

Title: Sibilla Aleramo

Known As: Faccio, Rina Pierangeli; Pierangeli, Sibilla; Faccio, Rina; Aleramo, Sibilla
Italian (1876 - 1960)

Author(s): Manuela Gieri (University of Toronto)

Source: *Italian Prose Writers, 1900-1945*. Ed. Luca Somigli and Rocco Capozzi. *Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 264*. Detroit: Gale, 2002. From *Literature Resource Center*.

Document Type: Biography, Critical essay

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2002 Gale, COPYRIGHT 2007 Gale, Cengage Learning



Table of Contents: [Biographical and Critical Essay](#) [Una donna](#) [A Woman at Bay](#) [Il passaggio](#) [Il frustino](#) [Writings by the Author](#) [Further Readings about the Author](#)

WORKS:

WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:

BOOKS

- *Una donna* (Rome & Turin: STEN, 1907); translated by Maria H. Lansdale as *A Woman at Bay* (New York & London: Putnam, 1908).
- *Il passaggio* (Milan: Treves, 1919).
- *Momenti* (Florence: Bemporad, 1920).
- *Andando e stando* (Florence: Bemporad, 1920; revised and enlarged edition, Milan: Mondadori, 1942).
- *Trasfigurazione* (Florence: Bemporad, 1922).
- *Endimione: poema drammatico in tre atti* (Rome: Stock, 1923).
- *Il mio primo amore* (Rome: Ars Nova, 1924).
- *Liriche* (N.p., 1925).
- *Amo, dunque sono* (Milan: Mondadori, 1927; revised, 1947).
- *Poesie* (Milan: Mondadori, 1929).
- *Gioie d'occasione* (Milan: Mondadori, 1930); republished as *Gioie d'occasione e altre ancora* (Milan: Mondadori, 1954).
- *Il frustino* (Milan: Mondadori, 1932).
- *Sí alla terra: Nuove poesie (1928-1934)* (Milan: Mondadori, 1935).
- *Orsa Minore: Note di taccuino* (Milan: Mondadori, 1938).
- *Dal mio diario: 1940-1944* (Rome: Tumminelli, 1945).
- *Selva d'amore* (Milan: Mondadori, 1947).
- *Il mondo e adolescente* (Milan: Milano-Sera, 1949).
- *Aiutatemi a dire: Nuove poesie (1948-1951)* (Rome: Cultura Sociale, 1951).
- *Russia alto paese* (Rome: Italia-URSS, 1953).
- *Luci della mia sera* (Rome: Riuniti, 1956).
- *La donna e il femminismo: Scritti 1897-1910*, edited by Bruna Conti (Rome: Riuniti, 1978).

- *Diario di una donna: Inediti, 1945-1960*, edited by Alba Morino (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978).
- *Un amore insolito: Diario 1940-1944*, edited by Morino (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979).
- *Dialogo con Psiche*, edited by Conti (Palermo: Novecento, 1991).

Edition in English

- *A Woman*, translated by Rosalind Delmar (London: Virago, 1979; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

LETTERS

- *Lettere*, by Aleramo and Dino Campana, edited by Niccolò Gallo (Florence: Vallecchi, 1958).
- *Lettere d'amore a Sibilla Aleramo*, by Vincenzo Cardarelli, edited by Gian Antonio Cibotto and Bruno Blasi (Rome: Newton Compton Italiana, 1974).
- *Lettere d'amore a Lina*, by Aleramo, edited by Alessandra Cenni (Milan: Savelli, 1982).
- *Per veemente amore lucente: lettere a Sibilla Aleramo*, by Clemente Rebora, edited by Anna Folli (Florence: Scheiwiller, 1986).
- *Un viaggio chiamato amore: Lettere 1916-1918*, by Aleramo and Campana, edited by Bruna Conti (Rome: Riuniti, 1987).
- *Lettera Papini-Aleramo e altri inediti, 1912-1943*, edited by Annagiulia Dello Vicario (Naples: Scientifiche Italiane, 1988).
- *Lettere a Elio*, by Aleramo, preface by Mario Luzi (Rome: Riuniti, 1989).
- *Per amor dell'amore: Corrispondenza inedita Fernando Agnoletti-Sibilla Aleramo*, edited by Anna Vergelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 1994).
- *Carteggio (1915-1955)*, by Aleramo and Antonio Baldini, edited by Maria Clotilde Angelini (Naples: Scientifiche Italiane, 1997).

BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY:

Autobiographical themes inform much of Sibilla Aleramo's literary production, from her first published work, the revolutionary *Una donna* (A Woman, 1907; translated as *A Woman at Bay*, 1908), to her subsequent novels, novellas, poetry, journalistic writings, and diaries. Through the story of a woman--herself in several vicarious representations--and most important through the creation of a singular and unusual "mythic body," however, Aleramo also aimed at tracing the history of women during a specific time. She wanted to redetermine categories and definitions of gender, in order that literature and life might merge irrevocably into one large, alluring, and disquieting text.

Un libro, *il libro* . . . Ah, vagheggiavo di scriverlo, no! Ma mi struggevo, certe volte, contemplando nel mio spirito la visione di quel libro che sentivo necessario, di un libro d'amore e di dolore, che fosse straziante e insieme fecondo, inesorabile e pietoso, che mostrasse al mondo intero l'anima femminile moderna, per la prima volta, e per la prima volta facesse palpitare di rimorso e di desiderio l'anima dell'uomo, del triste fratello . . . Nessuna donna v'era al mondo che avesse sofferto, quel ch'io avevo sofferto, che avesse ricevuto dalle cose animate e inanimate gli

ammonimenti ch'io avevo ricevuto, e sapesse trarre da ciò la pura essenza, il capolavoro equivalente ad una vita?

(A book, *the book* . . . Surely I didn't want to write that? But sometimes I felt such urgent longing when I thought about the book which should be written: a book created out of love and pain, compassionate, yet inspired by an implacable logic, heart-rending, yet optimistic. Such a book would show the world for the first time what it was to be a modern woman, instilling in the feelings of her unhappy brother, man, regret for the past, and an intense desire for change . . . Had no one drawn the same lessons from their lives? Surely it was possible for a woman to take the core of her experience and create a masterpiece from it--the equivalent of a life?)

These words, spoken by the female protagonist of *Una donna*, close the twelfth chapter, in which she reflects over the events that have defined--and continue to define--her life as a woman, a mother, and a writer. The words also summarize Aleramo's intellectual positions at that time, as well as her feelings, desires, and hopes, and disclose how--and how much--autobiography works its way into her novel; indeed, *Una donna* shows Aleramo reinventing the genres of novel and autobiography even as she exploits its traditional characteristics. In his essay "Ecce Foemina," published in *Annali d'Italianistica* (1986), Maurizio Viano notes that the entire corpus of her writing constructs not an autobiography but a true "autobiographical space," as defined by Philippe Lejeune in *Le pacte autobiographique* (The Pact of Autobiography, 1975). Indeed, while only one of Aleramo's texts (*Una donna*) may be defined as an autobiography proper, each of her written fragments aims at rendering an image of its female author. Moving within an autobiographical space of her own creation--first as Rina Pierangeli Faccio, which combined her married and birth names, and then as Sibilla Aleramo, which was her pen name--she constructed the tormented story of a woman in search of her identity and pursued the story throughout her life, adhering to a reality that she experienced in a completely subjective and personal manner. Aleramo thus conceived of writing as a cognitive medium through which she could build a privileged image of herself. The identity she eventually investigated and even molded was at first an existential self, as seen in *Una donna*, and later a literary self, as shown in *Il passaggio* (The Passage, 1919) and *Amo, dunque sono* (I Love Therefore I Am, 1927). The literary self depicted in these two novels is the one who writes and exposes writing in its making when Aleramo blurs the boundary between the work and the body.

Enigmatic, alluring, and utterly transgressive, Aleramo experienced many lives as she traversed, and in many ways designed and explicated for all women, the path to their new, modern position at the turn of the century. As some of the scholarship on her work reveals, her passionate and eccentric life often drew more attention than did her publications. The story of her unfortunate marriage, the legendary tales of her love affairs, her progressive commitment to the feminist cause, and her later membership in the Italian Communist Party--these events have been scrutinized frequently in critical writings on Aleramo. Her work was in fact dismissed at first--by, for example, Emilio Cecchi, who recorded his vehemently negative reaction in his diary in 1916. Only fairly recently has Aleramo's work received a second evaluation from critics, in that they now explore how her writing contributed to the literary debates of the time as well as to the shaping of a female poetic voice.

Aleramo was born Rina Faccio on 14 August 1876, the first of four children in a modest middle-class family in Alessandria. Her father, Ambrogio, was a science teacher, who, because of his

rather restless, eccentric personality, often changed professions. Ernesta, her mother, was a homemaker; an emotionally and physically fragile woman, she eventually developed psychological problems that led to her mental collapse and to an attempted suicide in 1889. Faccio loved her father intensely, and his intellectual presence initially dominated her world, as she suggests in *Una donna*:

Il babbo dirigeva i miei studi e le mie letture, senza esigere da me molti sforzi. Le maestre, quando venivano a trovarci a casa, lo ascoltavano con meraviglia e talvolta, mi pareva, con profonda deferenza. . . . E quante cose mi avrebbe insegnato il babbo!

(Father supervised my homework and my reading, although he never demanded much effort of me. When my schoolteachers came to visit us they seemed amazed at his knowledge, and often treated him, I thought, with profound respect. . . . My father taught me so many things!)

Above all, she gained from her happy childhood and adolescence an excessive love for reading, which her father nurtured, and the habit of using books as tools to investigate and understand life. In *Una donna* this aspect of Faccio's biography is invoked on more than one occasion by the protagonist, such as after she has been raped, and she tries to make sense of the assault by "rationalizing" it as a sort of sublime learning experience:

Come molte fanciulle, alle quali i romanzi suscitano immagini informi che nessuno illumina, io supponevo che la realtà non fosse tutt'intera in quella che mi aveva colpita disgustosamente: immaginavo un compenso avvenire di ebbrezze ineffabili che avrei goduto da sposa.

(Like many young girls, I had read novels which stirred up shapeless fantasies, never clarified for me. Although my experience with this man had disgusted me, I could not believe that it encapsulated the whole reality. I imagined that when I was married I would enjoy unutterable raptures which would compensate me for everything I had experienced.)

Una donna exposes the deepest root of the equation between life and literature--between life and writing--that best characterized Aleramo as an author and that produced other fine exempla in the lives and works of famous literati, such as Gabriele D'Annunzio and the writers associated with the journal *La Voce*. Her relationship with her father planted in part the germ of autobiography in her future writings and shaped one of the privileged "places" of her life and work--her relationship with men--which she viewed as the other side of oneself, or the "unfortunate brother."

As explained by Patrizia Zambon in her contribution to *Studi Novecenteschi* (1988-1989), family life thus signified for Faccio a cultural experience that was introduced mainly by Ambrogio, who also informed his daughter about their family history. In addition, Zambon remarks that, like most women in the lives of other Italian female writers of the time--with the exception of Ada Negri, whose mother was her guiding force after her father died--Faccio's mother was a "silent figure" in her upbringing. Some years after her suicide attempt Ernesta was hospitalized in a mental asylum in Macerata. Yet, although mostly silent, women of Ernesta's generation taught their daughters the art of sewing and weaving and thus provided them with metaphors for writing in both art and life.

In Faccio's early childhood, the family moved from Alessandria to Vercelli and then later to Milan. In 1881 Ambrogio decided to move to Porto Civitanova Marche to manage a glass factory, and within a few years Faccio began working there as a bookkeeper. At the age of sixteen Faccio was raped by one of her father's clerks, Ulderico Pierangeli, and was forced to marry him on 21 January 1893. Between 1892 and 1894 she wrote several short stories that remained unpublished, and--using different pseudonyms, such as Nira or Reseda--contributed to local newspapers. In 1895 her son Walter was born, but motherhood brought no stable happiness to Sibilla Pierangeli, who often suffered the vexations of her physically and verbally abusive husband and eventually tried to commit suicide in 1898.

During these tormented years, writing presented Pierangeli with an escape from her daily life. She contributed articles of a sociological nature on the female condition and on the issues of maternity and women's rights to newspapers such as the *Indipendente*, and to the feminist journal *Vita Moderna* as well as to *Vita Internazionale*, a biweekly journal on which writers and intellectuals such as Cesare Lombroso, Emilio De Marchi, Negri and Neera--the one-name pseudonym for Anna Zuccari--collaborated. Pierangeli also became acquainted during these years with what could be called the women's liberation movement. In 1899 she and her family moved to Milan, where she was offered the directorship of a new women's magazine, *L'Italia Femminile*, founded by the socialist Emilia Mariani. In Milan, Pierangeli met the writers Negri and Emilio Treves, the socialist leaders Filippo Turati and Anna Kuliscioff, and the writer and intellectual Giovanni Cena.

In 1900 Pierangeli was forced to move back to Porto Civitanova when her husband replaced her father in the management of the glass factory. She nonetheless continued her journalistic work and had already begun writing *Una donna*, the novel that brought her fame and a distinctive place in both the history of Italian literature and the history of women. Her personal life also underwent some radical changes. In 1902, just two years after relocating to Porto Civitanova, Pierangeli left her husband and her son and moved to Rome, where she began living with Cena, the editor of the prestigious literary journal *La Nuova Antologia*; they embarked on a romantic relationship that lasted seven years. Cena served as Pierangeli's intellectual mentor: he helped give structure and form to her erratic learning, fostered her literary talents, and introduced her to writers, artists, and critics, such as Luigi Pirandello, Grazia Deledda, and Giacomo Balla. During this time Pierangeli also received training and experience in social work: she and other socialist activists provided medical help in a health clinic in the poor Roman neighborhood of Testaccio, and she and Cena created schools for migrant workers in the countryside of the Agro Romano. Cena was also responsible for helping to contrive a pseudonym for Pierangeli. He joined the mythical Sybil--"Sibilla" in Italian--with the last name of an aristocratic family from Monferrato, the Aleramos, who were supposedly ancestors of the Faccios. *Una donna*, the novel she was writing, in large measure reflects the life of its author, Rina Pierangeli Faccio, but also the advent of a new persona--that of Sibilla Aleramo, the name under which *Una donna* was published and that resulted from Pierangeli's need for a new identity, one that captured the changes she was experiencing.

Though finished in 1904, *Una donna* was rejected for publication for two years, before the Turin publishing house STEN accepted the novel and published it in 1907. Many prestigious writers reviewed the book for various journals and periodicals, including Arturo Graf for *La Nuova*

Antologia, Enrico Ojetti for *Il Corriere della Sera*, Pirandello for *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, and Luigi Bontempelli for *Il Grido del Popolo*. Almost immediately, Aleramo's first narrative attracted criticism and generated controversy. Some critics, for example, compared *Una donna* to Henrik Ibsen's *Et Dukkehjem: Skuespil i tre akter* (A Doll's House: Play in Three Acts, 1879; translated as *Nora*, 1880) and viewed the novel as a feminist manifesto. It was published in France in 1908 and in Germany in 1909 and subsequently translated into many other languages.

With *Una donna*, the story of a woman and her liberation, told in a simple and direct style empty of the rhetoric that typified her later poetry and political essays, Aleramo began to merge autobiographical events--her life--with her art. Making her life and art coincide was essential to Aleramo in terms of her career, and her feminist awakening proceeded apace, in parallel with her growth as a writer. Indeed, the development of her consciousness as both a writer and a feminist resonates in her transition from writing as Rina Pierangeli Faccio--a victim of rape and spousal abuse--to publishing as Sibilla Aleramo, a newly freed, independent woman. In this respect one discerns the justification behind labeling the novel, as some critics did, a manifesto of women's liberation and thus a pioneering work in the history of feminist fiction. In his introduction to the 1982 edition of *Amo, dunque sono*, Gilberto Finzi notes that, beyond the relevant thematic elements presented in the book, the narrative itself is a striking novelty. That is, for Aleramo, the liberation of women must occur through language: since men have long dominated art, women need to master the "word"--and even the "poetic word"--in order to free themselves.

The writing of *Una donna* lasted for approximately five years, and--some innovations notwithstanding--displays a mastery usually shown by experienced novelists. As Mariarosaria Olivieri points out in *Tra libertà e solitudine: saggi su letteratura e giornalismo femminile: Matilde Serao, Sibilla Aleramo, Clotilde Marghieri* (Between Liberty and Solitude: Essays on Literature and Women's Journalism: Matilde Serao, Sibilla Aleramo, Clotilde Marghieri, 1990), in which she gives an accurate analysis of the novel, the story is narrated in the past tense from the first-person point of view; in addition, according to Olivieri, Aleramo mostly exploits the continuous past tense but also interjects the narrative with the past perfect and the present tenses. The devotion to tense obviously bespeaks an attempt to achieve not simply a memorial text but a true retrieval of the past in the hope of reliving important moments of one's experience. Through the intrusion of the present tense she reactivates the past, as if it were still "alive" in one's consciousness:

Venne l'estate; due mesi torridi, incerti nel ricordo. Le amiche, il "profeta," tutti erano fuori Roma. . . . Mio marito? Non so, non lo rivedo distintamente: ho solo l'impressione fastidiosa della sua voce un po' rauca . . . della sua fronte accigliata, in cui una nuova ruga diritta si approfondiva nel mezzo, mentre l'ira gli accentuava gli zigomi e le mascelle. . . . In realtà non stavo bene.

(Then summer came. Two months of burning heat. Everyone was away from Rome--my women friends, the "prophet" . . . How my husband spent these days I don't know. In fact I have no distinct recollection of him at all--only the distasteful impression of his raucous voice . . . and a distant memory of his forehead, now furrowed into a permanent frown, his prominent cheekbones, the bad-tempered set of his jaw. . . . And I was ill.)

As evinced from this fragment, the narrative moves from one tense to the other. On the one hand, the privileged tense of the narrative is the continuous past, the tense of autobiography for an author who constantly identifies with the protagonist. Yet, on the other, as Olivieri has observed, the narrative often switches to a past perfect that records the eruption of a particular event and fixes it in history; most important, at times the narration unfolds in the present tense, reminding the reader that a specific event does not necessarily reside only in the stagnant past but can still exist in present time--in the mind of the person who is remembering.

The constant switching of verbal tenses is perhaps one of the most modern techniques used by Aleramo in this otherwise fairly traditional novel with a realistic, or rather naturalistic, "bent." Yet, Olivieri rightly notes that whenever the author introduces social and political commentary within the narrative, the style changes and resumes the emphatic rhetoric that characterizes Aleramo's journalistic writings on feminism and social issues. The frequent discussions on the condition of women and on the birth of a female "autocoscienza" (conscience of oneself) in the protagonist suggest that this novel echoes the heated debates on feminism prompted by women's journals of the time. Indeed, these feminist and social digressions, though undoubtedly linked to the autobiographical experience of the narrator of *Una donna*, create a specific social and historical environment for the novel.

While *Una donna*, more than any other of Aleramo's literary endeavors, is oriented toward the traditional novel, the text nonetheless displays her ambition to find in writing not only a tool for self-cognition and self-definition but also a means to acquire a knowledge of reality itself. In the use of the present tense, for instance, the reader soon detects the tension to equate art and life--a tension that developed into a characteristic trait of Aleramo's journey not only as a writer and poet but also as a woman. Thus, the relationship between life and work gradually becomes the cipher of a self-creative impulse that, as stated earlier, did find direct inspiration in the lives and works of D'Annunzio and of the *La Voce* writers, leading to the creation of a true "autobiographical space." The diary form and fragmented structure of *Il passaggio*, published twelve years after *Una donna*, and the epistolary forms of the novella *Trasfigurazione* (Transfiguration, 1922) and of the novel *Amo, dunque sono* all testify to Aleramo's belief that the time of life must necessarily correspond to the time of narration, or writing, as well as to the need to represent art in action, as it is being created.

The years that separate *Una donna* and *Il passaggio* reflect a decisive shift in her style, as she fortified her literary background with a diverse reading regimen. During this time she read not only Ibsen, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, and D'Annunzio but also Matilde Serao, Deledda, Colette and other women writers. She persevered despite her troubled and restless life. In 1909 her passionate feelings for a "fanciulla maschia" (virile maiden) eventually drove Aleramo to leave Cena. In August 1910 she began an affair with Vincenzo Cardarelli, who was variously a contributor to *La Voce*, one of the founders of *La Ronda*, and later the editor of *La Fiera Letteraria*. During this period she also became acquainted with a few of the *La Voce* writers--among them, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Giovanni Papini, Scipio Slataper, and Ardengo Soffici--and in 1911 she left Cardarelli for a relationship with Papini. In 1912 she broke up with Papini and went to Corsica, where she began writing poems and had a brief love affair with the "ragazzo Joe." From then on Aleramo had an extremely eventful and yet

tormented romantic life that put her through an endless cycle of affairs with writers, poets, and artists, such as Umberto Boccioni, Giovanni Boine, and later Dino Campana .

Her second novel, *Il passaggio* , encompasses the fragmentary, confessional, and lyrical tension that found a more complete expression in her later poetry; the avant-garde writers of *La Voce* and, perhaps most important, writers and thinkers such as D'Annunzio and Nietzsche, in particular, inspired the writing of this work. Yet, she always resented the accusation of aestheticism, and years later she wrote in her diary:

L'appunto peggiore che mi si è sempre fatto per *Il passaggio* e per *Endimione* è quello di estetismo. . . . Estetismo è esteriorità. Nulla d'esteriore c'è nel *Passaggio* e quasi nulla in *Endimione*. Tutto è sintesi, concentrazione; tutto è lucidità. . . . Tutto è fedeltà alla mia interiore visione. Nessun gonfiore, nessun barocchismo.

(The worst criticism always raised in relation to *Il passaggio* and *Endimione* is that of aestheticism. . . . Aestheticism is exteriority. Nothing superficial can be found in *Il passaggio*, and almost nothing in *Endimione*. Everything is synthesis, concentration; everything is lucidity. . . . Everything is faithfulness to my interior vision. No excess, no baroquism.)

In this long but quite revealing statement, Aleramo coherently and eloquently explicates some of the most relevant points in her development as a writer and as a poet. As she unequivocally writes in her diary, the project was one of self-creation and self-definition:

E infine, si tratta di *opera di donna*, di *poesia femminile*, di tentativo eroico, per la prima volta forse nella storia del lirismo italiano, di attestare la qualità del genio muliebre, ch'io sostengo differente dal genio maschio. . . . Come mai tutto questo non è stato compreso ed ammesso?

(And in the end, this is a *woman's work*, *female poetry*, the heroic attempt, perhaps for the first time in the history of Italian lyricism, to state and assert the quality of womanly genius, which I hold to be different from masculine genius. . . . How is it that all of this has not been understood and admitted?)

In *Il passaggio* the lyrical tension intensifies to the extent that, as Rita Guerricchio indicated in her 1974 book, *Storia di Sibilla*, the book ceases to be a novel and instead becomes a rather "lyrical autobiography"--indeed, "a new autobiography" that subsequently eclipsed the mostly traditional autobiographical storytelling of *Una donna*. Through *Il passaggio* Aleramo tells the story of her many relationships--first with Damiani and Cena, and then with Cardarelli, Papini, Boccioni, Boine, and Campana; yet, she also tackles a far more controversial issue, such as her lesbian affair. *Il passaggio* constituted Aleramo's most troubling experience as a writer, for she was trying to join the need to express and define oneself in an artistic literary endeavor, a true "prosa d'arte."

In a 1931 essay titled "Orlando inglese," later included in the collection of prose *Andando e stando* (Going and Staying, 1942) that she dedicated to Virginia Woolf , Aleramo wrote, "Avere in mano un libro di donna, e sentirsi tentati di dichiararlo grande, in un grande slancio festoso, ecco un'avventura rara . . . Domani, chissà, sarà la volta che scopriranno la nuova Saffo. Non disperare, mia specie" (To have in our hands a woman's book, and to feel tempted to declare it great, in a festive impetus, here you have a rare adventure . . . Tomorrow, perhaps, will be the

turn for the discovery of a new Sappho. Do not despair, my species). Her words were prescient, for with her last novel, *Il frustino* (The Whip, 1932), Aleramo completed a journey toward the identification of herself as an artist and toward the acquisition of an exquisitely personal style--a definitively "feminine" one, in which the word directly emanates from and reflects her own inner vision, a true symbiosis of the body and the spirit. At first *Il frustino* seems to be the least autobiographical of her narratives, since it is told in the third-person voice. However, this story of romance between the protagonists, Caris di Rosia and Mino Vergili, is in actuality a recasting of Aleramo's relationship with Boine even as she obviously disguises it: Liguria becomes Campania, Clemente Reborà becomes Emanuele Origo, Giulio Parise becomes a nameless stranger living in Paris, and the painter Cascella--whom Aleramo left for Boine--becomes an aviator named Donato Gabri. While specific identities frequently fade simply into "man" and "woman," the narrative unquestionably urges the reader to listen carefully to the voice of truth and reality, as Viano observes in his article. *Il frustino* therefore captures an important stage in the questioning of literary autobiography and in the construction of a personal and compelling "autobiographical space."

Aleramo's last, and perhaps most disappointing, relationship began in 1936 when, at age sixty, she met and fell in love with the young poet Franco Maticola. She remained with Maticola for a decade and in the diary she began four years after the start of their affair, she wrote extensively about their relationship and the conflicts of World War II raging in the background. Indeed, her passion for the fragmentary and the confessional attained its purest expression not only in the plethora of letters she composed during her eventful life but also--even more significantly--in her diaries, which she maintained for the next twenty years. They enabled Aleramo to commence a new kind of writing, which she herself defined in the diaries as "flusso irrefrenabile di vita" (unrestrained flux of life). In 1945 the first 360 pages of her diary were published as *Dal mio diario: 1940-1944* (From My Diary: 1940-1944). Although nearly thirty years after its publication, scholars such as Guerricchio praised *Dal mio diario* as the best of Aleramo's writings, the diary selection received a rather negative reception when it first appeared--a response that ultimately prevented further publication of her confessional text for almost forty years.

In 1946 Aleramo began a new stage in her adventurous life by joining the Italian Communist Party. Its twin calls for solidarity and mission inspired the former socialist activist and compelled her to reach the emotional decision of becoming a party member. She embarked on her new life as a Communist with passion and commitment, startling the Italian cultural establishment, and spent the final years of her life occupied with intense cultural and political activity. She gave public lectures and poetry readings, participated in peace conferences, and contributed to *L'Unità*, *Rinascita*, and *Noi Donne*, thus continuing to write and live passionately until the end.

On 2 January 1960 Sibilla Aleramo wrote in her diary, "Né l'ultimo dell'anno né ieri trovai la forza di annotare parola. . . . Tempo chiaro. Ma fatico a tenere gli occhi aperti" ("Neither on New Year's Eve nor yesterday could I find the strength to record a word. . . . The weather is clear. But I find it difficult to keep my eyes open"). She died, eleven days later, on 13 January 1960. The struggle to construct an intriguing paradigm, whereby "art equals life," characterized most of her career and embodied her first work, *Una donna*, a novel based heavily on events in her life. Through the writing of *Una donna* she encountered the challenge of constructing a mythic

persona in the context of autobiography, an overriding tension that found more appropriate and satisfactory expression in her later novels and novellas and reached its height with not only *Il frustino*, her last novel, but also, crucially, with her diaries. Not until 1978 was the rest of her diary published in its entirety, titled *Diario di una donna: Inediti, 1945-1960* (Diary of a Woman: Unpublished, 1945-1960). In 1979 *Un amore insolito: Diario 1940-1944* (An Unusual Love: Diary 1940-1944) appeared in print; a version of her first diary publication, *Dal mio diario*, this selection reintegrated some entries about her relationship with Maticotta that had been omitted previously. In effect, Aleramo's diaries brought to completion her lifelong project of liberating a specifically feminine poetic language and simultaneously mapping out her own disquieting "autobiographical space."

Papers:

See also the Aleramo entry in *DLB 114: Twentieth Century Italian Poets, First Series*.

FURTHER READINGS:

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Biographies:

- Piero Nardi, *Un capitolo della biografia di Sibilla* (Venice: Pozza, 1965).
- Bruna Conti and Alba Morino, eds., *Sibilla Aleramo e il suo tempo-Vita raccontata e illustrata* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981).
- Annarita Buttafuoco and Marina Zancan, eds., *Svelamento: Sibilla Aleramo: una biografia intellettuale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988).

References:

- Matilde Angelone, *L'apprendistato letterario di Sibilla Aleramo: Con novelle inedite* (Naples: Liguori, 1987).
- Fiora A. Bassanese, "Una donna: Autobiography as Exemplary Text," in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, edited by Ada Testaferri (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1989), pp. 131-152.
- Bassanese, "Sibilla Aleramo (Rina Faccio) (1876-1960)," in *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, edited by Rinaldina Russell (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 9-17.
- Bassanese, "Sibilla Aleramo: Writing a Personal Myth," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, edited by Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 137-165.
- Marino Biondi, "Il personaggio maschile nei romanzi di una donna," in *Sibilla Aleramo: Coscienza e scrittura*, edited by Franco Contorbia, Lea Melandri, and Alba Morino (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986), pp. 78-87.
- Celia Bucci, "Historical Reference in a 'Lightly Fictionalized Memoir': Sibilla Aleramo's *A Woman*," *Romance Languages Annual: RLA*, 2 (1990): 200-204.
- Daniela Cavallero, "Io e Lei: Una donna e Cosima. Due esempi di autobiografia al femminile," *Romance Languages Annual: RLA*, 5 (1993): 174-179.

- Rita Cavigioli, *La fatica di iniziare il libro: problemi di autorità nel diario di Sibilla Aleramo* (Alessandria: Dell'Orso, 1995).
- René de Ceccatty, *Nuit en pays étranger* (Paris: Julliard, 1992).
- Emilio Cecchi, "Sibilla Aleramo incoronata," in *Letteratura italiana del Novecento*, edited by Pietro Citati, volume 1 (Milan: Mondadori, 1972), pp. 399-402.
- Fausta Cialente, "Un ricordo," in *Diario di una donna*, by Aleramo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978), pp. 17-23.
- Cialente, "Sibilla Aleramo mi confidava," in *Sibilla Aleramo: Coscienza e scrittura*, edited by Contorbia, Melandri, and Morino (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986), pp. 153-155.
- Bruna Conti, *La donna e il femminismo di Sibilla Aleramo* (Rome: Riuniti, 1978).
- Conti, "Due bauli: le carte dell'archivio," in *Sibilla Aleramo: Coscienza e scrittura*, edited by Contorbia, Melandri, and Morino (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986), pp. 13-26.
- Conti, "Intervista impossibile con Sibilla Aleramo," *Il Ponte*, 42, no. 6 (November-December 1986): 145-157.
- Contorbia, Melandri, and Morino, eds., *Sibilla Aleramo: Coscienza e scrittura* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986).
- Simona Costa, "Sibilla e D'Annunzio," in *Sibilla Aleramo: Coscienza e scrittura*, edited by Contorbia, Melandri, and Morino (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986), pp. 117-129.
- Richard Drake, "Sibilla Aleramo and the Peasants of the Agro Romano: A Writer's Dilemma," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 51, no. 2 (April-June 1990): 255-272.
- Adele Faccio, "Rina Faccio," in *Sibilla Aleramo: Coscienza e scrittura*, edited by Contorbia, Melandri, and Morino (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986), pp. 156-163.
- Maria Federzoni, Isabella Pezzini, and Maria Pia Pozzato, *Sibilla Aleramo* (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1980).
- Angelica Forti-Lewis, "Scrittura auto/bio/grafica: teoria e pratica. Una proposta di lettura androgina per *Una donna* di Sibilla Aleramo," *Italica*, 71, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 325-336.
- Fabio Girelli Carasi, "Disease as Metaphor in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna*," *Italiana 1987* (1989): 271-285.
- Isabel González, *Profilo di Sibilla Aleramo: La donna e l'intellettuale nelle opere e nel giudizio dei contemporanei* (Santiago de Compostela, Spain: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1982).
- Massimo Grillandi, "La poesia di Sibilla Aleramo," *Letteratura*, 29, nos. 74-75 (1965): 89-95.
- Anna Grimaldi Morosoff, "*Il passaggio*: An Autobiographical Novel by Sibilla Aleramo," in *Studies in Honor of Maria A. Salgado*, edited by Millicent A. Bolden, Luis A. Jimenez, and Graciela Palau de Nemes (Newark, Del.: Juan de la Cuesta, 1995), pp. 61-80.
- Grimaldi Morosoff, *Transfigurations: The Autobiographical Novels of Sibilla Aleramo* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).
- Rita Guerricchio, *Storia di Sibilla* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1974).
- Anette Hartstock, "Sibilla Aleramo und die 'scrittura femminile,'" *Italienisch Zeitung*, 17, no. 1 (May 1995): 42-57.
- Susan Jacobs, "In Search of the Other Subjectivity: Autobiography and the Works of Sibilla Aleramo," in *Literature and Quest*, edited by Christine Arkininstall (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 53-64.

- Keala Jane Jewell, "Un furore d'autocreazione: Women and Writing in Sibilla Aleramo," *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies*, 7 (1984): 148-162.
- Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975; enlarged edition, Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1996).
- Olga Lombardi, "Sibilla Aleramo," *Belfagor*, 41, no. 6 (30 November 1986): 525-544.
- Bernadette Luciano, "The Diaries of Sibilla Aleramo: Constructing Female Subjectivity," in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, edited by Maria Ornella Marotti (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 95-110.
- Elisa Martínez-Garrido, "El mito de la 'Virgen perseguida' en una novela femenina y feminista," in *Actas del IX Simposio de la Sociedad Española de Literatura General y Comparada: Zaragoza, 18 al 21 de noviembre de 1992*, edited by Túa Blesa, María Teresa Cacho, Gual Carlos García, Mercedes Rolland, Leonardo Romero Tobar, and Margarita Smerdou Altolaguirre (Zaragoza, Spain: Universidad de Zaragoza, 1994), pp. 253-261.
- Cristina Mazzone, "Parturition, Parting, and Paradox in Turn-of-the-Century Italian Literature (D'Annunzio, Aleramo, Neera)," *Forum Italicum*, 31, no. 2 (1997): 343-366.
- Antal Mazzotti, "Sibilla Aleramo," in *Letteratura italiana: I contemporanei* (Milan: Marzorati, 1963), pp. 211-235.
- Anna Meda, "Idea di potere e miti di rinascita nell'opera di Sibilla Aleramo," *Studi d'Italianistica nell'Africa Australe*, 9, no. 2 (1996): 45-63.
- Lea Melandri, "Ecstasy, Coldness, and the Sadness Which Is Freedom," translated by Kate Soper, in *Off Screen: Women and Film in Italy*, edited by Giuliana Bruno and Maria Nadotti (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 55-79.
- Melandri, "La spudoratezza. Vita e opere di Sibilla Aleramo," *Memoria: Rivista di storia delle donne*, 8 (1983): 7-23.
- Giovanna Miceli Jeffries, "Una donna: singolare e radicale esperienza di ricerca e di liberazione di una coscienza," *Forum Italicum*, 15, no. 1 (1981): 31-51.
- Giuseppe Monchetti, "Per una rilettura di Campana ed epistolario con Sibilla Aleramo," *Cristallo*, 14, no. 3 (1972): 63-86.
- Alba Morino, "Sibilla Aleramo: Autoritratto," in *Una donna un secolo*, edited by Sandra Petrigiani (Rome: Ventaglio, 1986), pp. 43-55.
- Mariarosaria Olivieri, *Tra libertà e solitudine: saggi su letteratura e giornalismo femminile: Matilde Serao, Sibilla Aleramo, Clotilde Margheri* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1990), pp. 33-48.
- Pickering-Iazzi, "Designing Mothers: Images of Motherhood in Novels by Aleramo, Morante, Maraini, Fallaci," *Annali d'Italianistica*, 7 (1989): 325-340.
- Gabriella Rovagnani, "'Lei è uno dei pochi forestieri da cui spero essere intesa': Sibilla Aleramo e Stefan Zweig," *Acme*, 48, no. 1 (1995): 155-173.
- Maurizio Viano, "Ecce Foemina," *Annali d'Italianistica*, 4 (1986): 223-241.
- Giancarlo Vigorelli, *A Sibilla* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1983).
- Barbara Zaczek, "Plotting Letters: Narrative Dynamics in the Correspondence of Giovanni Papini and Sibilla Aleramo and in 'La Trasfigurazione,'" *Italica*, 72, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 54-69.

- Patrizia Zambon, "Leggere per scrivere. La formazione autodidattica delle scrittrici tra Otto e Novecento: Neera, Ada Negri, Girazia Deledda, Sibilla Aleramo," *Studi Novecenteschi*, 15-16 (1988-1989): 287-324.

RELATED INFORMATION

See also:

- Twentieth-Century Italian Poets, First Series

Source Citation (MLA 7th Edition)

Gieri, Manuela. "Sibilla Aleramo." *Italian Prose Writers, 1900-1945*. Ed. Luca Somigli and Rocco Capozzi. Detroit: Gale, 2002. Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 264. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 15 Nov. 2012.

Document URL

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1200010846&v=2.1&u=queensulaw&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w>

Gale Document Number: GALE|H1200010846