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## REFERENCES

Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2009. Pp. XV, 291. ISBN: 978-0-8142-1106-9.

- 1 In his new book, *American Risorgimento: Herman Melville and the Cultural Politics of Italy*, Dennis Berthold shows how Italy's political transformation from a collection of small states controlled by foreign powers in the 1840s into a unified, independent nation by 1871 was central to Melville's writing. Melville clearly saw the parallel between Italy's struggle for freedom from foreign domination and drive for unification and, on the other hand, the war in the United States to abolish slavery and maintain the union. He developed this perceived affinity most explicitly in two seldom-studied poems with an Italian subject, "At the Hostelry" and "Naples in the Time of Bomba," but references to Italy pervade his entire work from his 1849 novel *Mardi* to his late poetry. By unveiling this complex web of Italian allusions, Berthold demonstrates that Melville's cosmopolitanism went far beyond his well-known interest in the Pacific.
- 2 Berthold finds, for instance, that *Mardi* was greatly affected by Melville's reading of Dante as well as by his awareness of contemporary events in Italy, namely, Pope Pius IX's recanting on his initial reformist position. Dante offered Melville an influential model of political, generically indeterminate poetry whose originality lay in the transformative use of a host of sources. The *Inferno* also castigates papal corruption, and a similar condemnation is found in Melville's negative portrayal of Hivohite MDCCCXLVIII, clearly modeled upon the disappointing Pius IX. The author shows that the critique of papal absolutism characterized *Moby-Dick* as well, where Ahab's illegitimate power sustains itself with the theatricality Protestant America associated

with Catholic liturgy. Berthold offers a brilliant reading of Ahab's allusion to "the Iron Crown of Lombardy," a very ornate gold crown fashioned from an alleged nail of Christ's cross and worn by Holy Roman Emperors from Charlemagne onward. Since the crown emblemizes foreign control of the Italian peninsula, Berthold shows that Ahab becomes a symbol of universal tyranny specifically through an Italian example of illegitimate power based upon mystification.

- 3 Just as important as Dante was to the Italian Risorgimento and to Melville's formation, Berthold maintains, was historian and political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli, like Dante a proponent of national unity and a critic of factionalism. Berthold finds Machiavelli's influence in several of Melville's characters who, like Machiavelli's ideal prince, employ seemingly unjust means to obtain just ends, most notably, Captain Vere in *Billy Budd*, who executes an arguably innocent sailor for the higher purpose of maintaining discipline on board. In his Civil War poems *Battle-Pieces*, Melville similarly defends William T. Sherman's scorched earth policies in Georgia as a necessary tactic to preserve the republic, while at the same time advocating that the victorious North respect the South to avoid the sectionalist divisions along regional lines that were troubling Italy after unification.
- 4 Berthold argument is new on many levels. Practitioners of a transnationalist American Studies have privileged the twentieth century over the nineteenth century, yet Berthold shows that the Italian Risorgimento was central to Melville's artistic and political development. Melville scholars interested in the cosmopolitan dimension of his art have focused chiefly on the early writing on the South Seas or late poetry on the Holy Land, yet references to Italy pervade his whole opus. Finally, Berthold contributes a nuanced historical perspective to the scholarship on the American responses to the Risorgimento. The reader learns how mid-nineteenth century Americans initially viewed Italy as picturesque but outside of historical development, but radically revised this perception in 1848-9, when revolutionary Italy appeared to them as a political entity capable of U.S.- modeled republican institutions. In 1860, Italy seemed to America on the verge of the Civil War an exemplum of national unity under a strong central government. To the post-war United States seeking sectional reconciliation, however, the new Kingdom of Italy became a negative model when the imposition of the northern civil code on the newly acquired southern territories incited armed resistance in the South. To this analysis of the chronological flexibility of the American image of Italy, Berthold adds the study of its synchronic complexity. Supporters of the Risorgimento, including Melville, were often anti-Catholic, while its opponents were almost always American Catholics. Similarly, Americans almost universally preferred the pragmatic Garibaldi, willing to subordinate his republicanism to the goal of national unity under a monarchy, to the more radical and uncompromisingly democratic Mazzini. One cannot but praise Berthold for his appreciation of the complexities of Italian as well as American political history.
- 5 *American Risorgimento* is a well-written, carefully researched addition to the scholarship on Melville. It will be of interest to U.S. Americanists and European scholars of American culture alike. Should anything less than unconditionally positive be said about it is that its title is somewhat misleading. Berthold's book details Melville's involvement with Italian culture and political thought well beyond the Risorgimento. The two major Italian sources for Melville's art, Dante and Machiavelli, although linked to Risorgimento politics because both proponents of a unified Italy, antecede it by

centuries. Even so, this broader and justifiable scope does not detract from the book, but rather makes it richer.

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AUTHOR

**PAOLA GEMME**

Arkansas Tech University