



Vengeance of the Victim: History and Symbol in Giorgio Bassani's Fiction (Minnesota Publications in the Humanities)

Marilyn Schneider

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More profoundly than any documentary record, the collected fiction of Giorgio Bassani—*Il Romanzo di Ferrara* — captures a very particular and powerful historical reality: Italian Jewish life under Fascism, especially between the passage of the so-called racial laws in 1938 and the end of World War II. Set primarily in the provincial city of Ferrara, Bassani's narratives interweave themes of death, victimization, betrayal, survival, and artistic production. His best-known novel, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* — and other works that concentrate on the crucial years of 1938-1945—stand at the center of the *Romanzo*. They are preceded by texts that look back on Jewish life in the liberal era of the Risorgimento, and followed by texts set in the liberated, democratic society of the postwar years. These framing narratives provide a space for remembrance and reflection.

Marilyn Schneider's aim, in *Vengeance of the Victim*, is to uncover the symbolic layers — historical, spatial, topographical, mythopoeic, allegorical, and sexual — that give Bassani's texts their richness and ambiguity, and in so doing to achieve a full understanding of his work and its representation of the Italian Jewish experience. Death and victimization, which pervade these texts, set in motion a process of artistic renewal that is most fully embodied in the vibrant young Micol Finzi-Contini, Bassani's textual icon and a victim of the Holocaust. Schneider also finds that the narratives, especially the late ones, pay self-reflexive attention to the creation of the text, constructing an authorial persona engaged in an existential, moral, and artistic journey from symbolic death to rebirth. It is the writing subject's successful completion of the journey that constitutes the vengeance of the victim.

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