dellian relativism. Tying this section neatly with the other sections, Bini differentiates between the figures that are intended to signify *rettorica* (spiritual death) and those that symbolize *persuasione* (true self-fulfillment). "This is clearly what Michelstaedter was striving for: that authentic expression he had never captured in all his linguistic attempts."

Bini's "Epilogue" flows logically and predictably from the hermeneutical premises established early in the text and are reiterated and elaborated throughout. In the entire study, Bini emphasizes the impossibility of attaining *persuasione* in life and her ample quotes from Michelstaedter's letters illustrate well the poet's growing frustration, desperation, and frequent meditations on suicide. In the "Epilogue," Bini discusses the significance of the poet's final act and the validity of interpretations of that act as the inevitable conclusion to a failed existence.

Overall, it would appear that the book's strengths are also its weaknesses. In coherently tracing the *persuasione-rettorica* dialectic throughout the life and writings of Michelstaedter, Bini runs the risk of overstatement and restatement of a fundamental paradox identified in the first chapter. The tautness of the interpretive line persuades, but it also excludes readings not accommodated by her theoretical/thematic axis; this is especially true in the case of the chapter devoted to the poetry of Carlo Michelstaedter. Also, Bini's meticulous citing of biographical fact and details contained in the poet's correspondence corroborates her contentions; however, it also tends to create variability in the critical tone of the text; in other words, the discourse varies from the intensely philosophical or analytical to the relatively mundane.

Nevertheless, despite the few limitations mentioned in the previous paragraph, *Carlo Michelstaedter: The Failure of Language* constitutes a valuable monographic study of the work of a Rimbaud-like figure whose distrust of language is more topical today in the context of postmodernist deconstructive discourse than it was in 1910 when Michelstaedter chose absolute silence over problematical rhetoric.

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Kroha Lucienne. *The Woman Writer in Late-Nineteenth-Century Italy. Gender and the Formation of Literary Identity*. Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: The Edward Mellen Press, 1992. Pp. 167.

The Fall 1992 issue of *Il Gonfaloniere* reported that among the voices opposing the formation of a women's caucus of academics in Italian Studies was one which queried: "Why not a caucus for children, fat people, miners, farmers, politicians, cats, dogs, etc.?" (2). By giving Derridean privilege to this question, we forget, perhaps, the absent question of this binomial; namely, "Why a caucus for women?" In this recent volume, Lucienne Kroha gives the reader an abundance of material with which to formulate a most convincing answer. In addition, Kroha asks a few questions of her own.

The focus of this book is on four women writers (Neera, Matilde Serao, Marchesa Colombi and Sibilla Aleramo) whose careers encompassed the years between 1880 and 1920. In the last chapter the subject changes to a male writer, Luigi Pirandello, who writes *Suo marito* from what he considers to be a female point of view. Curiously, *Suo*

marito is "the only one of Pirandello's novels to have escaped translation into English" (156). Kroha describes her study as a continuation of the recent academic attempts to reconstruct and map out the parameters within which European women writers are defined. By accepting (as we must) that "women's experiences in a given historical moment have placed them at the margins of dominant cultural institutions and often outside of dominant discourses" (5), she also rejects (as we should) that this situation remain so, and she joins a growing number of feminist academics who are struggling to give women writers a voice within the framework of dominant discourses. Her argument proceeds from her attempts to answer two questions. "How does the woman writer mediate between her own experience and those dominant modes of representation and discourse which constitute national literary traditions?" And, "How does she cope in a literary form with her social position, the expectations attached to her role as a woman, her fears, desires and fantasies?" (5). The answer to these queries lies also in understanding the social milieu within which the above named authors wrote. Kroha points out that traditionally the Italian novel had a didactic mandate at its core. Furthermore, "serious writing" risked self-exposure which was in strident contradiction of the modesty that bourgeois society demanded. Italian women writers of the late 19th century were also impeded by the fact that they had no role models to follow; as Kroha notes, Italian narrative history lacks Eliots, Sands, Austens, de Staëls and Brontës. Nonetheless, the work of those women writers who sought to give themselves a legitimate literary voice despite these obstacles, is deserving of critical attention.

In the first two essays of the study, Kroha focuses on the Marchesa Colombi. The opening essay, "The Marchesa Colombi: The Madwoman vs Manzoni," takes its cue from Gilbert and Gubar's seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, and provides a historical background to the Marchesa, including how she came to choose her pseudonym. Necessarily, the Marchesa made constant use of distancing techniques to emphasize the point that writer and work were not synonymous, the traditional understanding in the case of women writers. Considering primarily *Il tramonto di un ideale* (2nd. ed. 1896), Kroha evaluates the role of this novel's "madwoman" (an illiterate servant girl) as catalyst for the events in the novel, and describes how it proceeded in a spirit of controversial "antimanzonismo." She briefly describes the metaliterary nature of this fascinating book about a book, and this aspect should receive a more in-depth focus in future studies on *Il tramonto*.

The second essay is entitled "The Marchesa Colombi's *Un matrimonio in provincia*: Style as Subversion." *Un matrimonio*, according to Kroha, is fundamentally important because it foregrounds questions of gender. Particularly noteworthy is Kroha's meticulous research which corrects the erroneous assumptions and statements of previous critics (65 n.17). This, indeed, is not the only case in which an Italian woman writer has been undermined by the misinformation of literary critics; misinformation which subsequently assumed critical authority and became accepted as fact.

Chapters 3 and 4, on Neera, are respectively entitled "Neera: The Literary Career of a Woman of the Nineteenth Century" and "The Search for Literary Mothers: Neera's *Teresa*." The former provides a socio-historical background for the latter, and traces Neera's development as a writer. Furthermore it delineates the critical reception of Neera's work, emphasizes how (unlike the Marchesa Colombi) this writer was unable to transcend her "almost obsessive awareness of herself as a woman writer" (72) and discusses the effects of such self consciousness. The following chapter reiterates this problem, observing that

"as soon as [Neera] finds ways to combine writing and traditional feminine values . . . her novels undergo a transformation: the intensity of conflict experienced by her early heroines, torn between duty and adulterous desire subsides precisely at the point at which Neera assuages her own conflicts about writing novels" (94). Kroha details how this conflict remains unresolved in Neera's work. Particularly in the novel *Teresa* (1886), Neera's reading of Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* remains deliberately unacknowledged despite the fact that it is clearly part of the fabric of the Italian text.

In Chapter 5, "The Early Matilde Serao: An Author in Search of a Character," Kroha challenges the assumption that Serao was "entirely acritical in her approach to women's lives and as well as to their portrayal in literature" (101). She shows rather convincingly that instead Serao, at least initially, was able to represent women outside of the traditional realm allotted to the woman writer. Again, as in previous essays, there is a promising glimpse of the self-reflexivity in Serao's novel *Fantasia* but this is not developed fully. Kroha indicates that there exists a rapport between this novel and *Madame Bovary* despite the fact that Serao was "far more intimidated by literary conventions and by an acute sense of her own personal limitations as an artist than by social or moral imperatives" (119).

Chapter 6 focuses on Sibilla Aleramo, a woman writer who has hitherto not escaped critical attention. In this most original and thought provoking essay, entitled "Strategies of Intertextuality in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una Donna*," Kroha proposes the novel as superseding a typology of feminine *Bildungsroman*, acknowledging instead the intertextual awareness that this novel purports of Ibsen's *The Doll House*. This reading of *Una Donna* is most certainly valid; clearly Kroha's essay will have far-reaching critical repercussions.

Finally, in Chapter 7 "Pirandello and the Woman Writer: A Reading of *Suo Marito*," Kroha repropose the idea of *Bildungsroman*, identifying this as a "novel of awakening" (that is, in actuality a sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman*). Her reading is a deconstructive one and her conclusion fascinatingly both Pirandellian and Derridean.

Kroha's research in this collection of essays has been thoroughly and thoughtfully executed. If the book has weaknesses, they are few in number and primarily stylistic. For example, whenever a particularly relevant point is made or conclusion arrived at, it always appears in italics, a condescending stylistic device (cf. 54, 55, 72, 105, 106, 107, 111, 114, 135 etc.). Furthermore, the essays stand as strong individual pieces, without a cohesive unfolding. Consequently, Chapters 1 and 2 have overlapping biographical information; n. 11 on p. 157 dealing with Ibsen's *The Doll House* is unnecessarily long given that this play was discussed in the preceding chapter. Generally, however, the footnotes offer relevant and interesting information, although some more careful editing would have avoided examples such as n. 1 on p. 64 which merely refers us to two subsequent notes in which minimal bibliographic information is given.

Lucienne Kroha has made an indubitably valuable addition to the corpus of critical writings dealing with Italian women writers. This collection of essays must not be overlooked.

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Pietro Frassica. *A Marta Abba per non morire*. Milano: Mursia, 1991 (Testimonianze fra cronaca e letteratura 5). Pp. 136.

Nel novembre del 1986 Marta Abba, come si sa, si recò a Princeton per lasciare a quella