

Italian Studies: Theory and Practice
An SIS Workshop for ECAs
University College Cork/Society for Italian Studies
Thurs 24 – Fri 25 June 2021

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Thursday 24 June

Panel 1: TRANSLATING SUBJECTIVITIES

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Prof. Loredana Polezzi (Stony Brook University)

“Translating intersubjectivity through female genealogy: Visual art and the memory of the Italian diaspora”

In this talk I will ask how the memory of Italian migration has been translated through visual, verbal and performative practices by four women artists who identify as members of the Italian diaspora. I will concentrate, in particular, on three issues: the way in which gendered, intergenerational memory is elaborated by each artist; the intersection between media and modalities – including multiple languages as well as written, aural, visual and embodied codes – in their work; and the reformulation of the labour of translation as a localized, socially engaged and eco-critical practice which informs their art. Through their practices of self- and familial translation, I will aim to illuminate the construction of inclusive notions of Italian culture, which invite us to go beyond ‘methodological nationalism’ and to investigate plural forms of belonging and home-making, unmoored from rigid alliances between identity and blood, territory, or language.

Joseph E. Strasz (University College London)

“The guided shift toward Tuscanization in early lyric compilation manuscripts”

Dante, in his *De vulgari eloquentia*, sought to define an “illustrious vernacular” of late medieval Italy, and in doing so established the framework by which early Italian vernacular literature is judged to this day. From him we conceive of his predecessors in the Sicilian and Tuscan schools. This very framework calls into question our understanding of these earliest phases of Italian literature: if not for Dante and later Florentine-centric thinkers, would our concept of early vernacular be so heavily influenced by the Tuscans?

This paper argues that the process of Tuscanization was not some inevitable outcome fully realized by Dante, but rather an on-going dialogue between literary creators in which Tuscan was consciously chosen as the language of transmission to perpetuity. The greatest evidence for this dialogue comes from the major thirteenth-century lyric compilations, *MSS Laurenziano Redi 9*, *Vaticano Latino 3793*, and *Banco Rari 217*. These documents share many characteristics: considerable overlap in lyric content, significant emphasis on collaboration and exchange, and Tuscanized forms of Sicilian and Provençal

lyric compositions. This paper posits that the Tuscanizations in the manuscripts result from the collaborative nature of their creation. A common goal of the documents was toward transmission of their material: one facilitated by use of Tuscan dialect that had rapidly gained prominence as a trade language thanks to the mercantile efforts of Pisa and Florence. Trade left an indelible mark on the manuscripts: by its literary emphasis on exchange, especially in the form of the *tenzoni* they preserve and in the codicological makeup of the documents, and by the very languages used to transmit the material. These editorial decisions created the circumstances that allowed Dante's writings to achieve their privileged status and by extension shifted the focus of Italian vernacular production to the Tuscan-centric model we know today.

Marta Arnaldi (University of Oxford)

"Translational Subjectivities"

By means of translation, literary canons travel in space as well as in time, thus impacting our way of conceiving of history, aesthetics and the national-literary subject. As it engages with, and carves out, a new translational inter-nation (Apter 2006), this paper develops the intuition that lies at the heart of my forthcoming monograph, i.e. the idea that translation provides us with a new form of canonicity. First, and as a case study, I discuss the translational ways in which contemporary Italian poets have been exported and received in the American literary system in the past seventy years (1945-present). Whereas the Italian poetic tradition has privileged northern, male and/or philologically-tuned authors, the Italian canon in the United States has been constructed upon values of ethnic diversity, feminism, and literary progression. These values, I argue, are inherently translational in that translation, by nature, deals with margins (Baker 2018). The paper wishes to take these reflections further by asking what are the consequences of considering the Italian literary canon translationally and transnationally, as we look at Italy from abroad. To do so, it adopts a non-binary, diasporic and, ultimately, decolonising lens, one that can help us read the past – and, I hope, the present – anew.

Valentina Mele (University College Cork)

"Mistranslating Subjectivities: Pound editor and translator of Cavalcanti"

Ezra Pound's translations of Cavalcanti's work, emblematically represented by Pound's critical edition of the *Rime* (1932), have been traditionally neglected by Italian criticism, when not openly criticised. On the one hand, this paper will reconstruct the twentieth century reception of Pound's Cavalcanti in Italy by considering some of the most prominent reviews of Pound's edition (such as those of Mario Praz, Luciano Anceschi, Domenico De Robertis, Gianfranco Contini, Maria Corti) and by discussing them in the wider context of the long-lasting influence of philological approaches, historicism, and the so-called 'critica stilistica' which traditionally characterise Italian scholarly criticism. On the other, the discussion will reflect on Pound's translation choices and methodology in the light of his lifelong fascination for Cavalcanti's persona as well as of his desire for identification with the Florentine poet.

Anna Saroldi (University of Oxford)

"Anglophone Interest or Italian Desire? Bassani, his translators, and *The Garden(s) of the Finzi-Continis*"

The English translation of *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* constitutes a case of triple translation, extremely rare in the context of translation of contemporary prose into English, and quite unique for the English reception of contemporary Italian literature. Why was *Il giardino* retranslated three times in less than fifty years?

My paper investigates the re-translations into English of *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* (Quigly 1965, Weaver 1977, McKendrick 2007) to enquire why this classic gained so much attention in the English-speaking world (more than *Il gattopardo*, *Le città invisibili*, or *Il nome della rosa*). I analyse how these translations came to be, discussing the combination of contextual factors of the English and American fields (publishing agents, trends, and the success of De Sica's film of 1970), individual initiative of the translators (such as McKendrick's), of editors (like Wolff), or of the author himself. Drawing on archival research, I will challenge the notion that (re)translations are 'constituted within the target culture and reflect its own systematic constellation' (Toury 2002).

In the case of Anglo-Italian relationship, I argue, there is a constant and reciprocal influence between the two literary fields: Italian authors are in contact with their target field and contribute to the reception of their works. Thus, the translation of Italian literature into English is not only a sign of active interest from the English audience, but also the result of Italian authors' struggle to enter that specific field, from which they seek canonisation, as Bassani's case exemplifies. The results of my research add a new hypothesis to the so-far identified Italian versions of *Il giardino*, bringing not only an acknowledgment of Bassani as co-translator of the English versions, and of his agency in shaping his reception, but also of Weaver's role in the rewriting of the Italian versions.

PANEL 2: DIGITAL HUMANITIES

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Prof. Massimo Riva (Brown University)

"DH in theory and practice: Research, teaching and publishing"

In this presentation, I will briefly address three areas proposing some questions to be discussed in the Q&A session. Research: I will focus in particular on the value of digital modelling as a critical mode of humanistic knowledge production that combines data - or *capta*, to use J. Drucker's term - design and interpretation. Teaching: I will outline some of the possibilities offered by DH methods for a research-based, collaborative pedagogy in the humanities. Publishing: I will review new forms of born-digital publications, focusing in particular, as a case-study, on the digital monograph I've recently completed. In conclusion, I will touch upon the issue of alt-ac careers made possible by developments in the DH.

Cecilia Brioni (Trinity College Dublin)

"Youth, Identity and Digital Media: The case of YouTube Italia"

The field of Digital Humanities does not only concern the employment of digital technologies in Humanities research, but it also engages with the cultural and social implications of digital technologies and the advent of a 'convergence culture' (Jenkins 2006). This paper discusses the ways in which digital media, and especially social media platforms, impact media representations of contemporary Italian young people's subjectivity and identity. In particular, it concentrates on the video sharing platform YouTube, where young creators produce and share original video content that often

focuses on their own personal opinions and lived experiences. First, this intervention explores the role of YouTube representations in facilitating the normalisation of identities that are often 'othered' in Italian society. Indeed, several Italian YouTubers belong to marginalised groups like Second Generations and members of the LGBTQ+ community who, in the last ten years, have become increasingly visible in Italian society. YouTubers share with their audience stories of everyday discrimination or emancipation, such as experiences of racism and coming-out stories. In addition to their own personal stories, male and Afro-Italian beauty influencers call for more inclusive make-up products, therefore challenging the gender division and the constructed whiteness of Italian society. Second, the paper discusses how YouTubers' freedom in self-representation is at the same time facilitated and restricted by the digital platform. While young people are under-represented, or tend to be stereotyped, in traditional Italian media, YouTube allegedly grants a greater control over self-representations, and enables young people to construct their own identity within a participatory culture. However, the content of YouTube representations is subject to several limiting factors, such as sponsorship, the YouTube community guidelines and the platform's algorithm. This paper will ultimately argue that YouTube can be a significant source to investigate media representations of contemporary Italian youth, although these representations are far from being unrestrained.

Ana Stefanovska (University College Cork)

"Italian Literature born online: influencers, social media and new ways of using the written word"

The main aim of this paper is to reflect on the interrelationship between the digital and the analog worlds in the field of Italian contemporary literature, by taking into consideration books that were born digitally, as a result of the so-called influencers' posts on different social media. Nowadays, influencers obtain their audience through social media. In terms of creating and promoting cultural products, the existence of this new influential figure has brought profound changes in the literary world, especially in terms of how we conceive and consume their art. Conversely from the past, when intellectuals were becoming influential figures through their art that, once published, was being promoted through the media, today the creative process seems to follow a reverse order: one needs to promote their written word first on social media so that it can access the traditional publishing world in form of tangible paperwork. This paper argues that these changes in the relationship between the work of art, the writer, the publisher, and the audience have influenced today's literature both in terms of format and content: the digital world mainly inhabited by comments, hashtags and stories imposes specific rules concerning the use of words, whereas the need for audience influences directly the content that influencers create and promote as their new, digital-born literature.

Alessandra Trevisan (Ca' Foscari University)

"Podcast Fever" by Italian women writers and journalists in the time of COVID-19"

The practice of creating podcasts began in 2003, thanks to British journalist Christopher Lydon. Since that time it has been developed by radio, and today it is improved on new platforms which are repositories of knowledge (e.g. iTunes, Spreaker, Audible, Spotify and many others). In the time of COVID-19, in Italy, more than 13 millions of people has

listened to podcasts, with an increase of 15% of audience considering 2019 (sources: «Wired»; «Corriere della Sera»). Podcasts mix together narration, reading and storytelling. Contemporary podcasts can probably be defined as “forme inedite” (Riva 2011) compared to books and they could represent the “futuro della letteratura” (Riva 2011) in a perspective of “transmedia storytelling” (Riva; Scarpin 2016).

The pandemic has amplified a necessity of narration by women, in a way that is now revealing “aesthetic multiplicity of modes of expression in a body of writing” (Weiss Sussex 2021). Bloggers and activists are creating podcasts to tell stories about forgotten women authors but also to read their unknown work (e.g. *Vite poetiche* by Associazione Orlando, *Mis(S)Conosciute* and *Le Ortique*). A new scenery is also made by Italian women writers and journalists who have chosen their significant voice to give podcasts a new existence despite their books. They express “the ‘social act’ of listening” and they want to “speak against discrimination and denigration” (Zehelein 2019) as Postfeminism is asking, and they use their voice which is a tool of healing. Among others, we can consider: Lidia Ravera on Teresa Noce (Archivissima Festival 2020); Michela Murgia and Chiara Tagliaferri with Morgana; Annalena Benini with *Il Figlio* and Sabrina Pisu with *Nero*. This contribution aims to map podcasts made by Italian women authors, in order to analyse and to problematize approaches to study them as audio digital objects in the field of Digital Humanities and Gender Studies. It also aims to answer to challenges for humanities in the digital age: “scale; evanescence/obsolescence; ethos; institutional challenge; public relevance” (Riva; Carpin 2016).

Friday 25 June

Panel 3: INTERMEDIALITY

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Prof. Giancarlo Lombardi (College of Staten Island & The Graduate Center/CUNY)

“Of Old and New Roman Epics: Legendary Narrative Ecosystems, from Romulus to Francesco Totti”

This presentation seeks to discuss transmedia storytelling through a parallel analysis of two narrative ecosystems that gained significant traction in Italy during the year of the pandemic, both interrogating, in different ways and with different outcomes, the meaning of ‘legend’. On one hand, the legend of the birth of Rome, already revisited cinematically by Matteo Rovere in *Il primo re* (2019), returned to the small screen with *Romulus* (Sky Italia, 2020) and in bookshops with a cycle of Luca Azzolini’s eponymous novels directly inspired by the series, and targeted mostly at young adults. On the other, the legendary career of Francesco Totti, the soccer player known as ‘the last king of Rome,’ already discussed in his autobiography *Un capitano* (2018), became the subject of Alex Infascelli’s documentary *Mi chiamo Francesco Totti* (2020) and was later dramatized for Sky Italia in the miniseries *Speravo de morì prima* (2021). Connecting history, legend, and fiction these two narrative ecosystems attracted readers and viewers in dramatically different fashion, as each link in the two chains of re-mediation dialogued with systems of contextual references that were proper to its medium as well as the institutional discourse whence it originated. In teasing out commonalities and differences, my analysis seeks to illuminate how, in repurposing history and legend, each articulation of these two

ecosystems proposes its local, Rome-specific take on the New Italian Epic. Broadcast and produced by the same network and considered as its two most successful drama series of the past year, *Romulus* and *Speravo de mori prima* offer, in particular, a unique opportunity, when placed in conversation, for a critical reflection on media convergence in contemporary Italy.

Sara Boezio (University of Warwick)

“Intermedial Relations in the Turn-of-the-Century Cultural Production”

At the end of the C19th, cultural memories of the elapsing century were reflected in ephemera, collectibles, musical creations, and commemorative objects. These products fostered a retrospective assessment in Italy of the years that had witnessed the unification and of the legacy bequeathed by the closing century to the new one. I will explore the intermedial relations among these different items by looking at boundary-crossing artistic practices and by adopting a transmedial approach at the intersection of art history, media and periodical studies. My paper will scrutinize the diverse implications of the media-history link to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of cultural transmission operating at the time, and will look at the new forms through which audiences activated a process of remediation of their recent past shaping collective memory and identity.

I will focus on a specific case study. First, thanks to an iconographic and semiotic reading of the ephemera, festive postcards, badges, and medals portrayed in media, I will show how such products — possessing an apparently transitional purpose and short-time usefulness — prove in fact to be a precious resource for investigating the new time perception that emerged at the end of the century. Subsequently, by adopting Benjamin’s culture-approach, I will illustrate how such items operated as ‘time-shaping’ devices and how they provide unique insights on the tensions between consumerism, capitalism and the pressing demands of increasingly larger parts of society, thus yielding a portrait of late nineteenth-century Italy as a progressively industrialized country facing the challenges of modernity.

Sara Parisi (University of Strathclyde)

“Unravelling the Truth Through Art: Ekphrastic Strategies in Leonardo Sciascia and Vincenzo Consolo”

In his 1996 preface to Pino Di Silvestro’s *Le epigrafi di Leonardo Sciascia*, Vincenzo Consolo comments on Sciascia’s production by stating that «amava il disegno, Sciascia, le gravures, acqueforti e puntesecche, che, con il loro segno nero si potevano accostare alla scrittura, erano anzi per lui un’altra affascinante forma di scrittura, simile allo scrivere che è “imprevedibile quanto il vivere”». It is significant that it was Consolo who made this observation on the consubstantial nature of art and literature in Sciascia’s work, since the production of both authors is informed by a rich dialogue between art and images.

This paper aims to scrutinize the ekphrastic strategies adopted by the two writers in their novels to see how they are used to convey a political-ethical discourse and also to establish what a contemporary reader could find relevant for his age. I will use Sciascia’s *Todo Modo* and Consolo’s *Il sorriso dell’ignoto marinaio* as case studies, the reasons for this choice lying in the correspondence between the use of art in relation to the unravelling of the political theme. The ekphrastic strategies used by the two authors are

significantly different and denote a diverse approach to the rendering of the visual theme in literature, but at the same time they meet halfway in their common need to analyse the relationship that literature has with history, civic commitment and art. My analysis will show how, in both novels, art ultimately serves the purpose of disclosing truth by spurring the protagonists to read the images, to look beyond appearances and make connections with reality. Ekphrasis is indeed «designed to produce a viewing subject», because it guides the readers' eye and teaches them to become active observers, without passively submitting to the description of an artwork.

Guido Bartolini (University College Cork)

“Intermedial Phenomena in the Italian Cultural Memory of World War II”

The Italian collective memory of World War II has long been shaped around self-absolving ideas. Throughout the twentieth century, reassuring myths about the Italian participation in the war dominated the public scene while a layer of silence shrouded the crimes that the Italians had committed in the foreign lands they had occupied. The diffusion and maintenance of this problematic memory was facilitated by Italian cultural production which contributed to circulating and reinforcing many self-exculpatory tropes that characterised the Italian collective memory. Theories of intermediality can fully illuminate the role that literature and cinema played in the articulation of this self-absolving discourse. In this paper, I will draw examples from Italian literature and cinema of World War II to discuss several intermedial and transmedial phenomena that were instrumental in the creation of an unethical self-absolving memory discourse. By relying on theories of intermediality, the paper will also shed light on fundamental principles that inform the dynamics of cultural memory.

Marco Bellardi (Trinity College Dublin)

“Intermediality and Multimodality in Contemporary Italian Literature”

In the last twenty years, research methods informed by intermedia and multimodal analysis have allowed to get a deeper understanding of media products, seen as the products of communicative acts in given social contexts. Recent developments in the areas of transmediation or aesthetics and multimodality have pointed to a huge variety of applications examining the migration of content across different media as well as, more broadly, the affordances of modes and media in the process of meaning-making. Such developments have contributed to reshaping our insight into cultural practices ‘in-between’ or relying on several medial sources. However, while the proliferation of terminology as well as the possibilities of its application has allowed a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of media, on the other hand a series of overlapping and, at times, conflicting, critical terms seem to have overcrowded the field; moreover, concepts developed from intermediality and multimodality scholars have found fertile ground in specific disciplinary areas and sparked seemingly competing methodologies. Nowadays, an intermedial approach may seem to be better suited for disciplines such as literary criticism and film studies or interdisciplinary research investigating artistic expressions, while a multimodal approach has increasingly reshaped disciplines such as linguistics, education and semiotics at large. With this in mind, in this paper I offer a brief analysis of some critical terms with reference to a few case studies from contemporary Italian literature.

Panel 4: DECONSTRUCTING WHITENESS

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Prof. Gaia Giuliani (CES - University of Coimbra)

“Deconstructing whiteness, rethinking Italy”

Constructions of race are always historically contextual, geographically and symbolically mobile, necessarily intersectional, based on, and productive of, power relations. They coincide with interpretations of skin colours and behaviours, among other individual and collective bodily and cultural features, that differentially positions individuals and groups in national and transnational social hierarchies. These constructions are made of symbolic material that has a long story to be traced back in modern and colonial times. Also in the case of Italy, constructions of whiteness, brownness and blackness feed on and feed into the national cultural archive (Wekker) and the transnational colonial archive (Stoler) that nurture current national imaginaries and figures of race (Giuliani). Today, these imaginaries sustain and legitimise the idea of Italy as a white and innocent "imagined community" and of its cultural heritage as in danger. The main threat that is seen as questioning Italians' whiteness is represented by migrants and their offspring whose presence is represented by hegemonic public discourse and mainstream media as an "invasion". Like in many other Western countries, also in Italy, feelings of being in a "state of siège" (Hage 2006) are very important cultural and political factors. Here that what has been defined "white anxiety" in the context of 9/11 Western discourses on and security practices against terrorism and in the context of the so-called migrant and refugee crises, arises against all cultural and racial "diversities" (in far right discourse) or against those who do wrongs (in left discourses); at the same time, it reorganizes forms of vulnerability to suffering and death, differential inclusion and exploitation in the labour market along colour lines which are sedimented in time. My paper will map and explore genealogies and current features of the iconography of intersectional colour lines and its function in building and contesting Italians' whiteness. In particular, I will try to rethink Italy through the contestation of mainstream discourses on the Italian imagined community as white, innocent and at siege, raised in anti-racist political movements, independent journalism, art and scholarly work. Drawing from the 23 interviews of some of their protagonists I conducted in 2020-2021, I will focus on images circulated in newsmedia to offer a different understanding of the Italian "imagination of the siege".

Francesco Casales (University of Pavia)

“Building Italian Whiteness Through Colonial Novels”

This paper deals with Italian colonial novels as an archive of models of masculinity and whiteness; not a coherent archive, but rather a complex and contradictory one. After a brief overview of the editorial history of the phenomenon of colonial novel in the Italian context, I will argue that models of virility that are to be found in these works are somewhat incongruous and, at the same time, are built around a coherent core (the undoubted supremacy of the white man) and deployed through the very same narrative structure (a racialized set of narrative functions). Among the lasts, I will take into account some of the foundational topoi of the genre: the frenetic dance as the moment in which whiteness is confirmed in strict opposition to blackness (being whiteness also related to masculinity and ownership, therefore linking blackness to feminine and working-class); the birth of a mixed-race child (meticcio) as the narrative turning point of the plot; the

employment of a lost world narrative to legitimise Europeans' presence on African soil. In conclusion, through the analysis of these little-explored sources, I will link the building of Italian metropolitan (white) identity to the national experience overseas and to the rearticulation of gender roles implemented by fascism.

Jessica L. Harris (St. John's University)

"Race, Gender, and Americanness in the Italian Wild West: The Case of *Lola Colt: Faccia a faccia con El Diablo* (1967)"

This paper analyzes the film *Lola Colt: Faccia a faccia con El Diablo* (1967), a spaghetti western directed by Siro Marcellini, and starring African-American singer, dancer, and actress Lola Falana, a rising star in the United States by the time of the film's release. In *Lola Colt*, Falana plays Lola Gaye, the main protagonist who not only leads the fight against the film's antagonist, El Diablo, to free the townspeople of Santana from his control, but also performs several musical numbers at the local saloon. By presenting Falana as both action heroine and musical talent, *Lola Colt* combines the genres of the Italian Revisionist Western and musical to provide significant insight into Italian representations and understandings of (American) Blackness and femininity in the late 1960s (Broughton, 2016). The ongoing Cold War and the strong attraction of American popular culture in Italy allows Falana to be depicted in a rather progressive way due to her social capital—her "Americanness" and celebrity status. However, she still does not escape the more stereotypical sexualized depictions that recall the infamous colonial Black Venus, the exotic, inferior, and sexual "Other" meant to be exploited by Italian male colonists, of the Liberal and Fascist eras (Giuliani Caponetto, 2012; Ponzanesi, 2005). Thus, Falana has a polyvalent function, serving to represent American (cultural) imperialism and latent Italian colonial racist rhetoric, which separates Falana from her female African counterparts, such as Eritrean top model Zeudi Araya, star of Luigi Scattini's erotic film trilogy. But this separation is minimal. Falana is still placed in the Black Venus mold thereby reflecting the presence of Italy's so-called "colonial unconscious" in the late 1960s, which allowed for the continual exclusion of so-called "Others" from national belonging (Ponzanesi, 2012).

Francesco Chianese (Università di Napoli Orientale)

"Being Italian "in a Different Way": A Comparative Reading of Kym Ragusa's *The Skin between Us* and Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono*"

The aim of my paper is to read Kym Ragusa's *The Skin between Us* (2006) alongside Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010). Those memoirs resonate with each other in attempting to build a dialogue between Italianness and blackness, disconnecting cultural heritage from the racial perspective while also providing significant cases of cultural hybridization within Italian communities abroad as well as in the motherland. Born in Manhattan, Ragusa focuses her narrative on her experience as a daughter of an inter-marriage between an Italian American father and an African American mother. Conversely, Scego tells the story of her family migrating to Rome from former Italian colony Somalia. By investigating the ways their autobiographical representations of Italianness and Africanness undermine the established black-white binary paradigm in which racially based concepts of Italianness are rooted, I will point out the opportunity of considering a transnational and transcultural meaning of Italianness—Italianità—as a liminal space where identities and cultures hybridize and reconfigure each other in

unexpected ways (Fiore 2017; Tamburri 2017). Additionally, I will consider how Ragusa's and Scego's narratives provide two crucial Italian cases of intersectionality, allowing through the overlapping of racial and gender issues a deeper understanding of the complexity of the framework of the Italian migrations and of the construction of the Italian whiteness.