
Harvard’s handsome “new verse translation” of Orlando furioso offers “slightly more than half” of Ariosto’s text (viii). Fourteen of the 46 cantos in the third and final edition of 1532 are omitted: 25, 27, 28, 31–33, 35, 37, and 40–45. There are also cuts, some of them extensive, in other cantos. The translation keeps only 9 of the 157 stanzas of canto 29, 13 of the 95 in canto 30, 40 of 140 in canto 46. Canto 38 loses stanzas 1–28, 35–70, 73–76, and 82–90, leaving only 13 of the original 90. The list could easily be extended. The first omitted canto is 25, and there is only one cut in any of the preceding cantos (3.2–59). As a result, the reader may get the false impression that Ariosto began to lose control as he approached the end of his immensely long poem.

Many of the omissions come at the beginning of a canto, and thus offer a distorted view of Ariosto’s poem, since, as Robert M. Durling observes, “most of the canto openings present the poet in the role of a graceful and good-humored but fundamentally serious moralist. . . . They are elegant, eloquent, and serious” (The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic 132). But the real problem with David R. Slavitt’s translation of the Furioso does not lie in what he leaves out but in what he adds.

The presence of the narrator is more apparent in Slavitt’s translation than in Ariosto’s original, and he is a very different sort of narrator—unlike either the narrative voice of Ariosto’s smiling courtier or that of the cynical young narrator of Byron’s Don Juan. Such a narrator, too eager to display his own cleverness and too immature to make plausible the moral judgments scattered throughout the original text, cannot capture the quality—variously called disciplined serenity, conquistata serenità, sereine sagesse, and problemlose Heiterkeit—that scholars have seen as the hallmark of Ariosto’s style in the Furioso.

The authorial interventions in Orlando furioso suggest that Ariosto, although not a contemporary of his characters, nevertheless is a member of a society both like and unlike theirs; Durling remarks that Ariosto’s reader “must repeatedly see the ways in which the world of the poem is unlike the real world, but also—and this is just as important—the ways in which it is like the real world” (131). By contrast, Slavitt’s narrator is clearly at home in twentieth-century America. This narrator is fond of deliberate anachronisms, among them the declaration that “All these names /are sure winners, I’d think, in trivia games” (14.22) and the evocation of a comic strip in the reference to Silence “in Sleep’s house where he’s / often found at midnight, catching zees” (14.87, corresponding to Ariosto 14.90). Ruggiero’s exquisitely polite conversation with Astolfo, who has been transformed into a myrtle bush, prompts the narrator to say.

You think it’s easy? No, it’s very hard
  to say nice things to a tree—about how its bark
is worse than its bite? You can’t even send a card,
  unless it has that recycled paper mark. (6.54)

There are plenty of other equally egregious examples.

Slavitt’s narrator is often condescending to his reader even when he praises him: for instance, when he closes a stanza with “Get it? Got it?, Good!” (29.73) and when he addresses the reader in the lines “Samson begs / to be mentioned at least. Go to the head of the class / if you’ve thought of him and the jawbone of the ass” (14.47). (Only the reference to
Samson, not the address to the reader, comes from Ariosto.) The narrator repeatedly fears that his reader may have been inattentive: “You do remember the plot?” (2.11). He also likes to demean his characters. The troops that flee from Mandricardo in the siege of Paris become “all these useless yeggs” (14.47); the terrifying reappearance of Rodomonte in the last canto prompts the narrator to express the thoughts of the crowd at the wedding of Ruggiero and Bradamante by asking “What is he, some kind of nut?” (46.104); and Olympia’s breasts are said to be “snowy white, like cheeses on display” (11.67).

The narrator is often crudely salacious: for example, when Alcina, preparing to seek Ruggiero in his bed, “imagines her new boy, / his energies, his appetites, his vigor, / which, with art can be made even bigger” (7.26); or when Angela, naked and waiting to be sacrificed to the orc, is without “even a veil, / . . . lest crude / eyes peer at her jiggly parts, so pale . . . except for the places you’d / expect to be pink.” Here he plays with the prurient curiosity of his reader: “I mention this detail / only to show how accurate I can be / and enable you, in your imaginings, to see” (10.95). Ariosto’s conventional description of Alcina, “Bianca nieve è il bel collo, e ’l petto latte,” becomes the translation’s enthusiastic “Her neck? Snow! Her cupcake breasts? Cream!” (7.14).

Slavitt’s Translator’s Preface shows him to be at odds with the last half century of Ariosto scholarship in downplaying his author’s moral seriousness and stressing instead the Furioso’s “original playfulness.” He asserts that “the great lesson this book can have for students . . . is that poetry can be fun” and calls the Furioso “the greatest cock-and-bull story in literature” (viii). He believes that “the ottava rima stanza is inherently humorous” (viii), although a great many of Ariosto’s stanzas present material that is not at all funny, as do many of Byron’s octaves in Don Juan. Charles Ross, in his Introduction, calls Slavitt’s choice of meter “an elastic version of iambic pentameter” (xiv), but, to my ear at least, there are far too many unmetrical lines that read like prose. The translator’s insistence on perfect rhyme, rather than the near rhymes occasionally admitted by Barbara Reynolds in her excellent translation for the Penguin Classics, leads to all sorts of desperate measures, ranging from composing new stanzas that have nothing in common with the corresponding stanzas in the original to resorting to French to find a rhyme, as in “their déjeuner sur l’herbe” (10.37) and even “ne worry pas” to rhyme with “Angelica” (19.42). There are many violations of normal word order, freer use of enjambment than in the original, and countless examples of padding to fill out a stanza.

Thomas R. Hart
University of Oregon
DOI 10.1215/00104124-2010-025


The title of Jenny Davidson’s new book, Breeding, with its suggestions of blood and hereditary class, on the one hand, and upbringing and education, on the other, perfectly captures her topic: the puzzle of whether our characters are determined more by qualities we are born with or by the culture we are born into—whether we are more the products of nature or of nurture. It is a perennial debate, one as alive in our own time as it was in the eighteenth century, and because it is still alive there is a real danger that we will look at that
earlier period anachronistically and misconstrue how people then made sense of the puzzle. An understanding of the laws of heredity and the principles by which the gene works is indispensable to the debate in our own time, but of course eighteenth-century thinkers did not have this conceptual apparatus and consequently came to the problem with entirely different assumptions.

Perhaps because they lacked a workable theory of the mechanisms of heredity, most eighteenth-century thinkers took for granted the power of nurture over nature. For them, the notion that human beings are greatly influenced by such environmental factors as nutrition, climate, education, and custom was self-evident, and their conviction that human beings are malleable and can be shaped by such influences gave the century its distinctive tone, and in particular its enthusiasm for the idea of perfectibility and its shibboleths of education and improvement.

This is the territory Davidson explores in Breeding. Her purpose is not to write a cultural history of the period’s changing views about heredity or to trace the genealogy of our own century’s nature-nurture controversy, but, rather, to provide a sort of anthropological “thick description” of the eighteenth century’s struggle to understand the competing claims of biological inheritance and cultural and environmental influence. To this end, she proceeds associationally, putting one voice next to another in order to tease out the assumptions, anxieties, fears, and contradictions of the period. Locke, Rousseau, and Godwin loom large in her account, but so, too, do lesser known treatises on the influence of the maternal imagination, theories of agricultural improvement, dissertations on elocution, anxieties about over-population, and the movement to stabilize the English language.

“Separat[ing] out the literary from the scientific from the medical from the philosophical,” Davidson says, “does violence to the matters with which all of these disciplines are concerned” (8). Thus, in one typical chapter she moves from Virgil’s Georgics to Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe and Mere Nature Delineated to Swift’s fantasies of eugenics in Gulliver’s Travels (with short digressions on John Ray’s The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation, Plato, and Thomas More) to The Gentleman’s Compleat Jockey and discussions by agricultural writers and physiologists about cross-breeding to Maupertuis’s speculations on heredity to theories of the influence of climate and discussions of population growth and, finally, to Smollett’s Expedition of Humphrey Clinker.

Within this chorus of heterogeneous voices, we can hear some common refrains. While today we tend to see the threat of determinism as coming from genetics, eighteenth-century thinkers worried about the power of the environment—not only climate and nutrition but also habit and custom—and they did not have the sanguine confidence we have that such factors are easily manipulated. Despite their apparent optimism, the thinkers of the age were haunted by anxieties about the limits of perfectibility and dogged by fears that humans were so trammled in nature that no amount of tinkering with culture could overcome its influence. And although societal and cultural forces might move us up the ladder of progress and perfectibility, they might just as readily send us down the chute of decline and degeneration.

Breeding is an intellectual history of a different sort, one that resists the grand narratives we typically find in historical and literary criticism. “There’s something to be said for the worm’s-eye view” (12), says Davidson, and she focuses on the local, favoring the patient unraveling of subtleties and nuances over the broad generalization and the sweeping argument. She also resists “the more accepted modes of analogy and argumentation” (12). Instead of linking her texts and topics by sequential analysis, she clumps them together “by means of contiguity and association” and allows them to knock up one against the other to “show unexpected and revealing facets” about the matters at hand (12). Her intention is to create “a sort of mosaic” where the material is arranged (here she multiplies her metaphors) as in “an oratorio or a grand country dance,” where she herself hovers “medium-like, to make these pages a sort of parliament, an auditorium in which
voices of actors in and commentators on the story of heredity in the eighteenth century can be heard” (2, 12, 7). Or, as she also puts it, “The book will . . . take breeding for a walk through the stacks—a walk on a long leash” (11).

It is this aspect of Breeding, I suspect, that will disconcert many of Davidson’s readers. Indeed, I sometimes felt as if (at the risk of multiplying metaphors myself) I were in a museum without walls: first came the rush of exhilaration from stumbling across one unexpected exhibition after another, with some pieces rarely displayed elsewhere, and none ever arranged in such surprising ways—Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein next to Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on Virginia!—and then came the disorientation, followed by the longing for some officious curator to fix a label here or there or for an enthusiastic docent to point a kindly finger.

Davidson, however, relishes this “plunging into a vast sea of eighteenth-century material” and “welcom[es] the sheer disorientation that accompanies such an act of self-immersion” (6), and in the end I think most readers will as well. She is both exceptionally well-read and curious. The sheer energy and breadth of learning that went into gathering these voices is impressive in itself, and the intellectual generosity that prompted her to listen to them so carefully and then pursue their meanings so subtly and thoroughly yields ample rewards.

DENNIS TODD
Georgetown University

DOI 10.1215/00104124-2010-026


Laboring at the intersection of current work on gender, sexuality, and race, Slaves to Fashion aims to elaborate a cultural history of black dandyism in identities of the African diaspora from the Enlightenment to the twenty-first century. In training the specific lens of dandyism on such a wide historical and thematic expanse, Miller’s study incites a much-needed dialogue between existing scholarship on the figure of the dandy—particularly its performative queering of modern narratives of masculinity and nationhood—and the legacies of imperialism and slavery that attest to the constant, if silent, presence of race and racializing discourse in those same narratives.

To that end, the book professes and expressly reiterates at different points a concern to bring to the surface different relationships among race, gender, sex, class, and nation as they coalesce in black appropriations and inventions of fashion. Maintaining so many foci through a survey of more than two centuries on both sides of the Atlantic is a tall order, one executed with varying degrees of success throughout the book. What best unites the traveling analyses of Slaves is their insistent illustration of the constitutively racializing nature of the forms of dress and representation taken up by the black dandy. Miller’s five chapters mobilize an understanding of queerness that hews closely to E. Patrick Johnson’s notion of the “quare,” a term taken from African American slang that refers, among other things, to “‘one for whom sexual and gender identities always already intersect with racial subjectivity’” (qtd. in Miller 11); the dandies studied by Miller, beginning with eighteenth-century “luxury” slaves in London and ending with contemporary “post-black” artists in
New York, enact a playful manipulation of this entanglement of race and gender, glossing the “quâre” with “a queerness that attends to the politics and performativity of identity without reifying debilitating notions of any of identity’s markers” (11).

Miller’s first chapter locates the origins of black dandyism in eighteenth-century London, where exploratory depictions of Africans in theater, as well as the sumptuous dress and display of real African servants and slaves in aristocratic households, became instruments in the self-portrayal of Britain as an imperial world power. Miller analyzes the stereotypical speech and costuming of the slave Mungo, one of the first well-developed black characters to appear on London stages, in the comic opera The Padlock, along with the quieter presence of blacks in contemporary paintings and texts, to show how representations of Africans were caught up in the task of determining Londoners’ own self-image as citizens of an emerging modern metropolis. Character—understood as experimentation with surfaces and appearances, as opposed to the interiority of identity—plays the central role in these imaginings: Miller points out, for example, that Mungo’s affected West Indian speech and spectacular red and white silk suit are not so much a portrayal of the real mannerisms of newly arrived Africans and African Americans as a projection of modern Englishness through a “white fantasy of black reality” (41), an identity that could be donned and doffed like a mask by whites and blacks alike. When real blacks, like the famous “macaroni” Julius Soubise, began to assume and repurpose the sartorial and cultural “character” of blackness for their own ends, the figure of the black dandy was born.

The remaining four chapters pertain for the most part to dandyisms situated in, if not limited to, the United States, although the original dynamic of performative and character-based blackness remains operative. This overwhelmingly Northern purview of the book paints black dandyism as the exclusive business of African Americans and black Londoners, thus foreclosing some interesting connections with the well-documented traditions of dandyism forged in colonialism rather than in the middle passage, defined both by long-standing practices in precolonial and colonial Africa and in the postcolonial movement to and from Europe. The scant presence of Africa in the diasporic subjectivity explored in the book is tied to a tacit understanding that the blackness of the black dandy originates in slavery. Indeed, the conception of blackness (taken from Harry Elam Jr.) as essentially a performance, a forced invention of the diaspora, is read to the letter by Miller: through a diary excerpt, the introduction first presents us with the image of African slaves’ naked bodies, stripped, as it were, of identity as well as clothes and poised to be redressed in European materials and social codes. Plotting a trajectory of dandyism that begins, not with Africa itself, but in London, Miller’s study skips over the essential if epistemologically fraught question of the black dandy’s transcultural (African and European/American) elements: the complex and multidirectional lineaments of diasporic relations sedimented in black dandyism are reduced to blacks’ performative reinvention of dominant social and sartorial habits in the metropolis, a practice implicitly affirmed to be ubiquitous and sui generis rather than historically and culturally contingent.

This reduction troubles the readings of chapter 2, which “exports” the black dandy from London to antebellum America, from the opulent surroundings of England’s upper classes, where slaves were treated as pets and even as protégés, to labor-based chattel slavery. In her discussion of the carnivalesque festivals Negro Election Day and Pinkster, Miller concedes that “Africans may have arrived in America physically and metaphorically naked, a seeming tabula rasa on which European and new American fashions might be imposed, but they had likely not forgotten the customs and aesthetic practices that had governed their lives in Africa” (87). However, this statement is followed with only a summary reference to what such customs and practices may have looked like, after which “Africa” slips from view until the discussion of contemporary African artists in chapter 5.

If it is true that Slaves to Fashion presents a truncated vision of diaspora—concentrated, for the most part, on teasing out the dialectical constructions of American notions of white
and black through gendered performance and fashion—the wonderful detail with which these constructions are laid out nonetheless makes for engaging and informative reading. Chapter 2 contains comparative exegeses of well-dressed blacks in Harriet Stowe, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Charles Chesnutt, identifying the ways in which both black and white writers attempt transgressively to “signify on” the contested figures of these dandies. Chapter 3 reexamines W.E.B. Du Bois’s politics of race and sexuality, countering traditional interpretations of Du Bois’s black intellectual authority as inherently masculinist. Miller points out that in a number of Du Bois’s writings—including several essays published before *The Souls of Black Folk*, and *Dark Princess*, written some years after—the model of black intellect proposed intimates a “different” sort of race man, one who occupies a submissive, even feminine, role in various allegorical renderings of multicultural American or cosmopolitan families. The clothes of Du Bois’s characters help to flesh out the alternative class, race, and gender codes of black subjectivity, revealing a much broader spectrum of performance than the strictly masculine image of the three-piece suit associated with *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Chapter 4 follows the development of Black Harlem in the early twentieth century as the first scene of publicly visible, self-managed African American culture. Looking at military parades, drag balls, and other visual chronicles of black dress and performance, and later at the works of Harlem historian James Weldon Johnson, Miller suggests that Harlem’s black dandies offer a disruption of the debate over the putative existence of a specifically black modernism either as an imitation or subversion of prevalent modernist trends: in its “absolutely dogged sense of self-invention,” one may say, black dandyism upends the limiting binaries of identity, gesturing at an expression “one startling step beyond” black and white, male and female (179). Theoretical references like this phrase from Jessica Feldman are scattered throughout the chapters but are rarely made to illuminate the central arguments of the text—often seeming like perfunctory afterthoughts in comparison with the rich historical analyses that surround them. Indeed, the book seems almost compulsively to avoid developing the theoretical consequences of its findings; even standard approaches like Bhabha’s elaborations on mimicry or Du Bois’s and Gilroy’s notion of double consciousness, which would be extremely useful here, are invoked only in passing.

Chapter 5 provides the study with some of this missing theoretical mettle in a masterful investigation of how various African diaspora artists of the last two decades have manipulated the politics of looking. Both the last and the longest chapter, this essay also serves in a sense as the book’s conclusion. It follows the work of black British filmmaker Isaac Julien, African American photographer Lyle Ashton Harris, and Nigerian artists Iké Udé and Yinka Shonibare, examining how self-regard becomes for all of these thinkers a way of interrogating the space between the dandy’s skin and his clothes, the distance between self and other first noted by Fanon in the scene of interpellation from *Black Skin, White Masks*. The meaningful gazes of the dressed and nude characters of Julien’s film *Looking for Langston* and the direct stare of Harris’s self-portrait as a made-up Toussaint L’Ouverture or as part of a posed, defiant black “sisterhood” are dedicated to working through the assumptions and the genealogy of black masculinity, to determining “what black men want.” Harris gives the name “redemptive narcissism” to the aesthetics of this seeking, which rehearses the signature self-absorption of the dandy in order to conjure up and question different historical ways of looking at black men, not simply by reversing the gaze, as Jean-Paul Sartre has it in “Black Orpheus,” but by contemplating himself. This visual mediation of self-love has the effect of gathering, on one plane, both private and public spheres—self-conscious, self-regarding, and other-regarding gazes. The mock movie posters and magazine covers of Iké Udé, for example, often feature Udé looking at himself in a mirror, thus triangulating the spectator’s look in a self-reflection that is already packaged for display. The ostensibly intimate act of checking one’s appearance is presented as a public artifice, as the movie poster and magazine cover formats invite the viewer to peer at the
“contents” waiting behind Udé’s image—the narratives of his films, the feature stories of his magazine. Filled with intricate formal readings of this “post-black” aesthetic (although this term, like the text’s other critical or theoretical sound bites, remains relatively unexplored), the last chapter offers an elegant concatenation of the different issues of gender, sex, and performance, as well as nation and class, addressed discretely in the previous chapters. Here, Miller manages best to couple the multivalent scope of her study with a sustained critical approach, giving a glimpse of the political and semiotic ramifications of using dress to affix—or to probe—all the other categories that are used to fashion modern black identity. It thus makes for a fitting close to a book that, for its historical analysis, if not for its theoretical interventions, proves to be an absorbing and timely study of the black dandy.

Jaime Hanneken
University of Minnesota
DOI 10.1215/00104124-2010-027


Alessandro Manzoni, one of the “ambivalent tre corone (three crowns) of Italian Romanticism” (17), along with Ugo Foscolo and Giacomo Leopardi, concludes his “Letter on Romanticism” (1823) with this ironic statement:

Certainly, if some foreigner, having heard talk of the debates that took place here [in Italy] about Romanticism, asks where the question of Romanticism stands, one can bet a thousand to one that our foreigner will receive the following type of reply: “Romanticism? It was talked about for a while, but now it is no longer mentioned; the word itself is forgotten, except on those rare occasions when someone pronounces the epithet ‘Romantic’ to describe a strange proposition, a troubled brain, a futile cause . . . . But I would not counsel you to speak seriously of it: to do so would be comparable to asking people if they still enjoy playing with the kaleidoscope.” (314–15)

Joseph Luzzi rekindles the debate on Romanticism by using a critical kaleidoscope that rearranges the patterns and colors of Italian Romanticism, showing that the beauty (kalos) of its ideal forms (eidos) is necessarily connected to its multifaceted, ever-changing identity.

Luzzi’s innovative study “considers Italian Romanticism and, more broadly, the modern myth of Italy in a comparative European context” (2) with the aim of overcoming the persistent marginality of Italian letters in the Anglo-American reception of Romanticism—a marginality he attributes in part to the deep connection between Italian Romanticism and the formation of an Italian national and linguistic identity. Luzzi’s methodology situates Italian Romantic works in the context of deconstruction, gender, and cultural studies. A sophisticated translator of key contributions to the Romantic debate, such as Manzoni’s “Letter on Romanticism” and Germaine De Staël’s “The Spirit of Translation,” Luzzi brings primary Italian Romantic texts, such as Foscolo’s Dei sepolcri (1807; On Sepulchers) “into the broader comparative literary discussions, from which they have too often been excluded” (19). Luzzi’s reflections draw upon canonical Italian literary-historical criticism (Walter Binni, Mario Puppo, and Sebastiano Timpanaro), theoretical and interdisciplinary studies (Glauco Cambon, Mario Praz, Ezio Raimondi, Sergio Givone, Salvatore Nigro, Margaret
Brose, Robert Dombroski, and Roberto Dainotto, among others), and both classical and recent comparatist studies (Erich Auerbach, René Wellek, Richard Elridge, and Paul Hamilton). What makes Luzzi’s solid scholarship fruitful, though, is his truly comparatist belief that “the best response to a literary text has always been another literary text” (20). From this perspective Luzzi analyzes “the metaphors, facts, and fictions about Italy that were born in the Romantic age and that continue to haunt in the Western literary imagination” (2). According to the author, they originate from four distinguishing facets of Italian Romantic literature: 1) “the burden of antiquity,” or the genealogical matrix that Italian Romantics such as Foscolo and Leopardi established between their poetics and mythology and classical literature; 2) “high culture and national identity,” or the integration of lofty cultural expressions and rhetorical tropes, from Dante and Petrarch to Foscolo and Leopardi, into the literary discourse on nationhood; 3) “the religious imagination,” or the presence of a forceful Christian rhetoric even in the discussion of nonreligious themes, as is the case in Manzoni’s theoretical works or in Foscolo’s Dei sepolcri; 4) “the resistance to modernity,” or the attempt to intertwine innovation with tradition in order to infuse the future of Italianness with the ideals of an exemplary past, as proposed by Foscolo’s Dei sepolcri. These four features of the exceptional identity of Italian Romanticism are intertwined in Foscolo’s poem. A politically engaged work that fuses lyric and epic, immanence and transcendence, future and past, Dei sepolcri seeks among its dead rather than its living the foundational myth necessary to the spiritual unity of the Italian identity. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Foscolo is “arguably the protagonist” (4) of Luzzi’s study, or the textual thread that connects the three parts of his analysis.

Part 1, Genus Italicum, explores the persistence of a foreign notion of Italy, which, from Goethe’s neoclassical Italienische Reise (1816–29; Italian Journey) to De Staël’s Corinne ou l’Italie (1807), favors Italy “as a site for aesthetic exile, self-induced or otherwise” (49), selected for its magnificent past, which allegedly overwhelms any attempt to introduce cultural modernity in the early nineteenth century. This image of Italy as a land of ruins offers, according to Luzzi, a physical and cultural home to the homo poeticus of European Romanticism. Far from the Enlightenment ideals of cosmopolitan sociability and literary versatility, the Romantic view of literature is tied to “qualities of iconoclasm, originality, and specialization” (15), nurtured by a self-chosen isolation in a “cultural sepulcher, free from modernity and its uncertainties” (52). Italy thus becomes the “imaginary homeland” (52) of a foreign Grand Tour traveler, “an eminently premodern corpus of cultural traditions” (52), which prevents its European audience from perceiving and accepting its innovations and eccentricities. In particular, Italian Romanticism’s specificity relies upon “its heavily nationalistic critical discourse, traditions of providential thought, and its mythologized role in the foreign literary imaginary” (52).

The thought-provoking originality that characterizes Luzzi’s study emerges in the first chapter, “Did Italian Romanticism Exist?” A comparatist exploration of the standard Romantic trope of the crossing of the Alps begins with Wordsworth’s “Imagination” (Book 6 of the Prelude), continues with Foscolo’s Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis (1802; Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis) and Manzoni’s Adelchi (1822), and concludes with an analysis of Roberto Rossellini’s controversial Voyage to Italy (1954) and its reversal of the foreign gaze on the Italian “temple of the spirit” (52). The transformation of Italy in the foreign imaginary from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century—from Europe’s museum to its mausoleum, from the world’s university championed by Goethe to the moribund contemporary Italy of Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (1812–18)—is vividly depicted through Luzzi’s complementary analyses of literary and artistic images (Johann Zoffany, Jacques Sablet, Johann H. W. Tischbein), which clarify how Italy becomes “a collective sepulcher in the mind of many Europeans” (56), a funereal landscape from which the “genus italicum” is excluded.
Moreover, Luzzi convincingly demonstrates Foscolo’s crucial role in the understanding and deconstructing of the Romantic myth of Italy through an insightful reading of his *Lettere dall’Inghilterra* (1817; *Letters from England*). One of several important works of Italian Romanticism that have yet to be translated into English, the *Lettere dall’Inghilterra* functions as a synecdoche of Luzzi’s study as a whole in its attempt to “reorient the foreigner’s gaze upon Italy” (76). Foscolo’s dual perspective of insider/outside during his British exile allows him to highlight aspects of Italian culture—language, social customs, and historical events—that characterize the crisis of the Italian identity in the early nineteenth century and are overlooked in the clichés dominating the European imaginary at that time.

In part 2, “Heirs of a Dark Wood,” Luzzi extends his “reorientation of the foreign gaze” while arguing that the Romantic reception of Dante was characterized by aspects that were in fact opposed to messages at the center of the *Commedia*. Through an intriguing analysis of the transition from Dante’s rejection in the Enlightenment—epitomized by Voltaire’s verdict, “On ne lit plus le Dante dans l’Europe” (104)—to his elevation in Romanticism—exemplified by Stendhal’s characterization of Dante as “the poète romantique par excellence” (142)—Luzzi traces a parallel transformation in the writing about the self, from the Enlightenment’s *mémoire* to the Romantic autobiography. Vittorio Alfieri’s *Del principe e delle lettere* (1786; *The Prince and Letters*) and his autobiographical *Vita scritta da esso* (1804; *Memoirs*) “established a paradigmatically autobiographic reading of Dante that shaped critical interpretation of the *Commedia* in the early nineteenth century” (125). The Romantic attention to Dante’s biography corroborated the interest in “the fierce Dantesque self” as a “heroic sojourn rather than a religious pilgrim” (98). Thus, Luzzi argues, the Romantic reading of Dante’s work, particularly the *Inferno*, focuses precisely on what Dante overcomes in his work: the self.

Finally, part 3, *Corpus Italicum*, capitalizes on the synergy of literature and the arts to trace the development of a “hermaphroditic metaphor” (168) that blends “two dialectically related yet irreconcilable historical epochs: a corrupt and decadent modern Italy, represented in a beautiful but wounded body; and a martial and masculine ancient Roman Italia, with the bold heart and stalwart viscera of its imperial progenitor” (168). The journey of this androgynous “donna italica” begins with Dante’s *Purgatorio* (1308–14) and develops through Petrarch’s canzone 128, “Italia mia” (1344), Machiavelli’s *Il principe* (1532), and Alfieri’s sonnet to Dante (1783), culminating with Leopardi’s “All’Italia” (1818). Yet Foscolo’s *Dei sepolcri* emerges once again not only as a subtext of Leopardi’s “All’Italia” (187), but also as a point of departure for a cultural renewal of the Italian literary corpus, which Foscolo suggests in his bilingual *Essay on the Present Literature of Italy* (1818) written during his British years. In the same spirit of Foscolo’s rethinking of our cultural debt to the Italian past, Luzzi challenges us to examine the cultural *corpus italicum* of Romanticism in order to redefine our notions of contemporary Italian identity regardless of “our abiding desire to return to cultural homelands that never existed” (21).

Luzzi’s volume is an ambitious critical study of the myth of Italy, its reception by nineteenth-century European Romanticism, and its significance to the quest for a contemporary Italian identity. Given the breadth and depth of the analysis, some sections and statements could have benefitted from further and more nuanced development. I refer, for instance, to a rather vague discussion of Romanticism and modernity as “fluid signifier[s]” (84) in the beginning of the study, and to a simplistic exemplification of the relationship between high cultural expression and national identity as represented “in the monumental *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*; 1827) by Alessandro Manzoni, who spent nearly fifteen years translating his novel into Tuscan in hopes of finally establishing this dialect as Italy’s standard language” (3).

Despite these minor lapses, *Romantic Europe and the Ghost of Italy* represents a remarkable, original, and thought-provoking contribution to the critical debate on European
Romanticism and the quest for a “kaleidoscopic” Italian identity in the twenty-first century. Luzzi’s work as a cultural translator truly revitalizes Madame de Staël’s consideration that “more than any other form of exchange, the circulation of ideas is the one most likely to prove advantageous” (“The Spirit of Translation” 279).

Margherita Heyer-Caput
University of California, Davis
DOI 10.1215/00104124-2010-028

Works Cited


This well-researched and thoughtful book examines the exclusionary structures of racial democracy in Brazil and the United States, focusing on early twentieth-century writings about race and national identity by Brazilian authors who participated in the modernist movement and by U.S. authors of the Harlem Renaissance. While there has already been much research devoted to debunking the myths of racial democracy in these societies, Nunes’s approach is novel in two ways: it is comparative and it focuses on metaphors of incorporation found in key texts by these writers. Based on close readings of their work, Nunes seeks to offer a new understanding of the underlying structures that cause African-Americans in Brazil and the U.S. to suffer exclusion despite the fact that these societies aspire to achieve equality between the races. She proposes that these structures of racial exclusion are cannibalistic and excremental: the dominant society incorporates its subordinates in order to become whole, but since defecation necessarily follows ingestion, the process always produces a remainder, which is then disavowed. That remainder, she argues, is blackness, which people of African descent must leave behind if they wish to participate as full members of the national community. In the words of W.E.B. Du Bois: “Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?” Nunes thus argues that Brazilian and U.S. concepts of national unity through incorporation make “whitening” or “passing” the only path available to citizens of African descent.

In chapters 1 and 2 Nunes analyzes works by several prominent Brazilian modernist thinkers: Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaima*, Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropófago,” and Gilberto Freyre’s *Casa Grande e Senzala*. These authors promoted incorporation/cannibalism as the path to modernization in Brazil, which led to the growth of the myth of color-blind Brazil. Nunes shows, however, that their “constructive miscegenation,” to use Nancy Stepan’s term, is nothing other than whitening, “embranquecimento.” In the case
of Andrade’s *Macunaima* the hero actually becomes white, so, despite the nominal assertion of racial mixture in both the form and content of the novel, its ultimate lesson reinforces the idea of *embranquecimiento*. The same is true for Andrade’s essay “Excremental Medicines,” which celebrates excrement by extolling its whitening powers. In her reading of Freyre’s *Casa Grande e Senzala*, Nunes shows how “Blacks appear as threats to the body politic” because they are not easily “digestible” (84). Freyre’s book thus promotes assimilation rather than a truly multiracial society. The net effect, Nunes argues, is the disappearance of blacks from the modernizing project espoused by the modernists.

In chapters 3 and 4 Nunes examines how U.S. authors looked to Brazil as an example of racial democracy and how Brazilian authors in turn attempted to correct U.S. misperceptions. Charles Chesnutt’s essays and his novel *The Marrow of Tradition* explore the idea of racial amalgamation as a potential solution to the problems of racial inequality in the U.S., yet ultimately Chesnutt rejects this option because of his awareness that it “always produces a remainder” (103). Numerous black U.S. visitors to Brazil, including Robert Abbott, founder and publisher of the black newspaper *Chicago Defender*, claimed it was a color-blind society, with “Blacks and Whites living in harmony” (123) as a result of miscegenation. Brazilian blacks sought to set the record straight in the pages of a thriving black press, criticizing the U.S. visitors for not being able to see the limitations imposed on black participation in public life. Nunes extends this discussion of how Brazil figures in the imagination of black thinkers in the U.S. to two novels of the Harlem Renaissance, Nella Larsen’s *Passing* and Jessie Redmon Fauset’s *Plum Bun*. In these works, Brazil seems to be associated for some characters with a longed-for ideal of racial egalitarianism, while for others it signals an unconscious awareness that amalgamation is nothing other than whitening.

*Cannibal Democracy*’s nuanced analysis drawn from black journalism, essays, and fiction should substantially deepen our awareness of the complexities and varieties of modernist thought in the two countries. Nunes’s account of the dialogue between black thinkers in Brazil and the U.S. is particularly fascinating and useful. She argues for the existence of a transnational sphere of black thought that framed debates about black citizenship and that led the U.S. and Brazil to develop a special mirror-like relation to one another. A key figure in this circuit of intellectual exchange is José Clarana, aka J.B. Clarke or Jaime Gil, originally from the West Indies but a resident variously of Brazil and the U.S. He contributed articles on Brazil to *The Crisis*, a U.S. newspaper, and in Brazil wrote at length on the United States. As Nunes shows, his own transnational identity makes him exemplary and sheds light on how “Blacks in Brazil needed their image of the United States as much as Blacks in the United States needed their image of Brazil to articulate and negotiate the contradictions inherent in representing blackness in democratic societies” (xv). Nunes’s analysis of the distortions and misrecognition that resulted from this special relationship, as well as the opportunities it presented for thinking about the problems of racial democracy and imagining solutions to them, offers an important contribution to the growing field of comparative race studies.

Chapter 5, the last chapter of *Cannibal Democracy*, heads off in a different direction, moving beyond the modernist frame and the centrality of the Brazilian context to consider contemporary art and writing from a variety of African diaspora societies, including Cuba, Jamaica, and the U.K. The sheer number of works discussed in this chapter means that Nunes cannot give each the attention it deserves, and the variety of their provenance leads to overly general claims about racial democracy. This chapter is, by the author’s own admission, more speculative than the rest of the book, and it plays a discordant note with respect to the ideas advanced in the previous chapters on Brazilian modernism and the Harlem Renaissance.

The main argument of chapter 5 is that recent black writers and artists have developed a different way of approaching the question of identity. Unlike thinkers from the earlier period, these contemporary figures are not attached to concepts of national unity and
are no longer interested in resolving its contradictions. Incorporation, and thus the entire cannibalistic framework that marked the modernist project of identity, has been replaced by a new framework: necrophilia and necrophagia, the ingestion of the dead and the gone. Nunes argues that this turn to the past and to what has been lost—by August Wilson, Toni Morrison, Erna Brodber, and Keith Piper, to name only a few of the artists discussed in this chapter—signals the acknowledgement that the existence of remainders is inevitable. Instead of trying to get rid of the remainder, these writers offer a new relationship to it, one that “accompanies” and “embraces” it. Nunes here shifts from a descriptive to a prescriptive mode, and in what amounts to a repudiation, through presentist thinking, of the modernist project and the thinkers associated with it in Brazil and the U.S., she reveals that the problem all along has been identity itself: the desire for a name, for representation, for coherence.

Nunes’s analysis of the contradictions of racial democracy is heavily informed by structuralism. She looks to the structures of language (Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of metaphor), political theory (Carl Schmitt on democracy), and especially Freudian psychoanalysis (Abraham and Torok) for answers, rather than to changing historical contingencies. This emphasis at times overwhelms her analysis of the modernist thinkers whose cannibalistic ideas about race and national identity are at the heart of the book and also considerably weakens the impact of her critique of racism. It is worth noting that the cornerstone on which her analysis is built is not cannibalism per se, but rather a corollary of cannibalism, namely, the production of a remainder. This concept derives from structuralist accounts of signification and social relations and is the basis for her critique of identity, which crops up at various points in the book. Although Nunes’s use of the concept leads to some fascinating and inventive readings, because she presents the remainder in different and competing lights it also generates some significant diagnostic confusion that clouds the nature of the problem under discussion. From a moral and political perspective, the existence of a black remainder in Brazil and the U.S. is racist, unjust, and undemocratic; it must be remedied in the name of true democracy. From a strict structuralist perspective and its critique of identity, the remainder is an inevitable feature of the encounter between self and other and thus is devoid of any intrinsic moral content. From this perspective “inclusion” is not the solution to the problem of exclusion, and democracy itself seems to be part of the problem. The solution, Nunes seems to suggest, does not lie in fighting for a better democracy, but rather in changing our relationship to the remainder, avowing its existence. Thus, one wonders, is the racist discourse of whitening the problem to be remedied, or is the problem identity itself? And if it is the latter, then what does democracy have to do with it?

Estelle Tarica
University of California, Berkeley
DOI 10.1215/00104124-2010-029