

## Analytic summary

*Monograph*

### *Autobiography, women and education in Mediterranean Europe (XIX-XX centuries)*

#### *Lives in the mirror. Education in women's autobiographical writing. Introduction*

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The Seventies witnessed a renewed scientific interest in the literary genre of autobiography, even by researchers in disciplinary areas not strictly philological or literary. But, if often autobiographical narrative is used as a legitimation of a personal choice – especially in ethical and political realm – in the most recent works, the resurgence of “women’s pages” and the concomitant successful researches by scholars in different fields (history, education, and literature) have made their way to a reformulation of the value of the autobiography itself, not only as a meta-historical issue led to the formation of a national identity, but increasingly as a powerful key to introspection. Once women have become masters in this literary genre, autobiographies have become instruments to capture the inner self and categories have largely diverted to a more intimate life, in a space apart to better hear themselves. Interest in the autobiographies was born under this gender difference: descending into the abyss of the female autobiographical writings can illuminate parts of real life, guess censorship, look closely at the passing of everyday experience. The writer’s life is moving in this complex space, a place where desires for personal fulfillment usually fight against family responsibilities and social engagements, with traditional educational models and new projects for the future. Acting in this context is not simple, nor easy, because sometimes the strategies that women still represent are defined as coercive, more as resignations than options. The autobiographies analyzed in the essays that follow, give us examples of rebellion and revolt – more or less openly – put into action not to resign to inequality, especially when not only social rules refer to ways and times exclusively male, but when this injustice is seen in its full tragic sense. Then, rebellion in deeds and words is unavoidable and necessary.

**Key words:** Autobiography; Women; Writings; Education; Gender difference.

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## A modern female identity. *The autobiography of Ida Baccini*

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The life of the Florentine writer Ida Baccini (1850-1911) offers many insights in the history of gender, education and women's autobiography. She was one of the first Italian who managed to live with her work as a writer, not discouraging even in two exceptional circumstances in the socio-cultural context of the second half of XIX century Italy: the annulment of her marriage to the sculptor Vincenzo Cerri and the birth of an illegitimate child. Ida had the courage to walk alone in the difficult world of publishing and journalism in Italy, a world traditionally male-dominated, and to tell her adventures in an autobiography that testifies her extraordinary strength of character. Published in 1904, the book *My life: autobiographical memories* is one of the first Italian women's autobiographies written according to standards that still now define this genre. This is an essential book if we want to investigate the beginning of the use of female writing as a claim both of identity, and moral and intellectual authority.

**Key words:** Autobiography; Women; Ida Baccini; Identity; Children's literature; Journalism; Feminism.

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## *Building a story: myths and realities in the autobiography of Laura Orvieto*

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Laura Orvieto (Milan 1876 - Florence 1953), children's writer, always loved telling stories. She asked everyone to tell her stories and, if she couldn't find anyone available, she told stories to younger children. These stories were inspired by the many books she read and by the fairy tales told by old women. As an adult, once a writer, her most successful work was inspired by classical mythology and the small adventures of her own children. But in the second half of the 1930s many things changed for a family from the Florentine Jewish middle classes, with the increasing pressure of racial marginalization. In around 1936 Laura decided to abandon her usual themes, and instead to turn to her origins and tell her own story, and that of her husband Angiolo and their respective families. The *Storia di Angiolo e Laura* is written in a simple and direct style, close to Orvieto's other work. But in the final pages she allows space for statements that illustrate her painful crisis of conscience. Today we can ask to what extent these pages reflect a real biographical journey: other sources complete, confirm or deny the events and states of mind expressed in the book. A parallel reading of a few chapters and other documents reveals less well-known aspects of the thinking and frame of mind of Laura and her family and illustrates her working methods.

**Key words:** Laura Orvieto; Jewish writers of the XIX century; Women's autobiographical writings; Jewish emancipation; Racial laws; Writers for children.

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## ***Reality and fiction of an educator of the people. Study of the pedagogical mission of Federica Montseny through her autobiographies***

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In this work we intend to study, through the analysis of the autobiographical works of the anarchist thinker Federica Montseny (1905-1994), the educational context in which the writer was born and her attempt to transform the society through her own example and writings. The anti-authoritarian and freethinker background, the extended family of overtones inspired by Fourier's ideal, the rational and secular teachings of her mother Teresa Mañé, the full immersion into the world of politics and workers struggles of the early twentieth century shapes the awareness of a child who will devote her life spreading the anarchist model. Deeply aware of the ethical and social potential of art, she puts into practice her ability to become a writer, a speaker and an educator of the people. Fiction and reality blend aiming to create a heroine.

**Key words:** Pedagogy; Autobiography; Anarchism; Women; Women's writers; Spanish History.

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## ***Latin and knitting. Educational and biographical experiences in My life by Anna Franchi***

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The life and works of Anna Franchi remained undiscovered for a long time despite the writer desired to become part of history and to leave a trace both in the socialist and in the emancipationist movements. In the literary production of Anna Franchi, autobiographical elements and fictions become an inseparable issue. Particularly in her biography *La mia vita (My life)* published for the first time in 1940 the writer looked through her life searching for a deeper meaning. Franchi does not limit to describe events and characters but, through narration, she gives an interpretation of her own experience giving in the same time a meaning to it: from her childhood when she absorbs and adopts the ideals of the *Risorgimento* and the love for art and literature to the long and extremely painful period of her marriage; from journalistic and artistic activities to the political commitment with the socialist party and the movement for women's rights. Through her works, Franchi provides a political example of free woman.

**Key words:** Anna Franchi; Emancipationist movement; Divorce; Woman's suffrage; Education; Autobiography; Memory.

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## ***A model of female freedom: Maria Occhipinti's Una donna libera***

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Maria Occhipinti (1921-1996) has been recorded in Sicilian history as emblem of Sicilian women's protest in the mid-forties, events she narrates in *Una donna di Ragusa*. In her posthumous work *Una donna libera* Maria sums up her life from those years just to the time before her death: it is the autobiography of a self-taught woman that was, despite everything and everyone, a free woman slave to nothing – nor political ideas, nor a comfortable and bourgeois life – or anyone – family or love –, always coherent with her ideals and ready to fight for the fundamental human rights. *Una donna libera* tells us the story of a pilgrim in the world, a rebel, a rather difficult woman, uncomfortable for institutions and people, including intellectuals. Maria Occhipinti will become only in the XXI century a model to be followed by other women.

**Key words:** Maria Occhipinti; Freedom; Human Rights; Autobiography; Sicily.

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