

## Event. Money Must Stay In The Family



Centro Primo Levi presents Alain Elkann's quasi-autobiographical novel *Money Must Stay in the Family* (CPL EDITIONS, 2018) together with recently restored family home movies shot in the 1930's. Presented in collaboration with the Consulate General of Italy and the American Sephardi Federation.

### **The book**

Italian novelist, essayist, and journalist Alain Elkann follows the flight from fascist Italy of an upper class Jewish family from Turin, the fictional Ottolenghis, who arrive in New York in 1939 and settle on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The plot, loosely inspired by the author's maternal family, the Ovazzas, unfolds from the foresight of the matriarch, Olga Ottolenghi who, sensing that the family is succumbing to an inner centrifugal force, conceives of a will that will keep it together.

Traveling through a map of interconnected cities, Elkann narrates the Ottolenghi descendant's quests and achievements, as well as their feelings of attachment and estrangement in relation to Judaism in a post-Shoah world. The gravitational center of the story is New York: the place of safety, new beginnings, mixing, and eventual return. The city becomes a place where people who left behind everything that had been familiar for generations re-invent themselves, or at least attempt



to.

### **Ovazza family home movies**

Screened for the first time in public, this rare record of Italy's Jewish elite's daily life before the Shoah, is part of the Ovazza family archive and will be presented by Alain Elkann's brother, Giorgio Barba Navaretti. The footage was filmed by Vittorio Ovazza starting in the early 1930s up to shortly before the promulgation of the Race Laws, and shows travels and festivities in Italy, France, Lybia and New York.

### **Historical references**

Similarly to Giorgio Bassani's semi-fictional *Finzi Continis*, the Ovazzas did not reflect the economic and political status of the majority of Italian Jews. Their response to the racial persecution was tinged by their self-perception as national elite with direct ties to the Regime. Unlike Bassani's characters however, members of the Ovazza family made different choices, had dramatically different destinies of survival and death, and took different paths after the war.

This small and diverse elite has increasingly become the subject of research adding an important dimension to the understanding of the nature of the persecutuin and the complexity of the Italian Jewish experience under fascism.

How did it happen, as Michele Sarfatti asked, that some men embraced an ideology that ended up persecuting them and why did a political movement persecute its very supporters who were not internal political opponents?

Since Bassani's reflection on the Italian Jews who had embraced fascism, the tendency to either downplay or indict the past is slowly being replaced by attempts to understand the Jewish experience under fascism along three lines of research: the position of the Jewish minority in the modern nation state; the mechanism by which the state defined citizenship and belonging; and, finally, the forms that historical anti-Jewish hatred assumed in 19th and 20th century Europe.

A recent issue of *Quest* - the online journal of the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation explores the relation of a segment of the Italian Jewish elite with fascism and some of its interpreters.

In her essay "Fascist Jews Between Politics and the Economy: Five Biographical Profiles," Roberta Raspagliesi states: "If, in the beginning, Jewishness could live side by side with Fascism, since the early 1930s the relationship became more complicated and began to crack. With the Lateran Treaty (1929), the regime embraced an increasingly nationalist-Catholic ideology; at the same time, it strengthened its totalitarian grip". (...) By 1928, Mussolini was already asking the Jews: "are you a religion or are you a nation?" ([http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=391#\\_ftn1](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=391#_ftn1)).

Although only inspired by the actual Ovazza family story, this novel is one more contribution to stir the discussion on a topic that has long remained in the background and that should be carefully understood in all its complexity.

### **About the speakers**

Alessandra Stanley is a writer and a longtime journalist at *The New York Times*. She was *The Times'* chief television critic for 12 years and before that, the newspaper's bureau chief in Moscow and Rome. She wrote about the 2016 election and has covered culture, national politics and foreign affairs for the *Times* and other publications. She lives in New York and is currently working on a book about the Cold War.

Mario Calvo-Platero is a writer and a columnist for the Italian daily *La Stampa*. For over 30 years, he has covered the US financial and political world. He is Chairman of Investindustrial US, a private equity firm based in Europe and of Palazzo Strozzi US in Florence.

Alain Elkann is an Italian novelist, essayist, and journalist. He has written fifteen novels, as well as



collections of short stories, essays, and books of interviews. He has been a regular contributor to the daily paper La Stampa for over thirty years. A visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania and at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, he serves on the board of the Italian Academy of Advanced Studies at Columbia University. Mr. Elkann has been a counselor to the Italian Cultural Ministry as well as Chairman of the Egyptian Museum in Turin. He was awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the French Republic.

Giorgio Barba Navaretti is Professor of Economics at the University of Milan, Scientific Director of the Centro Studi Luca d'Agliano and Distinguished Visiting Faculty at Sciences Po, Paris. He specializes in international and development economics, working extensively on the economics of multinational firms and international economic policy issues. He is or has been a consultant for the European Central Bank, the World Bank, the OECD and the European Commission as well as for the Bank of Italy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Prof. Barba Navaretti published extensively. His books include *Multinationals in the World Economy* with Anthony J. Venables (Princeton University Press). He is a contributor of *Il Sole 24 Ore* and Editor in Chief of *European-Economy. Banks Regulation and the Real Sector*.

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Welcoming remarks: Consul General of Italy Francesco Genuardi.

Alessandra Stanley, journalist, and former New York Times bureau chief in Rome and Moscow in conversation with Mario Calvo-Platero, writer and columnist for La Stampa, Alain Elkann and his brother, economist Giorgio Barba Navaretti. Screening of family home movies.

Reception to follow. RSVP to Molly Engelman: [molly@primolevicenter.org](mailto:molly@primolevicenter.org)

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