



Journal of European Periodical Studies

an online journal by ESPRit, European Society for Periodical Research

Review of Morena Corradi and Silvia Valisa, eds,
*La carta veloce: Figure, temi e politiche del giornalismo
italiano dell'Ottocento*

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Journal of European Periodical Studies, 8.1 (Summer 2023)

ISSN 2506-6587

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The *Journal of European Periodical Studies* is hosted by Ghent University

Website: ojs.ugent.be/jeps

To cite this article: Dario Boemia, 'Review of Morena Corradi and Silvia Valisa, eds, *La carta veloce: Figure, temi e politiche del giornalismo italiano dell'Ottocento*', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 8.1 (Summer 2023), 75–78

Reviews

Morena Corradi and Silvia Valisa, eds, *La carta veloce: Figure, temi e politiche del giornalismo italiano dell'Ottocento* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2021). 250 pp. ISBN 9788835117469

The nineteenth century is a crucial period for the history of journalism and periodicals in general. While it is true that the first gazettes emerged between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and various journals were published during this period, it is only in the nineteenth century that this practice became institutionalized and acquired a business dimension. Newspapers became a commodity and their pages a source of authoritative information and opinion. As recalled by Morena Corradi and Silvia Valisa in the introduction to *La carta veloce: Figure, temi e politiche del giornalismo italiano dell'Ottocento*, in the first decades of the century, Italian intellectuals such as Vincenzo Gioberti feared that 'the winged literature of daily newspapers [...] ruins letters and sciences no less than politics' (quoted p. 11). In the Milanese newspaper *Eco* in 1833, Gioberti confessed that journalism was still a novelty, and many believed it to be worthless. In his *Guida della stampa periodica italiana* published in 1890, Nicola Bernardini attributed the poor quality of journalistic writing to the mechanical ease with which newspapers were compiled. According to him, 'the mechanical ease of smearing countless sheets of paper with ink every day has produced such a profound change in the act of reading and writing that there have been very serious consequences for the thinking and actions of people' (quoted p. 12). Change would come in the following decades thanks to a group of intellectuals who worked to support a new idea of culture that welcomed previously unknown people in the pages of newspapers and blurred the distinction between high and low culture in literature as well as in other fields of knowledge.

La carta veloce: Figure, temi e politiche del giornalismo italiano dell'Ottocento collects nine contributions on nineteenth-century Italian journalism. In particular, it looks at the periodicals published in Milan during the second half of the century. The essay with which the collection opens, written by Loredana Palma, offers a happy exception, because, as I will explain shortly, it deals with the Neapolitan press between the thirties and forties, providing a counterbalance to the Lombard entrepreneurial and cultural hegemony. These collected essays — which originally constituted two panels at the conference of the American Association for Italian Studies (AAIS) held in Sorrento in 2018 — not only provide an important contribution to the field of periodical studies but present a cross-section of the variety of positions offered in Italian Studies today. The essays in the volume offer interesting contributions on the audience of nineteenth-century newspapers, the education of Italian readers before and after the Unification of Italy in 1861, the evolution of the profession of journalism, and the relationship between institutions, political power, and the press. The topics covered include literature, book history, biography, modern journalism techniques, music journalism, and the relationship between iconography and text in periodicals. In terms of time frame, the essays — which are arranged in chronological order based on the topic — cover the entire century and focus on the activities of specific professional figures (such as Vincenzo Torelli, Leone Fortis, and Achille Bizzoni) and specific periodicals (such as *La Frusta*, *Giornale della Società del Quartetto di Milano*, *Il Teatro illustrato*, *Corriere delle dame*, *Ore*

casalinghe, and *Critica sociale*). Noteworthy attention is given to the 1850s, which have been little studied until now.

Well-framed historically, *La carta veloce* reveals the usefulness of nineteenth-century periodicals for historical research, as a window onto an Italy that was unifying and experiencing industrialization. The volume takes its place in a body of knowledge that ranges from studies on Italian journalism (conducted in recent decades by Castronovo, Murialdi, Della Peruta, Forno, and Gozzini) to periodical studies, and includes a reflection on the problem of digitizing nineteenth-century periodicals, especially the ongoing initiative to digitize *Il Secolo*, one of the major nineteenth-century newspapers. This latter reflection gives an overview of the five main digital repositories, including Internet Culturale of the Emeroteca Italiana, the digital Emeroteca of the National Library of Rome, the digital Emeroteca of the National Braidense Library, the Italian periodicals digitized by the Library of Archaeology and History of Art of Rome (BiASA), and the Tuscan Digital Library.

The first essay is titled 'Un giornalista dimenticato nella Napoli preunitaria: Vincenzo Torelli' and is written by Loredana di Palma. She reconstructs the life and times of Vincenzo Torelli, a writer, journalist, playwright, and co-founder of the political-literary journal *Omnibus*. Torelli animated Bourbon Naples in the 1830s and 1840s, a place where as many periodicals were printed as in Milan (according to chronicles of the time, numbers were as high as seventeen in 1833 and thirty in 1836). Palma aims to shed light on a figure forgotten by historiography but fundamental during that period, especially for his role as an intermediary between Florence, Rome, and Milan: Palma argues that Torelli, being at the centre of a dense network of social and professional relationships, inside and outside the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, helped to delineate and popularize certain aspects of modern journalism such as the

space provided for advertising, illustrations, and appendix novels (mainly aimed at a female readership). For this reason, studying this figure means demonstrating the transnational dimension of Italian journalism in pre-unitary Italy. Of particular interest is Palma's reconstruction of the debate on *Omnibus* regarding the role that journalism should have played. Achille Mauri's position expressed in 1829 is emblematic: according to him, the periodical should be the main organ used to stimulate public intelligence; it differs from scientific and literary works because it does not speak to a few but to many. Torelli, who takes up Mauri's thought on several occasions, goes further, claiming a professional status for journalists and positioning the newspaper as a business enterprise.

Among the other essays presented in the volume, those by Patrizia Landi, Massimo Castellozzi, and Morena Corradi are the ones that most explicitly address the relationship between journalism, the publishing world, and literature, explaining the particular ability of the Milanese publishing industry to take foreign (mainly British and French) stimuli and adapt them to the needs of the Italian market. In the essay 'Novità per un pubblico nuovo: Periodici femminili e umoristici a Milano prima dell'Unità', Patrizia Landi remains in pre-unitary Italy (i.e., the 1850s) but shifts her focus from Naples to Milan, the most city-like city in Italy according to Giovanni Verga. Landi focuses on women's periodicals such as *Corriere delle Dame*, *I costumi del giorno*, *La Ricamatrice*, *Le Ore casalinghe*, and the *Giornale dei sarti*, as well as satirical periodicals such as *Farfarello*, *L'Uomo di Pietra*, the *Crepuscolo*, and *Il Pungolo*. Each of these periodicals was immediately ready to adapt line and style according to the target audience. Landi aims to investigate the role played by Milanese periodicals of the 1850s in the development of modern journalism, thus exploring new and recursive forms, such as early reader correspondences and literary columns. These women's and humour

magazines, Landi argues, demonstrate an interest in entertainment literature, scarcely considered by high and official culture. The close relationship between editorial content and target readership makes these magazines unique in the Italian landscape. The following essay — authored by Massimo Castellozzi and entitled ‘Dall’Uomo di Pietra al Gazzettino Rosa: La Frusta di Antonio Picozzi rimane a Milano’ — keeps looking to Milan, like the rest of the edited volume, but it moves a few years into the future. His research reconstructs Milanese journalism during the transition from the late 1850s to the first decade after unification, and focuses on *scapigliatura* (an artistic and literary group developed in Italy from the 1860s that had its epicentre in Milan) and the participation of *scapigliati* (such as Felice Cavallotti and Antonio Ghislanzoni) in the press. In ‘Il giornalismo di Achille Bizzoni e Leone Fortis: paradigmi e sfide di una nuova professione nell’Italia unita’, Morena Corradi picks up where Castellozzi leaves off, reflecting on the figures of Achille Bizzoni and Leone Fortis, editors respectively of the *Gazzettino rosa* (which Castellozzi also covers) and the *Pungolo* (which Landi also covers). Corradi questions the role of censorship, the ideology of nation-making, and the relationship between literature and journalism, shedding light on the production and circulation of knowledge in the newly formed Italy. She studies the relationship between press and power (particularly the role of censorship), and the authors hosted by these newspapers, such as Cameroni and Ghislanzoni in *Gazzettino rosa*, and Boito and Praga in the *Pungolo*.

Bianca Maria Antolini and Alessandra Palidda deal with music periodicals in Italy after unification. In ‘Il “Giornale della Società del Quartetto di Milano” (1864–1865): un episodio del giornalismo musicale nell’Italia unita’, Antolini examines the birth of the journal of the Milanese *Società del quartetto* in 1863, established to promote

practical and theoretical knowledge of the instrumental repertoire (especially chamber music), which until then had mostly been surpassed by melodrama in the country’s musical life. Antolini explores the role played by the newspaper in the musical field and shows that it was able to reconcile the battle for artistic innovation and the desire for knowledge of the past. In ‘L’impresario editore e l’editore impresario: Edoardo Sonzogno e “Il Teatro illustrato” (1880–1892)’, Palidda looks at the figure of Edoardo Sonzogno, who, endowed with strong managerial skills, gave a new impulse to his father’s activity by transforming the print house into a real publishing company and founding *Il Teatro illustrato*. This music magazine, which makes extensive use of portraits and illustrations, was able to foster musical culture in Italy and stimulate Sonzogno’s musical ventures in the country and in Europe. Antolini demonstrates that *Il Tempo illustrato*, despite the brevity of its life, played a key role as an instrument of expression and legitimization for the activity of the Casa Musicale Sonzogno, an organization founded with the purpose of actively participating in Italian musical (especially operatic) life.

Maurizio Punzo shifts the discussion to the relationship between periodicals and politics: his object of study is a magazine founded in 1891 by Filippo Turati called *Critica sociale*. The topic is already introduced by Castellozzi and Corradi. Castellozzi dedicates a section of his essay to the political stance of two magazines, which he also studies from a literary perspective, specifically *Uomo di Pietra* and *La Frusta* (the focus lies on the relationship between the humouristic press and the emerging radical left). Corradi reminds us that journalism is first and foremost an instrument of political struggle and consensus aggregation by exploring the not irrelevant state intervention in shaping the editorial line of the *Pungolo* and the *Gazzettino rosa*. In ‘Un “faro per il socialismo: I primi dieci anni della “Critica Sociale”’, Punzo, who looks

at the first ten years of Turati's periodical, explains its genesis and development, also thanks to newly unearthed archival materials (such as Turati's correspondence with Anna Kuliscioff and Friedrich Engels). A conceptual conclusion to the book is provided by Sara Boezio's essay, 'A "Balance Sheet of the Nineteenth Century": fin de siècle accounts in Ernesto Teodoro Moneta's "La Vita Internazionale - Rassegna quindicinale politica, scientifica e letteraria"'. Boezio studies how the nineteenth century is conceptualized in the 'Balance Sheet of the Nineteenth Century' column published in Ernesto Teodoro Moneta's periodical *Vita internazionale* at the turn of the century, reviewing the ideological, technological, political, and cultural achievements of the period and attempting to give them a unified interpretation. The portrait that emerges of the twentieth century is that of an era that would have sponsored the reconciliation of science with life and would have witnessed the full realization of the peoples' tendency towards peace.

Taken together, the essays collected in *La carta veloce: Figure, temi e politiche del giornalismo italiano dell'Ottocento* significantly contribute to the study of nineteenth-century Italian periodicals, offering insights into little-known and little-studied publications and forgotten journalists. The study sets up a network of connections that find a fundamental node in the city of Milan, but place Lombard publishing within wider Italian and international horizons. Morena Corradi and Silvia Valisa's volume is part of a

recent trend that sees scholars balancing local and global perspectives, looking at Italy in the wider Mediterranean and international context. In this regard, it is imperative to remember the work proposed by Christina Bezari's *Transnational Modernity in Southern Europe: Women's Periodicals and Salon Culture* (Routledge, 2022). If it is true that in the first decades of the nineteenth century it was still unclear what journalism was, what power it could have, and what role it could play in socio-cultural dynamics, by the end of the century the field looked a lot different, as Dario Papa points out: 'The newspaper is an archive, a story, a fantasy, a phonograph and a photographer that puts all populations in communication and will put all times in communication.' (Quoted p. 7) In the 1880s, Roberto Sacchetti wrote that 'Milan is a literary market where, following the laws of supply and demand, one can procure with the pen a discrete position; writing is not here [in Milan] a solitary mania, but a recognized and almost regular profession' (quoted p. 102). The essays collected in this volume help explain how we can move from Gioberti's fatalism to Papa's faith in just a few decades and successfully answer a series of unsolved questions in the research field. The stories traced in *La carta veloce* are perhaps minor ones, yet they end up clarifying the complex vicissitudes of nineteenth-century journalism. In so doing, they build the soil on which twentieth-century culture will grow.

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