

# H-Net Reviews

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Sharon Wood, Erica Moretti, eds. *Annie Chartres Vivanti: Transnational Politics, Identity, and Culture*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016. 312 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-68393-006-8.

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## An Intellectual between Italy, Europe, and the United States

Critical attention appears to have somehow overlooked novelist, poet, playwright, children's author, journalist, and political activist Annie Chartres Vivanti (1866-1942), a transnational intellectual whose life and work across Italy, Europe, and the United States challenged the more traditional monolingualism of fin-de-siècle Italy. This articulate volume aims to place this eclectic literary figure and her work "questioning notions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity" (p. xi) at the core of Italian literary modernity. Drawing on current transnational and cultural approaches to explore this multilayered identity in her work and its legacy, this edited collection analyzes the figure of Vivanti and her work through five lenses corresponding to the five sections of the book: female representations, transculturality, journalism, trans-genre, and reception of her works.

The first section, "Constructing a Female Self," offers an interesting reading of gender and female constructions in Vivanti's novels and plays, outlining the nonconformist attitude of Vivanti and her characters as women. Casting light on the gender imbalance of turn-of-the-century publishing, Ombretta Frau's contribution departs from Vivanti's *Lirica* (1890), whose publication was facilitated by Giosue Carducci's mentorship in the form of a preface, to inquire into the relationship between mentor-mentee through the lens of Vivanti's creative writing, and ultimately reveals a rebellion against Carducci's authority. The way that autobiographical experiences shaped the self-constructions of characters in Vivanti's novels is discussed both by Julie Dashwood,

with regard to the centrality of (and identification with) the trope of the femme fatale in the broader context of cultural and cinematic references, and by Ursula Fanning, who offers an interesting interpretation of performing femininities and "hyper-femininity," particularly in terms of motherhood (p. 25), as an intentional parody. Maternity is also the focus of Cristina Gagnani's essay, which concludes the section by highlighting once again Vivanti's revolutionary political thinking in her support of abortion legislation for war rapes on the grounds of women's right but not, crucially, because of the perceived threat of the hybridity of mixed-raced children.

The second section, "Translation and Cultural Mediation," looks at how Vivanti's transcultural identity and unique plurilingualism shaped her own literary practice. By investigating the "transatlantic" works produced by Vivanti, Mariarosa Mettifogo offers a stimulating insight into representations of both Italians and Americans. The scholar captivantly reveals the novelist's critical questioning of recurring stereotypes in relation to the dichotomy between Italian backwardness and American modernity, highlighting how Vivanti provided an acute multilayered account of American "cultural misappropriations" (p. 69) in Italy, and of the controversies of Italian migration to the United States. Turning to Italian colonialism, Sara Ceroni examines instead representations of blackness through the lens of Vivanti's short story "Tenebroso amore," pointing out astutely how the female body was "a site that simultaneously affirms and subverts gender and racial relationships" (p. 97), thus confirming Vi-

vanti's perceptive depiction of the complexities and ambiguities of Western colonialism. Marianna Deganutti's contribution focuses in turn on textual translation, analyzing Vivanti's self-translations, which, though mostly dictated by economic reasons, reveal a salient reshaping of the text in accordance to the preferred language, through a predominant use of domesticating strategies.

"Political Engagement and Journalism" discusses Vivanti's activities and networks as a journalist, an aspect of her polyhedric career that has so far received scant attention. Providing readers with the first account of Vivanti's journalistic writings, Anne Urbancic rightly asserts two main features, which appear entirely in tune with the intellectual's personality: a cosmopolitan plurilingualism, and a sense of subjectivity in interviews, which is maintained even when her articles assume a stronger political stance after the First World War. With the aid of archival material—which represents one of the main strengths of this chapter—Chiara Chini offers a revealing insight into Vivanti's engagement with the struggle of Irish independence, pointing out the strategic role of Vivanti's transcultural connections at the Paris Peace Conference, in Switzerland, and in Italy, with her propagandistic articles in *Il Popolo d'Italia* and *L'idea nazionale*. Also drawing on untapped archival evidence, Erica Moretti looks more closely at the literary collaboration between Anne Vivanti and Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, and particularly her collaboration with editor Luigi Albertini, stressing the cross-fertilization between her newspaper pieces and literary work, especially the stylistic influence of the former in the conciseness and use of humor in her creative writing. Through the use of private correspondence, Noemi Crain Merz accounts for another key figure, aside from Albertini, in Anne Vivanti's journalistic production, Italian war correspondent Barbara Allason, in an essay that sheds light on their mutual influence in terms of female emancipation as well as their political distance with respect to fascism.

In "Vivanti Across Literary Genres," three essays emphasize the extent to which the variety of Vivanti's literary trajectory across numerous genres facilitated Vivanti's "modernity" with respect to nineteenth-century traditions and put her ahead of even twentieth-century literary paradigms. The section opens with Enrico Minardi casting a sharper focus on Vivanti's only poetry book, *Lirica*, and highlighting her contribution to post-Romanticist literary trends by means of her plurilingualism and ironic tone. Humor is also the focus of Sabrina Cavallucci's essay, which interestingly anticipates

the early twentieth-century theories of humor that uphold Pirandello as the exemplary Italian case. Cavallucci suggests that this emerges from Vivanti's specific literary endeavors spanning diverse cultural contexts and genres: American short stories, dramatic novels, and war plays informed by social and political satire. Giulia Pezzuolo concentrates instead on the publishing history of Vivanti's children's books, through a close comparison in terms of content and paratexts between the novel *Sua Altezza* (1923) and its rewriting, *Il viaggio incantato* (1933), but once again reveals the humorous dimension in Vivanti's work in an analysis which reveals the need for Vivanti to adapt the texts to the evolving expectations of twentieth-century young readers in terms of laughter and happy endings.

"Reception and Adaptation" aptly concludes the volume by exploring connections within and across Italy and Italian culture, with a particular focus on female representation and motherhood. Lisa Sarti opens the section with a close reading of Vivanti's autobiographical novel *Marion artista di caffè concerto* (1890) which puts the novel in the context of other fin-de-siècle narratives and audience, and suggests a tension between a subversive representation of the female body, conceived not simply as a male object, and the reinforcement of a still-masculinized stereotype of romantic love. Stephen Gundle and Simona Storchi offer a thorough analysis of Raffaello Matarazzo's movie (*Guai ai Vinti*, 1954) inspired by Vivanti's wartime rape play, *Vae Victis!* (1917). The latter situated the maternal body at the core of a narrative claiming the active role of women in motherhood, in disruption of nationalistic discourses. Matarazzo's movie had to adapt instead to 1950s moralizing political needs as well as popular melodrama aesthetic patterns. Less concerned with women's role, but as further evidence of Vivanti's multilingual and multicultural identity, Filippo Fonio highlights the plurilinguistic, and in places satirical, use of French language in her novels and poems as well as the recurrent influence of French works on Vivanti's characters and her works. This interest was not, however, mutual, as the lack of French translations of Vivanti's works demonstrates.

The academic rigor and the plurality of viewpoints of this edited collection serve well to offer scholarly readership a composite account of Vivanti's polyhedric personality and writings. Firmly and stimulatingly engaging with the multiple cultural networks and contexts of Italy and beyond, this timely volume facilitates a full reappraisal of a key cultural figure of turn-the-century Italy.

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