

# Mimmo Cangiano. The Wreckage of Philosophy. Carlo Michelstaedter and the Limits of Bourgeois Thought

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the poems *Il ratto di Ganimede* and *Narciso al fonte*, whose genesis and sources are examined in detail, reflect on psychoanalytical notions of homoeroticism and narcissism, especially in connection with Saba's relationship to his younger friend and poet Federico Almansì.

Tatasciore's rich prose at times leads the reader into digressions apparently unconnected to the main theme of the chapter. Yet, his style, *recherché* and often literary, makes for a pleasant read and an acute exploration of the reception of the classics into Italian poetry. Despite its length, the book exhibits very few typos. The many directions of research and the bibliographical richness attest to the author's wide array of tools and to his highly sensitive readings of the texts. While the book painstakingly illuminates the single author's relationship with the classics and the Italian literary memory with an overwhelming abundance of data, it also provides a valuable theoretical insight in reception studies and a sound methodology for the practitioners of the field.

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**Mimmo Cangiano. *The Wreckage of Philosophy. Carlo Michelstaedter and the Limits of Bourgeois Thought*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. Pp. 186. ISBN 9781487504649.**

Not only does Cangiano's provocative investigation in *The Wreckage of Philosophy* reconfigure the philosophical value of a lesser-known actor of European modernism, the young Goritian Michelstaedter, it also shows the innermost dialectic that words make meaning, and that the value of meaning determines power structures and roles of subjugation.

Especially for the English-speaking world, such inquiry stands out as an original departure in dialogue with a variety of literatures of thought that defined socio-cultural semantics of early twentieth century. It delves, primarily, into the knot of Italian modernist thought(s) within the "anarchy of chiaroscuro," György Lukács's expression employed by Cangiano here to reveal how peculiarly Michelstaedter interpreted the material unraveling of his time and exposed how "Rhetoric" of power permeates bourgeois society of social consensus as well as the anthropology of *technè* (3). In contrast to relativistic views of the philosopher, Cangiano persuades us to reconsider the words of the young Goritian as

a formidable attempt to interplay thought and matter and to disclose the social machine that hinges on individual needs. Cangiano sets up this trajectory in three phases: the 1905–07 “decadent” phase of individual’s forces of expressions, the 1907–08 “tragic moment” as “a possible means of salvaging an immanent meaning,” and the “persuasion force” of 1909–10 that sought resiliency against the vehicles of societal consensus (3). What is extremely compelling for us as readers is the ability of the young Goritian to function as the guilty conscience of modernism already at an early stage of his life (11).

The indictment of inauthenticity of the living, that the bourgeois thought would endure by abstracting values, needs, and modes of living, becomes the core of Michelstaedter’s unique perspective, which Cangiano deftly unpacks in the first chapter. While Michelstaedter critiques the ‘conventionality’ and ‘usefulness’ of life as mechanics for the powerful social consensus, there is also, for Cangiano, a disdain toward an illusionary new tragic subjectivity or the forging a secured value in the ‘trueness of the experience’ of life. The contrast is with a variety of other movements, from Bergson’s contemporary philosophy to Nietzsche’s interpretation of tragedy, from Ernst Mach and Pirandello’s account of life and matter, to the intersections with Husserl’s *Erlebnisse*. In fact, Cangiano contends that in Michelstaedter’s “pages, bourgeois thought [...] confronts the structures of its own alienation and even recognizes itself as abstract (‘using words, a war of words’), and recognizes itself as part of a social mechanism directed at distinguishing reality from the image of reality” (19). Hence, Michelstaedter’s world constitutes a third way of fully recognizing that the groundlessness of the subject lies within its social power of atomization and specialized labor.

Through close textual analysis of *La persuasione e la retorica* and its corollary texts, Cangiano illustrates how the paradigm of the subject’s will challenges the ways in which the individual moves, reacts, feels the need of, and engages in the world. Furthermore, it deconstructs a separation between the cognitive aspect of living and its materiality. This is perhaps the most significant section that allows us to grasp the degree of Michelstaedter’s unique approach. In his words, “consciousness of the individual subject [...] is nothing more than the state of need of the same subject” (38). A Leopardian theory of pleasure serves Cangiano with a way to gradually unpack some fundamental traits of this *weltanschauung*: from the direct mode with which he refers to usefulness but also veils human deficiency to the transformative connective mode where individual values, needs, and projections become collective absolute forms to rationalize the violence of the subject’s state of will (48). This mechanism represents the core of Chapter Two, displaying how

artificial the construction of sociality and structures of living truly are in the ambivalent safety net and disempowerment of individual mobility. The connective mode is effectively interpreted by Cangiano through the lenses of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. In fact, the illusion of the ontological subject constitutes the skin onto which Rhetoric operates and inscribes a “uniform framework” of “laws, codes, and knowledge” (58).

But, what are the forms through which Rhetoric feeds itself? In Chapter three the operations that Rhetoric puts forth in our society become evident, particularly in the spheres of language and ‘social consensus’, ones that resonate significantly with the current socio-political environment. Building on the previous relations of direct/connective modes, Cangiano brings us closer to what Michelstaedter defines “the straitjacket” of bourgeois culture (100). The structure of language ‘neutralizes’ the will of the individual. In other words, Cangiano affirms: “Language is one of the systems of social security that establishes itself as an abstraction,” because it distances the Hobbesian violence of the *neikos* into forms of agreement and uniformity (75). Despite similarity to Prezzolini’s critique of language as convention, Cangiano contends that language here operates as property, money, insurance, and welfare, since it generates words as commodities (76). Looking closely at ‘Appendice II’, Cangiano explores how, first, Plato, and then, Aristotle have contributed to the instrumentalization of reason and flatness from which consensus (the idealized form of abstracted social value) emerges. The dominant paradigm of specialization and automatization of individual “accidents” would establish a striking contrast to the Socratic experience of the “deficiency,” a forceful value of the “absence” of truth (95–99).

In the last chapter, Cangiano asks us to consider the dialectic of Rhetoric and Persuasion in their interlocking *praxis* of historical change. Whereas Rhetoric is inherently transformative adapting “its hegemonic cultural values” to each historical moment and social system, Persuasion operates in exposing the deeds of such abstract operation (137). The latter constitutes a never-ending approach of denouncement and exposing the flaws of arbitrary values, including the education of the ‘useful’, upheld as absolute, unequivocally good and sufficient by the ‘gangs of the evil’. Cangiano argues that this interaction occurs on the basis of obedience to the structural social truth as well as the resistance to it: compelling is the example of ‘giving’, a rupture of the exchange mechanism which for an instance takes the individual out of the equation. For this reason, Cangiano concludes, perhaps too briefly, his study brings Michelstaedter’s views closer, although not

fully comparably, to Lukács' interpretation of social class antagonism within the bourgeois idea of the Real as stasis and the problem of reification of values.

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**Jo Ann Cavallo and Corrado Confalonieri. *Boiardo*. Milano: Edizioni Unicopli, 2018. Pp. 278. ISBN 9788840019826.**

Il volume, curato da Jo Ann Cavallo e Corrado Confalonieri, fa parte della collana Atlante, diretta da Rinaldo Rinaldi e Francesco Spera. Si tratta di un volume antologico sull'opera di Boiardo di impostazione solidamente filologica. L'opera è suddivisa nelle seguenti sezioni: Poesia latina, Volgareggiamenti, *Innamoramento de Orlando – Orlando Innamorato, Amorum libri tres, Pastorale, Teatro, Lettere, Carte de Triumpho*. All'*Orlando Innamorato* è riservata la parte più consistente dell'antologia.

Per orientarsi all'interno del volume e apprezzarne il punto di vista è indispensabile la lettura della puntuale Introduzione di Jo Ann Cavallo. Dedicata in massima parte all'*Orlando Innamorato*, l'introduzione è suddivisa per temi e analizza alcuni degli elementi fondamentali del poema: dal legame tra ciclo carolingio e ciclo bretone, al ruolo dell'amore nelle sfaccettature di *Venere in malo* e *Venere in bono* fino allo scopo "pedagogico" del poema attraverso gli *exempla* di principi buoni e cattivi. È interessante il rilievo dato ai personaggi non europei dell'*Innamorato*, ribadito anche nella scelta di passi antologizzati. I loro legami con gli altri protagonisti evidenziano come i moventi individuali nell'intreccio esulino spesso da spinte religiose o politiche e siano invece generati da istanze del tutto personali, legate a desideri e ambizioni che appartengono alla sfera del singolo e non della società. Le sezioni in cui l'opera è divisa restituiscono la cronologia della produzione di Boiardo e sono tutte accompagnate da commenti introduttivi in cui spesso sono anche riportati i principali nodi critici che coinvolgono le singole opere. Anche i passi antologizzati sono introdotti da un commento esplicativo che inserisce il testo nel macrotesto dell'opera di Boiardo, agganciandolo dove possibile o necessario a contingenze biografiche o politiche, sottolineandone le influenze culturali.

Dal momento che lo scopo fondamentale del volume è quello di riportare tutta la produzione di Boiardo alla sua singolarità, emancipandola dall'influenza