coglie un aspetto importante della letteratura italiana nei decenni Sessanta e Settanta, alla luce dei testi neotestamentari, offrendo in questo modo quel tanto prezioso e caro “spessore della letteratura”.

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Christopher Wagstaff. *Italian Neorealist Cinema. An Aesthetic Approach*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. Pp. ix, 504 ISBN 0-8020-9520-8 (soft), 0-8020-9761-8 (hard). \$39.59 (soft), \$90.00 (hard)

At the heart of this significant new contribution to the critical literature on Italian neorealist cinema is a detailed *description* of what are generally considered three of its masterpieces: Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* and *Paisà*, and Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette*. *Description* is the term that the author repeatedly insists on using rather than *interpretation* or *analysis*. What in fact he is attempting to do, as he explains in the *Introduction*, is to “[...] expound an aesthetic approach to neorealist cinema”. It is a task that Wagstaff admits is fraught with difficulties inasmuch as neorealist films in general, and these films in particular, invite attention to the “*representation* of a material and historical ‘reality’” and thus deflect that attention from themselves as “aesthetic artifacts”. Wagstaff rises to the challenge quite admirably even if there are times when description—inevitably, it seems—becomes blurred with interpretation, a point almost conceded by the author: “It may appear that I am [...] interpreting the film, (...) showing how this was, at the time, a representation of a felt reality. That is not what I am trying to do.” (239)

The book begins with an initial *Overview* that summarizes the cultural-political and economic context. The process necessitates covering old ground; yet, there is a fresh new approach here, evidence of solid original research, resulting in the revision of some commonly accepted notions about neorealism, seen as *both* reaction to the “petit-bourgeois, escapist” *telefoni bianchi* cinema of the Thirties and continuation and critique of Fascist cinema. This, and more, is also briefly summarized in the first of the 27 appendices, *A standard introduction to neorealism*. Wagstaff succeeds in conveying a sense of the complex of forces at play in the making and in the commercial and critical fortunes of neorealist cinema, such as they were at the time, a cinema boycotted by the Catholic Church, attacked by its detractors, and caught in the ideological crossfire of the times, misunderstood by many of its supporters.

The second chapter, *Realism*, sets up the critical framework and defines the terms of Wagstaff's argument. In doing so he distances himself in significant ways from much of traditionally accepted critical literature. The sections on *Narrative* and *Genre* effectively elaborate what becomes one of the principle threads in his own narrative of neorealist cinema, namely his characterization of it as the poetics of the *lowered voice*, a concept he equates with the *sermo humilis* in classical litera-

ture. He takes issue, therefore, with the rhetoric of neorealism as the "heroic narrative" of a people unshackling itself from the tyranny of Fascism, or as objective document of a reality before which the filmmakers' simple task was to place their camera. It consisted, rather, of the *melodramatic* narrative of a "lost idyll", or of a society whose organic wholeness with nature was shattered or stolen by the intrusion of disruptive external forces.

The last point is developed further in the next chapter, on *Roma città aperta*. It contains not just a detailed description of all the technical and stylistic aspects of the film, but an extensive account of the filming, including the parallels with the historical events and people that inspired it. Wagstaff brings an impressive array of evidence to some old questions, including interviews, remarkably, with people connected with the making of the film, dispelling, in the process, the myth of the hardship in acquiring adequate film stock when in fact perfectly satisfactory professional quality film was used. The summary of the film's episodes, with detailed comments on the photography, the lighting ("a mess" in the Sicily episode), the sound, the *mise-en-scène*, the performers, dramaturgy, brings out a number of mistakes in the work. Some filming and editing was done by assistants, and in Rossellini's absence. The sequence of the shooting of Pina, which comes at the halfway point in the story, is examined particularly closely, and here too flaws are observed in the lighting and the editing, despite which it remains "one of the most admired in the whole of European cinema."

Wagstaff continues with the same "descriptive" approach on *Paisà*. His detailed account of the filming of the six episodes, the contributions of the people involved, the sequence in which they were filmed, the roughness and even the "sloppiness" in continuity and in the lighting, the wooden acting in some of the episodes, the death of Rossellini's son as he was preparing the film for the Venice Festival, provide as impassioned a reading of the film as any *interpretation*. The reader is somewhat bemused here by Wagstaff's denials of being engaged in an exercise of interpretation. At one point, as noted earlier, there seems to be a realization that he has perhaps painted himself into a corner when *interpretation* and *meaning* emerge from "descriptions", such as: "It may appear that I am giving a 'reading of *Paisà*: interpreting the film, saying what it means [...] That is not what I am trying to do." (239) Perhaps not, but readers may well ask what the difference is between description and interpretation when faced by some very convincing arguments that inevitably bring to light new and unexpected meanings, as he does—to cite only one example—when observing that the monastery episode, again described in terms of the *sermo humilis*, already shows signs of the contrast between North and South that will be the dominant themes in *Stromboli* and *Viaggio in Italia*.

On *Ladri di biciclette* Wagstaff produces perhaps the most insightful and satisfying results of the book by treating every aspect of the film, from Luigi Bartolini's book of the same title, and its cinematic genesis, to its completion. The essential collaboration with Cesare Zavattini is treated extensively, as is the contribution by Sergio Amidei and the latter's subsequent abrupt withdrawal, to his bitter regret. While recognizing that neither De Sica nor Zavattini would again reach

separately or with others the aesthetic success of this film, Wagstaff expresses his admiration for De Sica's achievement and gives him alone full credit for turning the script into a sublime poetic achievement, the most perfect realization of his concept of cinema as a reality transposed "onto a lyrical plane". The meticulous description of each of the film's sequences—27 in all—accompanied by stills of some of the shots, provide solid support for the metaphorically striking contention that *Ladri di biciclette* was "like a hand grenade thrown into a cocktail party" (397), the cocktail party being cinema as an industry and an institution.

A total of twenty seven (!) appendices provide excellent statistical and visual aids covering what seems like every conceivable aspect of the material treated. A solid bibliography completes a book that will serve students and scholars of neo-realist cinema well for many years.

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Graziella Parati. *Migration Italy. The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2005. Pp. 272. ISBN: 0-8020-3924-3. \$55

How will the new Italians coming into the country change the literary canon? How will they change cinema? How will they change the legal system? And, how will Italian sociocultural and political traditions respond? The antagonistic title of this volume suggests a hostile dichotomy of an unprivileged or at least, underprivileged, group that will finally take the opportunity to express itself before a privileged group. But in fact, the book begins first with talking, and only then does it proceed to "talking back". Talking back represents an art, a skill that will open a dialogue between the unprivileged other and the "destination culture", between migrants and the new homeland where they find themselves by circumstances and geography. By talking back, Parati intends the uncovering of narratives that until now have remained repressed within an Italian cultural identity. Essentially, talking back means the articulation of a new Italian culture.

The study opens with a monologue recounted by the author and intended for an audience of readers, an audience acknowledged and appreciated in much the same way as if the monologue were presented in a theater. Parati does not talk back, or rather write back, at us; she talks, she writes to us. No fourth wall divides her from her readers; her stage is the globalized world. Her play is about the delicate and difficult interrelationships that create "us" and "them" in a globalized environment. She comes to us directly and powerfully from the very first paragraph, supported by her grandmother, her cradle and her Occitan language, to inform us that she too knows all about destination cultures and their myriad complexities. Her own plurilingual and multicultural situation has helped her to understand the position of migrants, and their need for talking back. Migration stories can be fraught with emotional traps that often turn them into a type of