

settle irregularly in Italy or Greece—would not change the fact that border control acts through ‘attribution’ as a tool of production of knowledge around ‘migrants’.

Yet, while powerfully exposing the complicity of the epistemic violence of academia and other institutions, the book itself risks fixing migrants at the moment of border crossing and/or detention, so that the characters of the book often lack subjectivity, and their stories reproduce particular patterns of representation of those classified as ‘migrants’. In spite of this lack, *Crimes of Peace* is a valuable contribution that unsettles the reader from any comfortable neutral position and reminds us, to use the words of Walter Benjamin (1968), that ‘the current amazement that the things we are experiencing are “still” possible (...) is *not* the beginning of knowledge,’ but rather the product of contingent social, political and historical processes.

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Italian Women Writers: Gender and Everyday Life in Fiction and Journalism 1870-1910, by Katharine Mitchell, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2014, 264 pp., CAD\$65 (cloth), ISBN 978-1442646414

Italian Women Writers: Gender and Everyday Life in Fiction and Journalism 1870-1910 is a much needed book-length contribution on 19th-century Italian women writers. In it, Katharine Mitchell discusses the fiction and journalistic writings of three important *scrittrici*: Neera (Anna Radius Zuccari's *nom de plume*), Marchesa Colombi (the *nom de plume* of Maria Antonietta Torriani), and Matilde Serao, and argues that ‘the depiction of girlhood and womanhood in Italian domestic fiction and journalism as written by women functioned as a type of conduct manual that taught women how to deal with the predicaments and limitations in everyday life’ (p. 150). Mitchell is less focused on demonstrating whether these writings had an actual impact on legal and social changes, than she is on understanding and reviewing what female readers found, and identified with, in them. The result is an accessible, informed, and insightful overview of Neera, Marchesa Colombi, and Matilde Serao's works.

These writers' contribution to Italian literature and culture has long been obliterated or minimized by the Italian literary establishment, whose canonization practices favored male over female writers both as pedagogic and creative models. In recent years, Antonia Arslan and other Italianists such as Ann Hallamore Caesar and Lucienne Kroha (to name just a few) have contributed to a new visibility of these authors, with the positive result that the relevance of women

writers in pre-WWI Italian culture is no longer restricted to the supposed *unicum* of Sibilla Aleramo's controversial *Una donna* (1906). And yet so much remains to be done.

Mitchell's volume contributes substantially to our knowledge and critical assessment of these authors because it approaches them from several different standpoints. She provides a detailed historical and sociological overview of the place of women in post-Unification Italy, thus allowing the reader to contextualize the writers' interests and specific contributions. Her research is devoted to both fiction and non-fiction writing: Mitchell examines their domestic fiction (realist novels in which the female protagonists deal with their social and sexual position in society), journal articles, essays, and conduct books in order to reflect on and discuss the different stances assumed by the authors vis-à-vis themselves, their work as public figures, and the main concerns of their middle-class audiences. Finally, she also contributes overviews of specific themes and motifs within these works, such as the gendering of private and public spheres, the politics of emotions, and the different types of bonds between female subjects. Mitchell argues that in tackling such specific themes, these texts offered a much needed instrument of reflection and self-assessment for female readers. In most cases, the texts proposed subtle critiques of the status quo, or at least helped female readers cope with the limitations of their gender roles by acknowledging their predicament as the result of social structures, and not individual limitations.

The narrow scope of the book (three writers, and their works devoted to middle-class women) is less a limit than it is a strength; while in most cases what holds true for the texts examined would not be true for other classes of women, for example factory and farm workers, these explicit research boundaries allow Mitchell to focus specifically on middle-class women, that is on the category of female subjects that were being most directly interpellated by the ideology of domesticity and by discourses on femininity in liberal Italy, and that were publicly held up as models and representatives of their gender. As she explains, thanks to writers such as Neera, Marchesa Colombi and Serao, 'for the first time in Italy, middle-class women readers were reading about women like themselves who were depicted with sympathy and pity' (p. 20).

One of the most important points brought forward by this book, in continuity with Antonia Arslan's insights in her 1998 *Dame, galline e regine*, is that, far from operating in isolation and/or in competition with their fellow female novelists, the three writers established professional collaborations and a network of solidarity among themselves, just as they provided models for solidarity, female friendships, and mutual understanding among women within their fictional texts. Indeed, the discourse of solidarity becomes in this volume both a critical and an ethical gesture, one that dismantles the cliché of the female artist uninterested in the work of her female colleagues, and reasserts our duty to practice the same solidarity across generations. As Mitchell reminds us in the introduction, after all, it was not by coincidence that Marchesa Colombi's masterful novel *Matrimonio in provincia* (1885) was brought back from oblivion by the Einaudi publishing firm in 1973. The mother of the one female editor at the firm, writer Natalia Ginzburg, 'encourage[d] her daughter to recommend [Marchesa Colombi's] work to the publisher', (p. 3) arguing that it represented one of the most significant readings in her formation as a young woman.

This example of the transmission of female-authored literature from one generation to the next, a transmission, in this case, that had a direct impact on the text's availability to new readers, is illuminating in both its specificity and in its rarity. Only when we give importance to the experiences of subjects other than white males, and to genres other than the canonical ones, can we begin to appreciate fully the wealth and depth of material that Italian culture carries within in, and that should be made more known and available to the readers. Mitchell's thematic and ideological analyses transcend genres and narrative formats, drafting an original literary and emotional landscape that will hopefully continue to be expanded and explored by scholars. Clearly and

cogently written, *Italian Women Writers: Gender and Everyday Life in Fiction and Journalism 1870-1910* provides great critical insights on the works of Neera, Marchesa Colombi, and Matilde Serao, and helps us reconnect with literary representations that for the first time both described and criticized for female readers the world they lived in.

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Il mio diario di guerra (1915–1917) by Benito Mussolini, edited by Mario Isnenghi, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016, pp. 225, €18, ISBN 978-88-15-26050-5

From September 1915 to February 1917 Benito Mussolini fought in the war as a member of a rifle regiment. A simple soldier, he was at the same time the well-known director of the interventionist newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, and formerly of the national newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party *Avanti!*. He kept a journal of his war experience, which was serialized in *Il Popolo d'Italia*. Both as a public and a private document – given Mussolini's role in Italian politics of that time – the journal provides us, in Isnenghi's words, with the rhetoric of a palingenesis that is both personal and collective. Given its public dimension, and also because of its later publication during the Regime, some historians have dismissed the journal as an example of Il Duce's 'transformism'. However, in his thoroughly documented introduction, Isnenghi argues that had the author not become Italy's dictator, this text would have nonetheless attracted the interest of historians as the wartime testimony of both a simple soldier, and an interventionist primary school teacher who was closer to the working class than to the intellectual bourgeoisie. It is also a telling document of the path that led Italy to war and overwhelmed the working classes in the political context of 1914–15. For Mussolini the concept of class had become meaningless, as officers and soldiers allegedly perceived each other like brothers in a war that was made by 'peoples and not by armies' (19 September 1915, 64). In this sense, Mussolini's language was not entirely new, drawing considerably from the rhetoric of the Risorgimento volunteers. Still claiming to be a socialist, but venomously opposing the Socialist party that had expelled him on the eve of his interventionist turn, *Il Popolo d'Italia* echoed Mazzini's pairing of people and nation by reversing the premises of Risorgimento nationalism: the 'People of Italy', Isnenghi notes, was no longer the 'Italy of the people' (13).

Ignoring the fact that the majority of the soldiers had unwillingly entered the conflict in 1915, Mussolini claimed that the war was fought by 'the people'; defeatism was a bourgeois, not a proletarian trait. In 1919, at the foundation of the *Fasci* in Milan, the newspaper published another crucial historical document, the Programme of San Sepolcro, which harked back to these very pages of the journal: it was time for 'the people' – those who had given their blood in the front line, those who had wanted the war, a classless 'people' – to replace the old dominant class. In this sense, Mussolini's journal constitutes what Isnenghi called in a previous book the 'public diary of a rising Duce' (Mario Isnenghi, *Diario in pubblico del Duce nascente* (1985) now in