Aleramo, Sibilla. *Una donna*. Nuova ed. Prefazione di Anna Folli, postfazione di Emilio Cecchi. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003. Pp. xxi + 172.

Folli, Anna. *Penne leggere. Neera, Ada Negri, Sibilla Aleramo. Scritture femminili fra Otto e Novecento*. Milano: Guerini e Associati, 2000. Pp. 253.

Io ho dinanzi a me il futuro, anche se voi non lo credete. These words of Sibilla Aleramo open the preface to the most recent edition of *Una donna*, the forty-eighth since its first appearance in 1906 (STEN of Torino). It was considered by Aleramo herself to be a true classic and she marked her literary birth by the date of its first publication (3 November). The words are telling in several ways. They revisit the attitude demonstrated by Aleramo, no longer only Rina Pierangeli Faccio, no longer only daughter of Ambrogio and Ernesta, no longer wife, and, scandalously, no longer just mother of Walter. But they also describe the approach taken by literary critic Anna Folli in her introductory essay. Mentored by Antonia Arslan, Folli is of a new generation of Italian literary critics; she is highly knowledgeable of the imposing and ineluctable critical tradition established in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century by literary judges such as Croce, Binni, Sapegno. At the same time, she is unafraid of surpassing the tradition, or even thwarting it, as she approaches her subject boldly, confidently, providing the reader along the way with an overwhelming wealth of critical information, and of personal reflection that one does not read in her predecessors.

Often the introductory essay to a novel is overlooked in order to arrive faster at the pages of the novel itself. In this case, it is well worth stopping for a brief period to enjoy the essay itself. In its 15 pages, Folli manages to provide important background information for the novel and also points of departure for reflective thought as we read the novel. Here the point that she asks us to consider is "*la death in life* dei romantici, contro la quale [Aleramo] combattè pur sempre sublimandola in miracolo d'amore e sacrificio" (xxi). Seen in this way, not scandalous, not feminist, but human, Aleramo's work and life are enriched by a new perspective.

This highly readable introductory essay brought me to another recent work of literary criticism by Anna Folli, *Penne leggere*. Again, as in the prefatory essay to *La Donna*, Folli enters immediately into the thick of things, compelling us from the outset to consider, and reconsider, what it means to write critically of literature by women: "A chi si occupa di scrittrici capita sempre di incontrare qualcuno che chiede se la letteratura femminile esiste. Sorvolando sui presupposti della domanda, si preferisce rispondere che la definizione è astratta; meglio restringersi al dato culturale che esistono libri, testi, scritti da donne. Anzi bisogna farlo, anche solo al ricordo della fortuna di quelle formule inventate da Luciano Zùccoli, all'inizio del secolo: *il pericolo roseo, il gaietto sciame...*" (p.11). Folli challenges us to accept these cultural givens; if we do, then we can approach the books, the texts and the writings by women without succumbing to the temptation of Zùccoli's saccharine epithets.

In each of the three sections of her work, Folli impresses with her panoramic view of the lives and works of Neera, Negri, and Aleramo respectively. In her critical approach she is much closer to the traditions of Anglophone literary critics than to those of traditional Italian studies. She casts her net widely; no detail of the lives or

works of her three subjects seems to escape her. One must laud the assiduous hunt for confirmation and for corroboration which she undertakes. Her studies have taken Folli to the more obscure file folders of various archives, to much unpublished but seminal material, all of it carefully annotated. I offer as one example her study of Ada Negri's awareness of and admiration for Walt Whitman. In reading, one feels that Folli has been able to reproduce very closely through Ada's letters and comments, and through quotations of the American poet, how Negri must have appreciated Whitman. Here, as throughout *Penne leggere*, the footnotes are ample, informative, and give original information. Above all, they are interesting to read and to consider. If there is one criticism that might be made of this study, it is precisely that the notes are so rich in detail that they threaten to take over the text. For example, her long discussion of the interaction between Gabriele D'Annunzio and Angelo Conti in the section on Sibilla Aleramo takes many pages to get to the point, pages in which Aleramo is absent and which leave the reader wondering why they were included. But if we are patient, the answer to our query is there. The impression left by such a generous wealth of material is that, in the end, the women focussed upon in this study were not writing in feminine, or even feminist, isolation. We forget perhaps that they were formidable figures in their own time, not only in literature but in journalism, politics, and social reform. They were widely read, and succeeded in establishing for themselves what today would be called extensive networks and connections; they were talked about as influential colleagues by other writers, male and female alike, and not only within the confines of Italian borders.

In conclusion, just a brief note on the style of the *Penne leggere*. Folli has successfully provided a serious study without falling into the trap of overt didacticism. Her book is highly readable and engaging. At the same time, as academics and students we are truly grateful for her generosity in sharing her detailed notes and resources. Her confidence in knowing her material so well does not overshadow her delight in her research "finds"; the latter she conveys in her book without recourse to pedantic rhetoric. Quite to the contrary, her style invites the reader to discover along with her and to reflect on how the numerous threads that she presents in describing each author, finally tie together to give us a comprehensive view of the lives and the writings of Neera or Negri or Aleramo. Altroché leggere!

In her comment above, Aleramo referred to the future of writing. If in this study we have an example of the future of Italian literary criticism, then it does auger well.

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Cesaretti, Enrico. *Castelli di carta. Retorica della dimora tra Scapigliatura e Surrealismo*. Ravenna: Longo, 2001. Pp. 159. ISBN 8-8806-3284-1.

This book is an excellent re-examination of the literary and historical contribution of the late nineteenth-century movement known as "Scapigliatura." Though the work of Emilio Praga, Carlo Dossi, Ugo Tarchetti, and Arrigo Boito has been the subject of considerable critical attention over the last one hundred years or so, largely in the context of Italian Decadentism, Enrico Cesaretti revises the tradi-