a clear indication that intellectual debates were no longer exclusively suited to men and that women were not only consumers of culture, but expressed a visceral desire to engage with the literary world of their time.

Robin has nicely inventoried the material, offered a useful interpretative context, and advanced new interpretations. Perhaps inevitably in a study of such wide scope, the interpretation of historical events is at times a little meagre. Nevertheless, the volume is well thought out and provides valuable springboards for further research within the fields of poetry and of women studies for sixteenth-century Italy.

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Research on Renaissance gardens is rarely life-threatening. It can be in novels, though—especially in the wake of Umberto Eco and Dan Brown. When Adam Strickland, a Cambridge undergraduate, is sent off by his professor to investigate a sixteenth-century garden in Tuscany, he little suspects the cascade of complications that will ensue. Adam discovers that at least two murders (four hundred years apart) have taken place here, and that both can be reconstructed from the clues in the landscape. As he unravels the double mystery, danger closes in. Will the amateur sleuth discover that he himself has been framed?

The Savage Garden is an historical novel of sorts, set in the summer of 1958. The timeless Tuscan setting of olive groves and vineyards is enlivened by references to Domenico Modugno, Krushchev, and the Suez crisis. Italy has just joined the Common Market and the Communists have won a disappointing 22 per cent in the recent national elections. In lieu of an internship at the Baltic Exchange (one more step toward a dreaded career in marine insurance), Adam sets out on his detective mission with the barest textbook knowledge of Italy. Arriving at his pensione in San Casciano with a battered copy of Edith Wharton’s Italian Villas and Gardens and translations of Ovid’s Metamorphoses and Fasti, he sets out to decipher the program of this mannerist garden. Perhaps recalling a recent seminar, he is particularly eager to apply Edgar Wind’s theory of the allegory of love in Botticelli’s Primavera and Birth of Venus to the mystery of the garden: “It’s a new theory, very new,” he confides to his guide, the dark-eyed granddaughter who escorts him through the estate. Their progress through the garden culminates, as may be expected, with occasional reminders of Masaccio’s frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel. Memorably, at one point he tells her, “Whenever I smell sulphur I’ll always think of you” (265).

Mills is familiar enough with Renaissance gardens to have invented a plausible setting for his novel. The Villa Docci, he tells us, was built by Fulvio Montalto, a fictitious apprentice of the real Niccolo’ Tribolo (architect of the Boboli gardens). The patron, Francesco Docci, is an imaginary Florentine banker and contempo-
The library of Cosimo I de' Medici, with similar cultural and political designs (we are told that he entertained Bronzino and Tullia d'Aragona in his salon). From a file supplied by his employer, Adam learns that Docci built the garden in 1577 as a memorial to his dead wife. Its sculptural program at first seems a straightforward illustration of Ovidian myth; but Adam soon discovers a more sinister (if entirely predictable) Dantean subtext. References to Bomarzo, Caprarola, Gambaraia, the Villa d'Este at Tivoli, and other sixteenth-century Italian gardens show that the author has done his research. For the benefit of some readers he plants additional clues, like the professor's parting definition of the garden as a "third nature" (12)—a theory associated with the poet and humanist Jacopo Bonfadio, who may be the uncle of Francesco's unlucky bride.

There are a few minor violations of chronology: struggling with the Italian text of the *Divina commedia*, Adam relies on an old copy of the Dorothy Sayers translation that he finds in a Florentine bookshop (*Purgatory* was first published in 1958 and *Paradise* didn't appear till 1962, completed by Barbara Reynolds). Most phrases in Italian are grammatically correct, though one Italian character uses the [nonexistent] word *sombro* at a critical point.

The Renaissance plot is complicated by another mystery set in the much more recent past. Nazi troops occupying the villa during the Partisan Resistance shot one of the Docci sons; the third floor, scene of the murder, has since been sealed and preserved intact. Having solved the riddle of the secret garden, Adam turns his attention to the story of this crime—to his own peril (during one chase scene he improbably prepares to defend himself with a large book on Renaissance sculpture, perhaps Pope-Hennessy's classic of 1955).

As the plot thickens, the reader is faced with a series of questions: Why are there two orangutan skulls on the library shelf? Was the Docci family somehow involved in the disappearance of Tullia d'Aragona? To what extent did the family collaborate with the occupying Nazi forces? and why did Maria cook the wild boar in chocolate sauce? Although not all of these questions are equally compelling (the detour to the Dutch East Indies is an elaborate ruse), overall the novel is an entertaining example of the academic detective story, a genre where iconography is intriguing and research irresistible.

Through this adventure in Tuscany an indifferent undergraduate successfully avoids a career in insurance by discovering a vocation for scholarship. He may be driven from the garden but finds a way to the ivory tower.

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Lo studio di Fabio Dal Busco sul romanzo storico crea un "ponte" (7) tra l'Ottocento — periodo di massimo sviluppo del genere — e l'ultimo ventennio