

#### ABSTRACT

**Title:** Tra confessione e contraddizione. Uno studio sul romanzo di Alba de Céspedes dal 1949 al 1955

**English title:** Between Confession and Contradiction. A Study of the Novels of Alba de Céspedes from 1949 to 1955

**Author:** Ulla Åkerström

**University/Department/Year:** Göteborg University (Sweden)/Department of Romance Languages: French & Italian Section/2004

This dissertation focuses on the novel *Dalla parte di lei* (1949) by the Italian writer Alba de Céspedes (1911-97). The novel will be considered from four different, although mutually interacting viewpoints: first, in terms of narrative technique, then thematically, then in relation to the two succeeding novels by the same author, and lastly against the literary-historical context. Since the title of the novel is *Dalla parte di lei*, and the book is narrated from a feminine first-person perspective, the reader might well be tempted to assume that this narrative stance is similarly authorised by the text itself, as a number of critics have done. The aim of the present thesis is to show that the picture is by no means so unequivocal, and that there are in reality both a discrepancy and a series of contradictions between the world perceived by the narrator and that mediated by the novel as a whole.

The first chapter surveys the state of research on and the contemporary reception of the novel and concludes that neither the narrative technique nor the problems concerning the varying points of view in *Dalla parte di lei* have been studied to any meaningful extent.

The second chapter, which is devoted to narrative technique, shows, through a study of the novel's genre category, namely fictive autobiography in the form of confession, how the extremely subjective view of life of the narrator is opposed by the novel in a number of ways.

The third chapter begins with a consideration of the pervading theme of guilt in the novel and the motifs which embody this theme, such as confession, accusation and apology, amongst others. Through a number of examples it is shown how the attitude of the narrator is questioned in various ways by the novel and how, accordingly, an alternative message can be found. The novel indirectly conveys a critical attitude to the subjectivity of the narrator and challenges her exaggeratedly romantic and starry-eyed view of things, which in consequence marks the book with a tone of ambiguity much more complex than has been noted in previous studies.

In the fourth and fifth chapters Alba de Céspedes' novels *Quaderno proibito* (1952) and *Prima e dopo* (1955) are studied in the light of the findings which have been made in relation to *Dalla parte di lei*. While the narrator figure in *Dalla parte di lei* seems virtually unaware of her own inconsistencies, the narrator of the diary-fiction novel *Quaderno proibito* is conscious that, outwardly, she behaves differently than when she communicates with herself through her diary. The narrator in *Prima e dopo* seems to be more coherent than the other two narrators, but nevertheless shows a contradictoriness which is indicated in the difficulties she has in being simultaneously a 'happy' and self-aware woman.

In the last chapter of the dissertation the three novels are placed in the context of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian literature. It is argued that the narrative strategies, themes and motifs employed by Alba de Céspedes, such as the combination of romantic-decadent and realistic elements, together with thematic questions concerning the status of women in marriage and society, are recurrent and traditional amongst her contemporaries and immediate predecessors in Italian literature.

**Keywords:** Italian literature, Alba de Céspedes, 20<sup>th</sup>-century, first-person narrative, fictive autobiography, diary fiction, theme/motif, Italian *decadentismo*, realism, women's writing

---