

Angelo Castagnino. *"Fatevi portatori di storie". Alessandro Perissinotto fra giallo e romanzo sociale*. Ravella: Giorgio Pozzi Editore, 2018.

To contextualize his approach to Alessandro Perissinotto's detective fiction novels, Angelo Castagnino opens his volume citing a mentor-friend's brief observation on one of Perissinotto's protagonists: "Nei romanzi di Perissinotto c'è un'indagatrice-psicologa" (9). Given the detective genre in which Perissinotto has been distinguishing himself since his debut in 1997, it must have taken Castagnino an effort to resist framing the anecdote rhetorically as an initial clue, as it were, in his own investigation into the central themes that emerge from his attention to form, content and narrative techniques as they have developed in Perissinotto's novels over the course of the past twenty years. His own attention to form in the elaboration of his critical analysis, in this regard, is one of the volume's prime strengths. The analysis in question takes much more into account than the role of a single character in the author's works. It consists of an introduction followed by five chapters, one for each of the central themes in question – secrecy, injustice, identity, otherness and intertextuality – followed in turn by a brief conclusion. An interview with the author on the creative process and his methodology closes the volume.

The first chapter, "Giallo e nero," addresses the mystery/noir genre dichotomy in Perissinotto's works with a focus on secrecy. Castagnino opens with observations on the role of secrets in complex societies through succinct references to Georg Simmel,

Elias Canetti and Jacques Derrida, then proceeds beyond the dichotomy to explore the social dynamics of secrets and the ramifications of their revelation. Building on the common *giallo* technique, owing to Sciascia, in which a given crime serves as a pretext to examine intrigues of power in the decades following Fascism, Perissinotto's socially-conscious narratives connect the present with the past and explore the exploitation and abuse of the powerless. In so doing, a key element in Perissinotto's novels emerges: the inherent corruption of Italian institutions and the immutability of the power structures built around them, regardless of the truths uncovered in the process (30). Along these lines, Castagnino's discussion of social media in contact with Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han's reflections on the "eccesso di positività" and hyperbolic representations of the publicized self are especially apt for his discourse on *L'ultima notte bianca* and *L'orchestra del Titanic* (35-42).

The play of parentheses in the title of the second chapter, "(In)giustizia," mirrors the legal conflicts the protagonists, in a number of Perissinotto's novels, encounter in their open challenge to a corrupt, menacing judicial system (45). Castagnino explores the theme in several novels, noting a common theme of private revenge utilized as an alternative form of justice to bypass the bureaucratic mechanisms of the law (46). Over the course of his analysis accompanied by the novels' most relevant plot elements, he observes that characters attempting to achieve their revenge are often allegorical representations of social classes or something similar (54). Another such aspect of Perissinotto's novels that places them in a more intellectual register, as Castagnino argues throughout the volume, is the historical-political nuance he incorporates in certain characters' motivations for violence instead of a simplistic duality, as in other narratives set in the *anni di piombo*, for instance, of two armed forces in opposition (70).

Ascertaining identity, be it a victim, an accomplice or a culprit, has long been a hallmark of the detective fiction genre. The third chapter, "Identità," examines the myriad of ways in which identity, broadly conceived, is of categorical significance in four of Perissinotto's novels. This includes the conflict between regional identity and local identity in *Semina il vento*, with emphasis on the social pressures in the narrative that contribute to a central character's radicalization against Western society (72-73). The doppelgänger device in *Le colpe dei padri* facilitates Castagnino's lengthy discussion on the split in Italian society after the

seventies and the resulting social class conflict mirrored in the doubled characters (83). *L'anno che uccisero Rosetta* is one of several noteworthy texts for what Castagnino sees, as the author's most common theme, the attribution of identity through the necessity of narration (87). In contact with Umberto Eco and Robert Alter's reflections on metanarration, the chapter cites numerous examples of character narratives exercising a fundamental influence on the overarching narrative that encompasses them, i.e., the end of a diary coinciding with the death of its author (87-88). *Coordinate d'Oriente* goes so far as to involve a professor of narrative technique, a proximation of Perissinotto himself, urging his students to become "portatori di storie" in order to confer identity to those unable to do so for themselves (92-94).

An examination of otherness in a sociological key characterizes the fourth chapter, "Alterità e romanzo sociale," as Castagnino delves into the narrative construction of otherness and the characterization of the insider/outsider dichotomy in the contexts of Fascism, the *anni di piombo*, immigration and the emergence of new nations as seen in global perspective. Analysis turns to the relevant aspects of novels previously explored through the thematic lenses described above, highlighting the author's attention to the dehumanization of the working classes as well as the restoration of voice to the voiceless mentally ill in the years leading to important reforms in Italian mental health institutions. "Alterità e romanzo sociale" includes abundant citations and references to related literary and cinematic works.

The fifth and final chapter, "Intertestualità," considers the richness of intertextual and metanarrative references in Perissinotto's works, beginning with Robert Musil's *L'uomo senza qualità*. Castagnino notes that metanarrative elements appear in the novels with such frequency that the narrative process itself is less the fruit of inspiration and more the result of careful study and planning (125). He also notes that the Italian works Perissinotto specifically references tend to relate to historical, political or social dimensions of his narrative, while international sources take precedence where structure or technique are concerned (125). At this point in the volume, having glossed the theme in previous chapters, Castagnino's attention turns from Italian references to the numerous international influences on narrative structure, including Philip Roth and his reluctant storytellers in *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*.

Summative remarks reinforcing the points elaborated over the

course of the five chapters characterize the volume's conclusion.

Given an editorial market saturated with less sophisticated crime novels hastily sent to press, Perissinotto's works are distinctive for the author's scholarly attention to history, sociology, politics, and narrative technique. Castagnino makes a strong case. The volume's structure is very well conceived, the chapters strike a fine balance between primary texts and secondary sources, succinctly referenced, and each chapter's exposition remains aligned with its theme without excessive divergence into others. This critical study is a fine complement to similar works on the crime fiction genre.

Carlo Anelli

*Truman State University*