

Introduction

Roberta Cimarosti and Flavio Gregori
(Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

The articles gathered in this issue of *English Literature* originate from a project on the representation of Italy and its culture in the literature, cinema and theatre of the former British colonies and settler colonies (“La rappresentazione dell’Italia e della sua cultura nel cinema e nel teatro delle ex-colonie britanniche, le *settler colonies*, e in opere letterarie di scrittori post-coloniali anglofoni”), funded by the Italian National Research Projects Programme (‘Progetti di Ricerca di Interesse Nazionale’) and carried out in the University of Turin and at Ca’ Foscari University, Venice. In particular, they are the results of the project’s final conference that was held in Venice in October 2013. The conference, entitled *Italy through Postcolonial Eyes*, saw the presence of several scholars in English, Italian and Postcolonial studies, of writers and journalists, including Maaza Mengiste, Igiaba Sciego and Paola Pastacaldi.¹ The articles submitted to this journal went through peer reviewing, in accordance with the journal’s policy, except for the opening chapter by the poet and scholar Chris Zithulele Mann, which was the conference keynote lecture and was revised by the present editors, in collaboration with Mr Mann himself, and the final article by Paola Pastacaldi, which comprises the author’s personal reflections on the Italian colonial enterprise in Africa with regard to her own two novels, *Khadija* and *L’Africa non è nera* (Africa is not Black).

The two main points at issue in the conference were the ways in which Italy has been interpreted through the eyes of contemporary postcolonial literature in English, and Italy’s present postcolonial moment. The former has a well-established tradition in Italy, mainly thanks to the pioneering work done by university research groups that have contributed to interpret and spread both Anglophone postcolonial literature and its sophisticated, revolutionary theoretical thought from the late 80s to our days. The latter point at issue, Italy’s present postcolonial moment, has been brought into focus in more recent times, thanks to the convergence of three main efforts: the work done by scholars of Italian literature and culture based

¹ See the following video interviews: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CM2zgS32pgs>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke31U3pQxLE>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrfTN1Ag61U> (2017/05/08).

outside of Italy; the new trans-disciplinary research, carried out in Italy and including sociology, anthropology, history, cultural history and literary criticism, which looks at today's Italy through the lenses of established postcolonial theory and discovering a whole latent 'Italian postcolonial paradigm' in the works of Italian philosophers, writers and literary critics; and a new postcolonial literature produced in Italy today by both writers who have a biographical colonial legacy and by writers interested in drawing Italy's postcolonial life. For the first time in Italy, those two points at issue have brought to the foreground the crucial question of how these two traditions may or should dovetail to help us see the wider than national terrain of postcolonial Italy.

Peoples and cultures are the body and soul of a nation, and thrive beyond all the ideologies of nationhood that establish the idea of the nation-state. Not only are a nation's people and culture always manifold and plural, but they spontaneously cross paths, interweave with external cultures and people that impact upon them in chaotic ways, sometimes, if not often, in violent circumstances, after which they coalesce in a normal condition of value-sharing, and of composite continuities. As a result, a nation-state enlarges its boundaries by embracing a wider cultural space that may talk in multifarious languages. It is a space of double translation, because it is made up by the ways foreign visitors have come to understand themselves on a foreign soil by reading it through their own eyes and by articulating it in their own mother tongue; and because, on the other hand, through their language the visitors enlarge the local insight upon 'one's country'. For Italy, they constitute the deeper and truer sense of what Italians are and, finally, of what it means to be one entity, as one and plural.

This issue of *English Literature*, thus, contains precious insights that open up the scenario of a trans-cultural Italy that has been living and thriving over the centuries and needs now to be fully acknowledged. With a slight twist on the adjective, which will be explained below, it can be defined as a 'postcolonial Italy'. Yet, this does not depend so much on the fact that the paradigms of postcolonial theory, as developed in Anglophone studies in relation to Britain's ex-colonial world from the late Eighties (and ideologically rooted in French philosophical thought), have finally landed upon the Italian soil in order to be applied to Italian literature and culture. Rather, the label 'postcolonial Italy' indicates that Italians can now look at their own country with the awareness that its cultural complexity has always exceeded national boundaries for the following basic reasons:

- a. it includes moments in history that are not properly 'Italian' because they long precede national unification (typically the 'Italy' of the ancient Romans, or the 'Italy' of Dante and of the Renaissance);
- b. it includes countries of migration that extended the ideas of Italy and its very territory in the very years of the unification of the

- country: e.g. the floods of migrants, about twenty-seven thousand, that left Italy soon after it became a nation, taking with them the cultures of the regions where they had lived and that would be cultivated overseas; or, in the early decades of the Twentieth Century, the many colonial migrants who settled in the Italian colonies in the horn of Africa;
- c. it includes forms of exile, physical and intellectual, that shaped Italian identity, when it was still in embryo and in its infancy: e.g. Garibaldi's South American exiles and returns to 'Italy' to help unify the country and emblematically settling down in the isle of Caprera; the writers of the Resistance period who, as a way to reject the Fascist regime and its German affiliation, embraced Anglophone literatures and even thought of writing in English, like Beppe Fenoglio or Luigi Meneghello, who moved to Britain, founded an important department of Italian Studies at the University of Reading and continued writing about Italy from a distance, a condition that he defined with the neologism *dispatrio*, which brings with itself the idea of a 'dispersed' homeland;
 - d. it includes that space of 'translation' described before, which has been created by writers who have lived, or still live, in Italy at special moments in the history of our country and of their own homeland, and who have articulated their feelings in relation to both countries, thus engendering a form of belonging that includes Italy, and whose terrain is solidly shaped in their writings.

It is worth saying that one relevant aspect of this 'translational space' includes the writings by representative Italian literati like Giuseppe Ungaretti, who played a prominent role in defining Italian literary identity and whose multiple belonging is seldom considered. In this particular instance, we hardly know that Ungaretti only came to Italy as a 24-year-old man to fight in the trenches of World War I with the declared purpose that his participation in the war would make him become fully Italian and so re-join the motherland that his parents had left when they migrated to Egypt, where his father would work in the construction of the Suez Canal.

This wide geographical, memorial and literary space that has long formed a 'postcolonial Italy' we have yet until today failed to acknowledge. As the last two essays contained in this issue clearly claim, the full recognition and the collective knowledge of this too fragmentarily known postcolonial Italy is the *sine qua non* to understand today's migration. Italians still largely ignore, for instance, that the Africans who so dramatically come to our shores may be escaping from Italy's ex-colonial territories, or that African countries were artificially created by European decisions causing ethnic conflicts and civil wars, and that dictators in Africa were often set in place to serve European countries' interests. On a more general basis,

what we still fail to acknowledge is that Italy is geographically close to Africa and the respective peoples interwove and mixed up during colonial times even against Fascist racial laws, for the simple reason that a likeness appeared to be evident when they started to live together.

Therefore, the articles composing this issue are of two different types. Some delineate the principles that constitute postcolonial Italy (Mann, Ponzanesi-Polizzi, Pastacaldi); the others analyse the ways Italy has been seen through the eyes of Anglophone postcolonial writers (Badin, De Angelis, Fazzini, Voss, Concilio, Della Valle) and, therefore, the very special form of hybridisation that takes place through the encounter of these 'postcolonial Italies' and their readings.

Chris Zithulele Mann's opening article, "The Poetry of Belonging: Episodic Memory and Italian and South African Shades", presents the way in which South African and Italian cultures join and come together by forming a deep relationship, a terrain made of cultural interconnections and individual memories, itself becoming a hybrid place of belonging. This complex space that Mann lays before us is grounded on three main layers of experience and is composed of different temporalities. First, Mann retrieves and thoroughly examines five main aspects of the Italian tradition – language, accounting, religion, war and poetry – which deeply impact upon Zulu culture and daily life in South Africa, determining social development policies and their application. Then, he narrates autobiographical episodes in which he directly experienced each one of the above-mentioned aspects both in South Africa and in Italy. Finally, he turns each one of those episodes into a poem that recapitulates the overall experience. 'Language' is the first aspect of Italian culture that Mann describes as having a crucial impact on South African life. The focus of his attention is the Greek-Latin component of the English language, whose command allows people to efficiently write a formal report, therefore to account for the allocation and management of economics. Having access to the abstract and scientific lexicon and to the syntax forms stemming from Latin and Greek entitles one to master a complex situation, as well as to direct it to pragmatic goals. Italian, having this Greek-Latin structures and mechanisms at core, partakes in the dynamics of large scale societies ruling today's globalised world, in contrast with small scale societies – mostly those of ex-colonised countries – which only can plod slowly after them, also due to the fact that they cannot use the speedy means of a global lingua franca. An episode Mann uses to exemplify this linguistic aspect of the Italian-South African interaction is a meeting of the Valley Trust board to make the point on a water pipe supply project, whose funds had been allocated by an international Christian organisation, after two years of severe drought afflicting the local population, until then using the labour of women carriers to bring water from the spring to the villages. One lesson that Mann wants to bring to our attention is that writers must always be aware of their function in

cultivating the crucial linguistic terrain joining the local and the global together, by grounding the use of a large-scale-society language to local usage, yet remaining rooted in one's country's life and vernacular sources. The English language, just as the pipe water supply in the aforementioned episode, may then be turned to collective use when its local rootedness is made accessible to everyone as a 'lingua franca' through which life is made easier and fully satisfying one's practical needs. This seems to be the very conclusion drawn in Mann's poem, "Taps", which closes this section and stages an exchange between a shopkeeper selling a 'tap' and his customer: "You want a tap? | *Plonk* - that's it, friend".

'Accounting' is the second aspect tackled by Mann's essay. It concerns the invention of the double entry bookkeeping in early Renaissance Italy to serve the needs of large scale trading, particularly in Genoa and Venice, where the first book on this subject was published by Luca Pacioli in 1494. The invention proved to be "a cognitively powerful instrument" that prompted the diffusion of a financial lingua franca through which all commercial enterprises were conceived and accounted for. It brought about a knowledge that proved to be the key for the development of commerce in the Mediterranean trading area and then on a global scale, and that penalised the societies that did not know or did not use it but relied on a barter-based mentality and exchanges, with the consequence that the new system overwhelmed and absorbed them, for the simple reason that all forms of the economy started to be understood and translated into the terms of the new knowledge in which the previous values did not count anymore. The episode Mann uses to describe the impact of such an economic knowledge upon the South African community of the Valley is a road construction project in which the Valley board, including Mann himself, had to write an executive project complete with its estimated costs. Two projects were prepared, one in which machines were used to do the physical work and one in which man labour would be used, the former proving more convenient but the latter more valuable in terms of social employment and monetary distribution. The former, however, was approved and budgeted according to the economic 'ratio' responding to "global accounting standards" which all the funding and institutional authorities in charge relied on. The poem closing this section beautifully shows the irrational result of such rationalisation of costs. It is the common people that pay for it, who cannot afford owning or using vehicles that would run on the finally built road: "And rain has scalloped its ruts and corrugations in the gravels, | [...] but trucks and taxis | are grinding slowly up the curves crowded with people and heaped | with sacks of mealie-meal, bags of oranges, door-frames, | paraffin tins and mattresses".

The third aspect is the religious notion of the 'fellowship of the saints', the *communio sanctorum* established by the Catholic Church which become a syncretic religious practice in South Africa, where it is joined to

Xhosa and Zulu beliefs. It is a community composed of all the believers in hope and love, including the three categories of faithful people, of repenting souls and of saints living in a blessed realm of the spirit. The exemplifying episode that Mann describes is a funeral ceremony for the father of a local school teacher, whose grandfather had implanted the Catholic religion in that region, mingling it with Xhosa and the local beliefs. The episode makes the reader enter a place where, in spite of the fact that the absurdly inhuman laws of Apartheid outrageously divide people, people can meet on a common ground of deeply shared values that consist in a collective belief in a spiritual life joining the dead and the living. This is a rarefied terrain inhabited by “shades”, signposted by traces and fragmentary memories, and whose understanding is tentative and relying on the faith of finding a meaning for them, “a clustering of hints, a presence of clues”, mapped out by the poem concluding this section.

The fourth aspect is ‘war’ and, more extensively, violence as the disruptive consequence of the negative emotions that colonise our inner life, the *terra incognita* that is at the centre of this section, its dynamics involving our emotional and psychic life that is found out to be as cruel and as devastating in both South African and Italian history and societies. The episode exemplifying this aspect is the writer’s visit to the Italian family living in the countryside of Cavarzere, in the Veneto region, who saved his father’s life at the end of World War II. Here, by the Adige river, “signora Angelina” narrates two parallel episodes that opened and closed that war in opposite yet identical ways, in which members of the same community killed each other in the name of the ideals they were fighting for. The Fascists shot some Partisans and threw their bodies into the river; Partisans did the same as a revenge when the war ended. The story reminds Mann of Canto 12 of Dante’s *Inferno* describing the souls of the violent that are punished in a river of boiling blood, the Phlegethon, which Dante and Virgil compare to similarly ragged and slippery banks of the Adige river. It is a turning-point moment, in which Mann absorbs World War II and his father’s experience in his own inner life, as if the vividness of the connection made through Dante had made it substantial, concretely visible and understandable also in terms of the widespread violence of abuse experienced in his South Africa – as if violence could now be seen as something that sadly unifies the two countries. The concluding poem, “In a Field in Italy”, crystallises this moment of high awareness and the fact that it materialises into a piece of common ground where the writer now stands, feeling at home: “The trees are as in his diary. [...] | I’m standing in a field in Italy | trying to grasp what’s happening. The heat off the soil [...] | beats into my face as at home”.

The fifth and last aspect pertains ‘literature’ as a means of retrieving memory, or as bridge-building construction that joins present and past, events and their recollection, the living and the dead, in a meaningful and

self-evident continuum. This is a literary material that is made up of the South African poetic tradition, both oral and written, and of Italian poetry that acknowledges the active presence of the “shades”, i.e. the channels connecting the living with the dead, and as memory’s very means, the pillars of poetic tradition. There are two types of memory, in this respect, Mann explains. One is called ‘semantic’ and the other ‘episodic’. The former consists in the pragmatic knowledge of how things need to be done, including language and numeracy, as simple and complex skills; the latter consists in one’s ability to feel that an experienced situation contains facts that have already happened in one’s lifetime. Our individual memory, therefore, is many-layered and syncretic, and constitutes the material by which we may develop a complex, many-cultured identity.

Donatella Abate Badin’s essay, “Modern and Postmodern Rome in Irish Travel Writing: An Overview”, illustrates the two traditional ways in which Irish writers and intellectuals have looked at Italy over the centuries, from colonial times to the present days, and how four contemporary writers have attempted, and failed, to view Italy from a new perspective, free from past associations. The Irish Catholics have always seen Italy as a refuge, as an idealised homeland where to shelter themselves from the chaotic and tragic conflicts with the Protestants. Rome and the Pope have been ‘their own’ Italy. On the other hand, to Irish Protestants Italy has meant ancient Rome and Neoclassic grandeur, with a wink at their association with the British Empire. A third viewpoint was typical of writers such as Lady Morgan and James Joyce, who developed a critical eye on both things Catholic and (neo)classic, reminding them of the schizophrenic division between the two masters, Church and Empire, in the Irish mentality. This third viewpoint, further developed to fit the contemporary globalised scope, is the one assumed by the four writers Badin focuses on, none of whom, she concludes, manages to produce a convincing new insight on Rome. The writings of Sean O’Faoláin, Elizabeth Bowen, Julia O’Faoláin and Colm Toibin describe a chaotic Rome, where one can hardly find one’s way around, or is caught in its nightmarish traffic, while architectural beauties are lost in the smog. Rome turns out to be the mirror to a contemporary Irish identity that is deeply shaped by globalisation and by a willingness to abandon the trends of its traditional culture as envisioned by the previous Catholic-Protestant divide.

Irene De Angelis’s “Derek Mahon’s Take on Italy” makes us see how Mahon has positioned himself within ‘Irish Italy’ and produced his own ‘film’ about it. De Angelis selects crucial sequences from Mahon’s Italian pieces, the poems written after his four-month stay in Rome, contained in his *Collected Poems* (1999), as well as from Mahon’s versions of Italian and Latin classics contained in his *Adaptations* (2006), ranging from major Latin works to Michelangelo’s *Sonnets*, Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, and well-known poems by Saba, Montale and Luzi. The long poem “Roman

Scripts”, from the *Collected Poems*, is the most representative of Mahon’s cinematographic technique and of his view of Italy, and is therefore the object of De Angelis’s scrutiny. Her reading lingers on the central role of Pasolini’s political and aesthetic positions looming large in Mahon’s view. De Angelis explains how “Roman Scripts”, itself being constructed through a specific filmic technique overlapping times and places that move fast and fragmentarily from one to another, is overtly related to Pasolini’s *Le ceneri di Gramsci* (Gramsci’s Ashes), as made evident by a quote from Pasolini’s poem that also opens and closes Mahon’s: “in the refuse of the world a new world is born”. Mahon’s Rome is a non-Catholic city, projecting Pasolini’s locales and people with casual or no attention to the its architecture and glorious past. Classic Rome enters Mahon’s vision only in his *Adaptations*, where excerpts from Ovid, Juvenal, Propertius and Horace are used to translate significant moments of the poet’s life and feelings.

Marco Fazzini’s “Italy, World War II and South African Poetry” focuses on the work of two South African poets, Guy Butler and Chris Mann, and their memories of World War II, experienced directly by Butler and, through his father’s diary, by Mann. In Butler’s case, we read of his ‘pacifist’ attitude during the war (his refusal to take part in any action and his choice of teaching South African poets instead) and of his reasons for joining the British army, i.e. not out of implicit approval of the English Empire to which his country was still affiliated, but out of the will to defeat Nazi-Fascism and racist ideology. Butler had known racism first hand in South Africa where, after World War II he would see it institutionalised with the rise of the Apartheid regime. Back in South Africa where hope had turned into disillusionment, Butler worked for many years reviewing the two poems that he had written while in Italy during the war, *On First Seeing Florence* (1966) and *Elegy for a South African Tank Commander in Action in Italy* (1986), hence working hard on the very terrain of his juvenile ideals and their tragic aftermath. Chris Mann’s view of World War II is analysed through his father’s diary, written in Italian while hiding from the Germans in the Veneto countryside, as we have seen. The diary is representative of the way memories may work indirectly, constructing a vivid sense of past events and shaping one’s life from a distance. Such a remembrance may be appropriated and given a solid substance. This is the fragile ground that emerge in Mann’s poem, *In a Field in Italy*, telling the encounter with the woman who saved his father’s life: “My Italian is rough a slow, | her dialect rapid, | our talk lead to guesses. | Confusion. Laughter | Scraps of knowing. Then gaps...”.

Tony Voss’s compact essay, “From Trastevere to Table Mountain: Peter Blum’s ‘Kaapse Sonette’ and Gioacchino Belli’s *Sonetti Romaneschi*”, presents the way Afrikaans stateless poet Peter Blum wrote nine sonnets in two books of poetry, both published in the 1950s, inspired by Gioacchino Belli’s *Sonetti Romaneschi*. The resulting contrasts between authenticity

and most bleak exploitation, as addressed by both poets, provide Blum with an effective realistic setting to stage the inequalities of the South African state abusing and rejecting its own people. Blum's Roman sonnets are distant 'translations' of the originals and build a discourse about a South African nation, where he had long tried to obtain citizenship until he gave up and settled down in Britain, never becoming a full citizen in either of the countries he lived in.

In Carmen Concilio's essay "Italy in Postcolonial Discourse: Jhumpa Lahiri, Michael Ondaatje, Nuruddin Farah", Italy is presented through the eyes of three major postcolonial novelists, each one opening up the view of important spaces inside our nation through very different experiences of migration. Jhumpa Lahiri's Italy turns out to be a dwelling-place constructed by characters whose diasporic life reflects that of Lahiri herself, triangulating India, the US and Italy. Rome, in particular, becomes the link through which the two previous spaces of belonging can be joined becoming a composite dwelling-place of the mind. In Lahiri's fiction, Rome becomes a city of love in which also the experience of loss is elaborated through the visit to the Etruscan museums in Rome and Volterra, where the funeral monuments of two married couples (one young and happy, the other old and unhappy) give shape to a symbolic turning-point in the construction of the new home. This new home seems to be built on the conviction - inherited, perhaps, from the writer's biographical motherland, India - that one learns to love with time, by facing a sense of 'deadliness' in the first place, because the commingling of life and death, as well as of joy and sadness, is what constitutes home. The elaboration of this mental and emotional condition seems to provide a solution to the disturbing questions that may arise in the life of migrant people. Such questions we hear Lahiri's two protagonists ask and answer after their visit to the Etruscan museum containing the married couple's funerary monument: "They have lived here, in each other's company all their lives. They will die here. I envy them that'. Hema said. 'Do you?' 'I've never belonged to any place that way'. Kaushik laughed. 'You're complaining to the wrong person'". For immigrants, living in a new mother country implies an overlapping of love and death, and requires the acquisition of a new mother tongue that, also, implies a form of death. In her latest fiction in Italian, *In altre parole* (*In Other Words*, 2014), Lahiri describes the way her writing in Italian has been a continuous coming to terms with failures that feel like a kind of death. Writing in Italian is described as walking up and down the bridges of Venice as well as a continuous passage across life and death. In Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Concilio detects an unexplored perspective by following one Indian character's night walk through a part of the countryside at Gabicce Mare, where after the War a cemetery would be erected, one of the several Commonwealth Army's graveyards that exist in Italy, where the soldiers of the Allied Force Army are buried. These

soldiers were implicitly considered to be less important than the soldiers coming from the Commonwealth 'settler colonies' and fighting in the white battalions of British descent; thus, as Concilio makes us notice, even in its Italian World War II graveyards, the Anglophone colonial world reproduced its hierarchies. The Indian soldier in Ondaatje's novel attends a nocturnal procession, during which he understands the true reason why he finds himself fighting in Italy: the hope that India will become independent after the war. Ironically, the reader knows well that what is actually waiting for him back home is the partition of India from Pakistan and the ensuing civil war. Examining Nuruddin Farah's work, Concilio finds that Italy is described mainly in his novel *Gifts* (1993) and in a book of interviews, *Yesterday, Tomorrow. Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (2000). In the latter, Farah interviews Somali people, momentarily living in Italy to provide themselves financial and educational resources. Two of the interviewed people may have been the inspirational source for the novel's two protagonists, Dunya, a nurse working in a hospital in Mogadishu, and Bosaso, her boyfriend. Thanks to this Somalia-Italy-Somalia trajectory, Farah provides a transitional space that maps out the protagonists' life stories. This space is particularly evident in the life of Dunya's brother Abshir, who still lives in Italy and sends commodities and money back home, thus representing, as Concilio indicates, the contrary movement of goods and people across today's globalised world that move, respectively, from north to south and from south to north. Farah's Italy is made of material things but, as such, it has been known by Somali people since colonial times, when commodities and goods acted as a divide between dominators and subjects: "We weren't allowed to go anywhere near Croce del Sud in the fifties, when the Italians were the master race here. Nor were the waiters allowed to wear shoes". The truth being, however, that the Italians who lived in the African colonies had more similarities with the indigenous population than differences and that artificial lines were needed to mark out differences.

In Paola Della Valle's "From Galileo to Aldo Moro. Italian Imagery in Contemporary New Zealand Literature", two very different ideas of Italy are orchestrated through the readings of works by New Zealand's writers belonging to each one of the traditional sides that have divided the country since colonial times: the indigenous Māori and the Pākehā of British origins. On the one side, Della Valle provides a reading of Witi Ihimaera's Italy, through an excursus into his 'Italian novels', *The Matriarch* (1986) and its sequel *The Dream Swimmer* (1997), and mainly through the opera libretto *Galileo* (1998); on the other side, she also reads Italy-inspired poems in the Pākehā poet Allen Curnow's collection, *An Incurable Music* (1979). They both stage two very different Italies, which are linked (and divided) by a short interlude that discusses World War II Italy as portrayed in the memorial novel *Tu* (2004) by Māori novelist Patricia Grace. As a lead-in to her central reading of the libretto *Galileo*, Della Valle summarises some

conclusions that she drew in previous publications, based on in-depth readings of the above-mentioned novels by Ihimaera and their employment of the Italian opera of the Risorgimento. In the libretto, Galileo's story works as an empowering metaphor of the need to consider Maori knowledge and beliefs as central to New Zealand culture as its Pākehā counterpart is. In the two novels the emotional power of Italian opera that decisively contributed to the success of the Risorgimento is an allegory to talk about the dynamics of nation building in New Zealand. Likewise, the *Galileo* libretto represents the Māori Renaissance fights for civil rights in the 50s and 60s. Della Valle's innovative reading of Ihimaera's *Galileo* shows that its main theme is that of the individual facing society's hegemonic forces by running against the current yet, unlike the Italian Galileo, also by reaching a point where he can offer a compromise: the coexistence of both positions that do not need to be mutually exclusive of one another. Galileo's drama stands for a call to legitimise the Māori culture, although in inverted terms, because, as Della Valle explains, it is their animistic beliefs that ask to be admitted by a society with a scientific and deterministic approach to reality. The next work analysed by Della Valle, Patricia Grace's novel *Tu*, was inspired by her father's war diary that he wrote while in Italy during World War II, when he served in the Māori Battalion, exclusively formed by Māori soldiers, in the New Zealand Division of the British Army. The Māori fought in World War II both to demonstrate their value to their countries and the world, and to see their civil rights recognised once back home from war. Sadly, as Della Valle points out, the very high number of casualties among the Māori soldiers happened because they "took part in the most stupid and meaningless sectors of the whole business". They were relegated to the marginal space they occupied at home also during the war in Italy. This consideration finally introduces to the reading of Curnow's *An Incurable Music*, specifically the Italian poems and their vision of the world as centred on violence. Violence is presented as taking place on three orders of our existence: the natural, the human and the divine. Violence is perpetrated to feed primary, political and religious needs in all times and places. Interestingly, Curnow's collection gives us both the point of view of the murderer and of the victim, as in the case of the poem that closes the collection, inspired by Aldo Moro's assassination, which Curnow happened to follow when he was in Italy during the days of his imprisonment by the Red Brigades. The very concept of 'sacrificial victim', present in human societies from immemorial times, is here being questioned by the victim himself who can only explain his role as the evidence of the limit-edness and lack of humanity of his own 'friends', the people with whom he shared an ideal vision and who gave up on him, "how incredible it is, this punishment". This bitter coda shows how Italy is a central instrument in the depiction of worldwide violence. As Della Valle observes, Italy also provides Curnow with Gothic atmospheres, in his poems that describe

famous murders in Medieval and Renaissance times. Dante's Phlegethon appears here too, as in Mann's essay, to unfold one of the most effective images of brutal violence of all times.

Sandra Ponzanesi and Goffredo Polizzi's contribution, "Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory? Intersections in Italian Postcolonial Studies", provides the theoretical core of this issue and a positive answer to the question it raises. Italy does need postcolonial theory if it is understood as a means by which Italians come to see the specific features that have composed the country's postcolonial identity, over the centuries and especially around the years of national unification. Ponzanesi and Polizzi urge us to reflect that it is in the nature of postcolonial theory to work by ways of 'returns' to the country where some of its nuclear ideas had originated, to act on them anew, in more effective ways and through additional insights acquired abroad. Postcolonial theory's concepts are rooted and generated in many countries and at very different moments in history. In their multifarious combinations its concepts travel and change forms, acquiring wider meanings than they had been intended to have when firstly conceived and articulated. In this uncannily old and new form, postcolonial principles 'return' and enable to better focus on Italy's prismatic and hybridised identity. By contrast, when intellectuals fail to see that these 'returns' had always been in Italy, yet not quite, and that this latter side of the issue makes all the difference, then self-assertive and obtusely nationalistic conclusions come about to dismiss the need of a postcolonial critique, similar to that provided by Bayard's famous essay, which Ponzanesi and Polizzi confute in order to pinpoint the danger of taking a similar position in Italy. Just as French intellectuals, as Bayard's claims, developed philosophical concepts of postcolonial critique, so did the Italians, who could even boast having contributed seminal principles to the postcolonial critical domain. However, it is by applying these principles in their 'return journey' back to Italy and in their interplay with the wider postcolonial paradigm that their application may work as a mirror up to what Italians are. That being the case, what is it that constitutes the Italian 'mirror'? Ponzanesi and Polizzi give us an answer in five points. First, it is thinkers as different and distant in times as Giambattista Vico, Antonio Gramsci and Primo Levi, whose thought may be defined as 'postcolonial' for the reason that it has helped form the postcolonial paradigm abroad. Second, it is the historical presence of social and ethnic divisions that have created chronic north-south divide that has long split up the nation but that has recently been the object of theoretical reformulations in the so-called *Pensiero Meridiano*, and is at the core of Mediterranean Studies that relate the south to the 'postcolonial Mediterranean space' rather than to Europe. Third, it is the diasporic nature of Italy that became mostly manifest in the years of the Risorgimento when, just as the nation was unified, it was also taken apart by massive migration to the horn of Africa and to the Americas, by which

very different Italian regional realities were exported and maintained elsewhere, so that very different ideas around what it means to be Italian were elaborated from a distance. The removal of these Italian diasporas is one of the main causes for the present inability, in Italy, to cope with migration from Africa, because such a cancellation is the missing link that impedes us to see the logic by which today's facts connect with the past, with the result that "recognition, hospitality, and integration" become even cognitively unthinkable. Ponzanesi and Polizzi maintain that this is not simply a form of "amnesia", the ignorance of historical facts, but a form of collective "aphasia", i.e. a lack of knowledge that causes difficulties both to match 'things' with the words and notions that define them, as well as to concretely understand what one is being told. The fourth point Ponzanesi and Polizzi examine is the history of Italian racialism that produced specific subjects of discrimination, such as the southerner and the colonial other (around the unification period), the Jew (during the later fascist years), and the southern migrant (after World War II). The histories of those figures fracture the Italian national space and its narration to these very days. Finally, the fifth point is constituted by today's Italian intellectuals who are taking upon themselves the task of articulating these conceptual returns.

The volume significantly concludes with the novelist and journalist Paola Pastacaldi's reflections "Post-colonial Memories", which focuses on her two post-colonial novels, *Khadija* (2005) and *L'Africa non è nera* (*Africa is not Black*, 2014), set in colonial Ethiopia and Eritrea where the two main branches of Pastacaldi's family (her two grandfathers) lived. Crucially, the main focus of her reflections is the process of memory retrieval and of historical remembrance through research in both institutional and private archives, in quest of a colonial knowledge that is still elusive and, thus, hard to grasp and to articulate. As Pastacaldi writes, when her first novel came out, despite the fact that it was very well received, "the essence of the subject [she] dealt with was not fully recognized". The encounter of Italians, Eritreans and Ethiopians, as well as what it meant to her family, to herself and to Italy, were not understood by the Italian readership. In this respect, Pastacaldi points at the "hiatus" that impedes present understanding of the direct link between Italian colonialism and African dictatorships, as well as the comprehension of the reasons why African escape from their countries. Her novels break new ground or, better, break old ground anew, partaking in the formation of a new Italian genre in fiction, the 'colonial memoirs' that certainly can be one starting point from which to reconstruct one missing part of our complex identity. *Khadija*, her first novel of this kind, tells us the story of her Ethiopian grandmother. She married her grandfather who had escaped from Livorno where he had killed a man in a duel. The story portrays this Ethiopian-Italian woman who also looms large in some of the pages of Pastacaldi's second African novel, *L'Africa non è nera*. Its provocative title foregrounds the disastrous

and ridiculous ambitions of Fascist Italy that dreamt of extending its territory in Africa, but also of hard-working average people who migrated to Eritrea believing it could become their own new land. In Asmara, we meet Pastacaldi's grandfather, a road-constructor who migrated from Treviso, but also her mulatto father, the younger son of Khadija (who moved from Ethiopia to Eritrea when her Italian husband died) who got married, though unhappily, to Pastacaldi's mother, when she was in Asmara to visit her father. The story ends with the young couple splitting up: she returns to Italy while he stays on in free Asmara, nourishing growing resentments against the Italian invaders and confessing to have always loved only one woman, his mother Khadija. However, it is by reading these family stories with their psychological and emotional situations that we start filling up our memory gaps. Finally, what Pastacaldi's novels reveal is that, besides postcolonial critique, Italy needs its own postcolonial literature, written in a new Italian language, with its own views and scenarios and new ways to look at who Italians are and where they live: indeed a country 'seen through postcolonial eyes'.