of a suggestion for further research than a criticism. While Martini briefly addresses the French case, he does not engage thoroughly with similar events in other European countries nor does he address Italy's blocking of extradition requests by countries such as Yugoslavia. An integration of Martini's findings into a wider European context would provide further insights into the European transition period and highlight Italy's peculiarities.

These last remarks do not detract from the fact that Martini's book is a very convincing and long overdue study of Italy's trials against former fascists and collaborators between 1944 and 1953. His work is complemented by a useful bibliography that lists the various national, regional and local archives that Martini consulted for his study. His book is an excellent resource for scholars exploring Italy's complex and painful transition from a dictatorship to a democracy.

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Assassins against the Old Order: Italian Anarchist Violence in Fin de Siècle Europe, by NUNZIO PERNICONE and FRASER M. OTTANELLI, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2018, ix + 219 pp., $30.00 (paperback), ISBN 9780252083532

The tragedy of this book is that the author, one of the world's foremost authorities on Italian anarchism, did not live to see its completion. The original manuscript was 700 typed pages. We must heartily thank Fraser Ottanelli for editing it down into the present, publishable format, and providing an introduction, conclusion, and updated bibliography. Still, one regrets the loss of the larger and probably more nuanced work.

As the title suggests, Pernicone focuses on the deeds and motivations of Italian anarchist assassins during the 1890s, when 'assassin' and 'Italian anarchist' became practically synonymous throughout the world. He discusses six assassins in particular: Paolo Lega, Sante Geronimo Caserio, Pietro Acciarito, Michele Angiolillo, Luigi Lucheni, and Gaetano Bresci. The list of their victims is familiar: the president of France (1894), the prime minister of Spain (1897), the empress of Austria-Hungary (1898), and the king of Italy (1900), alongside failed attempts on the Italian prime minister (1894) and king (1897). The author discusses government repression and its abuses as well as anarchist violence, since he sees the former as a fundamental cause of the latter.

Pernicone's aim is to destroy the myth of the anarchist as a demented, murderous, inhuman creature by discussing the historical, social, cultural, and political conditions in which Italian anarchist violence developed. While the view of the bloodthirsty anarchist has long been abandoned by most historians, it no doubt persists in the popular imagination. What is new about Pernicone's argument is his contention that the Italian assassins were not terrorists but *giustizieri*, noble and heroic avengers whose motives were for the most part pure and selfless. Their acts of retributive justice punished tyrants guilty of government-ordered massacres or other wrongful deeds. The famous historian Gaetano Salvemini made a similar distinction between tyrannicide and terrorism. Terrorists kill innocent, unknown people, while the Italian assassins of the 1890s killed tyrants guilty of specific, deplorable acts. The Italians, unlike the French and Spanish anarchists, refrained from throwing bombs into cafés, opera houses, and religious processions. The only exception to this rule of avoiding innocent victims was Lucheni, the murderer of the

Empress Elisabeth. Elisabeth was no tyrant and Lucheni, who before his fateful deed had only briefly been involved with anarchism, stabbed her to death to redeem his miserable life. He also hoped to gain fame as a 'dangerous anarchist' and strike a blow against the 'rulers and bosses' who exploited 'those who work and sweat' (p. 119).

Pernicone downplays the role of anarchist ideology in fomenting Italian anarchist *attentats*. Instead he convincingly traces much of their inspiration to the Italian struggle for unification. Such heroes of the Risorgimento as Mazzini, Orsini, Agesilao Milano, and even Garibaldi had all either participated in assassination plots or praised them. This was why, rather than the French or Spanish, the Italians became known as the world's foremost assassins during the 1890s. The author highlights the 'lack of connection between violent anarchist rhetoric and violent anarchist action' (p. 41). Despite the London anarchist conference of 1881, a meeting that advocated 'propaganda by the deed' and bomb-making, no anarchist explosions took place in Italy between 1882 and 1890.

More than any other factor, anarchist violence was due to Italian government repression and retaliation. Indeed, Pernicone describes Italy as 'a virtual police state for the anarchists' (p. 31). Rome's suppression of the anarchists' organisations increasingly isolated them from the masses of the population. Immobilised in their isolation, only violent 'propaganda by the deed' enabled them to remain a viable force for revolution. Harsh repressive methods, which included pressuring employers to fire their anarchist employees, shipping thousands of anarchists to remote islands off the Italian coast (*domicilio coatto*), and shooting down hundreds of protesting men, women, and children, as in Milan in May 1898, stoked anarchist desires for revenge.

While the authorities' often brutal overreaction cannot be denied, Pernicone unfortunately creates a stereotype of the evil Liberal State at the same time that he demolishes the stereotype of the evil anarchists. Rather than a police state, Italy was a weak state, with fewer police per capita than France and lacking a modern identification system. Crispi complained that Italy had 'no detective service'. Correctly refuting the existence of a widespread anarchist conspiracy to bomb and assassinate, Pernicone constructs an Italian government plot to use fear of anarchism as a pretext to suppress popular discontent. He makes no distinction between a progressive Giolitti government (1892–1893) or a moderate Di Rudinì cabinet (1896–1898, although his moderate phase ended in May 1898 in response to widespread rioting) and the much more authoritarian and repressive regimes of Crispi (1893–1896) and Pelloux (1898–1900). Giolitti initiated unprecedented policies affirming the rights to strike and associate peacefully. Di Rudinì deplored the excesses of the despotic Crispi and quickly freed two-thirds of those whom Crispi had consigned to *domicilio coatto* for political reasons, including many anarchists. Privately he referred to this peculiar institution of administratively ordered forced detention as 'a verminous plague'. In an August 1896 letter to the civil commissioner administering Sicily, he wrote: 'I am of the opinion that when possible one ought to be very free in secretly releasing [the anarchists]. Woe to us if any talk is made of this because then the usual ones, who don't understand anything, would say that we are the anarchists' (Jensen 1989, 103–105).

Like the recent book by Tuccinardi and Mazzariello (2014), Pernicone speculates that in 1901 Giolitti ordered the murder of the incarcerated assassin Bresci in order to prevent his possible liberation. While unanswered questions remain about the death of Bresci, such a thuggish act would have been uncharacteristic of Giolitti and seems unlikely. He wanted to return Italy to a regime of strict law and order, not revert to the arbitrary and legally dubious tactics of Crispi and Pelloux. He had opposed Crispi's exceptional anti-anarchist laws because he believed exceptional measures were in themselves a mistake.

Read Pernicone's book for its sensitive and insightful analyses of the motivations and actions of the anarchist assassins, not for its less convincing or well-documented polemic against the Liberal State.

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Un Volgo Disperso. Contadini d'Italia nell'Ottocento, by ADRIANO PROSPERI, Turin, Einaudi, 2019, 324 pp., €32.00, ISBN 978-88-06-24009-7

The title of this ambitious and erudite tome pays homage to the chorus of Manzoni's tragedy, *Adelchi*. There the 'dispersed people' was the Italic one in the early Middle Ages; here it is the Italian peasantry in the 'long nineteenth century'. In Manzoni's tragedy the Longobards and the Franks (themselves allegories for the Austrians and French of Manzoni's own time) battle it out to then jointly oppress the nameless Italian masses. In Prosperi's book it is the seemingly divergent factions of the Italian upper classes, across the divide between conservatives and progressives, that create something of a Gramscian bloc to perpetuate the oppression of the rural masses, even in the face of the national resurgence that led to Italy's political unification. But perhaps more than dispersed, the book depicts the rural masses of the Italian peninsula as submerged in an ever-rising flood of numbers and words meant to study, and more broadly speak for, them. In the process, Prosperi documents how Italian peasants became objects of concern, derision, and romantic idealisation, even as some of them tried to organise themselves into historical subjects throughout the century, with halting success.

It is perhaps fitting that a historian of the Inquisition in the early modern era (among many other matters) would turn his attention to the 'spoken for' masses of the Italian countryside at the cusp of modernity, an era that would ultimately erase Italy's peasantries from the face of history. In this study Prosperi acknowledges, but does not systematically address, the paradoxes of mediation on which our knowledge of the subaltern classes is founded. The subalterns cannot speak, we learned from Spivak some time ago, but in this book they hardly even whisper. Two categories of intellectuals do the talking instead, in this impressively documented but somewhat undisciplined narrative. The first category is the priest, Gramsci's traditional intellectual par excellence, and the other is the physician, who over the century came to play an increasingly organic role in the reproduction (and sometimes in the questioning) of exploitative class relations. Both priests and doctors wrote extensively on the immensely diverse conditions of Italian peasants, in both descriptive and normative registers, at times creating provisional alliances but more often disagreeing in the name of tradition and progress. This study, however, deals mostly with the medical class, which Prosperi dissects with remarkable subtlety and critical empathy over the course of 18 loosely chronologically arranged chapters.

The author reminds us that for much of the century Italy had more doctors per capita than France or Germany. Some of these health professionals, like Agostino Bertani and Achille