Mediterraneo. Posta in una posizione di assoluta centralità geografica, l'isola ha conosciuto nel corso di centinaia di anni le più disparate culture e si è incontrata con le più disparate civiltà. Il saggio intitolato "Sicily and Araba Culture" rappresenta, in questo senso, un testo essenziale per comprendere come, nell'universo di Consolo, la Sicilia si metaforizzi per diventare una sorta di simbolo universale. Partendo da alcuni rilievi storici pertinenti il dominio musulmano cominciato nell'827 lo scrittore arriva a parlare di una sorta di rinascimento dell'isola e, soprattutto, di un'armonia tra razze, culture e religioni che ha pochi eguali nella storia moderna. Come scrive Consolo: "the greatest miracle during the Muslim domination was the spirit of tolerance, the cohabitation of peoples of different culture, race, and religion" (229). Allo stesso modo, la città di Palermo diventa, in "Palermo, Most Beautiful and Defeated", simbolo della grande ricchezza artistica e culturale della Sicilia e della sua moderna decadenza. La sezione include inoltre altri tre saggi: "Ibn Jubayr", "The Bridge over the Channel of Sicily" (sui pescatori siciliani e nordafricani) e "Porta Venezia" (racconto di una giornata a Milano passata tra extracomunitari di origine africana).

L'ultima parte ("Writing as Poetic Memory"), la più letteraria e metaletteraria dell'intero volume, si apre con "A Day Like Any Other", in cui Consolo stabilisce la differenza tra lo scrivere e il raccontare, e prosegue con le memorie letterarie di "For a Metric of Memory" e "The Languages of the Forest", una sorta di racconto della educazione letteraria e linguistica dello scrittore. A chiudere si trovano altri due saggi emblematici: il pasoliniano "The Disappearance of Fireflies", nota critica sulla evoluzione/involuzione della lingua italiana, e l'autobiografico "The Smile, Twenty Years Later", una riflessione sul romanzo scritto nel 1976.

Al termine di questa rapida carrellata un commento d'obbligo va dedicato a chi ha tradotto i singoli saggi. Selezionati tra i più autorevoli italianisti dell'accademia nordamericana (Ben Lawton, Joseph Francese, Francesca Parmeggiani, John P. Welle, Valerio Ferme) i traduttori hanno saputo preservare, con tutti gli ovvi limiti di ogni 'tradimento', il prezioso eloquio della prosa di Consolo, facendo giustizia della ricchezza (pluri)linguistica dei saggi scelti. Per questo motivo, e per il suo fondamentale contributo alla *scholarship* su Consolo, *Reading and Writing the Mediterranean* è un testo di assoluto valore che contribuirà di certo a far conoscere in Nord America uno dei più brillanti scrittori italiani.

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Eamonn Canniffe. *The Politics of the Piazza. The History and Meaning of the Italian Square*. Hampshire-Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2008. Pp. xiii + 288. ISBN 978-0-7546-4716-4. US\$ 84.

The author of the present volume provides a concise and informative description of the contents and scope of this fine publication by stating: "The book explores the history of Italian urban space through the relationship between political sys-

tems and their methods of representation in architecture" (1). Illustrated with 110 black and white photographs and 18 original drawings of more than 60 public squares representing the entire Italian peninsula and Sicily, the author offers a sweeping history of the piazza from Etruscan, Greek, and Roman prototypes to structures of the contemporary age. His field of study ranges from such well-known monuments and sites as the Roman Forum, Piazza San Marco, Piazza San Pietro, Piazza del Campo, Piazza del Campidoglio to perhaps less familiar but equally significant ones such as Rome's Piazza Sonnino, Bergamo's Piazza Vecchia, Brescia's Piazza della Loggia, Perugia's Fontivegge Piazza Nuova, and Modena's Cemetery of San Cataldo. In the process, the author engages with the major periods of Western architecture, from antiquity and early Christianity through Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassicism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. Canniffe organically and insightfully links the aesthetic features of these urban structures to political events that shaped these spaces for the purpose of articulating a variety of political, religious, and social discourses. As well, he consistently integrates observations pertaining to realized structures with imagined spaces as described in theoretical writings, from those of Vitruvius and Leon Battista Alberti to those of Marcello Piacentini and Aldo Rossi.

Part I, "The Roots of Italian Urban Form," covers the evolution of the piazza as an urban organizing principle from classical antiquity to the late Middle Ages, from the Greek and Etruscan antecedents of the Forum Romanum to the medieval piazze of Florence and Siena. Fusing an impressive command of history and of architectural aesthetics, the author delineates the changing function of the Forum from the socio-political context of pagan Rome to that of Christian Italy, establishing in the process an almost unbroken evolutionary line from the Forum to the "theory of permanence" formulated by Aldo Rossi in 1982. Having documented the shift from the Roman city to the Christian urban space, Canniffe next examines the public square of the 1200s and 1300s, in terms of its design, stating for instance that Piazza Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello "foreshadows the elements of more populous cities which developed on the Italian mainland into the medieval period" (49).

In Part II, "The Early Modern City," are discussed architectural developments from the late 1400s to the early 1700s, as the author examines the categories of Renaissance, Mannerism, and Baroque, taking into account the rediscovery of Vitruvius's *De architectura* and Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*. The author also examines the impact of the Catholic Reformation as well as of the political absolutism of the 1600s and 1700s on the "reinforcement of the personification of the state" (96). As Canniffe contends and persuasively illustrates, "the piazza was the medium through which authority was communicated directly to a population" (98). By emphasizing the notions of theatricality and spectatorship that emerged in this period, he interprets the location, design, and "scenographic intentions" of such spaces as the Palazzo Ducale in Vigevano, Piazza San Marco in Venice, and Piazza del Campidoglio as urban works that "arose from the desire of the power elite to project an ideal which would have the traits of the antique and the self-consciously rational" (97).

Important piazze from the mid-1700s to the mid-1900s are the subject of

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. *Rewriting the Journey in Contemporary Italian Literature*. Toronto: UP, 2008. Pp 381. ISBN 978-0-8020-9789-7. n.p.

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