Anna Grimaldi Morosoff. *Transfigurations. The Autobiographical Novels of Sibilla Aleramo*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. Pp. xi, 140.

Recent studies which re-examine the blurry line between autobiography and fiction, have brought welcome rereadings and reinterpretations of late 19th century and early 20th century Italian women authors. In this highly readable new study, Grimaldi Morosoff proposes Sibilla Aleramo through a series of transfigurations, and later, transcendences from autobiography to the autobiographical persona. Along the way, as is well known, even the author's name has changed from Rina Faccio to Sibilla Aleramo. For all its brevity, this volume traces in commendable detail the personal iter of Sibilla the literary character in her search for that ideal love that will complete her as a woman and as a writer. This is a project that, a century before her, Niccolò Tommaseo's Giovanni, the protagonist of *Fede e bellezza*, had attempted with much less success. While Giovanni remained at the level of almost autobiographical *bildungsroman* (for which *Fede e Bellezza* was highly criticized by Carlo Cattaneo and others), the various Sibilla's (and in one case, Caris) underwent a transfiguration according to Grimaldi Morosoff. This consisted of Aleramo's ever more perfected ability to "render the essence of experience, [and abandon] as much as possible referential language and [make] use instead of the rhythmic, visual and allusive properties of language. [It] allowed her to reveal more, while making [her work] refer less to herself as an individual and more to universal, or mythic woman" (p.121) Grimaldi Morosoff begins her study with a chapter on the documented events of Aleramo's life; wisely, here she chooses brevity over lengthy lists of where there is overlap between life and fiction. In later chapters, this tendency to acknowledge the overlapping between fact and fiction will become a weak point as Grimaldi Morosoff refers time and again to the real names and circumstances especially of the male characters of Aleramo's novels. In all fairness to Grimaldi Morosoff, however, avoiding the overlaps in a writer like Aleramo is a difficult undertaking indeed.

The subsequent chapters of this study examine carefully four of Aleramo's works, from the controversial first novel *Una donna* published in 1906, to *Il passaggio* (1919), to the epistolary *Anno dunque sono* (1927) and finally to *Il frustino* (1932). According to Grimaldi Morosoff, the main themes of *Una donna*, pride and silence and solitude, expand as Aleramo incorporates one into another in her reflections on her past self and in her search for what is referred to in this study as the "new-woman-writer". Aleramo's introspective stance led to her move, her transfiguration, from the life which she was motivated to abandon to the motivation to write that life. In bringing about such a transfiguration, she initiated an innovative literary approach, a perspective imitated by numerous Italian women writers who have been able to express in their own words the themes and situations described by Aleramo. On the other hand, as Grimaldi Morosoff points out, they have been unable to reiterate her style.

Il passaggio, too, is an exercise in style, from which derive the debates over its sta-

tus as novel or novella or autobiography. The themes of silence and solitude appear again, as does the new theme of love. Grimaldi Morosoff shows how Aleramo becomes increasingly preoccupied with describing the potential of love because life-power manifests itself through love. It is especially in this novel that Aleramo is able to transcend the past events of her life, rendering them artistically, and reinterpreting her experiences in their universality. From *Il passaggio* emerges the "new-woman-poet" (p.61) whose intention is to change the myth of woman that man has created. Yet this myth is curiously re appropriated in *Amo, dunque sono*, a series of never read letters written to her lover while he, at a faraway retreat, prepares his body and soul for more spiritual endeavours, denying her any contact or communication and demanding fidelity to their unconsummated relationship. Grimaldi Morosoff sees in this also a transfiguration: "Sibilla, who is not a saint, but a poet, strives to change what causes her the greatest suffering.... She recognizes herself incomplete... Woman was not created for man; they were created for each other." (p.78-79). But while man considers himself from Cartesian rationalism (I think, therefore I am), woman must be completed by love (*amo, dunque sono*). Grimaldi Morosoff calls this attitude subversive and iconoclastic, explicating how it has added to the myth of the angelic woman and demonic woman and pointing out how, through language that may be both highly lyrical and metaphorical or more plain and concrete, Aleramo seeks to dismantle that myth. But the example of Sibilla's head does not convince, although the point itself is of fundamental importance in Aleramo's works.

Finally, there is a perspicacious and well researched examination of Aleramo's only third-person narrative, *Il frustino*. The study of Aleramo in her transfiguration to woman-lover-artist is thought provoking particularly in its presentation of the metaphor of paper roses; of greater critical value is the evidence of how this novel presents Aleramo in her stance as a new Prometheus. Transfigurations by Grimaldi Morosoff curiously does not acknowledge the important contributions of Lucienne Kroha (1992) to Aleramo studies. Nevertheless, like the latter, this too is a most welcome addition not only for Aleramo scholars but to all those who are re-evaluating the works of women writers of early 20th century Italy.

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***Linguistica testuale comparativa*. Ed. Gunver Skytte and Francesco Sabatini. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1999. Pp. 388. (*Études Romanes*).**

The twenty articles in this volume were presented at the conference of the Società di Linguistica Italiana held in Copenhagen in February 1998. The volume is dedicat-