



**Rafael Newman**

## A selective summary of the contents

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He has come to serve as a symbol for postwar Italy like no other: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a child of the haute bourgeoisie, chose the path of radical anti-fascism, and followed it in every one of his endeavors. Upon his father's death in 1934 he found himself in splendid isolation with his mother and sisters, only to leave his gilded cage at sixteen for a life in the communist resistance against the Germans. Three years later he exchanged this life in turn for that of the professional man of culture, founding his publishing house in Milan. As a publisher, however, he did anything but lounge about in an ivory tower, bestowing largesse on the rabble. He ran his house with both intuition and hard-nosed business sense, and in a few short years he had become an international success. As an intellectual, meanwhile, he lived out his political engagement with a rare independence, needing only a short time to create one of the world's leading libraries of the workers' movement. He was still a member of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) when, in 1957, he published Boris Pasternak's critical novel *Doctor Zhivago* (the story of the coup itself reads like a first-rate novel) and thus established his reputation as a maverick with the party faithful. Feltrinelli enjoyed comparable success the next year, with Giuseppe Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, in 1962 with Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and with his publication of the diary of Ernesto Che Guevara in 1968. The first Italian translations of Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt appeared with Feltrinelli. His bookshops, by now swelling in number, were distinguished by a marketing style as yet unheard of: Feltrinelli knew how to exploit the rituals of Pop Art and of the youth culture, and his publishing house became a hub of the political and social scenes. Towards the end of the sixties Feltrinelli himself grew increasingly radical in his politics, less and less quotidianly engaged in the business of publishing, ever more drawn towards activism. He was always on the go, holding speeches and joining in demos all over the world, all in the name of justice and anti-imperialism. He warned of an imminent fascist coup in Italy before finally going underground, the police on his tail for his alleged involvement in a bombing incident. On March 14, 1972, he was found dead at the foot of a high-tension pole in suburban Milan, in possession of 15 sticks of dynamite. Was Feltrinelli a terrorist; had he been murdered; was it an accident? The case remains a mystery to this day. This edition of "du" magazine, which appears in tandem with an exhibit held by the city of Zurich in the Strauhof museum to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli's death, looks for clues. There are contributions from friends of Feltrinelli's such as Nadine Gordimer (the original English of her notes is printed here below), Antonio Tabucchi, Nanni Balestrini, Zigaina and Klaus Wagenbach. There are

tributes from Vassilis Vassilikos, author of the celebrated anti-Junta novel *Z* (famously filmed by Costa-Gavras), and the French publisher Christian Bourgois; both tributes are translated and printed here below in their entirety. The sometime-activist and Catholic Marxist Régis Debray is interviewed, and Rudi Thiessen, in his study of postwar western Marxism, considers the intellectual as heretic. Conradin Wolf introduces us to the tangled case of Adriano Sofri, a survivor of the wild days of the Italian Left (and a fall guy in the complicated wake of the publisher's death) who carries on the Feltrinelli intellectual legacy from prison. Feltrinelli's son Carlo, his successor at the publishing house, has his say, and Giangiacomo's widow, Inge Feltrinelli, by training a photoreporter, shares with us pictures of their bygone days together. Régis Debray, Che's former comrade, remembers Feltrinelli gratefully as one of his benefactors during his imprisonment in Bolivia, but is careful to note the ideological differences between himself and the Italian publisher. Debray is loath to join the conspiracy-theory speculations regarding Feltrinelli's death (and in which Feltrinelli himself would likely have joined, considering his penchant for finding the secret service behind everything); instead, Debray prefers to see the incident as due to one of the inevitable accidents to which the activist is prone. For his part, he would never have attempted the stunt that ended Feltrinelli's life: not because he is against the use of violence but because he continues to believe that such guerrilla actions are of no use in the established industrial democracies of Europe. "I never shared that brand of left-intellectual sympathy for terrorism, as it was felt in Germany or Italy. Sartre visiting Andreas Baader in his jail cell at Stammheim, Jean Genet writing an apology for Baader and Ulrike Meinhof – I could never understand it. The Rote Armee Fraktion and the Brigade Rosse were never my cup of tea." His antidote against such enthusiasms, says Debray, has been an abiding faith in the Marxist dialectic. "My connection with reality is intact. I know what is stupid and what is smart, what is left and what is right, what is dictatorship and what is democracy. In Latin America there was no other choice but armed subversion. In Europe it was utterly pointless." His subsequent career in western Europe as a legalist and reformer earned him the scorn of hardliners, but he maintains to this day that his democratic, humanist, indeed Christian brand of Marxism is more faithful to the tradition than any of the various totalitarian species of socialism.

Nanni Balestrini, meanwhile, a member of Italy's neo-avantgarde and some ten years Feltrinelli's junior (as well as the author of *L'Editore*, a book devoted to the older man), did share the publisher-activist's utopian convictions. In conversation with Jenny Friedrich-Frekxa, Balestrini talks of the euphoria of the post-1968 period in Italy, when anything seemed possible, including some kind of social revolution. And he recalls the Libreria Feltrinelli in Milan's Via del Babuino as a meeting-place for members of the counterculture, "journalists, musicians, writers... all of them still in suit and tie!" With the changes in clothing came other changes, of course, celebrated as the Summer of Love, as well as a gradual move away from the Stalinism of the Communist Party of the time. Nor did Feltrinelli evidently believe in the project of a world revolution, as did the Trotskyists of the period. Balestrini stresses the acute and contingent nature of Feltrinelli's engagement: "His analysis was far more precise. He was convinced that there would be a fascist coup d'état in Italy." After all, that is precisely what had just occurred in Greece at the end of the sixties, under the Colonels. "He was already in possession of information to that effect, from contacts he kept among former partisans." Balestrini recalls Feltrinelli's trip to Cuba, the beginning of his relationship with Fidel Castro. It was there that he learned a revolutionary method he thought could be successful for the resistance to fascism in Italy, if not for the creation of an Italian soviet socialist republic. For Feltrinelli remained throughout his life

the product of his own youth in the Italian resistance, methodical and organized, as opposed to his junior companions in the sixties generation, who were much more spontaneous. Still, there was about Feltrinelli something of the sixties flair for style, for personality, for happenings. Balestrini: "I found his ideas correct, above all when you look back and realize how right he was about the coup d'état. But the way he wanted to put those ideas into practice remains questionable. It was too personal, it all had too much to do with him. He was filled with spirit and enthusiasm, but in many ways he lacked political sense."

Cesare Milanese, another of Feltrinelli's literary comrades and the author of a learned study of the principles of revolutionary warfare, also remembers Feltrinelli as a lively and spirited man with a talent for accommodation to his immediate reality. What he lacked in political analysis he made up for with aesthetic and cultural intuition. His publication of *Lampedusa* and *Pasternak* constituted for Milanese the founding of a movement, the creation of two powerful symbols of the postwar Italian avantgarde. What Feltrinelli went on to do, according to Milanese, was simply to apply these same tactics to the world of the economy, of politics, of concrete society, with aim of bringing about the revolution that he and so many others believed was inevitable in those heady days after 1968. Milanese himself, meanwhile, having read deeply in Clausewitz, Trotsky and others, had come to the conclusion that guerrilla warfare (as Feltrinelli and, indeed, Debray espoused, though in different terms) could never act as the catalyst for a revolution. Rather, as Milanese maintained in the study commissioned by Feltrinelli, revolution could be brought about only by full-scale war, as in the case of Russia, and not simply skirmishes conducted underground. The '68ers, meanwhile, according to Milanese, didn't have it in them to wage such a war: they were merely "actionists" without the stamina for real violent change. "The really important development of the '68 generation," says Milanese, "was its journalistic activity, and of course the revolution it wrought in the universities. The '68ers were first and foremost a phenomenon of the university. That's why they all eventually asked themselves the same question: barricades or professorship? And even those who went on to work as journalists moved at some point to the serious papers, like the *'Corriere della Sera'*. They didn't make revolution, they just kept on doing what they had done before: writing, for the most part, only now under a new aegis." Viewed through a slightly different optic, however, Feltrinelli begins to look rather harder-core than many of his contemporaries, preoccupied as they often were with cultural production at the expense of concrete revolutionary activism. In a sweeping survey of the leftist intellectual scenes in several western societies of the period, Rudi Thiessen considers Feltrinelli's particular brand of political engagement as a type of heresy, both in terms of his partisan affiliations and in terms of his cultural solidarity. Thiessen cites the infamous 1969 declaration of the Italian revolutionary group *Potere Operaio*, their strict identification of the true revolutionary spirit with the will to subjugate everything to the demands of military organization, and recalls how deeply wounded Pier Paolo Pasolini had been by its implication that he himself, the devoted Communist, was not a true revolutionary. Feltrinelli, Thiessen feels, would for his part probably have agreed with the sentiment, immediately and without reserve, despite his phases of heretical distance from the party line. Pasolini, meanwhile, Thiessen goes on to speculate, might well have been able to second the implicit promise of mystical brotherhood contained in this call to an asceticism of action, had he for a moment been confident that the Party, heir to the grindingly lethal bureaucratism of the Bolsheviks, was capable of such transcendence. The language of religion is here intentional, not only because of Pasolini's profound connections to the Catholic Church (he shared with Debray this curiously apt nexus of Marxism and Christian faith): for Thiessen,

Feltrinelli and Pasolini represent the two greatest figures of postwar Italian heresy. He even goes so far as to devise a nuance of difference in his para-religious terminology (he uses heretic, from the Greek *haireo*, for one who chooses an unorthodox life without abandoning his faith, and Cathar, from the Greek *katharos* or pure, the name taken by a medieval sect of neo-Manichaean dualists) to distinguish between the stiff-necked, humorless faith of a Pasolini and the eclectic, contingent belief system of a Feltrinelli. And there is a meta-level to Thiessen's polarity, too, for he interprets Feltrinelli's eclecticism to have extended even to swerving between these two poles, being by turns a Cathar in his involuntary dissidence within the Party, and a heretic in his new-found, sixties-flavored faith in a universal community of freedom and resistance.

"The West German Left," Thiessen sums up his Priam's-eye-view of the post-1968 leftist battlefield, "had lost all connection with reality, burying themselves in their Leninist and Maoist projects. No fascist threat of the period could have justified their militant fantasies. The American radicals lost their ideological blinkers little by little, gave up their elaborate Marxian interpretations and turned wholly to the civil rights movement. In France, Sartre had become the Nestor of the radicals, although it's hard to say who was leading whom. In Italy, meanwhile, everything was different. The proof is still (sadly) to be found in the fact that Toni Negri and Adriano Sofri are languishing in their jail cells to this day. In Italy the zeitgeist was (and still is?) truly left-wing, and the state has shown itself much more implacable in its treatment of its alleged intellectual authors than it has ever been with the actual murderers of the period, be they mafiosi, right-wingers or left-wingers. The reasons are obvious. Here in Italy there was in fact a very real threat of a Greek-style fascist putsch, and Andreotti wasn't simply paranoid (anymore than Berlusconi is today) when he suspected the Italian intelligence would not provide him with an ally in government. These mandarins were to be found in the PCI, or excluded from it because of right- or left-wing dissidence; in voluntary exile and located somewhere to the left of the PCI; or installed as freelance leftist or at least critical instances. Those who had never been in the PCI still kept the faith somehow, calling themselves liberal socialists or the like. It is literally difficult to name a single significant intellectual, academic or artist with some sort of positive connection to Andreotti (not to mention Berlusconi). And this goes for the publishing world too: Einaudi, Garzanti, Bompiani and of course Feltrinelli have carved up the literary territory among them."

Thiessen goes on to discover the origin of this nexus between radical politics and literary culture in the peculiarly atomized nature of the Italian republic. "The cultural wealth of the Italian Left does not draw its source only from the identity politics of the *resistenza* and the fear of a fascist putsch, but is also rooted in the singular variety of Italian regional culture. It's clear where to look for the origins of Svevo, Gadda, Pavese, Vittorini, Lampedusa, Moravia, Morante, Calvino, Bassani, Levi, Pasolini and Magris. The cities, the landscapes, the colors and the smells make of each of these authors, for all his other literary qualities, the representative of his regional culture." And it was this very regional culture, Thiessen notes, that was threatened by the sinister forces gathering in postwar Italy. "Pasolini recognized in the late sixties that capitalism was beginning once again to unfold that destructive, revolutionary energy described by Marx in the Communist Manifesto: Pasolini called it an anthropological revolution in Italy, which would raze to the ground all rustic and pre-industrial life in its path. Calvino used to mock Pasolini as the champion of good old Italy, without understanding that it was in fact capitalism that was intent on overturning the applecart." Against such a capitalist revolution, writes Thiessen, the only possible defense is an attitude

that is at once radically democratic and ethically conservative. And Thiessen identifies this spirit, whether it can be labeled communist or not, in the contemporary critique of globalization. What is certain is that if Feltrinelli were alive today, a spry septuagenarian, he would be taking part in the alternative WEFs being held in Brazil, Switzerland, Canada and Italy, fighting for both a radical vision of justice and a democratic version of high culture.

### **Homage to Feltrinelli** **By Nadine Gordimer**

In 1960 I arrived from South Africa in Milan to meet the Italian publisher of my novel *A World of Strangers*, banned in apartheid South Africa. The meeting was not what I had expected: a formal greeting at a publishing house and the usual lunch with an editor. Instead, there was a young man whose challenging intelligence was at once extraordinary. My Italian publisher was Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.

At once we talked as if he himself had lived in and experienced the human conflict in my country. He had the gift of identification, through a deep understanding of the politics, society, and complex personal attitudes revealed in a work of fiction. No human condition was remote for him, anywhere, everywhere.

This young man had the talent, the love of literature and the literary judgment to become a great publisher – and he proved that early on with the discovery of a work of genius until then hidden from the world by an oppressive regime. He defied censorship and overcame formidable obstacles in the Soviet Union of the time, and published Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* – the first translation in any country, opening this marvelous work to other languages; all the rest of us. His instinct for the illumination, in literature, of what human existence is, was not confined to the political exposé. He was the one to publish Lampedusa, and others who have made world literature of our time a chronicle of the spirit within events, past and present.

Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.

A warrior of culture – yes. But he was also – and this aspect of his being eventually prevailed – one of those rare beings who take on the conscience of the world. This is not hubris, as some people might think. It is not adventurism. It is an enormous burden and self-sacrifice. The ultimate humility. Although he was born to privilege – and not just because he was; that's the easy explanation of those who are content with their own privilege – although he "had everything" there was the one and only thing he didn't have: a just world to live in. When communism as a solution did not appear to be bringing that about, he sought other means. Whether one deplors them or not, whether or not they were a tragic mistake, they arose from desperation with the human condition.

I wonder what Giangiacomo would think of our world 30 years later, when we have made all kinds of material progress, scientific progress, and have invented new forms of communication, a technology which, we have to admit, has not brought us together across the divide of those who have at their disposal all the resources of the world, and those who have virtually nothing.

I wonder what he would have thought of globalisation – our new concept of One World – while 20 percent of the 25 million rich people of the USA have more money than 43 percent of the total world population. I think he would have been one of those among us – and these include some of the most privileged – who are seeking through the many means now at our disposal to end violence as the old solution to conflict and injustice, and abolish poverty through transformation of globalisation from its condition as the exclusive power of the wealthy nations to the full participation of the world's poor

nations and peoples.

Of course, there was another side to the relationship with Giangiacomo Feltrinelli over the years. There was the couple, Giangiacomo and Inge, enchanting Inge, and the lively small boy, Carlo, in the castle to which I, my husband Reinhold Cassirer and our boy, Hugo, were many times invited. In my work-room at home I have a photograph where Giangiacomo and I are weeding the lawn at Villadeati. Whenever I go back there, with Inge, I see him again, attacking the weeds with the energy and passion for life that made him unforgettable.

### **Giangiacomo Feltrinelli** **By Christian Bourgois**

Let me say two things about Giangiacomo Feltrinelli: he belonged to a literary and publishing world that is alas becoming extinct, yet unfortunately his political analyses remain frighteningly up to date. Nevertheless the common run of eulogies for this great publisher activist seem to contradict my observations.

The last thirty years, after all, have seen the acceptable Left indulging themselves in an orgy of ridicule of that so-called revolutionary's autistic Garibaldism. Giangiacomo's strategic mistake was to have believed that a fascist coup d'état was possible in Italy. Fascism is not a thing of the past at all: the Fascists are in power now, in 2002. Feltrinelli overestimated the role of the secret service and the military and the networks available to that sinister octopus, and failed to see that the danger would come from the sausage-makers and the television announcers, or that the fascists had turned in their black shirts for the English flannels sold in the posh boutiques of the Via Montenapoleone. Those who despise his analyses should ask themselves, with humility and sorrow, what has become of that great Communist Party we all admired so much in those days, what has become of those leftist intellectuals whose critical musings seemed so subtle and relevant in the sixties. I am convinced that Giangiacomo Feltrinelli is not simply the bygone icon of a dépassé political era.

Feltrinelli the publisher needs no such revival. His name appears on the thousands of books published since his death by Inge and Carlo Feltrinelli, an act of passion and obstinacy and the source of some of the best works available in Europe. But publishing has undergone an enormous change in this young century. Some forty years ago, the grand cosmopolitan publishers were carrying on the work of the preceding generations, a club of people mad for books. They made deals, of course, but they thought of their role in the first place as that of facilitator to their authors, as patrons whatever the economic situation might be. What's more, they also saw it as their mission to usher a growing number of readers into the groves of academe. They were the children of the Enlightenment, entranced by original editions in paperback, ambitious encyclopedias and Great Books. But they were also members of a burgeoning jetset, regularly to be found in their regular haunts, spending the wee hours of the night discussing literature and the thousand little things that lend life its charm. Giangiacomo was part of this world, with its Weidenfelds, its Rowohlt, its Einaudi and its Strauses, all of them fools for the written word, addicted to publishing, its pleasures and its refinements. There are of course still writers, and publishers for them. And sometimes Frankfurt has something of the good old days about it, when Hanser throws a party or Suhrkamp does a morning event. But this world is mostly vanished. What would Giangiacomo or Ledig-Rowohlt say about all of these harried little figures working the aisles at the Fair, a mobile phone pressed against one ear and a computer in their hearts? We are witnessing the triumph of the Snopes, their victory over

the Sartoris, as predicted by Faulkner.

And yet I can still recall my last dinner with Giangiacomo at the Brasserie Lipp in the late sixties. He started telling me that he was going to be devoting himself to other projects, more underground, less literary. But he wound up talking about Gaia Servadio's novel *Melinda*, something I simply had to publish. And I have no doubt that we were both thinking, as we parted ways, that the silent yet precious presence of our books was far preferable to the hurly-burly of history.

### **Fearless Champion of the Downtrodden**

**By Vassilis Vassilikos**

I have always had the liveliest memories of him, without having met him more than a couple of times. Why? Because I was already thinking of him as a legend even before we had met for the first time, not only because of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and Régis Debray's trial in Bolivia, where he played a role as an unintimidated witness for the defense.

And when he entered his little apartment in the Via del Babuino that morning in 1969, keys in hand, and wondered what this stranger was doing in his home, I felt as if I were being confronted with a figure from mythology, an idol (he had in the meantime also become my publisher) whom I was at great pains not to offend.

He wasn't offended. He didn't once even ask who I was. He had simply not expected to find anyone in his apartment, and he would probably not have turned tail and fled had it not been for the pair of lady's shoes he noticed by the bedroom door.

I rang Franca in the bookshop and reported that someone had just entered the apartment with a spare key, someone who resembled the ghost of Feltrinelli. "That was no ghost," said Franca, "that was Giangiacomo in person." I couldn't believe it. Had this really been my first encounter with my legendary publisher? Giangiacomo must have asked Franca the same question, as he seemed in the meantime to have discovered that I was the author of *Z*, which had just appeared in Italian with his press. He sent word requesting a meeting. We met that very day, a few hours later in a caffè across the street. Without ado he asked me to write an introduction to a short text of his, *Summer 1969*. For those who did not live through it, let me note here that the Greek Colonels' coup had come as a shock to the progressive Italian intelligentsia. They feared that something similar could take place in their country as well.

So Giangiacomo explained to me that day in the caffè across from the Feltrinelli bookshop in the Via del Babuino how his anti-fascist comrades, who were to the left of the official Left, would react in the event of a military coup in Italy. "It's simple," he said: "You pour a little cement into the streetcar tracks, and you've paralysed the traffic. You cut a telephone cable at a central exchange and interrupt the phone lines; you occupy a television station and broadcast messages of resistance..."

He was handsome, intelligent, fascinating, a charismatic personality, someone to fall in love with at first sight. Others might have found him a little naïve. For us, in those dreadful years after May 1968, he was the only ray of hope on the publishing scene, apart from Maspéro in France.

That was when Giangiacomo Feltrinelli's second life began, about which we know what we do in part because of the book written by his son Carlo. It sets the record straight about several things, something that was long overdue. I don't know to what extent my own countrypeople had a hand in what happened, fascists who made him think they were of the Left. And I have no idea to what extent his love for the cradle of democracy, for Greece, was responsible for his falling victim to a conspiracy.

What I do know is that Feltrinelli's engagement breathed life into his publishing house. I know that he gave of his very blood, upon which the unholy vampires are still feasting even after his death. Giangiacomo wouldn't have any place in the world according to George Bush, jr. If he weren't mayor of Milan and promoter of environmental protection, a Green with a touch of red, he would be among the first dead in Seattle or Genoa.

For although I enjoyed only the briefest of relationships with him, I can truly say that he was a man of the "tragic element," as Chronis Missios puts it so expressively in his wonderful autobiographical novel *It's a Good Thing You Died Young*.

You died young, Giangiacomo. You left far too early, and in some sense that is what made you so lucky. Still, life is beautiful, even with tubes in your lungs. You were unable to taste life the way you should have; and yet love blessed you with some of its immeasurable bounty: and with some of its bitterness...

In the April "du":

Rosemarie Trockel. "Living means not good enough."

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