

Beniamino Della Gala. Una macchina mitologica del '68: Nanni Balestrini e il rituale della “Grande Rivolta”

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Beniamino Della Gala. *Una macchina mitologica del '68: Nanni Balestrini e il rituale della "Grande Rivolta."* Ravenna: Giorgio Pozzi Editore, 2020. Pp. 333. ISBN 9788831358040.

In his first book, Beniamino Della Gala explores the literary representation of the Italian radical movements in the context of the revolts and armed struggle that occurred from the 1960s until the end of the 1970s. The focus is *La Grande Rivolta*, a trilogy of novels by Nanni Balestrini, which the author persuasively reads as three successive moments in the life of the movement: separation from society, marginalization, and the activists' sacrifice.

The trilogy—*Vogliamo tutto* (1971), *Gli invisibili* (1987), and *L'editore* (1989)—is one of the rare narrative self-representations of the movement. This *epic* narration, written by an activist for activists, carries out a mythopoeic and political function. Hence, *La Grande Rivolta*, according to Della Gala, is a "mythological machine": it produces and reproduces, and works with and on the symbolic structures connected to the revolts of the 1960s and 1970s.

The threefold structure the author uses for his reading (separation, marginalization, and sacrifice) is a skillful deployment of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's findings on the structure of the rites of passage, which is moreover integrated with Furio Jesi's reflections on myth-making. "Separation," the first moment of the rite of passage, is clearly visible in the rise of the new workerist groups in the 1960s, the student movement, and the revolts of 1968—phenomena which all interrupt the normal functioning of capitalist society. The first novel of the trilogy, *Vogliamo tutto*, represents, in an epic mode, the first, highly heroic step in the rite. The period ends with the repressive wave at the end of the 1970s, the imprisonment of the activists and the first trials. When the political activists are incarcerated, they experience a process of individualization—Della Gala explains it drawing from, among others, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*—which ultimately dismantles the unity of the group. *Gli invisibili* tells this story and aftermath of the militaristic turn within the movement. Finally, the ritual ends with society's symbolic defusing of the image of the charismatic left-wing leader. Although the event Balestrini chooses to illustrate predates the repressive wave of

the late 1970s, it figuratively represents the last moment of the movement's life. *L'editore* is a novel about publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and the different interpretations of his death. If capitalist society and the parliamentary left neutralize the revolutionary potential of Feltrinelli's death by adumbrating it with mystery or interpreting it as an accident, the movement constructs Feltrinelli as an activist who died in action; that is, he died a *martyr*. Yet Della Gala draws on Furio Jesi to argue that a certain kind of myth-making surrounding Feltrinelli's death paradoxically serves the reactionary cause. Indeed, to worship a martyr of the revolution means to *accept* the defeat of the revolution as displayed in the tormented body of the victim.

In the context of this macro-interpretive framework, Della Gala's analysis of the texts is not only cogent, but even innovative at times. A perfect example is the historicization of Feltrinelli's autopsy as described in *L'editore*. The author reconstructs the symbolic chain of associations between the autopsy, two pictures of Ernesto "Che" Guevara and the infamous picture of Aldo Moro's corpse in the trunk of a Renault 4. Since both "Che" Guevara and Moro's pictures were used by reactionary governments to discredit the armed struggle, Della Gala persuasively shows that the capitalist state uses even the martyrdom of the heroes of the revolution as anti-revolutionary propaganda.

So far, I have discussed the last three chapters of the book. Indeed, it is here that the strength of the project lies. The preceding chapters appear as a lengthy and developing focus on the object of analysis. Chapter 1 is concerned with the connection of Furio Jesi's seminal work *Spartakus* with the 1968 movement. Chapter 2 engages the *vexata quaestio* of the representation of the revolts in the 1970s. Chapter 3 illuminates the relationship between Balestrini and Gruppo 63. Chapter 4 is a discussion of Balestrini's peculiar *modus operandi* and of the original materials he assembles in his novels. Chapter 5 functions as an *intermezzo*. It is an engrossing discussion on the multifarious interpretations of one of the most iconic pictures of the Years of Lead; that is, Paolo Pedrizzetti's polaroid of the "autonomo" Giuseppe Memeo levelling a gun at the police. Regardless of the inclusion of many interesting elements, the five chapters are at times redundant, and the book would have benefited from a compressed first section.

On the contrary, Della Gala's "Conclusion," one of the densest sections of the book, is perhaps too concise. Here, Della Gala offers a political analysis of the present based on his research. The loaded question put forward at the outset of the work, "Come è accaduto [...] che questo enorme sentimento della possibilità

andasse in crisi?” (“How did it happen [...] that this enormous feeling of possibility ran into a crisis?”; 10; my translation) finds an answer in the last pages of the book. On the one hand, the forced individualization of the activist, the creeping allure of the capitalist power structure on radical groups, and the leftist victimhood expressed in its heroes’ *religio mortis*, brought about the defeat of the movements that wanted to change society. On the other hand, Della Gala maintains quite rightly—drawing on Daniele Giglioli’s *Critica della vittima* (2014)—that public space is dominated by the discourse of the victims of armed underground groups. Therefore, a large part of the 1968 Italian radical social movements, which chose not to fight with weapons, has been wrongly subsumed into the symbolic space of armed struggle and has therefore been silenced. All efforts to create a different society disappear under the blanket of leftist violence.

The words of Primo Moroni—translated by Richard Braude—about the oppressive measures in the late 1970s seem apt to show how the movement was indiscriminately assimilated into armed struggle: “It was the destruction of a living community that, in the end, became dramatically totalizing.”¹ If today in Italy the lack of socio-economical alternatives to the status quo is so dramatically totalizing, it is partly a result of the false equivalency between radical political struggle and the Red Brigades. The spectre of this historical movement still haunts the present social imaginary of the political struggle, although radical struggle is not equal to armed struggle.

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Johnny L. Bertolio. *Le vie dorate. Un'altra letteratura italiana: da San Francesco a Igiaba Scego*. Torino: Loescher, 2021. Pp. 264 + dotazione multimediale. ISBN 9788858341001.

Le vie dorate è un volume “che propone un viaggio tra città, autori, autrici e testi della letteratura italiana dalle origini ai giorni nostri da un punto di vista innovativo” (1). Il libro, pensato per studenti di livello intermedio-avanzato

¹ *The Golden Horde, Revolutionary Italy, 1960–1977*. Edited by Nanni Balestrini and Primo Moroni. Translated by and with an Introduction by Richard Braude, Seagull Books, 2021, p. 11.