



www.ucalgary.ca/hic/ · ISSN 1492-7810
2002 · Vol. 2, No. 1

**Torriglia, Anna Maria. *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map of Postwar Italy*. Toronto: Toronto Italian Studies and University of Toronto Press, 2002.
Pp. xxii + 239. CDN\$50.00, (cloth).**

Reviewed by Maurice Yacowar, University of Calgary

More than France and Germany, Italy is still struggling to come to grips with its Fascist and World War II past. The continuity of so many political and cultural institutions and figures prevents the distancing necessary for Italy's hard, cold retrospection. Padua Professor Torriglia rejects the putative break between the Ventennio culture and the postwar one as a "selective memory" (xvi), calculated to avoid the embarrassment of historical truth. For example, postwar film and literary Neorealism is rather rooted in the narrative realism of the 1930s which was supported by key fascist figures than a radical direction against them.

Torriglia devotes one chapter to each of four themes that characterize Italy's attempt to reformulate its identity. The first is how language was used for purposes of cultural amnesia to deny collaboration, whether active or passive, with the Fascist regime. As Italy moved towards a Republic, it sought to forget its Fascist embarrassment while yet yearning for its lost innocence. The response was to continue the Italian tradition of institutionalized contradictoriness that accommodated conflicting behaviours already exemplified by the multi-partisan contributors to the *Enciclopedia Treccani* (1929-37). Language reveals the schizophrenic, illogical dichotomies in the need to reconcile the prewar and postwar self. In very close analyses, the author finds the disunified self retreating to a passive voice in Germi's film *Gioventu perduto* (1947) and Rossellini's *Germania anno zero* (1948), and in novels such as Vasco Pratolini's *Un eroe del nostro tempo* (1949).

The second chapter examines how women writers foregrounded subjective narrative and the fusion of personal and public lives. Culminating in Antonioni, male film directors picked up women writers' interest in female subjectivity. The instinctual, generous, passionate woman symbolized the rebirth of Italian culture, uncontaminated by the battlefield. In an open challenge to Italian politics and law, Alba de Cespedes' novel *Dalla Parte di lei* (1947) proffers a female genealogy against the patriarchal. Women's changing situation is examined in three 1953 films: Pietrangeli's *Celestina* and the anthologies *Amore in citta* and *Siamo Donne*. In Visconti's *Bellissima* (1951), Anna Magnani blossoms into the incarnation of the culture's new hopes and ideals.

And yes, yes, there is that familiar mixed blessing—Americanization—in Italy's rapid resurrection. Americanism quickly embodied both the fascination and the fright of the myth of modernity. Its youth and energy showed the future, but one violently materialistic and several commandments short of a full ethic. Both as a novelist and as a translator, Pavese grew from a believer to reject Italy's need for an "America" after the war. The American presence is shrewdly anatomized in Rossellini's *Paisa* (1946-7). The feminization persists in Rossellini's films with Ingrid Bergman and Cesare Pavese's *La luna e i falò*. De Sica's *Stazione*

Termini (1953) presents the linguistic antithesis of Italian Neorealism and the Hollywooden, already syncretized in Rossellini's use of Hollywood's Bergman in the Neorealist *Stromboli terra di Dio* (1951). De Santis's *Riso Amaro* (1949) represents American popular culture, especially in its fetishization of the Mangano body.

Chapter Four defines the new socio-geographical map of Italy. As the newly mobilized culture was discovering itself, journey plots abound. In Anna Maria Ortese's male-centered collection, *Il mare non bagna Napoli* (1953), and in the female-centered films, Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (1954) and Antonioni's *Le amiche* (1955), the South emerged as the "primitive" face of Italy: pre-Christian, arcane, with a Dionysian preference for the instincts over rationality—the "Other" to the more affluent North where the South workers sought jobs. Milan was "productive" and Naples "lazy" (119). Although this is outside Torriglia's range, in Episode 42 of *The Sopranos*, the Naples hood Furio explains to Tony's gang that he hates ("Ptui!") Christopher Columbus for the same reason the Native Americans do: the Genoan personifies Northern arrogance and oppressive imperialism. The myth lives.

The maternal, emotional Pina of *Roma città aperta* (1945) and the elegant, self-reliant Clelia of *Le amiche* stand only ten years apart but they embody Italy's transformation. Torriglia's point is that all the specifics of that national change were either fostered or foreshadowed within the inconsistencies of Fascist social and cultural policies. The rebellious characters who kill their fathers—symbolic stand-ins for *Il Duce*—are in loosey-goosey lock-step with the writers and directors who propose the female alternative to the patriarchal order. The over-arching dilemma is the legitimacy of an act in the exclusively public sphere "that is doomed to clash, sooner or later, with the emotional and/or sexual needs of the private sphere" (152). This dilemma is equally compelling in the individual's urgent motive and the country's need to remember and to distinguish itself from its shameful past. At that nexus, the genderized narrative modes of female, subjective memory and male, objective history collide.

This fascinating study of a crucial, symptomatic moment in history is exceptionally well argued across a wide range of literary and film texts, with exemplary closeness and sensitivity in their reading. It provides a superb model for the anatomy of other cultures torn in their own flux.