

## ***“Marine Feet and Vesuvian Eyes”: The Volcanic Aesthetics of Maria Orsini Natale***

**An edited volume**

**Deadline for proposals: 31 January 2020**

“The secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is: to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius!” ~ Nietzsche

“I have marine feet and Vesuvian eyes, and this belonging to a universe that is land, sea, and lava, my allegiance to a world, not only is a poetic inclination but, in its instinct, a resonant and overwhelming force” ~ Maria Orsini Natale

This volume intends to fill a gap in the critical reception of a remarkable Southern Italian woman writer. A journalist, a poet and a writer, Maria Orsini Natale (1928-2010) lived and worked at the foot of Vesuvius, and began writing at age 69, receiving several literary recognitions. Her novel, initially written as *Ottocento Vesuviano*, then entitled *Francesca and Nunziata*, and published for the first time in 1995, was also made into a 2001 film directed by Lina Wertmüller, starring Sophia Loren and Giancarlo Giannini. The book earned her a semifinalist’s place in the Strega Prize, the most prestigious Italian literary award, and features a family from Amalfi, dedicated for generations to the white art of pasta making. More than fiction, it illustrates what in Neapolitan is called a ‘cunto’, part historical account and part allegorical tale, derived from a reservoir of collective as well as personal memories. Among other aims, the writer wishes to reveal the sacrifice that was silently paid by hard-working individuals in the thriving industrial and rural worlds of the South when Italy was in the process of unification. The passion for memories, the act of remembering and reconstructing the past, characterizes Orsini Natale’s urge to write. Her Proustian literary technique is immediately apparent in works such as *La Bambina Dietro la Porta*, or *Il Terrazzo della Villa Rosa*, where a colorful crowd of characters in a tightly-woven community are portrayed while loving and living under the shadow of Vesuvius—“a muntagna” as the locals call it. Indefatigably devoted to celebrate and preserve cherished and ancient traditions, Orsini Natale also pays homage to the age-old heritage and multifaceted knowledge of food-making, with its related rituals (*Don Alfonso 1890. Una storia che sa di favola*). She particularly treasures the togetherness of breaking bread. In *C’era una Notte* and *Cieli di Carta*, as well as in other works, the sense of community, family ties, and religious feelings, heightened by the deep-seated tradition of the presepe (the Nativity scene), draw a distinctive scenario, even while echoing the Neapolitan classic by Edoardo De Filippo, *Natale in Casa Cupiello*. Throughout her oeuvre, Maria Orsini Natale honors the unrecognized work of many women who worked against the grain and under the weight of an oppressive patriarchal culture. The determination and willpower of such women in the *Meridione* of Italy serve as a mirror for the ‘volcanic’ splinter of a world that emerges in Orsini Natale’s writing, with all its intelligence and passion, its aspirations and energies, its thirst for redemption from the deadlock of history, its resilience, its creativity and strength. By engaging with different aspects of her literary production, this volume seeks to formulate a vision that characterizes authors as bound not only to a region but to a specific territory and community. Orsini Natale’s chosen self-definition as a “Vesuvian,” rather than Neapolitan author challenges the assumption that contemporary writing is a literary mode of the city, showing how the province, or the margins, and the countryside are fundamental to the development of a very distinctive and rich aesthetic.

Contributors are invited to send proposals relating to one or several of the following themes in Maria Orsini Natale’s oeuvre (but not limited to them):

- Explorations of Vesuvian identity/volcanic aesthetics
- Seascapes and cultural frameworks of the Mediterranean Sea
- Texts and contexts: writing from the Neapolitan province (either as an individual author or in comparison with Michele Prisco and others)
- Comparisons/contrasts with Elena Ferrante or other women writers from Naples/the Neapolitan province
- Auto/biographical writing and the role of memory
- The North-South relationship
- Historical, political, and economic contexts

- Writing about local traditions and religious practices and rituals (presepe, patron saint festivals/processions, funerals, washing laundry, pasta making, embroidering, etc.)
- The pleasure of storytelling: the ‘cunto’, allegories, and metaphors
- Etymology, culture, and meaning
- The uses of fairy tales and fables (either as an individual author or with Sabatino Scia, *La Favola del Cavallo*, *Favole a Due Voci*)
- Food practices, with their history and culture
- War and/or anti-fascist sentiments
- Emigration, *genius loci*, nostalgia, and/or loss
- The literature and cultural history of ‘Il Miglio d’Oro’ (the Golden Mile)
- Film adaptation of *Francesca and Nunziata*
- Intersections between history and allegory
- Men/ fathers and women/mothers
- Poetic expression
- On rhetorics and the language of the writer (uses of Neapolitan and Latin)
- Any critical analysis from the perspective of animal studies, gender studies, cinema studies, or other disciplines

Please send a short bio and a 250 to 500 word abstract by January 31st, 2020 to: [balzanow@wfu.edu](mailto:balzanow@wfu.edu)