

## 'Il Giornalino' di Prezzolini. La lingua italiana tra promozione e propaganda nella New York degli anni '30 e '40

by Roberto Dolci, Florence, Franco Cesati Editore, 2018, 253 pp., €22.00 (hard cover), ISBN 9788876677274

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While some of his points hold true, it seems to me that Šedivý gives too much credit to Metternich's enlightenment in explaining his support for cooperation and moderation in Italy. Metternich was a conservative statesman who supported Austrian absolutism, noble power, and censorship whose anti-liberal and anti-nationalist policies were reactionary and aimed at preserving Habsburg power in Italy intact. The Chancellor and other conservative heads of state created a system that aimed at upholding their power in Europe and suppress forces that advocated changes. His moderation and restraint in international relations were motivated primarily by the fact that Austria was the supreme force in the peninsula. Unrest, change, and interference by other countries were bound to weaken the Austrian grip over the peninsula. Moreover, Metternich also dreaded that upheavals in the peninsula would encourage uprisings and disturbances in other parts of the multi-national Habsburg empire. In 1821 and 1831, when he believed that military interventions suited Austria's interests, he sent Austrian troops to suppress the revolutions in the peninsula.

However, be that as it may, Šedivý's work includes much important information and analysis on international relations and conflicting policies in pre-unification Italy and is highly recommended to scholars of nineteenth-century European diplomacy and Restoration Italy.

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**'Il Giornalino' di Prezzolini. La lingua italiana tra promozione e propaganda nella New York degli anni '30 e '40**, by Roberto Dolci, Florence, Franco Cesati Editore, 2018, 253 pp., €22.00 (hard cover), ISBN 9788876677274

Between 1934 and 1943 a monthly magazine for Italian language teachers and students was published in the USA. Its dual purpose was to allow the school-age children of Italian emigrants to learn and speak the language of their ancestors and to maintain cultural contacts with Italy. It was called *Il Giornalino* and was conceived and directed by Giuseppe Prezzolini, journalist, writer, philosopher, eclectic intellectual and, above all, great cultural organizer, as demonstrated by two previous publishing enterprises he embarked on in Italy in the early 1900s, *Leonardo* and *La Voce*, with both of which the country's cultural elite had collaborated. Prezzolini directed *Il Giornalino* from his position as director of the *Casa Italiana* at Columbia University, in New York, an institution that aimed at promoting Italian culture in America in a period described by the fascist government as the 'new Italian Renaissance'.

That magazine has now deservedly been rediscovered by Roberto Dolci, author of a precious monograph entitled *'Il Giornalino' di Prezzolini. La lingua italiana tra promozione e propaganda nella New York degli anni '30 e '40*, published in 2018 by the Florentine Cesati in the series 'Americana' directed by Anthony Julian Tamburri. Through analysis of the themes addressed in the several issues of the magazine, Dolci offers a very interesting overview of the condition of the Italian language in the USA in the crucial years between the two world wars and provides useful information on the development of pedagogical theories of that time and their empirical implications in American schools. The book also brings to light the attempts made by Prezzolini to find an equilibrium between the political objectives of the Italian government, which financed *Il Giornalino* until 1938, and the cultural objectives of some of the magazine's eminent collaborators, such as Leonard Covello and Angelo Patri, Italian-American pedagogues who were followers of John Dewey, the instrumentalist theorist who had taught at Columbia until 1929.

*Il Giornalino*, which was written in Italian and printed by Andrea Ragusa, official publisher of the Italian House, dealt with topics covering all aspects of Italian culture, from literature to art, from geography to anthropology, from history to religion. Prezzolini's purpose, as he stated, was not so much to teach Americans of Italian origin their language, as to 'expand their spiritual world' and their 'vocabulary of affections and values, in short of humanity' (p.111). Therefore, great attention was paid by the director to the so-called 'active teaching' that guaranteed a close link between the students, their families, and the social context.

A large part of the book is dedicated to the question of whether the magazine should be considered a tool used by Prezzolini to promote the propaganda of the fascist regime's politics and knowledge of the Italian language instrumentals of 'cultural diplomacy', in order to create in the USA 'favourable attitudes towards Italy' (pp.141–152). The author concludes that, although Prezzolini seemed at times to lean towards open support and at other times towards veiled opposition to the fascist regime, nevertheless *Il Giornalino* played a significant role in delineating a positive image of fascism in the Italian community in the USA. In support of this thesis, the author mentions some of Prezzolini's praiseworthy accounts of the figure of Mussolini and his 'conquests', such as the inauguration of new cities, the military occupation of Libya, the emphasis on sport as a foundation of the Italian 'new order', the memory of the 'Birthplace of Rome', and the insistence on the role assumed by Italy in maintaining peace in the world (pp.175–179). Prezzolini, according to the book's thesis, treated these themes not as a mere political and institutional chronicle but in a 'mainly promotional' tone aimed at exalting the new Italian conquests and the attachment of Fascism to the 'spiritual interests of Italy'.

Finally, Dolci recalls the accusations that Prezzolini had been philofascist, such as the one contained in a letter of January 1934 from the anti-fascist Michele Cantarella, professor of Italian at Smith College, to whom Prezzolini replied that he had never participated in the fascist movement because of his 'critical spirit'. The book also reconstructs the journalistic survey, which began with an article in November 1934 in the newspaper *The Nation* and continued until 1936 in the

*Columbia Spectator* and *The New York Teacher*, in which the thesis was put forward that *Il Giornalino* and the *Casa Italia* were mere instruments of fascist propaganda in the USA.

Strangely, Dolci makes no mention of the content of two texts, *Diario 1900–1941* and *L'italiano inutile* (1953), which certainly help us to better understand those events from the point of view of Prezzolini, who significantly defined himself as 'a voluntary exile from Italy'. In these writings, Prezzolini described the articles, which always appeared anonymously, as 'nonsense' and spoke of a 'plan organized' by the Italian anti-fascists who 'would be happy to take my place'. One of the most influential anti-fascists was his former friend Gaetano Salvemini, exiled in those years in the USA and professor at Harvard University. At Harvard, Salvemini was not a 'full professor', as Prezzolini had been for an entire year, in 1929, at Columbia, where he had previously taught Italian literature in 1923 and 1927. The position of university professor assigned to Prezzolini at Columbia is a significant fact, at least as significant as the position he held as director of the *Casa Italia* and *Il Giornalino*. If this biographical element had been considered in Dolci's report, he could have clarified what Prezzolini meant when he spoke of 'envy', as a sentiment that moved Salvemini to the invective towards him. In *L'italiano inutile*, after confessing that he, the creator of *La Voce*, had 'humiliated' himself, by 'compiling a bulletin', referring precisely to Salvemini, Prezzolini wrote that he had never before found 'a friend who turned' against him with the intention of hurting him so much. The incompleteness of the documentation also concerns Prezzolini's judgment on Fascism. The latter, as he dispassionately wrote in his book *The Legacy of Italy* (1948), was but one of the various solutions found in the world to solve the crisis of capitalism: 'These solutions – he wrote – were different according to the different historical conditions and the character of each people: it was Communism in Russia, Nazism in Germany, New Deal in the United States. In Italy it was Fascism, and that word became universal'.

Nevertheless, the undoubted merit of this book is that of having rediscovered Prezzolini's never explored until today *Il Giornalino*.

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**Elena Ferrante's key words**, by Tiziana de Rogatis, New York, Europa Editions, 2019, 320 pp., \$18.00 (soft cover), ISBN 9781609455637

Tiziana de Rogatis has written a meticulous monograph about Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan tetralogy*. Ferrante's novels *My Brilliant Friend*, *The Story of a New Name*, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, and *The Story of the Lost Child* have attained best-seller status and, as a consequence, were considered, unfairly, as commercial