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Italian Unification and Nascent Italian Identity Examining Nineteenth-Century Italy through Interdisciplinary Lenses

Review of: Francesca Cadel & Paola Natri (eds.), *Italy in the Second Half of the 19th Century. Bridging New Cultures*, Wilmington, Delaware, Vernon Press, 2024, 248 pp., ISBN: 9781648899270, \$58.33.

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The role of marginalized groups (including women) in the Risorgimento is not a new academic theme. Mazzini himself famously set out his views on women's rights and their role in the formation of the Italian nation in his *Doveri dell'uomo* (1860). Yet beyond the most visible politics of the period, Italians from a variety of backgrounds heavily contributed to the formation of a sense of *Italia unita*, enacted through everyday social and ethical practices. These are the voices, many overlooked or marginalized, that receive attention in *Italy in the Second Half of the 19th Century*. Editors Francesca Cadel and Paola Natri seek to 'highlight the many and different facets of the period in which the interaction of literature, the arts and culture, become vital forces for great changes in the literary, political and cultural Italian landscape of the time' (p. xv). Topics include national identity formation in diverse works such as Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*, school texts from the pre- and post-unification periods and various analyses of Giovanni Verga and *verismo*. The editors and authors largely succeed in this endeavor, especially when they cohesively integrate the lost or little-known voices of the period that meaningfully contributed to the project of Italian unification.

The most compelling arguments of the volume focus on the voices of women, often overlooked by scholars in discussions of nineteenth-century Italian nation-building. The women featured prominently in the volume reject the narrative that Italian nation-building was exclusively the domain of the politically powerful or confined to male spheres of influence. These essays address Aurelia Folliero De Luna Cimino's and Fanny Salazar Zampini's contributions to debates on women's roles between the *Ottocento* and the *Novecento* (Palma), the dichotomy between tradition

and innovation in women's characterization in Nievo and Stuparich (Alberti) and 'Bridging Mystery and Serial Romantic Novels' in the characterization of Carolina Invernizio's *Nina, la poliziotta dilettante* (Buonocore). Collectively, these chapters clearly demarcate how women's national character was framed throughout the course of Italian unification.

Women's contributions to the project of Italian nation-building are also covered beyond Part Two. Antonella Valoroso's excellent essay, 'Uno sguardo dal palcoscenico: Il teatro "mondiale" di Adelaide Ristori', sheds new light on the fascinating career of Ristori, one of nineteenth-century Italy's foremost globetrotters, celebrities and even early cultural influencers. Ristori's diplomacy, global travels and work as a pseudo-Italian cultural ambassador exemplify a woman transcending the traditional constraints imposed on Italian women, especially in the masculine focus of a nascent Italy.

Another recurrent theme in the volume is the role of publishing during the Risorgimento, particularly in cultural production aimed at children. Sabrina Fava's chapter, 'La rivista *Le Prime Letture* (1870-1878): La formazione di giovani lettori "virtuosi e colti del pari"', and Letterio Todaro's subsequent chapter, 'A Mirror of Modernization: The Stunning Rise of Children's Books Publishing and the Unique Case of the Biondo Brothers' Publishing Company in "felicissima" Palermo', offer unique insights into how children's publishing was consolidated and modernized during and after Italian unification. Fava demonstrates that late nineteenth-century children's publications were tied to beliefs about building Italian character. She shows that *Le Prime Letture* advanced Cantù's ideal of the "civil man", urging children to grow into citizens who were both virtuous and educated. Furthermore, Todaro analyzes the previously overlooked publishing activities of the Biondo Brothers as part of a large-scale educational project aimed at Italian children. He argues that the Biondos were important as 'innovative publishers, as promoters of a modern style in children's literature, as agents of large cultural initiatives including the foundation of public theatres and philanthropic enterprises' (p. 68). These two essays, along with Rossana Dedola's chapter on Pinocchio and Ernesto Livorni's chapter on Edmondo De Amicis, offer new perspectives on the cultural publications and practices that were fundamental to shaping Italian national identity.

A few stylistic concerns do arise. As the collection contains chapters written in both English and Italian, the use of extensive translation in footnotes often seems unnecessary. In some cases these footnotes occupy more than half the page, impeding the larger arguments of the essay. Therefore, a more selective or integrative approach would have better served readers. Additionally, the juxtaposition of theater with archival and historical work in Part Three is puzzling. Unlike the preceding and subsequent sections, whose essays are thematically cohesive, the two contributions in this part have markedly different focuses, ranging from national and global theater to archival and collective work, without a clear unifying thread. Finally, some general statements would benefit from fuller contextualization. For example, the first essay mentions the boy in De Amicis' 'The Little Patriot of Padua' throwing money back at three travelers 'after listening to their conversation in which they were bashing Italy' (p. 12). More context on the travelers' grievances would have been useful. Similarly, a footnote in Chapter 10 claims that the Piemontesi, in ruling an existing territory, 'followed in the footsteps of the Bourbon colonizers' regarding Sicily (p. 200). Yet the Piemontesi often implemented policies in Sicily that were not direct continuations of Bourbon rule. These policies instead reflected a new national ideology marked by a shift to a different, yet still deeply problematic, rhetoric about the South.

Despite these caveats, Cadel and Nastri's collection is a useful resource for graduate students and scholars seeking a better understanding of the cultural and social production that contributed to the development of a vibrant and fluid Italian

national character. Rewriting marginalized or overlooked voices back into national canons is rarely a bad thing, not least because it stimulates robust scholarly debate. The Italian individuals featured in the volume, most compellingly the under-examined women, contribute meaningfully to the expansion of the nineteenth-century Italian canon. Mazzini, one imagines, would have approved.