasis mine).

Given the wide range and quantity of texts translated in this volume, it is inevitable that certain poems are perhaps somewhat hastily or imperfectly rendered into English. Yet there is no question that *Italian Woman Poets* represents a singular achievement. It is the result of much hard work, and it indeed fills a lacuna which has existed

for far too long. Catherine O'Brien cites appropriately these verses from Modesta del Pozzo's 1581 "Floridano" (229):

Le Donne in ogni età fur da Natura
Di gran giudicio, e d'animo dotate,
Ne men atte à mostrar con studio, e cura
Senno, e valor de gli huomini son nate,
E perché, se commune è la figura,
Se non son le sostanze variate,
S'hanno simile un cibo, e un parlar denno
Diferente haver poi l'ardire, e 'l senno?

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Luigi Rustichelli, ed. *Seminario sulla drammaturgia: Ferrone, Meldolesi, Marino, Martinelli, Molinari, Fo*. West Lafayette, IN; Bordighera, 1998. Pp. 87.

Questo volume comprende gli Atti del seminario "Incontri sulla drammaturgia italiana contemporanea" patrocinato dall'Istituto Antonio Banfi, e tenutosi a Reggio Emilia nel 1991. Il topos investigato dai sei saggi che costituiscono la raccolta in esame è quello relativo alla definizione di "drammaturgia," che, come avverte Luigi Rustichelli nella "Presentazione," è affrontato nella sua concretezza di "fare" teatro, cioè di operazione teatrale nei suoi vari aspetti di copione, di recitazione, e di messa in scena vera e propria. Nella Parte Prima, questo approccio concreto al mestiere teatrale viene assunto come premessa ai saggi preliminari di Siro Ferrone e Claudio Meldolesi, che sono di argomento strettamente pratico e legati all'esperienza personale.

In "Introduzione: Come nasce un copione," Ferrone focalizza la sua attenzione di autore e critico sul tradizionale rapporto spettatore-spettacolo, da leggersi come "il teatro guardato da dietro il palcoscenico" (1) nei termini di come si fa, o come si guarda, lo spettacolo. Questo richiede una particolare conoscenza degli strumenti atti a leggere il testo drammatico, non solo come testo letterario ma anche come allestimento di un lavoro teatrale. Ferrone lamenta la tendenza della cultura italiana ad avere tradizionalmente favorito la istituzione di uno spettatore ch'egli chiama critico (versato allo studio della storia del teatro), anziché, come nell'area anglo-americana, del modello di uno spettatore consapevole del teatro come *performing art* (lo studio del teatro come pratica). Fra gli autori contemporanei, che compendiano il rapporto ideale tra testo, attore, a sceneggiatura, si privilegiano Pier Paolo Pasolini, Giovanni Testori, e Dario Fo — quest'ultimo quando non soccombe al parossismo messianico-ideologico.

L'attenzione sulla pratica del fare teatro riceve ulteriore sviluppo nel saggio di Claudio Meldolesi "Poesia drammatica e recitazione: La drammaturgia, signora 'Dappertutto.'" Nel suo excursus organico dell'azione scenica dal primo declino della Commedia dell'arte al fenomeno del grande attore, dal Seicento a fine Ottocento, Meldolesi esamina il ruolo determinante dell'attore istrionico che si assume a formativo per i giovani autori teatrali. Si può, così, concepire un Tiberio Fiorilli-Scaramuccia, con le sue beffe immortali, che fu maestro di Molière, che su di lui modella la sua radicale drammaturgia della "naturalità" (19) per innestare vitalità nel rigore delle convenzioni. Scaramuccia si pone come un energico diaframma fra l'autore e l'azione in scena. Diventa, in essenza, un incentivo a un poetico gioco di identificazioni (attore-autore) che Meldolesi inquadra intorno alla creatività di un rapporto personale sostanzialmente ispiratore.

Rapporto più problematico è quello di Vittorio Alfieri coi suoi attori mercenari. Distanza dalle procedure di Molière e della sua naturalezza, l'Alfieri riuscì, tuttavia, e con successo, a portare i suoi interpreti nell'intimo delle sue tragedie. Per i suoi comici, la forma doveva riscoprire la traccia originaria.