

Unlocking the Mysteries of Cross-Gender Writing

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Fresh research into the phenomenon of transvestism in literature will attempt to unlock the mysteries of cross-gender writing.

Dr Rossella Riccobono and co-editor Dr Federica Pedriali from the Universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh respectively will launch "Vested Voices II", a volume of essays exploring writers who attempt to take on the persona of the opposite sex, at the Italian Cultural Institute in Edinburgh today (13th December).

Work on the pioneering project began in 2005 when academics from the US, UK, Italy, New Zealand, France and Switzerland gathered for a two-day conference at the National Library of Scotland examining the possible social or personal reasons for the style of writing.

Dr Riccobono, a lecturer in the Department of Italian at the University of St Andrews said, "This study has attracted a lot of attention because it is a very provocative topic in a new field. There has been some research done in America and Spain but this is certainly the first of its kind in Italian literature.

"In this second volume we apply some of the pioneering theories of the first book which I co-edited with Erminia Passannanti, studying exceptional texts in a less technical way.

"The aim of this study is to broaden the scope of first volume by checking and double-checking the theories, and analysing whether or not

the authors can successfully penetrate the psychology of the opposite sex."

Famous British writers who wrote in the character of the opposite sex include Virginia Woolf ('Orlando') and Daniel Defoe ('Moll Flanders'). George Eliot is best known for assuming a man's name in order to have her works published. The technique is still utilised in contemporary novels such as Arthur Golden's "Memoirs of a Geisha". Even Lewis Carroll's classic novel "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" placed him at the centre of the world of a young girl.

The book, "Vested Voices II. Creating with Transvestism: from Bertolucci to Boccaccio", further investigates the technique where a male author writes from a female point of view and vice versa by studying individual test cases throughout the history of Italian literature from the contemporary to the medieval.

Dr Riccobono continued, "It really is an extremely provocative topic and the ongoing project will broaden in the future to include a comparative study with European literature.

"Volume Three will be co-edited by my colleague Professor Carla Sassi from the University of Verona and will include a case study of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's "A Scots Quair"."

Thursday's event will begin with a lecture from Professor Remo Ceserani, who will be speaking on Disguise and Travesty in Ariosto.

Source: University of St Andrews

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