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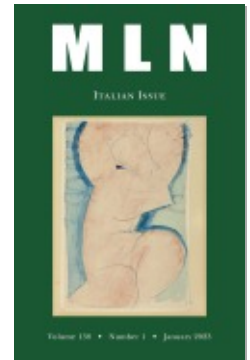
Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work by
Diana Garvin (review)

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intellectuals. All of the big thinkers at the heart of *Posterity*, moreover, find themselves united through their association with the Renaissance.

Matters of posterity and the author's consideration of their own future reception have been discussed widely by scholars of other other literary traditions—among them Edna Longley and Andrew Bennett—but a deep analysis of the Italian arena for these concerns had heretofore been wanting. Rubini's work is remarkable for establishing transhistorical connections between the most prominent minds of the Italian literary tradition, tracing a path from Petrarca to today through the persistent influence of Renaissance thought on the Italian literary mindset.⁶ A remarkable study, *Posterity* nonetheless presupposes acquaintance with the authors discussed and is thus best suited for scholars already familiar with the Italian thinkers it collects. Still, this and the earlier installment of Rubini's multi-volume investigation can certainly engage those scholars from any field who are interested in comprehending the Renaissance and its implications for the Italian literary tradition, the shaping of Italy's modern intellectual mindset and its significance to posterity.

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Diana Garvin. *Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), utorontopress.com/9781487528195/feeding-fascism, xvi+276 pages

Vittorio De Sica's 1948 *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*) marked world cinema with its raw representations of poverty in Italy following World War II. Faithful to its neorealist tenets, the filmmaker used food, from homemade frittata sandwiches to *mozzarella in carozza* (fried mozzarella), to comment politically on the working-class Italians' hopes and despairs after Fascism. While food predominates the narration of the film, its images of domestic kitchens also

⁶See Edna Longley, *Poetry & Posterity* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2000); and Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

provide ample information about the material lives of the protagonists, their poverty and their will to survive. Maybe less memorable than the famous scene where father and son share a meal to the notes of *Tammurriata nera* (*Black Drumsong*) in the Roman trattoria, stoves, pans and cooking utensils offer a more granular and lifelike sense of contemporaneous reality. Fascism had fallen but the material world it had built for Italians was all they had. Nearly thirty years later, Ettore Scola's 1977 film, *Una giornata particolare* (*A Special Day*), returns viewers to that reality, to the apartments in the projects built by Mussolini in Rome and other large Italian cities. Though our attention is focused on the interactions between a housewife and her gay neighbor—played by Sofia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni—we are also shown interiors where they interact with objects, fixtures and furnishings that organize the fabric of their experiences. While the rest of the neighborhood is away at a state parade, the two characters can finally live and express themselves in an environment where the woman would otherwise be ignored and the gay man ostracized.

Reading Diana Garvin's analysis of other historical artifacts in *Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work* may recall these films that draw our attention to kitchens as places of not only toil and duty but also negotiation with—and, at times, of direct resistance to—the powers ruling everything, from the head of the family to the government. Like the films, Garvin's work announces that the comprehensibility of the feelings, stories and struggles from those kitchens can only be partial without understanding their physical, tangible, tactile features. In the afterword, Garvin invites future researchers to consider “the power of the small”:

To get at the feel of women's experiences of Fascism, we need to rummage through the dented cheese graters, crumpled chocolate wrappers, and scratched matchbooks that they touched every day. [...] [P]ropaganda travels not through textual dictates but through material details. These meanings are so subtle, yet so ubiquitous, that even the designers themselves may be unaware of their presence.¹

Garvin's research showcases the material world that supported culinary practices and the discursive elements that surrounded and shaped them.

Garvin constantly reminds us that the protagonists of these dynamics, even when they were barely acknowledged or nearly stripped of visibility, were women. “They are actors, interpreters, and critics”, she aptly observes:

they accept, modify, and reject. Buildings, texts, and objects do not exist in a vacuum: they are processes of signification materialized by women's use of them. [...] The power of an individual may not be equal to that of the state, but even small choices create moments of independence. Even the smallest assertion of will constitutes a form of power.²

¹Diana Garvin, *Feeding Fascism: The Politics of Women's Food Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 221 and 223.

²Garvin, *Feeding Fascism*, 5.

Reflections like these that thread the volume echo Michel De Certeau on the tactics used by the seemingly powerless to resist those in power. Resistance thus proves a valuable index for research on a totalitarian regime determined to control every aspect of its citizens' lives, particularly for investigations into women's reactions to propaganda, into governmental attempts to control both food production and family feeding and breastfeeding practices and even into the identification of food as an expression of nationalistic strength.

Garvin's approach builds on theories and methodology from gender studies, food studies and material culture studies. Each of her five chapters adopts a unique focus—first, the Battle for Grain and the role played by women's associations that treaded the party line. This phenomenon offers a counterpoint to the women workers in the rice fields treated in the second chapter, who instead organized themselves as agricultural laborers and intentionally embraced socialist ideas. While the first two chapters center on the working class, the third and fourth scrutinize the activities of women from the middle and upper classes who had access to greater financial and cultural capital and who achieved professional success by bargaining comfortably with Fascist authorities. Of these women, perhaps the most interesting but least studied is Luisa Spagnoli, the founder of the Perugina chocolate factory and a paternalistic industrialist nevertheless concerned with the welfare of the women she employed, from canteens to breastfeeding rooms. Garvin also invites careful analysis of the work of food writers and cookbook authors like Lidia Morelli, Petronilla (the pen name of Amalia Moretti Foggia) and Ada Boni, whose *Talismano della felicità* (*Talisman of Happiness*), often given as a wedding gift, helped hone the cooking skills of generations of brides. While Garvin's entire volume is very engaging and well written, the fifth chapter, "Model Fascist Kitchen," may be the most original in its contribution to the study of Italian foodways under Fascism.³ Garvin's examination of urban design, architectural drawings and interior-design magazines illustrates that the policies of autarky and self-reliance, necessities for a Fascist Italy sanctioned for its 1935 invasion of Ethiopia, were woven into the long-term goals of the regime. Hygiene, education and the rationality of science, which would guide nutrition and health for individuals and the body politic alike, are here connected to the ideals of modernity and the acceleration of daily life that dominated early Fascism, aptly translated in Futurist musings on gastronomy.

Garvin describes kitchen floor plans as an unspoken but effective platform to nudge women to more efficiently perform their daily chores: "People (the cook), objects (food, pots, pans, mops, and brooms), and energy (sunlight, air, water, gas) moved through this space. And matter transformed as well: from raw to cooked and from cooked to waste."⁴ This world was not just drudgery, though, for it also offered glimpses of the bright future that Fascism continually promised, even when events seemed to suggest otherwise:

³See Garvin, *Feeding Fascism*, 153–203.

⁴Garvin, *Feeding Fascism*, 180.

“Whereas alimentary autarky evoked the dreary cuisine of the poor, rationalist kitchen work was aspirational”.⁵ Newfangled electric gadgets, all made in Italy, also leveraged the expanding electric grid to push domestic life towards a brighter future, quite literally. Fascist design culture promoted efficiency to limit wasted time, which in turn reflected the governmental emphasis on frugality intended to reduce food waste, and architectural features, interior design and furniture were meant to facilitate a flow of movements that would advance such goals. Attempts at imposing rationality upon lived spaces, moreover, operated in a modular fashion by expanding scales to regulate “the kitchen-apartment relationship”, “the apartment-neighborhood relationship” and “the neighborhood-city relationship”.⁶ What women did in their home kitchen was crucial to usher in the changes required for the betterment of the nation. While Garvin limits her analysis to the Fascist regime—with its particular structures, ideologies and material world—her constant emphasis on biopolitics and banal nationalism in everyday life underlines the extent to which food is always inherently political, whether or not it is recognized as such.

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Dalila Missero. *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture* (Edinburgh:Edinburgh University Press, 2022), doi. org/10.1515/9781474463263, viii+188 pages

In *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture*, Dalila Missero analyzes Italian women's film culture from the late 1950s to the early 1980s and its relationship to second-wave feminism. The volume explores women's role in film consumption, representation, and production, thus complementing the traditional history of cinema with a multifaceted program of sources that uncover women's neglected participation in this history. Situated among recent publications like Laura Buffoni's 2018 *We Want Cinema. Sguardi di donne nel cinema italiano* and the 2020 study *Genere e media. Non solo immagini: soggetti, politiche, rappresentazioni* by Milly Buonanno and Franca Faccioli, Missero's

⁵Garvin, *Feeding Fascism*, 197.

⁶Garvin, *Feeding Fascism*, 191.