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## Italian Futures: Introduction to Volume 2, Issue 1

**Albert Russell Ascoli and Randolph Starn**

When we set out, over a year and a half ago, to construct an issue of *California Italian Studies* dedicated to “Italian Futures,” we could hardly have foreseen the outcome. That, of course, is the nature of “the future,” a time, and a place, which must and cannot be known. We were spurred to the topic by a mixed set of concerns. There was the chorus of despairing voices saying of Italy, as the title of one of our essays suggests, “no future for you.” These complaints were reaching a crescendo at a time when Italy was preparing to celebrate and lament the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of its preeminent “futures past,” the Risorgimento, itself a series of events, an elaboration of myths, a convergence of desires, which proposed to “make the future” by redeeming a real or imaginary past. There was the parochial concern of Italianists (and humanists more generally), perennially fretting, though never with more reason than the present, whether in Italy or California or anywhere else, that our scholarly disciplines might, indeed, have no real future. There was the contrary hope that this electronic journal itself might represent some part of a future for Italian Studies, by mobilizing technical capabilities that are transforming scholarly disciplines everywhere. This looked like a future-oriented way to bring many perspectives to bear on the global and local pressures that make any pure notion of an autonomous “Italy” ever more problematic. Then too, there were the long-standing questions that had led the two of us to collaborate before this: How to decipher the shifting terms applied to the relationship of past, present, and future, particularly with respect to Italy and by Italians? How to strike a balance between “modernity” (early, late, or post-) and “backwardness,” “discovery” and “innovation” repeatedly trumped by “arrested development” and “forgotten centuries,” “decadence” and “decline.”

Our title acknowledges the many levels of our enterprise: the multiplication (and yet uncanny familiarity) of hypotheses about what the future may hold for Italy; the various ways in which the future has been and is being conceived and described by “old” and “new” Italians as well as by those who, for one reason or another, turn their thoughts to Italy from afar; the “futures” that “Italy” has lived before and is anticipating now. Within that title, too, is an allusion, whether ironic or not only time will tell, to the larger economic forces driving us, our field, the elusive objects of our study: this issue is a bet, or a series of bets, on the future of the commodity “Italy” in a “marketplace” that is by turns global, European, Mediterranean, regionalist, post-colonial, diasporic, ecological, political, mediatic, and, of course, academic.

How best to structure such a wide range of issues and approaches? How representative would they, or could they, be? What began as a checklist of topics—“futurity” as a concept in Italian contexts, visions and versions of the future of Italy, the future of Italian Studies—became far more complicated as this volume moved toward virtual reality. Essays, interviews, translations, discussions that we had solicited materialized (or didn’t) in unexpected ways; unanticipated, if hoped for, contributions arrived from predictable and unpredictable quarters. Most of all, our own understanding of what we were doing evolved under pressure from ideas different from our own (of

authors, of peer reviewers, of colleagues); from divergences within and between our individual conceptions of the enterprise at hand, and, perhaps most of all, from the practicalities of assembling, editing, and ordering a journal issue containing fifty plus separate items, each with its own peculiar preoccupations. If we needed structure, we also needed flexibility and finesse. As for structure, we adopted a basic conceptual scheme dividing the issue into “futures present” (contemporary reflections on what the future holds) and “futures past” (past attempts, from the late Middle Ages forward, to shape or predict the future). For flexibility, we let subdivisions be guided as much or more by what we had in hand than by our own *a priori* categories. Still, while each of the essays and other items (three translations, two responses, two interviews, and a video-conference) claims its own perspective, and while the gentle reader will relate them one to another in whatever way s/he likes (or not), we still take it upon ourselves to trace out some patterns and some problems that we believe make this issue of *California Italian Studies*, if not an organic whole, at least an ensemble, a “macro-text” if you will, worth considering beyond its individual parts.

The problem with the future, to begin with, is that it’s never around when you want or need it to be. By definition the future does not yet exist; it can only be conceived out of a web of pasts (collective or personal, “invented” or “real”), interpreted under the pressure of present expectations, hopes, and fears—unless, of course, it exists in the mind of God, where past and future alike are, as in traditional Christian theology, part of an eternal present. St. Augustine, for one, wrestled brilliantly with this conundrum, and the history of ideas of the future is a series of attempts at playing God by filling in the void as people wonder what comes next and invent more or less ingenious and arbitrary aids to finding out. The future as a unified but open-ended “space,” the counterpart to past and present in a linear trajectory of ongoing time, is a distinctive “modern” mutation that historians generally date at some point from the eighteenth century forward.<sup>1</sup> How well these views hold up to the reinterpretation of time in contemporary science is not in our competence to say. Just how universally human, generally Western, or specifically European they may be is arguable as well. But there can be no doubt that there are Italian variants in which the past is doubly and paradoxically cast as an inspiration of future ideals and as the chief obstacle to realizing the endless potential of the future.

Two recent examples happen to be particularly telling: the centennial celebration of the birth of the futurist movement, in and around 2009; the 150-year anniversary, even as we write, of the formation of the modern Italian nation-state still imagined as a *Risorgimento*, a “resurgence,” renewal and redemption of the past. One of Futurism’s founding motives was the critique of pervasive “*passatismo*” in Italian culture. Its manifestoes famously railed against the obsessive return to presumed glories or shortcomings of the past, the constant resuscitation of anachronistic models of art, society, and politics, which could be blamed, among other things, for the supposed failure of the *Risorgimento* to “make Italy.” The unnoticed irony—irony, at least at their own

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<sup>1</sup> In a vast bibliography, the classic text is Koselleck (2004); Hölscher develops an elaborate chronology of the modern idea of the future in five stages, from its discovery (1770-1830) to its decline since 1950; Burke (2010) offers a concise critique of the thesis of eighteenth-century origins and reviews proposals for an earlier dating.

expense, was not a Futurist strong point—was that this accusation dated from the Risorgimento itself.<sup>2</sup> In futurist terms a project for futurity grounded in a metaphor of resurgence and rebirth was (and still is) self-cancelling by definition. That the two great historical epochs—the Renaissance and the Risorgimento—which presumably set “Italy” on the path toward modernity, both made claims to be retrieving a future from the past rendered them prime, indeed necessary targets of a Futurist insurgency.<sup>3</sup> The signs that the “passatist” model is alive if not necessarily well today in Italy can be discerned in the celebration of a Futurist centennial. An irony that probably would *not* have been lost on the Futurists is that this backward glance cancels the central tenet of the movement while effectively erasing its evolving character as historical phenomenon (a point made by Claudio Fogu in his essay, even as he seeks an alternative, usable past in that same movement).

Futurism is not, at least not directly, a major concern of our issue. A great deal was written about the movement on the occasion of the centennial. This is a good excuse for avoiding the trap of a “passatist” reading of the Futurist theorists of “passatismo,” but it is not so easy to escape altogether the logic of the secular “anniversario” in its endless competition with the Catholic liturgical calendar. Futurism had its turn; shortly it will be the turn of, among many others, Machiavelli and his *Principe*, one of whose anniversaries, at least, is looming in 2013.<sup>4</sup> And to anticipate, Machiavelli is at least as well represented in this issue as Futurism, and, without denying the interest of the futurist project, there is no doubt that he and his text have a far more serious claim to an enduring influence on the conjoined questions of Italy-modernity-futurity, a point made by Robert Esposito in this issue. It is, however, the Risorgimento—in this anniversary year in which its triumphs are celebrated, its shortcomings remarked, and its significance for the future once again debated—that we have chosen as a point of departure and a persistent, if also contested, point of reference.

## *II. Risorgimento, Then and Now*

Our contribution to the debates over the Risorgimento opens the issue: a virtual Round Table held on-line between Berkeley and Florence (March 11, 2011) with Paul Ginsborg’s highly regarded book *Salviamo l’Italia* as its centerpiece, and with the participation of Lucy Riall, John Agnew, Alberto Banti, Silvana Patriarca, and Ginsborg himself. Ginsborg’s title is a proposition, not a question, although it becomes one in the course of the discussion and in the title we have given to the proceedings as a whole. The

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<sup>2</sup> If one looks closely at the last pages of De Sanctis’s *Storia della letteratura italiana*, in fact, he seems to be suggesting the need for a radically new, self-critical, Europe-oriented direction for the future of Italian literature, a lesson entirely lost, it would seem, on those who used his book to build a past-directed curriculum for national educational purposes.

<sup>3</sup> And this is doubly true of the Risorgimento, precisely because the past it most often claims to be recovering is the Renaissance (and on this point it is most significant that in the nineteenth century the period we call the Renaissance, following the Swiss Burckhardt, was often referred to as the “Risorgimento,” for example by De Sanctis himself).

<sup>4</sup> And not only Machiavelli—it is also the bicentennial of the birth of Verdi (1813-1901), the anniversary of whose death was just celebrated in 2001!

book looks to the past (yet again) for a guide to the future, amidst a spate of counter-histories, revisionisms, and the lingering whiff of patriotic nostalgia.<sup>5</sup> But unlike so many previous exhortations to go “back-to-the-future,” Ginsborg’s is neither a reason nor an excuse for triumphalism, disparagement, or indifference. Where it might be supposed that all possibilities for re-interpreting the Risorgimento had been exhausted, or even that Italy’s search for a usable past has become a dead letter, Ginsborg recovers with fine-tuned discrimination a set of positive and hopeful values in the period leading up to the formation of the Italian nation-state. One might even say that, in choosing the “road not taken” of Carlo Cattaneo, he anticipates, no doubt to the surprise of all concerned, the “uchronic” writing of alternative histories touted by the Wu Ming collective and discussed in a number of our essays, especially those under the subsection headed “Discourses for the Future.” Our readers may sample this in the book’s “Prologue,” which Ginsborg has kindly allowed us to publish here in an English version. They may then go to consult a written summary of the proceedings, to view the online Round Table itself, and then to read a response by Adrian Lyttelton. The exchange among some of the most thoughtful students of modern Italian history provides a searching reexamination of the variable currents of hope, skepticism and anxiety that have long characterized Italians’ attitudes toward their past, up to and including an outright repudiation of its relevance to a constructive future.

### *III. Futures Present, Introductory*

The divergent issues raised by the Round Table suggested a working template for dividing the balance of the issue in two parts. Part III, “Futures Present,” is devoted to the alternately desperate and hopeful efforts to grapple with Italy’s future in the present moment; Part IV, “Futures Past,” is concerned with the characteristic *mise-en-abîme* of a predominant historiography in which a given Italian past projects a future which is a restitution and renewal.

Part III is itself subdivided into four sections. The first (III.A) offers a series of essays that delineate a present state of social, political, and environmental crisis and project or contest possible future remedies. The second (III.B) turns to essays (and an interview) that interrogate imagined futures, from the ideal to the apocalyptic, which pervade a wide variety of media in contemporary Italian culture. The third (III.C) focuses specifically on the social and artistic consequences of the ongoing demographic shift from “Italiani doc” (in the current phrase, foregrounded in Barbara Spackman’s essay, for traditionally “ethnic” Italians),<sup>6</sup> to a heterogeneous, ethnically and racially diverse, Italy.

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<sup>5</sup> See Gentile (2010); Romano, Lazar, and Canonica (2011); di Fiore (2007); Vespa (2010).

<sup>6</sup> “DOC,” of course, is an acronym signifying “denominazione di origine controllata,” which was used as an official guarantee of the provenance and composition of certain Italian wines (Chianti; Barbera; etc.), and thus serves as a powerful metaphor for insistence upon genuine “italianità” in the citizenry. It is worthy of note that in recent years many of the best Italian wines have been blends, and have come from unexpected parts of the peninsula, and do not bear the “doc” seal of approval. On the other hand, it is also worth noting that the home-grown DOC denomination has been now replaced by DOP (“denominazione d’origine protetta”), a certification imposed by the EU and often seen as part of a general undermining of national identity and the “made in Italy” brand.

In the process, lingering traces of Italian imperialist ventures in former colonies come to light in predictable and in unexpected ways. The last section (III.D) focuses on present and future transformations and boundary-crossings of existing academic disciplines, some traditionally associated with Italy (philology; classics), others more recently developed there (microhistory), still others spanning the transnational frontiers of what one essay calls “neurohumanism,” itself a hybrid of neurobiology and literary theory. All these subsections are rich in variations on a theme that would be paradoxical if it were not so obvious: that the future is now, contingent on the moment of its projection and still anchored there as time flows on.

### *III.A. A State of Emergencies*

The title of the first of these subsections, “A State of Emergencies” points in different but not unrelated directions. Most obviously, it refers to the propensity of the Italian state always to find itself in the midst of emergencies of one kind or another, usually political, though at the moment of writing especially economic. One thinks, by now almost with fond nostalgia, of the ever-toppling, ever-renewed Christian Democrat (and Socialist) governments of the first forty years of the Republic’s life. The title also evokes a tradition of thought with Italian variants dating back to Machiavelli, if not before: the analysis of the dynamics of power as it defines and is defined by what Carl Schmitt followed by Italian political philosophers, notably Giorgio Agamben, would call “states of exception” rather than constitutions, social contracts, or “civil society.”<sup>7</sup>

The plural of “emergencies” reflects in turn the range of perspectives from history, politics, philosophy, environmentalism, and public opinion that our contributors bring to bear on the pessimism and sense of urgency that is perhaps the dominant future present in Italy. This view is represented with particular force in Alberto Banti’s interventions in the Round Table and in print, but, as we have just noted, it is also a recurrent feature of discourse in Italian “civil society” (itself a contested entity, at least since Leopardi) and its “public sphere,” neither of which is ever simply taken for granted. Nonetheless, in the twilight of the Berlusconi regime, outrage and dire prediction are arguably more intense than ever before in the history of the Republic. And one frequently senses the fear that Italy has now entered into a permanent emergency, an endless “state of exception.”

Public discourse in the media mostly concerns emergencies in national politics, or emergencies *as* national politics. John Agnew’s analytical chronicle brings out the principal “capi d’accusa” of the Berlusconi years: the abuses, personal and public, attributed to “Il Cavaliere” and his “uomini” (many of whom are “donne,” of course); the continuing threat to national integrity posed by the disproportionately central role played by the separatist “Lega Nord”; the insufficiencies, to the point of absenteeism, of the historic Left; the increasing domination of all political discourse by performance in and for the media, much of it controlled by Berlusconi. Of the four essays in this section, only Agnew’s focuses directly on contemporary politics and political opinion in a comparative account of how Berlusconi has been perceived by media abroad as well as at home. The

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<sup>7</sup> Machiavelli, with characteristic incisiveness, long ago called these, respectively, “lo straordinario” e “l’ordinario.”

analysis has the unsettling effect of highlighting the degree to which *all* discourse about Italian politics (and not only) is performance- and spectacle-driven. It also suggests the media's fixation on an eternal present; its endless commentary on the abysmal successes of Berlusconi and his cronies and the equally abysmal inadequacies of the Left; the lack of serious reflection on what can and will come after Berlusconi—so often portrayed as another, palpably weaker “uomo forte.” Will there be an ideological and institutional vacuum, a chaotic scramble for power, or something else again?<sup>8</sup>

The other three essays in this section shift attention from the politics of the short term to the deep structural legacies, which, from the vantage of the present, may seem either to enable or to obstruct Italy's future expectations. Both Emanuel Rota and Gianfrancesco Zanetti update long-standing arguments about the failure of the Italian nation-state to become either a unified nation or an effective state, but the bottom line is a familiar one: the present situation is (always already) a feature and function of the systemic constants of the Italian “character” and/or the historical specificity of Italy. Rota enlists the “biopolitical” criteria of modern state sovereignty to breathe new life into a long-standing indictment of failed nation-building, especially its incapacity to overcome the perennial divide between North and South, to meet the needs of younger generations, and, on the part of the Left, to propose a viable alternative to the scandalous incumbency. For Rota, the “future” of Italy is and will remain its capacity for politically and ethically charged cultural critique, whether by authors of works hovering between fiction and reportage, such as Giancarlo De Cataldo and Roberto Saviano, or, most crucially, in the writings of activist philosophers such as Agamben, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, and Roberto Esposito, following a tradition laid down by Machiavelli, Vico, and Gramsci.

In his brief but highly suggestive essay, Gianfrancesco Zanetti, asks that we reconceive Italian society and politics in terms first advanced in modern times by legal philosopher Santi Romano and then developed by Norberto Bobbio, among others. “Normative pluralism” on this account is intrinsic to Italian culture, at once the source of the perennial weakness of the Italian national state, but also is the key to certain successes as well as undeniable failures. By “normative pluralism,” Zanetti decidedly does not mean what most Anglo-American readers would suppose: a society built on the mutual tolerance of plural perspectives and group identities. Rather, he means the existence of “states within the state” that lay down competing sets of norms—de facto laws—to which members of Italian society are simultaneously subject. The primary examples are “the mafia” in its many geographical and nominal incarnations, and the Church, but Zanetti also invokes such rule-dispensing “aristocracies” as the medical profession and the University. With compelling irony he returns in closing to the great theorist of historical cycles, Vico, to ask what happens when a normative pluralism operating in the service of democracy reaches a point of crisis and possible collapse. Will there be a reversion to a “uomo forte” who can, apparently, arrest the centrifugal tendencies of proliferating and competing norms; or will it be possible to recognize and adapt the positive potential of pluralism, whether in incorporating a new and different citizenry (see section III.C), by embracing the alternative normative influences of the EU, or in other ways yet to be

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<sup>8</sup> The writing of this introduction began before the collapse of the latest Berlusconi government and, obviously, ends after it. For a brief reflection on the significance of the latest developments from the perspective of our issue, see the “Envoi” below.

determined? At the very least, Zanetti suggests that to focus on idea of the unitary “nation-state” is to ignore the fundamental sociological-political realities of “Italy.”

Salvatore Settis for his part, concentrates on a very specific emergency—the ongoing degradation and outright assault on Italy’s cultural heritage and environment—with all-pervasive ramifications. He moves between a full-scale denunciation of the political, economic, and cultural directions of the past twenty years and an appeal for the future. The vision is not a nostalgic one. For Settis, respect for the “paesaggio” is a necessity, a link between nature, culture, and history on which Italian identity hinges and the psychic and physical well-being of the population depends; it is not an abstract ideal but an institutional inheritance beginning with protective regulations enacted before the unification of Italy and culminating in the Italian Constitution where “the tutelary guardianship of the landscape and the historic and artistic patrimony of the Nation” was for the first time inscribed among the fundamental principles of a modern state. For Settis, the “state of emergency” is not only a crisis of the historic and natural environment; it is a tipping point calling for a twenty-first century Risorgimento, a citizens’ movement that places the issue of a degraded landscape and cultural heritage at the center of a democratic revival of the ideal of the common good. Settis asks his fellow Italian citizens to reconceive the problem of the future through a very different interpretation of the “state of emergencies,” as the once, and future, habitation of a human population.

### *III.B. Utopias, Dystopias, Heterotopias*

Emergencies are threatening, of course, and the obsessive focus on them may be a trap, but, as we have already seen, they may also provide an opening for new energies and possibilities. Under the rubric, “Discourses for the Future,” we turn to near contemporary reflections and analyses that imagine the future or foreshadow it—utopian, dystopian, heterotopian. Though the majority of these essays are in some sense literary, they also touch upon film, critical manifestos, political theory, cyberspace, and, in the final instance, that “cultural text” par excellence, Venice/Venezia. It will come as no surprise that the dystopic spirit predominates; more surprising perhaps are the energy, the initiative, the critical reflexivity to which these essays testify at a time when those qualities are allegedly in short supply in Italy.

The first essay, by Robert Rushing, offers a powerfully suggestive reading of a text from a classic future-oriented genre, sci-fi (apocalyptic division). Laura Pugno’s novel *Sirene* brings together multiple topoi of dehumanization on a global scale that point toward a non-human, post-linguistic future—cannibalism, rape, incest, monstrosity and animality, the babelic failure of language. In his analysis, Rushing confronts the larger problem of knowing and writing the future as radically “other,” “without a human face.” From the perspective of our issue, it might also stand for anxieties Italians (like other nationalities in our increasingly globalized culture) face in trying to recount a future “without Italy.” In her essay, “Flying Saucers would Never Land in Lucca,” Arielle Saiber approaches the broader question of the supposed absence of science fiction as a genre from the Italian repertoire. Deploying the heavy weapons of documentary detail she thoroughly explodes the cliché that Italian cultural identities are so firmly established,



and their capacity to absorb and domesticate “the alien” so powerful, that the necessary estrangement of sci-fi (however thin the allegorical veneer over recognizable familiar concerns) is unavailable to Italian authors. In this literary sub-culture, Saiber reveals, flying saucers might very well land in Lucca and indeed, in the ample realm of Italian sci-fi, have been doing so for a long time. Along the way she suggests a number of ways in which sci-fi *all’italiana* is adapted to cultural specificities and to the particular problems it faces in negotiating the passage from imposing past to uncertain future. For instance, she points to Venice as a privileged location of the genre, precisely because of its intrinsic (albeit familiar) “alterity,” and its role as border and boundary with worlds elsewhere (for more on this from very different perspectives, see the essays by Bassi and by Reill).

A cluster of essays then addresses a rather different sort of fictional production and its perceived threat to the traditional moral-political role of literature (or rather of narrative, since film and cyberspace play their parts as well). After the post-modern turn, globalization, and a widening contagion of “states of emergency” everywhere, what are we to make, these essays ask, of the various recent, often quite polemical attempts to find new literary means to ancient ends? One key figure here is Pier Paolo Pasolini, repeatedly invoked and constructed as the genealogical precursor of a return, however contorted, to a culture which is historically, morally, politically “impegnata.” His contemporary legacy is on display in the “docu-drama” fictions of De Cataldo and Saviano (along with Garrone’s cinema version of *Gomorra*), as well as the controversial cultural project of the collective author Wu Ming (and its most prominent individual voice “Wu Ming 1”) whose manifesto, the *New Italian Epic*, has sparked a fierce critical controversy. Some key future-oriented tendencies of Italian narrative jostle against one another within and among these essays: the turn toward “historicizing fiction” and the concomitant tendency to blur if not to efface the distinction between fiction and truth, reality and representation; the pursuit of devices of estrangement which paradoxically might force a reconsideration of the all-too-legible status quo.

It is useful to begin with Alessia Ricciardi’s claim that Pasolini may constitute a usable (recent) past for thinking and making the future. She (with Carla Benedetti) argues against bracketing Pasolini between an open nostalgia for a disappearing premodern culture and an apparently desperate, apocalyptic vision of an Italy without a future:

Pasolini..., *malgré lui*, stood for the future, albeit for a future achieved through apocalyptic lucidity, through a refusal to accept complacently the given state of affairs, through the repudiation of indifference.... [I]f there is one Italian intellectual of the twentieth century who may claim to have had a ‘future,’ it is Pasolini. From Nanni Moretti to Roberto Saviano, the most courageous minds in Italy have dedicated their own works to Pasolini in the years that have followed his death.

Lorenzo Fabbri’s essay proposes a genealogy leading from Pasolini’s characterization of the “anni di piombo” as a real-life novel (“il romanzo delle stragi”) to De Cataldo’s “fictional” re-presentation of the collaboration between a real-life Roman

gang and the Italian government at the time of the Moro kidnapping (*Romanzo criminale*). More than analyzing this chiasmus, Fabbri dramatizes it by importing the strategies of literary writing into his critical discourse and in fact by intermittently blending his voice with that of De Cataldo. Without referring to Pasolini directly, Matteo Garrone's film adaptation of Saviano's *Gomorra* is, in the analysis of Simona Bondavalli, profoundly committed to the kind of radical ethical-political stance Ricciardi identifies with the Pasolini-Saviano lineage. Bondavalli's claim is that the film forces its viewers at once to view the poisonous *camorra* version of "waste management" through Mafioso eyes and to recognize it as a metaphor for the late modern culture of consumption and waste in which we are all implicated.

Since the *New Italian Epic* has been a focal point of contemporary controversy over the future of literary politics in Italy, it also takes a central place in several contributions to our issue. The phenomenon began with a web manifesto written by Wu Ming 1, which then, with added material, was published by Einaudi as the product of the collective authorship of "Wu Ming" (responsible individually and collectively for a number of novels). Attacked by numerous critics—among whom, notably, Carla Benedetti—for representing precisely the evasive, non-serious tendencies of post-modernity associated with Italo Calvino, the *New Italian Epic* claims just the opposite: to be sponsoring and describing a return, with a difference, to ethics and to historicity. To make the point, the manifesto enlists a number of prominent contemporary novelists in the rolls of those who have produced UNOs (Unidentified Narrative Objects), which also fall under the general rubric of "New Italian Epic." Valentina Fulginiti and Maurizio Vito give a favorable account of the Wu Ming manifesto; for them, as for Wu Ming, the controversy is about a willful and necessary subversion of the rigid boundaries that the literary and critical establishments in Italy draw between popular literature and the genuine avant-garde as between the roles of the critic and the poet-author. The account closes with a summary of the debate between exponents of a new realism and the advocates of UNOs over the most celebrated piece of writing in Italy of the last decade, Saviano's *Gomorra*. Vito and Fulginiti make the persuasive point that not only should one distinguish between "reality" and "realism" but also between various "realisms," i.e., modes of re-presenting the world, and implicating an audience in those representations (see Bondavalli, above). It is in this sense, they claim, that Wu Ming's definition is eminently useful in understanding the workings of *Gomorra*. Their account is supplemented by an interview with Wu Ming 1, which, unsurprisingly, gives a strongly polemical account of the controversy from the perspective of the individual who initiated it.

The Wu Ming phenomenon is, in many ways, explicitly present- and future-oriented. The collective's website plays a crucial role in disseminating its works, and in eliciting a wide range of commenting voices, many from well beyond the confines of the traditional worlds of publishing and the academic study of literature. Its Chinese byline and English-language title are globalizing gestures to the point of (deliberate?) caricature. And yet, at the same time as the global and the "new" are specifically invoked, the *New Italian Epic* is clearly aimed at an italoophone public (although the website does offer English and Spanish versions to be accessed), while it systematically juxtaposes the desire for novelty with a vaguely invoked "epic" tradition (particularly its associations of a collective ethos and enterprise), and with the "Italian." Indeed, the manifesto specifically lays a claim to an anything-but-global Italian exceptionalism in the assertion that "Accade [the NIE

phenomenon] in Italia, non a caso. Paese delle mille emergenze, poco interessato al futuro.... ” (*NIE* 60). It must be said, however, that the *NIE* recognizes the paradoxes it confronts in trying to go “back to the future,” specifically asserting that “Stiamo costruendo il futuro anteriore” (ibid. 61).

The final two essays take us in rather different directions, while providing an appropriate point of arrival for the section. David Forgacs’ focus on the decline of a traditionally rich vein of future-oriented (if usually past-reviving) thought into a despondent anti-utopianism in the last quarter of the twentieth century, has a narrative arc much like that of Rota’s “No Future for You,” though from the perspective of a more detailed social-political history, and with constant reference to the larger context of European utopianism. Forgacs makes in a straightforward way the critical point that there is a long and rich history of thought, utopian and non-, concerning political futures. The end of this story, like Rota’s, takes a hopeful turn, but in a different direction, discerning a new Italian awareness of and participation in global social and political movements, most recently embodied by the controversial “Occupy the World” demonstrations in Rome on October 15.

The section ends with Shaul Bassi’s essay on Venice as the perfect heterotopic emblem of decay and of survival: “quel luogo concreto in cui una società rispecchia utopie e distopie.” Venice comes forth as a multivalent reality and fantasy—early precursor of the future of commerce and capitalism in the West reduced to grubby tourist attraction with a rapidly shrinking native population—figure of Italian uniqueness, but also of the civic and regional traditions that “Italy” has never fully absorbed, and, as well, of the internal differences—between Jew and Christian in this case—that have their own long history in both Venetian and Italian culture. Bassi reviews the multiple narratives of enchantment and disenchantment—*passatisti*, *futuristi*, *eternisti*, *presentisti*—that resonate around an objectively catastrophic historical trend in the life of the city. He concludes with his own practical proposal for recuperating the city: to turn it into a center for global educational and intellectual encounters that revive its traditional role as cross-roads and as marketplace, but now in terms of cultural and intellectual capital.

### *III.C. Old Italy, New Italians, Colonial Traces*

To Bassi’s inventory we may add another guise of Venice as a point of entry to the third section of “Futures Present.” Shakespeare, following Italian precursors, famously locates a Jew and a Moor there, not as visitors but as uneasy denizens, and then plays out an Early Modern clash of cultures. The essays in this section pose a series of interlocking questions about the evolving relationship of contemporary Italy as defined by its “normative” inhabitants (those always already “made” Italians, to reverse the semi-apocryphal phrase of D’Azeglio) to the colonized, racialized, religious “other” and vice-versa. The future import of these relationships has been and no doubt will be conditioned, even over-determined, by a series of historical and contemporary phenomena: the now well-known history of European orientalism, not to mention racism; the long-standing history of real-life “negotiations” (ranging from trade to crusade) with Islam; a history of Italian colonialism (generally deemed unsuccessful) and its aftermath (generally

suppressed in the collective memory until recently); the recent history of accelerated immigration from Africa, from the ex-Yugoslavia and especially from Albania, from Eastern Europe, and so on; the older history of the immigration of Italians themselves (the phenomenon deplored by Pascoli, in “La grande proletaria” [see IV.B. below]); and the negative population growth among the official citizenry of Italy in recent times. Earlier essays, notably that of Zanetti, have touched on the demographic argument: the by-now commonplace claim that to sustain itself economically and otherwise Italy must indeed “grow” its population not by reproduction but by the “adoption” of “new Italians” from disparate corners of the globe. This is, of course, paired with the opposing commonplace that the attitude of many “Italiani doc” toward immigrants is anything but welcoming.

The essays included in this section are not directly concerned with demographic or sociological analysis. Rather, they examine “cultural texts” which in one way or another represent and construe the interactions between “Old Italy” and (would-be) “new Italians” and/or its one-time colonial subjects. The first, by Derek Duncan, examines the representations of immigrants in four recent films made by Italians. In them he identifies the progressive breakdown of the characteristic attempt in earlier films to view new waves of migration through older historical lenses and by the use of a neo-neo-realist mode that was a cinematic precursor to the recent “realist” turn in Italian fiction. Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica*, for example, drew a straightforward analogy between Italians leaving for America and Albanians leaving for Italy. The more recent films tend to adopt the genre stance of Italian “noir.” Projecting new modes of the (re)production of national subjects in untraditional ways, they explore “possible futures” inclusive and constitutive of “new Italians.”

In the films analyzed by Duncan, an immigrant “other” attempts, with partial success or tragic failure, to enter into the world of “Italiani doc.” Barbara Spackman, by contrast, considers two cases—one pre-Risorgimental, one near-contemporary—of Italians attempting to “pass for” Muslims. (In effect, she constructs what amounts to a virtual allegory of Italian filmmakers, like those discussed by Duncan, who attempt to represent immigrant subject positions.) Her exceptional European who passes for a Muslim in the closed world of Mecca is Giovanni Finati, whose 1830 memoir recounts his expedient conversion to Islam and his subsequent life as an “Albanian” in Muhammad Ali’s Egypt. Spackman then turns to the Algerian-Italian author Amara Lakhous whose 2010 novel, *Divorzio all’islamica* playfully enters into the (filmic) genre of *commedia all’italiana* (“Divorzio all’italiana”) to recount the experience of an “Italiano doc” recruited by the secret service to penetrate “little Cairo” in Rome as a spy. The protagonist who passes for a Muslim symmetrically confronts Muslim migrants who are attempting to assume “Italian” identities. Lakhous’s work points toward an Italian literary future in which post-colonial subjects may at once reproduce, critique, and transform Italy’s language and culture, unveiling the life of disguise that has become a normative condition for migrants and “italianissimi” alike.

Cristina Lombardi-Diop’s essay, instead, traces an advertising motif of “whiteness” as emblem at once of hygiene and Italian racial identity. The essay moves from the explicitly racializing culture of Fascism through the television advertising campaigns of postwar and then contemporary Italy. In her analysis, while the latest round of “Coloreria Italiana” ads seem to represent a post-racial turn, they actually put racial difference back

in the spotlight, now as something to “be consumed and washed away.” Lombardi-Diop demonstrates how, historically, representations of blackness and whiteness can be transformed, as they are adapted to new media technologies and to shifting cultural attitudes, and yet remain a constant in the construction of Italian national identity.

The visual culture treated in Marco Purpura’s essay is of a radically different kind: cutting-edge media installations by Albanian artists (Gjergi, Paci, Sala), which “critically engage with...multiple narratives about migration in Italy,” in particular another famous ad campaign (Benetton) and, again, Amelia’s film, *Lamerica*. Like Bondavalli’s Garrone, and even more like Spackman’s Lakhous, the artists Purpura studies create installations that invite a paradoxically estranging identification of the (Italian?) spectator with “the virtual space on screen, the material space off screen, and the screen itself as object.” The materials that Lombardi-Diop and Purpura consider may be taken (heuristically) to stand at opposite poles of a contemporary dilemma: the Coloreria ads efface race and difference only to reinforce an integral—white, Italian—cultural identity; while the installations of the Albanian artists force engagement with seemingly radical ethnic differences only to reveal a complex and “contaminated” reality that eludes all binary oppositions. At the same time they both participate, like Wu Ming, in the technological turn that is rapidly reshaping the present and opening an array of possible futures, whether by reproducing ideology or critiquing it.

In the last essay of this section, Mia Fuller examines the “future” of the Italian colonial cityscape in Asmara (capital of Eritrea). In a decidedly revisionist account, Fuller argues that far from resenting, much less erasing the city-scape created by Fascist architects and planners, Eritreans have repurposed it to express their (historically uncertain) ethnic and “national” identity against the threats of external domination (Ethiopian) and internal civil conflict. Fuller’s essay does something that relatively few of our contributions do, namely call attention forcefully to the impact of Italy on “a world elsewhere” and especially on what becomes of “colonial traces” when they no longer “belong” to Italy at all.

The section’s final entry takes us out of the domain of cultural analysis and critique and into that of politically active art. Like Fuller’s essay, however, it too focuses on what one takes to be former Italian colonials, African refugees seeking to cross the Mediterranean to the “promised land” of Italy. Marco Martinelli’s play *Rumore d’acqua/Noise in the Waters*, written for the Teatro delle Albe in Verona, is here presented in the Italian original and in a translation by Thomas Simpson. The play documents, with singular pathos and irony, the senseless, horrifying casualties of diaspora, as viewed by a low level bureaucrat charged with “cleaning up the mess.” While each of the other contributions in this section contends with the uncertain future of the encounter between Italy and its migrant/(post)colonial others, this play testifies to the many stories of those of whom it may truly be said, with Rota, “no future for you.”

### *III.D. Futures of the Disciplines*

The last section of “Futures Present” samples an impressive, even improbable range of disciplinary perspectives: history, classics, literary criticism and theory, philology, philosophy, and neuroscience. For all the variety, there are connections going beyond the

methodological concerns likely to arise when scholars look ahead to the future in their fields. There are Italian connections of course, but the essays are strikingly cosmopolitan and open to boundary-crossing, both geographical and disciplinary. This is an encouraging indication of the opening of the Italian academy to international conversations and exchanges; it is a troubling sign too of the notorious combination of under-funding, oversubscription, and institutional sclerosis that has led so many Italian scholars to make their careers or collaborative connections abroad. An unintended consequence is that Italian scholars, by and large spared the scorched-earth theory wars and short half-life of academic fashions so marked in humanities disciplines elsewhere, are well-positioned to turn strong scholarly traditions to good account in the wider networks of current scholarship.

Taken as a whole, our sample presents a remarkable combination of professional expertise, Italian inflection, and “inter-” or “transdisciplinarity” as a practice and not just a slogan or aspiration. Six essays, an interview, and a response all combine contrasts, even incommensurables, freely crossing disciplinary boundaries without necessarily blurring or muddling them. In an exemplary opening case from (and of) historiography, Francesca Trivellato traces the Italian origins and specificity of microhistory, Italy’s most important contribution over the past generation or so in historical writing and research. Contrasting it with its less methodologically engaged if more accessible Anglophone reception, she then identifies and advocates a disciplinary future, a necessary one, she argues, in the coordination of micro- and macrohistorical (or global) approaches that may inform one another, especially because they are so often segregated in the “normal science” of historians. Trivellato goes on to a richly informed *vade mecum* of recent work pointing in this direction, including her own prize-winning study of the diasporic network of Jewish traders in eighteenth-century Livorno with their links across the length and breadth of the Mediterranean world, and beyond.

Classics, the oldest and arguably most Italian of humanities disciplines, and cognitive neurobiology, at the cutting edge of a revolution in the sciences, would seem at first to be least likely to transgress disciplinary boundaries, not to mention most likely to be at odds with one another in their disciplinary premises. Not so, at least on the first point. Of course classics, far from being a closed cult of ruins and dead languages, is not just the eldest but the most opportunistic of the humanities in its borrowing from many disciplines—twenty-four were prescribed in Friedrich August Wolf’s founding manifesto of modern classical scholarship. Maurizio Bettini is one of the most learned and most versatile of currently practicing classical philologists. He borrows freely from anthropology, weaves together ancient tales in his scholarship, and writes novels whose stories are as exquisitely precise and intricate as a philological puzzle. His essay is a lucid and unabashedly polemical defense—one thinks inevitably of the classical *rhetor*—of teaching classics in the secondary schools. The legacy of Roman antiquity is integral to the “encyclopedia culturale” of Italy, but the burden of his argument is not a defense of the status quo or of antiquarianism. What Bettini advocates is a radical revision oriented to the present and the future. Let Roman antiquity be studied, he argues, as a culture or cultures in an anthropological sense that would acknowledge its many contributions to Italian identity but at the same time would admit its difference, strangeness, otherness so as to become a lesson in diversity as much for old Italians as for new ones.

In counterpoint to this latest *aggiornamento* of antiquity for the future our most future-oriented, even futuristic contributions reach back through cognitive neuroscience to some perennial topoi of ancient philosophy and literary theory. The innovative and the perennial mingle in the teasingly oxymoronic but perfectly serious titles: “embodied narratology” and “literary biomimesis.” “How Stories Make Us Feel” and “Literary Biomimesis” parallel, or in terms central to their authors, “mirror” one another: both are collaborations of Italian neuroscientists and American literary scholars; both situate themselves at the intersections of scientific and humanities scholarship; both are intent on overcoming the perceived failings of the recent past in both cognitive neuroscience and humanities scholarship in the interests of a more nuanced yet still overarchingly ambitious program for combining them. On the one hand, the co-authors want to avoid the biological determinism and the quasi-Cartesian intellectualism pervasive in neurobiology and cognitive science; on the other, they want to counter relativizing anti-humanisms and dualistic post-humanisms and reinstate a revitalized humanism and humanities scholarship on a scientific base that will encompass the classic preoccupations and preserves of the humanities. This is where mirroring comes in: the “mirror neuron” identified in the animal research of Gallese and the Parma school of neuroscience is the key to the bodily simulation and re-simulation that enables our empathetic co-feeling with others, not only in direct experience but also as activated by representations in art and literature. Stories may make us feel; representations are not merely mental tokens of the real, merely symbolic, or only relative to cultural conditioning, they are what we “feel by,” what connects us. But mirroring is also a key problematic issue in Carla Freccero’s response to the two essays, not because it connects us intersubjectively, but because, as in Lacanian psychoanalysis and indeed in the classical myth of Narcissus, it deceives, distorts, or distances in ways that language demands and mediates. Rather than wanting more details here, we suspect that readers will hasten to read for themselves these challenging essays, and the interview with Professor Gallese, where many disciplinary futures are clearly at stake.<sup>9</sup>

We have placed the essays by Martin Eisner and Angela Matilde Capodivacca in the middle of the disciplines section of “Futures Present” because philology is still the central discipline in Italian humanist studies; we come to them here at the end of our introduction to this section because the same iconic figures preside over both and, *mutatis mutandis*, over the section as a whole. In Martianus Capella’s late antique allegory, the marriage of Mercury (Greek Hermes) and Philology figures the union of hermeneutics and the seven liberal arts. Mercury’s marriage bid is initially rejected in turn by Wisdom, Divination, and the Soul, but the rejection effectively leaves Philology alone as the mistress of the liberal disciplines, which she obligingly shows by throwing up the texts of them all at the feet of a presumably astonished Mercury. In keeping with the allegory, Capella’s treatise is a compilation of earlier pedagogical texts, themselves mostly compilations, and in its extravagant afterlife would be continuously interpreted and reinterpreted from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages. In Eisner’s variation on the theme, Philology is the goddess of the material text, Hermes the god of communication, their union a promising alliance for the future between literary-critical historicism’s attention to changing formats

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<sup>9</sup> We anticipate further installments in this discussion to appear in the next volume of *California Italian Studies*.

and interpretative codes and literary-critical formalism's disclosure of transhistorical structuring principles. Capodivacca's marriage of Philology and hermeneutics conjoins an ever-returning past in an ever-transforming present and future: the philologist immersed in the record of the past wills a metamorphosis into the philologist-philosopher of the future, "the past ceases to inform the present in the sense of a set of causes which determine it, but, rather, as a presence that constitutes and determines the now as well as the future of her own interpretations" (43). The proof in both essays comes in the hermeneutical virtuosity of close textual readings—Eisner's of Dante's *Vita nova*; Capodivacca's of the open and the occulted dialogics of Nietzsche's engagement with Leopardi—and in their careful, discriminating attention to past interpreters and interpretations.

#### *IV. Futures Past, Introductory*

The heading of our last section echoes Reinhart Koselleck's conception of "futures past" (*Vergangene Zukunft*), which itself refers to the resonances of once-anticipated futures in the lived present, their revision or rejection, and the continuous generation in turn of newly possible futures. In their display of the shifting, sometimes vertiginous effects of contemporary efforts to revive or cancel the past in order to construct "what is to come," the essays on "futures present" also invite the retrospective view, a kind of archeology or genealogy that this final collection of essays provides. Of course the layers and links will hardly be complete, but they will map some past possibilities that have been taken over, cast aside, or, without exhausting their potential, gone unrealized.

#### *IV.A. "Italy's Early Modernities"*

Our first subheading in Part IV, has the easy virtues and the liabilities of spanning "early" and "later," while also positing a distinction between them. "Medieval" and "Modern" is the standard chronological translation, but with due apologies to medievalists who may well feel that their period has been slighted here yet again, the essays in this first section are not so much concerned with continuities from the Middle Ages as with turning points in Modernity. It may be some consolation that while they privilege the Modern, they give it variable dimensions and levels, not always heading in one direction. An advancing Modernity here is more like a Moebius strip of alternative, sometime overlapping genealogies than a straight line.<sup>10</sup>

There is a certain logic, however, in three essays on Leon Battista Alberti coming between an opener that underscores the role of historical contingency as a guiding concern of the Italian philosophical tradition and two essays that analyze the undoing of preordained and predestined order in humanist historiography and Galileo's new science. Alberti brings arts and architecture into an early modern dossier of political thought,

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, a very recent and comprehensive review of variations and uncertainties on the meaning of modernities in a Round-Table published in the *American Historical Review* for 2011.



philosophy, and science. But this Alberti, avatar of the “Renaissance Man,” the “first born among the sons of modern Europe,” also becomes a case study in the strains on the Burckhardtian paradigm.

In the first essay, Roberto Esposito develops a position introduced in Emanuel Rota’s account of contemporary Italian philosophers—Agamben, Negri, and Esposito himself—best known for what might be called a radical philosophical anthropology of the dynamics of power. His essay pivots on a specifically Italian philosophical modernity represented above all by Machiavelli and Vico as distinct from the French or English forms inaugurated by Descartes and Hobbes. Over and against abstracting rationalism, the Italian tradition takes events to consist of elements that are themselves philosophical, that cannot be “philosophized” apart from the contingencies and actions that bring them about. Philosophy, so to speak, happens, particularly in politics. And since philosophers must be concerned accordingly with the complex textures of time and events, it will not do to dismiss as unphilosophical or irrelevant to the truth of philosophy perspectives deriving from history, anthropology, philology, and law. This is Italian “normative pluralism,” cultural exceptionalism, and historical *Fortuna* in a philosophical key.

Esposito’s is a genealogy of modernity that is taken up with qualifications by our other early modern essays. For instance, according to Capodivacca, as we have just seen, the Great Tradition of Italian philosophy passes not through politics but through philology as it wrestles with the imbrication of past, present, and future from Poliziano to Leopardi. And yet, for her too the key is the critical attention to historical contingency and, as the connection to Nietzsche also implies, this is a “philology for and of the future” with much more to say about power and political life than one might first assume.

The confirmation of, or at least compatibility with, Esposito, is particularly striking when it comes from far afield, as in the last two essays (Connell and Wilding) that deal respectively with the displacement of a crucial philosophical-theological concept and with the cosmology of Galileo. Both offer highly original, provocative arguments—ostensibly without connection between them—yet both point to an epochal shift in ideas of temporality. William Connell’s account of “Renaissance eternalism” traces a transformation from the closed world of divine creation, with its providential beginning and ending, to the view that the world has always existed, literally from time immemorial. Connell argues that this idea, circulating in the university philosophers’ commentaries on Aristotle, merged with the interest of Italian humanist scholars as they wrote and reflected upon history as the outcome of human action without preordained outcome or providential design. Nick Wilding suggests that the overriding attention given to Galileo’s ideas about the nature and order of cosmological space has obscured his “major contribution to the history of the future” in the universalization of terrestrial mutability: “Before Galileo the universe did not exist in time, after him it did.” The contribution to modernity here (and to Esposito’s argument) is that time, past, present, and presumably future, rather than having an objective existence, is made through human action—and made in Italy.

The early modernity of Alberti is more “modern” than “early” in the essays of Marvin Trachtenberg, Heather Horton, and Marco Ruffini, but in that they foreshadow distinctly different futures, their versions of his modernity are not the same. Trachtenberg’s Alberti has his parodic modern descendant—it is tempting to say, comeuppance—in Ayn Rand’s all-controlling, megalomaniac architect Howard Roark

who destroys a building of his design whose “pure art” has been compromised by collective meddling. In Horton’s detailed account of the vernacular and Latin versions of his treatise on painting, Alberti engages in a double duplicity: first in producing two versions of the work; then in referring to ancient precedents to show that there are none, either for a treatise on painting or for his production of a vernacular that can hold its own with, and even surpass, Latin. Horton’s Alberti represents himself as a collaborative innovator who is prompted by the new work of a community of artists and architects in Florence to produce a treatise that would be as novel as the works they are producing; Trachtenberg’s demiurge Alberti-Architect is the supreme individualist for whom the ideal matters more than actual outcome, a pose that has masked the many continuities of fifteenth-century Florentine architectural practice with those of the medieval period. Ruffini’s Alberti is the self-consciously conflicted modern, his insistent analyses of painting as an art and science of surfaces at odds with the lingering anxiety that ethical and symbolic purposes are only attainable through the illusion of depth.

In the familiar narratives of Italian history the early intimations of modernity are repeatedly stifled, truncated, by some combination of external intervention or internal retreat, declining into what Eric Cochrane called “the forgotten centuries.” These essays vouch for a narrative rather different from Esposito’s, but put in relief the contingencies not only of history but historiography itself. Their early modernities cannot be reduced to a singular, abstract Modernity that must rise or fall. Taken together, they encompass characteristic, and characteristically diverse, versions and possibilities of modernity, and this more than the stale narratives of rise and decline is its Italian *fortuna* and offering to the future.

#### *IV.B. The (Re-)births of a Nazione*

The competing geometries of time—circular and linear—that have long haunted the historiography of Italy, for obvious reasons haunt this introduction and this volume. It is thus particularly fitting that we return in our final section to measure (to use the metaphor of Claudio Fogu), from a different angle and with different instruments from those of Paul Ginsborg and his interlocutors, the ratio between the Risorgimento and the present day. To one degree or another, the essays under this rubric revisit in thought-provoking ways the problem of defining and constructing the nation of Italy from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The essays scan a series of moments in the recurring analysis of the Risorgimento as historical project and as metaphor: from the period leading up to unification (Reill; Corgnati), to De Sanctis’s cultural Risorgimento (Mackenzie), to the illusions and disillusionments of the later nineteenth century (Righi’s Collodi; Billiani’s Scapigliatura), to the first colonial period and the Great War (Baranello’s Pascoli), to Futurism (Re and Siracusa’s Rosa Rosà; Fogu), to Fascism (Lanfranchi); to the “boom” (Righi’s Malerba and Bene), to the very recent past (Benedetti’s Pasolini, Mackenzie’s Benedetti). The section opens with one essay, and closes with two essays that roughly span the life of the Italian *nazione*, and that, each in its own way, interrogate the recurrent motifs of critique, recovery, and re-visioning of the past for purposes of the present and the future.

A number of the essays confront the symbolic problem of delineating clear, even rigid borders that confer integrity and autonomy on the nation: whether by studying explicit treatments of territorial boundaries, or by analyzing less explicit discourses, which operate figuratively, especially through the personification of the nation as an intact (female) body. Like Ginsborg, Dominique Reill returns to the pre-unification period to recover a voice that did not prevail in the nation-building that followed. With his notion of permeable “borderlands” (particularly between Venice and her former holdings in the Eastern Adriatic), the Venetian journalist Pacifico Valussi advocated an alternative to the rigid “confini” of the “national territory” (in the phrase explored in other ways by Settis). The proposal was ignored in his own day, even by Valussi himself after unification had taken place, but may seem especially timely in our time. Our next essay focuses on the period after the real, and in some cases obviously unhappy, consequences of unification had begun to make themselves felt. Shifting from an historical to a literary perspective, Francesca Billiani examines the importation of previously excluded “foreign” genres/modes of Gothic and fantastic literature by the bohemian literati who styled themselves the Scapigliati. In this account, authors such as Camillo Boito and Ugo Tarchetti deploy figures of threateningly decadent and diseased female bodies and subjectivities, in careful juxtaposition with the “normatively” domesticated woman typically presented as the ideal (re)producer of the new Italian citizenry. They thereby indirectly thematize the already perceptible failure to constitute the national body. Billiani’s essay suggests a double violation of symbolic spaces: diegetically, in the penetration of normative domesticity by Gothic perversity; meta-diegetically in the attack on politically constructive realism of a distinctively Italian kind (read, Manzoni) by the recourse to foreign models.

Giovanni Pascoli’s “The Great Proletarian, She is Risen,” in Adriana Baranello’s translation and analysis, stands both as a fierce defense, in a new key, of the integrity of the national territory and as a kind of counterpoint to the gendered critique of Italy by Tarchetti and Boito. Not only does Pascoli re-figure the national *patria* as nurturing yet activist mother, he also seeks specifically to reverse the “colonization” of Italy by other cultural traditions, and the dispersal of her population in foreign lands, through the enterprise of Libyan colonialism (see again Fuller). For Pascoli, the integrity of the national body is guaranteed only by its expansion beyond national borders. This is imperialist permeability with a very different valence than that described by Reill’s Valussi, one which cycles back to the *mare nostrum* of ancient Rome and the conquest of Carthage, well before the same tropes were redeployed by Mussolini around the Ethiopian invasion. Thinking back to Maurizio Bettini’s essay (section III.D above), Pascoli, the extraordinarily learned classicist and sometime school-master, professor, and employee of the Ministry of Public Instruction constitutes a perfect example of how in the past the academic discipline of Classics was made to serve patently ideological and overtly political purposes.

With Pascoli, then, we see the model of redemptive historical cyclicity in fully-articulated form, and in carefully structured relationship to the problem of preserving and expanding national-imperial space. Stéphanie Lanfranchi explores a similar pattern of recycling in the discourse of literary prophecy fostered under Fascism. Noting the lengthy tradition of political exhortations by poet-prophets—from Dante and Petrarch to Leopardi and Foscolo (from whom she takes her typological title)—she documents the topos in

fascist literary criticism of seeing in these earlier canonical figures the prophetic annunciation of a “true Italy” now realized under Mussolini’s guidance. Against these she poses the solitary (one is almost tempted to say, prophetic) voice of the great Dantista, Bruno Nardi, whose *Dante-profeta*, carefully confined to his own historical moment, takes on new meaning as a figure of scholarly resistance to ideological appropriation.

The next two contributions are concerned with Futurism, though not with the works of Marinetti and others that are more or less directly concerned with the question of resurgent national identity. Rather, taken together they serve in their different ways as cogent critiques of past temporal models (circular vs. linear), and of “traditional” understandings of Futurist ideology. The first is a translation (by Siracusa and Re) with introduction (by Re) of Rosa Rosà’s novella, “A Woman with Three Souls,” one of the works by female futurists which are just now beginning to get the attention they deserve. “A Woman with Three Souls” stands at the borderline between science fiction and socio-political analysis (in a doubly realist and allegorical mode). The story charts a mysterious series of transformations of a classically domesticated bourgeois female subject by turns into a vibrant sexual being, an autonomous adventurer, and the outspoken discoverer of a “new science.” As analyzed by three male scientists, these transformations turn out to be the product of the invasion of the present by the future: a future in which women will no longer be “under control,” social or scientific as may be. Fascinating at several levels, the story may be read against the belated history of science fiction in Italy recounted by Saiber, as well as against the predominantly masculinist bias of much futurist writing. More to our immediate concerns, it can be seen as an even more direct challenge than that of Billiani’s *Scapigliati* to the ideology of the normative domestication of women on which post-unification Italy is founded, and, implicitly, as a critique of appropriative uses, such as Pascoli’s of figurative female bodies to represent what, in the end, remains a politics of and for men.

Claudio Fogu’s speculative essay on futurist anticipations of contemporary science takes what is apparently a very different tack and may, at least from one angle, best be seen in relation to the discussions of “new sciences” in the last section of the Part III. Fogu’s discussion of futurist “*misurazioni*” does, like “A Woman with Three Souls,” indicate a counter-current in Futurism, one which skirts the painfully anachronistic spectacle of a future-oriented movement whose time is long past, by revealing the possible genealogical filiations leading from “anti-dialectical idea of synthesis” to the postwar encounter between eugenics and cybernetics to which can be traced the most potent (and in some sense disturbing) scientific discoveries and technological advances of our own time. Both Fogu and Rosà, it seems, deliberately seek not so much the reproduction of historical schematics as the deployment of complex approaches to chronology (relativity; genealogy) that put the relationship of past, present and future “in play.”

The final two essays of the collection return explicitly to the issue of nation-building by cultural means, as each examines the recycling, with a difference, of the materials of visual and verbal arts to the specific purposes of a given historical moment. Martina Corgnati tracks the involvement over several generations of visual artists, from 1861 to our own time, in the imagination and critique of the idea of “Italy” and of Italian national identity. Andrea Righi studies the motif of “indiscipline” in Collodi’s *Pinocchio*, as notorious for its promulgation of the values of bourgeois culture, as for its fascination

with the unruly desires which that culture seeks to bring under control. He then follows out the redeployment of that motif in two of the many, many modern appropriations of the story, those of Luigi Malerba and Carmelo Bene. In Righi's persuasive account, where the "indiscipline" of Collodi's *Pinocchio* is driven by the endemic poverty of those Ottocento "Italians-in-the-making," that of the later twentieth century authors points instead to the ideological malaise of a bourgeois state which has, ostensibly, overcome the material hungers of its population (one thinks, again, of Bondavalli on the culture of waste). Both essays, in any event, offer models for the transformation rather than the reproduction of the past in the present.

We end, reversing our own chronology, with the very first essay of the section. By contrast with the essays just discussed, Jennifer Mackenzie offers a signal example, not only of the enduring centrality of literature and literary history to Italian self-conceptualization but also of a tendency to repeat rather than to analyze and overcome, recurrent cultural formations. This essay departs from the simple observation of a structural parallel between De Sanctis's seminal *Storia della letteratura italiana* and Carla Benedetti's influential and controversial *Pasolini contro Calvino*:<sup>11</sup> in each case, Mackenzie observes, a vibrant political future is made to hinge upon a binary opposition between two apparently antithetical authors: Ariosto and Machiavelli in De Sanctis paralleling, *mutatis mutandis*, Calvino and Pasolini. An aesthetics of evasion is poised against polemical *impegno*, with unequivocal preference given to the latter. Whether Machiavelli, as Esposito in some sense argues, or Pasolini, in the Benedetti and Ricciardi account, is Italy's future as well as its past (and even if so: which Machiavelli; which Pasolini?); or whether, instead, adapting Fogu's category of synthesis, the real key to Italian culture has been and may be the balancing act between aesthetics and ethics, poetry and politics: these are questions that still remain to be determined (after centuries of trying). This essay, however, gives an indication of just how tenacious the conscious and unconscious recourse to the past as model for and engine of the future has been and continues to be.

## ENVOI

Futures are proverbially a long time in coming, and readers who have read this far are not likely to expect, or by now to want, a summary or a conclusion. Futures also have a way of irrupting into and disrupting the best laid plans, rendering every narrative or conceptual conclusion just another episode in an unending saga. Then again, one person's future may bypass another's—and probably will. We offer an envoi with all these possibilities in mind, but with a single example to illustrate our point and our dilemma.

As we were putting the final touches on this issue, the government of Silvio Berlusconi finally gave way. Many years of predicting its demise came true—but in the form of a resignation that few thought possible much more than a week before it happened. The Cavaliere-Prime Minister was reduced to tendering his resignation to the President of the Republic at the Quirinale and skulking out in a black limousine through a

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<sup>11</sup> For Benedetti, pro and con, see again the essays by Ricciardi and by Fulginiti and Vito, as well as the Vito interview with Wu Ming 1.

rear exit. The Parliament applauded (some members anyway), crowds jeered, refrains of the Hallelujah chorus were sung in Rome.

The long-anticipated event had happened in ways that were not anticipated—and with outcomes that remain to be seen. Berlusconi has gone on promising to bury the future in the past at the expense of those “communists” from whom he had saved the nation before, if not at the expense of the country he had led into (or at least not rescued from) fiscal crisis. A “technocratic” replacement was called on to clear away the detritus of the fallen regime or, if it had not really fallen, to cover it up. Already different bets were being made on the future—*plus ça change*: collapse; slow recovery; the dubious distinction of being a bigger fiscal failure than the GIPS (Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain)? Always already we begin to hear the old litanies of disappointment, recrimination, failure after great expectations, but very little so far of some new Risorgimento. Even as the “threat” of a new Mussolini and/or the shame of “the man who screwed an entire country”<sup>12</sup> vanished, as if into thin air, new preoccupations, perhaps just as myopically anchored in the “eternal present,” hail into view: does Berlusconi’s overnight collapse signal a recognition that, in fact, part of Italian sovereignty, and its economic “futures,” are now de facto subordinate to the European Union? Does the installation of an unelected “technocratic” government pose as grave a threat to democratic institutions as Berlusconi seemed to in some quarters? What channel will the social and political forces that propped themselves against Il Cavaliere’s regime now find for expression, if any? And will the drive to economic productivity and recovery have the same effect, in the long run, on Italy’s *paesaggio* as did the exploitative *clientelismo* of the last several years?

Dante, in a notably cryptic, and possibly confused, phrase, said of his notorious DXV prophecy, foretelling the coming of a political and/or spiritual savior for Italy, that “the facts [would] be the Naiads,” in other words, the content of the prophecy would be exactly and only what actually happened in the future. This is no doubt the case with the questions posed above, as with the import of this volume itself. And that’s an end on it.

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<sup>12</sup> The phrase appeared on the cover of *The Economist*, June 11-17, 2011.

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