Introduction

The definition, cultivation, and literary application of good taste constitutes a quintessentially eighteenth-century topos, one that drove aesthetic debates over the course of the long eighteenth century, while eliciting essay-length reflections from the likes of Montesquieu in the only article he wrote for the *Encyclopédie*, “Goût” (Thomas 71), which disseminated a précis of half a century’s worth of French pronouncements on the topic.1 Taste became one of the most salient of enlightenment topics, a barometer and index used to determine the quality of a culture and civilization as well as its future vitality. The increasingly nationalistic tone of exchanges over taste among men of letters in France, Italy, and Spain reached a fevered pitch in the late-eighteenth century, eliciting multi-volume literary histories, apologies and genealogies viewed through a national prism.2 In the case of Italy and Spain, both heavily impugned as purveyors of bad taste by a series of French critics in the bridge years of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the stakes of taste as cultural marker and bastion of identity formation rose significantly after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767.3

Plucked from their New World missions and rounded up for expulsion and

1 Other important works on taste include three works by Voltaire: *Temple du goût* (*The Temple of Taste*) 1733; *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (*The Age of Louis XIV*) 1751, and *L’Essai sur les moeurs et l’esprit des nations* (*Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations*) 1756. For Voltaire, good taste was a harbinger of progress and civilization, the goals of the French enlightenment.

2 See Tsien for a discussion of the imaginary history of taste outlined by the French philosophes who sought to demonstrate the hegemony of France’s *Grand siècle*, which had taken up the mantle from Golden Age Greece, Augustan Rome, and Renaissance Florence under the Medici. In the French purview, the continuing upswing of French taste in language and literature depended on the imposition of French models and the ridiculing of the rest. In accordance with Homi Bhabha’s analysis of the creation of national narratives, Tsien notes how “customs of taste” are among the most salient in the construction of “nationness.”

3 To date, the most exhaustive study of the Italian exile of Spanish Jesuits can be found in Guasti, *L’esilio italiano*. 
relocation first in Corsica, still under Genoese rule at the time of expulsion, and subsequently to the Italian peninsula when Corsica became French in 1768 and could no longer house them, 5,000 Jesuits landed on Italian soil. They settled primarily in Liguria, the Veneto, and Emilia-Romagna. Realizing the potential of these Jesuits to tell the history of the New World, Spain made amends to them through the good offices of its ambassador to Italy, José Nicolas de Azara (1730–1804)\(^4\) who brokered pensions for them from the Spanish Crown in exchange for their writing of New World histories. Separated from Spain for some thirty or forty years and thus physically removed from the Spanish language and culture, many of the Jesuits wrote in Italian, the language of their exile; they also sought the favor of the pope. As prolific writers and erudite thinkers, they now participated in an intellectual community within the Italian peninsula that included Italian Jesuits, such as the renowned historian Girolamo Tiraboschi (1731–1794). His role as mediator of Italian culture within Europe as a self-declared objective voice in the debate over taste is echoed in his writings. The adversarial relationship over taste that developed between him and the Spanish Jesuit residing in Genoa post-expulsion, Francisco Xavier Lampillas (1731–1810),\(^5\) known as Saverio Lampillas in Italy, rapidly enlisted any number of stakeholders in the debate. The flashpoint in cultural relations discussed in this article elucidates shifting perceptions of cultural prowess as defined along national lines and the expansion and evolution of the debate within both scholarly and patriotic circles. This article assembles and interprets a set of documents in which the debate rages, infusing the old parameters of the dispute with new rivalries and injuries. These documents are discussed below and include:


\(^4\) For insights into Azara’s life and the cultural and diplomatic relations between Italy and Spain during the second half of the eighteenth century, see de Azara, *Epistolario*.

\(^5\) Francisco Xavier Lampillas became a Jesuit in 1748 and taught rhetoric in Barcelona until the expulsion of the Order from Spain and its territories in 1767. Post-expulsion, he relocated to Italy where he taught theology in Ferrara for many years. Compelled to defend Spanish culture from what he considered to be slanderous works by Girolamo Tiraboschi and Saverio Bettinelli, he wrote his *Saggio storico-apologetico della letteratura spagnola* (1778–1781) in hopes of asserting Spain’s literary prominence.


These documents fully establish the parameters for the unfolding debacle that would become the unfinished business of cultural competition, national hegemony, and comparative literary genius at the end of the eighteenth century, elements of which will become the canon for perennial cultural engagement between Spain and Italy over ensuing decades.

The History and Premises of the Literary Debate Between Lampillas and Tiraboschi/Spain and Italy

The cultural context for the debate that would fully erupt between the Italian Jesuit Girolamo Tiraboschi and Catalan Jesuit Francisco Xavier Lampillas, had been simmering for a long time. By the 1770s it was fed by any number of cultural and religious tensions that were addressed through a full airing in the multivolume works that we are analyzing here (Cian). These tensions included the disputes related to the aesthetic shift from a culture of poetry to a culture of prose in which Italy’s long-standing dominance was called into question; however, the contradictions, mixed loyalties, and hybrid identities that evolved among the many Spanish Jesuits residing in Italy post-expulsion were of no small importance, and are indeed reflected in the debates outlined in this article. In this unfinished business over taste, we note that all of the exchanges taking place are among Jesuits—Italian on the one hand and Spanish on the other. Increasingly called upon by the Spanish crown to contribute to Spanish letters and science despite their Italian exile, the odd status of the Spanish Jesuits vis-à-vis their nation of origin and nation of exile created an impassioned and at times erratic set of reactions in which personal issues of identity and acceptance within the country of exile are played out in the formal and protracted literary debate that we find in these multivolume works. One of the questions that certainly requires more research is the weakening of what was once a transnational Jesuit identity and the rise of a distinctly nationalistic form of Jesuit discourse in which national origin and history would emerge as dominant. Post-expulsion Jesuit scholar

6 “The important scientific and cultural development in Spain in the eighteenth century underlined by [Spanish Jesuit] Juan Andrés continued until the war of the independence and the reign of Ferdinand VII, events that involved a deep crisis in that development. But the roots of the crisis were already present in the
Niccolò Guasti has touched upon these vacillating identity issues, important keys to be applied to a reading of these cultural debates. In the interest of examining how the debate fueled and heightened the unfinished business of cultural competition over taste, we examine the literary arguments made on both sides and their connections with earlier positions.

The Debate: History and Premises

Tiraboschi, ex-Jesuit librarian to the Duke of Modena, was not timid in attributing the decline of Italian literature to Spanish bad taste through a carefully argued encyclopedic text, his *Storia della letteratura italiana*, with a first edition in nine volumes published 1772–1781, and an amplified version published in 16 volumes 1787–1794. Tiraboschi had set out to present the facts about Italian literature in the wake of numerous French attacks decrying the decadence of Italian Baroque letters. The most well-known of the French detractors was Père Dominique Bouhours, author of *La Manière de bien penser sur les ouvrages d'esprit* (1687). The attack had prompted a wide-spread debate in Italy in the first half of the eighteenth century, resulting in a first response by the most widely respected Italian historian in the first half of the eighteenth century, Ludovico Muratori (1672–1750), who countered Bouhours’ coupling of language, literary quality, and national character by demonstrating in his *Della perfetta poesia italiana* (1706) that the Italian language was not to be blamed for the excesses of the baroque, but rather individual authors. He thus rehabilitated Italian and its ongoing potential as a literary language, inviting new generations of writers to excel through the application of good taste. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Italian-Spanish cultural parameters of the debate were further exasperated by the expulsion of the Jesuits, with some 5,000 Spanish Jesuits from 1768 now residing permanently in Italy, where, free (and encouraged) to write, they began to come to terms with their role as cultural agents in a rapidly evolving scenario that called upon them to take a position on cultural, political, and scientific matters. Their role, then, was oddly both marginal and central—marginal to the extent to which they were ex-Jesuits and therefore portrayed in a negative light, while at the same time central in that they were increasingly valued for their perceived ability to definitively defuse the black legend by writing New World histories that placed the projects of colonization and Christianization in a positive light (Guasti, “Catholic Civilization” 285–302). Their knowledge of the New World, coupled with the escalating European reception of their writings, placed them in a unique position with regard to contradictions and insufficiencies of the Spanish Enlightenment and of monarchical absolutism. The expulsion of the Jesuits was a clear manifestation of those contradictions and insufficiencies; one of its results was to deprive Spanish society of an important group of intellectuals active in all branches of the culture, including science. These intellectuals continued to make a contribution to culture and science from their exile in Italy” (Brotóns 390–404).
the Spanish crown, Spanish identity, and the project of colonization. Their status as ex-Jesuits contributed to their odd position at the interstices of marginality and fame in a society that admired their erudition while scorning their reputation. Tiraboschi goes a step further (Distaso). By this time, the legacy of Italian letters had undergone further debasing by what had become the French literary establishment of the *philosophes*. Lampillas lived in Genoa and wrote in Italian. His adoption of a more Italian name is also curious, and should not go unnoticed as a manifestation of his evolving identity. He published a six-volume response, *Saggio storico-apologetico della letteratura spagnola* (1778–1781). The resulting debacle reveals the gamut of fully nuanced reflections about the past, present, and future of the literary production of Italy and Spain, including some surprising allegiances and enlightened literary views.

**The Literary Debate between Girolamo Tiraboschi and Saverio Lampillas**

The literary debate between Girolamo Tiraboschi and Saverio Lampillas was at its heart a dispute over Spain’s supposed corruptive influence on Italian letters. In his *Storia della letteratura italiana*, Tiraboschi argued that after the death of Augustus, the Spaniards Martial, Lucan, and Seneca corrupted Latin eloquence and poetry; he suggested that it was perhaps the climate under which they were born, combined with moral reasons, that had led them to become purveyors of bad taste (Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana* 2: 22). Tiraboschi’s assessment of Lucan, in particular, serves as an ideal, multilayered case for undermining not only Lucan, but also Lampillas. The Catalan Jesuit balked at what he found to be damning praise of Lucan in Tiraboschi’s literary history, citing, as proof, the following passage: “Nè voglio già io negare, che Lucano fosse Poeta di grande ingegno; che anzi ne’ difetti, che noi veggiamo in lui, non cade, se non chi abbia ingegno vivace e fervida fantasia” (“Nor do I wish to deny that Lucan was a poet of great genius, one who certainly would not have fallen into the errors he did, had he not possessed a most vivacious intellect and fervid fantasy”; Lampillas, *Risposta* 40–41). He reminds Tiraboschi in his diatribe that this is only the tip of the iceberg, citing the far more critical evaluation of the poet that would appear further on in Tiraboschi’s *Storia*: “[Q]uasi ogni cosa è mostruosa, e sformata – che non sa parlare se non declama – non sa descrivere se non esagera” (“Almost everything is monstrous, and deformed—Lucan is incapable of speaking without declaiming—incapable of describing without exaggerating”; Lampillas, *Risposta* 40–41). Lampillas goes on to berate Tiraboschi for his references to Lucan’s annoying grandiloquence and repulsive presumptuousness (Tiraboschi, *Lettera* 41). It is easy to read in Tiraboschi’s critique of Lucan an oblique reference to Lampillas, as we have already mentioned. Indeed, Tiraboschi often portrays Lampillas as far too emotional in his assessments to be a worthy intellectual adversary in the debate over taste. In the opening lines of his letter regarding Lampillas’ *Sagio*
*storico-apologetico*, Tiraboschi writes “Ma il Sig. Ab. Lampillas non contento di combattere le mie opinioni, combatte ancora la mia reputazione, e il mio buon nome. Egli mi rappresenta come un dichiarado nimico della Letteratura Spagnuola, che altro non cerca che di screditarla, che raccoglie studiosamente tutto ciò, che possa render ridicoli gli Autori Spagnuoli” (“But the Abbot Lampillas, not satisfied with refuting my opinions, instead attacks my reputation and good name. He portrays me as a declared enemy of Spanish literature, who seeks to do nothing other than discredit it, and who intentionally looks for anything that could make Spanish authors look ridiculous”; Tiraboschi, Lettera 4). To Tiraboschi, Lampillas’ aggressive discourse was clearly a sign of his bad taste. In his letter, he compares Lampillas to another Spanish apologist, Juan Andrés (1740–1817). In 1777, Andrés had published a letter to the Sig. Commendatore Valenti, defending Spain from arguments similar to those of Tiraboschi, but written instead by another Italian Jesuit, the Abbot Saverio Bettinelli (1718–1808). Regarding Andrés, Tiraboschi wrote, “Egli ha mostrato il buon gusto, di cui è fornito, col non accingersi a fare ridicole apologie di certi antichi Scrittori Spagnuoli, che non si possan difendere, se non da chi è lor somigliante” (“He demonstrated the good taste that had been given him, without hastening to make ridiculous apologies of certain ancient Spanish writers who can only be defended by those who most resemble them”; Tiraboschi, Lettera 37). Tiraboschi pays tribute to Andrés for defending Spain with such reasoned and measured arguments. “Io non vo’ dire con ciò, che l’Ab. Andres mi abbia convinto; dico, che la causa degli Spagnuoli non potea difendersi meglio di quel ch’egli ha fatto” (“With this, I don’t want to say that the Abbot Andrés has convinced me—what I am saying is that the Spanish cause could not have been better defended than by him”; Tiraboschi, Lettera dell’Abate Girolamo Tiraboschi 38).

For Tiraboschi, there was a very specific moment in history when bad taste had first been introduced in Italy, a moment whose legacy was still being felt in his time. He wrote that “La Toscana, che era più lontana dagli Stati e di Napoli e di Lombardia da essi dominati, fu la men soggetta a queste alterazioni, come se il contagio andasse perdendo la sua forza, quanto più allontanavasi dalla sorgente” (“Tuscany, which was geographically further removed from Naples, Lombardy, and other states controlled by Spain, was less subject to the effects of bad taste, as if the contagion gradually lost its strength, the further one moved from the source”; Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana* 2: 22). It is interesting to note Italy’s political and geographical divisions. Italy was not a unified and sovereign nation, as was the case for Spain and France. It had to contend with the dangers and repercussions of foreign invasions. It was perhaps for this reason that Tiraboschi found it so important to write his *Storia della letteratura italiana* which Philippe Simon has likened to the writing of an epic in which literature, culture, and science are what constitute the Italian nation. For Tiraboschi, it was high time that an Italian write this history/epic, particularly in the face
of so many French critiques at the end of the seventeenth century (Simon 201). In his preface to the first volume, he opined that while many volumes had been dedicated to the literary history of individual provinces and cities, no one had yet thought to write a general history of Italian literature. It was high time that the Italian peninsula present a unified cultural front to the rest of Europe (Tiraboschi, Storia della letteratura italiana 1: vii–ix); indeed, if there was one thing that was recognized as Italian, it was the literary tradition to which France had paid homage in the sixteenth century, emulating the cultural, linguistic, and literary patrimony of Italy through the ambition of the Pléiade poets who followed in Italy’s footsteps as they established rules for language standardization. Less well known to scholars are the ways in which France continued to adapt Italian literary models in the eighteenth century, as amply documented in the work of Françoise Waquet. Tiraboschi imagines that foreign admirers and imitators of Italian literature might well lament the lack of a single reference work that could stand as a monument to what he clearly sensed was a national tradition at risk of being forgotten or, even worse, supplanted by its many detractors, first French and now Spanish. “Ma certo pare, che gli Stranieri possan dolersi di noi, che in un secolo, in cui la Storia Letteraria si è da noi coltivata singolarmente, niuno abbia ancora pensato a compilare una Storia Generale della Letteratura Italiana” (“It appears certain that foreigners can complain that in a century in which the history of literature has been most uniquely cultivated by us, no one has ever thought to compile a general history of Italian literature”; Tiraboschi, Storia 1: vii). In reality, Tiraboschi’s Storia far exceeds the parameters of a literary history, supplying, instead, a history of literary production, the arts, sciences, language, civilization, and the ancient, erudite populations, i.e., the Etruscans, Greeks and Romans, whose best contributions would form the foundation of Italy’s identity. His multi-volume history also offers detailed accounts of Italy’s academies and cultural institutions. Indeed, Tiraboschi’s agenda is that of writing the history of a nation whose only claim to unity is cultural. He cleverly covers the cultural and literary history of the peninsula from antiquity, as we have stated, through to 1700, avoiding the first half of the eighteenth century which might have been perceived as the most vulnerable.

Tiraboschi’s intent to vet the question of bad taste and its purportedly Spanish origins can be traced not only in the contents of the Storia, as we have shown, but also in the paratextual material to the nine volumes of his work. The most important in this vein are the prefaces to the first and ninth volume (the ninth volume is the last volume in the first edition of his work).

By the time Lampillas published the first volume of his Saggio storico-apologetico in 1778, some four volumes of Tiraboschi’s Storia had already been on the market and their damning critique of Spanish letters had begun to have a deleterious effect. Lampillas read every mention of Spanish letters in Tiraboschi’s Storia as a call to action. True to his title, Lampillas indeed wrote an apology, a very pointed one that was poised to address every passage that he perceived as offensive in Tiraboschi’s Storia, citing his regret that the work
of two men whom he admired greatly, Girolamo Tiraboschi and Saverio Bettinelli, would have to be challenged: “…protesto di scrivere quest’Apologia contro le pregiudicate opinioni, che mostrano di nutrire a disfavore della letteratura degli Spagnoli il Sig. Ab. Girolamo Tiraboschi, e il Sig. Ab. Saverio Bettinelli…” (“I declare that I am writing this Apology in opposition to the biased opinions that Sig. Ab. Girolamo Tiraboschi and Sig. Ab. Saverio Bettinelli appear to cultivate to the detriment of Spanish literature…”; Lampillas, Saggio 1: 4). Lampillas’ preface, however, rapidly justifies the patriotic duty of defending one’s nation by defending one’s literature. He wishes to shed as much light on Spanish literature as Tiraboschi and Bettinelli have shed on Italian literature, “difendendo i nostri Scrittori da chi pregiudicato contro il loro merito ha offuscatà non poco la loro gloria” (defending our Writers from those who, having assessed their worth unfairly, greatly obscure their renown”; Lampillas, Saggio 1: 6). Lampillas, however, immediately slides into a litany of offenses to the Spanish nation that had accumulated over the course of the empire’s existence, alluding to the specter of the black legend that was evoked time and time again in anything written about Spain. As a Spaniard, he feels obliged to respond:

Ma quando viene attaccata l’intera Nazione, quando l’ignoranza, o la barbarie si vogliono far credere universali; quando si spaccia come forza di clima il cattivo gusto nelle scienze, nessuno tema di essere tacciato di pregiudicato, o troppo parziale, se muove la penna in difesa della Patria; sarebbe bensì degno di biasimo chi non ardisse di opporsi a tali pregiudizi, accrescendo nuova forza col silenzio alla sfavorevole opinione della patria letteratura (But when the entire Nation is maligned, when it is said that ignorance or barbarism is widespread, when bad taste in the sciences is explained as a result of climate, no one fears being charged with being biased or too partial, and the pen is taken up in defense of the Nation; he who felt no compulsion to oppose such prejudice would indeed be worthy of blame for allowing the unfavorable opinion of the nation’s literature to fester and grow; Lampillas, Saggio 1: 6)

Lampillas also mentions two other Spanish Jesuits, who wrote, like himself, in support of Spanish literature; one in particular, Juan Andrés, mentioned earlier in this study, had garnered the respect of Italian ex-Jesuits as well as apologists of Lampillas’ ilk. Andrés was expelled from Spain in 1767. He travelled to Italy, settling first in Ferrara and later in Mantua, where he would establish a career as a scholar of some renown. He was known for a seven-volume history of world literature, Dell’origine, progressi e stato attuale d’ogni letteratura (On the Origin, Progress and Present State of All Literature [1782–1799]), of which the first volume, published in 1782, had the greatest impact throughout Europe. Andrés was interested in literary historiography, and the recognition of the aesthetic perfection of all civilizations (Dainotto 7–29). His work demonstrates the ability to evaluate objectively literary sources in
the interest of discovering how literature, which he considers written culture, emerged and evolved over time.

Instead, Lampillas’ rewriting of literary genealogies in his Saggio storico-apologetico realized Tiraboschi’s greatest fears about a one-upmanship form of reasoning:

A nessuna delle straniere Nazioni (toltane la Greca) debbe tanto l’antica Letteratura Romana, quanto alla Nazione Spagnuola [P. II. p. 3.] In Ispagna furono coltivate le arti e le Scienze prima che in Italia (Ivi p. 5.). In nessun tempo poté Roma chiamar barbaro la Spagna; potè bensì questa per molti secoli chiamar barbaro Roma (Ivi p. 12.). La Lingua Latina debbe agli Spagnuoli l’essersi conservata men rozza nel secolo d’Augusto (There is no other foreign nation (with the exception of Greece) to which ancient Roman literature owes as much as it does to the Spanish Nation. In Spain the arts and the sciences were cultivated before they were in Italy. At no time could Rome call Spain barbarous; rather, it was Spain that for many centuries, could call Rome barbarous. If the Latin language was preserved in a more refined form in the century of Augustus, it is thanks to the Spaniards; Tiraboschi, Lettera 37–38).

Tiraboschi abhorred Lampillas’ reasoning and to being targeted as an enemy of the Spanish nation. He had asked scholars to respond to his work so that he could correct mistakes in the interest of presenting the literary and cultural history of the Italian peninsula (Casari 69). In his preface to volume nine, he asked Lampillas why he had not used his intellect to demonstrations the genius of Spanish authors, rather than applying it to painting him, Tiraboschi, as the enemy of Spain:

Perchè invece di fingersi in me un nemico de’ suoi concittadini, e invece di credere, o almen di affermare ch’io avea diretta, per quanto pareva, la mia Storia a disonorar gli Spagnuoli, non ha egli impiegato il suo felice talento a far conoscere all’Italia, quanto la sua Nazione sia degna della stima de’ dotti, e quanti uomini in ogni genere di sapere chiarissimi abbia prodotti? Io sarei stato il primo a far plauso al suo amor patriottico, e mi sarei unito con lui a celebrare que’ celebri geni che la Spagna ci ha prodotti (Instead of making me out to be an enemy of his compatriots, and instead of believing, or at the very least, claiming that I had apparently written my History to discredit the Spaniards, why did he not employ his exceptional talent to making Italy aware of just how deserving his Nation is of the respect of intellectuals, of just how many illustrious men, in every field of study, Spain has produced? I would have been the first to applaud his

7 Tiraboschi corresponded extensively with other scholars, seeking their input for both the first and second editions of his Storia. Most of this correspondence is unpublished, but is certainly worthy of study to determine the extent to which his colleagues’ input informed his writing.
patriotic zeal, and I would have joined him in celebrating those renowned geniuses that Spain has produced; Tiraboschi, *Storia* 9: ix)

Tiraboschi asked if he was supposed to ignore what others before him had said about literary decadence, wondering, ironically, if he should have written about the prominent Inquisition figures Torquemada, Tostado e Casafages, in his literary history, thereby placing himself and his *Storia* under investigation before the Spanish tribunal for having discredited the Spanish nation:

…”Ma che io…non dovessi dire ciò che tanti anche fra gli stranieri hanno detto, che dall'Italia si è sparso nelle altre province d'Europa quel germe della buona letteratura, il quale si copiosi frutti ha prodotto; che dovessi intorno alla patria di alcuni scrittori seguire quella opinione che a me paresse o falsa, o dubbiosa; che mi si dovesse imputare di delitto se io ripetessi ciò che della decadenza della letteratura e della corruzione del buon gusto avean prima di me affermato cent'altri scrittori; che'io dovessi nella *Storia* della Letteratura Italiana far l'elogio del Card. Torquemada, del Tostato e del P. Cassafages; come potea io crederlo, come potea sospettare che io dovessi perciò essere tratto quasi in giudizio innanzi al tribunale della Nazione Spagnuola, ed accusato come autore di un'opera diretta principalmente a creditarla? (…But that I…shouldn’t say what many others have already said, including foreigners, that from Italy, that seedling of good literature, spread to the other provinces of Europe, where it has produced such copious fruit; that I should have followed an opinion about the patria of some writers that to me seemed false or questionable; that I should consider myself a criminal if I were to repeat what a hundred other writers have said about literary decadence and good taste; that I should praise Card. Torquemada, Tostato, and Cassafages in my History of Italian Literature; how could I believe it, how could I have known that for this reason I should almost be brought to judgment before the tribunal of the Spanish nation, and accused as the author of a work whose principal intent was to discredit it?; Tiraboschi, *Storia* 9: x)

Tiraboschi adds that fortunately, many other Spaniards have judged his work worthy of recognition by the Royal Academy of History in Madrid:

Io però ho avuto un troppo dolce e onorevol conforto al dispiacere che mi ha recato il soverchio amor patriottico del Sig. Ab. Lampillas e ne’ sentimenti, co’ quali alcuni de’ più dotti spagnuoli si son dichiarati intorno al merito di questa contesa, e nella per me troppo onorevole accoglienza, che la Reale Accademia di Storia di Madrid si è degnata di fare alla mia *Storia* da me trasmessale, perchè in ciò ella avesse una testimonianza della mia stima per quella si illustre adunanza, e per tutta quella Nazione, della cui Letteratura essa è in certo modo arbitra e Legislatrice (However, the displeasure that Sig. Ab. Lampillas’ excessive patriotic love has brought upon me has been all too sweetly and honorably soothed through the sentiments expressed by some of the most learned Spaniards with regard to this dispute, and, in my estimation, the all too honorable reception that the
Royal Academy of History in Madrid has deigned itself to grant to my History, which I had sent to them so that they might possess a token of my esteem for their most illustrious assembly and for that entire Nation, over whose literature they somehow operate as arbiter and Legislator. Tiraboschi, *Storia* 9: x

Despite the recognition he has received by this illustrious body of scholars, Tiraboschi is all too aware of the strides that Lampillas’ harsh critique of him and his work as antagonistic to the Spanish nation has made in Spain through Josefa Amar y Borbón’s (1749–1833) heavily annotated Spanish translation of Lampillas’ *Saggio apologetico*. It should be noted that Josefa Amar y Borbón was no casual translator for this kind of work. She came from a highly educated family and had been taught Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English and would become the renowned author of numerous short-prose works on Letters and Humanities that contributed to the flowering of the Spanish essay at the end of the eighteenth century (Chavez Tesser 12–13). Her translation of Lampillas launched her career, making her a sought-after translator for other Italian works as well. The prologues she wrote to both editions of the Lampillas translation in 1782 and 1789 respectively reveal a thoroughly developed critical and political approach to the work. And while she undertook the translations as an act of loyalty and service to her country, she was fully aware of the role the translation would play in her ambition to advance her literary career. Indeed, she treads a very fine line as she points out those elements that might be judged as infelicities in the translation, i.e., repetitions (from which she exonerates herself to state that she had to follow the author’s use of terminology), as well as the need, at times, to depart from the text to render certain ideas better. Yet, the timing of the decision to translate Lampillas’ work in 1782, with a second, improved edition only seven years later in 1789 cannot be overlooked: it corresponds precisely to the dates in which the Spanish crown decided that the negative image of the Spanish Empire in the three geographical volumes of the *Encyclopédie méthodique* (published between 1782 and 1788) needed to be corrected in a Spanish translation, the *Encyclopedia metodica*, whose first volume appeared in 1788. The call for responses to French geographer Masson de Morvilliers who penned the damning article “Espagne” and the many answers written by the likes of Forner and Cavanilles, placed her and her work among the illustrious ranks of these erudite defenders of the Spanish nation. She was fully engaged in supporting the project of pro-Spanish propaganda that the Crown had solicited from the ex-Jesuits in Italy who were encouraged to write New World histories that placed Spain in a positive light. The telling of literary

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8 Among the Spaniards that held Tiraboschi in high esteem, one can certainly count Spain’s ambassador to Italy, José Nicolas de Azara and Pedro Rodríguez, the Count of Campomanes, who was made director of the Royal Academy of History in 1764 and President of the Council of Castile in 1783.
history from a Spanish perspective had also been folded into this propagandistic project, with Juan Andrés’ meditation on the status of literature as cultural history (Guasti, “Il tema americano” 429).  

My only intention is to make known to the public the small benefit of translating into our language what the Author, for his own reasons, has written in Italian. I do not deny that there are many in this kingdom who understand Italian, and certainly better than I do; but the fact that many others do not understand it is enough to make this translation worthwhile, so that by this means a work that brings honor to our Nation is circulated. This desire, however profound it may be in those who possess true feelings of love for the glory of their Homeland, would have been fruitless in me had I not found in this work, a measure of self-restraint that is typically uncommon in Apologetic works; Amar y Borbón, “Prólogo de la Traductora”

While there were many Spaniards who knew Italian and could read Lampillas’ original work, Josefa’s Spanish translation certainly allowed it to reach a wider audience and therefore increased its propagandistic potential. Her claim to have been attracted to the work’s moderate stance hints at the controversy over what for Tiraboschi were Lampillas’ strident declarations, substantiated more by personal injury than authoritative evidence. Indeed, Josefa Amar y Borbón may have also been more motivated to translate this work thanks to its inclusion of Spanish women writers, which she expands in an appendix to the fourth volume in a discussion that compares Italian women scholars, in particular the renowned Bolognese anatomist, Laura Bassi, with Spanish women who, she argued, were of no lesser fame. In her prelogue, she signals to women readers that they will certainly want to read her translation of Lampillas for the content on erudite women, of which she

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9 Juan Andrés’ Dell’origine, progressi e stato attuale d’ogni letteratura (On the Origin, Progress and Present State of All Literature) was published in seven volumes between 1782 and 1799. His brother Carlos later translated the work into Spanish and it was published in ten volumes between 1784 and 1806. As the title suggests, Andrés’ Dell’origine discussed the origins of literature, including the fundamental role that Arab literature played in the development of European literature. For an excellent article on Andrés’ Arabist Theory and his attack on Franco-centrism and Universal Reason, see Dainotto.
most certainly considers her own contributions as worthy of note as well (Lopez-Cordón Cortezo 324–341).

Her name figures prominently on the frontispiece as the “traductora” and the dedication to another woman, Doña Luisa de Borbon, Princesa de Asturias, “Protectora de los libros y de la nación Española” lends even further authority to her voice. It would take a close textual analysis of the Italian original and the Spanish translation plus the translator’s additions to determine whether the moderate tone may have been implemented by the translator herself to counterbalance Lampillas’ tendency to rail against Tiraboschi. It is clear in any case that engaging the highly regarded woman of letters Josefa Amar y Borbón as translator raised the status of Lampillas’ work considerably, lending greatly to its dissemination and popularity as reported in the correspondence of ex-Jesuit Filippo Salvatore Gilij in his letter of February 14, 1787. Gilij tells Tiraboschi how the Consul in Amsterdam had explained the success of the work in Spain: “Diede quindi ad intendere, che la voga in Spagna avuta dall’opera del Lampillas era tutta proceduta dalla traduzione Spagnuola fattane da una Dama di quella nazione” (“He intimated that the popularity of Lampillas’ work in Spain was predicated upon the Spanish translation of it that had been done by a woman from that nation”; Gilij, Filippo Salvatore Gilij to Girolamo Tiraboschi 14 February 1787). The involvement of Josefa Amar y Borbón in Lampillas’ apologetic work adds yet a further dimension to the intriguing question of taste as debated across Italian-Spanish lines. It reveals a subtle class-based division between Italian speakers who clearly belonged to Spain’s erudite governing class and the broader target audience of Josefa’s Spanish translation. This will be evident later on in our discussion regarding Azara and Campomanes’ admiration for Italian erudition.

The correspondence between Tiraboschi and Filippo Salvatore Gilij, an Italian Jesuit who left Italy for Spain at the age of 19, and later traveled to South America where he would spend nineteen years in the Orinoco Valley as a missionary, is particularly relevant to the growing politicization of the question of taste among Italians and Spaniards. The letters that Gilij wrote to Tiraboschi following his return to Italy post-expulsion in 1768 pointedly address the debate within a post-Jesuit framework. Dated between December 22, 1785, and February 2, 1788, the letters take up a series of issues that had long fueled the various constituencies both within Italy and Spain; they reflect the renewed vehemence characterizing the debate in the last decades of the eighteenth century, when the Spanish empire was increasingly under attack by the *philosophers*, as demonstrated in the Nicolas Masson de Morvilliers controversy.

One of the hallmarks of these letters is the evident bond between Gilij and Tiraboschi. For Gilij, Tiraboschi is both a mentor and a friend, a fellow Jesuit and Italian in whom he can confide. In a way, their bond was strengthened by the redrawing of national identities that occurred post
expulsion, and by a feeling of national solidarity that permeates the works of Tiraboschi and Lampillas. On November 16, 1785, Gilij wrote:

> L’antica fratellanza, l’onore di essere stato anch’io membro quantunque indegno del ceto cospicuo de’ Gesuiti, suppliscono a que’ meriti, che io non considero in me; e mi dan fiato per ripeterle di bel nuovo con sincerissimo cuore le più vive congratulazioni per la sua Storia; la qual opera solamente ho letto sinora, e a cui subito mi associat nell'edizione fattane nuovamente in Roma…Io ne restai estremamente pago, si per l’amore alla nostra Italia da Lei bravamente illustra, si per la sua erudizione, si per l’eloquenza non tediosa, si per la precisione opportuna de’ suoi racconti, si per altre innumerabili doti, che vi consideri e che insieme con meco vi scorgono tutti quelli, a cui Iddio fece la grazia di avere in fronte due occhi. (Our long standing brotherhood, the honor of having myself been an undeserving member of the eminent class of the Jesuits, endow me with so many attributes that I hardly consider to be my own; and they give me the energy and incentive to reiterate with you, once again, with a most sincere sentiment, the most heartfelt congratulations for your History; I have read your work in its current form, and have subscribed to the new edition of it that is being published in Rome…I found it to be extremely gratifying, for the love that you so expertly demonstrated for our Italy, for the erudition of your work, for its lively eloquence, for the happy precision of its narration, and for its countless qualities, which are evident to me and perceived as well by everyone who has been fortunate enough to experience the God-given grace of having been created with two eyes below their brow; Gilij, Filippo Salvatore Gilij to Girolamo Tiraboschi 16 November 1785)

The escalating nature of the debate is evident in Gilij’s letter dated December 22, 1785, in which the cultural strife between Italy and Spain is told through the Tiraboschi – Lampillas texts.

> Se non che io dalla lettura di tutta la sua Storia ben rilevo, oltre altre doti la sua prudenza, della quale ha voluto usare combattendo con avversari, che credevano da Lei intaccato l’onore della loro nazione. Ma sono persuassissimo, che se questo non fosse stato il motivo, ella avrebbe messo egregiamente in ridicolo chi le contradisse. (If there is one thing that I have learned from reading your History in its entirety, in addition to its many virtues, it is the great restraint that you have deliberately applied in fighting adversaries who believed that you had blemished the honor of their nation. However, I am thoroughly persuaded that if restraint had not been your guide, you would have easily ridiculed those who had contradicted you; Gilij, Filippo Salvatore Gilij to Girolamo Tiraboschi 22 December 1785)

Gilij’s mention of unnamed adversaries who believed that Tiraboschi had blemished the honor of their nation brings to mind Lampillas’ accusation that Tiraboschi’s *Storia* had done nothing more than blame Spain for Italy’s literary and cultural decline. Gilij wrote, “L’avversario è ben noto a tutti, ed è
solo. Dovea esser trattato, com’egli senza vergogna ha trattato spesso anche noi” (“The adversary is well known to everyone, and he is alone. He needed to be treated as he too has often and brazenly treated us”; Gilij, Filippo Salvatore Gilij to Girolamo Tiraboschi 22 December 1785).

On February 14, 1787, Gilij makes an even more pointed reference to Saverio Lampillas as he likens the debacle to a most imprudent war waged by Lampillas in his “apologetic tomes,” a war he states, for which there appears to be no end in sight, since he had heard, apparently from Lampillas himself, that two more volumes were in the making:

Io lo dissuasi più volte sin dal principio, ma inutilmente. Credetti, in occasione di essermi giunta lettera dal nostro Console in Amsterdam, persona letterata e di merito, in cui disappirova il troppo fuoco delle apologie suddette, di rinnovargli le mie premure, con riferirgli anche il parere di quel Console, ma tutto in danno; poiché in difesa sua, e in biasimo di lui mi rispose con una lettera voluminosissima a segno, che d’indi in poi ho seco interrotto ogni commercio di lettere. Egli è uomo inconvincibile. Mi par che dicesse inconvertibile. (From the very beginning, I tried to discourage him numerous times, but it was futile. Having received a letter from our Consul in Amsterdam, a well-educated person of esteem, in which he expressed disapproval of the all too fiery tones of Lampillas’ abovementioned apology, I thought it prudent to urge him to consider his position again, with reference to the opinion of that Consul, but it was all for naught, since in his own defense, and to his discredit, he answered me with a most voluminous letter on the topic, and from that moment on I have interrupted all epistolary commerce with him. He is a stubborn man whom we might even call intransigent; Gilij, Filippo Salvatore Gilij to Girolamo Tiraboschi 14 February 1787)

Gilij goes on to critique the structural weaknesses of Lampillas’ work, i.e., prolixity and repetition of the same arguments volume after volume. He wonders why the Catalan Jesuit did not just write a literary history of Spain instead of engaging in the relentless “tit for tat” exercise that had become the Apologetic Essay (Gilij, Filippo Salvatore Gilij to Girolamo Tiraboschi 14 February 1787).

Gilij’s running epistolary commentary on the Tiraboschi-Lampillas debacle culminates in the relating of a significant anecdote that highlights the drawing of lines across Spain and Italy with the high ranking and erudite ministerial and diplomatic class, all of whom express an appreciation for the quality of Tiraboschi’s reasoning and disdain for Lampillas’ clearly inferior scholarly effort as seen above in the commentary of the Consul of Amsterdam that Gilij referenced.

Abbiamo scoperto gran campo per la futura Storia, alla quale a suo tempo potrà inserirsi questo pregevolissimo aneddoto. Lunedì 22 del corrente mi portai dal Sig. Don Nicola Azara Ministro di Spagna e dopo aver seco discorso della mia traduzione Spagnuola della mia Storia, da lui
The unfinished business of bad taste is in many ways merely a veneer for the unfinished business of any number of historical events that were retracing religious, political, and national boundaries and identities in the long eighteenth century. Against Spain’s unified, albeit waning empire, Italy could only produce a cultural challenge in the form of a paper empire built on the moral high ground of self-conscious good taste. One cannot help but notice that the polemics of the unfinished business of literary taste in the early modern period were distinctly Jesuitic in nature. For it was the French Jesuit Dominique Bouhours who cast the first stone against Italian literary taste, creating a genre and a form of discourse that resonated with other Jesuits, namely Girolamo Tiraboschi and Saverio Lampillas. For them, the stakes of writing literary history had become too high to be ignored in a context where textual representations of the nation, its cultural capital, and even its sense of taste could be constantly renegotiated and circulated widely.

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