esteriche. Ma oltre a metterlo in mostra, va letto per la sua sostanza narrativa, che, in nessun modo intaccata dalla presenza di qualche neo linguistico, racconta con chiarezza e con sincerità la storia di un immigrato della pianura friulana che conquista le vette delle ripide montagne del mondo artistico canadese.

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Ursula Fanning. *Italian Women's Autobiographical Writings in the Twentieth Century. Constructing Subjects*. Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017. Pp. 239. ISBN 978-1-6839-3031-0.

Fanning's excellent study has all the hallmarks of a welcome resource for scholars investigating subjectivity in autobiographical writing, in Italian women's writing, and in writing in general. It is a deceptive volume, however, appearing to provide only a sweeping review of a panoply of Italian female writers covering the span of the twentieth century. Under consideration are works by women writers including Sibilla Aleramo, Grazia Deledda, Anna Banti, Natalia Ginzburg, Dacia Maraini, Francesca Sanvitale, Fabrizia Ramondino, Gianna Manzini, Lalla Romano, Francesca Duranti, Rosetta Loy, Edith Bruck, Oriana Fallaci, Gina Lagorio, Clara Sereni, Elsa Morante, Lidia Ravera, and Fausta Cialente. Nevertheless, the extensiveness is enhanced by finely honed and fascinating in-depth observations explicated through stimulating thematic perspectives, an approach Fanning refers to as a double helix (xv).

Because she understands that autobiography incorporates more than documented experience, Fanning also includes in her study works that are categorized as fictional but that play with autobiographical elements, both overtly expressed (Aleramo's *Un donna*) and more subtly inscribed within a fictional world that recalls events, approaches, and attitudes in the author's life (Anna Banti's *Artemisia*). By intentionally eschewing a chronological presentation of the writers, Fanning offers us "parallels and moments of intersection" (xv) that allow detailed exploration of the recurring themes. Hers is an innovative approach for a study on autobiography, where it would be easier to focus on individual subjects, writer by writer, plumbing their autobiographical details chronologically and evincing

how these intersect. Fanning's alternate, thematic approach works, however, and admirably so.

The delicate dance that Italian culture has often imposed on women struggling to express the self through writing begins, as it should, with an examination of patriarchal influence. In the opening chapter, "Figuring the Father: The Long Paternal Shadow," Fanning elucidates the tug and pull of the father-daughter relationship, both experienced and envisaged in fiction, where the desire to mirror the father and his achievements is blocked once the daughter's own sexual self ineluctably dashes her identification with her father (7). Paradoxically, Fanning posits that the father/critic often "gives stability to the self/writer" (15). Following the work of Judith Butler, she implicates the daughter/writer in a performativity leading to greater self-figuration, a performativity that, like a dance, follows a prescribed series of steps: construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction (27).

In the second chapter, "My Mother, My Self?," the autobiographical self encounters her mother "as a force to be reckoned with, a presence that must be recognized" (35), even in absence. Pointing to the fact that in Italian culture, and despite amendments to family law, very little changed in the consideration and experience of motherhood across the twentieth century, Fanning suggests that the "primitive, basic bond" (46) between mother and daughter almost inevitably implicates giving birth, whether to a baby or a book. In other words, the maternal body becomes a central trope of the mother/daughter binary, whether in an emotional, corporeal, or literary sense (69). Nor is this reshaped essentially when the privileged term of the dyad is no longer mother/writer-daughter but writer-mother/daughter as in the chapter "Bonds and Binds (2): Imagining and Reconceptualizing." Motherhood remains a "vexed topic" (105) for the culture of Italy; the silence and absence of the Italian writer-mother as the speaking subject has always been favoured socially and literarily, and especially in Italian Fascist culture was this silence promoted, for it assumed that a woman's time remained focused on her family, not her public writing. Consequently, Fanning notes, in this period, many Italian women writers resorted "to silence, or to obliqueness, especially where they [were] engaged in self-representation" (107). The later years of the century bring no modification, and Fanning finds that even as the century wanes, it "militates against personal discussions of mothering [...] insofar as its discussions of mothers were often largely negative" (107). And yet, there is admiration for a writer like Ginzburg who carefully carved out writing time (and space) for herself away from her children, or for Ramondino's putative motherhood in

Althénopis as a daughter becomes the mother of her elderly mother, or in the images and fantasies of writers who may not be mothers but whose writing clearly informs them as such, at times dystopic and anxious (Fanning chooses Banti as her example), sometimes utopian (like Morante), and sometimes firmly established within a maternal identity (Lagorio, Romano, Sereni, Ravera). And while motherhood is always politicized and problematized—a “risky disruption to subjectivity” (144)—it is also “always impossible to ignore, [and] it finds its way back into representation” (146).

As richly elucidated as these chapters are, Fanning’s best critical work is found in chapter 3, “Bonds and Binds (1): Rewriting Romance,” and in the final two chapters. Excised metaphorically from the constraints of parental ties, the autobiographical authors are able to convince us of their developing selfhoods as writers. Fanning also depicts them within the context of lovers/wives, it is true, but she is careful to underscore how these writers “want their work to be taken seriously and are vigilant against attempts to treat it as of lesser value than that produced by their male counterparts” (80). That they are able to do so is shown in the final chapters. “The Self as Writer” discusses the self-awareness of these women writers as protagonists, that is, as the women represented in their own narratives, informing their work with their own voice. Then, in the final chapter, “The Paratext,” they are presented as critical readers of their own selves, through epitextual and peritextual interjections. Reading Gérard Genette’s work on paratext, Fanning offers a strong and innovative essay that will be read and reread for its importance to Italian literature, and not only for women’s writing. She acknowledges the need for a more complete discussion of this topic (189); we hope she will consider undertaking it.

Enriched by comprehensive support of numerous contemporary literary critics, not only Italian, and not only women, this volume will prove itself an important addition to Italian literary criticism.

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