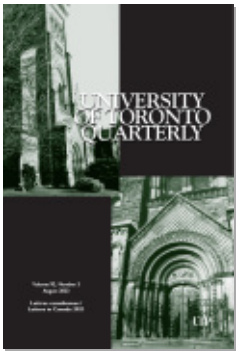
# *Kafka's Italian Progeny* by Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski (review)




Jennifer Burns

University of Toronto Quarterly, Volume 92, Number 3, August 2023, pp. 388-389 (Review)

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An emotion that attracted considerable early modern legal thought, remorse emerges as an extra-legal and often collective response to performative action in Geng's analysis of Lady Macbeth's *sleepwalking* scene and the Duchess of Gloucester's moments of penance. Finally, the book's postscript considers the value of excavating the legal and literary past, advocating for its potential to shine light on concerns about access, fairness, and effectiveness that continue to exist in popular thinking about law to this day. Overall, *Communal Justice* is impressive for both its breadth and focus, offering fresh perspectives on the affective power of the theatre as a locus of popular legal discourse.

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Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski. *Kafka's Italian Progeny*. University of Toronto Press 2020. ix, 302. $89.00

Setting out to reposition and rethink twentieth-century Italian literature in relation to world literature, Saskia Ziolkowski's substantive study combines an expansive vision of the work of Italian writers with a detailed engagement with selected texts. Its introduction eloquently makes the point that critical analysis of modern Italian literature has tended to privilege reading authors and texts within national, regional, and local contexts at the expense of uncovering connections with literature from other places and times. As such, points of contact are overlooked between Italian and international authors and, crucially, between Italian authors who are "hard to place" within a national literary taxonomy. The effect of this, Ziolkowski argues, is both that more diverse understanding of authors is hindered and that modern Italian literature sits on the periphery of a panorama of world literature, its mutually influential dialogue with other literary traditions and movements often unheeded.

Ziolkowski's method therefore disrupts literary-critical habits by adopting a transversal approach to Italy's literary modernity, as the book's title affirms: her point of departure is a non-Italian author, Franz Kafka, whose writing and biography prohibit placing him easily in a national identity or literary tradition. Tracing how Kafka is read by Italian authors within the context of the "awkwardness" of Italian modernism, and in ways departing from dominant associations of his writing with existentialism and surrealism, this book posits Kafka's work as an instrument to open up a more complex and networked mapping of modern Italian literature. This methodology offers alternatives not only to categories of time and place that have conventionally structured the canon but also to those of gender and form.

Five central chapters demonstrate Ziolkowski's method with detail, rigour, and creativity. Kafka's works offer in each a starting point from which develops an intricate dialogue with a selection of Italian writers' works. The selection


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itself is one of the brilliant elements of this study: all chapters deftly avoid default associations between writers secured by existing literary criticism and instead expose unexpected and well-evidenced connections that unsettle the reader's sense of where particular twentieth-century Italian authors "fit." In chapter one, Calvino and Pavese engage with Kafka around the question of realism, perhaps not surprisingly, but foregrounding the unusually intense reception in Italy of Kafka's *Amerika*. A focus in chapter two on short and ultra-short forms connects Manganelli, Romano, and Tabucchi with Kafka, whilst chapter three uses the form of detective fiction to disclose shared strategies for questioning social structures between Kafka, Buzzati, and Capriolo.

Ferrante and Svevo, Bontempelli, and Morante are brought together around Kafka in chapter four, revealing a thread of critique in Italian literature of the family specifically as institution. In chapter five, the affordances of Kafka's vivid creation of non-human animals to Italian writers concerned with the limits of the human are lucidly exposed through analysis of works by Landolfi, Morante, and Svevo; attention here to alternative communication practices serves compellingly to reframe the question of Italy's internal multilingualism. As my outline demonstrates, the ways in which some authors weave in and out of separate chapters is as cogent an articulation as any in the book of the efficacy of Ziolkowski's method, uncovering delicate connections rather than building rigid demarcations.

The space of a review cannot articulate adequately the quality and distinctiveness of argumentation in each of the chapters briskly summarized above. Each could stand alone for the precision of its research questions, the depth and range of its analysis (including rich engagement with sources across a number of literatures and associated disciplinary fields), and the originality of its findings. The whole book with its assured introduction and sharp epilogue remains, nevertheless, significantly greater than the sum of its parts, offering a timely call to readers of any and all literatures to look at (and look for) Italian literature from outside and, furthermore, to see from this refreshed perspective a diverse and transnationally connected Italian literature that has more to tell of the complexities of the modern world than conventional, embedded positions have allowed. *Kafka's Italian Progeny* presents an inspiring model to advance.

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Daniel Robert Laxer. *Listening to the Fur Trade: Soundways and Music in the British North American Fur Trade, 1760–1840.* McGill-Queen's University Press. xvi, 306. $49.95

How does one listen to a historical period bereft of audio recordings? Daniel Robert Laxer prefaces his ambitious study with this seemingly impossible


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# Book review

Saskia Ziolkowski, *Kafka's Italian Progeny*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2020, 302 pages; ISBN 9781487506308

**Reviewed by:** Marck Bernheim, Professor Emeritus

*Kafka's Italian Progeny* is an innovative and groundbreaking work of Comparative Literature forming a most interesting bridge from traditional studies of Franz Kafka's novels, stories, and aphorisms, and an effort, greatly successful, to open a new understanding of what might be termed a national Italian literary voice of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Author Saskia Ziolkowski is not the first to note the large scale influence of Kafka on Italian letters over the last hundred years, but unlike other earlier criticism which focused on individual writers and possible thematic convergences, she has an impressively broad scope: she will read Italian literature of the time period in a unified way of identifying what she calls the "progeny" of writers whose works are infused in a familial manner with those of Kafka. Indeed, the whole book has a familial feel, starting with the "progeny" of the title, and including numerous offspring with deep and meaningful connections to the entire Kafka opus.

Ziokowski can be seen in a (nonpolitical way) as anti-globalist. She is not concerned with past approaches to making a link from Kafka to particular writers influenced by him worldwide, but instead will not be satisfied with less than a totally revamped structuring of various movements in Italian literature, especially the problematic "modernism" which she believes badly needs reviewing and rephrasing if it is going to have anything of significance to say about world-class authors – as well as little known ones to date – whose work would be greatly different if not for this "Dante of our time" from Prague. It is that initial analogy with the Florentine master that appears both early on in Ziolkowski's introduction and then again in the very last pages. Her book revalidates Dante for our time, in a sense, by showing the deep imprint of Kafka in shaping a unique *Weltanschauung* just as Dante did seven centuries before:

> Studies of European or world literature often relegate modern Italian literature to a brief mention. Although Italy's strong medieval tradition guarantees that Italian have a prominent place in discussions of world literature, W. H. Auden declared Kafka, not a modern Italian author, the Dante of our time. (p. 6)

On her last page, Ziolkowski ends a key chapter on Kafka and his great influence on Italo Calvino similarly:

> This book takes the limited circulation of the debated category of modernism in Italy as an opportunity to rethink the contours of the modern Italian canon. By analyzing a few of the large number of Italian authors who produced works worthy of study, *Kafka's Italian Progeny* aims to propel more of them onto the shelves of non-Italianists, where they may receive more consideration. More than perhaps any other modern author, Kafka, "the Dante of our time," shows the vitality of literature. (p. 256)

Ziolkowksi makes great use of Calvino's words particularly, continuing to point out that, "as Calvino commented, Kafkas's writing not only helps readers understand the world but also helped create it" (p. 256). She concludes, her book "means to contribute to dialogues that reveal the great variety of modern Italian literature and how modern Italian literature can help us understand the world" (p. 256).

The ambitiousness of Ziolkowski's scholarship brings her to full chapter discussions of themes of family relationships in Kafka's tortured view of those dynamics as well as in Italian authors sensing a connection to his sufferings. She goes deep as well into the development of the famous Italian "gialli" detective and crime fiction influenced by Kafka's emphasis on absurdities of justice and legality, as well as numerous examples in Italian fiction of talking animals who question the borders of human nature in relation to other creatures, concentrating on the developing field of Animal Studies in the enigmatic Kafka story "A Report to an Academy." She spends full time on the famous as well as the less so. The book is eminently practical, an appeal to greater understanding and study of the richness of Italian literature not in a superficial *or* generalized *Weltliteratur* sense, but a newly-seen national one which shares great suggestive inspiration from readings of Kafka. Her roster can include Calvino, Svevo, Moravia, Ginzburg, Pavese, Morante, and Ferrante as well as far less-known Tommaso Landolfi, Lalla Romano, Antonio Tabucchi, Paola Capriolo, Giorgio Manganelli, and Massimo Bontempelli.

That is to say, it is a comprehensive study of the nation's modern writing, including that of the most ancient of all minorities, including those from the key city of Trieste and its Germanic traditions:

> For many Italian authors, Kafka helped them to define elements of their own Jewish heritage. Kafka's appeal as a Jewish author to many Italian authors with Jewish backgrounds also highlights the prominence of these authors in modern Italian literature. (p. 17)

Throughout she seeks the broadest meanings: "Analyzing the extent of Kafka's influence is not the goal of Kafka's Italian Progeny […] more significant is how putting their works into conversation with Kafka modifies the critical conception of Italian literature" (p. 27).

The book's dual accomplishment ultimately gives an "alternative world view" of Kafka at the same time these fruitful "conversations" with him redefine Italian writing of the last centuries specifically for the identity of the nation over undervalued and overlooked but always under examination. Not surprisingly, Ziolkowski, at the Department of Romance Studies of Duke, received for her first book a Book of the Year award from the Association of Italian Studies.

**Quaderni d'Italianistica**

# Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski. Kafka's Italian Progeny

Teresa Valentini

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non si escludano fra loro, ma anzi come le narrazioni più potenti siano quelle in cui diversi modelli coesistono e si scontrano (come in *Maria Zef*).

Se è vero che, come scrive Franco Moretti, "forms are the abstract of social relationships" allora "formal analysis is in its own modest way an analysis of power" ( "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review*, 2000). Parisi non è un critico marxista ma tuttavia crede nella funzione sociale della letteratura. "La letteratura italiana" osserva "ha contribuito alla creazione delle storie che ci raccontiamo per capire le diverse, complicate, dolorose vicende che vanno sotto il nome di abuso sessuale dei minori" e in generale ha svolto un ruolo chiave nella sfera pubblica di "un paese diviso e spesso in crisi come il nostro" (30–31). Non deve sorprendere allora, che un libro rigorosamente concentrato su aspetti tematici e formali si concluda con un appello morale e politico nel senso più alto del termine: secondo Parisi, le storie di abusi documentano "i meccanismi perversi della sfera pubblica in cui gli italiani dibattono i loro problemi" (338), la cui "faziosità" offre schermo a violenze e diseguaglianze, e impediscono quello che Leopardi definiva "l'onesto e il retto conversar cittadino," e che è un requisito indispensabile della democrazia.

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**Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski. *Kafka's Italian Progeny*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. Pp. 316. ISBN 9781487506308.**

When we think of the word *progeny*, our minds usually go to an offspring descending directly from its genitors, where the origin of such descendants is clear and unquestionable. It is exactly the problematic clarity of this process of progeny that Saskia Ziolkowski is valuably calling into question in *Kafka's Italian Progeny* by adopting Franz Kafka's *oeuvre* as the counterpoint to problematize the idea of a national literature, namely Italian literature.

Applying Jorge Luis Borges's discussion of Kafka's precursors to his descendants instead, Ziolkowski originally surveys Italian contemporary literature from 1940 in the light of Kafka's direct or referred influence. Accordingly, the chapters survey a variety of Italian authors, from those more traditionally associated with Kafka such as Italo Svevo, Italo Calvino, Elsa Morante, Massimo Bontempelli,

Antonio Tabucchi, Dino Buzzati, Cesare Pavese, and Tommaso Landolfi, to those less commonly related such as Lalla Romano, Giorgio Manganelli, Paola Capriolo, and Elena Ferrante. At the centre of these chapters is less the relation that these authors entertained with Kafka than the reconfiguration of the panorama of Italian contemporary literature obtained through this comparison. For this reason, each chapter also focuses on a different specific theme. In so doing, the author, while reconsidering and contributing to shedding light on new aspects that Kafka and Italian authors have in common, delineates an alternative map of contemporary Italian writers considered in discussions around—in order of chapters—realism and modernism, short fiction, detective fiction, the portrayal of familial relation, and animal studies.

The first chapter indulges in the interesting argument according to which the Italian reception of Kafka as a realist author depends, at least up until Calvino and Edoardo Sanguineti, on the great influence Georg Lukács played in the history of Italian literary criticism. The rest of the chapter focuses on the comparative analyses of Kafka's works alongside Italo Calvino's and Cesare Pavese's to illuminate how the ambiguity of their texts make it possible to read these authors as modernist or realist. Basing the comparison of Kafka and Calvino and Pavese on their "limited hope of finding community," though, may appear more to confirm the Lukacsian hermeneutic tradition than underline "the ambiguities of both works" (66).

Chapter 2 compares Kafka's short fiction with short texts written by Romano, Manganelli, and Tabucchi to undermine the reading of twentieth-century literature "in terms of the poetry-novel dichotomy" (66). While the consideration of these three authors alongside Kafka is new, the evidence of the aforementioned quotation may need more contextualization and justification. Chapter 3 originally shows how the openness of Kafka's plots, often read and interpreted as detective stories, calls into question the traditional structure of detective fiction and paves the way for new forms exemplified in Italian literature by Umberto Eco, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Leonardo Sciascia, Antonio Tabucchi, and Andrea Camilleri.

Chapter 4 draws stimulating comparisons between the depictions of the familial institution in the works of Kafka along with Svevo, Ferrante, Bontempelli, and Morante. At times, the confusion between fictional and biographical levels risks weakening the interesting similarities individuated in the portrayal of the family. The recollection of Kafka's life is important to understand its reflection in his work, but it is at times hazardous comparing fictional characters—from

Ferrante's novels, or later in the chapter, Morante's—with aspects of Kafka's historical biography (188, 202). Chapter 5 examines the human-animal boundary in Kafka alongside Svevo, Morante, and Landolfi. In particular, the chapter focuses not only on the representation of the animal and the difficult communication humans and animals may entertain but also, and more importantly, on what this relation with the non-human says about the human itself.

The author impressively and magisterially handles the bibliography that such a variety of authors and organization entails. The downside and the upside of such richness in figures and themes is that, while at times the academic reader is left with the feeling that there is more to say about the examinations of specific themes and authors, these analyses spark the reader's interest to learn more and to continue thinking about it. Ziolkowski succeeds in condensing in three hundred pages such an extensive topic, which would also fit the space an anthology or a book series could grant it.

As the title already suggests, *Kafka's Italian Progeny* speaks to an academic audience focusing on contemporary Italian literature as well as comparative literature. On the one hand, the goal of the book is to rethink national literature through an international perspective, while, on the other hand, the volume presents itself as a concrete experiment of comparative literature and comparative thinking that shows how the latter is useful to open new avenues of thought about national literatures. The comparative literature argument would become a stronger presence in the volume if more space could be dedicated to explaining why the book focuses on some aspects of Kafka over others and the contextual reasons for which every author mentioned can be considered alongside Kafka. Ultimately, *Kafka's Italian Progeny* is an exemplary work that shows the importance of questioning the foundation and criteria on which a national literature is based and how the comparison with an author who does not belong, in the traditional sense, to the literature of a specific nation, is a productive means towards achieving this goal.

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# ANNALI D'ITALIANISTICA

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### ITALIAN BOOKSHELF

### EDITORS OF ITALIAN BOOKSHELF

In the general conclusion (281-299) of the book Vitali sums up what the reader could have learned about language, authorship, the role of the *cantautorato*, and asserts that NPP music is to be considered one of the constitutive elements of modernity. This particular field of study is not especially recognized and established, although recent developments, such as Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016, have helped along the process. It also fits into today's tendency towards interdisciplinary studies. Vitali's book aims to fill a niche in the much needed study of this important section of Italian cultural life: popular and political songs, beginning with the group *Cantacronache* in the 1950s on up until the numerous and diverse bands and authors of the 2010s. Altogether, *Voices of Dissent* is a competent introduction to the modern Italian music scene, its history, influences, artists, and genres. It features plenty of general information and clear logical threads, and thus is easily readable even for those who are not familiar with the subject beforehand.

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**Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski. *Kafka's Italian Progeny*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. Pp. 302.**

Ziolkowski's innovative research fills a gap in Italian comparative literature and explores the Kafkian tradition in Italy, one that has not been examined up until today. The book analyses the work of many writers who have been described as isolated from the Italian literary scene and hard to place—Lalla Romano, Dino Buzzati, Tommaso Landolfi and Elsa Morante, just to name a few. The author's strategic objective is to bring the richness of Italian fiction to the attention of a larger Anglo-American audience by way of the German-language author.

Ziolkowski's methodological premise is that national literatures are not fixed. The author's critical objective is Franco Moretti's characterization of national and world literature in the terms of a dualism between "trees" and "waves": "national literature, for people who see trees; world literature, for people who see waves" (*Distant Reading*. London: Verso, 2015, 61). Against the methodological implications of this statement, Ziolkowski draws from Emily S. Apter's *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013) and maintains that "we create our trees; they are not solid and unchanging" (10). From this point of view, literary communities are not "gated" and, therefore, the trees of Italian literature are "more fluid, or rhizomatic in the Deleuze and Guattarian sense, than rooted" (10).

In the "Introduction", the author provides an overview of Kafka's Italian reception and highlights the frequently overlooked fact that such authors as Italo Svevo, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Natalia Ginzburg, Eugenio Montale, Alberto Moravia, Cesare Pavese, and Elio Vittorini mention Kafkas' importance even

before the end of the Second World War, that is to say, not so many years after the posthumous publication in German of *The Trial* (1925), *The Castle* (1926) and *Amerika*, or *The Man Who Disappeared* (1927).

The book is divided into five chapters and one "Epilogue". In the first chapter ("*Amerika* in Italy: Kafka's Realism, Pavese and Calvino," 32-79), Ziolkowski examines the convergence of factors that contributed to the popularity of Kafka's *Amerika* in Italy (its publication in Italian language dates back to 1945). The chapter also investigates the significance that *Amerika*'s peculiar realism had for Italo Calvino's early works (including *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, 1947) and for Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires* (1950). In the author's analysis, Kafka's image of the US (a country he never visited) is put in relationship with the Italian cultural imagination, one molded under many aspects by the immigration to America.

The second chapter ("Dreams of Short Fiction after Kafka: Lalla Romano, Giorgio Manganelli, and Antonio Tabucchi," 80-125) is devoted to a comparative reading of Kafka's extremely short works and three Italian short-work collections: Romano's *Metamorphoses* (1951), Manganelli's *Centuria* (1979), and Tabucchi's *Dreams of Dreams* (1992). The analysis of these three collections points out the authors' fragmented and non-hierarchical understanding of reality, an understanding that is in line not only with literary modernism but with a postmodern cultural climate as well, whose seeds are already present in Kafka's stories like *The Metamorphosis* (1915) and, above all, *The Bridge* (1931). Such a reconfiguration of reality is reflected by Romano's, Manganelli's and Tabucchi's writing style, one bringing their prose near to lyricism and poetry.

In the third chapter ("*Processi* without End: The Mysteries of Dino Buzzati and Paola Capriolo," 126-170), Ziolkowski takes into consideration the intriguing relationships between Kafka and his notion of *guilt*, on the one hand, and Italian detective fiction (*giallo*), on the other hand, so setting the conditions for a new approach to analyzing Kafka and both Buzzati and Capriolo, who are often associated with him. In Buzzati's *The Tartar Steppe* (1940), for instance, the protagonist Drogo "desires to know both the history of the fort and how it currently functions", so as to better understand his own role at the fort, "why he stays there, and his destiny" (141). In Capriolo's novel *The Dual Realm* (1991), the reader finds a similar split between discovering the embedded story (the history of the hotel in which the protagonist Cara suddenly finds herself) and determining the present situation (the reasons why Cara lost her memory and why she is now in the hotel). Both in Buzzati's and Capriolo's novels, detective fiction becomes a metaphor, in the last analysis, for the search of literature's meaning and for this meaning's *mysterious* openness.

"Kafka's Parental Bonds: The Family as Institution in Italian Literature" (171-211) probably is the most challenging chapter in Ziolkowski's book. The author underlines that "mothers are an important object of focus in recent Italian

literary criticism" (171) and, as far as this topic is concerned, she mentions Adalgisa Giorgio's, Laura Benedetti's, Patrizia Sambuco's and Laura Lazzari's works. However, from Ziolkowski's point of view, such a selective attention to mothers "points to a problem that several of these authors themselves protested: for instance, neither Natalia Ginzburg nor Elsa Morante wanted to be called the best Italian female author or to be included in anthologies of women writers since they resisted a division based on sex" (171-172). For this reason, the fourth chapter of *Kafka's Italian Progeny* draws from Kafka's short-story *The Judgment* (1913) and concentrates not on gender but on Italian representations of the family as an oppressive institution, like in Massimo Bontempelli's *The Boy with Two Mothers* (1929) and in Morante's *Arturo's Island* (1957), in Svevo's *A Life* (1892) and in Elena Ferrante's *Troubling Love* (1992).

The last chapter ("The Human-Animal Boundary, Italian Style: Kafka's Red Peter in Conversation with Svevo's Argo, Morante's Bella, and Landolfi's Tombo," 212-248) adopts the theoretical and anti-anthropocentric coordinates of the *animal turn*. This chapter establishes Kafka's story *A Report to an Academy* (1917) as a point of reference for a comparative reading of several other Italian stories. The protagonist of *Report to an Academy* is an ape, a talking-animal called Red Peter, who has affinities with other animals in Svevo's, Morante's, Landolfi's and Buzzati's narratives.

The "Epilogue" focuses on another underexamined topic: Kafka's importance for Italo Calvino, who was inspired by Kafka's "realism" throughout his entire life and who in turn inspired Ziolkowski in writing *Kafka's Italian Progeny*, precisely because of his complex attitude towards realism.

Scholars and graduate students in Italian Studies and comparative literature with a focus on Kafka and the relationship between realism, modernism, and the post-human will undoubtedly find food for thought. Ziolokowski's work, in fact, opens many paths for possible future research.

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## HISTORICAL, CULTURAL & MISCELLANEOUS STUDIES

**Francesco Benigno, and E. Igor Mineo, eds. *L'Italia come storia. Primato, decadenza, eccezione*, Roma: Viella, 2020. Pp 428.**

*L'Italia come storia* è l'esito e la testimonianza di un cantiere decennale di discussione portato avanti da un gruppo di studiosi di storia (germe originario una serie di seminari e discussioni della rivista *Storica*); il cantiere fu aperto in occasione del centocinquantesimo anniversario dell'Unità d'Italia, poi ampliato con il convegno *Discutere la storia d'Italia* (Trento, Istituto storico italo-germanico fondazione Bruno Kessler, ottobre 2012). Anche se la maggioranza

The European Legacy
Toward New Paradigms

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# The Expanding Boundaries of Kafka and Trieste

Andrew Wyatt

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REVIEW



# The Expanding Boundaries of Kafka and Trieste

**Kafka's Italian Progeny**, by Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2020, 312 pp., $85.00 (cloth), $88.00 (ebook)

**Modernism in Trieste: The Habsburg Mediterranean and the Literary Invention of Europe, 1870–1945**, by Salvatore Pappalardo, New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, 280 pp., $108.00 (cloth), $35.95 (paper), $86.40 (ebook)

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If Saskia Ziolkowski's and Salvatore Pappalardo's recent monographs are indications, the study of literature written in Italian is in a moment of expansion and possibility. Not only are the boundaries cordoning off national literatures more permeable than ever, but also the materials appropriate for literary analysis and the kinds of authors that can be put into conversation are more diverse than ever. While they both pursue different objects of inquiry, Ziolkowski and Pappalardo foreground the need to re-examine their subjects in light of work that has been done to affirm the continuing influence of Habsburg Europe. For Ziolkowski, *Kafka's Italian Progeny* (2020) aims to bring Kafka, an author from the German-speaking world, into conversation with Italian authors to highlight their "multilingual, marginal, and contested contexts" (9). Pappalardo is also explicit in his intentions, writing that *Modernism in Trieste* (2021) "reclaims Trieste for Austrian and Habsburg Studies and, more generally, calls for the incorporation of Austro-Italian affairs into the canon of literary studies concerning Central Europe" (7). In many ways, their intention to address the Habsburg dimension of their topics is the starting point for even broader questions that emerge from their studies. For example, what can the literary scholar of a certain national literature offer to, say, the intellectual historian? Or to the philologist? Or to scholars of different national literatures or contexts? In short, much. Aside from a general ethic of broadening the horizons of the field, these two works and the critical conversation they belong to suggest that literary texts are increasingly relevant to scholars of several disciplines.

Ziolkowski's *Kafka's Italian Progeny* demonstrates the fascinating results of using one author as a lens through which to reassess a national tradition. Her approach to Kafka relies on the unusual and unexpected pairing of the author with different literary "families," or authors grouped, above all else, thematically. To that end, readers looking for the definitive analysis of Kafka's big-ticket texts will find something else entirely. Namely, an altogether different perspective on Kafka that utilizes any and all of his texts that can illuminate something of his thinking. Appropriately, Ziolkowski adopts the same

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far-ranging and generous approach to selecting her Italian texts, ranging from canonical authors like Italo Calvino to popular contemporary figures like Elena Ferrante. The net result is an ever-shifting and mutually illuminating exchange between Kafka and Italian authors centered on similar forms and themes.

Each chapter excavates a different aspect of Kafka's work, which then becomes the basis for a discussion of works in Italian. In each section, Ziolkowski orients the reader by sketching out Kafka's position on each topic (the detective novel, for example) and the relevant critical reception in Italy. Following this, she puts Kafka in dialogue with several Italian works, constructing a literary family based on what Ziolkowski calls a "family resemblance" (27). For example, Chapter 1 addresses the reception of Kafka's *Amerika* in Italy based on its realism, unpacking how, differently from other national literatures, Kafka was read as a realist author. Owing largely to Lukács's particularly influential interpretation of a realist Kafka, a lively critical discussion developed that manifests itself most clearly in Calvino's fiction. The value of *Kafka's Italian Progeny* is most evident when it discusses cases such as these. Reading Kafka as a realist will come as a surprise to many readers since there are few modern authors more closely associated with modernism and surrealism than Kafka. However, an understanding of how such an interpretation of Kafka is transmitted in the Italian context unearths another side of Kafka's work and his impact on Italian writers. Each chapter in the book follows this pattern; Chapter 2 deals with formal concerns, in this case the reception of Kafka's short, lyrical, and fragmentary works. Ziolkowski convincingly argues that such texts foreground the experiential aspects of reading Kafka, as well as the Italian authors that engaged in similar, short-form projects. Chapter 3 focuses on genre and the extent to which Kafka, Dino Buzzati, and Paola Capriolo adapt and repurpose the tropes of detective stories, expanding them to consider broader epistemological questions.

Chapter 4 takes a more thematic and biographical approach to Kafka, focusing on the interrogation of traditional family dynamics and how they dialogue with the concerns addressed by Italo Svevo, Ferrante, Elsa Morante, and Massimo Bontempelli, fitting for a monograph invested in a reimagination of literary families. Finally, in Chapter 5, Ziolkowski adopts an animal studies approach to her subject, examining the ways that Italian authors have similarly taken up issues of transformation in their works, in large part inspired by Kafka's most famous work of metamorphosis.

To take one particularly memorable example, Ziolkowski highlights in Chapter 2 how Kafka, Graziella Romano, Giorgio Manganelli, and Antonio Tabucchi all faced questions about their short lyrical works that seemed to misunderstand the value of their dreamlike fictions. Ziolkowski notes how these shorter texts search not for clarity, but rather for hypotheses: "They aim not to represent reality but to alter the reader's view of reality" (125). The writers under discussion in this chapter are all engaged in a similar project of suggestion that defies familiar forms and genres, hinting that we should understand these texts for their ability to question our expectations, or, put differently, to propose possibilities and hypotheticals. Each chapter provides these kinds of pairings and insights, whether it be the commentary on literary detective stories as a critique of literary analysis in Chapter 3 ("[*The Tartar Steppe*] represents the pull of imagination and analysis, and it increasingly invites the reader to imagine and analyze" [161]), or the role of the family in the individual's construction of reality in Chapter 4.

The most intriguing aspect of Ziolkowski's book is the commitment to possibilities. For example, it is highly unusual to group together such disparate authors as Kafka, Svevo, and Ferrante; and yet, it is precisely this pairing that proves highly illuminating for these authors' discussions of family. Her work invites us to reconsider our literary conversations to include groupings that are relevant based on content and approach, "to construct an identity of modern Italian literature that is not primarily determined by chronological or geographical criteria" (27). In this sense, Ziolkowski is successful in thinking beyond the confines of national literature, which can provide many fruitful possibilities for literary analysis. As she notes in the epilogue, the goal seems to be an expansion of the conversation surrounding these works—perhaps putting Kafka on the shelves of Italianists as she imagines Italian authors entering conversations of non-Italianists.

In *Modernism in Trieste*, Pappalardo takes an equally interesting approach that is also defined, as he notes, by disciplinary expansion into the German-speaking Austrian context (7). Whereas Ziolkowski uses Kafka as the facilitator for a broad and inclusive literary conversation, Pappalardo's object of inquiry is Trieste, which brings together a host of writers and intellectuals from around the Mediterranean. The goal here, aside from a lively discussion of modernism, is to imagine "a Habsburg literary canon that conceptualizes, against nationalist readings of Central Europe, cultural integrity in an area characterized by linguistic multiplicity" (7). Drawing on intellectual history, Pappalardo explores a variety of unusual and innovative ideas about how Trieste factored into an increasingly nationalist European landscape, starting from the fascinating trope of locating the origins of Trieste in the Phoenician world as opposed to the Roman world. Like Ziolkowski, Pappalardo's study is ultimately constructive, aiming to propose a new canon that is bound together by shared ideas, "a heterogeneous collection of tropes, rhetorical strategies, and textual correspondences that together trace either the parallel developments or the intersections of shared aesthetic projects and political commitments" (39).

*Modernism in Trieste* begins with an introduction and first chapter that lay out much of the necessary context for the core argument, namely that literary modernism and notions of nonnational Europe share certain strategies. Chapter 1 continues on this point, uncovering the reimagining of the origins of Trieste in the Phoenician world, which itself was characterized as more cosmopolitan than the nationalist-tinged recourse to the Greek and Roman world. The subsequent three chapters each address a major author that saw Trieste as a model for the alternative senses of belonging envisioned by the various thinkers in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, Pappalardo explores Robert Musil's resilient individualism in the face of pressing ideological questions through several of his essays and his opus, *The Man Without Qualities*. Chapter 3 effectively addresses the question of Italo Svevo's language, repurposing the debate, not as a thorny knot that haunts his writing but, rather, as the key to understanding his covert commentary on literary language. Svevo's literary project is not a success despite his language; his project is precisely to be found in his use of language. Chapter 4 contains perhaps the most fascinating and idiosyncratic case, featuring James Joyce and his reimagining of Irish history based on language. Pappalardo's close attention to language, which emerges most strongly in Chapter 4, is the most stimulating aspect of the book. Aside from the obvious ways that language functions in the decidedly multilingual Trieste, language becomes a tool for various projects, from the fabricated etymologies of the name 'Trieste' to Svevo's

subterranean critique of linguistic purity to Joyce's literary, Slavic alter ego in *Finnegans Wake*. In the final chapter, Pappalardo points out that Joyce's anticolonial stance is linked, at least in part, to his sensitivity to language loss and "linguistic trauma" (231); the stakes of literary concerns could not be more prominent.

Lastly, Pappalardo's book offers a perspective on Trieste that happily runs contrary to much scholarship on the Adriatic city. Historical writing on Trieste's cosmopolitanism in the face of nationalism sometimes reverts to the rhetoric of nostalgia or failure, characterizing Trieste as the resilient final stand of a more elastic sense of belonging. Given that *Modernism in Trieste* is primarily a work of construction, it is fitting that Pappalardo concludes with a discussion of Claudio Magris's construction of a Mitteleuropean geography grounded in the Danube. Pappalardo astutely notes: "We should not mistake Magris's notion of Mitteleuropa as a mourning of the past that endlessly defers closure" (235). Similarly, *Modernism in Trieste* invites us not to marvel over projects that never came to be. Instead, the ideas in currency in Trieste throughout the book are an invitation to consider its capacity to ever-renew. The extent to which we can read the story of Trieste in the current age of nationalism in an optimistic light is certainly up for debate; *Modernism in Trieste* can be appreciated for offering it as a possibility.

These two works will be of great value to scholars interested in a new approach to literary study. There is a wonderful coherence between the nature of the material presented in these books and the methodology adopted to discuss it. If the literary texts display an ethic of fluidity, Ziolkowski and Pappalardo draw upon multidisciplinary tools to analyze them. For instance, in Ziolokowski's study, Kafka's biography (chap. 4) is useful for certain aspects of his work, while animal studies (chap. 5) draws out an entirely different perspective. Both literary scholars by training, Ziolkowski and Pappalardo take up the directive to examine our disciplines outside the context of national and disciplinary boundaries. As we consider the broader legacy of the humanities, it is worth reconsidering the role of the literary scholar and the expanding possibilities of literary study. These works are refreshing in their assertion that literature has a key role to play in the definition and redefinition of boundaries, be they national, cultural, or disciplinary. Such is Pappalardo's concluding note: the idea of Europe can be construed as a literary creation because the literary text preserves "personal allegiances," which are fundamental to the non-national senses of belonging in this region. Speaking in terms of national literature, Ziolkowski claims that Kafka's texts present a unique opportunity to reframe "the character of Italian literature" (256). Literature, in other words, can capture and explicate a certain dimension of lived experience that is particularly relevant to the study of fluid boundaries. *Kafka's Italian Progeny* and *Modernism in Trieste* make the case, quite successfully, that the value of literature should not be forgotten in such discussions.