

INTRODUCTION

Women and Territories in Italian Literature and Culture

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This issue of *Lingua Romana* began taking shape immediately following the BYU Women's Studies 2nd Annual Conference on *Women and Territories*, organized in Fall 2012 by Associate Professor of French Anca Sprenger and Associate Professor of Spanish/Coordinator of Women's Studies Valerie Hegstrom, which showcased the thought-provoking work of scholars across disciplines and with a global emphasis. Inspired by the conference presentations, Associate Professor of Italian Ilona Klein and Assistant Professor of Italian Jennifer Haraguchi, co-editors of this issue of *Lingua Romana*, wanted to provide a forum for the publication of peer-reviewed research on women and territories specifically in Italian literature and culture.

Through the generous funding of BYU's Department of French and Italian, in Winter 2013 we hosted two guest speakers—Paola Malpezzi Price, Professor of French and Italian at Colorado State University and Chiara Fabbian, Clinical Assistant Professor of Italian at the University of Illinois at Chicago—and have included their expanded essays in this issue. We also publicized a call for article submissions on aspects of women's experience in Italy having to do with "territories" in a real or abstract sense. We were pleased with the variety and scope of the submissions and have chosen to include the seven essays which provide the best coverage of the theme as it relates to Italy. The essays in this volume, with the exception of the final two, are placed in chronological order, according to subject.

The first essay by Paola Malpezzi Price documents the pioneering accomplishments of the Philadelphian writer, chef, and cyclist Elizabeth Robins Pennell who, with her English husband, traveled through Italy on a tandem bicycle in the 1880s. Tracing and crossing literal and figurative boundaries, Robins Pennell wrote copiously about her journeys and was possibly the first woman to explore Italy by bicycle. Dressed in Victorian attire, in 1897 she and her husband crested the Alps at 8,000 feet. Malpezzi Price's article highlights Robins Pennell's physical accomplishments and her dedication to establish and defend her identity through her writings.

Thirty years after Robins Pennell's work, the self-taught Sardinian writer Grazia Deledda also crossed literal and figurative boundaries by moving with her husband to Rome and becoming the first woman in Italy to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature (1926). Chiara Fabbian's essay demonstrates how Deledda marks the identity of her female protagonist in her quasi-autobiographical novel *Il paese del vento* (1931) through the meaning of smells and the memories they evoke. Fabbian argues that Deledda's narrative weaves elements from her protagonist's childhood, early adulthood, and married life with the historical, political, and social world of early twentieth-century Sardegna in a successful diachronic discourse centered on the olfactory. Deledda's protagonist struggles for her own intellectual, sexual, and social independence amid a

world of male mentorship, all the while seeking to interpret seminal olfactory experiences which, according to Fabbian, legitimize her perceptions, actions, and sense of self.

Moving forward and into the twenty-first century, and crossing other geographical and ideological boundaries, the Italian-Somali writer Igiaba Scego's novel *Rhoda* (2004) considers some of the tormenting issues that arise when immigrant and native cultures clash in their (mis)understandings of one another. Marie Orton's essay adopts a Lacanian framework which explains how Scego's narrative establishes the identity of the female protagonist through a subjective use of recognized symbols in language. As Scego's narrative develops, Orton argues, it becomes complicated by the reception of the *parole*, revealing how the protagonist's desire disintegrates and remains unfulfilled. Orton points out that Italy's historical colonial discourse further complicates the cultural clash through political and social destruction. Orton's analysis considers whether the confrontational stalemate will dissolve with the next generation and/or if the Lacanian identity can be reconstructed.

Also addressing contemporary issues of immigration in Italy, the Moldovan poet Eugenia Bulat, who has been living in Venice since 2007, writes haunting poetry about an immigrant's place in the mysterious and penetrating waterscape of Venice. Ilaria Serra's essay demonstrates how Bulat's poetry reflects the fears and uncertainties of an intellectual, active, and politically aware woman who is nevertheless an immigrant to her new, chosen aquatic world. Serra identifies the discordant symbolism associated with Bulat's representations of Dante's *femmina balba* and argues that Bulat seeks to express an otherwise marginalized voice through the songs and silences of her poetry.

The literary focus of the essays to this point shifts to an anthropological and cultural study of the history of Siena and its ramifications for today's Siennese women. Cinzia Donatelli Noble's essay considers the idea of territory as a delineated space of belonging, safety, and refuge. Donatelli Noble familiarizes the reader with several century-long traditions which divide Siena into seventeen unique neighborhoods, called *contrade*, each with its own strong culture and territorial pride. From a formal and historical frame, Donatelli Noble's study moves into an analysis of the modern applications of such spatial fractioning by treating interviews with several contemporary Siennese women who explain their obligations to, and enthusiasm for, the *contrada* to which each belongs.

Finally, the last two essays in this volume emphasize the literal and figurative territorial space of the sixteenth-century Venetian poet and courtesan Veronica Franco. Fabiana Cecchini's study of Franco's *Terze rime* draws on both the archetypal poetry of Petrarch and modern feminist theory to explore how the social and intellectual lives of Franco-protagonist and Franco-poet blend into a complex dance of assertiveness, needs, pain, humiliation, and a sense of pride in Franco's own poetry. Adele Sanna's essay links Veronica Franco's poetry and letters to the twentieth-century feminist orientation of Sicilian author Dacia Maraini's play *Veronica, meretrice e scrittrice*. Sanna's analysis combines Franco's ideological support of elitist prostitution and its insecurities with Maraini's depiction and critique of contemporary patriarchal commodification of women, objectified by a more or less pervading and overt misogyny.

The seven essays in this issue, analyzing the works of women in Italy in the sixteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, reveal a common theme about how women have negotiated their place in society: these essays demonstrate that women did not merely survive in—

and defend—a literal or figurative territorial space in Italy, but were passionate about extending and enlarging it through word and action.