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ABSTRACT

LIALA, COMPAGNA D'ALI E D'INSOLEENZE:
STORIA DEL ROMANZO ROSA IN ITALIA

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ABSTRACT

LIALA, COMPANION OF WINGS AND ARROGANCES: HISTORY OF ROMANCE IN ITALY

Many critical texts have devoted attention to that particular area of consumer literature that goes under the name of “romance”. Too often mistreated, the woman’s novel par excellence had to fight for long against a virulent social contempt that prevented an analysis without negative prejudices, based on its presumed belonging to a sub-genre concerning in particular women of low culture or, in the best possible way, naïve women. On the other hand, if a limit should be recognized to the romance, this is precisely in the strict segmentation of use: that romance, which is, united to the children’s literature, is defined not through the vocation of reading, but through personal details such as age and gender.

If this is an undeniable aspect, with my doctoral thesis, I endeavour to demonstrate that romance has its own tradition, and particular cultural and linguistic codes, having its precise scope, even if limited, in the broader history of world literature. Italy, in particular, has significantly contributed to the evolution of the genre, from the original novel of educational nature of late nineteenth century, to the stories of women’s determination at the end of the last century. Therefore, a diachronic and synchronic criterion was pursued; diachronic criterion from the point of view of temporal contextualization, which determines the more or less dramatic tone of the vicissitudes of heroine, and synchronic, where the constant fictions have been individualized, as well as variations of meaning and reason.

Following the unification of Italy, great attention, immediately, right from the Introduction, was drawn to the “noble crowd” of nineteenth-century feminist novelists who tried, and very often succeeding, to trace the sad aspect of the city life of women. Unavoidable premonitory signs, this educational literature, points to the results of the first decades of the twentieth century, which turns towards an empty aestheticism, and includes a disguised meditation on the woman condition, at this point extended to all the ganglions of Italian society. It is exactly at this point, the moment in which the feminine novel seemed to have taken a road with no way out, full of cynical pleasure seekers and

femmes fatales, nice one-dimensional characters for every occasion, that witnesses the advent of a young writer really capable of “scribbling” the papers: Liala, precisely.

With her, *Signorsì*, a novel written in 1931, the canons of romance are encoded once and for all, through the redefinition of the role of protagonists, whose role more acting and acted upon, compared to the recent past.

We are not certain at the threshold of the contemporaneity, but as the Lombard author herself understands clearly, the unrestrainable evolution of the society will join inextricably the expectations of her readers, more and more open to the world and desirous of new literary figures to which they can refer.

Before the analysis, more closely bound up with the biography and texts of Liala, we should approach a methodological examination of what is meant when we speak about consumer literature, popular fiction and, more specifically, romance. Starting from the plots of the liberation of Samuel Richardson, passing to the feuilleton, whose greatest exponent is undoubtedly Eugène Sue, and finally coming to the writer better known before Liala, Carolina Invernizio, the subject of a separate paragraph.

Then, we resume in the third chapter, the narrative of the adventurous history of romance in Italy shortly before, during and through the analysis of the post-World War II period, when Arnaldo Mondadori gives life to the periodical *Confidenze di Liala*, and after the extraordinary success of the aristocratic author of *Chiamami con un altro nome* - but this final part is included in the conclusion of the work, in which we arrive at the present day, through some forays in the Anglo-Saxon romance world, which has supplied the Italian publishing of the last thirty years-. This novel, and the contemporary *Una lacrima nel pugno*, are widely investigated, in the long paragraph devoted to the Italian novels of the economic boom, in order to identify distinctive characteristics that can connect to that period. Consolidating the thesis, according to which the real great credit of our protagonist was to adapt with much discretion to the changed habits of her faithful readers, even if she remained faithful to her dreamy literary world. A world in which, to explode another settled myth; in that women are anything but naive - and even less modest, and does not mean that they are unnecessarily - lascivious, but rather figures, determined to pursue their goals, much self-confident figures, to have a

relationship with the materiality of the their own body and the desired man, entirely free from too pressing moral constraints.

A very important aspect that we have tried to highlight in our work is the undeniable similarity in the course of life and art of Liala and her great precursor Carolina Invernizio. After setting the differences, we will deal with the undeniable similarities. Carolina Invernizio, for many things, anticipates the fiction of Liala. She made her debut in 1877 and her last novel was written in 1921. Liala began to write ten years later. After 1921, Carolina wrote only a children's book that came out in 1936. Between these two dates, in 1931, Liala's first novel *Signorsì* was published. This novel is a great success, and in many senses, establishes a basic difference between the classic *feuilleton* of which Invernizio appeared to be master, and the new romance. Carolina writes during the period between the beginning of the fascism and the end of the era of Umberto I, in the full patriarchal era. With the advent of fascism, it has the final resolution: in the male figure, the origin and the solution of everything is embodied. This is the crux of the success of Invernizio, which will be the same success to Liala: <<The collapse of patriarchy is reduced in a general disaster of those manly values that have always supported the organization of civilization. Moreover, while the male is revealed at this point, incompetent to be saddled with the responsibilities that are due to him, the female sex frees all her positive and negative potential. Angelic martyr or satanic monster, hard-working virgin or teacher of dissoluteness, the woman always dominates her companion, reducing him to the dull part of slave>>.

The two writers are closely related by a common destiny: a criticism that can turn to be the insult towards them and, similarly, the great love from the female audience.

If Liala is ridiculed for years by the Italian critics, we have seen how Invernizio is defined by Antonio Gramsci <<honest hen of popular literature>>, while an indignant Gian Pietro Lucini calls her <<impudent scribbler of papers>>, pointing out her dubious ability to put in her novels thousand ideas and then recompose them somehow at the end.

Also on Liala savage definitions are wasted: but the immense popularity of these two authors keeps them in a kind of untouchable isolation, not only towards the criticism and the "important" literature, but also towards imitators and rivals.

Both Liala and Carolina are two different worlds, and from their writing is immediately recognizable, champions of a new female leading character, who do not share their contemporaries with the authors of sentimental novels, barely capable to raise themselves above a widespread anonymity.

With Carolina Invernizio, a female figure now stands out by many aspects, who can be an angel, a martyr ready to sacrifice her life for her loved ones, but also a monster hungry for revenge against the man who refused her and her family, the image of what she was not granted. The radicalization of the conflict, good *versus* bad, is now played on all women: on the one hand, a queen of the laborious family who extends the outdated concept of “sublime sacrifice” to the sexual act useful to procreate; on the other hand, a teacher of debauchery who uses her erotic and sexual power to achieve all the prearranged goals.

The pale male figures serve to define with more force the female protagonists and antagonists. The women who live in the sexist, male-chauvinistic and patriarchal system decided to adapt themselves to this system: the man would never have had this strength.