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The *Bulletin of the Society for Italian Studies* is currently available free of charge on the Internet at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sis>. Enquiries about back numbers should be addressed to the Treasurer, Dr Mark Davie, Department of Italian, School of Modern Languages, University of Exeter, Queen's Building, Exeter EX4 4QH (e-mail: R.M.Davie@exeter.ac.uk).



## EDITORIAL

The *Bulletin* is published – as in previous years – on the Internet and in a limited print run. I am pleased to include three articles: Mary Ambrose writes on Naples in the late XIX century, Christina Manson on Dacia Maraini's *Donna in Guerra*, and Antonello Morea on the sonnet in the XX century. These articles, together with a comprehensive report of the 2003 SIS Conference in Cork, including detailed listings of each individual session, of the 2003 Edinburgh Postgraduate Colloquium, and a report of the Gruppo 62 Annual Conference on Peripheries and Centres in Italy attest to research vitality in Italian studies and links between Italianists and colleagues in a variety of other disciplines. Colleagues are strongly encouraged to submit all relevant reports, including news of interdisciplinary conferences and events in contiguous areas that will be of interest to the Italian studies community: the editors of the *Bulletin* remain particularly keen to develop this section in future years. The *Bulletin* also publishes – as in its previous two issues – an updated report from the Advisory Board of the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics, and Area Studies.

I am also pleased to announce that a database to hold an updateable webpage for 'Research and Publications' is now available from the SIS webpage (<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sis/>). This is intended to replace the sections on staff research interests and the bibliography of works of Italian interest published in the United Kingdom and Ireland that have previously been published in the *Bulletin*.

The lack of submissions and replies, both to the Staff List (compiled by Ruth Glynn and already sent in the mailing to all members) and to the Chronicle, remained disappointing this year. It is nonetheless our hope that the new streamlined format of this publication, its online version, and the implementation of the database will provide a useful means for gathering and disseminating information, and will act as a catalyst for individual members and departments to let us have all their relevant information in good time for Number 37 (2004). The deadlines for submission have been circulated, with the Staff List, in the November mailing and they are included again here.

I am grateful to colleagues who have helped in putting together this edition, especially former editor Simon Gilson and co-editors, Ruth Glynn and Catherine Keen, for all their hard work and perseverance.

Katia Pizzi

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## NAPLES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Southern Problem attracted the attention of the Tuscan writer Renato Fucini, the Neapolitan romantic novelist and journalist Matilde Serao, and the English social reformer Jessie White Mario. Each reacted differently to the unlovely reality of late nineteenth-century Naples. Yet, what they all tell bears an unforgettable individual stamp.

Jessie White Mario, from a Britain long united, returned to Piedmont in 1859 to dedicate herself to the cause of Italian unification. In 1857 she had married the Risorgimento hero and republican, Alberto Mario. Both had taken part in the abortive rising against the Bourbons by Mazzini's supporters in Genoa in June. After four months of prison, twice as long as Alberto because she refused to go back to England voluntarily, Jessie was deported and they married in Portsmouth. She was 25 years old and had already led a remarkably unconventional life for a young Victorian woman of middle-class origins. Through Alberto she also met the federalist Carlo Cattaneo with his strong socio-scientific ideas. Subsequently she went with Garibaldi and his Red Shirts to Sicily, and then followed him to Naples where she worked chiefly as a field nurse for him and had her first sight of the wretched, illiterate poor in the southern city, in their squalid caves, underground dwellings and cellars. She returned to Naples sixteen years later and published *La miseria in (sic) Napoli* in 1877, the year Fucini made his visit from late April to mid May.<sup>1</sup>

Renato Fucini published *Napoli a occhio nudo* in 1878, after the success of his poems written under the anagrammatic pen-name Neri Tanfucio.<sup>2</sup> For his major Tuscan works, *Le veglie di Neri* and *All'aria aperta*, he was hailed the epitome of Tuscan writers, partly because of his use of Tuscan expressions.<sup>3</sup> Fascists would later approve his hieratic and paternalistic view of society. *Le veglie di Neri* includes 'Lucia' (1878, in the Florentine *Rassegna Settimanale*) and 'Vanno in Maremma' (1880, *ibid.*), both sentimental. One is reminded of Cassola's anti-Fucini introduction to the 1979 edition of *Le veglie*: 'Siamo in un tempo lacrimoso, per cui grandi artisti come Pascoli e Puccini erano apprezzati solo per la loro lacrimosità'. 'Lucia' is about a little shepherdess who tearfully loses one of her flock and is misled by a bleating she thinks she hears from a bush, but it is a man watching her. She returns from her encounter with him, 'il viso acceso, un livido in una gota, e i

<sup>1</sup> J. W. Mario, *La miseria in Napoli* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1877; Naples: Quarto Potere, 1978, preface by A. Ghirelli, introduction and notes by G. Infusino, vol. 2 in the series *Meridionalia*)

<sup>2</sup> R. Fucini, *Napoli a occhio nudo* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1878; Turin: Einaudi, 1976, introduction by A. Ghirelli, bio-bibliography by L. G. Sbrocchi).

<sup>3</sup> R. Fucini, *Le veglie di Neri* (Florence: Bemporad, 1882; Milan: Hoepli, 1890; frequent reprints, most recently Milan: Rizzoli 1979, introduction by Carlo Cassola); *All'aria aperta* (Florence: Bemporad, 1897; Milan: Trevisini, 1946 and 1964, in the collected writings).

capelli e le vesti in disordine'.<sup>4</sup> These and other heart-rending details close the account of Lucia. 'Vanno in Maremma' is about a ragged family who, in wind and snow, make their way from the mountains to the Maremma, where they hope to find work. The susceptible narrator (Fucini) is moved to pity at the sight of them and gives the eldest boy some money. In conclusion the peasant and his wife invoke God's blessing on Fucini.

When, prior to *Le veglie di Neri*, Fucini went to Naples, the world he encountered there, far from his own Tuscany, evoked a positive response. This may have been prompted by the statesman Pasquale Villari who encouraged Fucini to go to Naples and furnished him with a letter of introduction. In his *Lettere meridionali* Villari had quoted an architect, employed by Naples Town Council, who wrote that the poor lived in cellars (*fondaci*) where there were 'ammonticchiate parecchie migliaia di persone, talmente avvilita dalla miseria che somigliano più a bruti che a uomini'.<sup>5</sup> This stark testimony is amply confirmed by Villari who, for his time, took an unexpectedly anti-Risorgimento viewpoint. He was bold enough to declare to the Parliamentary Right (he was a member of Parliament from 1870-76, when victory went to the Left) that Union had benefited the North, but at the expense of the South. Whatever may be the current judgement of his contribution to the *questione meridionale*, Villari certainly analysed unflinchingly the conditions of the poor in Naples.<sup>6</sup>

Guided by Giustino Fortunato, himself a Southerner, Fucini toured the Neapolitan slums and emphasised their gloom and stink in one of a series of letters to a Florentine friend. In one *basso* he comes upon a sleeping infant, its face black with bugs and its hair crawling with other insects (*Napoli*, Letter 4, p. 55). Naturally, the well-meaning Fucini is moved to intervene, with disastrous consequences.<sup>7</sup> In the same *basso* is an old woman who asks him for alms, as all the poor do (Church charity had been suspended with the closure of the monasteries and convents in 1861). She is blind in one eye and has a terrible sore in one leg which prevents her from moving from her seat, a stone surrounded by her excrement (p. 54). There are heaps of straw in the *bassi* which serve as beds for the crowded inhabitants, who lack all privacy. Infesting the cellars are rats, who will eat

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<sup>4</sup> R. Fucini, *Le veglie* (1979), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> P. Villari, *Lettere meridionali* (Turin: Loescher, 1872; Rome: Bocca, 1885) pp. 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> See *The New History of the Italian South: the Mezzogiorno Revisited*, ed. R. Lumley and J. Morris (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> The mother launches herself furiously on Fucini because she believes he casts an evil spell (*la jettatura*) on her child.

anything.<sup>8</sup> Later, Fucini is told about a mother who left her child sleeping in a *basso* and returned to find the rats had killed him and gnawed away his cheeks and lips.

The conditions in the *Camposanto vecchio (Napoli, Letter 6)* are equally horrifying. Fucini witnesses a coffin being jauntily borne in, then uncovered to reveal the corpse of a two-year-old child. It is seized by one leg and flung into the waiting pit (p. 79). The rose that had been piously put into its mouth flies off and is fought over by some urchins. Adult corpses are treated in the same way. With a ‘*Iamm!*’ from one of the servitors, the stone covering the burial chamber is removed and a nauseous stink rises (p. 81). Fucini sees a shapeless mass of whitening bones and mouldy garments in the pit below (p. 82). At a similar moment of revulsion, when he sees one of the pilgrims at Montevergine licking the ground and crawling towards the Madonna’s temple (*Napoli, Letter 5*), Fucini declares: ‘Non ne voglio più, non ne voglio più’ (p. 74): this visitor from Tuscany cannot bear any more horror.

Nevertheless, Fucini has the courage to denounce the Government for its failure to relieve the destitution of the poor. For Neapolitans, other Italians are the remote Piedmontese, the liberated ‘nation’. Fucini’s political opposition goes no further, however; its limitation is suggested by the conclusion to Letter 4: ‘L’unico essere, il quale s’occupi sul serio della questione [mistakenly, we conclude that he is referring to the Government – in Rome since 1870 – and to the Southern Problem] e che provveda instancabilmente abiti nell’inverno, medicamenti e disinfettanti nelle altre stagioni, .... con quell’amore, con quell’affetto disinteressato che qualifica il vero filantropo, è questo Sole’ (p. 59).

So, impartiality and philanthropy are left to the sun. Yet Fucini was appreciated by the *meridionalisti*. Giustino Fortunato had first of all written to him that he had not been severe enough in his social denunciation, and nothing was done for many years, but later Fortunato published *Napoli a occhio nudo* as the first volume of his series *La questione meridionale* (1913).

Discounting the idyllic tone of Letter 3 (Fucini’s trip to Sorrento, Amalfi and Pompei) and of his excursion to Capri where the people seemed ‘...tutta una famiglia, una buona famiglia, ordinata e pulitissima’ (Letter 7, p. 88) and his fervent tribute to the fearful majesty of Vesuvius (Letter 8), and ardent farewell to Naples, ‘Si parte! addio ... e addio, addio a te, dal profondo del cuore, o Napoli meravigliosa, addio’ (p. 125), in spite of his romanticism, this Tuscan visiting Naples became unexpectedly aware of the gulf that separated North and South in post-Unification Italy.

Another commentator on Naples is Matilde Serao, in Rome till 1902 and married to Eduardo Scarfoglio, from whom she later separated. She was the only Neapolitan among them and had spent her childhood and youth in the same part of the city she describes. In the first chapter of *Il ventre di Napoli* she reiterates a phrase used by Agostino Depretis when, with King Umberto I, he went to Naples in

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<sup>8</sup> ... ‘zoccole’, i grossi topi di chiavica che [Fucini] scambia per ‘talpe’. (*Napoli, Ghirelli’s introduction, p. IX*).

1884, at the time of the cholera epidemic.<sup>9</sup> On that occasion Depretis had said: 'È necessario sventrare Napoli' – a phrase seized on by many newspapers and sardonically commended by Serao in her opening, 'Efficace la frase!' To this she adds: 'Voi non lo conoscevate, onorevole Depretis, il ventre di Napoli. Avevate torto, perchè voi siete il Governo e il Governo deve saper tutto' (*Ventre*, p. 7). Then she details Naples' dingy lanes: one by one they are named – first the infamous Via Mercante, then the foul streets of the Vicaria ward, then those of the Mercato ward with the decrepit *vicoli* leading out of it.

Serao turns to what Neapolitans earn (ch. 2, 'Quello che guadagnano') – very little, in return for near slavery. The majority of women go into domestic service, among them the housemaids who, driven by need, hurry from one job to another on the same day, only to be scolded by the next mistress. A few get factory jobs, sometimes aided by family members. In any case their tasks, whether in the factory or at home, are poorly remunerated.

After dealing with what Neapolitans eat (ch. 3, 'Quello che mangiano') – Neapolitans never eat roast meat, they do not know what meat broth is, and they never have good wine to drink nor pure water – Serao then takes up an important subject, the Neapolitans' submission to other-worldly powers.<sup>10</sup> First, there is their belief in *la jettatura* or the evil eye (pp. 35-6). This is more or less superstition, though sometimes fused with a religious impetus (Neapolitans have more than two hundred names for the Virgin). Mere superstition, however, explains their application to the *fattucchiera* (sorceress). She will take a burnt lock of hair from a girl disappointed in love, mix it with other things and advise the girl to put them in the wine she offers the indifferent man. All in all, an irrational trust in the supra human, particularly in anything that will relieve the wretchedness of their lot, dominates the thinking of the Neapolitans. It accounts for their devotion to the lottery. So, especially on Saturday nights, every thought is directed to *il lotto* and to *la smorfia*, a book which in a wry way contains the truth, and also represents every circumstance by a number.<sup>11</sup> A woman, taken to court because she has punched another, defends herself with 'm'ha chiammata sittantotto'. The judge has to work out for himself that seventy-eight is the number in *la smorfia* for prostitute (p. 48).

Usury, or high interest, afflicts the lives of the Neapolitan poor.<sup>12</sup> Desperately, they seek additional money, sometimes appealing for a loan from a

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<sup>9</sup> M. Serao, *Il ventre di Napoli* (Milan: Treves, 1884; first revised, extended edition, Naples: F. Perrella, 1906; Naples: Del Delfino, 1973, introduction by G. Infusino; Rome: V. Bianco, 1973).

<sup>10</sup> Each chapter is neatly labelled, e.g., 'Il lotto' and 'Il pittoresco'.

<sup>11</sup> 'Smorfia', according to A. Salzano, *Vocabolario Napoletano-Italiano* (Naples: Del Giglio, 1989) may derive from Morpheus, the god of sleep and dreams, or simply from a word meaning 'a very ugly woman'.

<sup>12</sup> P. Macry, 'The Southern Metropolis' in *The New History* (op. cit.), comments on usury (p. 70) and usury banks (pp. 75-7), which attracted Neapolitan investors with the high interest rates they promised.

certain, apparently neighbourly, Donna Carmela. Then week-by-week they fail to pay back even the interest and Donna Carmela becomes a hyena and shouts for her 'blood' (pp. 56-7).

In the chapters added twenty years later ('Il Paravento' and 'Dietro il Paravento', pp. 83 ff.), the 'screen' is the great *Rettifilo* which had been carved through the poor quarters of Naples to make a fine approach to the Central Station, as befitted any modern city. But the Corso Umberto Primo (its proper name) screens or masks the unlit lanes on either side of it, the insalubrious dwelling-places, the filthy mid-street runnels of the old quarter, the unhealthy Mezzocannone running at right-angles out of it. What had now been renamed the *risanamento* of Naples ('risanare' is clearly blander than 'sventrare') had produced only inappropriate modern buildings, indifferent to the needs of the people for health, cleanliness, safety, and pure water, all urgent but largely unfulfilled desires.

The final section of *Il ventre di Napoli* contains articles (omitted in the Del Delfino 1973 edition) first published in *Il Giorno*, a paper founded by Serao, then in Naples. They begin with 'Guerra ai ladri', in which the robbers are the untrustworthy members of the Town Council, and a Neapolitan protests: 'Io voglio degli uomini onesti; io voglio delle coscienze sicure; io voglio delle anime austere'. This tripartite insistence on moral integrity typifies Serao's easy journalism. In 'Il Rione della bellezza' (*Il Giorno*, 5 June 1904) Serao, having satirised the 'beautifying' of Santa Lucia, climaxes once again with the three-fold interrogative: 'Il suo nome non ti sembra un poco esagerato, amico lettore? Non ti pare che la parola bellezza abbia un senso diverso e profondo? E che applicarla a si esigua e ambigua cosa sia una grande audacia?' The Chapter, 'Il pane dell'anima' (*Il Giorno*, 20 November 1904) applies the biblical phrase about the soul's need for nourishment to the Neapolitans' hunger for education. But there are no proper schools in Naples and the uneducated, illiterate people turn inevitably to vice, corruption and crime. In the last Chapter of the book *Tre donne*, Serao ardently recites the generosity of Teresa Ravaschieri who had opened kitchens (*cucine economiche*) where the poor could eat cheaply, established dormitories for abandoned children and contributed large sums of money for the relief of the destitute (Ravaschieri's three-fold goodness). She emerges as a virtually Christ-like figure.

At every point Serao is moved by pity for her fellow citizens (she insists she is a Neapolitan with them): they are dishonest because uneducated, dirty because of foul living conditions, idle and poor because there is no work for them. At the same time they are capable of reciprocal humanity; so, there is the woman who on seeing a child in the street will give him a piece of whatever she has, or there is another who hands the water from her boiled *maccheroni* to a poorer woman.

There is therefore, on the one hand, a lack of continuity in Fucini, though this did not prevent his *Napoli a occhio nudo* from being reprinted many times and, on the other hand, an excess of fervour and a fondness for journalistic detail in Serao. However, Jessie White Mario, an English woman of independent opinions, writing in Italian, and chronologically the first of the three writers treated here, is always

realistic and direct in *La miseria in Napoli*. In the opening chapter of Part I, ('Londra e Napoli'), White Mario quotes a letter to herself from Pasquale Villari: 'Io le assicuro .... che i poveri di Napoli stanno infinitamente, senza paragone alcuno, peggio di quelli di Londra' (*Miseria*, p. 18). London or England is Jessie's constant point of reference, natural enough in an English woman. Yet she does not see her country through rose-coloured spectacles. She is extraordinarily equable in her judgements.<sup>13</sup>

In Part I, Ch. 3, ('La Prostituzione'), White Mario immediately tackles the question. She gives many English examples of girls forced into the 'profession' by poverty, while in Naples it is the only work if one is not to die of starvation. Decent women (so they like to think of themselves) behave towards prostitutes like the Pharisee passing by on the other side, while respectable mothers are to blame for not representing to their sons the mortal sin of indulging passion without love. James Stansfeld, one of White Mario's heroes and a disciple of Mazzini, strongly encouraged young women to sign a protest to the English parliament against the causes of prostitution. So democratic Britain is the model offered by White Mario to her educated Italian readers.

In Part I, Ch. 4, ('Condizione Speciale di Napoli'), White Mario, aware of the gulf between *galantuomini* and *lazzaroni* in the city, and of the complete absence of rapport between classes arising from the Spanish domination, lists the usual jobs of the *popolano*, from hat-makers, soap-makers, snail-sellers, fruit-sellers, slipper- and mattress-makers, and a host of other menial occupations, to dealers in second-hand goods, coachmen, porters and street-sweepers (*Miseria*, pp. 60-1).

Part II (*Miseria*, pp. 69-183) is ironically titled 'La Ricchezza dei Poveri', and in Ch. 1, ('Istituti di Carità e di Beneficenza'), White Mario considers *opere pie* which richly maintain countless 'pious' administrators and officials at the expense of the residents.<sup>14</sup> In the second Chapter, we learn that the poor were once taught useful crafts in the *Reale Albergo dei Poveri*, but although the income of the *Albergo* has now increased, the number of poor, uninstructed residents has decreased and their treatment deteriorated. Now they get meat only twice a week, and insufficient bread to eat. They must also obey strict rules about bowing and scraping to their superiors, which the British writer finds unacceptable.<sup>15</sup>

The care of orphans and abandoned babies in *brefotrofii* is examined in 'La Reale Casa dell'Annunziata' (Part II, Ch. 3). Even legitimate children, sometimes

<sup>13</sup> Social reforms in other progressive European countries and in America are often cited, and extensively reviewed in Part IV, Chs. 1 and 2 ('Leggi Europee') pp. 249-66. For example, the work of the unpaid 9 member Commission for the Poor (*Armenverwaltung*) in the Prussian town of Helberfeld is described in detail 'come modello' (*Miseria*, pp. 264-5).

<sup>14</sup> In the *Reale Albergo dei Poveri* and its satellites, there were 707 salaried posts, one for every three of the needy receiving meagre support. The various categories are listed on pp. 92-3.

<sup>15</sup> 'E noi rispondiamo, adesso come allora: "Il popolo lo chiamava il serraglio, e fu ed è il nome appropriato"' (*Miseria*, p. 96). These rules, she pointedly reports, were among the new 'liberal' reforms of 1871 (*ib.*).

full-grown (8-10 years), were abandoned on the *ruota* (convent wheel), which operated all day in Naples (though only during the night elsewhere to receive illegitimate babies) (*Miseria*, p. 118). White Mario is shocked that priests pocket the money that would otherwise give life to *i figli del peccato* and *i figli della Madonna*, and that infant mortality rates were so high in the *brefotrofii* – 30% at best, but rising to 95% according to an official report published in 1873, which she describes as ‘quel libro stupendo’ (*Miseria*, p. 116).

It was also said that where *i religiosi e le religiose* nursed the sick in their *Istituti Ospitalieri*, proper food and even delicacies were supplied to patients who showed due devotion: those who refused to say their prayers etc. (*i renitenti*) were given salt water and mere bones to gnaw.

Malpractice and corruption were also commonplace in religious institutions which had originally been set up to protect the needy from money-lenders and extortion. These are exposed in the following Chapter (‘Monti ed Istituti Elemosinieri’). *Monti di pietà* (pawn-shops) now demand high interest on loans against over-valued pledges – the beds, pots and pans (*metalli rozzi*) and even ragged clothing of the poor.<sup>16</sup> Items in pawn are stolen and sold off by officials, and the falsely inflated proceeds from the auction of unredeemed pledges are also pocketed.<sup>17</sup>

In 1861 the Bank of Naples took over the *Monti di pietà* and in the same year spent huge sums on the vast, new *Monte di Donna Regina*, which was lavishly furnished and landscaped, and organised with meticulous efficiency, but deceptively subject to the same abuses.<sup>18</sup> It also charged 7% interest on pledges, an extra 1% above the standard Italian rate of 6% - itself, as White Mario notes, more than double the rate in London. ‘Verace abuso’, she sharply comments (*Miseria*, p. 168).<sup>19</sup>

Institutionalised usury was the root problem, the paradox of the history of the *Monti*: ‘... nessun Istituto di Beneficenza è più deteriorato dallo scopo suo originale che questi Monti, i quali sono puramente e semplicemente Banche d’usura’ (*Miseria*, p. 166). The author knows and shares Dante’s rejection of ‘subiti guadagni’ (*Inferno*, XVI.73) and also quotes Canto XI.95-6, where ‘usura offende la divina bontade’ (*Miseria*, p. 174). White Mario’s educated Italian readership would know their revered Alighieri’s description of usury as outraging God’s

<sup>16</sup> White Mario calculates that after pawning the same pitiful articles several times, ‘l’infelice in un anno avrebbe pagato il 40 per cento d’interesse’ (*Miseria*, p. 169).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Per dire il vero rimasi attonita del prezzo pagato per cenci e per altri oggetti venduti all’asta’ (*Miseria*, p. 167).

<sup>18</sup> ‘... ogni specie di abuso fu commesso’ (*Miseria*, p. 166).

<sup>19</sup> The scale of the *abuso* is underlined when we read: ‘I pegni consentiti dal Monte di pietà di Napoli, da cui tutti dipendono, ascendono a più di 20 milioni, tra cui le sole pannine figurano per quasi due milioni’ (*Miseria*, p. 169: cf. Infusino’s note 4 on p. 168).

goodness.<sup>20</sup> The author appeals to her audience on many levels; her irony will not have gone unnoticed.

In the same Chapter White Mario speaks of the way legacies are administered to the detriment of the poor, so that money left to a specific Poor House continues to be spent on it, whether it goes on repairs or into the pockets of *infidi amministratori*. On visiting Neapolitan basements, if White Mario asks to whom the property belongs, the answer is invariably l'Albergo dei Poveri or l'Ospedale degli Incurabili or some other Pio Istituto (p. 172). The filthy interiors, crumbling walls and leaking roofs are always matched by exorbitant rents. The author here declares: '... devesi studiare e concretare un progetto di legge per regolare il pauperismo in Italia in guisa da sollevare più efficacemente l'esistente miseria, ma con tutte quelle cautele insegnate dall'esperienza delle altre nazioni per impedire che la miseria prodotta da cause diverse .... non si trasformi in un pauperismo cronico e crescente' (*Miseria*, p. 173). The State is expected to intervene, as Parliament had done in Victorian England, with wide social changes.

In Part III, White Mario devotes nearly fifty pages to educational and penal reform and to *la mendicITÀ*. She rejects priestly teaching in elementary schools because it in no way develops mental faculties. Priests oppose municipal schools where pupils could study languages, mathematics, history, geography, the natural sciences: '... sia per non apprendere, come dicevano, massime contrarie alla dottrina cattolica' (*Miseria*, p. 216). She later cites with approval her brother's comment on the secularisation of primary education in England: 'Ciò abbiám fatto per dar il gambetto alle miserabili scuole dette nazionali e che sono clericali' (*Miseria*, p. 290). Priestly influence she sees only as negative. Reacting against her strictly religious upbringing, she is a free-thinker who consistently opposes all forms of authoritarianism.

On the theme of the *camorra*, while Fucini describes it as the only justice that Neapolitans know, and Serao acknowledges its insidious attraction for illiterate Neapolitans, White Mario, as usual, gives precise examples. She tells us that young female teachers from a poor background, in spite of parental sacrifice and their own hard work, have to give up part of their salary in return for a post, '... quando non sono obbligate a pagare col più prezioso tesoro della donna' (*Miseria*, p. 217). Those who demand a return for an appointment (whether in money, or in something 'more precious') are *camorristi*.

The *camorristi* are also active in Neapolitan prisons.<sup>21</sup> The authorities there are deeply corrupt, as they had been under the Bourbons.<sup>22</sup> They arrest, threaten, beat suspects unmercifully, then free those who pay them. The anti-revolutionary Moderates and the timid Progressives change nothing. Mazzini, revolutionary,

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Infusino's note 13 (*Miseria*, pp. 174-5).

<sup>21</sup> In Part III ('Proposte e Tentativi Fatti per Migliorare le Condizioni di Napoli'), Ch. 4 is devoted to *carceri*.

<sup>22</sup> Under the young Francis II they fled from Naples on September 6, 1860 and were defeated by Garibaldi at Volturno.

republican and long Jessie's mentor, disapproved of the Moderates. Jessie, in her turn, pilloried their perpetuation of the brutal, corrupt system practised by the Bourbons (*Miseria*, p. 238). She has already cited John Howard, the English prison reformer, who condemned small, dark prison cells with no ventilation or drains, as 'living tombs'. Beccaria, his 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian contemporary, promoting ideas well in advance of his time, agreed with Howard that society had a right to protect itself but not to wreak vengeance on the wrong-doer. Jessie clearly endorses their liberal, humanitarian concerns (*Miseria*, pp. 229-30).

As an ardent cosmopolitan – and half-American herself – Jessie refers to penal reform in America, but not uncritically.<sup>23</sup> The tendency there is to go one better than the mother country, in short to sentimentalise philanthropy. In keeping with this leniency, it turns out to be society's fault if the individual resorts to crime and expects to be compensated for his or her fall from grace.

Thomas Carlyle's views on 'questo eccesso di reazione' are also noted (*Miseria*, pp. 231-2). He had visited a model prison in England and found the food there excellent, cleanliness exemplary and the work undemanding. Given similar conditions, Carlyle sardonically observes that, though confined, he would be free from taxes and other inconveniences and would then be able to write such a book as the world had never seen. When she was young, Jessie had found Carlyle exaggerated; now she agrees with him that the 'Devil's own regiment' can be too leniently treated.

Another Englishman, whose novels she had read and admired, was Dickens, whose writings contributed, she believed, to significant social reforms. Earlier White Mario refers specifically to *Little Dorrit*, which tells of debtors' prisons, subsequently abolished (Dickens' father had been imprisoned in one). She mentions the Italian Mastriani in the same context.<sup>24</sup> His novels were about the *camorra*, poverty, infanticide, prostitution, and illiteracy in Naples – all topics of interest to White Mario. Although Mastriani 'ha scritto la verità, null'altro che la verità', his works did not, like Dickens', become contributions to the abolition of the evils he depicted, partly because they lack real literary value, unlike the novels of 'questo elasticissimo ingegno', Dickens. Also, as White Mario puts it, Mastriani may have written the truth, and nothing but the truth, 'ma non tutta la verità!' (*Miseria*, p. 199).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jessie was the fourth child of her father's second wife, the American Jane Teage Meriton, and christened Jessie Meriton after her mother, who died soon after the birth. See Infusino's introduction (*Miseria*, pp. XXIII-XXXVI) for a brief biography of White Mario.

<sup>24</sup> F. Mastriani (1819-91) was a Neapolitan, author of *I vermi* (1863-4), *Le ombre* (1868) and *I misteri di Napoli* (1869).

<sup>25</sup> Dickens and Mastriani are both mentioned in a review of documentary material and books on social reform etc. in Italy and other European countries in Part III, Ch.1 ('Bibliografia'), pp. 189-200.

Everywhere White Mario is ready with a reasonable proposal. Why shouldn't hospitals, *case di ricovero*, detention centres, female prisons be run or managed by intelligent women, such as those trained by the dedicated teachers working in schools for the poor? Surely Italy does not need to call in nuns from Belgium or France 'che non sono che tante gesuitesse', women who put the confessor before a mother's, a wife's, a citizen's duty? (*Miseria*, p. 132 and pp. 335-6).

Or in the Chapter 'Bastimenti – scuola' (Part IV, Ch. 7), White Mario offers Italians the example of British training ships, prefaced by a spur to Italian patriotism: Italy is the only country in the world with the potential to rival England as *la Regina del mare* (*Miseria*, p. 321). She instances two English ships which, though threatened with sinking, were saved by the discipline and courage of the *piccirilli* (young delinquents) on board. This signal act was rewarded by large sums of money from private subscription. Again Italian readers are offered an English model.

In the 1891 postscript to later editions, entitled 'Acqua in abbondanza in Napoli', White Mario relates how she returns to Naples after an absence of fifteen years to find the one thing she rejoiced in for Neapolitans – a plentiful supply of clean water. Clean water meant less disease (polluted water caused the frequent cholera outbreaks), an end to primitive ('adamitiche') toilets, filthy, foul-smelling houses, and streets with open sewers. Above all, it provided pure drinking water. No wonder everyone now exclaimed, 'Abbiamo l'acqua, l'acqua buona, l'acqua abbondante' (*Miseria*, p. 355).

Water had in fact reached Naples in 1884 when the waters of the Serino were finally channelled into the city by the Naples Water Company Ltd, suggesting that the transformation had been achieved by the input of foreign, indeed English capital, not by the well-intentioned but unfulfilled proposals for the South by the Piedmontese government. Of the latter, White Mario clearly expected measures to match what Parliament in London had done; it had passed Poor Laws, legislated against prostitution, given the police more authority and promoted a range of other reforms. She closes her work with an evenly judged tribute to 'quella docile, affettuosa, ignorante, superstiziosa plebaglia' she had known so long and studied with such energetic humanitarian concern (*Miseria*, p. 353).

In conclusion, two accounts of Naples in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Fucini's and Serao's, though absorbing, are perhaps of limited value. In Fucini, we find disjunction of focus (now natural beauty, as in Capri, now foul living conditions, as in the *bassi*), in Serao, an excess of dramatic feeling (as in her portraits of poor Neapolitans, or in the closing paean to Teresa Ravaschieri). On the other hand, a remarkable English woman, writing in Italian, is informed and uncompromising in what she tells us of Naples a hundred and twenty six years ago. Her evidence is compelling. *La miseria in Napoli* is a major document for the social reform of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Naples. Its appeal is also for an Italy truly unified. White Mario's final rallying-cry is visionary: 'Ci pensi il governo riparatore, ci pensino I Municipii progressisti, ci pensino tutti e tutte: Monarchici, Unitari, Federalisti! Qui

sta uno dei mezzi gradualisti, effettuabili, evidenti, per gettare le basi di un'Italia libera, florida, potente'.<sup>26</sup>

Mary Ambrose  
Kilconquhar

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<sup>26</sup> J. White Mario, *Miseria*, p. 336, cf. with Infusino's note 6. This final quotation is the climax of an impassioned plea for the liberal education of a new generation of Italian women – 'e per le donne stesse, quale beneficio!' (*ib.*). The formal 'Conclusione' to the work follows immediately (*Miseria*, Part IV, Ch. 9, pp. 339-43). The best account of White Mario's life and career – a woman both of her time and well in advance of it – is in E. A. Daniels, *Jessie White Mario: Risorgimento Revolutionary* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1972).

## THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION: DACIA MARAINI'S *DONNA IN GUERRA*

‘È probabile che *Donna in Guerra* possa essere, se non il primo, il più importante [...] dei romanzi femministi pubblicati in Italia’.<sup>27</sup> This comment, made by a contemporary reviewer, conveys the impact that Maraini’s novel had on its release. Maraini herself admitted that it was ‘il mio romanzo più coscientemente femminista’ and it can be seen as a strong manifesto of the author’s feminist beliefs.<sup>28</sup> In the novel Maraini portrays patriarchal society’s oppression of women, highlighting the political, social, emotional, and sexual repression that they suffered in a society in which abortion and divorce were illegal and in which women were often considered as objects or second-class citizens. In this article I intend to look at the process undergone by Vannina in her quest for greater self-confidence and independence, also examining the opinions of others that she encounters during her struggle to break free from the expectations of a patriarchal society.

Augustus Pallotta comments that Maraini’s *Donna in guerra* brings up to date Sibilla Aleramo’s extremely influential autobiography *Una donna*, with Vannina’s struggle echoing the journey undertaken by Aleramo in her quest for greater self-awareness and freedom from an oppressive marriage. Both Sibilla and Vannina must leave their husbands in order to find true happiness and self-fulfilment.<sup>29</sup> Vannina undergoes a dramatic change during the course of Maraini’s provocatively titled novel, developing from an obedient, subservient wife into a determined and independent woman. Throughout her marriage to Giacinto Vannina suppresses her own personality and conforms to his expectations of how a woman should behave. With her friend Suna’s guidance she gradually becomes aware of her tendency to be swayed by Giacinto’s beliefs. However, when Vannina begins to assert herself more forcefully, Giacinto is not pleased at the change in her character:

Giacinto è preoccupato della mia svogliatezza sessuale. Pensa che sono malumori passeggeri, dovuti alla cattiva influenza di ‘quella demente di Suna’.

“Tu tradisci la tua natura, amore mio.”

“Quale natura?”

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<sup>27</sup> Giovanni Mameli, ‘*Donna in guerra*’, *L’Unione Sarda*, 30 November 1975, cited on Internet Web Site: <http://www.daciamaraini.it/critica.asp?categoria=1&libro=24&ID=84> (Visited on 30/05/03).

<sup>28</sup> Dacia Maraini in an interview with Paolo Ruffilli, *Il Resto del Carlino*, 18 November 1975, cited on Internet Web Site: <http://www.daciamaraini.it/critica.asp?categoria=1&libro=24&ID=86> (Visited on 30/05/03).

<sup>29</sup> Augustus Pallotta, ‘Dacia Maraini: From Alienation to Feminism’, *World Literature Today*, 58:3 (1984), 359-62 (p. 361)

“Hai una natura buona, morbida, sensibile, e la vuoi fare diventare una cosa dura, aggressiva. [...] Sei aggressiva contro te stessa, fai violenza al tuo carattere.”

“Forse il mio carattere si era formato sul tuo, non era mio veramente. [...] Volevo solo piacerti. [...] Volevo essere una buona moglie.”

“E lo sei stata, ma ora stai cambiando, ora rifiuti la parte migliore di te.”

“Migliore perché comoda.”<sup>30</sup>

Giacinto believes that a woman should be ‘dolce, femminile’ and he feels increasingly threatened as Vannina becomes more aware of her own abilities (p. 141). Giacinto’s relationship with his wife is based almost entirely on his need to dominate her and Maraini portrays him as a man suffering from low self-esteem. He is jealous of Vannina’s superior knowledge and even desperately studies encyclopaedias in a bid to regain his dominance (p. 21). Showing little interest in her career, Giacinto resents the fact that Vannina must work, insisting that ‘se guadagnassi di più non ti manderei a lavorare’ (p. 240). He does not want to acknowledge that Vannina chooses to work, as this would threaten his sense of masculinity. Giacinto unwittingly exposes his vulnerability when he is asleep and therefore defenceless and unguarded, laying ‘nella sua solita posizione contratta di difesa, le gambe e le braccia piegate sotto il mento’ (p.11).<sup>31</sup> This unconscious display of insecurity emphasises his true character, with its desperate need for reassurance and encouragement. Anthony J.Tamburri states that Giacinto’s defensive position ‘exhibits his fear of losing something’, and he is certainly afraid of losing both his self-control and his dominance and control over Vannina’s thoughts and actions.<sup>32</sup>

When Giacinto realises that he is losing Vannina’s unquestioning devotion he suggests that they have a baby, even going so far as to rape her whilst she is sleeping after she shows reluctance at his request. He sees having a baby as the perfect opportunity to bind her to him once again and hopes that a child would cause her to revert back to ‘la donna dolce, remissiva, disponibile, arresa di prima’ (p. 261). Germaine Greer highlights this tactic in *The Female Eunuch*, describing men who aim to curb a woman’s self-sufficiency by making her pregnant.<sup>33</sup> In Giacinto’s opinion a woman is incomplete without children and ‘una donna sposata senza figli è come una gatta senza gattini, che piange, si dimena, si mangia la coda

<sup>30</sup> Dacia Maraini, *Donna in guerra* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001), pp. 236-7. Future page references to the novel will be given in parentheses.

<sup>31</sup> See also pages 6 and 18 for references to Giacinto’s sleeping position.

<sup>32</sup> A.J.Tamburri, ‘Dacia Maraini’s *Donna in guerra*: Victory or Defeat?’, in *Contemporary Women Writers in Italy: A Modern Renaissance*, ed. by Santo L.Aricò (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 139-51 (p. 143).

<sup>33</sup> G.Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971), p. 244.

che fa pena' (p. 246). Even when it is clear that his wife has moved on in her life Giacinto begs her to return to him as 'la dolce Vannina' that he married, magnanimously willing to forgive her for all her supposed faults and misdemeanours (p. 268). However, Vannina understands the danger that a baby would pose to her new-found independence and she therefore has no choice but to have an abortion if she is to break cleanly from her former life.

Giacinto's lack of understanding with regard to Vannina's true character and her hopes, desires, and ambitions is carried over into their sexual relationship. For the major part of the novel Vannina simply accepts that Giacinto thinks only of himself when they make love, although she is filled with a sense of frustration:

Abbiamo fatto l'amore. In fretta, come al solito, senza darmi il tempo di arrivare in fondo. [...] Gli dico di aspettarmi. Ma dice che se non fa presto gli passa la voglia. [...] Ha fretta di esplodere, come se indugiando potesse perdere qualcosa. [...] Così io rimango a metà, ansante, contratta. Lui corre, inseguito dalla paura di non so che. (p. 11)

Tamburri draws attention to the lack of any emotional or sentimental commitment in Giacinto's attitude to sex and a contemporary review of the novel by Giovanni Mameli emphasises Giacinto's 'attrazione animalesca per la moglie'.<sup>34</sup> By the end of the novel Vannina has learnt that there is an alternative to Giacinto's selfishness as a lover, having experienced sexual fulfilment during her affair with Orio Pizzocane. Unlike Giacinto, the fourteen-year-old Orio appreciates Vannina's needs, concentrating equally on her pleasure as on his own (p. 103). Giacinto is unable to satisfy Vannina sexually, intellectually, or emotionally and has no chance of saving his marriage once Vannina has found the strength to escape.

*Donna in guerra* includes examples of fundamentally opposing views of women in society. On the one hand there is Suna's feminist stance, whilst on the other there are the radical views expressed by Santino Pizzocane's family, which shock both the reader and Vannina and Giacinto. Suna's opinions on men's oppression of women run throughout the novel and she is highly critical of Vannina's relationship with Giacinto, chastising her friend for relying too heavily on her husband's opinions and approval. When Vannina hesitates over the question of a trip to Naples, saying that she must first ask Giacinto, Suna criticises her for acting 'come se fosse il tuo padrone' and demanding 'non puoi decidere di testa tua?' (p. 138) However, Suna's determination to further the feminist cause is sometimes at odds with her own personality. Whilst she advocates female liberation she forms an emotional dependency on Santino and, as Lazzaro-Weis points out, uses sexual promiscuity to counterbalance her disability.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand Maraini's portrayal of Suna's contradictory behaviour and opinions effectively shows the inherent difficulties that women face in combating attitudes that are so deeply engrained in society. Even the most liberated of women cannot avoid being

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<sup>34</sup> Tamburri, 'Victory or Defeat?', p. 143. Mameli, '*Donna in guerra*', op.cit.

<sup>35</sup> Carol Lazzaro-Weis, *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing, 1968-1990* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 76.

conditioned by various aspects of their environment and it is important for this to be acknowledged during any attempt at self-analysis. Suna's inconsistencies lend increased realism to the portrayal of her character, reducing the risk of her being viewed simply as a stereotypical feminist.

The Pizzocane family's gloating over their abuses of women provides verification for Suna's assessment of patriarchal society's treatment of women. The sons' stories about a young girl, whom they torment and rape, and the gang rape of a German lady meet with the joyous approval of their father, who looks on 'con occhi indulgenti, teneri' (p. 34). In both cases the men justify their actions by claiming that the women deserved and even sought their attacks with their allegedly provocative behaviour. Following their father's example, the Pizzocane sons view their crimes almost as noble actions, declaring that, far from abusing the women, 'del bene le abbiamo fatto' (p. 35). Peppino Pizzocane's shocking views have coloured his sons' attitudes towards women, whom he considers to be second-class citizens in a justly male-dominated society. His belief that his sons have provided a service by teaching a lesson to the young girl, raped whilst out swimming, highlights these views:

"Una lezione non basta a quelle puttane, e chi le ferma? Chi le ferma quelle spampinate? Ogni anno che passa diventano più sfacciate, più sgargianti e scendono tutte impallate a succhiare il sangue di questi poveri isolani nostri" (p. 33).

The fact that he married his own wife as the result of a vow, promising that if his mother recovered from cancer he would marry a prostitute, is further evidence of his low estimation of women. Having taken his wife from a brothel, Peppino will not allow her to forget her past, constantly and publicly reminding her of how worthless she is (p. 40). For Bruce Merry this vow is a clear example of the phenomenon whereby Italian males are utterly devoted to their mother, whilst relegating their wives to an inferior position.<sup>36</sup>

The widespread belief that men have a right to treat women as inferior is touched upon later in the novel with the pupils' enactment of a rape scene in Vannina's classroom. Maraini conveys the sheer saturation of patriarchal beliefs in society through the behaviour of these young children. The boys involved, all from respectable, middle-class families, look around, seeking the approval of their peers. All but two girls encourage the boys and even Maria Stella, the victim herself, is 'sorridente e compiaciuta' (p. 256). Vannina questions why the other girls did not intervene, enquiring whether it is 'perché pensano che i maschi hanno diritto di fare queste cose?' (p. 257) Maria Stella provides an example of how women's self-image and attitude to sex are affected by male attitudes from an early age, when she describes how 'la femmina fa la donna e sta sotto, il maschio fa l'omo e sta sopra e la fotte' (p. 257). Tamburri also states that here 'the literal position of top and

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<sup>36</sup> Bruce Merry, *Women in Modern Italian Literature: Four Studies Based on the Work of Grazia Deledda, Alba De Céspedes, Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini* (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1990), p. 209.

bottom metaphorically represents the general pattern of domination in patriarchal society'.<sup>37</sup> Vannina's subsequent impassioned speech about the relationship between men and women is a clear sign of her new, emancipated outlook and for the first time she finds a strong sense of satisfaction from her teaching. Her transformation from the passive, conforming woman at the beginning of the novel is evident:

Parlavo dello stupro, dei ruoli sessuali, con fervore e rabbia, come non mi era mai successo in tanti anni di scuola. [...] Per la prima volta, tornando a casa [...] dopo cinque ore di scuola, non mi sentivo avvilita e svuotata, ma presa da una febbre di allegria (p. 258).

The final confirmation of this transformation comes with Vannina's life-changing dream following Suna's death. The symbolic content of this dream is important. Vannina imagines herself flying and is filled with a sense of freedom and happiness, before she feels her body increase in weight, whereby she plummets to the ground, finishing up dead with broken legs and 'senza occhi, senza bocca, disfatta' (p. 265). Freud claims that dying in dreams is representative of the start of a journey, significant in Vannina's case as she begins a new, unpredictable Chapter in her life.<sup>38</sup> It is also of great symbolic value when Suna bequeaths her crutches to her friend, passing with them her strength as a woman and her beliefs and ideals about female liberation and emancipation. Vannina's dream reflects her desire to escape the monotony and restrictive nature of her life as a married woman and the imagery that Maraini uses is extremely powerful. Flying in a dream is common, seen by Freud as symbolising the penis and as representing women's subconscious desire to resemble or become men.<sup>39</sup> Vannina's dream is also reminiscent of Dacia Maraini's own frequent dreams of flying, which she describes to Piera Degli Esposti and also in *Dizionario Quotidiano*:

Sogno di volare. Spesso l'inizio è drammatico perché volo per scappare da qualcuno che mi insegue. Poi invece, una volta in aria, mi trovo benissimo e mi diverto un mondo a planare, scivolare agitando le braccia come fossero ali.<sup>40</sup>

The importance that Maraini attributes to this idea is emphasised by her inclusion of a similar dream in the later novel *Il treno per Helsinki*. Armida Bianchi, who is

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<sup>37</sup> Tamburri, 'Victory or Defeat', p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 130.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>40</sup> D. Maraini & Piera Degli Esposti, *Storia di Piera* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997), p. 39 and D. Maraini, *Dizionario Quotidiano* (Milan: Bompiani, 1997), p. 83.

likewise trapped in an oppressive marriage, also has recurrent dreams that she is flying over the city's rooftops, filled with a sense of liberation.<sup>41</sup>

For Vannina the dream is a turning point in her life and she begins to take control of her own destiny, deciding to have an abortion and thereby severing her final tie to Giacinto (*Donna in Guerra*, p. 267). She has accomplished what Germaine Greer sees as a vital step in the liberation of married women, in that she has re-assessed both her own character and the structure of marriage itself, combating the traditional sense of failure that women feel in what Greer labels an impossible set-up.<sup>42</sup> Maraini's choice of a diary format for the novel is important in this respect. Vannina's diary entries allow her to experiment with and examine her feelings and its uniquely personal and confessional nature allows the writer to be completely honest and unguarded. Maraini cites the advantages of a diary in *Amata scrittura*, saying that:

Il diario è un'esigenza, è il bisogno di parlare con se stessi, di chiarire delle cose che faticiamo a capire: la parola scritta ha questa capacità di chiarificazione; è come una mappa per orientarci [...] Il diario è anche la mappa del rapporto con noi stessi.<sup>43</sup>

*Donna in guerra* ends on a note of optimism as Vannina looks to her future, realising that 'ora sono sola e ho tutto da ricominciare' (p. 269). Her final words emphasise the necessity of her separation from Giacinto as a prerequisite for her own personal struggle for freedom. The question of whether Vannina can achieve true liberation in a patriarchal society, where others, including Suna, have failed, is left unanswered; however she has taken the first positive step. Through her depictions of Vannina and Giacinto's relationship and the attitudes of characters such as Suna and the Pizzocane men, Dacia Maraini makes her opinions on the domestic and social oppression of women unmistakably clear, condemning man's domination of all aspects of a woman's life. Vannina's personal journey is set against a background of radical pro- and anti-feminist beliefs, providing Maraini with the opportunity to show an individual's reaction to a variety of beliefs. Whilst much of Maraini's work carries a similar message, *Donna in guerra* is decidedly more forceful in its approach to the issue and more militant in tone. It can be seen as a powerful documentation of the struggles that women faced in Italy in the 1970s and, most importantly, makes a significant contribution to feminist literature at large.

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<sup>41</sup> D.Maraini, *Il treno per Helsinki* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001), p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> G.Greer, *Female Eunuch*, pp. 14 and 323.

<sup>43</sup> D.Maraini, *Amata scrittura* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000), p. 103.



## IL SONETTO NEL NOVECENTO: UN DIALOGO CON LA TRADIZIONE

Quanto alla metrica poi, [...] insofferente di disegni prestabiliti, prorompente da essi, si adattava ad un tempo strettamente psicologico musicale ed istintivo. Per caso volli rileggere poi i sonetti delle prime scuole italiane; affascinata dalla regolarità volli ritentare l'impossibile.  
Amelia Rosselli (*Spazi metrici*)

In questo intervento mi propongo di affrontare una questione letteraria su un 'istituto' della letteratura occidentale in generale e della letteratura italiana in particolare: il sonetto. In particolare cercherò di seguire quelle che si ritengono le tappe più importanti di questa forma lirica all'interno della poesia del Novecento italiano. Mi limito a chiamare quest'intervento una 'questione' e non uno studio perché non lo si potrà approfondire in tutta la sua complessità. D'altro canto, però, cercherò di fornire tutti quegli spunti necessari per un approfondimento da fare, magari, in un'altra sede.

Riguardo all'importanza del sonetto nell'ambito della storia del genere lirico, già Carducci ne rivendica una posizione rilevante<sup>44</sup>. Il sonetto, come la rima, infatti, ha costituito un campo aperto di riflessione, riassumendo in sé tutto il peso che un'istituzione letteraria può riflettere sulle poetiche e le innovazioni del moderno. Questo perché si è convinti che non si può mai parlare di vera morte in letteratura, e nell'arte in generale: un recupero c'è sempre nell'innovazione, sia quando essa è improntata su adesioni a forme pur sempre affascinanti e tentatrici del passato, sia nei casi in cui si attua nel segno del rifiuto o della parodia delle stesse. Esattamente a queste due diverse linee di scelta si guarderà: da una parte si porranno quindi quei poeti che attraverso il sonetto hanno espresso ed esprimono l'esigenza di cambiamenti più radicali, dall'altra quei poeti che grazie a questa lontanissima composizione poetica hanno tentato innovazioni meno rumorose ma certo non meno evidenti ed importanti. In entrambi i casi, però, sarà dunque stato il 'dialogo' con la tradizione ad aprire la strada dei cambiamenti.<sup>45</sup> È anche chiaro che volendo

<sup>44</sup> Nel sonetto *Al sonetto* delle *Rime nuove*, dove si elogiano le qualità del 'breve e amplissimo carne' per il modo in cui ad esso siano ricorsi i grandi poeti (Dante, Petrarca, Foscolo ecc.), Carducci pone se stesso come 'postremo' accanto ai maestri citati.

<sup>45</sup> A tal proposito Giovanni Getto si concentra da una parte sull'indagine dei fattori 'tecnici' e dall'altra su un possibile bilancio da tracciare riguardo alla forma metrica in questione negli anni della modernità. Per maggiori dettagli si confronti G. Getto, 'Immagine del

seguire queste linee d'interpretazione, legate più che altro alle possibili funzioni del sonetto in relazione ai cambiamenti e alle nuove esigenze della poesia italiana del XX secolo, nella presente 'questione' letteraria non avremo modo di affrontare tutti i diversi aspetti critici ad essa legati (ad esempio il problema delle traduzioni – come di Luzi da Ronsard o di Ungaretti dai 40 sonetti di Shakespeare). Mi sembra inoltre doveroso precisare che non ci si soffermerà su tutta la produzione sonettistica presente nel Novecento ma ci occuperemo di quegli esempi che maggiormente rappresentano e giustificano la nostra analisi. Produzione di sonetti, in effetti, spesso è sinonimo di produzione non eccellente, diletteristica, come ad esempio nell'antologia *Sonettieri d'oggi*, curata da R. Mandel, in cui sono inseriti sonetti di circa 67 autori, magari non privi di successo mondano (si tratta infatti di personaggi della corte reale o papale, fascisti di chiara fama, professori universitari), ma perfettamente sconosciuti all'interno delle antologie dei 'professionisti' della poesia<sup>46</sup>.

Ci si chiederà perché proprio il sonetto. Innanzitutto la sua importanza nel genere lirico della tradizione italiana a cui sopra si accennava ricordando Carducci. Poi il suo fascino e la sua resistenza alla valanga delle rimozioni che ha sepolto altre forme metriche nel Novecento (si pensi al madrigale, all'ode, alla stessa ballata e via di seguito). Questo fascino e questa resistenza potremmo ricondurle innanzitutto alla sua brevità e compiutezza, caratteri certamente predominanti nei componimenti moderni. Interessante risulta infatti la riflessione sul sonetto all'interno di un'epoca segnata dalla 'libertà', dalla propensione al nuovo. Questo perché il suo essere una 'composizione minima', in cui un tema, all'interno di due quartine e due terzine, al pari del suono di una fisarmonica, si adagia, si allunga, si restringe e viene infine fuori con una chiusura decisa, coinvolgendo tra l'altro lo stesso gioco delle rime, delle consonanze e delle assonanze interne, assume un valore esemplare nella costruzione di una lirica, rivelandone tutto il suo complesso sistema di simmetrie, rispondenze, parallelismi e opposizioni.<sup>47</sup>

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sonetto', in *Immagini e problemi della letteratura italiana* (Milano: Mursia, 1966). Circa altri studi interessanti sul sonetto, si vedano: G.Contini, 'Esercizio d'interpretazione sopra un sonetto di Dante', in *Varianti e altra linguistica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1970), pp. 50-73; G.Marazzini, 'Revisione ed eversione metrica. Appunti sul sonetto nel Novecento', *Metrica*, II (1981), pp. 43-68; A.Pinchera, 'Metrica e stile di Umberto Saba: le epifanie del sonetto', in *Atti del Convegno internazionale «Il punto su Saba»* (Trieste, 25-27 marzo 1984; Trieste: Lint, 1985), pp. 81-102; S.Agosti, 'Quand l'ombre menaça de la fatale loi', in *Il testo poetico. Teorie e pratiche di analisi* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1972), pp. 73-89; C.Di Girolamo, 'Microscopia di un sonetto di Dante', in *Teoria e prassi della versificazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976), pp.14-24.

<sup>46</sup> R. Mandel, *Sonettieri d'oggi* (Varese: Studio letterario milanese, 1940).

<sup>47</sup> G.Contini, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

Riflessioni di questo genere sono sicuramente alla base dei sonetti presenti in *Alcyone* (per non citare quelli all'interno delle opere dannunziane pre-novecentesche), dove il poeta, concentrando molto l'attenzione sul quattordicesimo verso, riflette il suo intento di perfezione formale, ritmica e contenutistica. Leggendo questi sonetti, infatti, notiamo come l'equilibrio formale e i rimandi fonosimbolici sono parte essenziale nella comunicazione del tema da esprimere. Eccone un esempio:

Estate, bella quando primamente  
 nella tua bocca il mite oro portavi  
 come l'Arno i silenzi soavi  
 porta seco alla foce sua silente!

Ma più bella oggi mentre sei morente  
 e abbandonata ne' tuoi cieli blavi,  
 che col cúbito languido t'aggravi  
 su la nuvola incesa all'occidente.

T'arda Ermione sul tuo letto roggio  
 gli àcini d'ambra dove si sublima  
 il pianto delle tue pinete australi.

Io della tua bellezza ultima foggio  
 una divinità che su la cima  
 del cuore mi danza: Undulna dai piè d'ali.<sup>48</sup>

Come vediamo, i motivi tipici dannunziani del panismo e del sensualismo si fondono perfettamente all'interno della struttura musicale del sonetto, al quale si fa ricorso proprio per esaltare l'equilibrio formale presente nella poetica dell'autore. Nel sonetto il poeta vedeva in sostanza rispecchiato quell'ideale che aveva fatto proprio, e tipicamente tre-quattrocentesco (poi sviluppatosi in modo peculiare nel Cinquecento e in epoca barocca), di equilibrio. Ecco quindi che la riflessione formale dannunziana si spinge al di là dello stesso sonetto, del quale addirittura si cerca di perfezionare le simmetrie fra le terzine e le quartine. Se notiamo, infatti, le parole più gravi e risonanti predominano nelle terzine (*Ermione, àcini d'ambra, pinete australi, Undulna dai piè d'ali*). Dando una scorsa ai suoi sonetti, si nota come, soprattutto nel quattordicesimo verso, abbondano nomi non comuni (*Undulna* nel caso citato), spesso esotici, o sentenze dal tono apodittico o, ancora, frasi profetiche, esclamative, in genere introdotte da un *E ...* conclusivo. A volte la clausola *E...* coinvolge l'intera

<sup>48</sup> G.D'Annunzio, *Litorea dea*, in *Alcyone*, Edizione Critica Nazionale, a cura di P.Gibellini (Milano: Mondadori, 1988), p.65.

ultima terzina (E la Speranza ha la meravigliosa/ bocca che il Vinci incurverà com'arco/ a mirar l'infinito del Mistero).<sup>49</sup> Certo, questi artifici possono sembrare esterni, superficiali, poco importanti, eppure a ben notare sono state proprio queste accortezze formali ad aver condotto i poeti successivi a guardare a D'Annunzio come ad un innovatore e spesso un esempio da seguire. E il fatto che egli abbia preso in seria considerazione, e in sostanza accettato, tutta una serie di regole formali e retoriche della istituzione letteraria del sonetto, dimostra paradossalmente come alla base della sua adesione ci sia sempre stata non un'intenzione puramente accademica ma un preciso intento di perfezionarne il meccanismo formale stesso e con esso innovarne l'idea. A conferma di questa fiducia riposta nel sonetto, del resto, ci sono dei numeri: 18 sono i sonetti presenti fra le 88 liriche di *Alcyone* (accuratamente divisi a loro volta nelle ultime tre delle cinque sezioni del libro) e 34 il numero totale dei sonetti presenti nell'intera raccolta delle *Laudi del Cielo, della Terra e degli Eroi* (in cui spicca la corposa sezione *Le città del silenzio*, inserita nel secondo libro delle *Laudi, Elettra*)<sup>50</sup>. Ecco quindi che la forma metrica si trasforma in spunto di riflessione poetica e critica, dove il piccolo congegno di leggi regolate da parallelismi e richiami interni a quattordici versi si pone come specchio di una forte ricercatezza di preziosità e compiutezza, caratteristiche tipiche, nella loro essenza lirica, di una poesia altamente 'novecentesca'.

Come si trova scritto in molte delle nostre *Storie della letteratura*, a fare da controcanto alla poesia dannunziana troviamo i crepuscolari. In questo caso si tratta di Gozzano, il cui atteggiamento nei confronti del sonetto è più che altro di polemica. Il prezioso meccanismo formale dannunziano, infatti, nei sonetti presenti nell'opera di Gozzano si trasforma, in linea con la poetica crepuscolare, in un componimento più familiare e discreto, utile in prima linea a ironizzare sulla ricerca lessicale del Vate e a spianare la strada verso altre future caratteristiche della lirica novecentesca, in particolare la prosaicità. Eccone un esempio tratto dal sonetto *Elogio del Sonetto* (in *Poesie sparse*):

Nulla è più dolce del vivere fittizio  
 di te, compenso della notte insonne,  
 non la capellatura delle donne,  
 non metri novi in gallico artificio  
 [...]  
 O forma esatta più che ogni altra mai,  
 prodigio di parole indistruttibile,  
 come vecchi gioielli ereditari!<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> G.D'Annunzio, *Pistoia, III*, in *Le città del silenzio, Elettra, Versi d'Amore e di Gloria*, a cura di A. Andreoli e N. Lorenzini (Milano: 'I Meridiani' Mondadori, 1985), p. 252.

<sup>50</sup> In *Alcyone* D'Annunzio fa ricorso anche alla cosiddetta 'corona' di sonetti, poi usata da Saba, con tema autobiografico, nei *Versi militari*.

<sup>51</sup> G.Gozzano, *Poesie* (Torino: Einaudi, 1973), p. 31.

Il tipo di riflessione gozzaniana ha tutt'altri interessi: il 'gallico artificio' dannunziano si trasforma in semplici 'gioielli ereditari'. Certo il sonetto è ancora un caro e prezioso 'prodigio di parole indistruttibile', ma viene messo a servizio di un'idea di poesia più prosaica e narrativa per l'appunto. In altre parole ci troviamo sì di fronte ad un sonetto sul sonetto, ma il tono piano e comune tende a dare forza a tutto fuorché ad una precipua celebrazione dello stesso. Come accadeva con l'utilizzo della rima, la posizione dei crepuscolari è sagacemente polemica. Il sonetto, infatti, espressione istituzionale della tradizione letteraria italiana, è il mezzo attraverso cui far passare il nuovo, il lasciapassare dell'innovazione.

A metà strada fra la riflessione sull'equilibrio formale fatta da D'Annunzio e quella sulla prosaicità di Gozzano troviamo Corrado Govoni, il quale, pur concentrandosi sul 'peso' da dare alla terzina finale del sonetto, propende per una linea lessicale più dimessa e quotidiana. Si tenga inoltre presente che l'intera raccolta poetica govoniana, *Le fiale* (1903), è composta da sonetti. Si legga ad esempio il sonetto *Paesi* (da *Poesie Elettriche*, del 1911):

Esplodon le simpatiche campane  
d'un bianco campanile sopra i tetti  
grigi; donne con rossi fazzoletti  
cavano da un rotondo forno il pane.

Ammazzano un maiale nella neve  
tra un gruppo di bambini affascinati  
dal sangue, che con gli occhi spalancati  
aspettan la crudele agonia breve.

Gettano i galli vittoriosi squilli.  
I buoi escon dai fienili neri;  
si spargono sull'argine, tranquilli,

scendono a bere gravi acqua d'argento.  
Nei campi, rosei, bianchi, i cimiteri  
sperano in mezzo al verde del frumento.<sup>52</sup>

Come in D'Annunzio, la forza di tutto il sonetto viene fuori nell'ultima terzina, dove l'intento principale è quello di fornire una conclusione epigrammatica fortemente pregnante all'interno del tema trattato. In questo caso la descrizione dell'ambiente campestre si dipana, attraverso un lessico tutt'altro che prezioso, da una strofa all'altra sino al dodicesimo verso, vale a dire fino al primo verso

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<sup>52</sup> C.Govoni, *Poesie. 1903-1959* (Milano: Mondadori, 1961), p. 34.

dell'ultima terzina. Tra questo verso e il successivo, poi, si presenta un'immagine diversa e fortemente distinta dalle altre che si assumerà il compito di chiudere il sonetto epigrammaticamente, con una pennellata più distesa che conferisce all'intero componimento un senso più arcaico e mitico, a sua volta rafforzato dalla presenza della rima tra il dodicesimo e il quattordicesimo verso (*argento: frumento*). La ricercatezza d'equilibrio si riconosce, inoltre, nella scelta degli stessi verbi che aprono e chiudono ogni singola strofa (*Esplodon; cavano; Ammazzano; aspettan; Gettano; si spargono; scendono; sperano*), dove, all'evidente richiamo strutturale in quanto tale, si aggiunge l'idea di una perfetta conclusione sia formale che tematica. L'ultimo verbo, infatti, (*sperano*) a differenza dei precedenti, si colloca in quella sfera più spirituale e mitica di cui si parlava poc'anzi e a cui fortemente si lega l'immagine dei 'cimiteri' (che si animano della speranza dei sepolti).

Ecco quindi un motivo su cui dobbiamo soffermarci parlando della funzione del sonetto nella lirica del Novecento. Esso è proprio questo carattere circolare e perfetto, fatto di quei parallelismi e quelle risonanze formali e tematiche che hanno spesso animato la riflessione poetica dei moderni. Alle qualità di equilibrio formale perfetto del sonetto hanno guardato in molti nel secolo scorso e spesso proprio quei poeti dai quali a prima vista non ce lo si aspetterebbe, perché molto sperimentali. Tra questi sicuramente Amelia Rosselli, di cui riportiamo subito una lirica tratta da *Variazioni belliche* (1964):

Se tu suoni un flauto troppo puramente entro i boschi  
privilegiati della tua caverna riempita di muffa, io non  
ti posso seguire entro il tanfo delle tue abitudini. Se  
tu apri una porta che socchiude un istante e non trovi  
la bella addormentata, io non posso scucire questo mio abito  
di tristi fantasie. Il monocolo delle tue invenzioni è  
pallida cosa in confronto all'abito che ti porgo ed ho  
scucito per la tua gagliardia! Ritrova il segreto che fece  
fiorire l'arbustello accanto alla porta che s'apriva con  
rapida facilità; io resto nel buio e ti contemplo lavarti  
le mani se non svieni sulla soglia di tutte le felicità.<sup>53</sup>

A premessa di quanto segue, perché non sembri a sua volta la presente interpretazione frutto di un puro 'esperimento' critico, si ritiene opportuno ricordare che quando scriveva questo libro la Rosselli aveva ben presenti i sonetti trecenteschi. Nell'allegato *Spazi metrici* che, sottolineando la lunga riflessione maturata negli anni, risale al 1962 e quindi due anni prima della

<sup>53</sup> A. Rosselli, *Se tu suoni un flauto troppo puramente entro i boschi*, *Variazioni Belliche*, prefazione di P.P. Pasolini, a cura di P. Perilli (Roma: Fondazione Piazzolla, 1995) p. 116.

pubblicazione della raccolta, la poetessa dice infatti di voler ‘ritentare l’equilibrio del sonetto trecentesco. [...] La memoria corre allora alle più fantastiche imprese (spazi versi rime tempi)’.<sup>54</sup> Nel sonetto trecentesco, infatti, come prima si accennava, veniva esaltata l’estrema circolarità del componimento, la perfetta corrispondenza e suddivisione in quattro parti e di conseguenza il suo equilibrio interno. Sono questi i caratteri che ricercheremo nella lirica citata della Rosselli. Innanzitutto la scomposizione della lirica in quattro zone semanticamente legate ma ben divise è di facile riconoscimento: quattro sono infatti i periodi che costituiscono la lirica, di cui i primi due cominciano con un ‘Se’ (*Se tu suoni; Se tu apri*) e semanticamente aprono il tema, tipico nella Rosselli, di un amore che celebra se stesso attraverso l’esaltazione della diversità tra chi ama e la persona amata (*Se tu suoni un flauto troppo puramente... io non ti posso seguire*). Il terzo periodo, in linea con l’idea del sonetto trecentesco, composto di parti in forte sincronia ed equilibrio fra loro, prosegue ed accentua il suddetto tema (*Il monocolo delle tue invenzioni è/ pallida cosa in confronto all’abito che ti porgo ed ho/ scucito per la tua gagliardia!*) Il quarto ed ultimo periodo, infine, termina dando alla lirica quella tipica conclusione circolare ed epigrammatica, attraverso l’immagine del soggetto parlante che ‘nel buio’ contempla l’altro immerso in un’atmosfera di onirica suggestione (*ti contemplo lavarti/ le mani se non svieni sulla soglia di tutte le felicità.*) Le quattro immagini, inoltre, che apparentemente si susseguono in modo lineare, negando quindi la regola della circolarità, in realtà sono tutte convergenti verso l’ultima, che in questo modo assume un ampliamento di significato che riconduce immediatamente alla prima immagine, di cui finisce per essere il *pendant* simbolico (rinforzato, fra l’altro, dal ricorrere, ma con un significato semantico più sfumato e indefinito, del ‘se’: *se non svieni sulla soglia di tutte le felicità*). La lirica, dunque, dal punto di vista degli scheletri sintattici come della strutturazione del tema, del suo significato e della sua dislocazione in sezioni, è certamente caratterizzata dalle qualità più evidenti del sonetto. Compiutezza, equilibrio interno e produzione di una forma chiusa, circolare, unitaria sono perfettamente rispettate dalla Rosselli. Se a questo aggiungiamo l’idea novecentesca di verso libero come contenitore di ritmi infinitesimali ma costanti, apparirà strabiliante la ricomposizione possibile della lirica succitata nel seguente modo:

Se tu suoni un flauto troppo puramente  
 entro i boschi privilegiati della tua caverna  
 riempita di muffa, io non ti posso seguire  
 entro il tanfo delle tue abitudini. Se tu apri

una porta che socchiude un istante e non  
 trovi la bella addormentata, io non posso

<sup>54</sup> A.Rosselli, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

scucire questo mio abito di tristi fantasie.  
Il monocolo delle tue invenzioni è pallida

cosa in confronto all'abito che ti porgo ed  
ho scucito per la tua gagliardia! Ritrova il  
segreto che fece fiorire l'arbustello accanto  
alla porta che s'apriva con rapida facilità; io  
resto nel buio e ti contemplo lavarti le mani  
se non svieni sulla soglia di tutte le felicità.

'Le lunghezze dei versi', conferma infatti la Rosselli sempre in *Spazi metrici*, 'erano dunque approssimativamente eguali, e con esse i loro tempi di lettura; esse avevano come unità metrica e spaziale la parola e il nesso ortografico, e come forma contenente lo spazio o tempo grafico, quest'ultimo steso però non in maniera meccanica o del tutto visuale, ma presupposto nello scandire, e agente nello scrivere e nel pensare'<sup>55</sup>. Un concetto di metro, come vediamo, libero sì, ma niente affatto lontano dall'idea tradizionale di metrica, in cui era lo scandire degli accenti a dare il movimento alle parole nel verso: 'per caso volli rileggere poi i sonetti delle prime scuole italiane; affascinata dalla regolarità volli ritentare l'impossibile'<sup>56</sup>.

Casi come quello della Rosselli ne troviamo in abbondanza. Si prenda ad esempio in considerazione un tipo particolare di sonetto, quello a carattere più propriamente descrittivo. In epoca moderna esso ha dato infatti vita a nuovi contenuti, in cui la quotidianità si lega a più profondi temi esistenziali. Un esempio interessante è certamente Rebora, il quale, tra l'altro, è sempre ben attento a conservare la regola della circolarità. E' esemplare, al riguardo, il tema del contrasto natura-città. Questa opposizione, presente in quasi tutti i *Frammenti lirici*, è una categoria indispensabile alla lettura di diversi altri poeti della modernità (Saba, Pavese, Gatto, Sinisgalli, lo stesso Zanzotto e via di seguito). Nella raccolta di Rebora, la più codificata espressione del contrasto natura-città si trova nel *III* frammento (*Dall'intensa nuvolaglia*):

Dall'intensa nuvolaglia  
giù - brunita la corazza,  
con guizzi di lucido giallo,  
con suono che scoppia e si scaglia -  
piomba il turbine e scorrazza  
sul vento proteso a cavallo  
campi e ville, e dà battaglia;  
ma quand'urta una città

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

si scardina in ogni maglia,  
 s'inombra come un'occhiaia,  
 e guizzi e suono e vento  
 tramuta in ansietà  
 d'affollate faccende in tormento:  
 e senza combattere ammazza.<sup>57</sup>

Il carattere fortemente descrittivo richiama molto, come dicevamo, il sonetto *en plein air* diffuso nella tradizione italiana, a cui però non fa affatto riscontro un clima placido e sereno. Nella poesia di Rebora entra prepotentemente il tormento dell'uomo moderno eternamente scisso interiormente. Per quel che riguarda la struttura, inoltre, si faccia attenzione al fatto che il testo presenta un numero di versi pari a quello di un sonetto, anche se lo schema strofico-metrico infrange la misura dell'impianto classico. Internamente, questa struttura si suddivide in due parti: da una parte semplificando la ripartizione in quattro del sonetto, dall'altra richiamandosi alla sua sottodivisione in due gruppi di strofe differenti. In particolare le due parti in questione si riconoscono grazie alla forte cesura tra il v.7 e il v.8 (il punto e virgola con il 'ma' avversativo), che divide il componimento in due strofe polimetriche di sette versi ciascuna. La prima ha una struttura regolare (ABC ABC A); la seconda presenta al contrario un andamento irregolare (DAA' EDE B), per la diversa disposizione delle rime ('maglia' e 'occhiaia' sono assonanzate).

Questa conflittualità rimica è ribadita anche sul piano metrico. Alla successione ordinata di ottonari e novenari della prima parte si contrappone nella seconda una maggiore varietà dei metri. Eppure l'attenzione alla circolarità non è affatto elusa. Essa è infatti assicurata da tre elementi in particolare: la forza epigrammatica dell'ultimo verso primariamente e la presenza sia di una rima interna ai vv.7-8 (*dà: città*) che della corrispondenza rimica tra l'ultimo verso del componimento e i versi 2 e 5 (*ammazza: corazza: scorrazza*), che correggono e attenuano in questo modo le antitesi interne. Grazie a queste accortezze, proprio nel punto di massima disgregazione strofica ed in chiusura del componimento, il poeta ricomponе così, almeno formalmente, la circolarità del testo.

Interessante, inoltre, l'attenzione di Rebora verso la punteggiatura. Essa, infatti, ha certamente contribuito a tutta la riflessione poetica del Novecento in generale. Proprio in relazione al sonetto già Pascoli tenta di spostare la punteggiatura al centro dell'attenzione: 'Del sonetto [...] forma metrica di ormai stabile struttura, [Pascoli] comincia a dare una lettura diversa e nuova; della sua struttura solida e quadrata logora le simmetrie, introducendo

<sup>57</sup> Si veda C. Rebora, *Frammenti lirici*, a cura di G. Mussini e V. Sheiwiller (Milano: Sheiwiller-Garzanti, 1988), p. 58.

dislocazioni di vario tipo, scosse e spostamenti tramite l'infittimento di una ricca e tormentata punteggiatura [...].<sup>58</sup>

Un'attenzione particolare alla punteggiatura in relazione alla struttura del componimento la troviamo anche in Sinisgalli, di cui particolarmente interessante risulta questa lirica di *Vidi le muse (Rue Sainte Walburge)*:

Forse ha battuto più forte  
 Il tuo cuore dei tacchi del lanciere.  
 Ti ritorna il frastuono in un odore  
 Di capelli, i giorni belli  
 Al moto biondo della Morsa.  
 Sbiadiscono nella caligine  
 La strada del borgo, le scritte  
 Straniere delle insegne, i campi  
 Dietro le palafitte.  
 Tu ne ritrovi la traccia  
 E da uno sbuffo di vapore  
 Avanza la cara figura d'amore  
 Quei dolci tacchi battuti sul cuore  
 E l'ombra calda sulla faccia.<sup>59</sup>

Come notiamo, la lirica ha un chiaro richiamo alla forma del sonetto per il numero dei versi e per la loro metrica frastagliata di endecasillabi. A questo va ad aggiungersi la forte presenza delle rime e, per l'appunto, la punteggiatura. Questa, infatti, a ben notare, se dividessimo la lirica nelle canoniche due quartine e due terzine, assume il preciso compito di legare le quattro strofe, essendo i punti, tra l'altro in numero di quattro, presenti nei versi intermedi ad esse (al II, al V, al IX e al XIV verso).

Un altro poeta del Novecento italiano che certamente ha guardato al sonetto in termini di innovazione-conservazione è Giorgio Caproni. Vero e proprio ritorno alla forma del sonetto è la corona di sonetti ricordata sotto il

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<sup>58</sup> A. Onofri, *Lecture poetiche del Pascoli* (Bari: Edizioni dell'Albero, 1953) p. 126. Si veda altresì, a proposito dell'ingresso massiccio della punteggiatura nella forma del sonetto, il seguente componimento di Sergio Corazzini (*La leggenda delle stelle*, 1904, ora in *Poesie edite e inedite*, Torino: Einaudi, 1968) p. 27: 'Il mare: muto. Senza vele. Senza / rondini, il cielo. Solo, nelle grigie / acque, lo scoglio della triste effigie, / immenso. Immoto. Sacro alla potenza / del Tridentier di Nettuno. Alto, in presenza, / il sole. Lungi dalle cime bigie / dello scoglio le umane cupidigie, / nessuno. Affretta il sol sua dipartenza // triste, dietro si lascia oscuri veli. / Cala sopra lo scoglio. Orribilmente / si frange all'urto. Il cielo, di scintille // è pieno. Sono mille, più di mille / che vanno e stanno. È notte. Alta. Silente. / Dormi, bimbo, di stelle ardono i cieli!' Il sonetto, come vediamo, è diviso non tanto dalle strofe, le quali non seguono la partizione tradizionale (le due quartine sono legate tra loro), ma dalla formicolante punteggiatura.

<sup>59</sup> L. Sinisgalli, *Vidi le Muse* (Milano: Mondadori, 1947), p. 49.

nome degli undici ‘lamenti’ de *Gli anni tedeschi* scritti tra il ’44 e il 45. Ma nella sua opera la riflessione poetica sulla forma tradizionale a quattordici versi la si ritrova praticamente ovunque. Ecco ad esempio in *Passaggio d’Enea* (1956) la lirica *Le giovinette così nude e umane*:

Le giovinette così nude e umane  
 senza maglia sul fiume, con che miti  
 membra, presso le pietre acri e l’odore  
 stupefatto dell’acqua, aprono inviti  
 taciturni nel sangue! Mentre il sole  
 scalda le loro dolci reni e l’aria  
 ha l’agrezza dei corpi, io in che parole  
 fuggo – perché m’esilio a una contraria  
 vita, dove quei teneri sudori,  
 sciolti da pori vergini, non hanno  
 che il respiro d’un nome?... Dagli afrori  
 leggeri dei capelli nacque il danno  
 che il mio cuore ora sconta. E ai bei madori  
 terrestri, ecco che oppongo: oh versi! oh danno!<sup>60</sup>

La poesia, in sostanza, del sonetto classico presenta l’unica variante del non avere quattro strofe distintamente poste sulla pagina. Per il resto è un perfetto sonetto composto da quattordici endecasillabi esatti. A renderlo un componimento fortemente moderno sono da una parte l’andatura allo stesso tempo prosaica e ritmica, musicale, dovuta, in questo caso in particolare, alla diramazione in ogni direzione di assonanze e consonanze che spesso rimpiazzano la presenza della rima stessa (anch’essa comunque presente), dall’altra il tema petrarchesco del poeta esiliato in ‘una contraria vita’ che però è chiaramente filtrato da una sensibilità moderna. Del soggetto parlante, infatti, viene sottolineata la sua diversità, la sua distanza da quel mondo di giovinette ‘così nude ed umane’. I versi, e dunque il suo stesso essere poeta, lo portano a vivere questo dramma: ‘oh versi! oh danno!’

In linea invece con quei poeti che, attraverso il sonetto, hanno preso una decisa posizione polemica, troviamo certamente i sonetti ‘eversivi’ di Dino Campana. Nei suoi *Canti orfici* il poeta ci ha lasciato per lo meno tre liriche ascrivibili, nonostante le loro variazioni, all’ambito del sonetto. A questi tre dovrebbe inoltre esserne aggiunto un quarto, mimetizzato all’interno degli ultimi quattordici versi di *Immagine del viaggio e della montagna*, peraltro perfettamente regolare nella metrica (si tratta infatti di endecasillabi) e nella struttura delle strofe (ABBA BAAB CDE CDE).

Le tre poesie sono del resto riconoscibili quali sonetti sia per i loro titoli (due di esse si chiamano *Sonetto di Vittoria Colonna* e *Sonetto perfido e*

<sup>60</sup> Cf. G.Caproni, *Tutte le poesie* (Milano: ‘Gli Elefanti’ Garzanti, 1999), p. 127.

*focoso*, mentre la terza è polemicamente intitolata *Poesia facile*), sia per la loro generale regolarità strofica (anche se non con una presenza canonica delle rime). Particolarmente regolare tra questi tre componimenti è il *Sonetto di Vittoria Colonna*:

Il bel paggetto dal corpo ondulato  
È andato nella stanza che rinchiuse  
In un velario di luce le sue fuse  
Forme di bronzo e un gemito attardato

Gentile e grave e ricco cuor d'amante  
Si offerse vivo alle chiarezze ignude...  
Poi la notte lentamente chiuse  
Il suo segreto pel mio cuor tremante

Oppresso dall'amore e dal mistero  
Il suo atroce segreto di fanciullo  
Partì dalle sue labbra lento e nero:

L'uccisi con un colpo alla mammella  
Nella notte: rimorso e catturato  
Alzai la testa e ricercai la stella

Avvelenata sotto cui son nato.<sup>61</sup>

Lo schema strofico, caudato, anche se sostanzialmente regolare (ABBA CXBC DYD EAE A), è variato in modo rilevante per ciò che riguarda alcuni punti: innanzitutto la modificazione della rima dalla prima alla seconda quartina e dalla prima alla seconda terzina, secondariamente la ripresa della rima in A nella seconda terzina e nella stessa coda finale del sonetto. A questo si aggiungerebbe lo straniante inserimento dei due versi irrelati (il VI e il X). Nonostante ciò, anche ad una lettura approfondita, notiamo che la forma del sonetto regge. Il richiamo della rima A in C, infatti, concentra in sé da un lato una forte eversione. Dall'altro lato, però, è proprio grazie alla sua presenza che viene compensata la generale violazione, rievocando, ancora una volta, quell'idea di circolarità chiusa del sonetto tradizionale. La rima *ondulàTo: attardàTo*, infatti, si lega fonicamente anche all'altra *amànTe: tremànTe*; e la ricomparsa della stessa rima A nel verso finale costituisce la chiusura più equilibrata. Si tenga inoltre presente che la rima irrelata X è in assonanza con B (*rinchiùse: fùse: ignùde: schiùse*) e che la stessa coda presenta una quasi rima (*Avvelenàta-nàto*). In altre parole ci troviamo di fronte a volontarie eversioni dal sistema, il che conferma in realtà che il sonetto, anche in questo

<sup>61</sup> D.Campana, *Canti Orfici* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1928), p. 66.

caso ‘polemico’, è servito al poeta come base di riflessione compositiva. D’altro canto è chiarissima l’intenzione polemica di Campana. Innanzitutto il titolo: il sonetto si intitola *Sonetto di Vittoria Colonna* come se lo si volesse attribuire alla poetessa cinquecentesca, ma in realtà il suo contenuto, incentrato su un oscuro e fosco delitto passionale, è anni luce distante dal temperamento religioso e austero della Colonna. Stessa cosa del resto potrebbe dirsi del *Sonetto perfido e focoso*, che sin dal titolo, rivela un intento sarcastico (già nella prima quartina Campana infatti dichiara di voler incatenare la provocante nudità della donna in un ‘sonetto pastorale’).<sup>62</sup> Per ciò che invece riguarda il terzo sonetto dei *Canti orfici, Poesia facile*, l’intento polemico mirante ad un’eversione è ancora più evidente, in quanto il componimento riprende nel primo verso un motivo del *Canzoniere* petrarchesco (sonetto CXXXIV – *Pace non trovo e non ho da far guerra*):

Pace non cerco, guerra non sopporto  
 Tranquillo e solo vo pel mondo in sogno  
 Pieno di canti soffocati. Agogno  
 La nebbia ed il silenzio in un gran porto.

In un gran porto pien di vele lievi  
 Pronte a salpar per l’orizzonte azzurro  
 Dolci ondulando, mentre che il sussur  
 Del vento passa con accordi brevi.

E quegli accordi il vento se li porta  
 Lontani sopra il mare sconosciuto.  
 Sogno. La vita è triste ed io son solo

O quando o quando in un mattino ardente  
 L’anima mia si sveglierà nel sole  
 Nel sole eterno, libera e fremente.<sup>63</sup>

Come nel primo sonetto anche qui ravvisiamo un cambiamento di rima dalla prima alla seconda quartina (ABBA CDDC); mentre nelle terzine una sola è la rima regolare che resta (vv. 12 e 14) anche se numerose sono poi le assonanze e le identità timbriche, esattamente come avveniva nel *Sonetto di Vittoria Colonna*. Il contenuto, inoltre, è volutamente banale e banalizzato: l’aspirazione alla solitudine, le vele e le navi dondolanti, il mare. In altre parole si capisce come l’eversivo Campana, proprio richiamandosi al sonetto

<sup>62</sup> Si veda la prima quartina del sonetto in D.Campana, *op.cit.*, p. 82: ‘Io voglio nel sonetto pastorale / Te luccicante nelle bionde anelle / Te dal nascente tuo sesso ribelle / Inasperita, nuda incatenare; [...]’.

<sup>63</sup> D.Campana, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

petrarchesco, vuole maggiormente attirare l'attenzione del lettore verso la necessità di un rinnovamento della poesia moderna. Egli, infatti, cuce le sue immagini *facili* in un componimento che alla fine risulta cantabile grazie ai suoi richiami fonici interni. È proprio qui che sta il messaggio *stilistico* innovativo di Campana: una nuova poesia può richiamarsi al passato ma solo per essere eversiva rispetto ad esso, la sua metrica deve contenere altri ritmi e i suoi temi devono fortemente legarsi a questo spirito moderno fatto di nuovi timbri.

Su un versante opposto troviamo invece poeti come Gatto, Caproni o Luzi, i quali si sono sempre cimentati a scrivere sonetti non per ispirare polemiche critiche nei suoi confronti, ma per, come dire, vestirlo di modernità. Di particolare interesse risultano i sonetti di Caproni. Anche nei *Lamenti* (come già prima nei *Sonetti dell'anniversario* – in *Cronistoria*- e nel *Sonetto dell'epifania* – in *Finzioni* ) la tecnica principale è quella dello scrivere *in continuum*, senza la canonica separazione sintattica fra le strofe, vale a dire esaltando, nonostante l'andamento fortemente lirico, la narratività dei versi, strettamente legati fra loro da frequenti enjambement.<sup>64</sup>

Ecco quindi che il sonetto è stato utilizzato nel Novecento come confronto produttivo con la tradizione, attuando così un vero e proprio momento di rinnovamento della costruzione lirica. Non è certo un caso che Fortini, ad esempio, si sia spesso servito di titoli che annunciavano la stessa forma metrica (come *Sonetto* – in *Foglio di via e altri versi* o *Sonetto del ragno* – in *Paesaggio con serpente*). Il guardare al sonetto, in altri termini, diviene per Fortini un momento di adesione all'istituto letterario nella sua forma, e, allo stesso tempo, un'occasione per introdurre nuove soluzioni operative, sia da un punto di vista strettamente metrico (il metro in Fortini non è mai ridotto a pura meccanicità), sia da un punto di vista tematico (inserendo all'interno di motivi tradizionali appassionate riflessioni riferite all'uomo della contemporaneità più recente):

È bianco il muro, nero il ragno. Eppure  
tutto fra gli arti e il ventre in sé compatto,  
confitto nell'impronta del suo atto  
non una sola ha in sé ma due nature.

Morte ha nome la prima. È il teschio esatto  
di velli drappi vertebre suture  
che affila e argenta esili bave impure.  
Ira è l'altra, che attende attimo e scatto.

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<sup>64</sup> Negli undici *Lamenti* non troviamo neanche un caso in cui la fine della strofa corrisponda alla fine della frase sintattica. Stesso dicasi per le assonanze, le quali spesso sono utilizzate al posto di due rime. Un fenomeno, dunque, che non può essere considerato come casuale, ma che ha di certo alla sua base una riflessione formale precisa.

Furia costretta della realtà  
urla a te quel sigillo una parola  
e in te già serva la mente risponde.

Il ragno non ti ascolta. Sempre e sola  
esegue sua figura di empietà  
furiere di defunte forze immonde.<sup>65</sup>

Come vediamo, tra richiami culti quali il legame fra 'la morte' e 'l'ira', che addirittura ci riportano con la mente alla classicità più lontana, si insinua strisciante una tematica esistenziale modernissima, quella di un soggetto che subisce la sua impotenza di fronte ad una realtà-furia che lo ingloba e lo schiavizza: 'in te già serva la mente risponde'. Il metro, poi, ha la stessa funzione di quei richiami culti; esso infatti rappresenta quello specchio letterario che consente al poeta di esprimere il proprio itinerario *ragionato*. Il metro controlla l'esibizione di una emotività eccessiva e, in modo del tutto stupefacente, rende possibile l'espressione di concetti altrimenti inesprimibili. Possiamo dire, con le parole di Sereni, che solo in questo modo, aggrappandosi cioè alla tradizione, le parole di Fortini riescono ad agire 'per un'irriducibile volontà di comunicazione, verso destinatari invisibili e anonimi, magari futuri'.<sup>66</sup>

Ma vediamo più da vicino questa scelta metrica e cerchiamo di trarne conclusioni riguardo alle intenzioni del poeta. Vediamo innanzitutto che lo schema delle rime, pur se apparentemente mantiene una certa vicinanza a quello tradizionale, non è affatto rigido o meccanico: ABBA BAAB CDE DCE. A ciò si aggiunga l'allungamento o la riduzione di alcuni versi rispetto alla norma. Tutto questo, però, per Fortini non ha un significato polemico come avveniva per Campana. Si tratta invece di un recupero raffinato della tradizione, essendo lo stesso schema e le stesse infrazioni metriche già utilizzati da Foscolo e ancora molto prima da Petrarca.<sup>67</sup> Il lavoro di recupero di Fortini deve quindi essere visto come un vero e proprio tentativo di rivitalizzare il sonetto tradizionale attraverso i mezzi e le possibilità del Novecento, cercando soprattutto di eliminarne la vuotezza accademica e puramente meccanica. Modificare diventa dunque una parola di fiducia verso il sonetto tradizionale, poiché nasce con l'esigenza di restituirne forza.

<sup>65</sup> F. Fortini, *Paesaggio con serpente* (Torino: Einaudi, 1984), p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> Risvolto di copertina dello stesso *Paesaggi*, *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Si veda *Solcata ho la fronte e Perché taccia*, U. Foscolo, *Sonetti e Odi* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1985), pp. 25; 54. Si veda altresì il sonetto CCLXXIX di F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1964), p. 209.

L'esempio più evidente nella lirica recente ci viene fornito da un'altra poetessa, Patrizia Valduga, la quale esordisce nel 1981 proprio con una serie di sonetti, *Quattordici sonetti*.<sup>68</sup> Anche nelle opere successive la Valduga, che tra l'altro ha brillantemente tradotto *Canzoni e sonetti* di John Donne, ha continuato a servirsi del sonetto come forma poetica, inserendo questa scelta all'interno della sua singolare e innovativa idea di poesia.<sup>69</sup> Valduga si distingue fra i poeti contemporanei per la particolarità della ricerca sul linguaggio. Come avverte Luigi Baldacci in una sua nota introduttiva a *Medicamenta e altri medicamenta* (1989): 'La Valduga ... ha fatto sua la crisi di linguaggio della poesia moderna. Non è un poeta in crisi, ma un poeta che parla con la crisi, servendosene. Una ricerca che sopravanza ogni contemporaneo'.<sup>70</sup> Il suo rapporto con la tradizione è, pertanto, contraddittorio e, in quanto tale, altamente moderno. Si veda il sonetto *In nome di Dio, aiutami! Ché tanto* (*Medicamenta* (1982):

In nome di Dio, aiutami! Ché tanto  
amor non muta e muta mi trascino.  
Ancora sete ho di te... soltanto  
sola a te solo e col sole declino.

O marea d'amore viverti accanto  
e arresto del cuore, amor mio divino,  
che eterni della vita luce e canto.  
La mia ne muore... dal ricordo sino

al qui ancora verso il cuore in cammino,  
verso te, mio dissorte eppur destino...  
se non di morte... ora di te rimpianto...

e il mare discolora il mio mattino.  
Ma tu incatenami all'amato incanto,  
resta, è giorno, vieni più vicino.<sup>71</sup>

Attraverso il ritmo imposto dalla forma sonetto, come vediamo, la poetessa rende accessibile il suo lavoro linguistico teso alla ricerca di un equilibrio fra

<sup>68</sup> P.Valduga, *Quattordici sonetti* (Milano: Mondadori, 1981).

<sup>69</sup> J.Donne, *Canzoni e sonetti*, traduzione di P.Valduga (Milano: Se, 1999).

<sup>70</sup> P. Valduga, *Medicamenta e altri medicamenta*, introduzione di L. Baldacci (Torino: Einaudi, 1989), p. VI.

<sup>71</sup> P.Valduga, *Medicamenta* (Torino: Einaudi, 1982), p. 11.

linguaggio letterario e linguaggio parlato. Il risultato raggiunto crea un effetto di grande interesse, anche estetico. Gli elementi fonoprosodici abbondano e creano rimandi continui di senso. Essendo il tutto armonizzato all'interno della circolarità di un sonetto, possiamo certamente affermare di trovarci di fronte non solo a una poetessa interessante per i contenuti, ma anche a una vera e propria artigiana del testo, una poetessa che profondamente medita sulla forma del verso e sulla sua architettura all'interno di una lirica. Anche in questo caso il sonetto è il primo testimone letterario. Esso le permette di impostare quel dialogo con la tradizione che si risolve niente affatto in pura e semplice accettazione, ma in spunto, ricchezza a cui attingere, senza per questo rinunciare alla ricerca di innovazioni.

Nel testo che segue (*Ti voglio far provare il bel piacere, Medicamenta e altri medicamenta*), vediamo, ad esempio, come un sonetto, scritto in forma di tenzone con un ipotetico corteggiatore, mira a svelare con ironia l'ipocrisia degli atteggiamenti galanti e dei modi della poesia amorosa della tradizione:

Ti voglio far provare il bel piacere:  
Pur mal mio grado? Lasciami tranquilla!  
Da troppe sere e troppe primavere...  
Dei superni desiri ecco la squilla.

La luna scorre su acque nere e brilla...  
Oh, tu vai alto per volermi avere!  
Ed io ti prenderò come un'anguilla.  
Dentro da me per vie d'acqua o vie aeree...

E perché più e più in te s'interni...  
Entrerai mai e mai, primavere o inverni.  
Dall'alto scenderò con giri alterni...

Pensatore di donne, mio amatore...  
Fin ch'io ti prenda, fin che l'incaverni...  
Ad averti c'è poco per il cuore.<sup>72</sup>

La poetessa raggiunge la sua propria emancipazione soprattutto rivendicando il proprio diritto a fare liberamente la propria scelta dell'amore e del piacere e a disporre autonomamente del proprio corpo, senza cioè mascolinizzarsi nei gusti e negli atteggiamenti.

Interessante è dunque il recupero della forma sonetto soprattutto negli ultimi decenni del secolo. Essa assume continue e differenti connotazioni negli intenti, dalla pura e semplice riflessione formale al tentativo ironico rivolto ai

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<sup>72</sup> P. Valduga, *Medicamenta e altri medicamenta*, op.cit., p. 19.

più disparati argomenti, come nel caso di Valerio Magrelli, il quale ha utilizzato la forma tradizionale per professare la propria critica alla società contemporanea e alle sue malattie.<sup>73</sup>

L'Utilizzo del sonetto, quindi, soprattutto nelle liriche più recenti, nasce proprio da questa esigenza di ristabilire un rapporto con i testi della tradizione e con i poeti stessi della tradizione. Una sorta di colloquio tra 'professionisti', che del resto è un refrain dell'intera storia della letteratura (quello di Dante con Virgilio è il caso più celebre).<sup>74</sup> In Zanzotto, ad esempio, questo colloquio si fa addirittura simbolo di 'galateo'. La raccolta *Galateo in bosco*, include infatti un *Ipersonetto* consistente in una serie di 14 sonetti, a loro volta preceduti da una *Premessa* e seguiti da una *Postilla*, quasi si trattasse di una anomala corona. Contini, nella *Prefazione* al libro parla di 'ingredienti' del Cinque-Seicento a cui vanno ad aggiungersi elementi metrici e lessicali facenti capo a Dante. Zanzotto, dunque, si rivela essere un punto di paragone, particolarmente 'aggiornato' riguardo al discorso di un dialogo con la tradizione. Per ciò che riguarda il sonetto in particolare, la sua lirica si rivela importante poiché in essa sembrano fuse entrambe le posizioni analizzate fino ad ora: da una parte v'è certamente un desiderio di recupero, dall'altra si avverte chiaramente un sentimento di amara polemica, soprattutto quando andiamo a leggere quanto simbolicamente dice nella terzina conclusiva della *Postilla* al suddetto *Ipersonetto*:

così ancora di te mi sono avvalso,  
di te sonetto, righe infami e ladre –  
mandala di cui di frusto in frusto accatto.<sup>75</sup>

Con le sue meccanicità, da Zanzotto del resto strettamente rispettate per una sorta di 'galateo' letterario, il sonetto diviene un 'bosco' e 'infame', poiché consunto da una iperletterarietà che supera l'essenza artistica e sbarca nell'artificio. Eppure, nonostante ciò, il poeta ritiene giusto accettare la sfida

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<sup>73</sup> Si veda, di Magrelli, la poesia-sonetto *Posta dei lettori:/ Ah, la burocrazia, II*, dalla raccolta *Didascalie per la lettura di un giornale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1999), p. 48: 'Il confine tra la mia vita e la morte altrui / passa dal divanetto di fronte alla tv, / pio litorale dove si riceve / il pane dell'orrore quotidiano. / Davanti all'ingiustizia che sublime / ci ha tratti in salvo per farci contemplare / il naufragio da terra, / essere giusti rappresenta / appena la minima moneta / di decenza da versare a noi stessi, / mendicanti di senso, / e al dio che impunemente / ci ha fatti accomodare sulla riva, / dal lato giusto del televisore.'

<sup>74</sup> Interessante a questo proposito il sonetto *Prova di sonetto* di A. Bertolucci, *Opere* (Milano: Mondadori, 1997), p. 133. In questo sonetto il poeta pare animato da una sorta di *pietas* letteraria che richiama in particolare quella di Foscolo: 'Al sole che declina questo giorno/ d'alte nubi, poeta derelitto, / imporpora soave il disadorno, umile marmo ove il tuo nome è scritto'.

<sup>75</sup> A. Zanzotto, *Galateo in bosco* (Milano: Mondadori, 1978), p. 45.

della sua frequentazione, probabilmente perché animato da quella sua suggestiva perfezione, quella sua forse apparente ma pur sempre equilibrata circolarità, geometricità. Un 'mandala' buddistico, per l'appunto, che nel suo disegno riassume l'idea simbolica della creazione di un microcosmo.

Antonello Morea

Dublin

SUBJECT CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE,  
LINGUISTICS AND AREA STUDIES  
REPORT FOR SUBJECT ASSOCIATIONS  
AUGUST 2003

This document serves to provide a brief update on the key areas of activity for the Subject Centre in 2002-3.

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## EVENTS

We have held a considerable number of workshops across all our subject areas this year. The events pages of the website provide more detail about the programme and in many cases an event report. Go to: [www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/events/llaseventsarchive.aspx](http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/events/llaseventsarchive.aspx)

- European Day of Languages Symposium organised jointly with the School of Modern Languages at Southampton
- Reception to launch the Languages box
- Subject Centre Open day
- Curriculum 2000 and the implications for HE
- Institutional visit to Coventry University attended by staff from Coventry, Aston, Warwick, Birmingham, Staffordshire.
- Postgraduate Information Day at CILT
- Using Virtual learning Environment for Languages
- Personal Development Planning in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies
- Open meeting: postgraduate training issues in Linguistics
- Area Studies Network meeting
- Intercultural learning and the role of visual media
- Interactive Whiteboards for Language Teaching
- Computer Assisted Assessment
- Pedagogical Research workshop
- Teaching on less commonly taught Area Studies programmes
- Interdisciplinarity & inter-cultural learning in Area Studies curricula
- Implications of the White Paper and the National Languages Strategy
- Key Skills and Assessment in Linguistics
- Set texts? New approaches to the teaching of literature in languages and related studies/area studies
- Resources and Techniques for Teaching Linguistics

## PROJECTS

We are now involved in such a broad array of projects that we have devoted an edition of our newsletter *Liaison Light* to them. Copies of the newsletter are

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available from the Subject Centre. *Liaison Light* can also be viewed online at [www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/news/newsletter.aspx](http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/news/newsletter.aspx)

### ***List of projects included in the newsletter***

- Materials Bank
- Good practice guide
- Extending good practice in less widely used less taught (LWULT) languages
- Pedagogical Research
- Area Studies project
- Lingua: Opening the door to language learning
- Lingua: Join the Club
- Collaboration Programme in Modern Languages in Higher Education
- The forthcoming Learning Technologies project

Several of these projects also contain mini-projects – a good way of involving a wider range of expertise and sharing out funding amongst the community.

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

#### **Website**

The new Subject Centre website was launched in January 2003. It is database driven, resource rich and, we hope, easy to navigate. The website continues to be well received and is being updated constantly. The next project involves working with the website consultant at Southampton to integrate into the website the software database previously managed by the Subject Centre team at the University of Hull.

### **Marketing Languages update**

Over one hundred Language Boxes have been sent out to HE modern languages departments across the UK. There has been a lot of interest in the ‘Why Study Languages?’ presentation from secondary school teachers who have seen it advertised on the CILT and ALL websites. We have had at least 50 enquiries from schools asking to be put into contact with somebody in their local university and we have had very positive feedback from schools who have had a visiting speaker giving the presentation. The Subject Centre Web Editor, Becky Jennings, has modified the page in the Languages box section which gives a list of schools liaison officers in 50 UK HE departments. The page now includes an interactive map. There were articles on the Languages Box in the Times Educational Supplement in October 2002 and January 2003.

#### **Revised PowerPoint presentation**

We have produced another version of the ‘Why study languages?’ CD which includes updated statistics from Keith Marshall and additional slides. Also on the

CD are resources for promoting Linguistics and Area Studies. This can be obtained from the Subject Centre with LLAS notes (see below)

#### LLAS Notes

We are producing a book of useful facts and figures on student numbers in our subject areas (GCSE, A Level, university applications etc). This is available in August and will be distributed free of charge to those who complete the online booking form. This is available at [www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/maillinglist/notebookfrm.aspx](http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/maillinglist/notebookfrm.aspx)

#### Area Studies Bulletin: Atlas

We have recently published the first issue of 'Atlas: the bulletin of the Area Studies projects'. If you are interested in receiving a free copy of this, contact Marie Weaver at the Subject Centre (M.Weaver@soton.ac.uk).

### Visitors and Enquiries to the HE resources collection at CILT (January to March 2003)

The information does not include shorter enquiries.

<b>Enquiries:</b> January - 32; February -29; March - 25;	<b>Visitors:</b> January -27; February - 57; March -31
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### Information sheets

The following information sheets have been produced/updated since January 2003 by Dawn Ebbrell, Subject Centre/CILT HE Information officer

- Information sheets: 26, 28 and 31 on subject associations updated - to feed into contribution on Subject Associations to web guide.
- NEW: information sheet on 'Key documents about Higher Education and Languages' in progress.
- NEW: Studying Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies at University –three new Fact Sheets which can be downloaded from the Subject Centre website at [www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/resourcesitem.aspx?resourceid=1586](http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/resourcesitem.aspx?resourceid=1586)

### Conference publication

An editorial team with representatives from the Subject Centre, CILT, UCML and SCHML has produced a publication covering the policy strand of the 2002 conference. The book will be published by CILT in September.

***Languages: work project***

*This project has received funding from the DfES for a two-year period to create promotional materials for languages for school pupils and careers advisers. Subject Centre staff are represented on the Steering Group of this project.*

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## OTHER ACTIVITIES

**Postgraduate training in Linguistics**

Ali Dickens has organised three meetings to discuss the issues for postgraduate training in linguistics.

## Foundation Degrees

The Subject Centre convened an informal meeting held immediately before this UCML plenary to discuss the implications of foundation degrees for our subject areas.

## Scotland

The partnership with Scottish CILT is now well established and the second meeting of the Scottish Advisory Group took place on 16 May. The Chair of the Scottish Advisory Group is John Joseph, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh.

## Wales

The Subject Centre is working with Keith Marshall, Director of CILT Cymru, to set up a partnership to support colleagues in Wales following the SCILT model. In addition to this we have, in partnership with Alison Allan at HEFCW, convened a meeting of those involved in the teaching of Welsh in HE in January 2003. At present, we are in discussion with HEFCW about the future role and remit of this group. The Subject Centre has been invited to participate in discussions on the implementation of the Welsh Assembly Government's Modern Foreign Languages Strategy for Higher Education.

## Learning Technologies

The Learning Technologies Special Interest Group met in February. Additional members were added to the group. The group provided useful advice to the Subject Centre on the shaping of the call for bids for the learning technologies project on 'Rethinking pedagogical models for e learning'. Eight bids were submitted. The University of Sheffield was awarded the project. This will be led by Danielle Barbereau, Director of the Language Centre at Sheffield.

**2004 Conference**

The Subject Centre and CILT are starting to think about a conference for July 2004. The focus will be languages and related studies with strands on policy as well as

pedagogy. Partners in the conference are UCML, SCHML and AULC. The conference will take place from 30 June to 1 July at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

### **Management issues**

The University of Hull withdrew from its partnership with the Subject Centre at the end of December 2002 following the departure of Janet Bartle, the full-time Learning Technology Advisor.

### **Higher Education Academy**

The Report of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee published in January 2003 recommended that a new Higher Education Academy be established. The Academy would bring together the functions of ILTHE, HESDA and LTSN and develop new functions to better support the enhancement needs and interests of higher education communities. At present, the functions and remit of the academy are being developed in detail. Subject Centres should be fully integrated into the Academy by August 2004.

E J Ashurst  
Subject Centre Manager

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

**Biennial Conference of the Society for Italian Studies,  
University College Cork (4-6 July 2003)**

The Cork Conference saw the Society adopt for the first time the practice of inviting members to propose themed sessions, as well as individual papers on work in progress which were organized into open sessions by the Programme Committee of Mark Chu, Silvia Ross and the Society's Research Portfolio holder, Ann Caesar. The result was a particularly strong academic programme. The early development of the Conference Web site, combined with the use of the Italian Studies Mailbase to publicize the event, attracted several new members from further afield than the core constituency of Ireland and Britain, which was nevertheless well represented. In total, over the three days, the thirty sessions involved nearly ninety speakers from nine countries.

A generous grant from the UCC Arts Faculty Conference Fund assisted in bringing guest speakers Elena Gianini Belotti and Rosetta Loy to the Conference. Both writers have published several novels and collections of short stories, many of which have been translated into English and other languages. In her talk entitled 'Le donne, la memoria, la storia: un percorso narrativo', Elena Gianini Belotti outlined the themes and contents of her novels, from her earliest, *Il fiore dell'ibisco* (1985), to her most recent, *Prima della quiete* (2003), which is based on the story of Itala Donati, a young schoolteacher living in late nineteenth-century Tuscany, who is victim of the cruelty of local gossip. She closed her talk with a reading from this latest work. Rosetta Loy also traced her development as a writer in 'Il romanzo e la storia' and described her progressive fascination with history, on both a personal and a public level, and its effect on her work. She explained her oeuvre's concern with the issue of the Holocaust, and read a brief passage from the opening of her best-known text, *La parola ebreo* (1997). The session allowed time for some discussion, and questions focused in particular on other writers' influence on Belotti and Loy.

The important social aspect of the Biennial Conference was not neglected, and, on the Friday evening, a reception in the Staff Common Room, sponsored in part by Maney's, allowed new and old members to mingle. The Conference Dinner took place on the Saturday evening in the atmospheric setting of UCC's newly restored Aula Maxima, with its state of the art smoke alarm which attracted a visit from the Cork City Fire Brigade! Further entertainment at the Dinner was provided by Irish traditional musicians.

The Conference Committee acknowledges the support of organizers and chairs of sessions, many of whom have also contributed to the following synopsis of the academic programme. The full programme and abstracts, as well as photographs taken during the Conference will remain available via links from the main Conference Web page at <http://www.ucc.ie/italian/sis/conference2003.html>.

Mark Chu and Silvia Ross  
University College Cork

The programme began on Friday morning with three themed sessions run in parallel, two of which continued after the mid-morning break.

'Literary Legacies and the Uses of Tradition in Twentieth-Century Prose Writing' was the title of a double session organized and chaired by Deborah Holmes (International Centre for Cultural Studies, Vienna) and Luciano Parisi (TCD), which focused on twentieth-century prose writers and their indigenous models. Deborah Holmes opened the first section with a discussion of Silone's ambiguous attitude to Verga, whose *Aci Trezza* is often erroneously posited as inspiration for *Fontamara*. Eduardo Saccone (UCC) presented Tozzi's reception of Verga in the 1918 article 'Giovanni Verga e noi' and in his narrative works. Daragh O'Connell (UCD) concluded with an examination of how Vincenzo Consolo enters into dialogue with both Verga and Manzoni, but particularly the former, in a conscious attempt to become part of a specifically Sicilian literary canon. The second section began with Luciano Parisi's analysis of Anna Banti's respect for Manzoni, which he argued was based on a similar awareness of the difficulties of narrating history. The discussion concentrated on Banti's reception of the defiant Gertrude. Finally, Gabriella Caponi-Doherty (UCC) showed how Tarchetti wished to be seen as a modern and innovative writer, but nevertheless was strongly influenced by the Manzonian model he repudiated. The session closed with a debate on the use of 'fatti di cronaca' in prose fiction, both as a throwback to Manzoni and as a reflection of the modern mass media.

A session on 'New Trends in Contemporary Naples: Culture and Society', organized by Anna Cento Bull (Bath) and chaired by John David Rhodes (UCC), discussed recent cultural, social and political developments in Naples since the election of Bassolino as Mayor (1993-2000). Felia Allum (Bath) spoke on 'Women in the *Camorra*', arguing that while much had changed in the public sphere, illegal activities continued to thrive. The paper examined the new phenomenon of women bosses, their roles, and their impact. Anna Cento Bull's own paper examined the redevelopment of Bagnoli after the closure of the Italsider factory (1993), and explored the reasons for and consequences of the adoption by Bassolino's new administration of an 'exceptionalist' approach to urban planning and a grand ecological vision. Adalgisa Giorgio (Bath) discussed 'New Narratives on Naples in the 1990s', arguing that while the new climate promoted by Bassolino can be held responsible for the outburst of new writing, it is not clear whether the new writers have succeeded in creating new images of the city and to what effects.

Rhiannon Daniels (Leeds) organized a double session on 'Boccaccio in Italy and Beyond', which brought together a stimulating selection of contributions. The speakers – Simon Gilson (Warwick), Tiarnán Ó Cléirigh (Cambridge), Rhiannon Daniels, Guyda Armstrong (Brown), and Alessia Ronchetti (Cambridge) – engaged with issues of intertextuality and material culture, and succeeded in presenting an extremely coherent session, which nevertheless reflected a range of different approaches to Boccaccio and reception scholarship. There was lively discussion in both panels, chaired by Cormac Ó Cuilleain and Corinna Lonergan (both TCD),

which demonstrated that the author continues to engender passionate responses in those relatively new to research and established scholars alike.

After coffee, a session on 'Contemporary Italy', organized by the Conference Committee and chaired by Vittorio Bufacchi of UCC's Philosophy Department, addressed the on-going issue of the dubious relationship between Italy's political order and political violence. Alan O'Leary (Cambridge) asked the question whether, in the absence of any 'Truth Commission' for the political violence of the 1970s, narrative could be said to be fulfilling a function analogous to that conceived for such commissions. In the discussion that followed, some people were sceptical of the need or wisdom of setting up a 'Truth Commission'. Salvatore Colucello (Coventry) analysed the alleged support enjoyed by *Forza Italia* among the mafia in return for guarantees that the confiscation of its property and harsh prison conditions for *mafiosi* would be addressed. One of the main points of the ensuing discussion regarded differences between the Sicilian mafia, the *camorra* and *'ndrangheta*.

The topic 'Urban Spaces in Literature and Film', elicited a double session organized by Silvia Ross. The first, held on Friday afternoon and chaired by Martin McLaughlin (Oxford), consisted of papers based on two cities: Florence and Rome. Anne O'Brien (Birmingham) discussed the nineteenth-century debate on Florence as a locus of death and described the manner in which the city was attributed representative value for the whole of Italy. Silvia Ross examined Pratolini's characterization of the 'Signora' (in *Cronache di poveri amanti*) whose corporeality and the space she inhabits hold links with Florentine politics and landmarks and, ultimately, with the *Duce* himself. In 'Self and the City: Walking with Malerba in Rome', Ruth Glynn (Bristol) analysed Malerba's representation of Rome in his 1966 novel *Il serpente*, through the theoretical lens of de Certeau and Lacan. Eleanor Andrews (Wolverhampton) covered a wide scope of filmic interpretations of Rome, illustrating how the city has had a major impact on filmmakers such as Rossellini or Fellini, to the contemporary Moretti. The papers presented in the second session, held on Saturday morning and chaired by the organizer, were instead not linked to specific localities, but rather reflected on the notion of the 'city' in its more abstract sense. The first two papers concerned Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibili*: Martin McLaughlin outlined the influence of Conrad on Calvino's earlier writings, and described how Calvino's American sojourn affected his later text, *Le città invisibili*. He illustrated the manner in which Calvino's core text has also influenced other writers such as Winterson and Kalfus. Gian Paolo Giudicetti (Louvain) concentrated on the series 'Le città continue' in Calvino's text, indicating intertextual and semiotic links between the various cities. Laura Rorato (Bangor) gave a paper which focused on the variety of urban spaces presented in Gianni Celati's works, and Laura McLoughlin (NUIG) explored the metaphorical use of colour in relation to the city as mental space, in the poetry of Campana, Luzi, and Raboni.

Deirdre O'Grady (UCD) organized and chaired a session on 'Literary and Social Studies in Opera'. The session centred on the exposition of the aria, its

interpretation and symbolic function in the text, allied to the intensity of passion in its dramatic presentation. Richard Andrews (Leeds) assessed Monteverdi's *Arianna* in the light of literary convention and theoretical arguments presented by musicologists. A complex analysis of the aria pointed towards the celebration of the female figure as inspirer of divine love. Jonathan White (Columbia) addressed the presence and the purpose of passion in the eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century operatic aria. He objectively considered the performance of the musical piece allied to the rapport between public and artist, seen as the determining factor in the creation of impassioned responses. Focusing on the adaptation of Ettore Scola's *Passione d'amore* (a film based in turn on Tarchetti's novel *Fosca*) by Stephen Sondheim for his 1994 musical *Passion*, Colleen Reardon (Binghamton) considered literary and visual adaptation for the musical theatre. Sondheim's *Passion* was seen as 'just another love story', an unsuccessful adaptation of Tarchetti's work on account of its avoidance of the dark disturbing features of *Scapigliatura* literature, as illustrated by Sondheim's portrayal of the character of Fosca.

The session on 'Vested Perspectives: Literary Transvestism in Italian Literature' was organized by Rossella Riccobono (Victoria, Wellington) and chaired by Gillian Ania (Salford). Four papers on very diverse subjects in modern and contemporary Italian narrative and poetry were included in this session: Rossella Riccobono examined 'The Art of Dressing and Undressing in Pavese's *La bella estate* and *Tra donne sole*'; Margaret Mazzantini's 2002 Premio Strega-winning novel, *Non ti muovere* was the subject of a paper by Laura Leonardo (Manchester Metropolitan); Erminia Passannanti (Oxford) discussed 'Soggettività travestita in letteratura', while Bart Van den Bossche (Leuven) addressed questions of point of view and gender in realist narrative (1930-1960). From the papers presented, a core group of articles will be developed, alongside other invited articles, with a view to publishing a volume of essays, to be edited by Erminia Passannanti and Rossella Riccobono.

Denis Reidy brought the formal proceedings of the first day to a close, providing further insights into research patterns and requests for Italian material at the British Library, and he urged members to continue to make proposals for acquisitions by the Library. As in the past, Denis also secured the very practical, material support of the Library for the Conference packs, for which the organizers are extremely grateful.

The Saturday morning programme began with three varied sessions in parallel. 'Travel in the Italian Renaissance' was the topic of a session organized by Ita Mac Carthy (UCC) and chaired by Eduardo Saccone. In her own paper, 'Metaphorical versus Material Travel in the *Orlando Furioso*', the organizer asked why a travel-loathing poet embraces an 'inexhaustible geography' and the theme of travel so enthusiastically in his poem, if Ariosto is simply 'infected by the spirit of the age of discovery', and whether his journeys express nostalgia for Italy's lost past as a point of departure and arrival for European travel or are a projection of the poet's desire for a united and healthy nation capable, alongside England, France and

Portugal, of expanding the limits of the known world. Eric Haywood (UCD), in 'To Go or not to Go to Ireland?' focused on literary reports of travelling to Ireland from Pius II, who thought Ireland not worth visiting, to Fazio degli Uberti who found it a mild and temperate land of 'dolci' inhabitants. After a review of conflicting accounts of the country, Haywood proposed that in this literature Ireland is more significant as a focus for questions about travelling, knowledge and discovery than as an actual destination.

John David Rhodes (UCC) organized a session on 'Italian Visual Avant-Gardes', which was chaired by Luca Somigli (Toronto). Lindsay Myers (National Library of Ireland) examined the combination of elements of futurism with an art nouveau style in the illustrations by Antonio Rubino for his 1919 children's book, *Viperetta*. In 'Vanguard as Rearguard and Vice Versa: Some Thoughts on the Cinematic Afterlife of a Fascist Suburb', the session organizer analysed the attention paid by modernist filmmakers to Rome's EUR district. Finally, Noa Steimatsky (Yale) traced remnants of Italian avant-garde visual culture of the late 1930s, and in particular futurist *aeropittura*, in the cinematic modernism of Michelangelo Antonioni.

The third session, organized by Anna Proudfoot (Oxford Brookes) and chaired by Donald O'Driscoll (UCC), addressed 'English and Italian: Uses and Abuses', and contained three highly diverse papers on issues relating to language. Franca Pellegrini (Oxford Brookes) spoke of the recent trend among certain young Italian writers to bridge the gap between the written and spoken registers. From the more conservative work of Paola Capriolo and Alessandro Baricco to the linguistically revolutionary texts of Rossana Campo and Paolo Nori, she ended by considering the balance of innovation and conservatism occupied by Carmen Covito. Anna Proudfoot gave a highly entertaining and informative presentation on the tendency in European-wide advertising agencies to use the same television advert in more than one country. She also examined the reasons behind the often amusing (mis)use of English in Italian print advertising. Finally, Monica Boria gave a practical demonstration of the variety of ways in which literary texts of all kinds can be used in the language-teaching classroom. She also highlighted the cross-fertilisation possible between literary and other media, specifically TV advertising and film.

After coffee, four sessions ran in parallel, including the second part of the 'Urban Spaces' session. The first open session was organized by the Conference Committee and chaired by Louise Sheehan (UCC). The three papers addressed different aspects of twentieth-century literature. Marella Feltrin-Morris (Binghamton) was first to speak and discussed Massimo Bontempelli's ambiguous relationship with tradition, focusing on the contradiction between his declared rejection of past literary traditions and his own relapse into the same forms. Gillian Ania (Salford) examined epistolary texts by Ginzburg, Fallaci and Capriolo, questioning why authors choose this form and considering different motives of letter writers as well as different types of addressee. Finally, Bruno Ferraro (Auckland) discussed three of the most recent novels by Antonio Tabucchi, raising

issues such as the relationship between ‘realtà’ and ‘finzione’ in these texts, the relationship between the writer and the society in which he lives, and the significance of Portuguese settings in this writer’s work.

‘The Languages of Medieval Italy’ was the title of a session organized by Mair Parry (Bristol) and chaired by Giulio Lepschy (Reading/UCL), which presented research undertaken within the Bristol-Manchester project, *A comparative morphosyntax of early Italian vernaculars*. Mair Parry, with Robert Hastings and Nigel Vincent (both Manchester), presented the project of the group in ‘*Sintassi degli Antichi Volgari Italiani*, a Modern Grammar of the Early Romance Vernaculars – Aims and Means’. Alessandra Lombardi (Manchester) and Roberta Middleton (Bristol) jointly presented the paper ‘Clitic position and word order in the medieval texts of the Italo-Romance varieties’, providing further considerations on the Tobler-Mussafia law. Nigel Vincent gave a paper on ‘Syntax and Metre: The Omission of *che* in Duecento Poetry’, offering a historical profile of Italian complementizer deletion, in the context of the language of poetry, prose, and ordinary speech. The contributions highlighted on the one hand the linguistic complexity of medieval texts, which reflect the pronounced multilingual environment in which they were written, and on the other, the insights to be gained from systematic morphosyntactic analyses that combine formal linguistic theory with philological and sociolinguistic awareness.

Although session 18, chaired by Ursula Fanning (UCD), was technically ‘open’, the two papers in it complemented each other really well and gelled in a manner one might not have expected, given that one dealt with a fifteenth-century ‘sacra rappresentazione’ while the other was firmly rooted in the late twentieth century, with its discussion of subjectivity and the threat posed to it by post-modernism. The common link that allowed this to happen was that of women’s writing and women’s self-expression. Judith Bryce (Bristol) analysed a text by Antonia Pulci on Guglielma, queen of Hungary, with an eye to what it had to say about Pulci’s own situation in its discussion of sanctity and the married woman or widow. Mario Moroni (Colby College) considered the possible existence of a female poetics of subjectivity and its problematic relationship with post-modern theory. The ensuing discussion on both papers was lively and stimulating, and the speakers also found they had much to say to each other!

The session on ‘*Gialli and Inchieste: Investigations in Fact and Fiction in Italy*’, organized and chaired by Anne Mullen (RHUL), brought together an interesting and varied range of papers on Italian detective fiction. Luca Somigli (Toronto) presented a cogent analysis of one of the earliest contributors to the genre, Augusto De Angelis, and De Angelis’ expression of the subtle and ironic ambiguities of crime writing during the Fascist regime. Stephen Kolsky (Melbourne) gave a close and meticulous reading of aspects of the work of the phenomenally successful Andrea Camilleri, whilst Lucia Rinaldi (RHUL) demonstrated the enduring fascination in Italy with the interplay between visual and written crime narratives, focusing ultimately on Camilleri. Reflections on the contemporary scene were further elucidated by a careful study by Nicoletta Di

Ciolla-McGowan (Manchester Metropolitan) of innovative female-authored fiction, namely that of Laura Grimaldi.

A key component of much contemporary filmmaking, nostalgia, has been amply discussed within the academic debate on postmodern cinema in the light of concepts such as the 'end of history' and the amnesiac inclination of contemporary western societies. Nostalgia is a recurrent feature also of the Italian cinema of the past twenty years; the four papers in the session organized by William Hope (Salford) and chaired by Laura Rascaroli (UCC) explored some noteworthy examples of this trend, looking at the social, artistic and emotional implications of evoking bygone eras and lifestyles, as well as at the stylistic and narrative techniques employed by specific directors and films: Giuseppe Tornatore was discussed by William Hope in 'Tornatore's *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*: Society, Cinema, Emotion'; Marco Bellocchio's *Vacanza in Val Trebbia* and Federico Fellini's *Giulietta degli Spiriti* were addressed by Clodagh Brook (Birmingham) in 'DreamTime: Hallucination as Excavation of the Past'; Moretti's *Dear Diary* was analysed by Mary Ann McDonald Carolan (Fairfield) in 'Film History through Autobiography: Nanni Moretti's *Caro diario*'; and Francesco Rosi's post-1970s production was discussed by Cosetta Veronese (Portsmouth) in 'The Later Rosi: From (Collective) History to (Personal) Memory'.

Three connecting threads linked the papers in the third open session, chaired by Ann Lawson-Lucas (Hull): tradition and its disruption, the interplay of literature with other branches of cultural and social life, and morality. Franco D'Intino (Birmingham/Perugia) spoke on 'Il sogno di Robinson. Esperimenti etici alle origini del romanzo moderno'. This comparative paper focused on loyalty and betrayal in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the originator of two types of betrayal fundamental for the modern novel: social (de Sade's *Histoire de Juliette*) and subjective (Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*). In 'Arrigo Boito's *Re Orso* and the Decapitation of Literary Tradition', Deirdre O'Grady (UCD) demonstrated that Modernist experimentation was not new. Through parody, Boito used deformity and brutality to symbolize the destruction of both conventional morality and literary tradition. If Boito composed a *Hymn to Evil* in 1865, in 1886 De Amicis elaborated a hymn to goodness; Elena Ward (Portsmouth), in 'Learning by Heart: *Cuore*, the Novel that Taught Us How to be Italian', suggested that, in the absence of a popular novelistic tradition, *Cuore* appropriated theatrical sentiment, and became a 'melodrama without music'.

In a lunchtime session on Friday, Ciarán Dawson of UCC's Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha (the Centre for Spoken Irish, which also generously provided Internet facilities for Conference participants) had demonstrated the flexibility provided to the teacher of language or culture by the wireless mobile classroom for the use of online materials. The mobile classroom was then kindly made available in the Saturday afternoon session, organized by George Talbot (Hull) and chaired by David Robey (Reading), on 'Web-based Developments for Research and Teaching in Italian Studies'. The session reported on the three Italian projects that are part of the Collaboration Programme in Modern Languages, which has been jointly developed and managed by UCML and the LTSN Subject Centre for Languages,

Linguistics and Area Studies, and supported by a grant of £482,950 from HEFCE. The purpose of the programme is to develop, test and embed a range of inter-university collaborative projects involving a broad range of languages, types of institution, and forms of academic activity. These will act as pilots and examples, to test, illustrate and promote the different possibilities of inter-institutional collaboration and cooperation in languages and more generally; they will also, it is hoped, serve as a vital series of supports for the departments and subjects involved, and provide some much-needed strengthening of modern languages nationally. There are eight other projects, involving other languages, in the programme. (For details see <http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/collaboration.aspx>). Guido Bonsaver (RHUL) reported on the 'Port Project' - see <http://www.portproject.net>. This is a joint venture by the Institute for Romance Studies and the Royal Holloway/Reading/UCL joint training programme for research students. Gerry Slowey (Birmingham) then reported on the joint Birmingham-Warwick MA in Italian Studies, which makes extensive use of purpose-designed on-line resources as part of the Collaboration Programme. See <http://www.italian.bham.ac.uk/collab.htm> for further details. George Talbot and Kathryn Cheshir (Hull) reported on the *Gruppo 62* project (Universities of Hull and Leeds - <http://www.hull.ac.uk/G62/g62home/g62index.htm>), which has produced learning and teaching resources for three undergraduate modules, sample of which are available on the web. Finally, *fuori programma*, Mark Chu presented web-based resources which he has developed to support the study of modern Italy.

The full programme continued on Sunday morning, with four parallel sessions both before and after mid-morning coffee. Straddling the break was a double session on 'Dante and the Ethical Uses of Poetry', organized by Claire Honess (Reading), which aimed to address the ways in which Dante views poetry as having a fundamentally ethical function. The first panel, chaired by Simon Gilson, focused on the moral, religious and political implications of 'ethical poetry'. The links between ethics, nobility and politics which Catherine Keen (Leeds) identified in the poem 'Le dolci rime' and in the commentary on this poem in *Convivio* IV, were taken up by Claire Honess, in her consideration of medieval definitions of the genre of satire – poetry which attributed praise and blame in order to bring about moral improvement – and of the ways in which the *Commedia* can be viewed as a satirical (and therefore ethical) text. Moral improvement, brought about by penitence, was also the theme of the paper by Theresa Oliver (Reading), which examined the function of Psalm 50, the *Miserere*, in the *Commedia*, and analysed the parallels Dante creates between himself and David, the archetypal penitent. The second panel, chaired by Claire Honess, began with a consideration of the moral virtues of the pagan world by Olivia Holmes (Yale), in her analysis of the ethical choices made by Dante's Ulysses. In contrast, the down-to-earth ethics of the comic-realist poets formed the subject of the paper by George Reid (Reading), which illustrated Dante's use of ethical notions traditionally linked to the comic-realists, both in the *Commedia* and in the *Fiore*. Finally, Vittorio Montemaggi (Cambridge) brought the session to a fitting close with his discussion of the ethics

of language and of the unknowability of God. Both sessions were followed by lively discussions.

Daragh O'Connell chaired the fourth open session, which was made up of papers with a common Sicilian thread. Andrew Wilkin (Strathclyde) argued the need for a re-assessment of socio-economic factors in Verga's *I Malavoglia*. The other two speakers both examined aspects of the strong textual tradition in Sicilian literature: Mark Chu analysed its influence on Sciascia's interpretation of the Risorgimento, while Catherine O'Rawe (Exeter) explored the textual geographies of Gesualdo Bufalino, comparing these to the relationship between *locus* and *logos* in the writing of Seamus Heaney.

Laura Lepschy (UCL) chaired the session on 'Arts and Sciences in Twentieth-Century Italian Culture'. One paper, by Florian Mussgnug (Scuola Normale, Pisa), looked at more general problems on the theory and practice of literature in the 1960s, analysing the shift from High Modernism to Postmodernism. The other two speakers took individual cases. Pierpaolo Antonello (Cambridge) focused on Daniele Del Giudice's narrative, investigating the role and epistemology of object and objectivity, primarily in his *Atlante occidentale* and in *Staccando l'ombra da terra*. Charlotte Ross (Warwick), the session organizer, discussed the relationship between scientific and artistic productions in the case of the twins Rita and Paola Levi Montalcini, drawing from their correspondence and from Rita's essays examining the similarities and differences between the two fields.

Christopher Cairns (Westminster) organized a double session on modern Italian theatre, and was joined in the first panel, chaired by Joe Farrell (Strathclyde), by Luciana d'Arcangeli (Strathclyde) who examined the place of terrorism and terrorists in the life and theatre of Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Christopher Cairns then explored Fo's 'subversive' re-reading in 2002 of Rossini's 1825 opera, *Viaggio a Reims*, for the Finnish National Opera, and illustrated the highly coloured visual language of the production. In the second session, chaired by Christopher Cairns, Donatella Fischer (Strathclyde) analysed De Filippo's contribution to Italian theatre, the continuing legacy of his plays and the issues raised in them, which transcend Naples and his time. Joe Farrell examined the figure of Carmelo Bene and the tension between his iconoclastic opposition to the theatrical establishment on the one hand, and his position as that most traditional of all Italian theatrical figures - the actor-author - on the other.

'Colonial Cultures' was the title of a session co-organized by three speakers from Bristol and Bath and chaired by Steve Garner of UCC's Department of Applied Social Studies. Charles Burdett (Bristol) examined the writings of Italian travellers to India in the 1920s and 1930s, and explored the methodologies deployed by these writers to make sense of the culture, religion and social practices of different regions of the sub-continent. Derek Duncan (Bristol) also addressed aspects of colonialism under Fascism, analysing the work of two contemporary writers, Giovanni Comisso and Enrico Flaiano, for whom the fear of racial contamination through contact with the native population in Africa is an abiding preoccupation. A third paper, by Sarah Grivois (UCL), sought to define the

monument to Vittorio Emanuele as a symbol of a failed matrimony between Liberal Italy and a 'colonized' Rome. Co-organizer Jacqueline Andall (Bath) concluded the session with an account of qualitative research focusing, through the themes of 'belonging' and the development of specific social spaces, on the experiences of young adults of east African origin who were either born in Italy or came to Italy as young children.

A final open session, chaired by Andrew Wilkin, brought together three speakers on aspects of twentieth-century literature. Marina Spunta (Leicester) examined the relationship between the 'narrare semplice' of Gianni Celati, Daniele Benati and other writers, and the landscape of the Po valley which features in their work. Monica Francioso (RHUL) took as her point of departure Celati's theoretical writings, seeking to provide a reappraisal of some lesser-known writers of the period of *neorealismo*, in particular, Sergio Antonielli, while John Butcher (UCL) aimed to stimulate wider debate on the poetry of Sandro Penna.

*Society for Italian Studies Postgraduate Colloquium*  
University of Edinburgh, 24 May 2003

Continuing the peripatetic tradition inaugurated in 2001, this year the post-graduate colloquium took place on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May at the University of Edinburgh. As was hoped, the idea of offering post-graduate students from across the UK an opportunity to volunteer their organizational skills each year has proved successful in many ways. Besides involving a greater number of departmental communities around the country, (Warwick in 2001, Leeds in 2002), the changing geographic location seems to be attracting greater numbers of students, both from within and beyond the UK. This year the colloquium was organized with great efficiency by Luisa Carrer, who coordinated an extremely full programme: thirty-one papers given by students from nineteen institutions, including the universities of Glasgow, Leeds, Reading, Royal Holloway, UCL, UCC, Bristol, the Courtauld Institute of Art, Naples, Cagliari and the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. Several staff attended the event, from the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews and Strathclyde, and their comments and support were much appreciated. Papers had been carefully sifted into sessions giving the event an overall coherence. Session topics ranged from 'The 1930s and 1940s', 'Boundaries and Literature', 'Translation Studies' and 'Gender Identity and Media' to 'Applied Linguistics' and 'Romance Linguistics'. The quality of all the presentations was high, and there was plenty of engaging discussion around issues raised.

The colloquium was opened by Dr. Ian Revie, Head of the School of European Literatures, Languages and Cultures, which generously financed the hire of the conference venue. Dr. Revie also sits on the Editorial Board of *Arachnofiles*, the university's online journal of languages and culture (<http://selc.ed.ac.uk/arachnofiles>) and thanks to his support, as well as to the initiative of Luisa Carrer and the department in Edinburgh, a selection of papers

from this year's colloquium will be published online. This is a welcome innovation which gives graduate students an opportunity to begin publishing their research.

Thanks are due to the many individuals and organizations that made the event possible. First, thanks to Dr. Ennio Troili and the staff at the 'Istituto Italiano di Cultura per la Scozia', for their professional advice and support and practical assistance on the day by offering the premises and services of the Istituto as a very congenial meeting place for networking and further discussion. In particular, the conference organizers are grateful to the staff at the Istituto for their help over a weekend. Secondly, a warm thanks to 'Giuliano's' whose staff provided splendid food and excellent service. Sincere thanks to the SIS and the Italian Section, Edinburgh University for contributing towards the operating budget of the conference. Finally, I would like to thank Luisa Carrer for her flawless coordination and Professor Jonathan Usher whose enthusiastic support and encouragement were gratefully appreciated, both by the organizers and by all those who attended the colloquium.

Charlotte Ross  
University of Warwick

### **Gruppo 62 Annual Conference:**

#### ***ITALY: PERIPHERIES AND CENTRES***

***University of Salford, 22 February 2003***

The aim of this conference was to address aspects of culture, literature, history/politics and language which have their roots – or centres – in the islands, outlying areas, or margins of Italy.

Jonathan Dunnage (Swansea) opened the proceedings with a fascinating paper entitled 'Lavoratori messi al margine della società: Policemen, Protest and the PCI, 1968-1973'. In the late sixties and early seventies an informal relationship developed between Italian policemen and the Italian Communist Party against the background of the student and worker protests. This relationship was partly founded on anonymous letters written to the Communist Party daily, *L'Unità* by a significant number of policemen. There were, moreover, a number of articles in the paper, in part fed by these letters, which give a fairly sensitive analysis of the life of Italian policemen, the majority of whom were recruited from the poor of the South of Italy; they clearly faced social disorientation and professional hardship as a result of their policing of widespread, mainly urban protest in Central and Northern Italy, and were increasingly determined to fight for internal reforms. The paper closed with a discussion of the extent to which these policemen were representative of the corps as a whole, and the accuracy of the Communist Party's analysis of the police.

Judith Woolf (York) then presented an unusual and most interesting analysis of a specific aspect of Giorgio Bassani, in 'Adagio a sommergerla': echoes of Venice in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*'. The most celebrated part of Bassani's 'Romanzo di Ferrara', his great novel *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*, is strangely haunted by echoes of another city famous for its Jewish community. Geographical proximity was not the only reason that led Bassani to give such an important, though always off-stage, role to 'La Serenissima', a city which becomes inextricably associated in the novel both with its heroine Micol and, through her, with 'sleep and his brother death'. The paper explored some additional implications, both literary and historical, of the many references to Venice in the novel, ending with an intriguing comment on the implicit association between the glass vases collected by Micol and the ground up bones of the dead.

This was followed by Salvatore Colucello (Coventry), whose paper 'Nec tecum nec sine te vivere possum: Centre and Periphery in the Mafia World', analysed the tense though often profitable relationship of the Sicilian mafia (a periphery phenomenon) with the centres (Palermo and Rome). Without abandoning its traditional structures and activities, the mafia continues to be a constantly evolving phenomenon, with the 'cosche' showing themselves quick to perceive and understand the changing social, economic and political realities around them. This relationship, though, has sometimes turned sour, as demonstrated by the Mori repression of the late 1920s, the maxi trial of the 1980s and the recent counterattack of the State with the capture of some of the most powerful and fearful Mafiosi figures.

After a welcome break for coffee and the beginnings of discussion on the largely historical, the focus turned to language. Paolo Coluzzi (Bristol) spoke first of the 'Protection and Promotion of Minority languages and dialects in Italy: the case of Friulian and that of Milanese'. After giving brief definitions of the two often confused terms *language* and *dialect*, discussion focused on the fact that minority languages and dialects remain at the margins of official culture in Italy, 'peripheral' languages both from the socio-economic and the geographical point of view. Nevertheless, some of these languages are quite widely spoken and can boast very interesting literatures; if they are still termed 'dialects', it is only because of their lack of prestige and official status. The paper examined what is being done in Friuli and in Milan and surrounding area for the protection and promotion of the local languages, with reference to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Italian Law 482/1999, regional legislation on dialects, and the latest bill on the protection and promotion of dialects put forward in the Italian Parliament.

'Writer's Presence in Italian: from a Grammatical to a Pragmatic Perspective' by Gabrina Pounds (East Anglia) continued the linguistic theme, with a theoretical and practical examination of three main levels at which attitude, subjectivity and interaction are expressed in Italian. The first section dealt with the potential attitudinal meaning associated with the particular grammar structures available in modern standard Italian, including the notions of mood and modality. The second, based on a corpus of forty 'Letters to the Editor', considered the ways in which the

letter writers make themselves *visible* to their readers through the particular pattern of argumentative strategies they adopt to express their opinions. The third section briefly explored the cultural tradition in which 'Letters to the Editor' are set in Italy. It was argued that, although potentially high in the grammar of Italian, the actual level of *writer's presence* is largely dependent on type of discourse and cultural setting.

Erminia Passannanti (St Catherine's College, Oxford) gave the final paper for the day: 'Tarantelle e tammurriate: devozione e irriverenza nelle celebrazioni del calendario religioso partenopeo', which provided notable insights into such traditions, both through words and image. In the area around Vesuvius, popular festivals linked with the Madonna offer a pretext for the annual 'tammurriate', the 'tammurriata' being a particular, ritualistic and seemingly less fiery version of the more well-known tarantella. The dancers, both religious and lay participants, are accompanied by folk music, and move and sway rhythmically in open spaces for hours on end. They are giving vent to pent-up frustrations and endeavouring to exorcise, and not succumb to, the negative energies of nullifying forces. A useful outlet, had one the time....

Lively discussion of some of the more complex and polemical issues raised in certain papers closed what proved to be a most absorbing day. As organizer of the event I wish to record my thanks to Debbie Hughes of the European Studies Research Institute office for her administrative support and helpful efficiency.

Gillian Ania,  
University of Salford

## CHRONICLE, 2002-03

I am pleased to report below information on a variety of events from the past session. Only a very small number of colleagues submitted information for the Chronicle, and I apologise for the brevity of this section.

### Staffing matters

At Leeds Alan Bullock retired in September 2003, and has been replaced at lecturer level by Claire Honess.

At Oxford, Peter Hainsworth has retired and Michelangelo Zaccarello has moved to an appointment at the University of Verona. They have been replaced by two new appointments: Manuele Gragnolati (Somerville College), who takes up a dedicated post in medieval Italian, and Guido Bonsaver (Pembroke College), with a post dedicated to the modern period.

The University of Cambridge saw the retirement in September 2002 of Pat Boyde as Serena Professor of Italian; he has been replaced by Zyg Baranski, who has also taken up a college appointment at New Hall. Virginia Cox has moved to a chair at New York University, with Abigail Brundin appointed as her replacement, holding a fellowship at St. Catharine's College. Robin Kirkpatrick has been promoted to a personal chair in Italian and English.

The University of Warwick has made an innovative joint appointment, in which Carlo Caruso takes up a position shared between the Departments of Italian and of Classics and Ancient History.

At Reading, Claire Honess's move to Leeds created a vacancy filled by Paola Nasti; Lisa Sampson has been appointed to three-year lectureship, covering for David Robey's commitments at the AHRB as Programme Director for ICT in Arts and Humanities.

At UCD, Ursula Fanning and Eric Haywood have been promoted to the level of Senior Lecturer.

### Awards, Research Activities and Seminars

At University College Dublin (UCD), in 2002–03 the Department organized its eleventh annual series of research seminars. Seven seminars were held, at which papers were delivered by Claudia Boscolo, Eric Haywood, Clare Lapraik Guest, Vittorio Montemaggi, Tiarnán Ó Cléirigh, Daragh O'Connell and Sandra Parmegiani. It also held its thirty-first annual Dante Lecture Series, consisting of six lectures, on the theme *Dante and the Human Body*. All the lecturers were guests from outside the Republic: Simon Gilson of the University of Warwick ('The Anatomy and Physiology of the Human Body in Dante'), Vittorio Montemaggi of the University of Cambridge ('La rosa in che il verbo divino carne si fece': Human Bodies and Truth in the Poetic Narrative of the *Comedy*'), Elizabeth Mozzillo-

Howell from the University of Cambridge (“Divina anatomia”: Laying Bare Body and Soul in the *Comedy*), Tiarnán Ó Cléirigh of the University of Cambridge (“Passo verso contrappasso”: The Poetics of Schism and Remedy in the *Comedy*), Gervase Rosser of the University of Oxford (‘Dante’s Invocation of the Veronica: A Miraculous Image of Christ’s Incarnate Body at the Threshold between Two Worlds’) and Jonathan Usher of the University of Edinburgh (‘Weight and Weightlessness in Dante’s Afterlife’). Staff and students of the Italian Department, and others, were directed by Mary Casey in an excellent production of Pirandello’s *Il berretto a sonagli*.

The UCML-funded collaborative venture run between the Italian Departments of Hull and Leeds reached the end of its funding period (2001-2003), bringing the project to a successful conclusion. The collaboration was put together to develop CIT-supported materials for teaching Italian culture at undergraduate level, and was linked to the Gruppo 62 association of Italian Departments in Northern Universities. The project developed a set of wide-ranging web-based resources in three broad subject areas: Medieval Language and Culture, Renaissance Language and Culture, and Language and Linguistic Variety. The framework developed for these materials has proved successful with students, both campus-based and distance learners, in both institutions, and has the flexibility to accommodate further development in future; possibilities for further expansion are to be considered by the project group.

At University College Cork (UCC), a successful seminar series in 2002-03 offered a wide range of papers, with talks from a large number of Departmental members (Mark Chu, Eduardo Saccone, Silvia Ross, Louise Sheehan, John David Rhodes, Ita McCarthy), and, as external speakers, Sharon Wood (Leicester), Sharon Ouditt (Nottingham Trent), Giampaolo Borghello (Udine), Steve Garner (Dept of Applied Social Studies, UCC), and Ann Caesar (Warwick).

Bristol hosted two research papers from distinguished external speakers: Carole Angier (*The Double Bond: Primo Levi, A Biography*) spoke on ‘Primo Levi and the Problems of Biography’, and Lawrence Venuti of Temple University on ‘Translating Humour: Equivalence, Compensation, Discourse’.

Leeds Italianists were delighted to be able to enjoy a seminar paper delivered to the Centre for Medieval Studies Research Association by George Ferzoco (Leicester), on the subject of ‘Fair maidens and foul play in the body politic of medieval Tuscany’.

Catherine Keen  
University of Leeds

**DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR NUMBER 37 (2004)**

In an effort to facilitate the gathering of information for the next issue of the *Bulletin*, we are distributing the deadlines, preferred format, and addresses for submission of material. *All material may be in either Italian or English and, except for articles, should normally be sent in the body of an e-mail message.*

Articles Friday, 2 April 2004

**Dr Catherine Keen, Department of Italian, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT; e-mail [C.M.Keen@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:C.M.Keen@leeds.ac.uk)**

Articles of an *informative and/or didactic nature* should be submitted in three typescript copies. Typescripts and disks should be prepared in accordance with the *MHRA Style Book*, obtainable from Maney Publishing, Hudson Road, Leeds, LS9 7DL, price: UK & EU £5.00; overseas £6.00; US \$12.00.

**Conference Reports**

*Friday, 27 August 2004*

**Dr Catherine Keen, Department of Italian, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT; e-mail [C.M.Keen@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:C.M.Keen@leeds.ac.uk)**

Reports of 500-800 words, which may be edited. Reports are also welcomed from participants at interdisciplinary conferences and all other conferences of interest to Italianists.

**Chronicle, 2003-04**

*Friday, 27 August 2004*

**Dr Ruth Glynn, Department of Italian, University of Bristol, 19 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TE; email [r.s.glynn@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:r.s.glynn@bristol.ac.uk)**

Information should be submitted under the following headings: Staffing Matters; Awards, Research Activities and Seminars; Degree Schemes and Courses; SOCRATES; Other News. Reports or notices of collaborative ventures and Italian-related events from departments and other sources are also welcome.

***Forthcoming Events, occurring up to and beyond 30 September 2004***

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**Staff List**

*Friday, 27 August 2004*

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