

status quo. Pertanto, la seconda parte del libro "Testimonianze" è come una casa con le finestre aperte solo da un lato e gli interventi, benché interessanti nella loro individualità, sembrano acquarelli dello stesso panorama.

Malgrado questa lacuna, il libro *Giuliano-Dalmati in Australia* aggiunge un valido ed importante capitolo alla storia delle popolazioni delle regioni nord orientali dell'Italia che, maggiormente colpite dalla guerra e disperse dalla pace, aspirano oggi a riunirsi nella storiografia.

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Shemek, Deanna. *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy.* Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 1998. Pp. 258.

The title's juxtapositions, "wayward" versus "order," "women" versus "society," reinforced by the multi-levelled meaning of "errant," encapsulate the thesis of this study concerned with the literature that conveys women's potential for transgressing bounds set by society, and deviating from paths sanctioned by a culture centred on male privileges, thus posing, supposedly, a danger to individual men and to the order of the community as a whole. The title intends to evoke the fear in early modern culture, that representations of feminine initiatives — in intellectual achievement, in images of military prowess, in amorous indulgence — might lead the ordered society astray. The study that considers the *Orlando furioso*, the *Discorso* by Laura Terracina, and two of Bandello's novelle, effectively presents a counterpoint to social reservations and censure by celebrating the deliberate efforts of women in fiction, who advance beyond the social and cultural barriers set for them by men. In this way, the author invites the reader to understand errancy not in relation to doing "wrong" or "straying" from a fixed path, but rather as the deliberate act of resistance, symbolizing a separate sexual affirmation. Both fictional and historical references capture the sixteenth-century attempts at arresting the mobile and elusive female, personifying the difference that men located in women as a way of defining their own selves. Feminine physical and intellectual "mobility" was synonymous with waywardness, instability. (In today's colloquial jargon as well, the notion that woman ought to be "pregnant," "barefoot," "in the kitchen," implies essentially to circumscribe her mobility in the interest of masculine control.)

Although three of the five large chapters are centred upon the then very popular *Orlando furioso*, discussions about the feminine range over a wide literary and historical landscape where womanhood acquired its meanings, be it in the writings of progressive humanists, in fictional narrative, in poetry, treatises, or in literary theory, in a period of early modern Italy when writings on nearly every aspect of women's lives flourished to an unprecedented degree. Shemek regards the *Furioso's* importance as pivotal in European literary development up to Spenser,

Monteverdi, Cervantes, even to Italo Calvino's best loved novels. Inherent in the vast cultural panorama disclosed in this epic are fundamental dichotomies which Ariosto deliberately blurred in order to expose the difficulty of interpretation in a world of "contingency and moral dilemma" (10): dichotomy of Christian and Muslim, friend and foe, man and woman, good and evil. Shemek regards the contemporary, raging *querelle des femmes* as pertaining to the fashion of the *Furioso's* story where the narrating "voice" cannot make up his mind about women, and is in fact an "errant" type himself, fickle as the knights. Taken as a whole, the chapters are concerned not only with examining the great literary works concerned with gender issues in the early modern period, but also with identifying the inability to arrest, or set free, a movement potentially able to effect an unprecedented social transformation. The female figures examined loom large on the literary stage of this period, but were nevertheless denied a rooted context, a locus within the accepted social and moral fabric — headstrong, but also compromising and ambivalent women destined to remain in fiction and in literary iconicity as wayward women out of place.

The first chapter engages in an extensive examination of the Palio of San Giorgio as depicted in the Salon of the Months commissioned by Duke Borso d'Este of Ferrara. Here, the role of women and "pute insino a 14 anni" (202) is analysed in relation to moral and social significance. Although both "good" women and prostitutes participated, the former were clearly privileged by keeping a visible distance to affirm their Christian values, their domestic place and obedient stance in contrast with women regarded as transgressors. This visible and accepted festival pattern remained consonant with ongoing social practices and philosophies, which categorized women in terms of their relations to the female ideal of virginity. Like the *querelle des femmes*, it placed the question of chastity at the centre of the concerns with women's worth and proper social roles.

Chapters 2 and 3 continue the discussion of the contrasting representations and roles of women in the *Furioso*, in the creations of the exotic Indian princess Angelica, inexplicably blonde and supremely beautiful on one hand, and on the other, the warrior-heroine, wife and queen, Bradamante. In "That Elusive Object of Desire," Deanna Shemek offers a detailed and fresh exploration of the relations between the notions of womanhood and desire in the *Furioso*, relating them to Ariosto's presentations of selfhood and difference, pointing out that Ariosto deliberately imports into the text several of the most important discourses of the sixteenth century: the humanist liberalization of female education, the activity of a number of women poets, the prominence of the women of powerful families in Italy's courtly society, and in contrast, the relegation of women to a subsidiary sphere, the value of accomplished women as a reflection and enhancement of the superior skills of men — issues significant enough "to constitute Italy's *querelle des femmes*" (46). The presence of Angelica as an elusive object of male gaze and desire is studied in terms of Lacan's structural scheme where, as for Ariosto, the elements of escape and repetition are integral components. As a consequence, woman always remains beyond grasp and comprehension, so that attempts at appropriation are doomed to continuous repetition. Having placed himself in

absolute specular opposition to Angelica as ideal, as Woman, Orlando can possess Angelica only in his imagination, and when confronted with concrete evidence confirming his loss of her, his withdrawal from desire, his rejection of language and self lead to loss of his human self and eventual madness. Intrigues and blurring of gender and desire form the basis of discussion for the chapter centred upon Bradamante, "Gender, Duality, and Sacrifices of History." Shemek discusses the fact that issues of gender are kept very visibly in the foreground in repeated instances of the *Furioso*, not only in light-hearted instances as when Fiordispina mistakes the gender of Bradamante and her twin look-alike brother Ricciardetto (113), but also in dramatic and crucial moments as when on Rodomonte's bridge, Bradamante makes an uncommon declaration of her sex before a joust, following her discovery of Isabella's tragic death in fidelity to the spirit of her dead husband. Toward the conclusion of the epic, the blurring and yet affirmation of gender reappears in the person of the pregnant warrior-wife-mother Bradamante who, with Marfisa, ventures out in search of the body of her slain husband Ruggiero, and in bloody revenge destroys "by fire and sword" the fief of the Maganzesi (123). Bradamante may give the semblance of domestication through marriage and motherhood, but till the end Ariosto impresses upon the reader her role as warrior and her nature as hero.

Whatever today's interpretations of femininity and feminism may be, it is recorded that in Ariosto's time women readers were affected by the poem's representations of the female sex and by the manner in which Ariosto repeatedly displays — openly and subliminally — the irrationality in contemporary notions of femininity. The purpose of Chapter 4, then, is to examine the response to the poem by the poet Laura Terracina, one of the *Furioso's* most avid readers of the sixteenth century. A prolific writer herself, Terracina set forth her views in the *Discorso sopra tutti i primi canti d'Orlando furioso*, which appeared in more than eleven editions between 1549 and 1608, over the six decades following Ariosto's death. So successful was the *Furioso*, that the *Discorso*, architecturally mimicking the epic, proved to be the most successful "spin-off" of its time. Shemek outlines in detail how Terracina constructed her poem replacing Ariosto's internal stanza content with her own message, framed by Ariosto's first and last verses for each stanza, so that what results is in fact a "kind of coauthored *Furioso* in miniature, whose female-authored stanzas serve as echo chambers for the resonance of the canonical male poet's lines" (131). One can only imagine how a living Ariosto would have reacted to such appropriation, especially following his recommendation (*Canto XXXVII.23*), that women should render their own independent "virtues immortal" ("poi che voi fate / per voi stesse immortal vostra virtute"). Terracina's purpose, however, was timely and pressing, and using a remake of the most popular literary work as a vehicle, assured not only the profitable marketing and dissemination of her own message, but also the continued popularity of the *Furioso's* illustrations, much to the printers' profit and delight. Terracina's pressing wish was to discuss men's injustices to women, as well as the barriers she herself experienced as woman and writer: "Vorrei parlar, ma l'ira il dir m'intoppa / Poi che sola difendo il nostro sesso. / Già il desiderio mio brama, e galoppa / Di ven-

dicarsi, e pur non m'è concesso,/ Contra costor c'han si la mente zoppa / Appo noi Donne; in darne oltraggi spesso:/ Ma spero che dal ciel verrà sactta,/ Et credo che di noi farà vendetta (*Canto V*). Here, and more dramatically elsewhere, writing is cast as a means of combat often used by men against women, who till now have been ill-equipped to retaliate. As a lyrical document composed during the Counter Reformation, the *Discorsi* also displays themes consonant to the times: a nostalgia for a more innocent past; mistrust of worldly ambitions; disapproval of abuse of sexual freedom by women; concern for victims of wars. Terracina's work and its popular reception at the time illustrate the ability of accomplished women to articulate through creative methods independent and often very contrasting views in relation to those of prominent writers. At the same time, Terracina's appropriation and remaking of the *Furioso* also demonstrates how even highly literate women were dependent (openly or not) upon acclaimed models, in light of which their own were to remain of secondary importance.

Illustrating the motif of "errancy" in a person of early modern Italy, the last chapter, "Adding Insult to Injury: Bandello's Tales of Isabella de Luna," examines the difficult but wealthy life-style of the Spanish-born Isabella (d. 1565), who "practised virtually the only profession that allowed women of her day the freedom to earn and dispose of their own income as she does ... a courtesan" (158). A well known figure in military circles, Isabella travelled through Europe and north Africa, following the vicissitudes of a man she loved in the army of Emperor Charles V, eventually settling in Rome to build a career as one of the most successful courtesans of the Renaissance. This useful chapter reviews the main literature of the sixteenth century concerned with courtesans, be they "oneste" or otherwise, in order to contextualise Bandello's *Novelle* that include several tales of courtesans with the figure of Isabella featured in two tales. Bandello's portrayal of Isabella attests to his concern for both accuracy and literary organization of historical material: she is in fact depicted as a world-wise prostitute, often echoing Bradamante-like bravery and intelligence. In the first of Bandello's example (Part II, *Novella* 51), Isabella comically outsmarts a man who set her up to being defamed in front of his friends. To her profit and amusement, she manages to show him up as a truly hypocritical and untrustworthy man. The second example (Part IV, *Novella* 16), addresses the more thorny issues of prostitution that place Isabella at the centre. She submits to a public whipping for having defied the law and clashed with authority — this cruel public punishment is significantly foreshadowed in the preface to the *novella* where another defiant military prostitute is burned at the stake. Shemek effectively points to Foucault's observation — and Nietzsche's before him — that public punishments rely on the creation of memorable images for the observing audience (178), and Bandello makes eminent use of punishment as spectacle in order to drive home to women the dangers of waywardness and defiance. In real life, however, Isabella was fully responsible with respect to settling properly her public score before death, ensuring that all debts were paid, all her beneficiaries were recompensed, that her loved ones, monasteries, and convents were remunerated handsomely, that servants and destitutes were well cared for, and several dowries distributed. In keeping with the

concerns of the Council of Trent, as a woman of considerable means, Isabella de Luna reformed the latter years of her life in order to enjoy a life of ease and independence, far from the errancy that had characterized her youth.

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw an unprecedented outpouring of treatises and manuals on social behaviour and good governance. Fiction and reality, what was and what ought to be, often became blurred as did the crucial concerns related to sex and gender roles. This study by Shemek addresses both literary fiction and contemporary social realism seeking to distinguish one from the other, but also pointing out how fairly and unfairly they affected each other. Her answer to the question "Did women have a Renaissance," remains not less negative than when it was first asked twenty years ago (15). Her careful, detailed investigations confirm, in fact, that Renaissance women were "creatures of compromise and ambivalence as much as of headstrong rebellion," who "trace the early modern notion of women 'out of place,' of wayward ladies dangerously errant"(16). This work is valuable to students of the *Quattrocento* and *Cinquecento* for the several revisions it brings to previous studies on errancy and feminine behaviour, and how these were perceived to threaten male identity and social order in the artistic, social, and intellectual manifestations of the Italian Renaissance. For these same reasons, this study is also valuable to students of contemporary Italian women writers, who often portray women characters at odds with their familial and social *milieus*, who often argue that an individual identity and voice may be best achieved through resistance to or separation from the unquestioned social order.

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