

**M. Grazia Sumeli Weinberg**, *Invito alla lettura di Dacia Maraini*, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1993. pp. xvi & 273

Dacia Maraini is a leading figure in the Italian women's movement and one of the most consciously feminist writers on the Italian literary scene. Her work has often aroused hostile reactions from the critics, reminding us of Maraini's observation that books by women are treated by male critics as if they *are* women.

In her *Prefazione* M. Grazia Sumeli Weinberg notes that over the years "l'intervento della critica nei riguardi della Maraini ha dato sempre maggior peso alle qualità effettive dei suoi scritti e delle sue opere drammatiche" (xiii). Nevertheless, Grazia Sumeli Weinberg's book is one of the very few rigorous, scholastic and comprehensive studies of Dacia Maraini's works.

Conscious of the difficulties of objectively assessing the *oeuvre* of a writer who is "tuttora impegnata a scrivere le sue pagine migliori" (xv),

Sumeli Weinberg wisely chooses to organise her critical material strictly according to Maraini's creative *iter*. She accordingly provides an introductory chapter on *La vita e le opere* in which, together with a chronology of Maraini's life taking us right up to 1993, she includes a very useful section on "prime rappresentazioni teatrali". There are seven further chapters, one dedicated to Maraini's poetics, two to her prose, three to her theatre and one to her poetry. There is also a Conclusion and an extensive Bibliography. Grazia Sumeli Weinberg is to be especially congratulated on the wealth of material she has gathered in the first section of her Bibliography, listing articles from newspapers and "riviste di attualità". Spanning the years 1962 to 1991, this critical corpus will provide a rich source of contemporary information for future researchers.

As Sumeli Weinberg points out in her first chapter, Dacia Maraini's literary discourse can be defined as a "process" which has as its objective "il recupero dell'io femminile" (17). Indeed, Maraini's writing focuses specifically on the exploration of the female condition and Sumeli Weinberg cogently argues that in order to understand more clearly Maraini's artistic process and to follow its three constituent phases, "si rende necessario un primo ricorso all'opera narrativa in quanto forma che, nel ricreare il simulacro della realtà fattiva, più si adatta, nei tempi e nello spazio, a registrare l'atto del 'divenire' dell'io parlante" (31). Thus, chapters two and three deal respectively with the prose writings from 1962-1975 and the novels from 1980-1990.

Maraini's novels published after 1975, *Donna in guerra*, *Storia di Piera*, *Lettere a Marina*, *Il treno per Helsinki* and *Isolina* are concerned largely with a woman's developing awareness of herself within a male-dominated social structure. Sumeli Weinberg concludes her analysis of *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucría* (1990) with a comment which, in fact, sums up all of Maraini's later novelistic production: "se il romanzo è la raffigurazione del mutismo storico della donna, esso è anche la testimonianza della parola scritta come mezzo per il recupero di una sua nuova coscienza che però non scopre nemici imperdonabili, ma che vede anche le ragioni di altri in quella guerra che è la vita umana" (106).

Maraini forges strong links with other women writers and their fictional heroines, subtly reworking traditional female developmental paradigms into her own texts. This is made particularly evident in the sections dealing with Maraini's theatrical works, culminating in a re-writing of myth which unites "il lavoro di scavo nell'immaginario

femminile che caratterizza la fase più programmatica della sua produzione artistica” with “l’impegno ad assorbire nell’insieme di questa visione il rapporto della donna con l’immaginario maschile” (176).

In many of these works the body is established as the foundation of fantasy, of the imaginary, and it is altered in its turn. Not surprisingly, Maraini’s poetry is her most “corporal” genre. This is perhaps best exemplified by the poems in *Mangiarmi pure* in whose ideology “l’estremo atto d’amore [...] dall’annientamento dell’io, dal suo sprofondarsi nell’altra, porta verso il ritrovamento di una coscienza collettiva” (227).

Sumeli Weinberg concludes that “Dacia Maraini è una donna-scrittrice nel senso più impegnativo della parola. Il femminismo che l’autrice rivendica nelle sue opere è atto stesso della scrittura fattasi corpo di donna” (242). By representing women in current social context, Maraini’s writings “rivendicano una corporeità che le è stata sempre negata e, pertanto, incidono nel linguaggio i segni dell’immaginario femminile. Di conseguenza, il linguaggio letterario si fa portante di un nuovo ordine simbolico e, in quanto tale, è rivoluzionario” (244).

Grazia Sumeli Weinberg’s book is a noteworthy contribution to scholarship on women in Italian culture. Some of the issues raised in the analyses of individual texts suggest possible directions for future scholarship both on Maraini’s works but also more broadly on Italian women’s writing. Indeed, by focusing on the gradual and, at times, contradictory evolution of “l’io femminile”, Sumeli Weinberg complements and broadens existing definitions of women’s cultural and social identity.

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