

ideas. He asserts in conclusion that studying history means fostering innovation by encouraging today's youth to think analytically (p. 221).

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doi:10.1017/mit.2019.1

Italian Motherhood on Screen, edited by Giovanna Faleschini Lerner and Maria Elena D'Amelio, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, XIII + 293 pp., £80.00, ISBN 978-3-319-56674-0 (hardcover), £63.99, ISBN 978-3-319-56675-7 (eBook).

In the words of the philosopher Luisa Muraro, 'I was born in a culture where women are not taught to love their mothers. Nevertheless, this is the most important knowledge [...]. The beginning we are looking for consists in the ability to love one's mother' (*L'ordine simbolico della madre*, Roma, Editori riuniti, 1992, p. 60). According to Muraro, winning back the symbolic order of the mother translates into reconquering a female genealogy. This would entail being aware of the contribution to knowledge given by other women predating us, so as to give the idea of *partire da sé* (starting from one's own experience) an historical and political insight. Rehabilitating the mother means giving the maternal a generative, and not only reproductive, function.

However, the idea of motherhood does not live in a reconciled space. As signalled by another Italian feminist philosopher, Adriana Cavarero, the philosophical thought has often described the combination of the female inclination towards seduction and eroticism with the maternal tendency as unsettling (*Inclinazioni. Critica della rettitudine*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2013). On the one hand, maternity seems to be an inclination that rejects eroticism and unfolds in the Virgin Mary's act of leaning lovingly towards her son and, on the other, a space of crisis of female identities when the opposite inclination towards the excessiveness of passions comes to the surface, in an unresolvable tension between reassurance and rebellion.

Italian cinema has often explored this plethora of figures of the maternal, maybe in an attempt to build its own matrilineal genealogy, as Lucia Cardone suggests (*Madri*, in 'Quaderni del CSCF', 9, 2013, pp. 204–208), drawing a map revolving around a number of remarkable sites, ranging from the *mater dolorosa* (as it has been defined by Julia Kristeva) to the identification (as ambiguous and problematic as it is) with mother, martyr and nation in the post-war era through the body of Anna Magnani/Pina in *Roma città aperta* (R. Rossellini, 1945). From that very body also stems the definition of a body-landscape as described by Giovanna Grignaffini, where the genealogy mother-daughter unfolds in a maternal landscape of 'rebirth': 'the rebirth of Italian cinema – its immediate recognisability as "other", the tangible sign of its difference – [unfolds] around two marks of attraction, two "landscapes": that of Italy and that of women, both recalled in the name of their profound, unmistakable beauty' (*Racconti di rinascita*, in Ead., *La scena madre. Scritti sul cinema*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2002, p. 263).

The essays included in *Italian Motherhood on Screen* stem from this philosophical and historiographical weft, weaving the warp of maternal images in contemporary Italian film and audio-

visual products. The first section, dedicated to ‘ambivalent mothers’, includes two of the most complex works, the first being the essay by Marcia Landy, which explores the continuity of maternal bodies from Fascist cinema to the melodramas of the 1950s to Dario Argento’s horror films. Landy observes how the female body is construed as monstrous and abject when the inclination (cf. Cavarero again) towards maternity surrenders to erotic desire, which sees in Argento’s *Profondo rosso* (1975) and the ‘trilogy of the three mothers’ (*Suspiria*, 1977, *Inferno*, 1980, *La terza madre*, 2006) an itinerary into the subversion of the maternal stereotype that goes together with calling into question of the omniscience of the classical cinematic vision; a clear reference to Michelangelo Antonioni that unfortunately goes almost unnoticed in Landy’s text. The second essay by Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo focuses on two female directors, Cristina Comencini and Alina Marazzi, who dealt with the strong ambivalence of motherhood in *Quando la notte* (2011) and *Tutto parla di te* (2012). Supported by solid philosophical references (Cavarero above all), the two authors reveal with elegance and agility of writing their analysis at the level of both the plot and the architecture of the images, guiding the reader to a careful and acute reflection on the modes of narration and the style adopted by the films. ‘Lost mothers’, the second section, includes – besides a reading of *Io sono l’amore* (Guadagnino, 2009) and *Il capitale umano* (Virzì, 2013) and a comparison, maybe too bold, between *La sconosciuta* (Tornatore, 2006) and the South-Korean *Milyang* (Chang-dong, 2007) – the profound and rich essay that Stefania Benini dedicates to Nanni Moretti’s *Mia madre* (2015), read through the lenses of Roland Barthes and Marguerite Yourcenar. The third section, ‘Motherhood and the Body Politics’, presents a more evident militant attitude ranging from the single mothers depicted by Francesca Comencini, read by Maria Letizia Bellocchio in the light of the passing of the Italian Family Law that defines the status of children born out of wedlock, to the figures of mothers and daughters that inhabit the films by Susanna Nicchiarelli, analysed by Silvia Carlorosi with an eye to Luisa Muraro’s maternal genealogy, to end up with Cristina Comencini’s *Lo spazio bianco*, with its calling into question of the idea of a ‘natural’ maternity, as described by Millicent Marcus in an accurate and compelling reading that explores the bond between the city of Naples and fecundity as a recurrent stereotype in Italian films. Lastly, the book ends with an original insight into the representations of motherhood in the new media, giving room in particular to the ‘Lunàdigas’ project, mixing a vast array of audio-visual materials in the courageous and worthy attempt to give voice to the women who refuse motherhood.

The sole criticism to be made to a collection that has a solid point of interest in the wide range of approaches, as well as in the variety of materials taken into account, is a bibliography that refers almost completely to the Anglo-Saxon area, apparently underestimating the numerous contributions made in recent years by Italian scholars to a gender studies perspective: the essays by Giovanna Grignaffini quoted above, the works published by Lucia Cardone with the research group FAScinA since 2011, the special issue of the ‘Quaderni del CSCSI’ *Storie in divenire. Le donne nel cinema italiano* (2015, edited by Cardone, Jandelli and Tognolotti), as well as the many essays by Veronica Pravadelli and Ilaria A. De Pascalis.

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doi:10.1017/mit.2019.2