Alessandro Vanoli considers the legacies of 19th and 20th-century orientalism and imperialism, with reference to the recent Muslim presence in Italy and the inverse challenges of writing a history of Islam in Italy, clearly a disjointed and not continuous grand narrative from the Middle Ages forwards (except in Sicily), despite the desire to create a sense of continuity. Eugenio Mazzarella instead focuses on the current crisis of national identity during the Berlusconi era which fostered an “ideal climate for the winds of the anti-political” in order to *not* look itself squarely in the mirror and *not* make structural change (thus a “cowardly” politics), but rather confirming the stubborn endurance of the three fundamental Italian structures: family, oligarchy, and corporation. Finally, the intellectually playful (*Arte Povera*) sculptural art of Luciano Fabro’s “Italies” (1968–2005) multiply the possible “lettture parallele” of our many Italies. These are variously hung upside down, accidentally fragmented and then bandaged (the crystal “L’Italia Savoia”), or preciously gold-plated (“L’Italia d’oro”)—all with clever bits of text attached. These works are treated in Sharon Hecker’s fascinating exegeses of the wider implications of art and the “imaginings of Italy’s identity.” Like Jasper John’s musings on the American national icon (*Flag*), Fabro both invites and disavows inherently political interpretations, concluding that “no matter how hard one tries to define Italy, the boot never quite fits.” And I might be tempted to conclude that this elusiveness may be the best national identity of all, preventing any faction from claiming Italy’s supposed essence for itself.

LUISA DEL GIUDICE

Los Angeles (Independent Scholar)

Chiara Ferrari. *The Rhetoric of Violence and Sacrifice in Fascist Italy. Mussolini, Gadda, Vittorini*. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. 230. ISBN 9781442613935. \$ 29.95.

Should we take fascist rhetoric seriously? According to Chiara Ferrari we should. Referring to Mussolini’s famous speech of January 3, 1925 where he took responsibility for the Matteotti murder—and subsequently dismantled the liberal democratic state—Ferrari claims that “the speech was more than ‘just words.’ It did things.” (p. 18) Ferrari’s book, which compares the rhetoric of Mussolini to that of the modernist writers Carlo Emilio Gadda and Elio Vittorini, both one

time fascists who became anti-fascists after the war, suggests that the rhetoric of fascism is essential to understanding both the construction of the dictatorship—and the rise of anti-fascism. For Ferrari, the rhetoric of violence and sacrifice, used numerous times by Mussolini throughout the *Ventennio*, was central to the regime's attempts to bind the masses to the fascism. Ferrari's book is a response to those scholars who insist that we should not take what fascism said about itself seriously. Ferrari also takes issue with the "sacralization/spectacularization paradigms" of those scholars who study fascist spectacle but ignore the text of Mussolini's speeches. She rejects any attempts to consider fascist sacrificial rhetoric as simply an example of the sacralization of politics borrowed from traditional Catholic discourse.

Ferrari's project is to take rhetoric seriously through a close reading of three speeches given by Mussolini. One is the aforementioned parliamentary speech of 1925, a pivotal moment in the regime's history where "things for Italy could have gone differently and anti-fascist action had a chance to succeed." (p. 17). The other speech came in 1932 during the celebrations of the *Decennale*, and the other in 1939 on the eve of war. Drawing upon theorists such as Derrida and Foucault, Ferrari provides a complex reading of the speeches demonstrating how they constructed a rhetoric of violence and sacrifice in which Mussolini was able to present himself as a *pharmakon* or the "'substance' that is at once dangerous, lethal, crisis provoking, and its exact opposite: beneficial, therapeutic, pacificatory—the poison/medicine" (p. 24). In an example of "sacrificial substitution" Mussolini became both cause and remedy for the crisis. For Ferrari, the speech of January 3 was not merely a parliamentary speech but a "sacrificial ritual performance" which, in the words of Rene Girard, a "mimetic crisis" which allowed Mussolini to become a "surrogate victim." (p. 19, 20, 25) This is how the potentially disastrous Matteotti crisis for the regime became a triumph that set the stage for dictatorship.

In the other two speeches, which came at crucial moments in the regime's history, Mussolini was able—again through rhetorical constructs—to present fascism as the solution to a permanent crisis, or "wheel of history" where crises would "loop the national trajectory into a circular logic of anticipation and fulfillment." (p. 27) Here Mussolini was also able to articulate a distinction between "good and bad violence". In the 1939 speech, Ferrari argues that Mussolini again was able to draw upon the "ritual logic of crisis and intervention" to claim that neutrality was not a valid long term option as it played into the hands of those anti-fascists still lurking in the "junkyard of masons, Jews, and lovers of all things foreign" (p. 37, 46).

Ferrari uses these speeches to demonstrate that words mattered in Fascist Italy and that Mussolini's speeches were typically constructed in a "rhetoric of anti-rhetoric" which, paradoxically, attempted to sacrifice words and create a "fascist silence" where Mussolini could dialogue with the crowd albeit in a manner that "echoed" the speech back to him. In other words, through a complex rhetorical strategy, Mussolini was able to "dialogue" in a way that allowed the masses to sacrifice their subjectivity: "The voice of the fascist subject is denied at the same time as it is being elicited, or, more precisely, it is elicited as a self-denying voice that mirrors-echoes-the master's voice." (p. 67) One senses that the critics of Ferrari's approach wouldn't disagree with this conclusion as it suggests that there was no real dialogue taking place. Yet, what Ferrari does is present a scenario in which the masses lose their subjectivity through Mussolini's careful and conscious rhetorical strategies.

The final two chapters of the book deal with the writers Gadda and Vittorini. Both men had been fascist supporters but became disillusioned with the regime and moved to anti-fascism. Ferrari argues that these shifts were not just matters of opportunism but were grounded in the rhetoric of sacrifice and violence which both men used in their anti-fascist work albeit moving in different directions. For both men, it was the unresolved tensions in fascism's sacrificial discourse that led Gadda and Vittorini to adopt their anti-fascist positions. In the case of Gadda, it was the fear of allowing the uninformed masses into the state which threatened the technocracy that he had hoped would govern Italy. For Vittorini, fascist rhetoric demanded the sacrifice of the masses to the perpetuation of bourgeois values under the regime. Despite Mussolini's frequent attacks on bourgeois values, the regime had allowed the bourgeoisie to maintain its hegemony and prevent the masses from elevating themselves culturally.

Ferrari's book makes an excellent contribution to the subject of fascist rhetoric and provides a corrective to those recent works on fascist culture which ignore the text of Mussolini's speech in favor of the spectacle. It's a timely reminder as well that Mussolini was a journalist well versed in rhetorical strategies which he used to good effect in his speeches. Having said this, perhaps Ferrari goes too far in privileging the text and ignoring the spectacle. Still, one hopes that future work on fascist spectacle will take seriously Ferrari's call for greater attention to words but one cannot live on words alone when it comes to understanding fascism.

PAUL BAXA
Ave Maria University