E.R. Hughes. Nel far questo, Beecher spiega come ha provveduto a correggere incorrettezze nella traduzione di Waters, come parti lasciate non tradotte e altri cambiamenti arbitrari apportati al testo originale, oltre a migliorare la sintassi. Alla fine dell'introduzione Beecher aggiunge anche quattro appendici. Nella prima fornisce per ognuna delle 75 storie delle *Piacevoli notti* una tabella con le possibili fonti a cui Straparola si sarebbe ispirato, come ad esempio la raccolta di novelle di Girolamo Morlini pubblicate nel 1520. Nella seconda appendice Beecher schematizza il tipo di storie raccontate nell'opera di Straparola rifacendosi a lavori come *Types of the Folktale* di Aarne-Thompson. Nella terza appendice, invece, sono riportati in tabella i nomi dei narratori per ogni storia delle *Piacevoli notti* e nella quarta e ultima Beecher riassume la vicenda delle illustrazioni che dalla fine del Cinquecento hanno accompagnato l'opera di Straparola, fornendo anche una serie di belle riproduzioni.

In definitiva Beecher ci restituisce l'opera di Straparola tradotta in inglese in forma corretta e linguisticamente aggiornata, accompagnando il testo con note esplicative e storiche utili e precise, e con un ampio, valido e ben documentato studio introduttivo che ci fa riscoprire un autore considerato, ben 250 anni prima dei fratelli Grimm, il fondatore della fiaba come genere letterario.

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Helena Sanson. *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900.* A British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monograph. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xii, 417. ISBN 978-0-19-726483-6. £ 85.

The dispute that intensified in the sixteenth century over the form and nature of the language to be adopted by all inhabitants of the Italian peninsula was one that concerned, throughout most of its course, mainly prominent, erudite men. The female voice in the *questione della lingua* is seldom evoked by modern scholars, and was largely suppressed in its time by the very factors that spawned the *questione* in the first place: the commanding role of the Church and of the Latin language—over any local vernacular tongue—in education and intellectual circulation; the practical inaccessibility to education for large swaths of the population; and the linguistic and political disunity that long characterized the peninsula. Helena Sanson places women at the centre of the *questione della lingua* in her *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy 1500-1900*. This unique work traces Italian women's historical engagement with language from the time of Bembo and Castiglione to that of Manzoni and the early days of the united Kingdom of Italy; it exposes women's largely overlooked intellectual, spiritual, and practical contributions to the discussion on the nature and evolution of language practice and policy in Italy; and it reveals the effects that the *questione*, in the way that it unfolded, had on women's place within Italian society.

This recent publication is divided into three principal parts, corresponding largely to: the Reformation and Counter-Reformation; the Enlightenment and

French Revolution; and the Risorgimento and early years of Italian unification. Every section is composed of two chapters, the first of which generally addresses women and their relationship to Latin, their native vernaculars, Tuscan, and other languages; while the second focuses on the academic and literary activities that involved or targeted women and girls, together with the linguistic considerations relevant to such activities. Each of these chapters is further broken down into between four and seven narrower topics, such as “Women discussing the *Questione*,” “Grammar and the ‘ladies’,” “Women readers, writers, and translators,” “French grammars and the Italian ‘dame’,” “Florentine women as language informants,” and “Women and norms of language use,” *inter alia*.

Sanson indicates in her prologue that the sixteenth century was an obvious starting point, for it was in this century that the first grammars of the Italian vernacular were being published. It is further appropriate because it was in the Cinquecento, at Bembo’s urging, that the intellectual elite came to recognize an already-antiquated form of the Tuscan vernacular, that of the great *trecentisti*, as the preferred literary language of all of Italy. This decision itself rendered literary Italian something natural to no one, just as Latin had been for Dante when he wrote the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in which he referred to Latin as “gramatica.” Dante defined *gramatica*’s counterpart, the vernacular, as what one acquires in imitation of one’s *nutrix*, without having to learn rules. In embracing fourteenth-century literary Tuscan as a model for all to imitate, Italian had become something more akin to Dante’s *gramatica* than to his *vulgaris locutio*. Sanson’s work brilliantly reframes the essence of what the *questione della lingua* was by tracing the process of making the new Italian *gramatica* into something people learned “nutricem imitantes”; that is, by reconciling the speech of women with grammar.

Sanson illustrates the major reasons for which this reconciliation took over four centuries to gain serious traction. By centring her analysis of the *questione* on women and girls, she shows how, as much as social class figured into determining whether one could obtain access to literary Italian, even greater barriers faced women and girls across all classes. Sanson demonstrates how even those who had opportunities for an education were usually directed toward one that focused on morality or practical skills, which did not normally require advanced study of grammar, and that often even “protected” them from it. The author dedicates ample space to a phenomenon that permeated the higher ranks of society especially in the Settecento, namely “Gallomania.” It was precisely society’s regard for French that prevented even cultured women from mastering literary Italian, for the language of France, a prestigious and very much *living* tongue, was a more worthy object of study, and could be learned by less taxing, less rule-oriented means. By the nineteenth century, the crisis of the Italian literary language was being felt on a larger scale, as Manzoni expressed in his writings on language. Sanson highlights the consciousness of writers such as Manzoni who sought out native Tuscans—and chiefly Tuscan *women*—to provide them with the practice of native, unaffected spontaneity that literary Italian, as a form of *gramatica*, was sorely lacking. There was a new cognizance—which according to Sanson was reflected in later educational policy—of the idea that for the nation to share a

common language, it had to be that which was passed down by an authoritative, nurturing, *motherly* figure.

The chronological structure of Sanson's volume is logical and straightforward, and the narrower thematic subheadings address focused concerns particular to the time periods in which they are inscribed. I feel, however, that this division neglects to address adequately the politically and culturally fragmented reality of Italy, which is something about which the author herself expresses misgivings in the prologue. Sanson does not generally trace the phenomena that she is reporting along comparative geo-political lines within Italy, for in so doing, "it might have implied losing sight of overall tendencies and problems" (14). I appreciate her acknowledgement of this concession, and recognize that in a work of this breadth one is always forced to define and to stay within certain limits. But while expressing a preference for a "bird's-eye view" of the situation across Italy, she does seem to draw her sources disproportionately from certain parts of the peninsula, such as Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany, the Veneto, and neighbouring regions, without making that imbalance an explicit topic of her analysis. A wider discussion on any geographic concentration of women's participation in education, literary production, and language policy, and an analysis of why in other regions there may have been a relative dearth of female voices in these areas, could have been, in my opinion, an important component of this study. I feel that Sanson should have refined the sometimes-loose reference to "Italy" as a whole on matters that potentially differed from state to state.

Though I have drawn attention to one particular area that I would like to have seen developed differently, I do feel that the scope of this book is well defined in the prologue and that the volume as a whole responds in full measure to the important issues being treated. Exceptionally well documented, this work constitutes a most important font for the study of women and language in Italy. Sanson ventures into territories largely untouched by modern scholars, tying together a wealth of primary and secondary sources from across four centuries with modern views on gender and language. Her work is an exposé of conceptions of the relationship between language and writing and the way in which gender figured into that relationship. It also highlights the way in which the publishing industry, especially in the Cinquecento, and then again in later periods, had a democratizing effect on the matter of women's access to literacy and "grammar," and even to some extent on women's unique influence on the world of letters and the education of other women. This is an important contribution to the study of the linguistic and social evolution of Italian civilization, and an essential resource in the history of gender and language.

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