



Nel Golfo Irrequieto: La Narrativa di Piero Chiara

Milan: Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 2020. 286 pp

Stefano Giannini

To cite this article: Stefano Giannini (2022) Nel Golfo Irrequieto: La Narrativa di Piero Chiara, *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 76:1, 47-49, DOI: [10.1080/00397709.2022.2024007](https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.2022.2024007)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.2022.2024007>



Published online: 09 Mar 2022.



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from professional scholars to undergraduates. *Home Away from Home* makes a vital contribution to scholarship on contemporary Spain as well as gender studies, post-colonial studies, and migration studies—it is not to be missed.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.2022.2024006>



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Jessica A. Folkart is a professor of Spanish at Virginia Tech. Her research centers on the cultural representation of identity, immigration, and the liminal body in contemporary Spain. She has authored two books, *Liminal Fiction at the Edge of the Millennium: The Ends of Spanish Identity* (Bucknell University Press, 2014) and *Angles on Otherness in Post-Franco Spain: The Fiction of Cristina Fernández Cubas* (Bucknell University Press, 2002), as well as many articles on Peninsular Spanish literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Her articles have appeared in such journals as *Philosophy and Literature*, *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, and *Hispanic Review*.

Mauro Novelli. *Nel golfo irrequieto: La narrativa di Piero Chiara*. Milan: Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 2020. 286 pp.

Piero Chiara (Luino 1913-Varese 1986) was a prolific Italian storyteller who authored ten novels, hundreds of short stories, essays, and translations, and published a myriad of journalistic contributions from the 1950s until his death. His novels and short story collections, mostly set against his familiar Lake Maggiore landscape, enjoyed great success and became bestsellers in Italy. After spending many years developing a profound familiarity with Chiara's work, it made sense for Mauro Novelli (who has already completed two exemplary volumes that collect Chiara's novels and short stories published in the Mondadori series *Meridiani*) to combine some of his existing pieces (such as, for example, the *Meridiani* introductions) and new research into a single volume that gives readers a comprehensive take on an author like Chiara, who is still able to garner keen attention from his readers so many years after his death.

Novelli's book is divided into four sections that admirably synthesize almost forty years of Chiara's work. In the first section, Novelli delivers an expansive and accurate analysis of novels and short stories by identifying Chiara's main topoi and literary antecedents. The second section delves into Chiara's treatment of other images that recur in his pages: the city of Milan; the judicial aspects of social interactions (Chiara worked for many years as an employee of the Department of Justice); food (as occasion for conviviality and the expression of vitality but also for satirizing the Fascist regime, as in the memorable and comical episode of the watermelon that hits a fascist official); and family (in its most expansive sense, ranging from turbid family relationships to enigmatic considerations of the idea of the double personality). The third section provides a close reading of seven of Chiara's works: the early and recently discovered prose piece *Monte Solitario* and the

novels *I giovedì della signora Giulia*, *Il piatto piange*, *La spartizione*, *Il balordo*, *Una spina nel cuore*, and *Vedrò Singapore?* The final section moves beyond traditional storytelling to explore other artistic territories probed by Chiara: parody; journalistic and travel writing, and interactions with cinema and television.



Chiara's prose is elegant, discursive, seemingly simple, and carefully polished. He is a master of ellipsis and communicative economy. His prose is endlessly entertaining, constructed in a sustained ironic note that touches every page. Chiara takes no prisoners: family, friendship, love and eros, politics, religion, illustrious characters—everything and everyone is fair game. Themes do not live in isolation in Chiara's universe—as Novelli explains—and intertextual analysis proves crucial in examining his work. A master storyteller, Chiara does not hide his debts to authors such as Boccaccio, Tessa, Pirandello, Gadda, and Sereni. Sereni is another Luino-born writer, a friend of Chiara's since childhood. He is the one who pushed Chiara to embrace writing, as recounted in Novelli's beautiful chapter 9, which compares two homonymous works: *Il piatto piange*, authored by the two friends. Novelli acknowledges Chiara's admiration for Sereni in the title of the book: "Nel golfo irrequieto" is the second line of Sereni's poem "Inverno a Luino."

The wealth of motifs and pages that mark Chiara's imposing work poses a serious challenge to the scholar who wishes to capture Chiara's greatness. It is a pleasure to see in Novelli's prose the solution that brings the thousand rivulets of Chiara's storytelling together into a deep, majestic river of scholarly synthesis that turns into narrative mastery. Novelli cleverly interweaves motifs that run like a karstic river through multiple novels and stories. They quickly disappear and then resurface many pages later but are always elegantly co-present and distilled in Novelli's pages. The result is a polished prose that does not run after the motifs but recalls them from their hiding places and guides them into a seamless flow of reflections and information. This book captures Chiara's multi-faceted activities and identifies his main trait: Chiara is a writer who summons autobiographic atmospheres to graft onto them the most astonishing stories about dozens and dozens of seemingly ordinary characters. The careful, almost obsessive, close-range observations of the daily routines of these characters reveal the deviations from the so-called norms, which make their stories worthy of being told, because the most astonishing stories are the ones that stem directly from our daily life. Novelli writes: "Ogni pagina di Chiara lievita da un'indomabile curiosità per le vite degli altri. E da vicino, si sa, nessuno è normale. Nessuno è innocente" (back cover) [Chiara's every page rises from an indomitable curiosity for other people's lives. And near at hand, everybody knows it, no one is normal. No one is innocent].

The notable and highly agreeable trait of Novelli's latest book is the stylized, discursive, and scrupulously precise prose that ties together the almost 300-page investigation into Chiara's artistic production. The vocabulary selection is part and parcel of the stylistic solutions Novelli employs. Readers will treasure the refreshing uses of everyday words combined with rhetorical terminology, witty remarks, and the brilliantly recontextualized adoption of overlooked words. Novelli ends his book with a brief afterword, whose importance is best summed up as inversely proportional to its length. His final pages look into Novelli's personal (and sentimental) reasons for his research interest in Chiara, which stems from his own early love for and careful reading of Chiara's only book for children. At the end of the book, a note from archivist Anna Lisa Cavazzuti describes the Chiara holdings in the Fondazione Arnaldo e Alberto Mondadori.

A testimony to Novelli's impressive knowledge of Chiara's work, *Nel golfo irrequieto* is an exemplary achievement of scholarly inquiry that powerfully engages readers in a journey of discovery. Novelli's book shows how to combine broad scrutiny of an author's complete corpus with detailed observations on the distinct literary elements that build it. As Novelli's prose

seamlessly ties together these the two strands, his investigation confirms the thought that *Nel golfo irrequieto* is going to be one of the most important tools to guide readers and researchers in the fascinating storytelling of Piero Chiara, while celebrating the essence of literature.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.2022.2024007>



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Héctor Jaimes, editor. *Mario Bellatin y las formas de la escritura*. Chapel Hill: Editorial A Contracorriente/U of North Carolina P, 2020. 382 pp.

The narrative of Mario Bellatin resists interpretation by destabilizing orthodox practices of reading and authorship. Bellatin has likewise become infamous for questioning the specificity of literature by opening this category to photography, contemporary art, and performance. The author's system of writing without writing (*escribir sin escribir*) thus poses a challenge to conventional academic criticism. It might appear paradoxical to devote a traditional edited volume on a single author to a figure as heterodox as Bellatin, since the undermining of authorship defines his system in no small part. Furthermore, Bellatin's process of re-writing resists delimitation and totality, categories that underly the academic genre in question. Héctor Jaimes navigates such problems admirably in this volume, circumventing Bellatin's hermeneutical traps through an innovative blending of critical and literary registers. Most notably, Jaimes includes a previously unpublished text by Bellatin alongside scholarly interventions, thus allowing the author to participate in his own critical construction. Bellatin's contribution, entitled "Mis nuevas escrituras, las nuevas escrituras," forms the first of the volume's three parts. The second cluster of texts, "Lecturas desde la literatura," likewise breaks with academic convention by bringing together authors Daniel Link, Pedro Ángel Palou, and Margo Glantz, who similarly blend critical and literary registers in their reflections on Bellatin. The third and final part, "Lecturas desde la crítica," maintains the established form of an academic volume of critical essays by scholars. Thus, one might read the book's title as deliberately ambiguous. Given Jaimes's experimentation as editor, the forms of writing under scrutiny here appear to be at once literary—that is, Bellatin's—and academic.

The narrator of Bellatin's text claims, "he reunido a un grupo de personas, académicos principalmente, para que discutamos, en medio de tanto desconcierto, la posibilidad de la