THE RESILIENCE OF THE ANGLO-ITALIAN HEROINE IN MARGARET COLLIER GALLETTI DI CADILHAC'S *BABEL* (1887)

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In 1807, Germaine de Staël's novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (*Corinne, or Italy*) established the myth of the poetess as an Anglo-Italian heroine who subverts social conventions by leaving her British fatherland to realize her literary talent in her Italian motherland. A precursor to the Romantic Byronic hero, as firstly asserted by Ellen Moers (1977), de Staël's transnational protagonist chooses to identify as an Italian performing poet, an *improvvisatrice*, thus capturing in the image of the Italian woman a trope of independence and resilience; that is, a romantic heroine whose artistic genius and passionate sensibility render her able to express human feelings, aspirations, and sufferings. Consequentially, she is also a hypersensitive individual who is exposed to human feelings and behaviors. In other words, the receptiveness that heightens her creativity is simultaneously at the root of her vulnerability. A rewriting of Sappho's story for the nineteenth century, *Corinne, or Italy* affirms a public artistic role for a woman poet and simultaneously establishes her as a tragic, vulnerable heroine who, having been abandoned by the novel's hero, loses her artistic talent and, in the end, dies. For many nineteenth-century British women writers, indeed Corinne was "the archetypal figure of female suffering and vulnerability" as Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler state in their collection of essays *Unfolding the South* (2003: 2). Following de Staël's example, who "asked her readers to re-think their preconceptions about women, art and the Italian peninsula" (1), at the start of the twenty-first century, Chapman and Stabler in their volume called for the re-evaluation of the complexities and variety of the interactions of nineteenth-century British women writers and artists who traveled to or resided in Italy with the peninsula's Risorgimento politics and

Renaissance aesthetics. In answering their call, this essay reassesses the fictional representation of the talented Anglo-Italian heroine in the nineteenth century and reclaims her empowering difference by focusing on her transnational identity, an aspect that continues to be largely unexamined. Kari Lokke, for example, identifies de Staël's novel as "the originary portrait of European female genius" but perceives its "overwhelming emotional power and cultural response [to be] not always easy for us to understand." (2004: 4) This essay furthers our understanding of the enduring, transnational legacy of the Anglo-Italian heroine into the twenty-first century by outlining how, in this nineteenth-century protagonist, we find a precursor to the transnational girl of contemporary narratives of development dealing with the permeability of cultural, ethnic, and geographical boundaries and with female subjectivity positioned across nation-state borders (Smith 2019).

This study of the resilience and vulnerability of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Italian heroine as a transnational character aims to reveal her significance as a pioneering literary experiment in envisioning the complexities of representing, in the novel form, a multinational subjectivity, whose actions and identity span across the boundaries of unitary concepts of nationhood. Her challenges anticipate those tackled by literature and philosophy today in rethinking subjectivity by grappling with a posthuman, nonunitary conceptualization of the subject, conceived of as "a socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multilayered social structures." (Braidotti 2011: 4) Her resilience asserts the value of difference and multiplicity, which are also at the root of her vulnerability as a multinational, multilingual subject. The Anglo-Italian heroine, I argue, is an archetype of what Rosi Braidotti defines as a nomadic subject because she resists "settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour." (Braidotti 1994: 5) Her struggle against normative dichotomous dualisms, which appears to determine a fragmentation of the self, denotes a vision of the subject that is nonunitary. Moreover, it questions universal humanistic assumptions of a

rational, male, unitary subject by affirming otherness and multiplicity as a means to "creating possible futures […] by mobilizing resources that have been left untapped, including our desires and imagination." (Braidotti 2011: 286) Through the perceptive but vulnerable transnational Anglo-Italian heroine, by the late nineteenth century, British women writers, like Margaret Collier Galletti di Cadilhac (1846-1928), interrogate alternative modes of imagining female subjectivity that draw attention to the weaknesses of linear evolution and determinism, and pursue instead affirmative and empowering narratives of difference and agency.

After outlining the prevailing influence de Staël's Corinne had in the nineteenth century on British and American women writers and artists "whether they travelled to Italy, or, […], only imagined it," (Chapman and Stabler 2003: 1) this essay examines the resilience and vulnerability of this transnational character in a little-known novel by Collier Galletti di Cadilhac entitled *Babel* (1887), to emphasize how her Anglo-Italian Giannetta is an innovative, auspicious envisioning of transnationality that tests the complex vulnerabilities of multicultural, border-crossing identities to assert "multilocality," a term used by Braidotti to define the "affirmative translation" of the pain and sense of loss and displacement migrants, exiles, and refugees experience into "the active production of multiple forms of belonging and complex allegiances." (2011: 322) In *Babel*, I posit, the Anglo-Italian heroine challenges family and social conventions and, by resisting cultural expectations defined by nation states, suggests ways to transcend them. Giannetta may not yearn to be a poet, but she is a cultural mediator who advocates a positive attitude to diversity and plurality. In answer to adversities, she does not silence her Anglo-Italian identity by complying with one nationality but resists socio-cultural and gender norms, and affirms her transnational subjectivity. A fiction and travel writer, Collier also contributed to British periodicals, such as the *Cornhill Magazine, Good Words*, *The Victoria Magazine*, the *New Quarterly Magazine,* and the *Lady's Realm*. Initially, she published under her Italian married name, as M. I. Galletti di Cadilhac, Madame Galletti,

or the Countess Galletti; later, in the 1880s, she signed, using her maiden name, as the Hon. Margaret Collier, and leaving her married name in brackets and smaller font. This is how her name appears on the title page of *Babel*, published in 1887. She then returned to her married name in periodical pieces, when it also appeared as The Countess di Cadilhac, The Countess Galletti, and in an Italianized version as The Contessa Margherita di Cadilhac (Capancioni 2021a).

In *Corinne, or Italy*, de Staël builds on the geographical, gendered opposition between northern European countries and southern ones distinguishing specifically Britain as masculine and rational and Italy as feminine and passionate. Embodied within the Anglo-Italian heroine, the two national identities appear to be incompatible: as the title suggests, Corinne is Italy and, as long as she passes as an Italian and silences her transnational, British and Italian identity, she is an independent woman and a highly successful poet. In the words of Prince Castel-Forte, she "is the image of our beautiful Italy" (Raphael 1998: 27) and she enters the narrative on the day she is crowned, like Francesco Petrarch, a most admired "poetess, writer, improvisor" (21) on the ceremonial Capitoline Hill, in Rome, a city whose historical and cultural reputation is summarized in this image of civic celebration of poetry. In the concluding chapter, her last song is dedicated to Italy, her country, and Rome, where her "ashes will be conveyed." (402) However, Corinne's sensibility means she is attuned to the melancholy and sorrow of the hero, Oswald, Lord Nelvil. These sentiments are associated with his Britishness and a Romantic aesthetic whose seductive self-preoccupation, in Looki's view, is "an affective state which functions for Staël as a synecdoche for patriarchal values and cultural traditions." (2004: 25) Corinne's inability to move beyond Oswald's betrayal and her consequential death are therefore associated with her transnationality as an inevitable vulnerability.

Notably Britishness is epitomized by Oswald, who is a Scottish peer. Moers points out how "the distinction between England and Scotland meant little to Mme de Staël, but it was very

important to her that her hero be a Briton." (Moers 1977: 178) A French writer exiled by Napoleon Bonaparte because of her opposing political views, de Staël was not only a significant figure because of her eventful, intellectual life, her fiction and seminal literary criticism but, as Biancamaria Fontana demonstrates in a recent biography, also because of her original approach to "politics – the theory and practice of the exercise of power," (2016: 2) in particular "the intimate relation she established between theory and practice, her unwillingness to separate principles from their application." (4) In her novel, both Corinne and Oswald therefore are epitomes of ideals that are represented through geopolitical conceptions of countries that appear to correspond to unitary nationalities at a time when, after the French Revolution, notions of the modern nation as a sovereign state were debated and trialed with a variety of results in Europe. De Staël's narrative is not interested in reflecting on the distinguishing features of her characters' complex, multifaceted subjectivities. Whilst Oswald can embody Britishness as a unitary nationality, Corinne's Romantic paradigm of the Anglo-Italian heroine suggests that, notwithstanding her ability to craft her own literary voice, Corinne's transnational subjectivity is the source of her tragic ending. Tricia Lootens argues "de Staël dramatizes Corinne's secret, fatal national vulnerability." (2005: 260) In my view, in choosing to pass as an Italian poetess and silence her English background, Corinne aims to fit within a unitary concept of nationality but underestimates the ways in which her multinational subjectivity is essential to her talent and her resilience. Like Collier's Giannetta demonstrates in *Babel*, to survive, the Anglo-Italian heroine needs to be both British and Italian.

At the end of the 1970s, Moers stated that the significance of de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* "should be familiar" to all scholars interested in understanding the writing of British and American women in the nineteen-century (1977: 173). I maintain that this should still be the case because of the relevance of Corinne's transnational identity, an aspect that, to date, has received scant critical consideration. The attention has been on the novel's writer and Anglo-

Italian protagonist as muses to British and American writers and artists, and on how, from its publication, Corinne's story affected women's perception of female artistic genius and alienation, and of the possibilities offered to them when they travelled abroad. Some of the most influential works have studied the seminal influence *Corinne, or Italy* had on establishing the Victorian poetess (Chapman and Stabler 2003; Brown 2000; Leighton 1992; Leighton and Reynold 1995; Leighton 1996). Corinne's fictional story as the Italian *improvvisatrice* whose poetic voice receives public recognition in Rome impacted on so many British women poets who struggled to achieve professional and literary recognition, starting with Felicia Hemans, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. After all, the novel established the myth of the heroine as a performing poetess whose artistic genius is expressed through improvised verses (Moers 1977), and whose ability to be a public, leading figure cannot be reconciled with "her yearning for domesticity." (Leighton 1995: 2) It asserted women's literary talent and contribution to the history of poetry through a protagonist that reclaimed the role of women in the history of world literature by referencing two of the female lyric poets of ancient Greece whose fame had been recorded, Corinna (with her name), and Sappho (with her tragic life). Her "brilliant career", in the words of Sandra Gilbert, "provided a paradigm of female artistry for countless nineteenth-century literary women on both sides of the Atlantic." (1996: 30) Translated into English the same year it was published in French, *Corinne, ou l'Italie* reached thirty-two French editions between 1830 and 1870. The 1833 Bentley edition, which combined the translation of the prose by Isabella Hill with that of Corinne's poetry by Letitia Elizabeth Landon (Reynolds 1996), "saw at least twenty-five editions by 1900." (Isbell 1998: x) Echoes of *Corinne, or Italy* can be found in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Armgart*, in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Moers 1977; Gilbert 1996; Leighton and Reynolds 1995), in Mary Shelley's *Valperga*, and George Sand's *Consuelo* (Lokke 2004).

In *Networking the Nation: British and American Women's Poetry and Italy 1840-1870* (2015), Chapman more recently explored the significance of the relationship between the Risorgimento and the poetry of the expatriate community of British and American women who lived in Florence, particularly Barrett Browning, "mediating, reconfiguring, and transforming the conventions of the poetess." (xxviii) Chapman highlights how they created a transnational "network of sociability, print, and politics" (xxviii) within which the Italian poetess Corinne becomes an allegory of the expatriate British poetess (Chapman 2003a and 2015). De Staël's Anglo-Italian heroine is therefore a paradigm for the travelling heroine who leaves home to pursue her talent in a nurturing place idealized through an image of Italy that does not reflect the political fragmentations of the peninsula, or the Edenic Miltonian haven. The Victorian Florentine community of Anglophone women expatriates envisions Italy as "that place of fruitful nurturing and satisfied desires" (Leighton 1995: 3) for women's artistic genius, in opposition to their home countries where women's talent is limited to the domestic space. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Italy is the country where the woman writer needs to relocate to foster her literary talent. Like Barrett Browning and her Anglo-Italian heroine, Aurora Leigh, in the 1856 eponymous epic novel in verse, the poetess needs to expatriate to the Italian peninsula to find a nurturing environment where her imagination can thrive and have opportunities for her passionate sensibility to be praised and celebrated publicly.

Through Corinne, de Staël associates Italy not only with feminine excessive, debilitating sensibility but also with a victim violated by foreign rulers. She claims an Italian national cultural identity at a time when the peninsula is a divided country, not a nation state. Accordingly, Corinne symbolizes both an independent artistic female genius and a fragmented subjectivity: an independent woman and a renowned poet who dies of grief when her Oswald rejects her Anglo-Italian identity. Fifty years later, in *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning provides a happier ending for the resilient Anglo-Italian heroine returning to her quest of being a writer

who, this time, identifies herself as an English poetess who moved to Florence, her mother's native city, where Aurora was born and had lived until the death of her parents when she was sent to her father's family home in England. In Florence, she builds an independent life as a professional writer whose resilience is rewarded with literary success and marriage. Aurora marries her cousin Romney and leaves the home she has built with Marian for a future built on her union with the British hero. She does not choose the confessional sphere of lyrical improvisation but the public one of epic poetry. Furthermore, she has a public, political voice as a poet whose heart, "[c]an swell to a pair of nationalities / However ill-lodged in a woman's breast" (Barrett Browning 1995: 6, ll. 50-3). Corinne's decision to move to Rome and to characterize her identity as an Italian poetess associates her verses with an Italian poetic tradition the novel highlights by mentioning Petrarch and Torquato Tasso in the first paragraph of the first chapter of book two, "Corinne at the Capitol", which introduces Corinne, thus associating her lyrical talent to Renaissance lyric and epic tradition, to the sonnet form and the *ottava rima*. Through Aurora Leigh, Barrett Browning transforms the suffering Anglo-Italian heroine into a public, political Risorgimento advocate and reclaims epic ambitions in women's poetry. The conclusion of Aurora's story is hopeful even if it unveils how Barrett Browning, the English poetess who lives in Florence with her husband, who is also a poet, does not go beyond a marriage plot to provide her heroine with a happy ending. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Italian heroine remains a compromising model of resilience for the woman writer but one whose horizon is enriched by future possibilities of belonging, and a transnational home.

Barrett Browning and de Staël supported the Italian Risorgimento ideals and imagined a united Italy at a time when the peninsula was not yet a nation state; paradoxically, Italy could offer them a space in which their protagonists could express their artistic talents partly because of its non-existence as a nation-state. Margaret Collier Galletti di Cadilhac's two-volume novel

Babel is set in the newly united Kingdom of Italy. Her study of the complexities of transnational dynamics in a multilingual and multicultural Anglo-Italian family does not rely on Italy's most famous cities, such as Rome and Florence, but affirms the diversities of Italian regions by representing a remote area of Abruzzo. In 1873, Collier had married Arturo Galletti di Cadilhac (1843-1912), an Italian count with a political career, who had fought for the unification of Italy as a Garibaldian officer. She settled with him in the Marche region where she raised an Anglo-Italian family. The first decade of her life in their isolated, farming estate is recorded in *Our Home by the Adriatic* whose success, in 1886, established her reputation as a British writer who produced genuine and original accounts of Italian life (Capancioni 2021a and 2021b). Mirroring her personal circumstances, her Anglo-Italian heroine in *Babel*, Giannetta, has an Italian father and an English mother, and inherits passionate sensibility from her father and rationality from her mother. She is brought up in the Italian countryside and wants to travel to England. More significantly, Giannetta defies the need for a single national identity by claiming her multinational English and Italian identity, and is resilient in affirming her awareness of the confluence of both cultures in her behavior and consciousness. It is Collier's attention to Giannetta's interactions, language, reflections, and decisions that renders this Anglo-Italian heroine an innovative observation of diverse forms of being (Beer 2009) that transcends unitary concepts of nationhood.

Not a portrayal of female creativity but of transnational gendered subjectivity in a coming-of-age story, *Babel* was noticed by reviewers in the *Westminster Review* and the *Saturday Review* for its distinctive contribution to understanding ordinary life in a newly formed modern nation in need of fostering a unitary political and cultural Italian identity after centuries of multiple and diverse geopolitical realities. *The Saturday Review* appreciates *Babel*'s "great freshness" and "sympathetic interest the writer takes in the story she has to tell." (1887: 589) In *The Westminster Review*, the reviewer feels indebted to Collier for "something very new

and attractive in [her] Italian story." (1887: 652) Together with *Our Home by the Adriatic*, the previous year Collier had published an illustrated Christmas book entitled *Prince Peerless: A Fairy Folk Story Book* (1886). Dedicated to her children, this collection experiments with alternative worlds where children can forge transnational identities as they grow up through encounters with magical creatures and journeys to fantastic worlds. As I argued in another article (2021b), through a biographical approach, *Prince Peerless* shows how Collier was stimulated by her multilingual and multicultural household. Her fairy tales can be understood as narratives of growing up that pursue positive experiences of being other, cultural differences, and possibilities for transnational young protagonists to negotiate and interact. Similarly, *Babel* presents clear echoes of her familiarity with negotiating Anglo-Italian dynamics, and of her attention to the potential of growing up multinational. In Giannetta Collier configures a resilient Anglo-Italian heroine precisely because, faced with nonunitary conceptualization of individual subjectivity, Giannetta asserts her multicultural and multilingual identity to transcend socio-cultural expectations defined by gender as well as unitary national identity. Giannetta in fact is faced by those patriarchal norms that are often absent in idealized depictions of Italy by British and American women writers.

In Collier's novel, Babel is the name of an isolated, countryside estate, where an English mother, Janet Seymour, and an Italian father, Count Guido Laurelli, reside together with a French Professor of music and his Russian wife, Monsieur and Madame Chaumont, who act as tutors to the Anglo-Italian Laurelli children, Ugo and Giannetta. After having been "passionately in love," (Collier 1887: I, 46) Janet and Guido are no longer a happy couple. Misunderstandings and obstinance have driven the couple apart. At the end of the first volume, Guido's tragic murder results in Janet's death of heartache. As with the biblical tower, in Babel many are the languages spoken; however, the title's foreboding resonances, which appear initially fulfilled, are then reversed, in the second volume, by Giannetta, a young woman whose

Anglo-Italian subjectivity becomes a means of resilience and affirmation. After her parents' death, Babel degenerates once it falls into the hands of her brother who, following local patriarchal traditions, imposes his decisions on her. Giannetta does not react to these traumatic events by choosing the predominance of one cultural influence over the other or by denying her hybrid subjectivity. It is her awareness of her transnational difference that sustains her agency and her ability to move across cultures as a responsive translator. Whilst her parents' marriage is reflected upon as an unsuccessful experiment, the novel closes with a sustainable, hopeful horizon for a new Anglo-Italian couple. Giannetta's marriage to the British hero, Lord St. Quentin, is followed by a final scene that asserts her agency as an Anglo-Italian wife and mother that raises a new Anglo-Italian generation represented by her son Edgar and her nephew, Gianni, whom she brings up after her sister-in-law leaves her brother's household. In Gianni the omniscient narrator projects the image of a possible future of "harmony," (Collier 1887: II, 248) which is also suggested by the character's first name which, in Italian, merges the name of the Anglo-Italian heroine, Giannetta, with that of her mother, Janet. Collier's novel thus claims the value of hope as a motivator for resilience and transformation as affirmative forces of life.

Giannetta's transnational identity is epitomized by her unusual first name too, which translates her mother's English name with a diminutive form of the Italian first name Gianna, a distinctive derivative of Giovanna that is typical of Italy's central regions. Giannetta's name therefore signifies the distinctive circumstances of an Anglo-Italian family placed in a specific region, as well as her exceptional abilities as a cultural mediator. In the first chapter of *Babel*'s first volume, Giannetta is described as one of two interpreters in Babel; the other one is Madame Chaumont, who has a successful literary career as a translator. In England too, Giannetta is defined by her translation abilities. Her hostess and relative Lady Seymour states: "Yes, Giannetta Laurelli, I think you have translated Janet Seymour into Italian very well."

(II,154) The translation into Italian of her mother's name stands as the signifier of her capable deciphering and transferring of one cultural and linguistic heritage into the other, interpreting of similarities and differences, and crossing of borders of ethnic and cultural categories. As the omniscient narrator explains, Giannetta's most significant purpose is "that of peacemaker." (I, 106) Resiliently she trusts her ability to mediate and to find common grounds for understanding in all situations, be they ordinary, dangerous, or festive, starting with those moments of crises when her parents and brother insist on reverting to the use of one language only.

Like Corinne, Giannetta has dark hair and the eyes of her Italian parent, but her behavior reveals qualities belonging to both her English and Italian cultural backgrounds. Madame Chaumont describes Giannetta as "gay and frank as her father, but as proud and reserved as her mother." (I, 72) She is "a strange cross between the two nationalities," (I, 72) who shares with Corinne and Aurora an exceptional education: she speaks "all the European languages," (I, 18) reads the classics, plays the violin, and sings to a professional standard. It is in fact her voice that attracts the attention of the novel's hero. Although he claims he is "not a really good linguist," (I, 27) St. Quentin is an experienced traveler and has a good ear for modern languages. He is immediately "enthralled" (I, 34) by her voice, and "reduced to abashed silence in a moment" (I, 35) as she appears for the first time. It is love at first sight for the British earl, who sees in Giannetta an apparition of Hebe, an image of youth, health, and beauty that captures "the charm of 'life', a thing neither to be described, nor painted, nor understood, only felt." (I, 36) He does not have words to translate the effect Giannetta has on his senses. Interestingly, her voice and her singing are admired both in Italy and England. Her singing is not specifically associated with her Italian, a language that was often admired for its musicality especially by British women poets. Whilst the first time her voice is overheard, she is calling for Madame Chaumont in German, Giannetta's ability as a singer is associated with the music she produces playing the piano, a language that goes beyond words.

In her family's farming estate, Giannetta likes to apply her horticultural knowledge to partake in the production of fruits, vegetables, and silk. She recognizes her difference, both in terms of Anglo-Italian heritage and Protestant faith, in comparison with her local community and her Italian relatives, who are unable to empathize fully with her. The narrator explains that, whilst they "could not quite understand *her*, she perfectly understood *them*. She had been born amongst them; none of their ways astonished or shocked her. […]. Giannetta was a daughter of the soil, and had an instinctive comprehension of her kinsfolk." (I, 233-234) Her relatives identify her in relation to nature: having born and brought up on their land, they think she is a product of the same soil that produced them. Conversely, Giannetta has learned about her Britishness only through the mediation of her mother, the Chaumonts, and education. She has never visited her mother's country or met any other British person until St. Quentin is invited to dine at Babel. Having stopped at a random local railway station on the Adriatic coast to wait for the next express train to Brindisi that would return the pocketbook he left in Ancona, St. Quentin decides to go for a walk and discovers an "unexpectedly" (I, 10) beautiful countryside where he meets Ugo, who offers him hospitality.

Giannetta has internalized a natural understanding of her rural environment that nurtures her and gives her purpose through its seasonal activities; however, she sees herself specifically connected to Babel, a place that is distinguished by its multilingualism and multiculturalism. Initially, and erroneously, she thinks she is "the presiding genius of" Babel (I, 237) belonging to a specific place. The novel's intricated, and at times sensational, events test young Giannetta's perceptions so that she comes to realize how the resources her transnational subjectivity offers do not depend on a place but are portable attributes of her resilience and agency. After the violent, sudden death of her father, she suffers a deepest grief when her mother also dies and, finally, travels to England when she learns how to translate her Anglo-Italian identity into "the active production of multiple forms of belonging and complex

allegiances." (Braidotti 2011: 322) She discovers that her ability to be a member of multiple communities and to form her own Anglo-Italian family, thus affirming her model of multilocality.

Whereas Corinne's Anglo-Italian subjectivity is a secret, Giannetta's multilingual consciousness is a source of resilience to subvert conventions and achieve happiness. Yet, to understand what she defines as her "anomalous existence," (II, 222) Giannetta must personally experience the environments in which both her parents grew up to recognize that she belongs to both. After her parents' death, Giannetta is rescued from her brother's cruelty by Madame Chaumont, who brings her to London with St. Quentin's help. As she crosses the Channel Giannetta exclaims: "England! can it be England?" […]; the England I have so dreamed of, so longed to see!" (II, 86-87) Giannetta's journey is difficult because of the precarious state of her health, but when she looks at the "cliffs of Old England" (II, 86) she realizes this journey has long been her dream. The novel speculates on ways to imagine a transnational identity but does not idealize either Italy or England. The emotional arrival to her mother's land is followed by a series of episodes that open Giannetta's eyes not to cultural differences but economic ones: Victorian British progress amazes her, but the class divide and poverty it produces shock her deeply. Her empathy contrasts with the narrator's distinctive class prejudices. Once in London, her exceptional education allows her to participate in the social and cultural events, but her accent distinguishes her as a foreigner. A mark of her diversity, Giannetta's accent denotes her transnationality, maintaining the attention on her distinctive, captivating voice. Her visit to her mother's country of origin deepens her understanding of her distinguishing multicultural identity and need to be both English and Italian. By traveling, Giannetta expands her mind, modifying her preconceptions of a dichotomy between North and South based on those conceived differences that preoccupied her English mother and her Italian father, and perceiving her subjectivity more acutely as Anglo-Italian.

To conclude, whereas Corinne and Aurora define their difference through their literary talent, Giannetta believes her life to be atypical but, instead of comparing herself to a prophetic sibyl, she values being a cultural mediator. Although she reflects the biblical polyglot image inscribed in the novel's title, she does not become a tragic heroine because she has the strength to resist both English and Italian gender and socio-cultural conventions and to embody a multiple, transnational identity through her agency. Collier does not suggest an innovative image by returning to that of maternal achievement as an educator but looks positively into the possibilities of future Anglo-Italian generations. She highlights Giannetta's commitment to asserting a transnational Anglo-Italian subjectivity whose English and Italian cultural and linguistic backgrounds are equally influential. It is Giannetta's consciousness of cross-cultural differences that gives her the freedom to move across cultures and languages and to avow her affiliation to both. Collier's Anglo-Italian heroine stands out not only as an original contribution to the trope of the Anglo-Italian protagonist but also as a successful resilient woman who passes down a positive attitude to diversity and transnationality. As a transnational protagonist that defies notions of unitary identities, Giannetta transforms accepted dualisms into processes of relations and negotiations that are complex, multiple, and resilient against normative conventions. Moreover, she is a valuable, affirming model of resilience, difference, and multilocality. In the second half of the nineteenth century, *Babel* demonstrates, the Anglo-Italian heroine provides a literary tool to explore the themes of vulnerability and resilience, and to experiment with alternative modes of representation whose challenges and complexities remain relevant in reconfiguring subjectivity, concepts of identity, nationality, and belonging.

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