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*ITALY AND THE BOURGEOISIE. THE RE-THINKING OF A CLASS*  
EDITED BY STEFANIA LUCAMANTE

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**I** *taly and the Bourgeoisie. The Re-Thinking of a Class* is a collection of nine essays on the Italian bourgeoisie. In her introduction Stefania Lucamante explains the difficulties in defining the term bourgeoisie. The scholar examines Croce's notion of the Italian bourgeoisie as it is formulated in his "Di un equivoco concetto storico: la borghesia". Croce makes a distinction between a "thoughtful bourgeoisie" (p. 18), endowed with cultural power, and the "capitalistic" bourgeoisie" (p. 18), lacking moral and intellectual qualities. Lucamante claims that this distinction holds true even today, finding it "a useful point of reference" (p. 18) in comprehending the evolution of this class, its inherent plurality, and the challenges one must overcome when depicting it in artistic representation. In her introduction, Lucamante also provides a detailed summary of the essays included in the volume.

In "Exposition Narratives and the Italian Bourgeoisie: Edmondo De Amicis's *Torino 1880*" Cristina Della Coletta shows how Turin and its surrounding industrialized region used the language of universal expositions to create "a sense of collective identity" (p. 33) within the recently born Kingdom of Italy. Della Coletta analyzes the tour guide *Torino 1880* by De Amicis, which, at the time, was featured in many guides and catalogues. Here Turin is depicted as "a large fairground" (p. 34) and a "permanent exhibition" (p. 34). Because of its hegemonic and efficient topography, the city of Turin exposes the values, as well as the anxieties and contradictions, of its entrepreneurial middle-class. In her analysis, Della Coletta investigates how power shaped the city at the center of the House of Savoy's empire. The scholar pinpoints and discusses in detail a series of sketches of Turin, including: the panoramic view from the hill of Superga, the vertical order of the various *palazzi* and their horizontal counterpart, the numerous city boulevards, madhouses, hospitals, the suburbs and their "marginal society" (p. 44), the marketplace, the university, and finally the Galleria Subalpina, where "the upper bourgeoisie celebrates itself and its values" (p. 46). Supporting her study with Foucault's theories on discipline, Della Coletta amply demonstrates how power "is both imposed upon and shared by the

social collectivity” (p. 38). This proves to be a carefully researched and clearly-argued essay, an ideal selection to initiate discussions on the Italian bourgeoisie.

In “Growing up Jewish in Giorgio Bassani’s Ferrara: A Personal Recollection” Guido Fink offers a concise but enthralling picture of the Ferrarese middle-class depicted in Bassani’s works. Fink focuses his attention on various short stories such as “The Gold-Rimmed Eyeglasses”, “A Walk before Supper”, and “The Smell of Hay”, as well as the celebrated *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*. Fink’s textual analysis is intermingled with personal recollections that link him directly to Ferrara in the 1940s and to the author Bassani himself. The scholar accurately identifies the three generations of Ferrarese Jews represented in Bassani’s stories and upon which his narrative is based. Fink’s analysis explores individual characters in Bassani’s works and offers a clever and demythicized portrayal of the bourgeoisie just before, during, and shortly after the Nazi persecutions. This illuminating essay encourages further research regarding fact and fiction and the correlation between macro and microhistory in Bassani’s literary production.

Giuseppe Tosi’s “*Morte della Patria* and Mourning Elaboration: Memoirs and State of Consciousness after *Otto Settembre*’s Italy” analyzes various texts and memoirs of authors who were born and raised under the fascist regime. Among these writers are Piero Sebastiani, Giorgio Soavi, Corrado Alvaro, Carlo Mazzantini, Vittorio De Caprariis and Giose Rimaneli. Their voices sharply clash against Croce’s interpretation of fascism as a parenthesis in Italian history. In fact, their memoirs painfully show that the fascist *ventennio* cannot be dismissed as a temporary break within the healthy historical development of the Italian nation. The authors’ recollections offer a painstaking picture of an entire nation seen as a “victim of a hallucinatory state verging on public madness” (p. 66). Their experiences have marked them forever, and at the end of the fascist *ventennio* they are left with disenchantment, fractured personalities and, above all, the hammering sorrow of their lost youth. For them, “the historical defeat fatally turns into an existential rout” (p. 73).

Claudia Nasini offers a fascinating picture of the Italian industrialist Adriano Olivetti in her essay “Adriano Olivetti: A ‘Socialist’ Industrialist in Postwar Italy”. Nasini begins her discussion with an analysis of Olivetti’s writings, pointing out the intellectual entrepreneur’s “intention to devise a ‘third way’ between Marxism and capitalism” (p. 77). She enhances these claims through a close study of archival documents belonging to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); these records are fundamental in understanding Olivetti’s personality and his tight relationship with the United States throughout the 1950s. In these documents the industrialist is described as a “utopian socialist”, a “Europeanist” and an “unshakeable democrat” (p. 96). Confessions by Olivetti to an American agent unveil his concerns about

political domination in postwar Italy by the Christian Democratic Party and the Communist Party.

In “Anna Maria Ortese’s *Alonso e i visionari*: A Reflection on Bourgeois Culture and the *Anni di Piombo* in Italy” Cosetta Seno Reed discusses Ortese’s relationship with mainstream culture and its official literature. Reed characterizes Ortese’s life by “a continuous state of lacking” (p. 104) for money, material fortune, and education, which has resulted in the writer’s uneasiness and constant “erranza” (p. 105). Because of this *erranza*, both actual and ideological, Ortese is able “to discover a truer reality” (p. 106) that is “made up of things that cannot always be seen” (p. 106). Reed focuses her attention on two of Ortese’s works: *L’iguana* (1965) and *Alonso e i visionari* (1996). Both novels offer a sharp critique of a bourgeois society that has lost humanity, fostered terrorism and abused nature, all consequences of the degeneration of positivist ideals. The bourgeoisie thus encompasses the endless perversions of reason. For Ortese, “authentic reason will be had only when we reconcile with nature [...] and accept our role as pure guests in the celestial body” (p. 114). In the essay’s conclusion, Reed mentions Emerson’s influence on Ortese, leaving room for future investigation.

Giancarlo Lombardi provides an illuminating interpretation of Bertolucci’s 1984 *Segreti segreti* in “*Di buona famiglia*: Portrait of the Bourgeois Terrorist in Giuseppe Bertolucci’s *Segreti segreti*”. In his article, Lombardi explores the complex cinematic narrative of the film, its elliptic and nonlinear narration, and Bertolucci’s intermingling of several stories. The narration of *Segreti segreti* revolves around a female terrorist, Laura, “the quintessential image of the woman warrior” (p. 122), who kills a judge in Venice and then returns home to her aging mother before also visiting a former governess. Bertolucci does not offer any discussion on the ideological motives that led Laura to embrace armed struggle; the film, instead, focuses on mother/daughter relationships and gender politics. Femininity here “reveals itself as lack and, at the same time, as potentially castrating” (p. 121). Terrorism is to be interpreted as a type of civil war and as a family affair as well. In the end, Laura decides to cooperate with justice and incriminate other terrorists, and Reed posits that “the phallic power of the gun [Laura’s gun] has been replaced by the power of speech” (p. 129). In the film’s background, the earthquake that has destroyed Irpinia is charged with metaphorical significance. Similar to an earthquake, terrorism in turn tears apart families, wreaking havoc upon the smallest most fundamental constituents of society and its stability.

Gius Gargiulo’s “In the Living Room of the Red Brigades: The Shrinking of the Italian Bourgeoisie and its Intellectuals from Terrorism to Berlusconi’s Tele-Existence” provides a stimulating interpretation of terrorism and the bourgeoisie through the analysis of Marco Bellocchio’s film: *Buongiorno, notte* (2003). Gargiulo points to transformations in the seventies and how

they profoundly shook the identity of Italian bourgeoisie. Then, he connects the shrinking of the middle-class and “its blurring within a ‘low-cost’ class” (p. 134) to “the shrinking of conversation, a quintessential component of the bourgeois identity” (p. 134), and examines how conversation was replaced by television in the last half century. The television set remains at the center of the living room, a setting of flawlessly clean floors and plastic-wrapped chairs, where dialogue between father and child is now interrupted or, worse, no longer takes place. Dogmatic myopia characterizes the leader of the Red Brigades, Mario Moretti, who shares the Montalcini Street apartment with kidnapped statesman Aldo Moro. In a partitioned area, Moro tries to converse and mediate with brigatista Moretti, but his attempts are in vain. Here in this prison-apartment we find the television omnipresent and playing a pivotal role. Gargiulo concludes his essay emphasizing the significant role of television in the formation of modern Italian culture.

Nicoletta Di Ciolla’s “Bourgeois Portraits Inside-Out: Family Groups in the Narrative Fiction of Gianni Farinetti” analyses works of Gianni Farinetti, an architect, screenwriter, director, copywriter and novelist. Farinetti’s literary productions are most noteworthy for their adamant attention to the Italian bourgeoisie, particularly that of northern Italy, depicted extensively in both private and social habits. The scholar is able to connect Farinetti’s cinematic experience with his writing; his novels depict “a multifaceted *comédie humaine*” (p. 158), a plethora of characters interwoven in complex relationships. Nonetheless, due to his familiarity with film techniques, Farinetti is able to maintain control over all of these figures “without generating confusion in the reader or allowing narrative strands to go astray” (p. 157). Di Ciolla focuses mostly on his first novel, *Un delitto fatto in casa* (1996). She examines the traditional bourgeois family, which turns out to be a largely controversial institution: while offering protection, the bourgeois family simultaneously imprisons its members and violates their personalities. The last part of the essay is devoted to Farinetti’s treatment of marriage and homosexuality.

In the volume’s last essay “A Dutiful Daughter: Francesca Mazzuccato’s *Hot Line: Storia di un’ossessione*” Stefania Lucamante offers a captivating and thorough reading of Mazzuccato’s 1996 novel *Hot Line*. Its central protagonist, Lorena, is trapped in the role of a dutiful daughter despite her transgressive night job as a pornography hotline responder. Lucamante claims this outlet as “merely a pretended transgression and not a joyous, liberating one” (p. 192). In examining the story, we discover Lorena’s emotional paralysis due to her father’s abandonment of the family for another woman; this traumatic experience continues to profoundly affect her even into adulthood. Lorena’s past contaminates her present, preventing her from becoming a mature woman capable of building and enjoying relationships with other men. Her relationship with Gabriele, a client, turns inevitably into an obsession predetermined by her father’s ghost and results in melancholy,

the distinguishing feature of Lorena. She is doomed to unrequited love, which seems to replicate her relationship with her father. The social *milieu* in which mother and daughter are trapped is the conservative Emilia-Romagna. Lorena's childhood dwellings are within the Catholic Church and the Feste dell'Unità, both depicted as powerful institutions with "suffocating roles in the education of women" (p. 184).

*Italy and the Bourgeoisie. The Re-Thinking of a Class* is a collection of engaging and thought-provoking essays that encourage the reader to reconsider the problematic Italian bourgeoisie as it is critically explored in various artistic renderings. The volume fosters discussions not only on the definition of the term bourgeoisie in an Italian context, but also on the representation of this class throughout the last 150 years.

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