

The prose of women writers: the language in debut novels from 1940 to 1968

Field of Study : Literature, Linguistics

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KEYWORDS

Novels, women writers, gender studies, linguistic, XX Century

ABSTRACT

The candidate's project aims at studying 30 debut novels by Italian women writers in the period 1940-1968. The analysis will focus on phonetics, morphology and syntax, taking contents and themes into consideration as well. The project has been conceived because the lack of studies of the entire novels landscape affects the investigation on the language of the XX Century Italian novel.

The works of women writers show a peculiar dialectic with the dominant literary and its linguistic model, to which they relate and adhere in a partial, lateral and critical manner. This approach often turns towards fantastic and psychological investigation showing a different reading of reality if compared with the dominant neorealism, favored by the Italian novel since the post-war period. Women novels are therefore different both in language and in contents from the dominant literary model and are often in contrast with it. The analysis of women writers' novels allows to make a more equal comparison with the literary canon, which they were excluded from.

As for language, we see two opposite tendencies in these decades: the first is a medium style of writing especially from the 60's onwards, which allows attention to focus on the context of the narrative rather than on its modes of expression. Such sobriety also comes from a desire to react to the traditional cliché of emotional and intimate women's writing marking in this way a difference with novels of male writers. The second tendency is to keep a conservative style.

Research aims and methodology

The project aims to study the language of 30 debut novels by Italian women writers from 1940 to 1968. The corpus consists of novels distributed unevenly across the three decades: it reflects the stagnation in publications during the war and the gradual increase in the cultural industry in the 1950s and 1960s.

For the 1940s, the candidate has selected five novels: Pia D'Alessandria, *Casa a ponente*, De Luigi, Roma, 1945; Natalia Ginzburg, *La strada che va in città*, Einaudi, Torino, 1942; Milena Milani, *Storia di Anna Drei*, Mondadori, Milano, 1947; Elsa Morante, *Menzogna e sortilegio*, Einaudi, Torino, 1948; Orsola Nemi, *Rococò*, Bompiani, Milano, 1940.

For the 1950s, the candidate has selected ten novels: Minnie Alzona, *Processo alla camerata*, Di Stefano, Genova, 1958; Luce d'Eramo, *Idilli in coro*, Gastaldi, Milano 1951; Livia De Stefani, *La vigna di uve nere*, Mondadori, Milano, 1953; Elsa de' Giorgi, *I coetanei*, Einaudi, Torino, 1955; Laura di Falco, *Paura del giorno*, Mondadori, Milano, 1954; Brunella Gasperini, *L'estate dei bisbigli*, Rizzoli, 1956; Grazia Livi, *Gli scapoli di Londra*, Sansoni, Firenze 1958; Lalla Romano, *Maria*, Einaudi, Torino, 1953; Fiora Vincenti, *Malattia*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1959; Giovanna Zangrandi, *I Brusaz*, Mondadori, Milano, 1954.

For the 1960s, the novels selected by the student are 15: Luisa Adorno, *L'ultima provincia*, Rizzoli, 1962; Angela Bianchini, *Le nostre distanze*, Mondadori, Milano, 1965; Laudomia Bonanni, *L'imputata*, Bompiani, Milano, 1960; Alice Ceresa, *La figlia prodiga*, Torino, Einaudi, 1967; Maria Corti, *L'ora di tutti*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1962; Oriana Fallaci, *Penelope alla guerra*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1962; Fleur Jaeggy, *Il dito in bocca*, Adelphi, 1968; Marina Jarre, *Monumento al parallelo*, Samonà e Savelli, Roma, 1968; Dacia Maraini, *La vacanza*, Lerici, Milano, 1962; Clotilde Marghieri, *Vita in villa*, Ricciardi, Milano- Napoli, 1960; Anna Maria Ortese, *L'iguana*, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1965; Goliarda Sapienza, *Lettera aperta*, Garzanti, Milano, 1967; Beatrice Solinas-Donghi, *L'uomo fedele*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1965; Carla Vasio, *La foresta e la fine*, Grafica, Roma, 1961; Mimi Zorzi, *I nemici in giardino*, Mondadori, Milano, 1965.

The methodology will involve reading these novels and analyzing their language (phonetics, morphology, and syntax), as well as their content. This analysis will be compared with existing studies on the standard Italian language of the period and the linguistic styles of male writers.

Relevance and added-value of the proposed research in relation to the current state of knowledge

In the last years language studies about works of women writers in XX century mainly lingered on a limited number of figures and works, isolating them from the literary context and the wider development of the language of Italian novel in that period. Besides, no critical attention was paid to the problem of the debut of novel writing.

The analysis of women writers' novels allows to make a more equal comparison with literary canon, which they were excluded from. No critical attention has been paid up to now to the problem of the debut of novel writing and no study has been carried on about language of novels corpora; the project aims at covering this unexplored field.

Interdisciplinary nature of the research together with the alignment with the CHORAL programme and complementarity expertise of the teams

The research will be carried out under the supervision of two skilled professors: in Chambéry, Professor Cristina Vignali de Poli, who is highly experienced in 20th-century literature, where the project offers an original contribution, and in Turin Professor Margherita Quaglino, who is an expert in the history of 20th-century language, also from a gender perspective.



Output plan including publication and dissemination activities

Books and articles will emerge from the thesis, with outreach efforts also directed at schools and libraries.

Estimated schedule

1st year: reading and analysis of 15 novels; reassessment of outcomes mainly in the Forties.

2nd year: reading and analysis of other 10 novels; comparison with the results of the previous period; start of thesis drafting.

3rd year: analysis of the last 5 novels; final drafting of the thesis.