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THE SEMANTIC EVOLUTION OF THE LATIN TERMS
DOMINA, FEMINA AND *MULIER*
IN THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE

Domina, femina and *mulier* were terms of common usage throughout various stages of Latin history, which later evolved into various forms in the modern Romance languages. The derivatives can be linked closely semantically with the original Latin words and concepts. Others may have taken on completely innovative meanings. Through the course of this study, which consists of an in-depth look at the Italian derivatives, we will see, for example, how the semantic possibilities of words stemming from these Latin etymons have expanded and widened to include references to tools, plants, animals and even cuisine. The purpose of this study is to illustrate the semantic evolution of the derivatives of the Latin terms *domina, femina*, and *mulier* in literary Italian and its spoken dialects from a diachronic point of view.

Similar linguistic studies on these specific concepts exist that outline important stages in the semantic evolution of the three terms to be studied. For example, the article entitled *Femmina e donna* by G. Bonfante, published in 1958, is useful for the present paper because it deals with the evolution of the terms *donna* and *femmina* in early Italian literary history, specifically the 13th and 14th centuries. Another relevant article, entitled *Ricerche sulle denominazioni della donna nelle lingue indeuropee*, by Anna Giacalone Ramat, appeared over 10 years later in 1969. The section on the Latin language where the author explains the semantic stages of *mulier* and *femina* and the competition between the two is particularly valuable and the author also deals briefly with *donna* and *femmina* in Old Italian. Finally, in the same year, Eugenio Leone published a detailed article called *La complessità semantica-concettuale di 'dominus' 'domina' nella lingua latina*. This article is also useful, especially since it provides a more diachronic view as opposed to synchronic, beginning with Latin all the way to the modern Romance languages with emphasis on Italian. However, this study only deals with *donna* and honourific titles such as *madonna*, and is thus limited to references to human beings. Furthermore, as stated, Bonfante studied *donna*

and *femmina*, and, as we will see, G. Flechia devoted a portion of his work to the evolution of the term *donnola*. These papers then are all concentrated and fairly specific in their study. This paper differs, therefore, from the existing scholarship because it is an attempt to compile and combine a diachronic history of the semantic evolution of all the three terms, including diminutives, from Latin to modern day Italian.

The paper will begin with a section on the original meanings of *domina*, *femina* and *mulier*; with a brief explanation of the overlapping of these last two. After having explained *mulier*, I will continue with its derivatives in the Italian language and its dialects. The next section will be structured in the same manner with an analysis of *femmina* in the Italian written language and spoken dialects. The final and substantial section of the essay is reserved for the derivatives of *domina* since they are the most abundant both in standard Italian as well as in the dialect varieties. I will begin with the older phases, for example with the triumph of *donna* over *femmina* based on literary tradition, and then continue through to the 19th and 20th centuries to innovative and interesting meanings.

According to *A Latin Dictionary* by Lewis and Short, the meaning of *domina* is a mistress or she who rules or commands, especially in a household, and secondly, it refers to a mistress or lady. (608). More particularly, it applies to the "appellation of a lady belonging to the imperial family..." (608). It was also used as a term of endearment towards a wife or mistress. *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives further definitions in reference to goddesses or as a term of respect (570). This last meaning is perhaps an extension of the appellation of a lady of the imperial family.

The first definition cited dates back to the Classical period and is the original from which the others stemmed. This meaning of *domina* as 'signora padrona' has been maintained in the Gallo area in French 'dame' and in Provençal, 'dona, domna'. Lewis and Short dictionary reference of *domina* as 'wife' is not included in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, but is noted by both E. Leone and A. Ramat with the former commenting on the logical extension from the first meaning. I believe it is important to note that the attestations with the meaning of *wife* are generally accompanied by a specifier, such as a possessive adjective. For example: Petron. *Cena* 66, 5 "bene me admonet domina mea" (quoted by Leone 336). Without this specification, that particular meaning would not exist. According to Ramat, this concept of *domina*, which developed during Imperial Latin, was used not only as a respectful way of referring to one's wife, but was extended also to female relatives, such as the mother (111). Traces of this exist in the Italian language where,

as we will see, the word for mother-in-law is a variation of *domina* in some southern areas and variations of *madonna* (from *mea* + *domina*) in northern regions. *Domina*, as a term of endearment for one's mistress or lover, most probably developed as an analogy from 'mistress/owner of the house' to 'mistress/owner of the heart' (Leone 337). This is demonstrated in the literature, for example in Tibullo's poetry: "...iuuat immites uentos audire cubantem et dominam tenero continuisse sinu!..." (28). Lastly, the use of the term to refer to goddesses, such as *venus domina*, appears to be a logical extension when one considers the original meaning in the sense of being above others in rank.

The Latin etymon *femina* denotes a 'woman' or, as is known in modern Italian 'donna < domina'. It was very similar and almost interchangeable with *mulier*, a term which lives on in Italian in the form of 'moglie' for wife. *Domina* at this point in history was always kept separate from these other two, having in general a more prestigious tone.

The first definition given by Lewis and Short for *femina* is in reference to human beings, that is "a female, a woman". Secondly, it was applied as a term of reproach to effeminate men (734). It was also used to indicate a female animal and as a transfer, *Femina* was also used, according to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, for the smaller or lesser varieties of plants and other natural objects (684). Lastly, in technical terminology, this word was used in the term 'cardo *femina*' (a mortise). This dictionary also purports 'woman' as "...in the capacity of wife" (684). In contrast to *domina*, where the specific *r* is added for 'wife', *femina* does not necessarily have indications of possession, for example, "...quae cumque uiri femina limen amat" (Prop. 2.6.24. quoted in *Oxford Latin Dictionary* 684).

Latin *mulier* is also a term that has undergone various stages throughout history. *Mulier* was equivalent to *femina* in so far as it meant a woman or female and according to Lewis and Short, this was whether she was married or not (1170). The term is also defined as 'wife', in opposition to a maid. The term 'maid' here appears to refer to a lack of sexual relations, as seen by the examples given in the dictionary where 'virgo' is in opposition to *mulier*: "si virgo fuit primo, postea mulier", Lact. 1.17.8 al." (quoted by Lewis and Short 1170). Lastly, *mulier* was seen as a term of reproach, such as 'coward'. Therefore, although very similar, some distinctions can be made between *femina* and *mulier*. For example *femina* was applied to plants and animals which *mulier* was not, and as described above, *mulier* had as its opposite 'virgo'.

Femina and *mulier* did in fact take different paths throughout the cen-

turies. Not only in modern Romance languages, but beginning right from Latin. In the Republican Age, *mulier* was the most commonly used term for 'woman', whereas *femina* was fairly rare. Plauto for instance used *mulier* approximately 300 times as opposed to *femina* which appeared only on a dozen occasions (Ramat 109). In these earlier times however, when *femina* was used, it sometimes contained a dignified meaning or alluded to a respectable social position, such as when certain adjectives were added: *femina sanctissima*, *femina nobilissima*. It did not contain the sexual or pejorative connotations we see today in its derivatives. For example, as A. Ramat notes, in Cicero's *De haruspicio* we find: "...femina autem quae matronarum castissima putabatur..." (44)

Beginning in the Augustan period, *femina* did surpass the use of *mulier* in the sense of 'woman', first in poetry and then in prose. *Femina* and *mulier* were interchangeable in late Latin, but only in the sense of 'wife', which had previously been referred to as 'uxor' (Ramat 109-110).

The derivatives of *mulier* that have developed in the Italian language have not strayed too far from the original meanings. It is interesting that in opposition to the derivatives of *domina* and *femina*, where names for plants, animals and objects have come about, *mulier* derivatives are all in some way connected with either the idea of 'wife' or 'woman'. A reason for this is perhaps the fact that in many of the cases that we will see, the Italian derivatives are connected in some way with beauty or gracefulness, such as with *donnola*, *donzella*. The images and ideas of young, innocent maidens evoked by these words are therefore more appropriate. With the term *mulier*, these allusions and images do not exist because the word itself evokes the mental image of an older woman as opposed to a young sweet girl (*moglie* vs. *donzella*). Another reason may be that phonetically speaking, *moglie* and its altered forms are not as appealing as the other possibilities.

The most widespread remnant of Latin *mulier* in the Italian language is the term for wife, *moglie*. What is interesting about this is the fact that *moglie* is a conservation of the nominative in Latin, which is rare and limited to a few terms such as *uomo*, *sarto* and *ladro* in the Italian language (Rohlf's *Gramm. storica* 5). This is in opposition with the accusative which is normally the case for Italian. Other than to indicate a 'wife', *moglie* is also used by extension in reference to female animals although it would be subordinate, I believe to the use of *femmina* (Battaglia 10:687).

Another derivative that is connected with the idea of a woman, but not a wife, is the adjective *muliebre*. This is actually a learned word, coming from *muliebris*, a derivative of *mulier*. According to the *Dizionario etimologico*

italiano (DEI) by Battisti and Alessio, the term is first attested in literary Italian in the 14th century (4: 2527). It is used for example to indicate anything that pertains to, or is characteristic of a woman. For example, in *Gli indifferenti* by Alberto Moravia, we find "...la gonna corta scopriva una grossa coscia muliebre stretta da un legaccio rosa" (129). Lastly, Battaglia in his *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* notes that *muliebre* can also be used in a derogatory sense towards an effeminate man, as seen with *femmina* and *mulier* (11: 59).

A form from the Latin accusative *mulierum* did pass into the Italian language although it is now an antiquated term. In the 13th century, when *moglie* came about, *mogliera* was also used to refer to 'wife'. A century later, *muliere* also appeared for a short period with the same meaning as *mogliera* (DEI 4: 2527). In present day, however, it is merely used in a comical and teasing manner (Battaglia 10: 689).

Although *mogliera* and *muliere* may not be in use in the national language, forms stemming from the Latin accusative have very much survived in various Italian dialects. Map #73 (La sua moglie) of the AIS (= *Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Sudschweiz*) illustrates some examples scattered in the north, with a heavy and almost total concentration as one moves southward. For instance in Lombardy at point #278, Solferino, we find *so muer*. In Emilia Romagna we find many examples including *su muyer* in Bologna (=456) and *su myí r* on the eastern coast in Comacchio. In Borgetto di Vara, Liguria (=189), we find *sùa muge* and in the north western part of Tuscany we find *soè myera* (=500 Arzengio [Ponremoli]). In all the southern regions in general we can see the accusative form which has strongly survived. For example in Campagna we find *la mulyeri* in Acerno (=724) and in Palermo, Sicily (=803) we find *so muggyeri*.

The modern day definition of *femmina* has not changed a great deal from the original Latin *femina*. As noted by Battaglia, it retains the references to plants and animals that reproduce, and to a woman or wife. Furthermore, *femmina* is still used in indicating a weak, effeminate man. Some of the new meanings *femmina* has acquired throughout the centuries include, "Persona di sesso femminile" in the pejorative sense, as seen above (5: 804). It is interesting to note the technical and mechanical meaning of *femmina* (as in *cardo femina*) that continued from Latin into *chiave femmina*. According to Battaglia as well as Cortelazzo and Zolli in their *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana* (DEI), it is not attested in Italian until the 1500s by Benvenuto Cellini in his *Trattati- discorsi- lettere- poesie* in *La vita*: "Questo detto mastio si è quello che veramente si domanda vite, e la femmina si

domanda chiocciola." (quoted by Battaglia 5: 804)

The diminutive *femminella* which first appears in the 13th century (Battisti/Alessio 3: 1615) provides some interesting definitions, which, although innovative, seem to be connected with *femina*'s original meanings. Battaglia's first description is a pejorative one, as seen above, in reference to a person: "Donna di aspetto, di condizione modesta, debole, umile, poco coraggiosa, credulona." (805). It is first attested in the *Novellino* dated 1280. In the DEL, *femminella* is dated also in this century but provides only the definition in the agricultural sense: "falso getto della vite potata"(3: 1615). Although this is a reference to a plant, this definition does not seem to be linked with the original meaning of *femina* since it is used to describe a vine that does not bear fruit.

Battaglia goes on to give several other meanings that indicate objects including the ring section of snap buttons on clothing into which the smaller section is inserted. *Femminella* is also used to refer to the "...occhiello praticato nel cuoio di valige, borse ecc., per farvi passare bottoni, cinghie, fibbri ecc." (5: 805). In marine terminology it is used as the term for "ciascuna degliere metalliche che si applicano alla poppa delle imbarcazioni per sostenere gli agugliotti del timone." (5: 805). In these last three examples given, the explanations of the objects are all similar in shape to the original *cardo femina* and are all thus called surely by analogy with the female sexual organ and the role played in the sexual act.

The *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* defines *femminella* also as a 'miccia' in the sense of a fuse or string that is covered in gun powder and will explode as attested by Gerolamo Baruffaldi in the early 18th century. I was unable to find any explanation for the attribution to *femminella* to this object (Battaglia 5: 805).

Lastly *Il nuovo Zingarelli* presents another definition for this diminutive of *femmina* which is not present in any of the other sources consulted. *Femminella* is used to describe a "varietà di bergamotto" (712). This 'bergamotto' can be in reference to two separate items. The first is an esteemed pear variety, in which case the term *femminella* may have been attributed due to the pear-like shape of a woman's body. The second possibility is a tree that bears white flowers and small orange-like fruit (citrus bergamia), (Zingarelli 204). This citrus fruit yields a pleasing and sweet smelling essence which may have influenced the designation of *femminella* to the plant, if this is indeed the bergamot to which the dictionary refers.

The Italian dialect varieties also provide meanings stemming from the Latin etymon *femina*. These are concepts and definitions that do not make up the

official Italian language and are not found in Italian dictionaries, but are included as part of the lexicon of certain regions or dialects of the peninsula.

Firstly, in many areas of Italy, variants of *femmina* are commonly used to refer to 'woman' (*donna*), as well as to 'wife' (*moglie*). For example in his *Dizionario dialettale delle tre Calabrie* Gerhard Rohlf's cites *fimmina* in the province of Cosenza such as in Aciri and Mangone, *fimmana* in Catanzaro and Reggio, and *bimmana* in Centrache, all as references to 'woman'. In one area of Cosenza he cites *fimmina* as 'moglie', although a form of *muggbere* is the dominant type found in these areas. Dictionaries from northern regions provide interesting entries also. In *Il dizionario etimologico veneto-italiano* for example *femena* refers to 'femmina, moglie, donna' (165). Similarly, in *Il nuovo Pirona*, the Friulian *femine* is used in reference to 'femmina, donna, moglie' (304).

To continue with *femmina* as a reference to female human beings, it is interesting to note the meanings of some diminutives in the dialects. In Lecce for instance, *fimmenazza** is seen in a positive light: "1- Bella donna prosperosa, 2- Donna energica, che si comporta con risolutezza e soprattutto con saggezza" (Garrisi 244. The asterisk indicates that the form has been re-constructed). In contrast, in the *Nuovo vocabolario siciliano-italiano* by A. Traina, the same form with slight phonetic differences, *fimminazza* (and *fimminuzza*) is considered a pejorative form of *femmina*. The Italian equivalent too, as seen in Battaglia (*femminaccia*) is negative. A positive form does exist in the Sicilian dialect dictionary just mentioned and it is in the form of *fimminuna*. Here the definition 'savia, brave donna' (386) basically corresponds with the definition for *fimmenazza* seen in the *Dizionario leccese-italiano*. This illustrates, therefore, the diversity of concepts that exist for one term between the various dialect varieties.

Derivatives of *femmina* have developed not only in regards to humans, but also appear in the spoken language as references to objects. For instance, altered forms of *femmina* are used to indicate hinges (*gangheri*). According to AAIS map #883, this form is found in various localities of Puglia. For example, in northern Puglia, we find *la fim'nédde* in Canosa (#717) and at the southern tip, although an antiquated form, we find *la fimmanédde* in Salve (#749). The interesting case however is that in Matera (#736) a distinction has been created between a small and large hinge. *La fimmanédde* is used only to refer to a small hinge and a larger one is called *u kang r-* coming from the Italian 'il ganghero'.

Lastly, in the locality of S. Pantaleone in Reggio Calabria, the variant *fimmina* is used to describe an object that is part of a small machine. *Fimmina*

here refers to the "parte superiore della gramola" (Rohlf, *Diz. tre Calabrie* 303). Because there is no further specification given, it is not clear whether the reference is to the upper part of a kneading machine, or refers to the machine used in the textile industry for separating fibres. Nonetheless, this definition presents an interesting case because it is not found in standard Italian.

Although in Latin, *domina* had always been set apart from *femina* and *mulier*, the case of its Italian derivative *donna*, formed from the syncopated *domna*, is quite different. It is difficult to note the precise date that *donna* took on its modern meaning of 'woman', overtaking *femmina*, which itself (then *femina*) had surpassed *mulier* in Latin. According to Battaglia, the first attestation of *donna* in its new meaning of 'woman' is by the Sicilian poet of the 13th century, Cielo d'Alcamo. In his poem, 'Il contrasto', he writes, "Rosa fresca aulentissima c'appari inver la state/ le donne ti disiano pulzelle e maritate." (34-35). The first attestation of *femmina* in the modern pejorative sense is recorded in the same century. In his *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, Francesco da Barberino writes "Ma qui, per Dio, mi perdonate, donne, che questa cotale ch'io ho nominata, poniamo che sia femmina, ella non è già donna, né vo che sia tra le donne nominata." (quoted by Battaglia 5:804). These first attestations obviously do not mean that everyone at once began using the terms in the modern sense at these precise moments in time. By studying the semantic changes of these two words throughout the Italian literary tradition however, it is possible to note the gradual lean towards the modern meanings.

In Old Italian, *donna* did initially conserve a noble identity and its original meaning from Latin, 'lady' (*signora*, *amante*). This occurred through a series of poetic influences beginning in Latin where forms of *domina* and not *femina* was used. For instance, it is found in Ovid. This vein of thought continued into French classicism in the 11th and 12th centuries and then influenced Italian poetry (Leone 341). Furthermore, the Provençal troubadours influenced a great part of Europe including Italy. The meaning of *donna* as 'signora, lady' is still maintained in fact today in the Gallic area. In French the form is *dame* (also passed into Italian *dama*) and in Provençal we have *dona* or *domna*. Italian poets also played a significant role. Guido Guinizelli, the founder of the 'dolce stil novo', which had a great influence with regards to the victory of *donna* over *femmina*, refers to 'la bella dona'. Guido Cavalcanti refers to his noble loved one with 'donna me prega'. In fact, as confirmed by checking the concordance at the end of his *Rime*, he never uses *femmina* at all (387-388) (Bonfante 82).

Using Dante as an example, the evolution of both *donna* and *femmina* is quite clear as the former gradually takes over the latter in the sense of 'woman'. In his earlier works, such as in the *Convivio* (II, 6, 13), Dante uses *femmina* to indicate a 'woman' and even in reference to the Virgin Mary (Leone 343). However, in the *Divine Comedy*, a shift is evident. *Donna* appears 96 times compared to *femmina* which is used 9 times (Lovera 743-745). In this work *donna* and not *femmina* is used to refer to the Virgin Mary: "Donna è gentil nel ciel che si compiange" (*Inf.* II 94). The places where *femmina* is used is basically in the sense of 'woman' and without the full modern meaning. However, I believe that it is important to note that *femmina* does not appear at all in *Paradiso* and that within the 9 references to *femmina*, a move towards the modern pejorative connotation can be detected. For example in Canto 18 of *Inferno*, we find, "Via ruffian! Qui non son femmine da conio." (*Inf.* XVIII 65-66). Also, further along, as noted by Bonfante: "poi che l'ardite femmine spietate/ tutti li maschi loro a morte dienno" (*Inf.* XVIII 89). As mentioned above, while the cases of *femmina* are in decline, *donna* appears 96 times. It is evident that *donna* is gaining its new meaning of simply 'woman' in a few cases out of almost 100. For instance, in *Purgatorio* XX 19-21: "Dolce Maria! Dinanzi a noi chiamar così nel pianto/ come fa donna che in parturir sia." In the majority of cases, *donna* is used in the most positive and noble sense, such as when Dante refers to Beatrice, but also in figurative meanings: "la bella donna, e poi di farne strazio?" (*Inf.* XIX 57). Here *donna* refers to the Catholic church. The mere fact that *donna* is being used is important for its diffusion and move towards a new meaning.

Other poets and authors of approximately the same time period illustrate the move towards the modern meanings of *donna* and *femmina*. Petrarch uses *donna* over one hundred times in his sonnets in both a noble sense and also in the modern sense (Bonfante 88). Confirmation of this latter usage is the fact that where Dante had used *femmina*, "quanto in femmina foco d'amor dura." (*Purg.* VIII 76), Petrarch similarly writes "ond'io so ben ch'un amoroso stato/ in cor di donna picciol tempo dura" (Son. 183 v.12s quoted by Bonfante 89). It is clear here that *donna* means 'woman' and by the end of the 14th century, the shift from *femmina* to *donna* to designate 'woman', was complete, first in Florence and then in all of Tuscany. This change occurred throughout the century with the degradation of *femmina* and at the same time the exaltation and extensive usage of *donna*, by the poets of the 'dolce stil novo'. *Donna* eventually spread outside Tuscany, including for example nearby areas that today make up Emilia Romagna,

Umbria and part of the Marches, as illustrated in AAIS map #48 (due donne). From this poetry, *donna* spread to everyday language and with its extended use as 'lady', the term *donna* underwent banalization to become the modern day 'woman' (Ramat 113)

This definition of 'woman' did not take hold throughout the entire area of Italy. For example, the influence of Florence, the important cultural centre, did not reach Sicily and other southern areas. However, the concept *donna* existed nonetheless in the poetry of 'la scuola siciliana' which had in fact great influence on the 'dolce stil novo'. I find the situation in Sicily particularly interesting because despite the appearance of *donna* in the poetry of the 13th century here as well, the same pattern did not occur. The examples of *donna* abound where they mean either 'lady' or are a reference to a loved one, (padrona del cuore). In both cases, the sense of nobility and respect is still present. The use of *femmina* does not appear often, but when it does occur it is to indicate a 'woman' and never has a pejorative connotation. Perhaps this is why *donna* never took over: it was not necessary to find a replacement for *femmina*.

Furthermore, although Sicilian prose texts of the 1200s are scarce, the ones of the 1300s illustrate in general that *femmina*=woman and *donna*=lady, much in the same way of the prose in Tuscany at that time (Bonfante 106). The Sicilian school therefore did not give any indications of a move toward the modern meaning of *donna* and I believe also that banalization of the term did not have time to occur since this poetry came to an abrupt end with the death of the kings Federico and Manfredi and their court. In fact, to this day Sicily and surrounding areas still maintain *femmina* as the means of expressing 'woman' and *donna* as a term of respect. This is noted even in the DEI where as part of the definition for *donna* the following phrase is included: "...nell Mezzogiorno e nell'aristocrazia titolo di deferenza nobiliare e (volutur.) della suocera..." (2: 1381). Perhaps this distinction is due to the strong influence that Provençal poetry had on the Sicilian school. We can see this distinction in spoken Provençal which has the distinction between *femna* and *donna*. France too has maintained *femme* and *dame*; perhaps contact with the Norman invaders in southern Italy and Sicily is a factor in explaining a semantic evolution different from that of Tuscany and its surrounding area.

In fact map #48 (due donne) of the AIS illustrates clearly the diffusion of the *donna* forms mentioned above and the retention of the *femina* derivatives in others. Using Florence (#523) as the focal point, phonetic variations of 'due donne' are seen throughout all of Tuscany, southward in northern

Lazio, northern and central Umbria, as well as scattered in part of the Marches. Below these points however the attestations are a variation of 'due femmine'. It appears that in the Marches, the mountainous areas such as Montecarotto (#548) and the southern parts such as Ascoli Piceno #578 have *femmina* forms, perhaps because they are more isolated. The northern areas of the Marches, as well as those in contact with the Adriatic sea, have the *donna* form.

It is interesting to note too the situation in the north. All of Emilia Romagna and part of the Venetian plains have a form of *donna*, as do part of the Lombard plains and all of Liguria, except one point, #184, Calizzano. This last locality however is in the dioceses of Mondovì which is part of Piedmont. In fact the majority of cities in this region have phonetic syncopated variations of *femmina*, such as *du fümne* in Giaveno (#153), surely due to the strong influence from France. Piedmont was seen as the doorway to France and it was influenced throughout history politically, culturally and linguistically by its neighbour. In fact, as noted by C. Marazzini, "La sua storia linguistica...si caratterizza per le forti resistenze italiane in un contesto di forte influenza della lingua e della cultura francese..."(7-8). Perhaps then this region has taken the meaning and form of 'woman' from the French *femme*, proof being found in the phonetic syncopated version not present in the other Italian spoken varieties. In general, other northern regions did not feel the influence of Tuscany at the time either, when the varieties were being stabilized. Friuli-Venezia Giulia for example, is a region where we find forms of *femmina* throughout, not only in the mountainous areas, but even in the plains. This region is obviously isolated geographically, being the most north-east. It was also socially and linguistically isolated from the rest of what is now Italy, during a crucial period of the development of the language. Friuli did not take part in Italian culture between the 11th and 12th centuries being under the German patriarch. The AIS does however have seven localities marked with *donna* forms in the Venezia-Giulia area. Point #369, the capital city has *do dône*. This may be due to the fact that being the main centre of the region, it had contact with other major centres of Italy. Another possibility is the fact that it is near Grado which is a tourist spot and would be filled with well off people, most probably from Florence, Piacenza and other city centres. The localities of Fiume (#379) and Cherso (#399) have *donna* forms according to Bonfante due to a strong influence from the literary language (78) The areas then, that have maintained *femmina* for 'woman' have also maintained *donna* as a form of respect.

Throughout the centuries, *donna*, the main derivative of *domina* has

acquired several new meanings. Some of these have remained somewhat close to the original definition such as a servant, a maid, and also in reference to a governess (Battaglia 4:949). Continuing with the idea of respect, an interesting case is *donna* which had been used as an honourific title preceding a woman's name as early as the 1200s. It did not gain popularity however until the 1500s when it battled with the title *madonna* which had been the most popular up until that point. *Donna* triumphed eventually over *madonna* which had actually been reduced to *monna* (except for references to the Virgin Mary) (Leone 404). This reduction or shortening most probably played a role in its defeat to *donna*. In the *Decameron*, for example, *monna* was used for lower class women: "monna Belcolore foresotta di Varlungo" VIII, 2 (409 quoted by Leone). It was also used in references to animals. Obviously, once this has occurred, it would be difficult to take the title *madonna* (*monna*) seriously. I believe also that the masculine equivalent, *don*, contributed to the success of *donna* as an honourific title. Since *don* survived and *messer*, (the masculine equivalent of *madonna*), died out, this gave all the more advantage to *donna*.

Around this same time period, innovative and interesting meanings are attributed to *donna*. For example, in the 16th century, (along with *dama*), it came to be the term for the queen in the game of checkers as well as the queen in playing cards. Also in the 1500s, it was used for yet another game to signify a masculine figure in cards: "il fante al giuoco delle carte napoletane." (DEI 2:1381)

A meaning of *donna*, which is now antiquated, entered the Italian language in the 17th century as the name of a fish: "nome di un pesce che ha proprietà emostatiche" (DEI 2: 1381). Perhaps this vertebrate acquired the name *donna* in a link with the weasel, (*domnola*), the latter of which kills other animals by sucking their blood. The fish therefore may have been referred to as *donna*, being linked to the weasel by a contrast, that is the fact that the *donna* prevents bleeding. This reference to a living creature is in fact one of many when we take into account all the derivatives from the Latin *domina*.

The popular term for the weasel in Italian is one of the better known examples of animal references stemming from *domina* derivatives. The *donnola* is an animal that is very common in Italy. It comes from the late Latin *dommula* (signorina, padroncina), a derivative of *domna* < *domina* (DEI 2: 362). The first written attestation in Italian is by B. Giamboni before 1292 (Battaglia 4:951). It came to substitute the scientific name *mustela* and there exist a few reasons for the switch in term to designate weasel, which I

believe are all connected. One is in reference to its gracefulness and slender form, as noted by Battaglia and in the DEL. In fact, other Romance languages have similar gracious words for 'weasel'. For example, the Portuguese term is *doninha* (Battisti Alessio 2: 1382). The Spanish word is *comadreja* (FEW 127) and the French term is *bellette*. Even languages stemming from other linguistic backgrounds have positive, graceful and appealing names. In German, *jungferchen* is equivalent to *donzellina* in Italian and in Danish the word for weasel is *brud*, meaning 'bride' (Flechia 50)

Many others however use *donnola* as a euphemism for this carnivorous animal that is in reality ferocious and wild that kills rabbits, chickens and mice. In Cortelazzo and Zolli's etymological dictionary, it is stated that *donnola* was used as a euphemistic substitute for 'mustela' and they cite A. Prati as proof: "Le donnole sono vendicative: se si fa loro qualche dispetto, si vendicano, rovinando vestiti o altro, che trovano nella casa. Il loro morso è velenoso." (139). Although the bite of the weasel is not poisonous, this quote illustrates the combination of superstition and viciousness attributed to the weasel.

In the last century, the scholar G. Flechia treated the subject more in-depthly citing specific examples as to why *donnola* became a euphemism. He believes that it was associated with the mysterious and mystical notions attached to the animal. First, Flechia states that instead of deriving from the Latin *domnula*, meaning 'signorina', *donnola* most probably derives directly from the Italian *donna*, and therefore has the meaning of 'donnuccia, donnetta, donnina, donzella'. In this way, the name is closely related with definitions from other languages. For example, in modern Greek, the word for weasel *nymphitza*, is equivalent to 'donzella' or 'sposina' in Italian. Similarly, in Romanian, the term *nevastuica* is equivalent to 'donnina'.(50-51). To prove that *donnola* is a euphemism, Flechia digs into the past and states that mystical qualities connected with the weasel were prominent in the middle ages, and existed even in ancient times. In Old English, for instance, the weasel was referred to as *maga* and *fata*, meaning 'fairy'. Furthermore, if a weasel ran onto the street in Greece, a public meeting would have to be adjourned. Also, Theophrastus wrote that if a weasel crossed one's path, one was not to continue walking until another person walked by or until one threw three stones across the street. In present day Italy, the mystical and folkloric notions of the *donnola* are seen in expressions such as *succiato dalla donnola* which is used to refer to a skinny person (Flechia 50-51)

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly which explanation for *donnola* is correct, although a combination of factors is most probable since the weasel's slen-

der build and shiny coat made it quite easy to attach this pleasant name to create the euphemism. What is clear nonetheless is the fact that the popular term has replaced the scientific *mustela* which survives in only a few isolated romance areas. Catalan retains *mustela*, while in Piedmont one can find *la mustel a* in Ostana (#161 from AAIS map #438).

Some interesting derivatives have entered the Italian language by way of other Romance languages not evolving directly from Latin to Italian. The term *dama*, for instance is first attested in Italy at the end of the 13th century. It derives from the French word *dame*, first attested in France in 1080. *Dama* is an archaic term that was used in Italy to refer to a lady of a feud or the wife of a knight or horseman (Battaglia 4: 2). Today, it is used to refer to a noble lady, although now too it is not in very much use: "oggi, donna appartenente all'aristocrazia o a un'importante famiglia borghese, di elevata condizione sociale, di gran rango: nobildonna, gentildonna, signora." (Battaglia 4: 2). Within the same semantic range, we see ladies that aid other ladies, all with noble connotations. For example *dama di compagnia* (also *damigella di compagnia*), involves a young lady or woman that is paid to take care of a noble elderly lady (Battaglia 4: 3). *Dama* was also an honourific title used for women of noble tenure, similar to the cases already seen with *madonna* and *donna*. A third definition for this term came about in the 18th century, still in the ambience of high society; it was in reference to the female partner of the 'cavaliere', in a dance couple at a ball (Battaglia 3).

Dama, however, is not a lexeme limited only to humans and it too is used to indicate objects. Firstly, it is used in relation to two games. In the game of cards, it is an alternative term for the queen (Battaglia 4: 3). Most often it is known as *la donna*, as mentioned above, or *la regina*. In the year 1562, the French term *dame* was first recorded in reference to the game of checkers and by the end of the 16th century it made its way into the Italian language (see also *donna* above). Battaglia's dictionary does not give any separate etymological evolution for this definition, but in the DELI it is noted that, although this meaning of *dama* is paralleled with the evolution of the first *dama* given (*dame* Fr. from *domina*), it would seem that in this case *dama* comes from an ancient *dame*, meaning a stone or piece (2: 310).

Lastly, *dama* is even a term found in the area of tools and equipment. According to Battaglia, it is the "stampo di ghisa detto anche chiodaia." (4: 3). The semantic evolution of this equipment used for making the heads of nails is unclear although Cortelazzo and Zolli believe it is somehow connected with the other *dama* concepts already stated (DELI 2: 310)

An interesting case that is possibly connected with *dama* is *damigiana*.

This is a large glass bottle used for wine with a tight round opening at the top and a large wide body. It is protected with a wicker lining and usually has a wooden bottom. The etymology of *damigiana* is uncertain. It is popularly believed that it comes from the combination of the French *dame* + *Jeanne*, equivalent to 'signora Giovanna' in Italian. Battaglia attests *damigiana* around the year 1694, while Cortelazzo and Zolli attest it as early as 1586. The DELI also proposes that *damigiana* is not a derivative of the French *dame-jeanne*, but rather a derivative of the modern Provençal *dama-jano* from *demeg* meaning 'half' (L. **dimedius*). In the *Dictionnaire étymologique du français*, under the entry for *dame*, it is stated that it is possible that the French *dame-jeanne* is the origin of the term in all the other languages, and that female names were commonly used to designate containers. For example, in Normandy 'christine' is used to designate a large bottle made of sandstone (191). The DEI gives another possibility for the etymology of *damigiana* which does not link *dama* with the Latin *domina*. It is written that it may derive from the Arabic *damagan*, the word for a clay canister (2: 1207)

Diminutive forms of *domina* have also made their way into the Italian language. For example, **dom(i)nicella* passed through Old French and became the form *dameiselle* in the 12th century (modern French *demoiselle*). It first appeared in the Italian language in the 13th century as *damigella* (DEI 2: 1207). According to Battaglia, the first meaning attributed to *damigella* is that of "Fanciulla, giovane donna appartenente a famiglia nobile o di agiata condizione (anticamente poteva indicare anche la moglie dei gentiluomini non titolati e degli scudieri); giovinetta di classe benestante, che si distingue per la particolare raffinatezza dei modi del contegno, degli abiti." (4: 6)

The second definition that follows for *damigella* appeared at the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century and still maintained its refined connotations. It was used to describe a young girl of noble stock that would be part of the official royal court and would be assigned to tend to the needs of the queen or princess (Battaglia 4: 6). Most probably by extension to this meaning, *damigella* also came to mean 'bridesmaid' (*damigella d'onore*). Starting in the 16th century, it was used to refer also to a house maid or servant, although this is not a term used presently. It is interesting to note that the first definition does not include any references to providing service, but from the second definition onwards, the idea of helping another person is always part of the meaning. Another interesting difference is that the idea of nobility and high class that constitute the early definitions gradually decreased and have completely disappeared with the

meaning of maid or housekeeper.

As stated above, quite a few derivatives of *domina* have passed on to indicate various animals. From the diminutive **domi(i)nicella* we also find similar noteworthy cases. *Damigella* became the term used to indicate a bird in the 19th century; *damigella di Numidia* is part of the crane family. It is slightly smaller than the crane, and is grey in colour except for the head and neck which are black along with white clumps on the side of the head. This bird's habitat is near shallow waters and it lives in southern Europe and Central Asia, but migrates to North Africa in the winter (Battaglia 4: 6). This diminutive of *domina* also developed through French, but in this case from a calque of the modern French *demoiselle*. This bird has been attributed this name for its tall and slender build. In fact when it moves along the waters' edge it resembles a slim feminine figure (Battisti/Alessio 2:1207). It is interesting to note the Latin scientific name for this creature which is 'anthropoides virgo'. 'Virgo' was commonly used in Latin for the naming of animals. Perhaps the popular term in French, which then gave *damigella*, arose from a connection with 'virgo' and its slender form, which together evoke the idea of a young lady.

In the DELI, there is a reference to *damigella dell'Indie* to designate a flamingo (2: 310). This is the only source indicating this term, but perhaps it developed by analogy with the *damigella di Numidia* since they are both similar in form, being tall, slender and feminine like.

Lastly, *damigella* also became the term used in the 19th century to indicate a dragon fly. The reason again perhaps is the slender form of this insect or its Latin name 'Agrion virgo'. It is the popular term evolved from the French *demoiselle* and is the equivalent to the scientific word 'libellula' in Italian. Interestingly, this extended meaning of *damigella* has even made its way to the English language in the form of the *damselfly* (OED CD-ROM).

Another interesting diminutive is *donzella*. According to Battaglia, it is a word that comes from the Provençal *donsela*, a syncopated form deriving from the late Latin **dom(i)nicella* (4: 953) *Donzella* is first attested in the Italian language in the 13th century, some time before the year 1257 in Bonagiunta Orbicciani's *Ballate*, where he writes, "Non si poria trovare né donna né donzella tanto bella." (315). The meaning of *donzella* here is that of a young girl who is at a marrying age or a virgin. A second definition for *donzella* is very similar to some of the meanings for *damigella*. Battaglia defines the term as a woman serving another lady from the noble sense all the way down to servant: "Fanciulla per lo più nobile che faceva parte del seguito di una gran dama; damigella, dama di compagnia; cameriera." (4:

953)

The term *donzella* has also acquired a new meaning in reference to other living creatures. This diminutive is used to designate a fish known as a 'wrasse'. It is first attested in Italian in the 14th century and is the popular term for 'il labro' and for other similar species that make up the 'cremilabro and coridi' fish family (Battaglia 4: 953). The *donzella* is a very beautiful and bright coloured fish with a long, slender body. According to the *Grande dizionario italiano* published by De Agostini, this fish can be up to 20 centimetres long and is found along the Mediterranean coast (669). This however does not completely correspond to the explanation of this aquatic animal found in the *Illustrated Library of Nature* where there too it is noted for its bright colours but where it is also stated that it can range from 10 feet long to a mere 3 inches (9: 1152). Furthermore it is written that the wrasse is found in tropical, as well as temperate waters. It is difficult to distinguish, therefore, whether *donzella* refers to all species of wrasses in general, or instead if it is reserved for only the smaller varieties. How this name was attributed to the fish is not known, although I believe two very probable reasons may be, first its colourful and beautiful appearance evoking the dainty name, and second, a possibility that has already been looked at in the case of *donnola*, a term which actually appeared in the same century. The wrasse, especially the smaller type is very vicious: it attacks and mutilates other fish, as well as fish from its own species. Perhaps then *donzella* is a euphemism for this deceivingly beautiful fish.

Lastly, *donzellina*, a diminutive of *donzella*, has made its way into Italian culinary terminology. It is used to refer to a "fritella di pasta lievetata con dentro pezzetti d'acciuga" (de Agostini 669). The dough is also smoothened and softened out and cut into strips. It is first attested in the 19th century in the book *L'arte di mangiar bene* by Pellegrini Artusi (Battaglia 4: 953)

The number of derivatives of Latin *domina* that are found in the dialect varieties of Italy are equally abundant. First, as noted earlier, variations of the forms *donna* and *madonna* are found throughout the peninsula as a term for mother-in-law. In the northern areas, the most widely used term is *madonna* which has survived from the honourific *madonna* (=signora) that was used for women up until the 16th century in Tuscan. Map #32 of the AIS (La suocera), illustrates that these forms cover the vast area from Piedmont and Liguria all the way to Friuli. One example in Piedmont is *la madóna* in Torino (#155) and in Friuli there are forms such as *madóne* in Tricesimo (#338). In the southern areas one can see the forms of respect with *donna* such as in Saracena (#752) where we find *a domme*.

Secondly, in Calabria and in Sicily, a derivative of *domina* exists that has entered from another modern language. The term *gna* is used as a sort of prefix to a woman's first name. It is used by the lower levels of society and is derived from the Spanish word *dueña* (Battisti/Alessio 2: 138). A time period is not given for this innovative term although it would seem likely that the many years of Spanish domination in Sicily and southern Italy played a significant role in its being adopted into the dialects.

The term *madonna*, which we have seen as being a term of respect in Piedmont, is also used in reference to the poppy flower in this region. More specifically, the *madone* applies to the brightly coloured wild poppy found in the fields (Sant'Albino 730). According to map #625 of the AIS, (Il papevero dei campi), one similar form is attested in Liguria, as *a madama* in Airole (#190). An interesting case is found also at point #453 in Sologna in Emilia Romagna. Here we find a form coming from 'donna', *i duni*.

Other interesting meanings are present in the Italian dialects if one considers again *dama*, which did not derive directly from *domina* but rather from the French *dame*. According to *Il nuovo Zingarelli*, in the Tuscan dialect *dama* is used for fiancé (505). Even more significant however is the use of *dama* in Piedmont in reference to a screech owl (*L. strix flammea*). This owl of prey has a hooked beak with nostrils covered by stiff feathers and is characterized by its large eyes, ears and head (Sant'Albino 445). This case is very interesting because, although no reason for this name is provided, I believe that it may be a euphemism, very much as has been seen in the case of *donnola* and *donzella* (wrasse). Being a creature of the night, the owl has always had superstitious allusions attached to its name. The screech owl especially, with its exaggerated facial features and low heavy cry, may indeed have been viewed with fear and thus to appease for this, the term *dama* was applied. Even Pliny, the naturalist born around 23A.D. in what is now Como, Italy, writes that the screech owl is 'excrable and accursed' and brings 'fearful misfortune' (*Illust. Lib. Of Nat.* 4: 413). In the *Vocabolario piemontese- italiano*, *dama* is given as the term for another creature of the night, the bat (Ponza 310)

The diminutive of *domina* (**dominicella*) also provides interesting cases for Italian dialect varieties. For example according to the DEI, *damigella* is used in northern Tuscany to indicate a herbaceous plant with the Latin scientific name 'nigella Damascena' (Battisti/Alessio 2: 1207). Perhaps however *damigella* simply became the term used in the region due to its phonetic similarity with 'nigella' and may not be a derivative of **dom(i)nicella*.

Lastly, the four different meanings that follow, stemming from **dom(i)ini-*

cella, are present in the Italian dialects and all refer to objects. In the *Vocabolario trentino-italiano* from the year 1904, we find *donzela* meaning "sferrina (del ferro da stirare)" (145). The term is preceded by an asterisk which indicates either a word of particularly marked dialectal character, with equivalent forms in old Tuscan, or a modern Tuscan term that is not Florentine. The first option appears the most probable in this case.

In the *Vocabolario parmigiano* by Carlo Malaspina, it is interesting that *donzella* is reserved to indicate 'damigella', while *donzela* (with one l) is used for objects. It designates a trolley used to transport cooked food (portavivande). Another amusing meaning has also been attributed to *donzela*: Malaspina defines this term as a 'orinaliera'; that is, the box or case in which a chamber pot is kept (55).

Finally, the milanese dialect variety provides yet another noteworthy definition for this derivative of **dom(i)nicella*. *Donzella* (also *donsêla*) is used to indicate a particular kind of mirror. Augusto Banfi refers to it as a 'specchio bilico', meaning that it is a large mirror held up by, and attached to two poles on either side of it. The portable mirror is connected at its centre point to allow for it to swing and to incline to alter the angle from which one can see oneself (231).

It is evident that the derivatives of the Latin *domina*, *femina* and *mulier* abound in the Italian language from the more basic ideas of 'woman' and 'lady' to 'wrasses' and 'mirrors'. I believe that I have compiled the most salient aspects of each of these terms to form an interesting historical study based on linguistic articles and dictionaries. The vast semantic evolution of the terms dealt with in this diachronic study, especially *domina*, are also important because new doors are opened for further study. For example, this paper dealt with locating and searching for meanings attributed to these derivatives. An interesting topic would be trying to identify, with well-founded data, the reasons behind these meanings, as has been done with *donno-la*. Further study may also be done in a structure similar to this paper, but on a vaster scale. For example, it would be very interesting to study the semantic evolution of particular terms, across the Romance languages. Taking even one concept and studying the names that have developed in various languages for identifying it could prove very productive. I have touched upon this with the names for the weasel, which all seem to be linked, such as *dominha* in Portuguese, *comadreja* in Spanish and *jungferchen* in German. Thus, studies such as these can bring to light facts concerning certain stages in linguistic history as well as cultural information that would otherwise remain unknown.

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