Fenu Barbera, Rossana. *La donna che cammina. Incanto e mito della seduzione del passo femminile nella poesia italiana del primo Novecento*. Ravenna: Longo, 2001. Pp. 153. ISBN 8-8806-3279-5.

This book examines the poetic image of the walking woman in Italian poetry of the early twentieth century. Women in motion have provided inspiration for mythology, philosophy, and art in general. We need only think of Botticelli's *Primavera* or Dali's *Gradiva*, as well as Baudelaire's sonnet "A une passante," the most famous literary example of the walking woman. A study of the symbolic meaning of the motif occupies the book's first two chapters, which touch upon religion, philosophy, literature, figurative arts and provide an apt introduction to the second two chapters, that move to specific textual analysis of Italian poetry by Gabriele D'Annunzio, Vincenzo Cardarelli, Camillo Sbarbaro, Dino Campana, Corrado Govoni, Cesare Pavese, Eugenio Montale, Giorgio Caproni, Mario Luzi and Attilio Bertolucci. Fenu Barbera's contention is that, despite the broad and varied presence of the image of the walking woman throughout the cultural spectrum over the centuries, it is at the rise of the Novecento that the *topos* assumes complex metaphorical meanings, crucial for the male poet/viewer of the woman. The walking woman exhibits the sense of novelty, freedom and emancipation, that mark Novecento's modernity. With her motion and energy she can stir emotion and pleasure in the poet/viewer, and she can serve as a vehicle for epistemological investigation. The passerby finds her ancestral roots in the Jungian archetype of the 'anima,' symbol of life, vital breath and mystery. Moreover the walking woman can express the creative energy of the poet and his journey through poetic creativity.

Chapter 1 ("L'immagine della donna cammina nella cultura europea") opens with an overview of the image in turn of the century European culture. The woman caught in the act of walking has strong effects on the observers, be her a passerby in the crowded city street, or the fashion model walking down the catwalk. Fenu Barbera investigates the symbolic significance of a *topos* whose origin dates back to primitive cults, mythology (Ovidian myths) philosophy (Plato and Aristotle) and religion (Song of Songs), to reappear in Medieval Italian lyric poets such as Dante, Cavalcanti ("Chi è questa che vèn, ch'ogn'om la mira") and Petrarca. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the image of the woman in motion finds a fascinating incarnation in Wilhelm Jensen's short novel *Gradiva* (1903). Perhaps better known through Freud's essay "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*" (1907), this novel is interpreted as a modern visitation of the myth of Pygmalion. In fact Fenu Barbera sees the image of the walking woman as the locus where two myths conflate: the myth of Pygmalion and the one of Apollo and Daphne.

In chapter 2 ("Dal mito dell'anima al mito dell'anima gemella") Fenu Barbera establishes the link between the walking woman and the concept of 'anima' which is investigated from a mythological, philosophical (as developed by Aristotle and Plato) and psychoanalytical perspective. In the collective unconscious of philosophers and poets 'anima' takes up human form, female gender and is associated to

the idea of movement, and vital breath, all founding elements that appear in the image of walking woman.

Chapter 3 ("La donna che cammina nella poesia italiana del Novecento") moves directly to Italian early twentieth century poetry for a close analysis. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's concept that from movement originates our desire, and that motion is an essential communicative element in perceptive relations between individuals, Fenu Barbera then locates in movement and sight the pleasure of the poet/viewer, his sense of anticipation and mystery at the sight of the elusive passerby, who excites his imagination with her indefinite and transient presence. So Campana "Andava. La vita s'apriva/ Agli occhi profondi e sereni?/Andava lasciando un mistero/ di sogni avverati..." Sometimes mystery and anticipation lead to anticlimax as in Bertolucci's "Chi è quella che viene verso di noi affannata." Here the poet recasts Cavalcanti's famous opening line in a demystified variation of the *topos*, where instead of an idealized female figure the woman is the family servant. A semiotic analysis of literary representations of body in motion reveals that, through the image of the walking woman, the male poet can acquire identity, sense of self, can enjoy visual pleasure, achieve complementarity and union with the woman, who can be for the poet both 'anima' and 'anima gemella.'

Perhaps the most interesting part of this book is chapter 4 ("Il testo poetico come spazio e percorso della camminata"), where Fenu Barbera, supported by theoretical study on poetic creative process as explained by Barthes, De Certeau, Lorca, Maria Corti and others, finds in all the poetic instances of female perambulation a unifying element: the walking woman is a metaphor for the 'anima' of the poet and his voyage through the thematic, stylistic, metric, rhythmical adventures of poetic creation. As stated in Maria Corti's *Il viaggio testuale*, poetry itself can be seen as a journey, measured in feet, pace and rhythm. Fenu Barbera thinks that the literary motif of the walking woman can be "una sorta di drammatizzazione figurata dello svolgersi del linguaggio poetico." (115) Poetry is the path that one walks slowly or fast, it can skillfully reproduce the movement of the walking woman. Campana in "Tre giovani fiorentine" follows the rhythm of music and uses synaesthesia to convey poetically and metrically feminine movement; Govoni in "Contro corrente come bionde trote" sees the stroll of two young women along the street as the flow of fish down the stream and reproduces it in the poetic rhythm.

For Fenu Barbera the walking woman of early twentieth century poetry can look back, assert her presence in the world and exorcize death with her vitality, as Annina does in Caproni's poems. The passerby seems to display a "profonda maturità e coscienza proprio grazie a questa libertà di guardare sia avanti che indietro: una libertà che permette ... il distacco da certi legami culturali col passato" (98). However the very absence of the female voice in these texts seems to reinforce a more traditional cultural perspective than Fenu Barbera sees; in fact the only form of expression offered to the silent walking woman is the display of her body and her movement. The woman in motion as a metaphor for male poetic creation and vehicle for the construction of male subjectivity still denies her own voice. As

Fenu Barbera mentions in the Conclusion, a look at how and whether women writers have employed the image of the walking woman, could yield very different conclusions.

By favouring a philosophical, psychological and semiotic reading over more traditional socio-historical and literary approach, this book offers an innovative and meaningful perspective into twentieth century Italian poetry. By placing early Novecento poetry in a wide context including visual arts (the book includes plates reproducing important samples of walking women in painting, sculpture and photography) and European literature this book can be of interest to both the specialized scholar and the common reader.

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Dombroski, Robert S. *Creative Entanglements: Gadda and the Baroque*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. x, 151. ISBN 0-8020-4490-5 \$40.

Spentosi il 10 maggio del 2002, Dombroski è stato, per lungo tempo, una delle autorità letterarie e critiche dell'italianistica nordamericana. I suoi lavori su Boccaccio, Pirandello, Manzoni e, soprattutto, su Gadda, rimangono ancor'oggi un punto di riferimento importante per tutti gli studiosi di letteratura italiana, analisi puntuali ed approfondite in cui l'autore ha saputo combinare studio letterario ed influenze interdisciplinari. Il volume in questione (il terzo dedicato al grande scrittore lombardo dopo *Introduzione allo studio di Carlo E. Gadda* del 1974 e *Carlo Emilio Gadda: Contemporary Perspectives* del 1997) conferma questa tendenza. Al fine di penetrare i significati più profondi dell'arte narrativa di Gadda, Dombroski usa con perizia vari approcci critici (la psicologia freudiana, la filosofia di Leibniz, oltre che teorici quali Benjamin e Deleuze). Il risultato è di notevole spessore. L'autore si dimostra assolutamente a suo agio nell'inserire ogni possibile spunto metodologico all'interno del proprio discorso critico che, lungi dal risultare appesantito da un tale apparato epistemologico, se ne giova, dando vita ad un testo intenso e illuminante che di certo appassionerà i tanti lettori dello scrittore milanese.

Scopo dello studio di Dombroski è quello, evidente e scoperto sin dalle primissime pagine, di inserire l'arte gaddiana all'interno di una prospettiva più ampia, e cioè quella prospettiva *neobarocca* che, tanto in voga in questi giorni, acquista in Gadda — come in pochi altri scrittori — una valenza ed una rilevanza assolute. Il barocco, inteso non solo come categoria estetica ma anche come visione del mondo, probabilmente rappresentò per Gadda l'unico strumento in grado di "dire" una realtà non più lineare e meccanicistica ma, al contrario, "creative, unpredictable, and mysterious" (p. ix): in altri termini, spiega Dombroski, "Gadda is baroque [...], because the world itself is baroque" (p. 4). Ma le implicazioni del barocco, o *neobarocco* se si preferisce, non finiscono certo qui: infatti, attraverso una scrittura fatta di infinite digressioni, variazioni, relazioni, lo scrittore