danger of slipping back into the trap that he tries to escape. Picchioone is obliged to reconcile the statements that affirm the role of poetry as "a way of searching for some forms of truth" (132) with assertions that poetry is for Porta "a discourse reduced to zero: the reduction of language to zero corresponding to the negation of the world" (135).

For Picchioone, Nanni Balestrini's poetry is "one of the group's most radical attempts to break down literary practices tied to principles of subjectivity or to representational canons" (148). The reader finds neither the reflections of the subject nor narration in Balestrini's "revolt against all forms of poetic conventions" (152). The author gathers fragments of material strewn in the mass media and juxtaposes them on the page to generate an image of disorder and meaninglessness. As part of his strategy of sabotaging the communicative process, Balestrini composes concrete and electronic poems in which he strives to make the purpose of poetry the manipulation of the linguistic sign, separating it from its semantic properties. This direction of creativity allows Picchioone to consider the development of technological, concrete and verbal-visual poetry that parallels chronologically the work of the Novissimi.

By relating the theories and creative works of the *neoavanguardia* to the historical avant-garde, the experimentalism in Pop Art, contemporary music, and the theories of Roland Barthes, John Picchioone has produced what is clearly a most comprehensive and insightful study on the Italian New Avant-garde that is likely to remain a cornerstone of future studies.

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Alessia Ricciardi. *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. 266. ISBN 0-8047-4776-8.

The Ends of Mourning offers nothing less than an all-embracing hermeneutic approach to postmodernism. Based on, but not limited to, Freud's concept of mourning, Ricciardi's book argues that a culturally meaningful, morally accountable relationship to the past requires a commitment to working through historical loss. For Freud, mourning involved the progressive detachment of the libido from the lost object, a process accomplished by the reinvestment and hypercathexis of each bit of related memory. Ricciardi does not expect art works to enact the Freudian mourning process in order to establish an ethically responsible relationship to history, but she does ask that texts of memory repropose and reinterpret the past in ways that invite our active critical and moral engagement with its lessons. Mourning, for Ricciardi, thus becomes a metaphor for the ethically and cognitively demanding work of confronting historical loss.

This metaphor is developed with great richness and sophistication through a dialectical strategy in which Ricciardi reads back and forth between two sets of texts to establish either an oppositional or a complementary relationship which allows her

to continually refine her theoretical focus. In Chapter One, "The Twilight of Mourning," she sets Freud against Lacan, in such a way that the latter's focus on absence, or lack, as the structural foundation of psychic life, throws into high relief the former's notion of loss as historical, contingent, and therefore amenable to replacement. The contrast between Freudian and Lacanian approaches to mourning leads Ricciardi to distinguish between two kinds of postmodernism, one of which will serve as the basis for her impassioned plea for cultural renewal. Ricciardi links Lacanian psychoanalysis with the anti-historicist impulse of postmodernism—the tendency to reduce the past to questions of style, to indulge in nostalgia for its own sake, heedless of the critical demands that historical citation entails. Ricciardi applies the adjectives "populist" and "consumerist" to this strain of postmodernism, since it is a product of mass media culture and invites commercialization. Despite her animus against this form of postmodernism, Ricciardi does not advocate a return to high modernist art, with its mania for the new, its focus on the crisis of the subject, and its penchant for historical passivity. What she fervently advocates, instead, is a critically engaged postmodernism—a position she expertly develops in connection with the work of Proust, Pasolini, and Godard.

In keeping with her dialectical method, Ricciardi reads Proust alongside Benjamin. What emerges is the indebtedness of the German theorist to the French novelist for his much celebrated notion of "aura." A careful analysis of Benjamin's own evolving approach to the auratic leads Ricciardi back to Proust, who becomes a transitional figure in the movement toward postmodernism as a stylistic recuperation of the past. Of greatest interest to Italianists is the section on Pasolini, which prompted this reader to re-screen *Teorema* (after a hiatus of 25 years!), and to revise, however unmournfully, her earlier approach to the film. This chapter begins with an analysis of Pasolini's relationship to the ghost of Marxism past, and to the "haunted history" so poignantly represented in "Le ceneri di Gramsci." *Teorema* thus emerges as a double enactment of mourning—both for the sacred, embodied in the messianic guest, and for revolutionary political activism, motivated, in an aimless and futile way, by the guest's sudden and traumatizing departure. Reading *Teorema* in tandem with Pasolini's ground-breaking essay "The Cinema of Poetry," Ricciardi applies the filmmaker's theory to his practice by means of a brilliant technical observation. Ricciardi notes that the two stylemes which Pasolini associates with a poetic language of cinema—those of obsessive reframing of shots, and of characters' exiting from the frame—recur throughout *Teorema* in conjunction with the film's twin themes of repetition and mourning.

In addition to offering an inspired interpretation of an individual film, Ricciardi's study makes a courageous (and I think successful) attempt to situate Pasolini within the various currents of postmodernism. In so doing, she accomplishes the daunting task of adding an important chapter to the already voluminous critical studies on Pasolini—criticism, which in recent years has reached the level of a cultural industry. Ricciardi argues that despite his wanton borrowing of earlier styles (his debt to art historical models from the Renaissance and Mannerist periods is well known), and despite his promiscuous mixing of high and low cultural registers, Pasolini does not indulge in the consumerist nostalgia that charac-

terizes postmodernism at its worst. Nor can he be seen as a cultural reactionary, celebrating the archaic and the mythic in a rejection of any progressive notion of history. Nor indeed can he be aligned with the modernist avant-garde with its frenzy for novelty and inevitable contempt for the past. Pasolini's filmmaking, instead, exemplifies the Derridean notion of "spectropoetics" that Ricciardi advocates as a cinematic antidote to the consumerist, populist postmodernism that she deplores. "In contrast to the stylistic fetishism of the past and celebration of retro typical of commercial motion pictures," Ricciardi insists, "spectral cinema relentlessly rephrases the question of mourning, not as an exercise in nostalgia, but as a call to reinterpretation and thus to change."

In her chapter on Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema*, Ricciardi argues for the importance of this film to the notion of a critically engaged postmodernism. Documenting the history of the medium, whose end has been signaled by the advent of digital technology, Godard's film may be seen as an example of mourning that serves to challenge and resist the superficial, commodifying tendencies of postmodern media culture.

With *The Ends of Mourning*, Ricciardi has made an impressive contribution to the fields of French, Italian, Comparative Literature, Film Studies, and Cultural Studies. She moves gracefully and productively across the divides of national cultures, media, and disciplines, and juxtaposes them in ways that provide for rich comparative and contrastive discoveries. The result is a wise and profound book in which the voices of a number of great continental thinkers have been fully internalized by the critic, who has made them her own, before applying them with sophistication and insight to an original, even surprising assortment of texts. Italianists will be especially enlightened by Ricciardi's placement of Pasolini among the ghosts to be mourned, and among the guides to how such mourning can generate a critically engaged postmodernism.

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