

similar manner in the essays contributed by Best and Ross. For Best, Cassola's "frequent scenes of self-speculation" underscore a "sense of incompleteness in the protagonist that can only be resolved by utopian mirroring" (194). Ross considers the self-contemplation of Santacroce's female characters in terms of an attempt to both "reclaim" themselves from the gaze of others and to seek a "sense of wholeness" that anticipates a "moment when they will achieve bodily coherence as individuals" (253). Lacanian theory is the chief theoretical component of Wren-Owens's essay on Tabucchi. Though she references the mirror stage in terms of its role in the acquisition of language and the consequent entry of the subject into the symbolic order, her main focus lies with the Lacanian real as she considers Tabucchi's ghostly presences in terms of their psychoanalytical function. Alternating between the positions of analyst and analysand, these presences help Tabucchi's protagonists symbolize repressed experience, trauma, or desire. Something of Ross's identification of Santacroce's "critique of postmodern sexual mores and 'liberated' female identity" (243) might be found in Chiesa's excellent contribution on Pasolini's final production. Addressing Pasolini's professed hatred of bodies rendered ugly by the advent of Italian consumerism, Chiesa writes that the "injunction to emancipate oneself sexually goes hand in hand with the injunction to consume the economic surplus" (210). Moreover, Chiesa considers the psychosomatic neurosis that spawns the aesthetic degeneration of bodies as a consequence of the impossibility of consuming the sexual surplus and the loss of corporeal expressiveness (211-12).

Despite these few echoes between the essays and notwithstanding the undeniable quality and relevance of each and every chapter, including the theoretically sophisticated introduction, the volume as a whole does not quite constitute a coherent project. In all likelihood, this is an inevitable consequence of the vastness of the topic and this circumstance certainly tallies with the editors' desire to create a text that invites further considerations of the plurality of bodies in Italian cultural production. These considerations will no doubt be forthcoming given that this stimulating sampling of Italian bodies asks us to indulge what Polezzi and Ross describe as our "compulsion" to narrate, interrogate, and observe the "unquantifiability of the body" (18).

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*Irresistible Signs: The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity.* By PAOLA GAMBAROTA. Pp. vii + 234. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Paola Gambarota's *Irresistible Signs* is an invaluable contribution to the discourse on Italian linguistic and national identity. Focusing on the myths of the innate characteristics of language and nation, the so-called "genius" of her book's subtitle, she convincingly argues that the nationalistic will to link the two, as both intrinsic to a culture, came about long before the German Romantics introduced the idea to the rest of Europe. Gambarota, in her examination of Benedetto Varchi, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, Giambattista Vico, Melchiorre Cesarotti, and Giacomo Leopardi, shows how ideas of language and identity were circulating years before the *Ottocento* and how the aforementioned authors came to influence the Risorgimento patriots. Her argument is further enhanced not only by the relationships that she finds among the primary Italian authors she chooses to analyze but also by relating the Italian discourse to the greater European obsession with the "genius" of both language and nation.

Gambarota's study is divided into five chapters, each devoted to one of the aforementioned authors and with ample use of secondary authors and sources to contextualize and situate her discourse in time and space. Chapter one, entitled "Scripts of Vernaculars and Collective Characters in Early Modern Europe," focuses primarily on two texts: *Ercolano* by Benedetto Varchi (1570) and Juan Huarte's *Examen de ingenious par alas ciencias* (1575). Varchi's text serves as evidence of an increasingly more naturalist view of language, as he followed humanist tendencies that link natural language to the minds of the people who are the users — and

therefore the creators — of language. Varchi's view also gave linguistic agency to the lower classes and paved the way for the constitution of future social and political communities bounded by language.

The inclusion of Huarte's text allows Gambarota to exemplify a naturalistic view of language imbued in Epicurean theories that link the body and mind to the natural environment, as the work combined theories by Hippocrates, Aristotle, Plato, and Galen in an attempt to explain national temperaments and relate them to scholarly disciplines. The key aspect of Huarte's argument, and its importance to the discourse on the genius of language, was that he used science to assign collective dispositions to different populaces. In Gambarota's words: "another important building block of linguistic nationalism — that is, the idea that a nation has a natural collective disposition and behaves like *one* individual possessing *one* mind — was construed on the basis of what were considered the scientific parameters of the day" (50). This chapter concludes by placing the discourse in the context of Europe as a whole, with specific mention to works by Henri Estienne and Etienne Pasquier, who declared the superiority of the French language by building on Varchi's arguments. The comparison with France reveals Gambarota's impressive ability to make historical connections and reinforces the indisputable interconnectedness of the European experience.

Chapter two, "*Ut Lingua, Natio*: Dominique Bouhours's *Genius of the Nation* and Ludovico Antonio Muratori's *Italian Republic of Letters*" moves the debate to the seventeenth century, with an initial focus on Bouhours's dialogues *Les Entretien d'Ariste et d'Eugène* (1671) and *La manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit* (1687), both of which made a case for the superiority of the French language and its intrinsic freedom from artificiality, a quality that Bouhours also attributed to peasants and women. Integral to Gambarota's argument is the fact that Bouhours considered written and spoken speech as two parts of the same superior whole, thus giving the peasants a sovereignty that would serve as a precursor to nationalism.

In Gambarota's view Ludovico Antonio Muratori recognized the political implications of Bouhours's dialogues and was one of the few Italian intellectuals to broach the subject. Muratori carefully dismantled Bouhours's argument and made a case for the dissociation of a language from a people, claiming that certain qualities were not a reflection of national character or language but rather of the mind that created it. Unlike Bouhours, and Varchi before him, Muratori saw language as the responsibility of individual writers. According to Gambarota, Muratori's other significant contribution to the debate on language and identity was his investigation into the origins of Italy within the culture of the Middle Ages. In direct opposition to the commonly accepted narrative of the genealogy of Italy in the Roman Empire, Muratori focused on the barbaric origins of the Italian peninsula. Perhaps in an attempt to distance Italian from French, he also stressed the Germanic, rather than Latin, origins of different words. Gambarota explains that Muratori's theories were unpopular and ultimately rejected, but that his writings did represent a passage from patriotism (that is to say, identifying one's "patria" as one's local place of birth) to nationalism, as they "question[ed] the boundaries between the notions of national character and national identity, as well as the opposition between ethnic and national identity recently set up by scholars of nationalism" (97).

Chapter three, "Giambattista Vico, the Vernacular, and the Foundation of Modern Italy" brings the debate to the first part of the eighteenth century. Gambarota focuses on Vico's contribution to the discussion of the genius of language and the nationalist claims on his views, which later would be appropriated (and perhaps even misinterpreted) by Risorgimento patriots. In her examination of the last version of *Scienza nuova* (1744), Gambarota argues that for Vico "ingenium" was a matter of talent and not something innate, thus distinguished from "genius," as Bouhours would have it. In this chapter Gambarota also focuses on Vico's views on linguistic diversity as "the expression of different interpretations of disparate environments" (113) and the role of the people in the creation of the vernacular. Gambarota argues that Vico, in contrast to Muratori, sought to disprove the foreign origin of vernacular languages and placed the power of expressive creation in the hands of the people. Finally, Gambarota addresses Vico's change in thought with regards to Dante and language. For Vico, Dante lived

during a time in which "ingenium" was stronger and therefore allowed him to create a powerful language that was not only a pure Tuscan language but also a microcosm for all of Italy. According to Gambarota, by giving such primacy to Dante's language, Vico also promoted the *Commedia* to the same position of a foundational myth for the Italian peninsula that Vico had given to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In her words, "Cultural homogeneity, sublime (popular) quality, instrument of political empowerment — Vico's characterization of Dante's language — provided those who read it from a nationalist perspective with all the ingredients for a recipe of national identity" (142).

"Translating Genius: Cesarotti, *Ossian*, and the Question of National Character" is the title of chapter four, where Gambarota discusses the debate in the latter part of the eighteenth century. She focuses on Melchiorre Cesarotti and his views on translation, with specific reference to his translation of James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* (1760–63) and Cesarotti's *Saggio sulla filosofia delle lingue* (1785). Gambarota begins by looking at Cesarotti's celebrated translation of the *Ossian* poems, which had no shortage of significance not only for the translator himself but also for Italian readers, who found the image of the warrior poet convincing and relatable. After numerous revisions, Cesarotti determined that a knowledge of the Celtic character was essential to understanding the translation, which resulted in a new approach to the process in general: he came to distinguish between grammatical equivalence and rhetorical equivalence, ultimately advocating for infidelity. Cesarotti set forth, in his *Saggio*, the idea of the nation as a process, rather than as something innate, the product of a constant dialogue between that which is not fixed and universal but constantly evolving. According to Gambarota, for Cesarotti "a nation is not a culturally homogeneous and uniform body but consists of different *popoli*, speaking different dialects, perceiving and feeling in different ways, and sometimes living in very disparate environments" (187). Ultimately, Cesarotti's work seems paradoxical: *Ossian* spoke to national character and the birth of a nation out of violence and barbarism, while the *Saggio* advocated for the inclusion of the very foreignness that the former seemed to refute.

The fifth and final chapter, "Towards Sameness: Leopardi's Critique of Character, and the End of the Nation" brings the study to the eve of the Risorgimento and tackles issue of the "paradoxical pragmatist" Leopardi (226). Against a context where the link between language and nation was considered innate, Gambarota contends that Leopardi understood the genius of language as a myth. Her analysis begins with a discussion of Leopardi's interpretation of national languages, in which she finds a materialistic belief that nothing is innate, including language. Moreover, because for Leopardi language was "the very foundation of our symbolic worlds, of our cultures" (195), he valued multilingualism for its ability to enhance both. Much as Cesarotti found Italian lacking while translating the *Ossian* poems, Leopardi found the growth of Italian to be stunted thanks to the "purifying" work of the Accademia della Crusca, the entity whose purpose was to safeguard the Italian language. For Leopardi, the only solution to this static condition of language and literature was to embrace a foreign language, borrow from it, internalize it, and make it Italian.

Gambarota also makes recourse to Leopardi's *Discorso sopra lo stato presente dei costumi degl'italiani* (1824) to further explain his views on the Italian character by analyzing his theory of the *società stretta*, the modern civil society that was ultimately doomed to failure because it diverged from the successful arrangement of ancient societies, which instilled a healthy amount of self-love for one's fellow citizens and a hatred of distant foreigners. The attempt to turn Europe into a single, therefore uniform (in Leopardi's view) family meant that such a concept of the nation was untenable. In Gambarota's words, "In the modern civilized world, where hatred of the foreigner is morally not allowed and where institutions such as slavery are not sustainable, the nation cannot exist" (224). Gambarota recognizes the seemingly paradoxical aspects of Leopardi's thought, as he advocated for diversity while at the same time condemning it as the cause of the death of the nation. As she points out, Leopardi had long resigned himself to the imminent demise of civilization, but he remained an unwavering proponent of the human responsibility to participate in the intellectual conversation.

Gambarota finishes with a postscript entitled “Irresistible Signs? A Postscript and the Question of Media,” in which she outlines a possible study on the impact of the media on constructions of national character, as she admits that the discourse on Italian language has long been the field of the literate elite and not of the *Volk*, as it was in Germany. Therefore, in Italy ideas of national character are even more heavily influenced by images and symbols, and what people know about the relationship between language and identity is what the media tell them they should know, namely that they can only be truly Italian if they speak Italian. While she acknowledges that this is changing, and that dialects are experiencing a revival, from a scholarly point of view she proposes to examine the different media that have influenced the way Italy as a nation has been perceived and how it perceives itself, beginning with an analysis of the nature of the medium itself as it relates to ideas of nationalism, as “a medium inevitably transmits its own ideology” (232). She concludes by advocating for “an education that separates languages from identity issues — national, ethnic, and otherwise — thereby restoring the friction between language and the experience of the world” (234).

In conclusion, Paola Gambarota’s *Irresistible Signs: The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity* makes an excellent case for the existence of the sediments of linguistic discourse on the Italian peninsula long before the Risorgimento and the foundation of the Republic. By placing the authors in relation to one another historically and chronologically, as well as expanding the debate to the international level, she enables the reader to acquire a greater understanding not only of the myth of the Italian genius of language and nation but also insight and background into its surrounding European counterparts, most notably the French. The fact that the Italian context is made more transparent by an analysis of the situation in France is proof that the encounter with foreignness is in fact the best way to define one’s own identity.

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The Novels of Federico De Roberto: From Naturalism to Modernism. By ANNAMARIA PAGLIARO. Pp. 218. Leeds, UK: Troubador Italian Studies. 2011.

In *The Novels of Federico De Roberto: From Naturalism to Modernism*, Annamaria Pagliaro provides a comprehensive discussion of De Roberto’s oeuvre. While other critics have focused on some aspects of De Roberto’s writings (e.g., journalistic essays, trilogy of novels on the Uzeda family, etc.) this study considers the entire author’s corpus, commenting on his evolution (or involution, as Pagliaro describes it), while simultaneously providing a comprehensive overview of the criticism of each work.

Federico De Roberto (1861–1927) began his literary career as a journalist. While writing for some of Italy’s nationally published newspapers, De Roberto met Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga, the fathers of Italy’s *verismo*. After being introduced to some of the most important minds in the salons of Milan, De Roberto published two collections of short stories before turning to novels. Although De Roberto was highly influenced by Verga in particular, De Roberto’s writing does diverge at times from the themes of *verismo*. In this book, Pagliaro analyzes the writer’s philosophy and theoretical approach to narrative in order to explain the similarities and differences between De Roberto and other *veristi*.

The introduction situates De Roberto among his contemporaries and also provides an overview of the critical opinions of De Roberto. As Pagliaro notes, “De Roberto has been generally described in studies on *verismo* as the third and youngest of the Sicilian *veristi*” (1). At the same time, she explains his ambivalence toward Verga and Capuana, and why she does not consider him a true proponent of *verismo*. In Pagliaro’s words, “at the core of his investigation is a constant questioning of objective and subjective reality [...]” (2). The introduction compares and contrasts De Roberto with his contemporaries, while contextualizing his work