

inteso a negare proprio le ascendenze zoliane di Verga. Al contrario, i capolavori di Verga dipenderebbero in gran parte da quelli di Zola (e di Flaubert), restringendosi così notevolmente i margini per individuare una via autonoma del verismo italiano.

O meglio: se ci sono elementi peculiarmente veristi, essi vanno ricondotti secondo Pellini alla parte meno moderna della poetica del romanzo, e non tanto ad altre dimensioni tematiche, come per esempio quella dell'antinomia sociologica città/campagna. La rappresentazione degli scenari cittadini rientrava anche nel programma dei veristi; il punto è che, mentre Zola non si preoccupa di modificare i propri strumenti mimetici quando si muove fra i vari punti dello spazio sociale, in Verga e Capuana c'è l'idea che per l'ambiente borghese servano tecniche più raffinate e profonde di quelle idonee a rappresentare gli scenari rustici. Sarebbe questo l'equivoco che rende meno avanzato il verismo, e che andrebbe ricondotto alla persistenza, nella cultura italiana, di convenzioni retoriche di lungo corso, innanzitutto «l'imperativo della divisione degli stili» (130). Per quanto abbia pianificato la rappresentazione dell'intero organismo sociale, poi, Verga sembra conservarne una visione più irrigidita e gerarchica, che in parte lo frena nella propria analisi. Non per niente il ciclo dei *Vinti* si presenta appunto come un ciclo orientato da una freccia sociale, mentre per i *Rougon-Macquart* sarebbe più corretto parlare di una «serie» romanzesca senza bussole sociologiche.

Anche in Zola, comunque, manca il mito del progresso. Il suo determinismo non è fatto di cause metafisicamente permanenti, ma di una pluralità di cause «prossime», parziali e frammentate, che pongono le basi per una visione destrutturata e caotica del reale. Il mondo dei suoi romanzi, dominato da inesorabili circuiti materialistici, si rivelerebbe così non troppo lontano dalla radicale negatività del pensiero di Schopenhauer. Sostenuto da una scrittura trasparente ma carica di senso critico, Pellini illumina anche questa «feconda ambiguità» del naturalismo, in un volume che non perde mai di vista il nesso profondo fra poetica ed ideologia.

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Thomas E. Peterson. *The Revolt of the Scribe in Modern Italian Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

The Revolt of the Scribe in Modern Italian Literature is much more than twelve brief monographs on as many writers from Foscolo to Bertolucci and Rosselli. Peterson's is a deeply serious critical study addressing the ethical responsibilities of intellectuals to themselves and to society whether these individuals are writers or literary critics. For Peterson, literary practice must occupy a "common ground between questions of aesthetics (colour, harmony, rhythm, symmetry) and questions of ethics (duty, conscience, humility, commitment), between the concrete reality in which literature is produced and the imaginary spaces it creates" (287). An example, then, of a critical practice committed to combining aesthetic judgment with ethical assessment understood not only in the sense of political engagement, but also in regard to such more intimate and individual matters as conscience and humility, *The Revolt of the Scribe* is a complex work of critical reading whose richness can only be hinted at by this perforce reductive review of its accomplishments and insights.

The "revolt" described in the work's title involves the embrace of a new kind of writing at a crucial moment in an author's life that follows a period when the writer has served as a scribe or copyist intent only on reproducing accepted norms. The gesture is at once intensely personal and disruptive of collective ties but is not the same as "rebellion," since for Peterson, following Camus in *L'Homme Révolté*, the scribe's revolt "considers questions of social class as peripheral to the actual changes in consciousness that determine cultural evolution" (4). Such a literary revolt is allied instead with "the

Vichian idea that history and literature, as human products, are closely interrelated." For this reason the literary work can provide, if not an 'alternative' history, at least a reformulation of views about the past (276). For Peterson (as for Cesare Segre, whose 1969 *I segni e la critica* is quoted at the conclusion of his study) stylistic criticism should be ethical in nature rather than a formalistic exercise that privileges the signifier at the expense of semantics (8) and must be firmly grounded in the material and technical, that is communicative, aspect of the work at hand (277).

The first of the three main sections of *The Revolt of the Scribe* is titled "The legacy of the *Poeta vate*" and treats Foscolo, Manzoni, Bertolucci, Ungaretti, and Valeri. Given his ethical concerns, it is not surprising that Peterson devotes the first section of his book to writers considered the moral consciences of society, a view developed during the nineteenth century when a "vatic notion of prophecy was incorporated into the new historiography" that, in turn, allowed "the creative author to become a kind of alternate historian" (277–78). In such a context, poets like Foscolo were even able to "prophecy the past" by identifying what might have happened as well as describing what did. In his under-studied tragedy, *Ajax*, Foscolo was a scribe in revolt through his criticism of the blindness of the world of power. Manzoni, similarly, through his presentation in *Il Cinque Maggio* of a new image of Napoleon consonant with the Milanese writer's concerns for death, confession, redemption, and grace rather than with customary panegyrics, was yet another scribe in revolt. By positioning his writing outside the mainstream of twentieth-century Italian poetry through a lowering of tone and predilection for "prosaic" subjects Bertolucci, too, exemplifies the category, as does Ungaretti—not so much because of his technical innovations as for his conviction that "all true poetry is born in the desire for solace" (111). Valeri, similarly, as a "poet of rectitude as well as melody and harmony" (112), broke with dominant notions of poetic styles in favor of an apparently simple poetry of sensory novelty and wonder in the context of the possibility of grace.

The second section of the book is called "Roads to Rome: The Feminine Voice." In it Peterson treats Deledda, Morante, Banti, and Rosselli. These writers are like the poets in revolt of the previous section through their "opposition to moralistic, ideological, and prescriptive approaches to literature" (19). The four women also share a vision of Rome as "a place of alienation but also of refuge against the patriarchal oppression of the provinces" (279). Deledda qualifies as a "scribe in revolt" for her *Canne al vento* of 1913 whose religious themes testify to a development in her thought from the typical to the typological (143) while Morante "circumvents the implied power structure of a male-dominated Logos" (160) in such works as *Lo scialle andaluso*. In her proclamation "that the archaic properly understood signals a return to the moral contours of the self, as they existed before the alienation of masculine scaffoldings" (179), Banti too can be placed in this category as can Rosselli whose poetry frequently attempts to represent the nonrepresentable and perhaps the divine.

The book's third and final section is entitled "Peripheral Novelists and the Problem of Evil." The novelists are Svevo, Morselli, and Pratolini. For Peterson, each of these writers inhabits a contested space, either geographically or ideologically, where social marginality provides the impetus for transformation on the ethical plane and brings about a rupture with copyism. This is evident in Svevo's *Corto viaggio sentimentale*, in which an "embrace of benevolence" (214) leads to "the prospect of a self-knowledge and the acquisition [...] of a positive morality" (217); in Morselli, who was never a "copyist" but through all of his work, both essays and fiction, contested literary and intellectual conventions; and in the anti-ideological Pratolini, who is studied here for his use of Dante's *Purgatorio* as a calque for his novel, *Il quartiere*.

The Revolt of the Scribe is a work of immense sweep as well as intellectual depth. In remarks early in its pages on Foscolo, Manzoni, and Leopardi, Peterson notes how in different ways each of the three great Romantics recognized the need for "courage and humility" in their efforts "to integrate aesthetic and ethical issues" as part of what they

considered the “civic mission” of their poetry (6). In his book Peterson has clearly attempted something similar in his tracings of the turns from the conventional to the new made by his twelve scribes in revolt.

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Gianna Manzini. *Game Plan for a Novel*. Trans. Martha King. New York: Italica Press, 2008.

Martha King, a pioneer in introducing to the English language works by Italian women writers, keeps regaling us, at regular intervals, the fruits of her acute reading of contemporary Italian literary works and of her agile, bilingual mastery. Her translations include works of Grazia Deledda, Maraini, Banti, Pirandello, Pratolini, Giorgio van Straten, Silvia Bonucci, in addition to editing two collections of translations of short fiction by Italian women writers. Her valid contributions to the library of Italian narrative and women writers’ works have permitted countless students in the US campuses to become acquainted and explore contemporary voices and problematics of the Italian literary landscape.

With this last translation of Gianna Manzini’s *Lettera all’editore* (*Game Plan for a Novel*)—the first of Manzini’s works to be translated into English—Martha King undertook a (the?) major if not superior challenge of dealing with one of the most idiosyncratic and difficult Italian writers of the past century. Additionally, in selecting this specific work, Manzini’s meta-novel, the translator accomplishes a double feat, that of targeting the writer’s mastery and development of the “frammento,” lyrical and artistic prose, and of the writer’s exploration and exploitation of the possibilities of the novel and its language range. In the introduction, Martha King rightly points out to the “curious situation” of the insufficient critical and printing attention given to Manzini’s works, though most of the distinguished Italian critics of the past century, did not failed to recognize and praise Manzini’s “innovative and revitalizing prose” (viii). As remarked by Lia Fava-Guzzetta in *Gianna Manzini: una voce del modernismo europeo* (Pesaro: Metauro, 2008), thirty years after the writer’s death, it is no possible to access to all of Manzini’s works, thus precluding the serious scholars interested in the development of the twentieth century novel to explore and appreciate the writer’s significant contributions to modernism alongside other protagonists such as Wolf, Joyce, Gide and Pirandello.

Game Plan for a Novel, originally published in 1945, is an intensely self reflective narrative moving back and forth through various plans while slightly disorienting the reader and keeping her in wait for something to happen, for a closure. The writer formally announces her untitled work by introducing it to her publisher, with whom she keeps talking about it at regular intervals throughout the text in distinct segments, which function as direct commentaries and analyses of her own poetics in the making of the novel. In those segments, Manzini reveals the work of her mind and art as she maps out her characters’ intentions, emotions as well as her own emotional relationship with them, their genesis in her own life: “Why must my emotions, defeats, misfortunes conceal themselves in novelistic fiction? Why must they hide in the ambiguity of a resemblance, and then refashion themselves with a life fleeing from a violently real world into a more or less coherent allegory? Here I must openly compromise myself, clearly expose the workings of this exchange” (4).

The effects and results of such interrogations are fashioning the stories and the development of the characters in the narrative. The characters start to appear as evoked or sketched by either time, places, atmospheric moments, and they gradually progress to a thickening of intensity and complexities while, at the same time, their perceptions and involvements with each other, their drama are sort of suspended, move freely from

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