

Enrica Maria Ferrara, ed. Posthumanism in Italian Literature and Film: Boundaries and Identity

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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, multi-pronged 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

difference in this context; in this collection, for instance, literature, or specifically *writing*, historically and materially “entangled” with the humanist subject (2–5), is shown to lend itself to the representation of posthuman(ist) subjectivities in a manner utterly distinct from cinema. It is difficult to conceive of the received audiovisual structures of narrative cinema in a non-anthropocentric sense; cinema, despite its technical basis, is deeply connected with the humanist project, precisely because of its privileging of the faculty of vision. It is equally arguable, however, that cinema as a medium is more amenable to a critical posthumanist paradigm than is literature, given the fundamental mediatic and ontological differences between the dialogic distribution of authority in the novel, for instance, and the literal distribution of agency in the filmmaking process. And, while the advent of digital technology has radically transformed the medium of cinema, it has left its deindividualized material basis essentially intact.

Rather than looking back to the Enlightenment, however, Ferrara’s introductory chapter, “How Italians Became Posthuman,” begins with Elio Vittorini’s 1945 novel, *Uomini e no (Men and Not Men)*, featuring German attack dogs that speak to one another in human language. As a literary experiment that foregrounds the animals’ humanness and the fluidity of species’ boundaries, this may not be the best example of a literary posthuman. Ferrara admits as much, using Vittorini’s novel rather to “reconsider the place of the human vis-à-vis the non-human other” (3) in the specific context of the two world wars. It is no coincidence, then, that Primo Levi’s 1947 breakthrough, documenting his experience of Auschwitz, is titled *Se questo è un uomo (If This Is a Man)*. As Ferrara states, “The second half of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century” coincided not merely with European modernism but also saw the ground laid for the “decentering” of “man” from the ontological and epistemological centre of things, leaving the door open, through the question of gender (and other identity categories), to a theory of the posthuman subject (3). In reconfirming the inextricable link between literary discourse and the humanist subject, Ferrara rightly questions Karen Barad’s challenge to the so-called hegemony of representationalism; that language, despite the poststructuralist deconstruction of Western metaphysics, “has been granted too much power” (5). In chapter 5 Ferrara employs Barad’s theory of “performative” or “agential” realism to analyze Ferrante’s Neapolitan novels, an enterprise that, as much as it sheds light on Ferrante, exposes the limitations of Barad’s theory. In chapter 13, by contrast, Paolo Saporito applies Barad to an exegesis of Antonioni’s *L’avventura*, revealing the limitations of attempting to interpret the macro-textual level of cinematic forms—the result of choices made

by more than one human being—through a physico-philosophical theory of the “sub-atomic” level of filmic materiality.

Locating the roots of much contemporary posthumanist thought in early twentieth-century modernism, Ferrara makes the crucial point that, in Italian literature (the volume’s primary focus), the humanist subject of Cartesian modernity emerged late, in the nineteenth century, exemplified in Leopardi (see also Vettore) and Pirandello, posthumanists *avant la lettre*, as argued, respectively, by Gianna Conrad (ch. 2) and Alberto Godioli, Monica Jansen, and Carmen Van den Bergh (ch. 3). These authors convinced me that the latter are far better examples of an “ecosophical” posthumanist literature than, say, Marinetti, whose bombastic fetishizing of the technologies of modern warfare marks him out as the worst kind of masculinist humanist (7). The hegemony of gender, moreover, prevents me from agreeing with Ferrara’s contention that Marinetti anticipates Barad’s “disempowerment of language as a human-centred, egotistic and subjective tool” (8). Questions of gender in a critical posthumanist light are effectively considered, however, in subsequent chapters on more contemporary practitioners of Italian dystopian narrative, such as Laura Pugno (ch. 4, Marco Amici), Luciano Bianciardi and Tiziano Scarpa (ch. 8, Eleanora Lima), Viola Di Grado (ch. 9, Anna Lisa Somma and Serena Todesco), Aldo Nove (ch. 10, Eugenio Bolongaro), and Gianni Celati (ch. 11, Enrico Vettore). The volume also offers chapters on other genres and media forms, including the fate of Italian poetry in the age of digital reproduction (ch. 6, Giancarlo Alfano), and the mobile phone as posthumanist prosthesis in Italian fiction (ch. 7, Kristina Varade). And Fabio Camilletti’s chapter 12, focusing on the figure of the zombie in its uniquely Italian iterations, sheds welcome light on the fascinating convergence of posthumanism, pop culture, and new political subjects that emerged in the notorious “Years of Lead” (267).

Ferrara’s introduction also augments the volume’s contribution to film and posthumanism through the example of Pasolini who, in *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966), for instance, incorporated pseudo-anthropomorphized non-human creatures, in this case a talking raven, to explore the uniquely Italian concept of *impegno* (see also Varade and Camilletti), which Ferrara interprets as a “challenge to the inherent dualism that rules Western thought, and its representation in literature and film” (11). It becomes clear that Ferrara’s object in choosing examples like Pasolini and Vittorini is to highlight not their anthropomorphisms but the degree in which they emphasize the paradoxical legibility of the relation of radical otherness between the human and the non-human. Ferrara rightly pinpoints the impact of feminist theory, whose critique of gender-based inequities opened

the door to a far more extensive critique of the limits of the human vis-à-vis the technological, animal, or environmental other (11). The essays in this collection more generally affirm and reaffirm the capacity of human language writ large to bridge the gap—or lay bare the entanglements—between the human and non-human worlds. This is the book's most problematic, but also its boldest and most productive, claim.

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Fabio Fernando Rizi. *Coraggio nel presente e fiducia nell'avvenire: Politica e cultura sotto il fascismo nel carteggio tra Benedetto Croce e Giovanni Laterza dal 1925 al 1943*. Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2020. Pp. 123. ISBN 9788876678202.

The object of inquiry of “*Coraggio nel presente e fiducia nell'avvenire*.” *Politica e cultura sotto il fascismo nel carteggio tra Benedetto Croce e Giovanni Laterza dal 1925 al 1943* is the intellectual and business relationship between Benedetto Croce and his publisher, the ambitious maverick Giovanni Laterza. An ideal companion to the previous volumes published by Fabio Fernando Rizi (*Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism* and *Benedetto Croce and the Birth of the Italian Republic*, both published by University of Toronto Press, respectively in 2003 and 2019), this study adopts a similar methodological approach: to explain Croce with Croce. The book is a thematic exploration of the vast correspondence between Croce and Laterza, which spanned almost four decades. The rich five-volume epistolary—edited by Antonella Pompilio and published by Laterza, 2004–09—constitutes the foundation of Rizi's study. The correspondence is complemented by the six volumes of Croce's *Taccuini di lavoro* (published in 1987) and other scholarly studies and tributes to Croce such as *Croce e la cultura europea* by Daniela Coli (Il Mulino, 1983) and Gennaro Sasso's contributions, most notably the volume *Per invigilare me stesso. I taccuini di lavoro di Benedetto Croce* (Il Mulino, 1989) and the recent *Croce. Storia d'Italia e Storia d'Europa* (Bibliopolis, 2017). Rizi's latest Crocean offering builds on these studies to demonstrate how Croce's opposition to fascism was nothing short of active. It is now a scholarly commonplace to refer to Croce's discovery and republication in 1928, of Torquato Accetto's 1641