

508 *Annali d'italianistica*, volume 33 (2015). Italian Bookshelf

un'accurata bibliografia critica comprendente anche le tesi di laurea e di dottorato e un'elegante appendice iconografica. Quello di Giulia Iannuzzi è un ottimo contributo per l'apertura di una fase nuova e fruttuosa di studi su Quarantotti Gambini a cui, mi pare, la studiosa è pronta ad offrire anche materiale di tipo interpretativo.

Luciano Parisi, *University of Exeter (UK)*

**Lucienne Kroha. *The Drama of the Assimilated Jew: Giorgio Bassani's Romanzo di Ferrara*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. Pp. 313.**

Lucienne Kroha has written a comprehensive, engaging, and original study of Giorgio Bassani's *Romanzo di Ferrara* (comprising the novels *Gli occhiali d'oro*, *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*, *Dietro la porta* and *L'airone*, as well as the collections of short stories *Dentro le mura* and *L'odore del fieno*). Bassani was an author obsessed with his native Ferrara but at the same time also culturally cosmopolitan. Kroha's book shows with lucidity how, in order to fully understand Bassani and his work, one must situate him within the broader European context.

The monograph's key argument is that, taken in its entirety, the *Romanzo di Ferrara* contains a "concealed" subject that goes beyond the meaning apparent in each individual novel or story. The "apparent" meaning is that of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, and among Jews, in Ferrara between the end of the nineteenth century and the post-war period, with a particular focus on the years of the anti-Semitic persecution. The "concealed" meaning is that of Bassani's own struggle to overcome the constraints of "widespread passivity and denial" of his own particular Ferrarese Jewish background (3). According to Kroha, this struggle resulted in Bassani's decision to join the Resistance but went on to affect his understanding of himself and of "his place as a Jew in Italian society and in history" (4) well after the war.

Kroha identifies three cultural keys to access the "concealed" meaning of Bassani's *Romanzo*: "the Nietzschean narrative of *ressentiment*, the Freudian family romance, and Thomas Mann's diagnosis of the distortions wrought by emancipation on the Jewish psyche [...]" (4). Their point of intersection is in the gendered discourse of Jewish identity, a lens seldom used by scholars of Bassani beyond the reading of homosexuality as a metaphor of social disorder.

The influence of Nietzsche, Freud, and Mann on Bassani's understanding of his own history is the subject of the first chapter. Bassani's work is populated with characters affected by passivity and paralysis, forever on the cusp of adulthood but unable to cross into that territory, and thus mirroring Freud's theories about the consequences of failure to achieve psychic separation from parental figures (28). The *Romanzo* is also replete with weak and ultimately impotent figures animated by *ressentiment*: Bruno Lattes resents the political passivity of his Jewish milieu but cannot bring himself to activism; Elia Corcos resents his Gentile

wife, whom he has chosen precisely to avoid having to face the possibility of failure; the Finzi-Continis show resentment in their haughty isolation. None of them finds a way out of this spiral (34-35). In Kroha's view, Bassani mirrors Nietzsche's understanding of *ressentiment* as epitomised by Second Temple Judaism's "slave revolt in morality" as a compensation for their lack of power (31). Thomas Mann's narrative of ambivalent Jewish identification with Germans presented in his short story *The Blood of the Walsungs* is an influence on Bassani "not identified thus far" (36); Kroha sees evidence of its influence in the very centrepiece of the *Romanzo: Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*.

These themes inform the analysis of the subsequent six chapters, which follow the structure of the *Romanzo*. Thus, chapter two investigates the *Cinque storie ferraresi* grouped in the section *Dentro le mura*. These are resentment-filled stories about Jewish identity (either rejected, as in the case of Elia Corcos, or angrily reclaimed by Holocaust survivor Geo Josz), and arrested development (as in the case of many of the characters and the entire population of Ferrara).

Chapter three presents a refreshing rereading of *Gli occhiali d'oro*. Its compelling argument is that the novel is not the story of the narrator's acknowledgement that his discrimination as a Jew and that of Dr Fadigati as a homosexual are similar; on the contrary, it is the story of the protagonist's avoidance of engagement with these similarities, and of his own role in the demise of Fadigati. As Kroha perceptively writes, "if the novel has anything to say at all, it is not so much that we can all become victims, but that we can all, unwittingly, also become perpetrators without realizing it and without even knowing why" (107).

*Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* and *Dietro la porta*, discussed in chapters four and five, are also stories of resentment and passivity, marked by the impossibility for the narrator to find positive male Jewish sources of identification. In both stories, arrested sexual development, dysfunctional identity formation, and the anti-Semitism/Jewish self-hatred connection are all commingled. In particular, *Dietro la porta* is a novel about blocked male sexual maturation when Jewish masculine sexuality is associated with degradation; however, the novel is also a story about the impossible choice between Jewish marginalisation and self-effacement in post-Concordat Catholic Italy (188-89).

Bassani's journey comes full circle with *L'airone*, analysed in chapter six. Kroha claims that Edgardo Limentani's failed attempt to adjust to life in postwar Ferrara, leading to his suicide, is Bassani's catharsis. With the suicide of Limentani Bassani kills his own resentment and situates himself as both an Italian and a Jew, living in the present but without repressing the memory of past persecutions (197). This reconciliation with his Jewishness is sanctioned in *L'odore del fieno*, which is the subject of chapter seven. The positive figure of the Eastern Jew in "Due fiabe" marks Bassani's own overcoming of his own self-hatred (247). In the end — and this is the gist of Kroha's thesis — the whole

*Romanzo di Ferrara* is the story of Bassani's own "overcoming", or phrased in more Nietzschean terms, becoming what he was.

There is much to praise in this monograph. The author draws on her extensive previous work about the relationship between Italian and European culture to situate Bassani at the junction between national and international literary influences. This is important, because many of Bassani's concerns were marginal for much of the Italian literary world at the time, and can only be fully appreciated in a broader context. With her subtle and compelling argument, Kroha has given us more elements to better evaluate the place of Bassani in Italian and European Jewish and non-Jewish literary culture.

Emiliano Perra, *University of Winchester*

**Daniela La Penna. "La promessa d'un semplice linguaggio". *Lingua e stile nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli*. Roma: Carocci, 2013. Pp. 207.**

Since Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo's inclusion in his anthology *Poeti del Novecento* (1978), Amelia Rosselli has been, slowly but unrelentingly, recognized not only as one of the most relevant voices of Italian twentieth century's poetry, but also one of the few Italian poets who can reasonably be defined cosmopolitan. That is, undoubtedly, due to her tragic biography: daughter of Carlo La Penna, murdered because of his antifascist engagement, and the British Marion Cave, Rosselli was raised between France, Switzerland, United States and England, eventually moving to Italy in 1946. Linguistic experimentalism is intrinsic in her work, which, along with her massive Italian production, includes also several publications — both in prose and poetry — in English and French. But Rosselli's reflections on language(s) do not derive exclusively from her polyglot education: as most of the critics underline, languages competence works in Rosselli as a substratum as well as her dramatic biography, never transposed into poetry in a confessional way, but somehow developed in a tormented personal research. Sharply, Daniela La Penna states that in Amelia Rosselli "l'ovvio dato biografico viene sottoposto a decantazione letteraria, messo in circolo insieme a tanti altri dati, come, ad esempio, le tappe della propria educazione estetica e letteraria" (15).

La Penna collects and revisits in this volume a large part of her long-dating study of Rosselli's linguistic experimentalism, style and themes, focusing particularly on the collections *Variazioni belliche* (1964), *Primi scritti* (published in 1980; composed between 1952 and 1963) and *La libellula* (1963- 1964); the last section considers also *Serie ospedaliera* (1969).

The first two chapters, focusing on *Variazioni belliche*, are clearly the core of the study and witness La Penna's scrupulous dissection of Rosselli's poetics. The first chapter analyzes the contents of the collection, the reiteration of themes