Quaderni d'Italianistica

VOL. 42, NO. 2, 2021

QUADERNI D'ITALIANISTICA

Vol. 42, no. 2, 2021

Strange Encounters in the Italian Baroque
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Charles L. Leavitt IV. *Italian Neorealism. A Cultural History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. Pp. 328. ISBN 9781487507107.

Upon its conclusion, in the late 1940s and all the way through the 1970s, Italian cinematic and literary Neorealism received the fervid attention of national and international criticism. For a couple of decades thereafter, interest was fairly mild, and yet the new millennium witnessed a considerable upsurge of upsurge of critical attention for this significant development in Italian literature and film. The history of Neorealism has been frequently recounted, and its qualifying traits have been thoroughly investigated, often in the attempt to outline a possible homogeneous progression of what some have, quite wrongly, defined as a movement, as Gianni Rondolino aptly observed in his 2003 history of Italian cinema. In 2014, Stefania Parigi published a volume entitled *Neorealismo. Il nuovo cinema del dopoguerra* in which the historian speculates on the possibility that, more than a movement, Neorealism may be defined as a genre, and she pursues such a notion by resorting to Rick Altman's three generic dimensions of film genre—semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic, with which the American scholar identifies the process of regentrification that is somehow characteristic of expanded neorealist cinema. However daring such a hypothesis may be, it testifies to the plethora of diversified voices involved in the "neorealist conversation," as Charles Leavitt IV pointedly defines such polyphonic dimensions of Neorealism and its criticism in his latest volume, *Italian Neorealism: A Cultural History*.

Leavitt's work is organized in four chapters accompanied by an introduction in which he outlines the content of the volume and its historical scope, and a conclusion in which the author recalls the guiding principle of his study: a profound persuasion that at the core of classical Neorealism, that is the one developing in the years from the 1930s through the 1940s, one finds a productive and constant exchange between artists and intellectuals as well as a "substantial unity underlying the period's creative diversity and artistic hybridity" (178). Thus, Leavitt assumes the notion of Neorealism as a cultural conversation, that is "a coherent field of discourse in which discussion and debate worked to shift the confines of creativity and to revise the terms of artistic expression" (178); such perspective would allow one to comprehend Neorealism's fundamental inclusivity, plurivocality, and universality, and thus its profound democratic spirit that, as concerned cinema, was the byproduct of the movement of liberation of the country from Nazi–Fascist occupation. Yet, as Leavitt pointedly explains and proves, in his first chapter, with a thorough recollection of the literary debates that developed in

Italy from the late 1920s onward, such call for a novel approach to reality and realism initiates well before the 1940s. He challenges the notion of neorealism as modernism *tout court*, and yet he also acknowledges that for intellectuals and critics such as Bellonci, Barbaro, and Bocelli, it certainly was nothing less than a new interpretation of modernist realism, one that was anticipated by works such as Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943) and was to characterize a rebirth of Italian cinema in the aftermath of the Second World War, through, amongst other things, an unquestionable retrieval of Italian *verismo*. However, while in closure it reports the rich debate among writers, filmmakers and critics over the relevance of the neorealist agenda across the arts, the first chapter substantially tries to prove that the war did not change, immediately or substantially, the definition of Neorealism elaborated in the 1930s. Indeed, such belief rests at the core of the second chapter, where the author, perhaps not in a thoroughly convincing manner, attempts to account for Neorealism's pre-war history as well as its well-established derivation from fascist cinema; he does so by restating the necessity to reconsider Neorealism's true relationship with the processes of post-war cultural renewal. Indeed, the most engaging section of this chapter relates the rich debate over the issue of continuity and/or change in the post-war years, by reporting a plethora of diverse positions, such as Gian Luigi Rondi's, Alessandro Blasetti's, and yet also Trombadori's and Angioletti's. Through a close analysis of Giuseppe De Santis's *Caccia tragica* and Italo Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, both released in 1947, and thus of the relationship between literature and film, the author addresses the issue of periodization in relation to Neorealism.

The third chapter offers a convincing discussion of the ways in which Neorealism portrayed the historical crisis experienced by post-Fascist and post-war Italy, and concentrates on the diverse ways in which neorealist cinema and literature aimed at providing historical meaning to the portrayal of individual experience. Moving from a detailed investigation of Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette*, the author addresses the vexed question of history versus chronicle, and relates the rich debate developed in Italy by the most diverse intellectuals over such issue, one that reflected the clash between two critical camps: the defenders of art and the defenders of chronicle, despite the difficulty in providing an unambiguous definition of the latter. Notwithstanding the commendable intention, this section appears slightly confusing, and perhaps not thoroughly thought-out in its structure. The fourth and final chapter successfully investigates the very nature of Neorealism's ethics, and the ways in which it represented history: the author argues that, ultimately, such representation is permeated by the profound

reliance on art's ability to promote not only "historical reconciliation but also national redemption" (12), and yet he also stresses the complexity of such cultural issues and relates the diverse responses to Neorealism's heterogeneous politics.

Written with the persuasion that Neorealism was a rich and complex cultural conversation, and with the understanding that it is necessary to listen attentively and perceptively "to a conversation that has all too often been distorted by history, by mythology, and by ideology" (178), Leavitt's work concludes by claiming that much is left to say about Italian Neorealism, and unquestionably and convincingly promotes a thorough rethinking of both the neorealist phenomenon and the cultural debates that developed around it.

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Enrica Maria Ferrara, ed. *Posthumanism in Italian Literature and Film: Boundaries and Identity*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Pp. 303. ISBN 9783030393663.

Posthumanism signifies not only a technophilic, utopian transhumanism—a distinct field of inquiry—but also as a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, multipronged critique of the ideology of human exceptionalism and ubiquitous anthropocentrism that are the lingering after-effects of Enlightenment humanism. With the Italian Renaissance as the birthplace of early modern humanism—out of a rediscovered classical humanism—it is poetically fitting that Italian scholars are at the forefront of applied critical posthumanist thought (e.g., Vattimo, Agamben, Braidotti, Ferrando, 13). Critical posthumanism, after all, extends as much as it reacts against earlier humanisms, as *Posthumanism in Italian Literature and Film*, edited by Enrica Maria Ferrara, amply illustrates. As the cover blurb attests, this is "the first academic volume investigating narrative configurations of posthuman identity in Italian literature and film," with chapters on authors such as Leopardi, Pirandello, Calvino, and Ferrante, as well as auteurist filmmaker Antonioni. As the latter suggests, the book's general approach to posthumanist film style is not limited to twenty-first-century digital cinema, since the definition of posthuman, rather than privileging technologically based transhumanism, instead recognizes the more pressing need to analyze heretofore ignored, suppressed, or silenced subjectivities and voices. There is in fact much work still to be done on mediatic