Part III, "The City and National Consciousness," which deals primarily with the Risorgimento and Fascism. As regards the Unification, Canniffe describes the creation of a specific genus of piazza, often named after the heroes of the Risorgimento. In this context, the author's comments regarding the Vittoriano and its conspicuous position in Piazza Venezia are especially interesting and relevant. He then goes on to identify the use that Mussolini made of the same space and structure to personal ends, moving his government's office to Palazzo Venezia in 1929. Extending the critical perspective beyond this specific space, the author proceeds to recognize the almost paradoxical attitude of the Fascist regime in terms of the architectural projects it undertook in the 1930s and 1940s, projects "which underline the simultaneously forward and backward looking attitudes" (186).

The final section of the book, "Urban Expression in the Age of Uncertainty," concentrates on buildings constructed, along with the functions they were intended to perform, in the immediate postwar period, coinciding with the time of the Neorealist filmic and literary aesthetic, the tension filled "years of lead," and the contemporary age. In this Part IV, the author navigates elegantly between the grave postwar economic situation, with its need for social housing, and the subsequent dialogue between architectural modernism and postmodernism, on the one hand, and the persistence of the classical or historical tradition on the other. An appropriate illustration of this process is Rome's Stazione Termini, which can be seen to represent the political situation of the country "as an open, modern democratic veneer [...] placed over a substantial fascist legacy" (211). The closing pages of the volume focus on the theories of Piacentini and Rossi which, in Canniffe's view, address the primary subject of The Politics of the Piazza.

To sum up, The Politics of the Piazza is an important publication that provides a coherent, comprehensive, and fascinating account of the evolution of the public square through the complicated political, social, and religious life of the Italian peninsula and the islands, spanning more than two-thousand years. In the process Eamonn Canniffe deftly intertwines expertise in the critical analysis of architectural forms and their relationship to the spaces they occupy, with knowledge of momentous historical events that have come to define the nation.

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Cinzia Sartini Blum writes with the clarity of a classic. Her argument is very ambitious and admirable. Figures of speech such as "the end of the journey" and "the end of History," which aim to sum up the postmodern impasse, are challenged by Blum who believes that there is an alternative between the two futureless choices that the Western intellectual establishment is stuck with: "the nostalgic attachment to and the disillusioned deconstruction of the old monuments of culture" (4). The
alternative arises from her close examination of women writers in Italy who have made the trope of the journey central to their writing. What is most admirable in Blum's project is that it is in no way confined to a discussion on women writers in a strict sense. That is, the movement or tension that one detects throughout the book is one that begins in the microcosm of women writers and eventually ends up in the macrocosm of epistemological systems that determine the course of history. One of the most interesting aspects about Blum's work is its development into a project that led her beyond the sphere of her initial focus. She states in her introduction: "what started as a study of figures of subjectivity in contemporary Italian women's writing took an unexpected course, that of exploring the new ways of thinking about and being in the world — a world where the movement of texts and ideas is affected but not contained by multiple boundaries" (5-6).

The author makes her intent clear in chapter three, "Biancamaria Frabotta's Lead," when she compares her position to that of critics such as Giulio Ferroni who believe in reviving and rescuing the cultural heritage of the past as if nothing lies "beyond the collapse of the Eurocentric and phallogocentric systems of values" (92). Blum suggests a woman's perspective to lead us through the gloomy view of the end-of-the-journey supporters: "My approach, in contrast, is premised on the belief that the journey appears to be over only to those who remain trapped in the rubble of failed ideological systems. I have been inspired by theoretical and literary discourses that seek to depart from the melancholic or nihilistic impasse of the end-of-the-journey mentality, and first and foremost by Frabotta's work, which is characterized by a sustained effort to revise, or revisit, the metaphor-concept of the journey from a woman's perspective" (92-93). It is important to note that Blum's work never simplifies matters, and in suggesting a woman's perspective of the journey through her examination of Frabotta's works, for example, problems are not resolved by a simple switching of roles. In Blum's study the implication is that woman's thought suggests that there is something more than just self-preservation and mastery over nature. According to Blum's argument, this has been a limiting factor in the direction of the male-centred journey because it has lead to a perspective of being which lacks an interaction with becoming.

By examining the works of Frabotta, Dacia Maraini, and Toni Maraini (sister of Dacia Maraini), Blum clearly demonstrates that these are women writers who do not refuse their literary heritage. Throughout her book the main tension in the arguments concerning the female writers mentioned above is between the old and the new, tradition and modernity, order and chaos, being and becoming, and so on. The whole drama of the conflict between permanence and change seems to be played out in the writings of these prominent writers. In my opinion, the most compelling chapter of this overall interesting book is the one dedicated to Toni Maraini. I think Blum does an exceptional job in demonstrating how Maraini never negates her cultural heritage and at the same time explores new dimensions that lead the writer beyond the confines of her own culture in order to rediscover the common ground beyond categories and epistemological systems. The ultimate lesson that Blum underlines in her reading of Maraini's work is of a journey that suggests an alternative to the postmodern impasse: "A clear lesson emerges from
such a journey: connections between the ontological and the historical path must be explored, and awareness that we all belong to the same ‘universal homeland’ must provide an ethical point of reference for a constructive approach to the particulars of history” (192). This lesson is learnt through Maraini’s experience of exile and wandering, where exile has nothing to do with nostalgia and alienation but rather has much do with a notion of travel that completely discards the tourist visit: “It does not evoke melancholic nostalgia for lost origins, authenticity, and meaning; instead, it points to a place beyond «the frontiers of common knowledge» [...] where it is still possible to wander in search of «the common coordinates of humanity»” (194). Categorizing Maraini’s view is not a simple task, and this is precisely Blum’s point, since it is this characteristic that makes the writer so apt to reconfigure Western tradition and its relationship with the non-Western other.

In chapter six Blum turns to migration literature written in Italy and continues her discussion on female mobility by examining “its role in mediating the encounter between different values and cultures” (204). One of the main points of Blum’s investigation in this chapter is related to the difference between integration and interaction. The clash between cultures in Italy is reflected in Blum’s examination of some of the literature that has been produced by female native Italians, such as Maria Pace Ottieri, and immigrant writers, such as Khadj Beye. In relation to the trope of the journey, Blum believes that the age of migration in Italy offers a new way of viewing the postmodern impasse. With Ottieri she explores the possibility of mythical thinking in an attempt to grasp the whole and living it in daily life. From here she leads her reader to the concept of “writing as an act of intercultural mediation” (222) and the work of Edouard Glissant, who discusses errancy in terms of “a way of finding oneself «by taking up the problems of the others»” (223). Glissant’s idea of “rhizomatic or nomadic thought” (223), provides Blum with a constructive way of viewing exile. Rather than discovery or conquest, we can consider the relationship with the other from a new perspective: “«Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what [he] call[s] the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other»” (223). In view of this, the task that Blum has taken upon herself is that of investigating how the plot of the conventional journey (male-centred) is being rewritten in the migration literature in Italy today. The fundamental role of women writers and women characters in migration literature goes from viewing feminine mobility as threatening a static notion of identity to “a central figure for constructive transformation” (233).

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Some twenty years ago, I happened across a book written in English that cleverly enticed me to travel through space and through time, pursuing the trails of some of my admired English authors. It was not quite a biography, not at all fiction, but