auteur. Lorsqu'on leur joint la traduction concise de Mariella Colin, avec une introduction qui contextualise bien le roman — et De Amicis — dans le cadre social, culturel et politique italien du XIX^e siècle, *Le roman d'un maître d'école* est une édition appréciée et nécessaire d'une œuvre littéraire importante rédigée par l'un des romanciers italiens les plus importants.

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Gabriella Romani. *Postal Culture. Writing and Reading Letters in Post-Unification Italy*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. 272. ISBN 9781442647084.

In an internet-dependent world where the accepted protocols of letter writing have largely lost their status as positive social capital, an in-depth study of how letter writing developed in the non-elite classes, and of the intricacies involved in the delivery of their letters, is both welcome and relevant. Romani is a specialist of late 19th century Italian literature. She is also a researcher whose breadth of knowledge, admirable ability of relevant and perceptive analysis, and just plain pleasure in pursuing new directions of research within her specialization, has allowed her to contribute meaningfully and substantially to Italian literary criticism at the end of the 1800s. Nor does the present volume disappoint.

Postal Culture consists of two principal parts, each with two chapters; a long concluding note ties the work together. A study such as this one, with its emphasis on late 19th century authors of epistolary novels, cannot begin *in medias res*, as it were. So, in Part I, Romani describes the social and political environments that fostered the growth of the Italian postal system. Of course, mail had always been sent to and from and within the peninsula, often at great expense and exasperation. Alessandro Manzoni's letters to friends are a delightful mirror of the vicissitudes of sending mail in the first part of the 19th century, reflecting long held practices of having to find means of delivery, of having to pay appropriate taxes across a number of jurisdictions, of never knowing, really, whether your letter would arrive. Often, as Romani points out, it was just more expedient to send business correspondence for it was more likely to be delivered than the personal.

As for the latter, again we can look to Manzoni, in his *Promessi sposi*, to reflect the value of a letter in a largely illiterate social environment. Those who could not read or write (or only to a limited degree), had to avail themselves of professional writers and readers. Unfortunately, at times, these professionals became more interpreters than scribes, adding their own commentary to the missive. The early 19th century brought to Italy two fundamental examples of epistolary literature to Italy, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* and Ugo Foscolo's *Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis*. However, the evolution of the Italian postal system (concomitantly with developments in the rest of Europe and North America), made the epistolary novel intended for readers of the middle classes more accessible and also more enjoyable, because they could understand not only plot development (often sentimental, as Romani notes, appropriating David Henkin's apt turn of phrase: *Coeur-responding*) but could also accept as familiar (and therefore more realistic) the protocols of letter writing. Romani continues with a fascinating overview of the principal developments of the postal system in Italy, including the myriad self-help books that followed legislation for a government controlled service in May 1862. Other social changes had their effect as well, including the relatively inexpensive rates for mailing newspapers through the peninsula (Romani transcribes a letter from Giovanni Verga who tries to teach his mother to write code words and abbreviations on the address label of newspapers she sends him to avoid incurring further costs in sending personal letters, pp 110–112). Nor does Romani overlook the marketing of the postal system, particularly through annual calendars (reproductions of these from various archives enhance the chapters). She also addresses the proliferation of new periodicals and magazines, intended more often than not for a rapidly increasing female audience. Women were also the principal readers of letter-writing manuals, and in her study of how these evolved and maintained their prominence well into the 20th century, Romani offers a history of postal etiquette.

Having outlined the sociopolitical parameters of letters (writing, sending, receiving, reading), the author continues with a comprehensive study of two writers well known at the end of the century for their epistolary novels: Verga and Matilde Serao. Here too, she is careful to contextualize their work within the growing attention paid to letters in the press. Newspapers and journals increasingly “communicated” with their subscribers through letters to the publisher; some of these appeared in print, along with a reply; some letters invited further response from readers; at times authors were prevailed upon to write a letter specifically

addressed to another author, who would then respond, creating a dialogic exchange which, in appearances, included all the readers, not only the original sender and receiver. The ostensible involvement of the reader made Giovanni Verga's *Storia di una capinera* attractive to the public, if not to critics who received it negatively. However, as Romani eloquently describes in her study, Verga understood the cultural landscape of the time with its new exigencies and desiderata, and in allowing the work to appear first in serialized form letter by letter, he gained for himself an intent audience, eager to find out how the forced entry of a young woman into a convent would unfold. Eager also to read the story again when it subsequently circulated as a volume.

Later in the century, Matilde Serao also inherently understood the value of epistolary fiction. Criticized heavily for writing highly sentimentalized stories, she continued to publish works in which the reported letters had a strong didactic aim; in this seemingly direct dialogue with characters and readers, Serao's position was that her books were not capricious or irresponsible tales of romance, but that, instead, they described situations which refused to "[glamorize] love and its effects on women's lives" (135).

To complement her perceptive critical observations, Romani has enriched her study with number of relevant and interesting letters from late 19th century periodicals, largely forgotten today, but nonetheless important to our understanding of how epistolary literature developed, how it was shaped by and in turn helped shape the tastes of readers in the years following the Unification of Italy.

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Deborah Anderson and Elena Past, editors. *Thinking Italian Animals. Human and Posthuman in Modern and Italian Literature and Film*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. 263. ISBN 9781137454751.

The volume *Thinking Italian Animals. Human and Posthuman in Modern and Italian Literature and Film* is a thought-provoking contribution to the emergent field of animal and posthuman theories applied to the study of both Italian literature and film. It engages with the theoretical conceptualization of nonhuman