uses an article by Giulio Bollati of 1972 as a springboard to criticize ideas of national character advanced by commentators in the past twenty-five years. The collection succeeds in its purpose in stimulating interest in this important subject. Anyone even passingly familiar with Italian history of the last two centuries or other eras of Italy’s rich past, and cognizant of the debates about the Italian natural character, its perceived glories and faults, will find much good material in the essays. On the other hand, bad practices often irritate the reader. Every article uses “I,” “me,” and “my,” sometimes to an excessive degree. This is jarring and draws attention away from the historical material. By contrast, third-person historical narration produces a seamless and enjoyable narrative. Easily available primary sources are sometimes quoted from secondary sources. While there are many English translations of Italian quotes, the original Italian is sometimes given and sometimes omitted; there is no consistency. All the articles demonstrate a flight from chronology, which is unfortunate in a collection interpreting the past of a nation. Life dates of key figures, publication dates of works analyzed, and other useful chronological information are frequently missing, or can only be found after a tedious search in the bibliographies. Full names of major and minor figures are missing and have to be located in the index. Some individual articles in collective works listed in the bibliographies lack pagination. Theory intrudes unnecessarily in a few essays. The primary responsibility for these faults rests with the authors. But the publisher should have provided better editing.

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It must be said straightaway that Giuseppe Mazzotta’s Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment is a dazzling read. Original insights, fresh perspective, and inviting prose combine to make this collection of essays a work that is both provocative and engaging.

First delivered as a series of public lectures, the chapters of Cosmopoieses are essays which treat the common theme of “world-making” as it appears in several different Renaissance texts. Often in counterpoint to the so-called Machiavellian or empirical interpretation of the world, Mazzotta conducts his examination by drawing on the humanist understanding of the power of the imagination to recreate the world. A Vichian critical perspective informs the various analyses, stemming from Vico’s conception of making, or poiesis, which identifies making as innately linked with the imaginative act of creating. Mazzotta reads, and argues for reading, literature in a dialectical relationship with other arts, or, as he says, as part of an “encyclopedic conversation” that encompasses, and responds to, all the fields of human knowledge. With this approach, he is able to go beyond traditional Renaissance paradigms which tend to divide the period according to antagonistic models of making, that is the creative (for example, literary and philo-
sophical) versus the actual (political, historical or scientific).

In *Cosmopoiesis*, these distinctions are investigated as reflections of each other, rather than as competing versions of the world. Specifically, literature is shown to be the domain where possible worlds are created out of a conversation with the arts of power in politics, psychology, science, magic, theatre and literature itself, thereby supplying the necessary vision upon which power can be enacted and history can be made. Turning to such important writers as Poliziano, Ariosto, Campanella, Bacon, Shakespeare and Cervantes, Mazzotta analyzes their unique imaginative design for overstepping the world as it is and ushering in a new order.

The first chapter begins with Poliziano’s *La fabula di Orfeo*, and by contrasting the historical situation (Lorenzo de Medici’s rule after the Pazzi Conspiracy) with the progression of Poliziano’s writing, Mazzotta shows that history is the backdrop against which and for which the poem is written. Illusive and magical powers dominate in the Orpheus myth and therefore counter Neoplatonic claims of an existing rational order in the pastoral world. In this way, Poliziano indicates that the world is a language construct, thereby cautioning Lorenzo as to the unpredictable, topsy-turvy nature of politics. Likewise in chapter two, Ariosto is shown to be warning against the rational view of power, though in *Orlando Furioso* the danger is that the possession of power inevitably leads to madness and violence. *Orlando* criticizes the arrogance of power politics (and solipsistic romance), offering in its place the multi-perspectival and disinterested power of play as a way to erect an ethical model. Continuing in an anti-Machiavellian vein in chapter three, Mazzotta investigates the new utopian discourses of Campanella, Bacon and Shakespeare. In these modern utopias, scientific or esoteric knowledge is cast as the primary means to secure political power and social order. In the final chapter, an analysis of the Clavileño episode in *Don Quijote* puts forward the anti-rational notion that self-delusion can transform into the transcendental vision requisite to good government.

*Cosmopoiesis* is clearly a far-reaching work as it discusses the works of seven central Renaissance writers in four compact essays. However, by focussing on the theme of world-making in the diverse “conversations” of the works, Mazzotta provides thorough examinations of the texts (with the exception of the *Tempest*) and evokes many novel and persuasive ideas. Furthermore, he consistently emphasizes how each of the cosmo-perspectives uses the power of human discourse to create knowledge and ultimately struggle against a factional, power-based politics. Thus, as Mazzotta weaves his thesis in a dialectical manner with a wide range of various arts, he reveals challenges to empirical ideas of invention, as he ultimately argues for a world order in which the seat of power is constantly shifting. The final effect of such compelling interpretations of world-making, however, points beyond the themes themselves. *Cosmopoiesis* awakens us to a new appreciation for this theoretical approach, and, it, therefore, leads us to consider following Mazzotta’s encyclopedic model and to re-read the Renaissance accordingly, in resounding “conversation.”

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