

Introduction

Masculinity Studies explore what being a man signifies. Taking into consideration social constructions of roles and both the relationships and the behaviors of men in a society, masculinity scholars study the different and multiple ways in which men perform their masculinity and establish their identity. Masculinity Studies are still a relatively new and underinvestigated area in the field of Italian Studies. From a theoretical point of view, the influence of American and English research on this subject can be found in the approaches and methods employed by texts produced about Italian culture. However, in the last two decades, scholars of Italian have published stimulating volumes that have paved the way for the establishment of original, solid, and consistent scholarship on this topic in the Italian Studies area. Just to mention a few of them, we can indicate *Essere maschi. Tra potere e libertà* by Stefano Ciccone and *Uomini e corpi. Una riflessione sui rivestimenti della mascolinità* edited by Elisabetta Ruspini, as examples of texts that investigate masculinity from multiple perspectives. If we consider the application of Masculinity Studies theories to the analysis of works of Italian literature, cinema, theater, art, television, and the media, we notice that in recent years there have been increasingly important contributions to this area of scholarship. Most notably, Sergio Rigoletto's *Masculinity and Italian Cinema, Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s* and Catherine O'Rawe's *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema*.

Following in their footsteps and in an effort to contribute to the growing conversation about masculinity in Italian culture, we thought it was important to devote a volume of *NeMLA Italian Studies* to this topic. The present issue of the journal, titled *Italian Masculinities*, took shape from this interest and commitment.

The essays in this volume present several points of view. Some of the contributors work in the North American academe while others work in Italian universities or for Italian cultural institutions. Additionally, the essays analyze a variety of works: novels, films, and plays. These works were produced in the period that spans from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. In our opinion, this diversity is a sign of the scholars' growing interest in creating a new space of dialogue and research in the field of Italian Studies. The present *NIS* issue would like to serve as a vehicle to enhance this dialogue and this research.

INTRODUCTION

Although the essays in the volume manifest different positionalities, they are also closely connected. During the fascist era, Italy witnessed the representation and cultural dissemination of a specific type of masculinity modeled on Benito Mussolini. The scholarship on the production, representation, and performativity of such a masculine paradigm is rather well established and includes, for example, Barbara Spackman's *Fascist Virilities Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* and John Champagne's *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy*. Many of the articles in this issue of *NeMLA Italian Studies* re-examine the presence, in literature, theater and cinema, of this cultural subjectivity. The male figures examined in this volume are affected by either the acceptance or rejection of this prevailing form of masculinity in Italian society and their struggles reflect their inability to conform to it or their resistance to its codes of conduct.

The volume is divided into three sections, each dedicated to a specific genre: literature, cinema, and theater. In the first section, the two essays examine respectively Michela Murgia's *Accabadora* (2009) and Francesco Piccolo's *L'animale che mi porto dentro* (2018). In the second section, one essay analyzes four movies: *Il grande appello* by Mario Camerini (1936), *Luciano Serra, pilota* by Goffredo Alessandrini (1938), *Saimir* by Francesco Munzi (2004) and *La prima neve* by Andrea Segre (2013). In the third section, the three essays investigate in turn *Mia famiglia* by Eduardo De Filippo (1955), the change that occurred in Neapolitan theater in the Eighties, and the genre of *sceneggiata*.

In the volume's first part, Angelo Castagnino's thorough study of three male characters in *Accabadora* shows their inadequacy, by comparing and contrasting it to the strength and determination of the female characters, who inhabit a social milieu that is radically hostile to them. Ineptitude, absence and mutilation characterize the three male characters, who fail to adhere to the dominant masculine traits championed by fascist ideology. Through a detailed analysis, Castagnino presents Murgia's male characters as falling under the pressure of their failure as men, husbands, and fathers.

The meticulous examination of Andrea Rondini dissects the protagonist of the auto-fiction in *L'animale che mi porto dentro* offering a penetrating introspection into the split psyche of its protagonist: a wild, irrational, animal on the one side and a cultivated, rational, human on the other. Even though this male

character tries hard to reconcile this dichotomy, Rondini follows and shows his defeat as this objective proves impossible to achieve. Both cultural background and social norms prevent his male subjectivity from emancipating himself in a society that has never confronted its models of toxic masculinity.

In the second part of the volume, Lisa Dolasinski interrogates the way father-son relationships are depicted in movies of the fascist era to find similarities and differences in contemporary Italian cinema. Male representations of a foreclosed Italian colonial time are compared with masculinities occupying the present, to highlight the forgetfulness of Italy's historical responsibilities vis-à-vis its colonial past. The films by Camerini and Alessandrini show the approved masculinity embraced during the fascist colonial enterprise. In the contemporary movies, both dealing with the phenomenon of migration in Italy, the notion of race is again at the center of a controversial debate.

In the third part of the volume, Alessandra Marfoggia engages us in re-reading Eduardo De Filippo's *Mia famiglia* in light of the crisis of the traditional masculine role as *pater familias* in a time of radical social and cultural change. Marfoggia explores how critics misinterpreted De Filippo's male protagonist, an increasingly disempowered and marginalized husband and father, by applauding the authority and patriarchal order he stood to represent.

The following essay takes the investigation of this crisis a step further by examining how the Neapolitan theater in the Eighties tends to marginalize the traditional male character. Together with this marginalization, Mariano D'Amora shows how, on the stage, a space opens up for a protagonist who rejects the conventional binary system of gender and sexuality.

Finally, Raffaele Furno, in the volume's last essay, proposes a comprehensive survey of the *sceneggiata*, a typically Neapolitan dramatic genre where gender fluidity is both represented and celebrated. Since the beginning, in the 1910s, *sceneggiata*'s authors and audience have never linked the gender to the sex of the protagonists. Gender has always been connected to the characters' actions.

It is our hope that the present volume will add significant value to the academic research and conversation in and around the field of Masculinity Studies and Italian Studies. We wish to thank the authors of the essays for writing and submitting them, the

INTRODUCTION

reviewers for carefully reading and commenting on them, and the editorial staff for making the publication of this issue possible.

Buona lettura a tutt!*

Emanuela Pecchioli
Simona Wright

UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO, SUNY
THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

WORKS CITED

- Champagne, John. *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy*. Routledge, 2012.
- Ciccione, Stefano. *Essere maschi. Tra potere e libertà*. Rosenberg & Sellier, 2009.
- O’Rawe, Catherine. *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Rigoletto, Sergio. *Masculinity and Italian Cinema, Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s*. Edinburgh UP, 2014.
- Ruspini, Elisabetta, editor. *Uomini e corpi. Una riflessione sui rivestimenti della mascolinità*. Franco Angeli, 2009.
- Spackman, Barbara. *Fascist Virilities Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy*. U of Minnesota P, 1996.