

The Art of Joy: A Novel

By Goliarda Sapienza

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The tumultuous twentieth century, told through the life of a single extraordinary woman

Rejected by a series of publishers, abandoned in a chest for twenty years, Goliarda Sapienza's masterpiece, *The Art of Joy*, survived a turbulent path to publication. It wasn't until 2005, when it was released in France, that this novel received the recognition it deserves. At last, Sapienza's remarkable book is available in English, in a brilliant translation by Anne Milano Appel and with an illuminating introduction by Angelo Pellegrino.
The Art of Joy centers on Modesta, a Sicilian woman born on January 1, 1900, whose strength and character are an affront to conventional morality.
Impoverished as a child, Modesta believes she is destined for a better life. She is able, through grace and intelligence, to secure marriage to an aristocrat—without compromising her own deeply felt values. Friend, mother, lover—Modesta revels in upsetting the rules of her fascist, patriarchal society.
This is the history of the twentieth century, transfigured by the perspective of one extraordinary woman. Sapienza, an intriguing figure in her own right—her father homeschooled her so she wouldn't be exposed to fascist influences—was a respected actress and writer who drew on her own struggles to craft this powerful epic. A fictionalized memoir, a book of romance and adventure, a feminist text, a bildungsroman—this novel is ultimately undefinable but deeply necessary; its genius will leave readers breathless.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist
Sapienza, born in Sicily in 1924, became an actress and wrote several earlier novels. Considered immoral, The Art of Joy wasn't published until after her death, in 1996, and is now translated into English for the first time. The sweeping story centers on Modesta, who was born in Sicily in 1900, orphaned at age nine, and sent to a convent, where she is told to "pray and embroider." As she becomes sexually aware, she rebels against the "renunciation and humility" espoused by the nuns and is sent to a villa where, "strong and willful as a man," she quickly takes control of the estate. Modesta attends university, seduces women and men, and becomes an ardent socialist. Arrested for espionage, she spends five years in prison with Nina, her lover, and faces near starvation in the ruins of postwar Italy after their release. Sapienza's style is dramatic, even overwrought; her dialogue is operatic in its intensity. And although the novel's length may deter some readers, it is an astute litany of the moral, political, and feminist issues of the last century. --Deborah Donovan

Review
Modesta...is a Sicilian Emma Bovary devoted to the pleasures of living... Tuttolibri Imaginatively and unobstrusively translated, perseverence brings considerable rewards TLS For me, this is the publishing event of the summer -- Boyd Tonkin Independent

About the Author
Goliarda Sapienza (1924-1996) was born in Catania, Sicily in 1924, in an anarchist socialist family. At sixteen, she entered the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Rome and worked under the direction of Luchino Visconti, Alessandro Blasetti and Francesco Maselli. She is the author of several novels published during her lifetime: Lettera Aperta (1967), Il Filo Di Mezzogiorno (1969), Università di Rebibbia (1983), Le Certezze Del Dubbio (1987). L'Arte Della Gioia is considered her masterpiece. Anne Milano Appel, Ph.D., a former library director and language teacher, has been translating professionally for nearly twenty years, and is a member of ALTA, ATA, NCTA and PEN. Her translation of Giovanni Arpino's Scent of a Woman (Penguin, 2011) was named the winner of The John Florio Prize for Italian Translation (2013).

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