

Conference announcement

***In the Name of the Mother.
Rethinking Motherhood and Its Representations***



November 11 - 12, 2015

Università per Stranieri di Siena
Piazza Carlo Rosselli 27/28
53100 Siena (Italy)

This conference brings together creative writers and specialists in different disciplines (Literary studies, Comparative literature, Anthropology, Laws, Classical studies, Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology) with the aim of identifying and discussing traditional and emerging models of motherhood in popular imagery, art, literature, and cinema.

One of the main purposes of the meeting is to deconstruct the traditional figure of the mother as a mere physical source of nourishment and protection. We believe it is time to re-evaluate motherhood in modern societies by promoting a public debate that 1) does not indulge in the over-idealized image of the omnipotent mother 2) does not oppose the mother and the father in a run for the leadership in determining the direction(s) of children's psychic and cultural development.

This competitive dualism, which dates back to ancient Platonism, has gained ground in the public discourse over the last two decades. Its purpose seems to launch a sort of a neo-patriarchal manifesto: it bestows on the fathers the privilege of children's education, explicitly or implicitly relegating the mothers to the mere biological sphere – a displacement that appoints them inevitably to the role of self-sacrificing caretakers.

This pattern urges real mothers to conform to the image of motherhood as the realm of primordial instincts and visceral emotions, thus preventing not only women but the whole humankind from experiencing the maternal symbolic in more complex and rich ways – for example as a dialogic interface between the mind and the body, and between nature and culture.

We suggest that the borderline between the mind and the body is the ideal place where maternal genealogical lineage – the relationships between mothers and daughters and the construction of female identities – should be rooted and fostered.

The issues at stake are major themes in many contemporary narratives – in Elena Ferrante’s work, to mention one – that could be profitably put forth in the public debate.

Helena Janeczek, one of the speakers of the conference, will give a talk on her book *Lezioni di Tenebra* (1997), an autobiographical novel centered around the figure of her mother and the writer’s Jewish heritage. As for maternal genealogy in particular, the pioneer work by Elsa Morante has been the inspirational source of many original reflections to be found in Italian women writers of the mid- and late 20th century. Another figure of the 20th century Italian literature that deserves reconsideration is Alba de Céspedes. She was very popular between 1940 and 1960 – influential as director of the magazine “Mercurio”, creator of ground-breaking narrative patterns centered around the relationship between mothers and daughters and aimed at deconstructing the bourgeois conventions of marriage – but her success declined in the subsequent years. Her books have been labelled by literary critics as “romantic novels” and were no longer published until recently.

In this regard it is hoped that the participants will question the reasons why 1) these writers are almost completely absent from Italian textbooks; 2) the Italian public debate and editorial market – run by women for the most part – appear so reluctant to bestow value on subject matters such as motherhood and mother-daughter relationship that are so crucial in a female’s life and imagination.

Time and Venue:

The conference will take place at the Università per Stranieri di Siena, Piazza Carlo Rosselli 27/28, Siena - Room 10 (1st Floor) over two half-days:

November 11, from 3pm to 7.30pm

November 12, from 9.30am to 1.30pm.

[For further information and online registration see here](#)

Speakers:

- Caterina Botti (Philosophy, Università di Roma “La Sapienza”) - *Madri cattive. Libertà e responsabilità femminile nella riproduzione.*
- Daniela Brogi (Modern Italian Studies, Università per Stranieri di Siena) - *Introduzione.*
- Tiziana de Rogatis (Comparative literature and Modern Italian Studies, Università per Stranieri di Siena) - *L'eredità della madre: cerimoniale iniziatico e strutture rituali nei primi tre romanzi di Elena Ferrante.*
- Manuela Fraire (Member of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society) - *Fantasma dell'origine.*
- Cristiana Franco (Classical Studies, Università per Stranieri di Siena) - *Madri speciali. Modelli, contromodelli e fantasie di maternità nella zoologia antica.*
- Helena Janeczek (Creative writer), *Idee della madre tra mostruosità e normalità.*
- Silvia Niccolai (Law, Università di Cagliari) - *Omogenitorialità, sessuazione e nuovo universalismo.*
- Cecilia Pennacini (Anthropology, Università di Torino) - *Altre madri. Culture della maternità nell'Africa sub-sahariana.*
- Chiara Saraceno (Sociology, Honorary Fellow Collegio Carlo Alberto Moncalieri/Torino) - *Maternità: un incessante lavoro di costruzione sociale.*
- Lucinda Spera (Italian Literature, Università per Stranieri di Siena) - *«L'anima mia è con te»: figure della maternità nell'archivio personale e nella produzione narrativa di Alba de Céspedes.*
- Monica Cristina Storini (Italian literature, Università di Roma “La Sapienza”) - *Figurazioni del materno e voci narranti nella letteratura italiana fra Otto e Novecento*
- Katrin Wehling-Giorgi (Italian Studies and Comparative Literature, Durham University) - *Dislocazioni materne: memoria, linguaggio e identità femminile nelle opere di Goliarda Sapienza.*

Organizers:

Daniela Brogi

Tiziana de Rogatis

Cristiana Franco

Lucinda Spera

Contacts:

Dipartimento di Ateneo per la Didattica e la Ricerca

Università per Stranieri

Piazza C. Rosselli, 27/28 – 53100 Siena

dadr@unistrasi.it

tel.: (0039) 0577 240223 – (0039) 0577 240244