

Gabriella Musetti. Oltre Le Parole. Scrittrici Triestine Del Primo Novecento

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di continuare ed ampliare il dialogo sulle opere di Vincenzo Consolo, dando spazio anche a giovani ricercatori.

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Gabriella Musetti. *Oltre Le Parole. Scrittrici Triestine Del Primo Novecento*. Trieste: Vita Activa, 2016. Pp. 318. ISBN 9788894045291.

The focus of this exceptionally interesting and beautifully edited volume of essays is on the lives and work of five Triestine women writers active in the turbulent first half of the Italian twentieth century. The polysemy of the title signals a promise that does not disappoint. The volume does not limit itself to the analysis of the literary opus of these now largely and unjustifiably forgotten writers — Ida Finzi (*nom de plume* Haydée), Pia Rimini, Fortuna Morpurgo (*nom de plume* Willy Dias), Anna Curiel Fano and Alma Morpurgo — but it truly ventures *oltre le parole*: first into the spaces of the city that defined the work of these writers, and then into those personal and external, physical spaces that have made possible and deeply meaningful the intellectual and emotional encounter between the woman author of each essay and her chosen woman writer.

Oltre le parole is a product of the *Laboratorio di scrittura*, a year-long collaborative research project of a group of Triestine women. The volume is divided into five sections: *Introduzione* by Gabriella Musetti; *Biografie*, with essays on individual authors by Mariella Grande (on Haydée), Maria Neglia (on Pia Rimini), Marcella Trulli and Giada Passalacqua (on Willy Dias), Silva Bon (on Anna Curiel Fano) and Marinella Zonta (on Alma Morpurgo); *Antologia*, with excerpts from novels, short-story collections or journalistic writing by the five authors under study; a remarkable *Bibliografia* of primary and secondary sources; and an essay by Silva Bon titled *Postfazione. La soggettività femminile ebraica tra Ottocento e Novecento a Trieste*. Regrettably, apart from their names and the rare scattered bits of personal information discernible from the essays, the volume contains no separate section with information about the contributors. Photographs and facsimiles from public and personal archives add to the appeal of this remarkable collection, certain to interest anyone working in the field of women's studies in Italy, Italian post-Risorgimento intellectual history and Italian Jewish studies.

In the *Introduzione*, Gabriella Musetti outlines the goals of her project. The first one is to acknowledge (with Dacia Maraini, on whose critical approach to the sociology of Italian literary institutions she strongly relies) the fact that, although the Italian book market is filled with works by best-selling women authors, Italian literary institutions (prize selection committees, encyclopedias, school anthologies, mainstream media, etc.) have consistently minimized the presence of women authors. The second goal is to focus on those women writers who, in the period politically and culturally crucial for Trieste, marked by deep tensions, distinguished themselves *both* as protagonists *and* as astute or ironic polemicists and observers, thus shaping cultural and political debates within the city and — through their works of journalism or fiction — between the city and Italy (first the *Regno* next door, then, after World War I, their new country).

For a few decades now, Trieste and its *letteratura di frontiera* — comprising the literary production of the Italian Northeast and the neighboring coastal areas of Croatia and Slovenia — has been drawing fresh critical attention as an important *locus* of cultural production, Mitteleuropean and Italian at the same time. In North America, this kind of attention has been more noticeable in Canadian than in U.S. universities; in the U.S., for instance, studying the multicultural in Italian literature has so far meant principally a focus on the works by recent immigrants from Africa and Asia living in large cities: Rome, Turin and Milan, at the expense of studying the historically dynamic multicultural settings of the Northeast. As this volume shows, women authors from Trieste, a city long positioned on a remarkably productive cultural and political fault line, were in their lifetime far from being strangers in mainland Italy. Several of them, in fact, occupied prominent posts as journalists in different Italian cities (Willy Dias, for example, was a journalist for *L'Unità* in Genova) or were best-selling authors of novels felt to be primarily addressed to women readers (Willy Dias, Haydée), seen as conventional but, examined more closely, containing important seeds of challenge to women's status quo. Some wrote about their experiences as exiles, first from Mussolini's Italy (Alma Morpurgo), and later from the cultural climate in the post-war Italian Republic where, following a long absence (Morpurgo spent seventeen years in Chile, before returning, in 1955, first to Rome and then Trieste), they found themselves professionally marginalized. Others, like Pia Rimini, were tragically defined by their deeply-felt Jewish *triestinità*: refusing to leave her city even when it fell under German occupation, in 1944 Rimini was deported to Auschwitz.

There is one omission in *Oltre le parole*: Each one of the authors examined is of Jewish origin. The final decades of the nineteenth and the first half

of the twentieth century were, of course, a central period in the life of Italian and Triestine Jewry. The role of Jewishness in the lives of writers such as Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba, and their complex identity as Triestines, have long been subjects of critical attention. Yet, the title of this volume does not make its focus on Triestine Jewish writing explicit. It would be a pity if such an omission made this remarkable work escape the attention of scholars working in the growing field of Jewish Italian studies. Indeed, if this book were to be translated into English, one can only hope that the title of the translation could be altered so as to make the focus on the literature by Jewish women authors more obvious.

This wonderful volume is all the more valuable considering that the work of many of the writers studied here is either out of print, or was published by small, regional publishing houses, or indeed remains accessible only in archives (an exception is the work of Willy Dias, which continued to be re-printed by a large Italian publisher until the 1970s).

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