

Pier Massimo Prosio. *Da Palazzo Madama al Valentino, Torino, e Gozzano. Studi sulla letteratura del primo Novecento in Piemonte*. Turin: Centro Studi Piemontesi - Ca de Studi Piemonteis, 2000.

With this volume Pier Massimo Prosio adds to his already extensive production of works on Piedmontese authors and on the culture of the Piedmont region. These include *Dal Meleto alla Sacra di San Michele. Piccola geografia letteraria piemontese* (1984, second edition 1997), *Guida letteraria piemontese* (1988, second edition 1993), *Piemonte letterario. Sette Studi da Alfieri a Pavese* (1980), and *La città nascosta. Insoliti aspetti letterari e figurativi della Torino del Novecento* (1993). This rich and handsome book consists of a collection of ten essays, the majority of which have appeared in various outlets over the past two decades. The volume is divided into four major sections, the first of which focuses primarily on the various and multiple expressions of Turin in the creative works of Guido Gozzano ("Gozzano e dintorni"). The opening chapter of this section, which bears the title of the book and is the only previously unpublished essay in the collection, begins by recalling the inaccuracy promulgated by critics regarding Gozzano's actual place of birth. For Prosio, the mistake of identifying Gozzano's birthplace as Aglie rather than Turin is emblematic of the poet's relationship with his city. According to Prosio, Gozzano's relationship with Turin is "solo in apparenza lineare e semplice, e invece sfumato e sovente ambiguo, complesso e a volte sfuggente" (9–10). Prosio notes that this complex and ambiguous literary connection between Gozzano and Turin is best illustrated by the eponymous poem *Torino* in which the poet's affection and nostalgia for the city manifests itself from two very different perspectives. On one hand, the city is very present and alive as the poet draws a familiar portrait of a Turin *belle époque*; on the other hand, the city is nostalgically longed for by the poet — exile and traveler — who is compelled for reasons of work and health to distance himself from his land. Prosio turns briefly his attention to the short story *L'altare del passato*, as he addresses a less featured characteristic of Gozzano's "Turinese" production: "una Torino misteriosa dunque popolata da anomalie personaggi" (23). Prosio also highlights the impact of the 1911 Turin Exposition on Gozzano's prose production in that same year. In these writings inspired by the Exposition, Turin does not merely serve as a background or frame, but rather it becomes, writes Prosio, a "presenza che accampa protagonista, solida e viva nei suoi monumenti nelle sue vie nella sua storia nella sua gente" (25). The chapter then considers those works centering around Turin written after Gozzano's return from his travels to the Far East. Prosio's familiarity with the texts allows the reader to appreciate how Gozzano's once modern city is transformed at the end of his career into "una magica capitale di un fantastico passato" (42). The remaining two chapters of this first section briefly examine the theatrical works of Sandro Camasio and Nino Oxilio within the context of a "Torino gozzaniana." Prosio muses that reading Camasio's and Oxilio's *Addio giovinezza*, considered to be one of the most popular and beloved texts of the early *Novecento*, evokes the same feeling of a "delusa nostalgia" that one experiences turning the pages of the photo albums of the 1911 Exposition.

The next section of this volume includes two studies on Giovanni Camerana ("Giovanni Camerana tra poesia e pittura"). In each Prosio focuses on Camerana's artistic and personal relationship with the painter Antonio Fontanesi. In the first of these chapters, Prosio, through a detective-like examination of each artist's will and testament, traces the rather enigmatic itinerary of Fontanesi's paintings, which were first bequeathed to Camerana by the painter himself before eventually landing in Turin's Civic Museum. In the second of his essays, Prosio explores in greater detail the relationship between Fontanesi's paintings and Camerana's poetry. While noting that the influence of Fontanesi on Camerana represents a brief episode in the latter's poetic fortune, Prosio identifies in each a propensity for a certain type of landscape: "[s]ottostà ad entrambi la ricerca di un paesaggio dai toni severi o foschi o drammatici che di rado consente l'idillio" (84). Fontanesi's influences begin to fade in the 1880s as Camerana is drawn to the most vital voices of European decadentism.

The third section of the book bears the suggestive title "Enrico Thovez, un torinese guastafeste" in reference to the writer's basic extraneousness to the Italian literary tradition.

In the first of the three chapters dedicated to this isolated and misunderstood artist, Prosio considers the ample production of critical writings that were published in the last years of Thovez' life. Situating Thovez among those so-called "spiemontizzati" Piedmontese writers who exhibited a love-hate and attraction-repulsion relationship with their land, Prosio points out two features of the poet/critic's works and disposition that he characterizes as typically "piemontesi": first, an indomitable moralistic and serious vein that takes the form of a refusal "di certa esteriorita' e faciloneria 'italiane'" (97); and second, Thovez' attraction toward the North, which manifests itself in his taste for winter landscapes and in a sentimental affinity with the literature and art of the Northern Europeans, most notably Germany. What emerges from the chapters on Thovez is a poet and critic who is "ferocemente esterofilo in arte, musica, letteratura" (102) and whose works are characterized by an autobiographical excess. Prosio, instead, prefers to side with those critics that place Thovez in the circle of late romantics alongside the name of Alfred de Musset.

The volume concludes with three essays dedicated to Cesare Pavese that attempt to draw parallels between his autobiographical writings and his creative production ("Pavese, tra vita e letteratura"). In the first of these studies, Prosio explores the extraordinary literary value of Pavese's letters. While recognizing the incompleteness of his study, Prosio, nevertheless, succeeds in distinguishing a number of literary characteristics in the Piedmontese author's rich correspondence that offer key insight into Pavese, the man and the writer. In the letters that span the period of Pavese's youth until his political confinement in 1935, Prosio notes that from an early age the writer's native Langhe region is presented as "il luogo incantato dell'infanzia." Selected letters from this period reveal Pavese's attraction to the "periferia torinese, della 'barriera'" and to the dialect and jargon of this world that serve as a vital source in the writer's search for popular realism and genuine local flavor. These features will later find their creative expression in the novel *Il compagno* and in the short stories of *Ciau Masino*. For the period of confinement in Brancalione Calabro, Prosio conjoins Pavese's letters with his diary *Il mestiere di vivere* to illustrate the writer's need "di confessarsi, di conoscersi piu' a fondo, di combattere la solitudine" (192). The lyricism, thematic implications, and stylistic depth and agility of the letters to Fernanda Pivano in the early 1940s mark, according to Prosio, a significant moment in Pavese's evolution as a writer. Turning to the Piedmontese author's correspondence during his final years (1945-50), Prosio suggests that, with Pavese having secured the literary means to transform his ideas and fantasies into fiction, "la lettera come canale piu' o meno surrettizio di 'letteratura' (quasi uno sfogo, e un compenso, di quelle esigenze di creativita' che non si riesce a comporre e a compiutamente tradurre nell'opera scritta) venga a scadere, assumendo sempre piu' l'aspetto di pratico mezzo di comunicazione" (207). However, Prosio is quick to point out that there are numerous letters in these years that stand out for their "carica umana" and aesthetic effect. This reader would have liked the revisions to this essay, originally published in 1979, to have been a bit more current, particularly in reference to the much debated letter from Pavese to Davide Lajolo, which Prosio presents as "il sigillo di quest'affascinante e tragico epistolario" (217). In the second essay, Prosio offers a perceptive, thematic reading of Pavese's 1942 short story *Il mare*. His analysis of this narrative piece as a "turning point" in the writer's mythological representation of the hill is especially illuminating and convincing. In the concluding essay, Prosio, ascribing to the common critical opinion that *La casa in collina* represents "la trasposizione piu' o meno immediata e veritiera dell'esperienza umana di Pavese durante la Resistenza" (235), persuasively explores the character of Corrado in order to display two human and spiritual problems that obsessed the Piedmontese writer in those years: the sense of guilt that resulted from his inability to take part in the "armed struggle" and his religious "crisis." With *Da Palazzo Madama al Valentino Torino e Gozzano*, Prosio has weaved together an eloquent guide to the rich, literary world of Piedmont and to some of the most significant voices of twentieth century Italian literature.

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