

## Antonio Gramsci. Lettere dal carcere

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**Antonio Gramsci. *Lettere dal carcere*. Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2020. Edizione critica realizzata in collaborazione con la Fondazione Gramsci. A c. di Francesco Giasi. Pp. cxiv + 1262. ISBN 9788806245405.**

Francesco Giasi, in his introduction to this latest edition of Gramsci's prison letters, argues that this collection be read, as has been the case with all previous editions, as a "romanzo epistolare" (XXXVIII), or "opera letteraria" (XLIV). To support this posture, he reminds readers that the first edition, winner of the 1947 Viareggio Prize, was itself "un'«opera» postuma, [...] un'invenzione editoriale che travalica la volontà dell'autore" (VII), aimed, I would add, at diverse reading publics of varying levels of culture, and of political awareness and maturity. The initial decision to collect and make public the correspondence was made by Gramsci's political heirs, the leaders of the Italian Communist Party, who believed it would be both "il più degno omaggio a Gramsci" and "un'arma efficace per proseguire la lotta contro il fascismo" (VII).

Giasi's fluid narrative more than accomplishes the difficult task of coordinating and historicizing primary interpretative texts with a succinct, yet detailed and comprehensive summary of the letters' non-linear editorial publication history, that provides, along the way, an update on the current state of what we can know of Gramsci's biography, a body of knowledge that has had to be revised periodically, as new primary documents have come to light, often in the form of new donations to the Fondazione Gramsci by Gramsci's family members and other correspondents. For example, the volume contains previously unpublished letters (three to his mother, one to his brother Gennaro), three telegrams, and three postcards.

Indeed, over the past two decades many related documents have been donated to the Fondazione, and so, part of the novelty and, therefore, the importance of this volume is its use of this recently acquired material. For example, Schucht family papers have cast new light on and demand interrogation of previously held 'truths' (L). The Appendix is also significant, as it too contains heretofore unpublished documents while making readily accessible 17 "istanze" [*formal petitions, or requests*] to various Government offices, including Gramsci's "Memoriale," his term, of April 1928 to the chief magistrate of the Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State.

Giasi's essay, together with the highly informative "Chronology" and the biographies of Gramsci's correspondents, family members and others mentioned in the letters (both composed by Maria Luisa Righi) — achieve one of the volume's

goals: that of making Gramsci's writings, prison and otherwise, accessible to those who are approaching them for the first time while furnishing those well versed in this field with new materials and fresh insights.

The importance of the prison letters for the study of Gramsci's work cannot be overstated. A fuller appreciation of his notebooks is contingent upon their proper historization, an essential condition of which is familiarity with the letters. Indeed, the notebooks were the first step taken by their author in a "war of position" — a strategic retreat, as it were, by a "combattente che non [aveva] avuto fortuna nella lotta immediata" (627) from the "war of maneuver" to which he fully intended to return — whose goal was to conduct research that was "disinterested," that is to say, freed from contingency, and would produce living, "für ewig" (75) — a term that signified for Gramsci immersed "in time" (not outside time, "in eternity") — results that would engage posterity "in perpetuity," that is, in ever-evolving, highly diverse heres and nows. (If I may, see Joseph Francese, "Thoughts on Gramsci's Need 'To Do Something *Für ewig*'", *Rethinking Marxism*, 21:1 (2009): 54–66, or the Italian adaptation: "Sul desiderio gramsciano di scrivere qualcosa «für ewig»,” in *Critica marxista* (n.s.). January-March 2009. 45–54 and in *Americanismi: sulla ricezione di Gramsci negli USA*. Ed. Mauro Pala. Cagliari (Italy): CUEC, 2010. 127–43.)

The letters shed light on Gramsci's thought processes and life situation as he compiled his notebooks. In this regard, early letters from Regina Coeli to his wife and his mother help us understand how he lived his arrest. More significantly, perhaps, this volume brings forth (for the first time, in the notes) sections, stricken by Gramsci, of letters to Tania and Giulia (both dated 6 November 1932), regarding his mistaken belief that his release from prison had been imminent, and the extent to which the undermining of that hope weakened his ability to resist psychologically the condition of prisoner.

The notes to the letters, I must mention in passing, are much more detailed and accurate than those of previous editions, as is the curating of Gramsci's letters to his sons, here dated and integrated chronologically. These notes contain a wealth of valuable information, and the publisher would have done well to facilitate their utilization by converting them from endnotes to footnotes. Indeed, the publisher might have made Giasi's introduction much more reader-friendly had copyediting been directed to cull from his footnotes a list of works cited.

The text is enriched by a collection of photographs (portraits, stills, reproductions of autographs). The two with greatest impact, on me, are, firstly, the one taken through the bars of a cell window at Turi, and, secondly and especially, the

interior view of Gramsci's cell, showing his bed, desk, and privy. They give us an idea both of how he lived the humiliation of a life without privacy — he wrote with the constant awareness that his every word was viewed by a censor — and of how he sought to stave off a slow, but certain, death through reading and writing.

Given the vitality of Gramsci studies across the humanities and social sciences, this volume is a 'must' acquisition for research libraries and individual Gramscian scholars.

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**Migliorini Bruno e Gianfranco Folena. *Piccola guida di ortografia. Saggio introduttivo di Claudio Marazzini. Anastatica, 4. Sesto Fiorentino: apice libri, 2015. Pp. v–xxxviii + 73. ISBN 9788899176020.***

L'idea di pubblicare questa *Piccola guida* prese forse l'avvio nel 1950, in conseguenza della conferenza organizzata da Geno Pampaloni, allora direttore della biblioteca aziendale della Olivetti, che Bruno Migliorini tenne ad Ivrea dal titolo *Problemi della lingua contemporanea*, campo di ricerca particolarmente amato e studiato dal nostro grande storico della lingua. Attraverso la documentazione epistolare però, possiamo dedurre che l'opera fosse pronta fin dal 1952–1953, ma che probabilmente – l'incertezza ci viene dal fatto che su di essa non compare la data – si può fissare la pubblicazione nel 1954, se il 1955 è l'anno della "II edizione", come riporta la copia che è stata riprodotta anastaticamente qui. In essa, rispetto alla prima, è stato aggiunto un *Indice* ortografico di quindici pagine non numerate (ma lo sono nella nostra ristampa: pp. 57–71) e spostato il *Sommario* dall'inizio alla fine dell'opera (anche questa pagina in origine non numerata, ha qui il n° 73). L'ampio, dotto e per di più illustrato con cinque figure che, con le rispettive legende, arricchiscono il testo, *Saggio introduttivo* (pp. V–XXXVIII) di Claudio Marazzini, intitolato *Un'ortografia per macchina da scrivere* è davvero la degna presentazione di "un libretto d'ortografia di grande significato storico" (p. V) tracciato da uno storico di valore della nostra lingua, che ha acquisito una caratura internazionale con la presidenza della prestigiosa 'Accademia della Crusca'. Come si capisce bene fin dal titolo – e non poteva essere diversamente, pensando al Committente del libro – una buona parte delle pagine introduttive si polarizza intorno a quello che