

Jessica L. Harris. Italian Women's Experiences with American Consumer Culture, 1945–1975. The Italian Mrs. Consumer

Luca Cottini

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intravedere, come filamento luminoso tra cerchi concentrici, il ritratto dell'uomo Dante Alighieri reso storico attraverso la rappresentazione letteraria.

VALERIO CAPPOZZO

University of Mississippi

Jessica L. Harris. *Italian Women's Experiences with American Consumer Culture, 1945–1975. The Italian Mrs. Consumer*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Pp. xiv + 235. ISBN 9783030478247.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the United States invested heavily in the restoration of Italy's political, economic, and industrial assets. The Marshall Plan offered the country substantial aid in the reconstruction of infrastructure and urban spaces. At the same time, the plan provided a significant stimulus for the strategic development of both a new market for American products and a new mass consumer-based culture in Italy. As American goods invaded the peninsula, embodying the soft power of the United States, they also brought over different models of consumption and a new lifestyle.

As a way to observe the phenomenon of U.S. commercial penetration in Italy, Jessica Harris chose the original perspective of women as the target of U.S. democratic consumer capitalism, the key negotiators of new foreign influences, and the “front line soldiers in the battle between capitalism and Communism that marked the period” (5). In her well-crafted cultural history of the post-war years, Harris considers the emergence of “Mrs. Consumer” in Italy and her economic, cultural, and creative role in absorbing and defining the industrial transition. Through the eyes of women, Harris provides a unique vision of the parallel processes of the Americanization of Italy and the Italian negotiation and reinvention of U.S. imports. The structure of her book reflects this transitional narrative, first by analyzing the impact on Italian women of new American models (e.g., glossy magazines, the department store, and the supermarket) and goods (e.g., refrigerators, cosmetics, hygiene products), and then by considering Italian women's narratives about them (through ads, magazines, and oral history).

In the first part of the book, Harris analyzes the impact of two Italian entrepreneurs, Arnaldo Mondadori and Aldo Borletti, on importing the American lifestyle and creating a female customer base in Italy. Mondadori, who purposely

imitated glossy American magazines, established an office in New York, imported the most advanced printing machines, and launched *Grazia* as a platform for the divulgation of a new American lifestyle, even dedicating a special issue to America. Borletti, the owner of La Rinascente, reconstructed the department store (which was heavily bombed in 1943) by introducing American innovations (e.g., escalators and new furnishing styles), and broadening its clientele from a national to an international audience.

In the second part of the book, Harris outlines the impact of new American commodities (e.g., refrigerators, cosmetics, hygiene products) on the Italian lifestyle, and explores the relationship between the American originals and their Italian reinventions. The chapter dedicated to refrigerators focuses on the role of the new technology in the development of new forms of food preservation and shopping. Harris traces the evolution of refrigeration in the United States and explains how American interest in Italy was moved by a saturated domestic market. At the same time, in presenting the innovative owner of Ignis, Giovanni Borghi, and his success in adapting American refrigerators to the smaller size of Italian houses, Harris captures the impact of the new appliance on the Italian *casalinga* (“housewife”) and on the birth of supermarkets. The chapter on cosmetics and hygiene further exemplifies the transition from American models to Italian re-elaborations, as the author moves from the first images of the Modern American Girl to the Italian appropriation of a modern model of beauty, centred on youth, sex appeal, and cleanliness (or whiteness, as often expressed in the ads for toothpaste and washing machines).

In the third part of the monograph, Harris investigates the emergence of Mrs. Consumer in Italian society from both a political and an insider’s perspective. Against the backdrop of the culture clash between Communists and Catholics, Harris observes the consumer culture coming from the United States as the terminal of a “three-way struggle” (19). In a thorough analysis of the leading Catholic and Communist magazines *Famiglia Cristiana* and *Noi donne*, Harris documents not just their apocalyptic resistance to the perceived invasion of American products or their difficult negotiation of the new models of womanhood promoted by the U.S. industry, but also their construction of American capitalist society as a “shared enemy” (19). At the end of her itinerary, as an additional element of value, Harris’s book concludes with a chapter dedicated to oral testimonies, as a way to situate these changes within a cultural context and explore them from an insider’s perspective.

The book is a much-needed contribution to the studies of the post-war era, masterfully combining gender and object studies in a solid and enjoyable prose. The research is simultaneously rigorous and malleable, in its capacity to extract depth from concrete cases and to introduce new sources of analysis, as well as new horizons of scholarly reflection.

LUCA COTTINI

Villanova University

Silvia Cucchi. *Una teologia della frustrazione. L'opera letteraria di Walter Siti*. Firenze: Franco Cesati, 2021. Pp. 192. ISBN 9788876678776.

Articolare un discorso critico sul contemporaneo, e in particolare su uno specifico autore, è un'operazione che richiede al saggista non soltanto intelligenza nell'analisi dell'apparato testuale, ma anche una certa maturità nel maneggio degli strumenti critico-formali. Ed è quello che emerge dalle pagine di *Una teologia della frustrazione. L'opera letteraria di Walter Siti* di Silvia Cucchi, che offre un inedito lavoro di ricognizione dell'opera dello scrittore modenese, sfruttando in maniera interessante le risorse dell'analisi tematica e quelle della critica testuale. Il testo prende quindi in esame un arco temporale che va dalle prime prove poetiche di Siti sul finire degli anni '70 sino all'ultimo romanzo, *La natura è innocente* (2020). Il rischio nel dover gestire una materia così ingente e composita è quella di costringere i contenuti in un descrittivismo di superficie che non riesce a cogliere le questioni di portata più ampia che si trovano nelle profondità del testo, e che dovrebbero rappresentare il vero obiettivo di qualsiasi sforzo critico-letterario. Per attraversare, quindi, la totalità della produzione nello spazio ridotto di un testo onnicomprensivo l'autrice sceglie di mettere a fuoco i "fondamentali" teorici da cui si sviluppa la riflessione di Siti, in quanto linee guida che rimangono immutate di romanzo in romanzo al di là delle metamorfosi dei contenuti.

Sin dalle prime pagine del saggio si mostrano chiare le intenzioni di chi scrive: muovere la riflessione a partire dalle idee e dai *maître à penser* che hanno consentito la genesi del mondo letterario di Siti. L'inizio del discorso critico dal pre-testo, ossia dalle regioni preliminari che orientano la scrittura di Siti, porta la saggista a individuare in Matte Blanco e Francesco Orlando i due riferimenti teorici principali. Questa valutazione è determinante per il tipo di analisi che verrà