

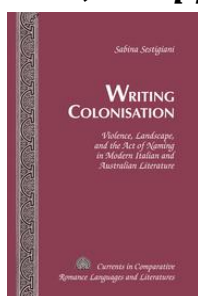


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Paolo Bertinetti

Writing Colonisation: Violence, Landscape, and the Act of Naming in Modern Italian and Australian Literature

Sabina Sestigiani. 2014. Writing Colonisation: Violence, Landscape, and the Act of Naming in Modern Italian and Australian Literature. Peter Lang: New York, 254 pp., US\$ 87.95. ISBN 9781433123986.



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Sestigiani's innovative essay examines the relation between language, violence and colonialism through comparing some key works by Italian and Australian writers; and combines an illuminating investigation on the symbolic meaning of space, border and the unknown (which is based on the rationalization of space in Western culture), with a philosophical, linguistic and anthropological approach to colonisation.

The most striking feature of her scrutiny, which investigates the ways in which language has been utilised to ideologise the colonial experience (particularly with respect to the relationship between landscape and language), is to be found in the fourth and fifth chapters of her essay, dedicated to the act of naming and to Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*.

The book is divided in three parts and has eight chapters; and is a crucial critical analysis and comparison between selected Australian and Italian narrative texts that explores landscape, its definitions, representations and critical discourses. Sestigiani's scrutiny originally contributes to the study of colonialism in its relationship with language and the act of naming, and it also adds meaningful insights on the authors analysed.

Place naming, as Sestigiani shows adapting Benjamin's theory of *Ursprache* to her theme, becomes a way to possess an unknown territory and to subdue it through a process of appropriation (in stark contrast she offers an interesting example of the non-arbitrary bond between language and things in aboriginal place-naming). In the fourth chapter Sestigiani also takes into consideration Heidegger's view of the act of naming (his theory

of an 'enframing' of reality), which she discusses in the context of her inquiry in a very convincing way.

Through Benjamin's reflection on language, Sestigiani dedicates the following chapter to a textual analysis of the element of place-naming in David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*: Ovid, during his exile in "barbaric" Tomis, is presented as trying to capture the myth of a pristine language devoid of the deceits of communication. "Malouf builds on Ovid's incapacity to adapt to the new environment, and gradually starts linking the poet's scornful rejection to his being deprived of language". As Ovid tries unsuccessfully to "translate" that foreign and barbaric land in Latin, *An Imaginary Life* advocates a parallelism with the Australian reality, where the "language of civilization" and the act of naming a hostile environment end up recreating a concocted otherness.

The entire book is characterized by an impressive richness of critical discourse and offers an original and engaging standpoint on the fallacies of the colonial adventure.

Paolo Bertinetti is Professor of English Literature at the University of Turin. Among his publications are studies on 20th-century English Theatre, Restoration drama, Graham Greene, postcolonial literature and espionage novel. He is editor and co-author of a two-volume history of English literature and of a short history of English literature, both published by Einaudi.

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