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Editorial

This is the second edition of the Bulletin on the internet. Though there have been no substantial changes to last year's format, and most of the traditional features of the Bulletin have been retained, we are looking to alter and improve the presentation and accessibility of information. It has been suggested that 'Staff Research Interests' be merged with 'Works of Italian Interest Published'. The 'Research and Publications' webpage would no longer be annually revised but would be constantly updated. At the meeting of the SIS Executive Committee in July 1999 Richard Andrews put forward a project in which a more rationalized system of categories of research would be created for this purpose. This would still allow researchers to indicate their particular interests within broader research areas and would also give them the opportunity to distinguish between their current and their past research activities. It is hoped that, following discussion and feedback, the changes will be implemented for the year 2000. Such changes clearly pave the way for the development of a future system of regular rather than annual entries and alterations to the website on such matters as forthcoming events and conference reports as well. I am sure that Phil Cooke will be grateful for any suggestions and/or feedback you have regarding the web version of the Bulletin (e-mail: p.e.cooke@strath.ac.uk). Please note that as last year the staff list will also be distributed separately in the next SIS mailing (end of November 1999).

In the thirty-second edition of the *Bulletin* there are three main articles: Claudia Bernardi's substantial essay discusses the debate on the nature of avant-garde writing in Italy surrounding the *Ricerca* literary meetings which have been taking place in Reggio Emilia since 1993. This is followed by an article by Denis Reidy, Head of the Italian and Modern Greek collections of the British Library, on the vast resources and services in the British Library available to Italianists. Originally given as a paper at the SIS biennial conference in 1997, this article will be of particular benefit to those Italianists who were unable to attend the conference. The third article by Anna Proudfoot reports on the setting up of the SIS Language Group for the purpose of promoting aspects of Italian language teaching more widely. It is hoped that as many of you as possible will support this important initiative in raising the profile of language teaching.

I wish to thank those of you who have contributed to the production of this year's *Bulletin*. I am particularly grateful to Adalgisa Giorgio and George Ferzoco for their hard work and dedication in gathering and putting together information for 'Forthcoming Events' and 'Works of Interest Published', respectively, and to my co-editors: Penny Morris, for her updating of the staff list and 'Staff Research Interests' and Philip Cooke for putting all of this on the SIS webpage. You have been very supportive and it has been a pleasure to work with you.

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Experiments in Writing and Criticism: Ricerca (1993-1999)

A series of literary meetings, called *Ricerca*, has taken place annually in the city of Reggio Emilia since 1993. The *Ricerca* conferences are sponsored by the local authorities, (1) and are organised by a scientific committee, which has included critics Renato Barilli and Romano Luperini, writers Nanni Balestrini, Francesco Leonetti, Giuseppe Caliceti and Giulio Mozzi, and representatives of the publishing industry Laura Lepri and Massimo Canalini. Structured around readings of the works of unpublished or little published authors and the critical response of an audience of experts (literary historians, critics, publishers, writers, teachers), the encounters provide a useful, though controversial, moment of critical discussion on the state of contemporary Italian writing. They are now among the most awaited and influential events in the Italian literary calendar.

The first meeting, in 1993, was entitled *63/93. Trent'anni di ricerca letteraria*. Its stated aim was to debate the influence of the *Gruppo '63* on the younger generations of Italian writers and to verify whether the experimental project of the *Neoavanguardia* was still alive in poetical and narrative works of the Nineties. The thirtieth anniversary of the birth of the *Gruppo '63* offered the perfect excuse for a reunion of its historical members and sympathisers. Edoardo Sanguineti, Francesco Leonetti, Angelo Guglielmi, Renato Barilli, Nanni Balestrini and Alberto Arbasino were among the participants. At the same time, 1993 was the date chosen by the rather less influential *Gruppo '93* for the conclusion of their own experience. The *Gruppo '93*, which was born from the *Milanopoesia* poetry readings in 1989, included emerging poets, such as Tommaso Ottonieri, Lello Voce, Marcello Frixione, Biagio Cepollaro and Giuseppe Caliceti. The allusions to the *Gruppo '63* contained in the group's name were intended both as an act of respect towards the *Neoavanguardia*, in recognition of the common experimental drive, and as an ironic comment on it. The strategy to call themselves by the date of their own planned demise, rather than the year of their first meeting as a group, aimed at distancing the aspirations of the younger poets from the more ambitious ones of the *Gruppo '63*.

The motivations behind the formation of the *Gruppo '93* were framed within clear limits, as it emerged during the critical discussions in Reggio Emilia. If literary experimentation was a valid term at all, the young poets seemed to suggest it was only in terms of a specific goal shared by a group of individuals. As we shall see, the problem of the short life-span of any avant-garde project (and of any critical discourse about it) was a common theme in all seven editions of the conference to date. This approach, with its emphasis on the fluid nature of experimental writing, reached a melancholic climax in 1998, when the participants were able to see the evidence that the compact poetics of the *Neoavanguardia* could not be proposed as an aesthetics for the Nineties. A more varied and flexible definition of experimental writing was needed. The member of the 1998 organising committee Vittorio Spinazzola felt finally entitled to state: 'In campo letterario non esistono più tendenze forti: dunque è sembrato poco ragionevole restare legati alle regole dello sperimentalismo e dell'avanguardia'. (2)

In this essay, I will provide an overview of the debate on the nature of avant-garde writing which has developed during the first seven years of *Ricerca*. I have adopted a chronological approach in order to also highlight the influence of the recent changes in the Italian political landscape upon both the literary output of the new writers and the critical discussions held in Reggio Emilia. The tension between the political ideology of the different participants and the terminology borrowed from linguistics, which most critics have adopted in order to explain the nature of experimental writing, represents, in my view, one of the most interesting features of these meetings.

In 1993, the return of the *Neoavanguardia* to the centre of the Italian literary scene was happily celebrated by its protagonists, who linked the rebirth of experimental writing to the demise of the First Republic. After the late Seventies and Eighties - a period of sadness and gloom from a literary

and political point of view in the perception of most *Ricerca* participants - a new wave of writing became possible in the changed social context. Romano Luperini, a member of the 1993 'comitato scientifico', explained the desolation of the recent past:

nel quindicennio fra il 1973 e il 1988, la reazione ha largamente prevalso. Il romanzo ha deposto la ricerca sperimentale ed è tornato a strutture narrative concilianti e seriali, mentre in poesia si è affermata una generazione di poeti orfici e innamorati, che hanno riproposto il ritorno al mito, alla bellezza, al simbolo. (3)

A similar evaluation of the years which had followed the climax of the *Neoavanguardia* experimentation was articulated by Nanni Balestrini. He explained the aims of the conference in the following terms: 'è la critica degli anni Ottanta: un periodo di involuzione generale, infame per la cultura, oltre che per la politica: restaurazione, riflusso, poca e pessima letteratura'. (4)

If the Eighties had been the age of political reaction and literary conservatism, the Nineties were witnessing a new beginning, represented by the poets of the 'third wave', (5) and by novelists such as Rossana Campo, Silvia Ballestra and Carmen Covito, all of whom attended the 1993 meeting. (6) These writers were following in the footsteps of the *Gruppo '63* and of the few examples of experimental writing produced in the Eighties, that is to say, the works of Pier Vittorio Tondelli and Aldo Busi. Busi, who himself attended the 1993 conference, and Tondelli, whose *Altri Libertini* (1980) was re-read and re-appraised the same year in Reggio Emilia, had given voice in the Eighties to the same experimental tension which had characterised the works of the *Neoavanguardia*.⁽⁷⁾ A similar concern with the creation of a new literary language was identified as the link between the Balestrini-Arbasino generation, that of Tondelli-Busi and that of Ballestra-Covito.

Members of the *Gruppo '63* argued their own influence on the new writers of the Nineties both in linguistic and political terms. The two realms became in fact inextricable when the *Neoavanguardia* attempted to define the experimental nature of new writing. On the one hand, the language adopted by emerging poets and narrators was perceived as new and challenging in its attempts to reproduce the orality of youth jargons and for its contamination with the language of other, popular media (television, music and cyber-technology, first of all). On the other hand, the subject matter that required the creation of such a language revealed a return to political engagement, which, according to the *Gruppo '63*, had been abandoned during the darkest years of the right-wing backlash in the Eighties.

In the early editions of the conference, that is to say, until the explosive 1996 meeting with its 'pulp' controversy, 'experimental' was equated with 'political'. With the rise of Berlusconi and the Italian Right, avant-garde literary choices were discussed in the same breath as political opposition to the ruling power. Francesco Leonetti, for example, drew a comparison between *Neoavanguardia* and new experimental writing based on the choice, apparently common to both generations of writers, 'di proporsi come opposizione al mondo esistente'. (8)

During the following years and with the modification of the Italian political landscape, this equation was questioned and reversed. The 1998 and 1999 meetings reached the conclusion that the avant-garde, if intended merely as a creative disruption of mainstream literary languages and forms, can be disengaged from political reality. By contrast, traditional narrative strategies, such as the use of genres, can be very effective in narrating the Italian political context.

The young authors who were invited to read their work in progress in 1993 did, however, underline the political connotations of their writing. Lorenzo Miglioli, who presented *Ra-dio*, (9) the first 'ipertesto italiano', explained that his attempt at a new narrative form was meant as a 'riappropriazione dello spazio politico della scrittura'. (10) At the same event, Silvia Ballestra read a few pages from her new novel *La guerra degli Antò*, (11) the only Italian text which deals with

facts and fictions of the Gulf War and with their consequences on the Italian political consciousness. Her narrative production, while challenging the standard literary Italian of mainstream narrative, through the introduction of youth jargons, syntactic structures based on the Abruzzese dialect and contamination of genres, is highly charged with political meaning. The powerlessness of the Left in voicing its opposition to events such as the Gulf War, is dealt with again by Ballestra a year later in *Gli orsi*, an avant-garde Cruise missile against Berlusconi and the Italy which had elected him Prime Minister. (12)

The fact that these political themes and their input in the creation of new linguistic codes were more visible in fiction than in poetry, determined a progressive shift of the conference focus towards narrative. The 1993 meeting had confirmed the traditional bias of Italian intellectuals towards poetry, in concentrating on the relationship between the poets of the *Neoavanguardia* (both Balestrini and Leonetti read their new compositions) and the 'third wave' of experimental poets. The following editions of the meeting proved, however, that fiction was in fact the most promising area of Italian writing and that if *Ricerca* aspired at having any influence on Italian publishing and reading habits, it could only be achieved by reinventing itself as a space for provocative discussions on contemporary narrative. Poetry was, after all, destined to remain a privileged space and no degree of critical debate could carry any significant weight on the market forces which regulate its being published and read. The reason why an avant-garde movement was more difficult to identify among authors of prose fiction than among poets, was due to the fact that 'i narratori più giovani [...] hanno molte più difficoltà a trovare una linea comune di resistenza, e hanno problemi di rapporto con il mercato assai più complicati di quelli che hanno i poeti'. (13) The 'weakness' of prose writers, their resistance to carry out any co-ordinated avant-garde project, persuaded the conference organisers that they should invest more time and attention in this form of writing during future *Ricerca* appointments.

After Ballestra's, Campo's and Covito's success at the 1993 conference confirmed their status as emerging authors, *Ricerca* acquired the power and took on discovering new narrative talents. Narrative writing needed therefore an articulate discussion, that would outline a number of experimental strategies which new authors were already adopting or wished to adopt. Experimental writing was moving, according to Nanni Balestrini, in the direction of a 'tono basso, parlato'. (14) Such an 'abbassamento linguistico', which was shared by the most interesting authors, became a favourite critical term and the most discussed innovative strategy of our national narrative. There was consensus on the fact that only after such a linguistic tension had been identified by critics as the main feature of different texts, a discourse on experimental writing would be allowed back into the Italian literary debate. For the moment, Romano Luperini explained, 'le posizioni che praticano lo sperimentalismo sono costrette alla lateralità e alla semiclandestinità'. (15) The task of *Ricerca* was, therefore, that of giving a name to a possible movement, by finding a common denominator among the variety of new texts. At the same time, this critical experiment would only be useful if the elements shared by the new authors were reclaimed by the *Neoavanguardia* itself and if the discussions in Reggio Emilia were followed by changes in readership and publishing habits.

The conference organisers and critics, led by the *Neoavanguardia* stronghold, did reach their target, by developing a discourse on narrative writing that was to characterise the decade. Texts such as those read in 1993 by Silvia Ballestra and Rossana Campo introduced linguistic concerns, which were then developed in 1995 by Giuseppe Caliceti (when he read a passage from his *Fonderia Italghisa*), (16) Andrea Demarchi (who presented a few pages from *Sandrino e il canto celestiale di Robert Plant*) (17), and Matteo Galiazzo (*Una forma particolare di anestesia chiamata morte*). (18)

All these writers worked within a tradition of 'abbassamento linguistico', which, according to Barilli, goes back not only to Busi and Tondelli, but also to Celati, Sanguineti, Porta, Arbasino and, further back, to Vittorini. (19) What such a low style consists of, how it is articulated in each text and how one should judge its literary and political oppositional value, are questions which remained

unanswered by Barilli. Biagio Cepollaro was more precise during the 1995 meeting, when he advocated a language which could introduce 'tematiche relative al detrito, alla degradazione, al patologico'. (20) The most exciting names which answered this definition were those of Antonello Satta Centanin, Tommaso Ottonieri (who had already taken part in *Ricerca* as a poet in 1993) and Giulio Mozzi.

Satta Centanin's text became the opening story in *Woobinda*, which he published under the name of Aldo Nove. (21) The pathological condition of his characters is expressed through a language flattened to the level of media advertising jargon, by way of exclusively paratactic sentence constructions, vocabulary streamlining, repetitiveness of psychological situations, homologation of registers. The shock effect of Nove's stories, with their bloody and violent endings, derives from a monotonous linguistic surface meant to echo a flattened human perception. On the contrary, Ottonieri's 'stile basso' is only apparently so, that is to say, it is realised through the interference of conversations in dialect (reproduced in a pseudo-phonetic style) within a narrative that betrays 'high literature' aspirations. (22) A rich, unusual, poetic vocabulary is adopted by Ottonieri to describe the degraded (economically and culturally, as in most of Silvia Ballestra's fiction) Italian province. Finally, Giulio Mozzi introduced an alternative level of 'abbassamento linguistico', which became most influential in the following developments of *Ricerca*. His short story 'Vanessa', a preview of his book *La felicità terrena*, (23) is on the borderline between realism and hyper-realism. Linguistically, Mozzi used standard literary Italian, but his authorial voice constantly intervenes within the narration in order to estrange the readers from the plot and force them to take a critical distance from the mediocre reality it refers to.

The heterogeneous spectrum of what *Ricerca* proposed as the new experimental narrative underlined the fact that the many strategies used to produce the effect of 'abbassamento linguistico' corresponded to various degrees of political awareness of the writers. This approach caused a small controversy in 1995, regarding Marco Lodoli's reading. His text was disliked by most critics present at the session, especially those who belonged to the *Gruppo '63*, for its lack of experimentation and political engagement. In 1996 the controversy about Lodoli, an author who had written and published with relative success in the Eighties, widened to include a discussion of the literary merits and demerits of his generation, as opposed to the new breed of writers.

The debate was fierce, fuelled more by the media than by its protagonists. On the one side, *Ricerca* and the *Neoavanguardia* were trying to discuss critically a number of emerging authors whom the newspapers liked to call 'pulp' or 'cannibali' (a few of them had just been published in the anthology *Gioventù cannibale*). (24) On the other side, the old enemies of the *Gruppo '63* seized the opportunity to oppose an idea of avant-garde literature which excluded a great part of the middle generation, that is to say, the writers who had emerged in the Eighties. Rather than detailing the polemical exchanges between *Neoavanguardia-Ricerca* on one front, and individual critics such as Cesare Garboli, Giulio Ferroni, Roberto Cotroneo, Renato Minore, Fulvio Panzeri, Franco Cordelli on the other, I will analyse the critical suggestions that came out of the 'pulp' edition of the conference. (25)

New terms were created during the discussion, among which 'buonismo letterario' - as opposed to 'letteratura cannibale, pulp, cattivista' - is worth mentioning for its political implications. The kind of writing opposed by *Ricerca*, corresponding to most narrative output of the Eighties (except Busi and Tondelli), had its political equivalent in the newly victorious PDS and 'la leva di scrittori cresciuta sulle pagine culturali dell'*Unità* di Veltroni'. (26) With his characteristic directness, Balestrini declared that he despised these writers' tame version of political engagement: 'È quella letteratura che, invece di affrontare la realtà, la evita cercando di dare delle interpretazioni di comodo. Rasserena il lettore senza inquietarlo e porgli dei problemi, come fa la vera letteratura. Casi tipici, Susanna Tamaro e Alessandro Baricco'. (27) In his opinion, the avant-garde position was occupied, both stylistically and politically, by those authors who dealt with the problem of

representing reality, however disturbing, under whichever ruling party. Certainly disturbing were the texts presented in 1996 by Enrico Brizzi, Isabella Santacroce, Niccolò Ammaniti and Tiziano Scarpa, both for their contents and for the effort required on the part of the audience to decode the language each of them adopted.

It is not obviously clear why this heterogeneous group of authors should be seen as a movement, if not for a generic similarity of themes. Nevertheless, I will suggest how a common linguistic purpose and political engagement unites the texts read at *Ricerca* 1996 by the so-called 'pulp' writers. Brizzi's narrative of cold-blood rape and murder, presented through the unflinching perception of the perpetrators, is a linguistic tour de force. (28) His use of youth jargons is, in fact, a reconstruction of Italian youth language in the Eighties. It is a careful act of historical linguistics, comparable, for its ambition, to the overall baroque structure of the novel, which moves freely back and forth in time and between narrative focalisers. The result is a historical fiction, a comment on the recent Italian past by way of the linguistic idiosyncrasies of its younger generations. Santacroce's use of jargons, on the other hand, does not reflect any specific time or place. (29) It does not belong to any real Italian youth, in the same way as her misfit protagonist Misty does not belong to any geography, notwithstanding the fictional dark London, recreated through its mythical reverberations rather than as a tangible setting (compare Santacroce's ethereal Russell Square with Campo's visual, olfactive Bloomsbury, for example). (30) Nevertheless, Santacroce's Italian, like Brizzi's, requires from its readership a high degree of fluency in youth culture and references and a sharp attention for detail.

'Pulp', an adjective which many critics used to refer to the violence and the crudeness of the plots, should in my view be interpreted as an attempt on the part of a number of new writers to invest the language with distancing and estranging power. Only in this sense can this term be used to describe an experimental (and political) purpose common to a mixed group of writers and to turn them into a movement. Tommaso Ottonieri explained that the new writer 'scrive la *realtà* per l'appunto trascrivendola, distorcendola, ricodificandola nel suo artificio, e non trasmettendola di seppur fallaci trasparenze'. (31) This direction, evident in Brizzi's and Santacroce's readings, was shared 1996 by the more traditionally structured text of Niccolò Ammaniti, (32) which progressively deviates towards the surreal, and by Tiziano Scarpa's ironic exercise in essay writing. (33)

Neoavanguardia intellectuals and *Ricerca* critics tried hard to find a way to express in a positive light the enormous changes introduced in the Italian literary scene during 1996. Barilli insisted that a mainstream current of young experimental writers existed, who worked on lower linguistic forms, by introducing jargons and specialistic languages to literature, and who were inspired in the choice of their themes by the 'violenza ordinaria, normalizzata' of contemporary life. (34) At the same time, a minority current was developing, called 'fredda', 'minimalista' by the media, which was less obvious in its linguistic experimentation. The authors who belong to this group work within the boundaries of standard literary Italian. Nevertheless, their narrative, inspired primarily by the works of Giulio Mozzi, is as disturbing for subject matter as that belonging to the 'cannibali'.

The 1997 *Ricerca* meeting was dominated by this new trend, the so-called 'scrittori freddi', headed by a 'scuola veneta', to which Vitaliano Trevisan, Marco Franzoso and Simone Battig belonged. (35) These authors were invited to *Ricerca* in conjunction with the launch of their first books, the meeting having become a literary showcase, while continuing to be a 'laboratorio di scrittura'. Giuseppe Caliceti observed that a tension towards cultural globalisation, implicit in many stylistic choices of the so-called 'pulp' writers (linguistic contamination and technological influence), was still present, together with a widespread desire for a literary 'ritorno alle radici, ai propri circoscritti territori [...] il desiderio di ridare dignità alla cultura popolare, alle tradizioni'. (36) Though a little romantic, Caliceti's interpretation of the flourishing group of regional writers, is interesting for its linguistic implications. Once again, if the 'scrittori freddi' from Veneto can be put in relation to each other, this must be for the linguistic and political regional elements introduced

into their standard literary Italian. Franzoso's novel for example, is written entirely in Veneto dialect modified by youth jargons. Narrating the constant self-delusion and failures of the protagonist, this language functions as an ironic comment on his independentist aspirations.

1997, however, was Simona Vinci's year. At the conference she presented a short story, 'Cose', for which the critics invented the expression 'filone post-umano', to describe her representation of the psychological and physical relationship between a human character and the objects in her house. Her reading was acclaimed by the audience of *Ricerca*, but it moved the debate further away from the discussion of 'pulp' narrative. Vinci's text highlighted the fact that also a highly rarefied standard Italian, one which works by simplification and subtraction, rather than accumulation and invention, can reveal the horror which lies behind the façade of middle class provincial normality. (37) This point was reiterated the same year, when Vinci's novel, *Dei bambini non si sa niente*, was published and caused a great controversy for its plot of children who are the protagonists of sexual experimentation and the victims of sexual abuse. (38)

The rules of experimental narrative outlined by the *Neoavanguardia* critics in the previous editions of *Ricerca*, theorising a continuum between linguistic and formal innovation and political grasp on reality, were now questioned. Tiziano Scarpa himself, one of the protagonists of the 'pulp' revolution, warned against the tendency to turn experimentation into mannerism: 'Il rischio, e le furbate [...] sono quelle di pensare che bastano due marche di prodotto di supermercato, quattro citazioni musicali e tre allusioni alla tv per certificare che nella pagina è entrata dell'aria fresca'. (39)

During the last two meetings, in 1998 and 1999, *Ricerca* tried, on the one hand, to re-define experimental writing in more flexible and inclusive terms and, on the other hand, to create the critical language necessary to deal with the changing landscape of Italian narrative. No names emerged at these meetings, which made an impact in publishing and readership terms. In 1998 professional and non professional audiences found the texts by Paolo Nelli and Tommaso Pincio interesting; in 1999 the readings of Paolo Nori and Greta Danes were considered the most promising: some of the texts read by these writers are now in the process of being published. No clear-cut trends were identified, except for a sense of the 'end of pulp', in a proliferation of texts written in what Barilli called 'stile acqua e sapone', (40) a low style flattened to a version of standard literary Italian which has undergone various levels of personal re-elaboration.

In 1998, Tommaso Ottonieri - one of the authors proposed by earlier *Ricerca* appointments who, together with Caliceti, Cepollaro, Scarpa and Mozzi, found in Reggio Emilia a space to formulate critical opinions - felt that the conference readings revealed 'un sempre più insanabile conflitto tra forma e sostanza motivante'. (41) The distance between narrative motivations and the form chosen to express them became evident after the readings of Maria Teresa Zoni, Geraldina Colotti and Helena Janeczek. These writers presented autobiographical texts which dealt with the historical and emotional trauma of the students' movement in the Seventies and of terrorism. Most critics present at the conference agreed, however, that the burning political material was unable to rise above the emotional traps of the traditional confessional form adopted by the writers. At the same time, the texts which seemed most interesting from the linguistic point of view, that is to say, which complied with those levels of 'abbassamento linguistico', contamination and innovation discussed in the previous years, such as that of Giuseppe Casa, (42) were already showing the signs of mannerism and were lacking in any political focus.

A possible solution to this impasse was identified in the use of genres by Pietro Pedace during the 1998 round table. He believed that this strategy, already adopted by a few writers, was the most suitable for mediating 'il rapporto tra la letteratura e il pathos dell'esperienza e del sentire', as each genre 'accetta consapevolmente la sfida allo stereotipo al fine di rendere rappresentabile (e cioè comunicabile) quella "cosa" che chiamiamo *trauma*'. (43) I would like to suggest that it is precisely in the power of generic literature to communicate by way of agreed mediation, however impossible

any attempt at communication might be in postmodern culture, that we can see the difference between experimental writing in the Nineties and the *Neoavanguardia* of 1963. Balestrini himself talked of the new avant-garde as 'sperimentalismo di massa [...] che non rinuncia a comunicare', as opposed to the incommunicability actively pursued by the *Gruppo '63* in a different historical and political context.

The critical tools of the *Neoavanguardia*, as well as those of more traditional literary criticism, were finally put under scrutiny during the 1999 meeting. The question was posed in the terms of whether the known critical language of the conference was able to offer an appropriate definition of experimental writing and of fiction in particular. The generation gap between new writers and the majority of their critics was the first problem. Tiziano Scarpa voiced his own discomfort as a writer in search of adequate critics when he lamented that: 'quando leggo Cesare Segre o Ermanno Paccagnini o Giovanni Pacciano o Massimo Onofri che scrivono di Aldo Nove o Isabella Santacroce sui giornali, penso che è come se i Prodigy e i Portishead venissero recensiti su *CD Classica* o *Amadeus*'. (44) It was agreed that the next step for the conference should be a tuning in of the critical language with the cultural discourses presented by the new body of fiction. It is possible that the most likely candidates for such a task are the growing number of writers who come to read their texts at the conference and who return as critics the following years.

Meanwhile, a critical vision which could indicate the direction writing was or should be taking in Italy is now absent. Moreover, the *Neoavanguardia* enthusiasm is diminishing, due also to the fact that its members are growing older. The landscape of new and experimental Italian writing appears fragmented, monological in style and form, neurotic in content and politically disengaged. Lost in the variety of literary production, critics are divided between the 'contemplazione fenomenologica del ribollire degli stili' and a nostalgia for a more rigorous experimental position. (45) The conference is going through a moment of transition, waiting for new texts that feed its critical perspective and for new critics who can systematise the complexity of the emerging literary production. Nevertheless, if it does not become paralysed by its momentary crisis and succeeds in moving beyond the intellectual tenets of the *Neoavanguardia*, *Ricerca 2000* will be an exciting observatory for the development of both experimental writing and critical discussion.

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Notes

1. I wish to thank the *Assessorato alla Cultura* of Reggio Emilia and, especially, Patrizia Paterlini, for allowing me prompt and full access to their *Ricerca* archives.
2. Donata Righetti, 'Ragazzi si cambia: finito il pulp, comincia la vita', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 May 1998.
3. Romano Luperini, 'Per la critica della retorica nel '63 e nel '93', *63/93. Trent'anni di ricerca letteraria* (Reggio Emilia: Elytra, 1996), pp. 19-26 (p. 23).
4. Quoted in Laura Lilli, 'Blob sessantatré', *La Repubblica*, 31 March 1993.
5. Filippo Bettini/Roberto Di Marco (eds.), *Terza ondata. Il nuovo movimento della scrittura in Italia* (Bologna: Es-Synergon, 1993).
6. Nanni Balestrini: 'Silvia Ballestra è una grandissima scrittrice [...] Sempre sul versante narrativo, oltre alla Ballestra, altre due donne hanno dato un segno forte: Campo e Covito', in Marco Romani, 'La letteratura che c'è e non si vede', *Liberazione*, 9 April 1993.
7. Nanni Balestrini: 'Negli anni 80 è prevalso il vuoto, l'evasivo, il consolatorio. Un vero e proprio periodo di riflusso che non ha dato nulla non solo sul piano letterario [...] Le uniche esperienze interessanti sono quelle di Tondelli e del primo Busi', in Marco Romani, 'Il frastuono della letteratura', *Liberazione*, 8 May 1996.
8. Quoted in Marco Romani, 'La letteratura che c'è e non si vede', *Liberazione*, 9 April 1993.
9. Lorenzo Miglioli, *Ra-dio* (Rome: Castelveccchi/ Bologna: Es-Synergon/Milan: Human System, 1993).
10. Quoted in Rita Rocchetti, 'Blob ha fatto splash', *La Gazzetta di Reggio*, 6 April 1993.

11. Silvia Ballestra, *La guerra degli Antò* (Ancona: Transeuropa and Milan: Mondadori, 1992)
12. Silvia Ballestra, *Gli orsi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1994).
13. Remo Ceserani, 'Trent'anni dopo, una convitata di pietra di nome Avanguardia', *Il Manifesto*, 6 April 1993.
14. Quoted in Maria Cristina Righi, 'Parole nuove, dette a chi?', *La Gazzetta di Parma*, 9 June 1994.
15. 'Due domande a Romano Lupérini', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura*, (May 1994), no. 111, pp. 11-13 (p. 12).
16. Giuseppe Caliceti, *Fonderia Italghisa* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996).
17. Andrea Demarchi, *Sandrino e il canto celestiale di Robert Plant* (Milan: Mondadori, 1996).
18. Matteo Galiazzi, *Una forma particolare di anestesia chiamata morte* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997)
19. 'Due domande a Renato Barilli', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura* (April-May 1995), no. 120, p.28.
20. 'Due domande a Biagio Cepollaro', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura* (April-May 1995), no. 120, pp. 28-30 (p.28).
21. Aldo Nove, *Woobinda e altre storie senza lieto fine* (Rome: Castelvècchi, 1996). Revised and published again as *Superwoobinda* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998).
22. Tommaso Ottonieri, *Crema acida* (Lecce: Pietro Manni, 1997).
23. Giulio Mozzi, *La felicità terrena* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996).
24. Niccolò Ammaniti (et al.), *Gioventù cannibale. La prima antologia dell'orrore estremo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996).
25. For a brief summary of the more polemical aspects of the episode see Claudia Bernardi, 'Pulp and Other Fictions: Critical Debate on the New Italian Narrative', *Bulletin of the Society for Italian Studies* (1997), no. 30, pp. 4-11.
26. Mirella Serri, 'Scrittori buonisti, erbaccia sotto l'Ulivo', *La Stampa*, 4 May 1996.
27. Quoted in Marco Romani, 'Il frastuono della letteratura', *Liberazione*, 8 May 1996.
28. Enrico Brizzi, *Bastogne* (Milan: Baldini e Castoldi, 1996).
29. Isabella Santacroce, *Destroy* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1996).
30. Rossana Campo, *Mentre la mia bella dorme* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999).
31. 'Considerazioni al margine. Tommaso Ottonieri: Mentalismi', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura* (August-September 1996), no. 132, pp. 23-24 (p. 23).
32. Niccolò Ammaniti, *Fango* (Milan: Mondadori, 1996).
33. Tiziano Scarpa, *Occhi sulla Graticola* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996).
34. 'Considerazioni a margine. Renato Barilli', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura* (August-September 1996), no. 132, p. 19.
35. Vitaliano Trevisan, *Un mondo meraviglioso* (Rome, 1997); Marco Franzoso, *Westwood dee-jay (Il miracolo del nord-est)* (Milan: Baldini e Castoldi, 1998); Simone Battig, *Fuck Vitalogy Today* (Rome: Theoria, 1997).
36. Quoted in Rita Rocchetti, 'Scusa, che lingua scrivi?', *La Gazzetta di Reggio*, 14 May 1997.
37. 'Cose' has only just been published in a collection of short stories: Simona Vinci, *In tutti i sensi come l'amore* (Turin: Einaudi: 1999).
38. Simona Vinci, *Dei bambini non si sa niente* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997).
39. Marco Romani: 'Tiziano Scarpa: Basta con i padri', *Liberazione*, 18 May 1997.
40. 'Considerazioni al margine. Renato Barilli', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura* (May-June 1998), no. 147, pp. 28-29 (p. 29).
41. 'Considerazioni al margine. Tommaso Ottonieri', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura* (May-June 1998), no. 147, pp. 32-33 (p. 32).
42. Giuseppe Casa, *Veronica dal vivo* (Ancona: Transeuropa, 1998).
43. 'Considerazioni al margine. Pietro Pedace', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura* (May-June 1998), no. 147, p. 33.
44. Tiziano Scarpa, 'Ma che ci faccio a Cologna Veneta?', *Il Manifesto*, 31 May 1998.
45. Nicola Signorile, 'Frammentazione e nuove sensibilità', *L'immaginazione. Mensile di letteratura* (June 1999), no. 158, p.23.

What the British Library can do for Italianists

Colleagues and fellow Italianists, in this article¹ I intend to show how the very considerable resources of the British Library can be of benefit to Italianists.

There can be very little doubt that the greatest single resource, and one of the greatest assets the British Library can immediately offer Italianists, is its Italian Collections *tout court*. The British Library's Italian Collections are very extensive and are generally considered to be one of the finest collections of Italian printed books in the world. It has been calculated that there is a grand total of approximately 450,000 to 500,000 Italian printed books at the British Library of which the vast majority, 422,475 books to be precise, are Humanities and Social Science books, the principal area of interest to most Italianists. This latter figure can be broken down approximately as follows: 35,000 fifteenth and sixteenth-century books of which 4,460 are fifteenth-century books or incunables or incunabula, that is to say, books printed before 1501.

The British Library's collection of 4,460 Italian incunabula is simply the largest and the finest collection of Italian incunabula in the world and represents 43 % of all the Library's incunable holdings. Of these, no fewer than 94 of the British Library's Italian incunables are unique. One book of particular interest to Italianists is the rare complete text of Boiardo's *Sonetti e Canzone* printed by Franciscus de Mazalibus in Reggio Emilia in 1499. Although not an 'unicum', only two other copies of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, printed at Naples by Francesco del Tuppo in 1478 (G.11348.) exist. Our copy, beautifully illuminated for the Ginori family of Florence by a contemporary artist, contains their coat-of-arms illustrated in turquoise, green, and gold leaf.

There is probably no finer library anywhere for the Italianist to consult the first editions of classical, patristic, theological and Humanist authors, indispensable for Italianists working on Mediaeval and Humanist literature. Our holdings of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, to name only a few of the greatest authors, are second to none. The first editions of Humanist authors and scholars from Poggio Bracciolini to Pico della Mirandola, from the celebrated Aldine incunable first editions to almost the complete output of Savonarola's *oeuvre*, all can be consulted in our Rare Books Reading Room. The remaining 31,525 sixteenth-century books have been described by Professor Conor Fahy as simply the best and the richest collection of Italian sixteenth-century books anywhere.

Clearly our holdings of Italian books at the British Library are not as numerous as those held by the Biblioteca Nazionale in Rome or Florence or the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, but what we may lack in number, we more than make up for in quality and richness. Not many libraries could produce all the first editions of most if not all major sixteenth-century authors, and hardly any other library could produce books of this period (and incunabula for that matter) in finer condition. We principally have Sir Anthony Panizzi (1797-1879) the Italian patriot, exile, scholar and Principal Librarian and Director of The British Museum - it was he who was mainly responsible for the creation of the famous Round Reading Room - and The Honourable Thomas Grenville (1755-1846) to thank for this, because it was Panizzi who persuaded Grenville the Whig politician, First Lord of the Admiralty and Chief Justice in Eyre south of the Trent, to bequeath his superb personal library of 20,240 volumes, many of which were exquisite Italian books, in pristine condition, to the British Museum in 1847.² Nor should we forget the splendid King's Library formed by King George III which contains a very high proportion of Italian books which were bequeathed to a grateful nation by George IV, in 1828. Nor could many other libraries present their readers with Isabella D'Este's own personal copy of her Aldine *Petrarch* adorned with her coat-of-arms, a copy of Vittoria Colonna's *Rime* owned by Michelangelo Buonarroti and bearing his signature of ownership ("Michelangelo Schultore," C.28.a.10) which may well have been personally donated by Colonna to

Michelangelo. Even if this were not the case it would certainly indicate that Michelangelo was very probably influenced by Vittoria Colonna's poetry in general and her *Rime* in particular, when he came to write his own poetry.

How many other libraries possess all the editions of Tasso's works plus a copy of the 1581 edition of Tasso's *Rime* published by Aldo Manuzio the younger, together with manuscript corrections to the text, in the printer's own hand, the whole, moreover, kept in a box which contains a fragment of wood, which, legend has it, is supposed to have come from the prison door of Tasso's cell when he was imprisoned in Ferrara? I cite these few rarities and association copies merely to illustrate the richness of the British Library's Italian collections. There are so many Italian sixteenth-century books at the British Library, especially books printed in Venice because it has been calculated that no fewer than 61% of all books printed in the Italian peninsula in the sixteenth century were printed in Venice alone.

As one would expect after a decline in the fortunes of the Venetian Republic as a major printing centre, the figure for our seventeenth-century Italian holdings dips to 19,500 reflecting also the decline in book production in Italy in that century when printing was transferred and expanded in printing centres north of the Alps, principally at Basle, Paris, Amsterdam and Antwerp. Our holdings for this period are still very impressive and all the first editions of seventeenth-century authors are present from Campanella to Vico together with all the principal seventeenth-century editions of major works.

The British Library has approximately 17,500 eighteenth-century books including what may well be an unrecorded sonnet by Goldoni, the first editions of Galvani's and Volta's scientific experiments with their manuscript dedication to Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, manuscript annotations by Cardinal Vitaliano Borromeo, a descendant of Saint Charles Borromeo, in tracts published in the Romagna, and last, but by no means least, a recently acquired copy of Lorenzo Lippi's *Il Malmantile racquistato* owned by Giuseppe Baretti and very heavily annotated by him. This latter work is extremely interesting since it sheds a considerable amount of light on Baretti's linguistic theories. In my view this copy would make an ideal research project and a splendid scholarly edition for some enterprising Italianist.

Some of you are aware that my colleagues Dennis Rhodes, Chris Michaelides, Stephen Parkin and I have been busy compiling a catalogue of the British Library's eighteenth-century Italian holdings for several years now. This catalogue will hopefully contain considerably more information than our very useful Italian Short Title Catalogues of Fifteenth to Seventeenth-Century Italian Books. Not only will the title of a work be given in full, but there will be a full author and imprint statement, printers' index, place of printing index, and all association copies, dedications and provenances will be recorded. The catalogue which is being produced on a main-frame computer, will also contain an index of engravers, artists and illustrators and will be a major resource for research into the eighteenth century in general, and into literary, social and art history of the period. It could also form the basis of a future cumulative catalogue of Italian eighteenth-century books. We may even consider publishing this catalogue as a CD ROM, thereby making it a much more versatile bibliographical and scholarly tool. Incidentally as far as we are aware, no major programme for cataloguing of eighteenth-century Italian books is being undertaken in any other institution elsewhere, at least to our knowledge.

Turning to the nineteenth century, it has been calculated that our Italian books printed in this period number some 150,000 to 200,000 items. Our Risorgimento holdings are particularly strong and contain some very rare Jacobin items, including the very rare pamphlet *Il pappagallo romano* of which only one other copy has been located, plus very extensive and complete runs of important,

and in some cases, quite rare, Italian newspapers and periodicals of the period. We are constantly being told that our collections of this latter material are much more complete and very often better preserved than similar material available in Italian libraries. Our holdings of Foscolo, Leopardi, Verga and Capuana, and items by Monti printed at Lugano, are particularly fine. Reference to Lugano prompts me to point out that we also purchase modern books printed in Italian-speaking Switzerland. We have very extensive collections of Swiss Italian books printed in the Ticino, and since the total production runs to only a few hundred monographs annually, we can afford to continue purchasing virtually everything of research value printed in Italian speaking Switzerland each year.

Our holdings of twentieth-century Italian books number about 150,000 to 200,000 items and are added to at the rate of 3,000 to 4,000 monographs per year as funds permit. We have particularly fine examples of books printed in the Fascist period, especially very rare books printed in the Italian Colonies in Africa, many rare works by the Italian futurists, including dedication copies signed by Marinetti, Russolo, Mazza and others, and splendid copies of fine printing and *livres d'artiste* illustrated by De Chirico, Morandi, and Manzù. We also have most first editions of most major and minor Italian twentieth-century authors. It should also be pointed out that each year we receive many donations of books from the Italian Government, from Italian publishers, University Departments and from Italian academics who deem it an honour to have their works deposited and held here. Indeed a few important Italian novelists have decided to deposit all their works and translations of their works at the British Library so that the "official archive" of their oeuvre can be held here. Publishers have responded very favourably to this idea and have co-operated by depositing all translations and editions of a novelist's work with us.

Nor should we overlook another extremely valuable resource for the Italianist, no fewer than 375 Italian newspapers some of which are extremely rare. My colleague Stephen Lester from our Newspaper Library at Colindale and I have produced a print-out of these newspapers and it is available for consultation at the British Library. It is intended to transfer this information to a database and to make this information available electronically at the end of 1999 or early in the new Millennium.

We should also recall the resources of the National Sound Archive with its recorded speeches of modern celebrated poets, the speeches of Mussolini, Hitler and others, the Music Library with its wealth of printed Italian Music, and last, but by no means least, our Manuscript holdings. Some of the gems in this collection include The Sforza Hours, Leonardo Da Vinci's Codex Arundel, manuscripts by Machiavelli, Leopardi, Mazzini and others and one of the earliest detailed manuscript maps of Italy showing all the fortifications on the peninsula, probably made expressly for King Henry VIII. To this list must be added 2,000 State Papers, official government publications and periodicals in the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

So much for the statistics of the BL's holdings. I have endeavoured to capture the flavour and give you the briefest insight into the richness and extent of these collections by citing some of our more notable items. In the limited confines of this article I have only been able to scratch the surface. There can be little doubt that our collections are our principal resource which can be consulted either in London or in our Reading Room at Boston Spa in Yorkshire. Many universities in the Midlands and from farther afield, provide a regular bus service for their academic staff to consult books at our Document Supply Centre in Yorkshire.

Our collections can be consulted electronically on line, on the internet, on CD ROM and on the very versatile and user-friendly computer terminals, the OPACS, in all our reading rooms. Many of you also make full use of our document supply service in Yorkshire in order to track down that elusive

article and often request a photocopy or microfilm of the item you require from our reprographic service.

The Inter Library Loan system is also another very useful service enabling you to consult our books, in your own university library. However, how many of you know of and use our information service which exists to help scholars with their bibliographical queries? When you have a bibliographical problem or need a last minute reference so that you can meet your publisher's deadline, why not think of us? We will be only too happy to help. Not many of you will be aware that we have recently spent £18,000 to purchase the complete set of the *Archivio Biografico Italiano*, a truly superb biographical resource on microfiche which appears to contain details about every major and minor Italian, even the most obscure, from the year dot to the present day. We have acquired this work so that it can be of benefit to *all* Italianists so why not try contacting us with your queries? Not all of you appear to be aware that readers at the British Library or in other institutions can suggest books or periodicals for purchase by the Library, so the next time you see a rare item in a catalogue and you feel that there should be a copy of the work in the British Isles, please do not hesitate to contact me. You have my assurance that I give the highest priority to readers' suggestions for acquisition.

How many of you also know that we have a very good exhibitions programme and that we welcome suggestions for themes for exhibitions? The last very successful exhibition we arranged and sponsored was *Women writers in the Italian Renaissance*. We have also held exhibitions on Tasso, Boccaccio, Dante, The Italian Book, The Officina Bodoni, Sir Anthony Panizzi, Aldus Manutius, and Virgil, to name but a few recent exhibitions of interest to Italianists.

In my view one of the most serious problems facing Italian Departments in British Universities is that of under-funding, particularly funding for the purchase of Italian books and periodicals at undergraduate and postgraduate level. One immediate solution, in my opinion, would be to update that excellent Society for Italian Studies sponsored *Guide to Italian Periodicals in British Universities* which was compiled by Brian Cainen and published almost ten years ago. This would really benefit from an update. I am volunteering to update this guide and to put it on a database which could be copied and be made freely available to all who need it. All I require is your co-operation in filling in the periodical holdings of your Library on the forms which I will produce for the purpose. Any offers of help will also be gratefully received.

I also propose that a Working Party or Italian Library Group, should be formed, perhaps as a Society for Italian Studies Sub-Committee. Its remit would be to try and avoid unnecessary duplication of Italian books and periodicals in institutions where Italian is studied, and to ensure that at least one copy of an expensive Italian item, would be located in the British Isles. I am willing to offer accommodation in the form of meeting rooms at the British Library and I would be even willing to chair the first few meetings in order to get the project off to a sound start. Anyone wishing to participate in this initiative and anyone who is willing to serve on this committee in any capacity is kindly requested to contact me directly at the British Library.

I sincerely hope that I have succeeded in persuading you that the British Library is a very rich and an invaluable resource for Italianists in general, and for British Italianists in particular. We should also recall that many other Italianists from Italy, and indeed from all over the world, come to use our Italian holdings on a regular basis, thus ensuring that Italian is the third most heavily used foreign language at the British Library. For your information, books in English are, as one would expect, the most frequently consulted, followed by books in French, German and then Italian.

I know many of you personally and I know that many of you make full use of the British Library, but I am particularly addressing my invitation to those of you who might not have used us in the past. Please remember that the British Library is your National Library so do come and visit us and make use of the many services we have to offer.

Denis Reidy

Head of Italian and Modern Greek Collections, British Library

Notes

1. This article was originally a paper delivered at the SIS Biennial Conference, University of Glasgow, 17-19 April 1997.
2. For further information on Sir Anthony Panizzi and the Honourable Thomas Grenville and a detailed description of the relationship between the two men which led to the bequest of the Grenville Library (which incidentally, contains many important and rare Italian books) to the British Museum, see: Denis V. Reidy 'Panizzi, Grenville and the Grenville Library', in *The British Library Journal*, Volume 23, Number 2, Autumn 1997, pp. 115 - 130.

A year in the life of the SIS Language Group

This is the account of a year in the life of the SIS Language Group, which began in a tea shop in Stow-on-the-Wold.

The beginning....

The **SIS Language Group** really started in January 1998 when Gino Bedani invited me to look after the portfolio for Language teaching. In May 1998 Loredana Polezzi, Judith Bryce and I arranged to meet in Stow-on-the-Wold, which on the map appeared equidistant from Warwick, Bristol and Oxford. Judith agreed to be Chair.

We discussed the issues we felt the group should and could address, and drew up a list of colleagues in other universities we knew to have a special interest in language teaching. It was gratifying that all of those whom we asked agreed to join. This gives us a member of the group in (almost) every corner of the UK. If any corner feels left out, we would be glad to hear from them.

At the same time, we are inviting each Italian Department/Section in all UK universities to nominate one person (not necessarily an SIS member) who can serve as contact for the Language Group. We will then set up an email mailing list for all these representatives, whose role would be to ascertain what information and resources would be useful to Departments and to generate discussion.

Judith Bryce reported briefly on the group at the SIS AGM in January 1999. A draft statement of proposed aims and objectives was put before the SIS Executive on 2 July 1999 and approved.

The aims...

So what are the aims of the group?

The aims of the group are to promote all aspects of Italian language teaching and/or applied linguistics, including sociolinguistics, amongst SIS members and amongst the wider academic community.

We plan to do this in various ways:

- firstly, by disseminating information and promoting discussion.

Webpage

The Group will have its own webpage, part of the main SIS website. The SIS finances the technical support for the main website. Since there is no additional funding for a language page, we are looking for sponsorship either from publishers or from bookshops selling Italian language books. Our intention is not to sell space to the highest bidder (although all offers are welcome!). We will post details about **all** new Italian courses, textbooks, books of language teaching interest, without bias. The only criterion is usefulness.

We would in addition provide hyperlinks to publishers' websites where new texts might be advertised; these would be funded by publishers themselves. Alternatively, bookshops might like to

sponsor the page with a banner advert. The Italian Bookshop in London has been approached and is interested in principle.

Because the SIS webpage is unrestricted and can be accessed by members and non-members alike, it should prove a valuable resource for language teachers in schools as well as in universities. Links to sites useful to language teachers would increase the number of hits on the SIS website and in the long term raise the profile of the SIS and of Italian. We also hope to post information about conferences, journals, and developments of particular interest to those teaching language in universities.

Email lists

We considered - and rejected - the idea of a separate **email discussion list**. George Ferzoco's Italian Studies list does an excellent job. Setting up a separate list might serve to 'ghettoize' language teaching further. There is also an **Italiano L2 email discussion list** for teachers of Italian, hosted by the Università per Stranieri, Perugia (Stefania Spina).

- **secondly, by promoting the profile of language teaching in universities**

The group has three suggestions to propose (not mutually exclusive) and invites comments:

Language days

Warwick has organised language days for some years now. They are extremely successful, attracting language teachers from schools as much as from universities. But it is hard work for the organisers. Perhaps departments should take it in turn to host and organise language days. Language teaching needs to be seen as something central to **all** universities.

Language teaching workshops

The shift from TQA to **QAA** and the issue of **subject review and benchmarking** will move the focus on to issues of language teaching. Italian will have the specific issue of **ab initio teaching** at university level to consider, and related issues such as curriculum design, assessment practices and learning outcomes. The Group could organise **day schools, workshops**, etc., open not just to Italianists but to others teaching languages in universities. They would not take the place of the Language Days since they would address the particular issues found in language teaching at university level. They would have to be self-financing.

Language sessions at SIS conferences

The Group could hold language sessions within SIS mainstream conferences. Holding separate language teaching conferences may have the effect of 'ghettoizing' ourselves. The Language Group could actively promote sessions on applied linguistics, methodologies, etc. at SIS conferences.

- **thirdly, by forming formal or informal links with research bodies** in similar areas (e.g. the British Association of Applied Linguistics) and disseminating information on linguistics conferences of interest to SIS members.

RAE Millenium + 1

How much of a long-term future the Group will have depends to some extent on whether attitudes can change...or be changed. Language teaching is given low priority. This has always been held to be the case at 'old' Universities (yes, the binary divide again), but is now becoming true of 'new' universities as well, even those where language teaching represents a high percentage of the courses on offer. Ironically, for language teaching to be successful, it needs more resourcing, staffing and support than other areas of teaching.

There is evidence that Italianists (and others) are making strategic decisions linked to career opportunities. At the SIS conference in Bristol this April, for example, no papers on applied language research had been offered by the deadline. There is a widespread feeling that there is no point spending time on writing, speaking or even thinking about an area which is not considered 'research'. So the future of language teaching very much depends on how the next RAE views language teaching and applied linguistics publications. We have again received assurances that language teaching publications will be considered by the Italian panel at the next RAE, on condition - naturally - that they include an element of original research and scholarship.

Who's who

The three founding members of the SIS Language Group are Anna Proudfoot (Oxford Brookes), current SIS portfolio for language teaching, Loredana Polezzi (Warwick), organiser of the Italian Language Days at Warwick, and Judith Bryce (Bristol), Chair of the Group. In addition, in order to represent as many UK regions as possible, and as many interests as possible, Italianists with particular interests in language teaching in several locations were invited to participate and have accepted:

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The north-west of England is still uncovered, as is Northern Ireland. This is not deliberate. We welcome expressions of interest from there.

Other issues and areas of concern

Other issues we would like to tackle - time permitting - are

- **PGCE**

Ensuring the availability of an Italian option on PGCE courses is important for Italian teaching at secondary level and therefore for university admissions.

- **Copyright.**

Changes in the copyright laws have particular impact on language teaching materials

- **The Year abroad**

This is clearly linked to language teaching but involves other issues (such as funding) and, therefore, will probably be looked after by someone else in the SIS. Nonetheless, the preparation for the year abroad and any assessment of linguistic progress there are very much linked to language teaching, and can be part of the Language Group's brief. We should tap into existing expertise. The LARA project, for example, is a consortium of universities, led by Oxford Brookes University, which was given 250,000 GBP by HEFCE to disseminate good practice on the Year Abroad.

For this year, that should be enough. We look forward to receiving comments from everyone reading the *Bulletin*, at whatever level, in whatever area. We will do our best to raise the profile of language teaching and we hope you will all support us.

Anna
Oxford Brookes University

Proudfoot

Chronicle

Appointments and Staff Changes

There have been several new appointments and promotions over the last year. David Forgacs has been appointed Professor and Head of the Italian Department at UCL. Laura Lepschy, who has now retired from that post, has been awarded an Honorary Professorship at Reading. At Leeds Dr Alan Bullock was promoted from Reader to Professor of Italian Literature. Michelangelo Zaccarello left University College Dublin at the end of 1998-1999 in order to take up a Fellowship at Pembroke College, Oxford. Leonardo Lastilla is also relinquishing his post of Fellow of University College Dublin in order to develop his career in Italy. Emanuela Cervato has left Aberystwyth to take up the post of Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent and Elisabetta Tarantino has been appointed in her

place. The Italian Section at Aberystwyth has also seen the continued support of two part-time Lecturers, Antonietta Feroldi and Jean Jones, and a Language Assistant, Giuseppina Vinante.

Gillian Ania has taken up the post of Lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Salford. This has also been a year of big changes in the Warwick Italian Department, which with great regret has said good-bye to Jennifer Lorch, who has retired. The good news is that the University has appointed a Professor of Italian for the first time and Ann Caesar arrived from Cambridge in September to take the Chair. There also two new Lecturers: Dr Jennifer Burns from Manchester and Dr Simon Gilson from Leeds. Dr Mair Parry was awarded a personal Chair at Bristol with effect from August 1999 and the Italian Department has appointed a sixth permanent Lecturer, Dr Sarah Morgan. At Portsmouth Lectureships have been awarded to Fabio Vighi and Sonia Cunico. At Strathclyde Giovanna Iorio from the University of Salerno has been appointed Lettrice.

Conferences, Seminars and Research Activities

The Italian Department of University College Dublin held its twenty-seventh annual Dante Lecture Series, consisting of five lectures, on the theme *Language and Style in Dante*. Four of the lecturers were guests from outside the Republic: Peter Armour from Royal Holloway, London ('Dante's Tongue: The Language of Oral Narration in the Comedy'), Carlo Caruso of the University of St Andrews ('Dante's Language and Style and Modern Exegesis'), Valerio Lucchesi from Oxford ('Pressures and Management of the "materia sorda" in the Style of the Comedy') and John Took of University College London ('Language and Being in Dante'). The Series was completed by Michelangelo Zaccarello's lecture on 'The Chicken or the Egg? Purgatorio XXIII and the tenzone with Forese Donati'. The Italian Department at University College Dublin also organized its seventh annual series of research seminars. Five seminars were held, at which papers were delivered by Carlo Caruso, Carla De Petris, Lindsay Myers, Jennifer Petrie and Edoardo Sanguineti. The University College Dublin Foundation for Italian Studies has published *Pasolini Old and New: Surveys and Studies*, edited by Zygmunt Baranski.

At Bristol visiting speakers in 1998-1999 were Ann Caesar (Cambridge), Giuliana Nuvoli (Milan), Paolo Orvieto (Florence) and Paul Diffley (Exeter) and Steve Milner received an AHRB award (Spring 1999) and a one-year Harvard fellowship at I Tatti (Florence) for 1999-2000. At Birmingham a Centre for the Study of Leopardi and the Age of Romanticism has been set up, directed by Dr Franco D'Intino. The Centre will be a UK focus for research in this area, will organize colloquia and lectures, and will offer bursaries to students. A programme for 1999/2000 will be published in the autumn. Birmingham University also hosted an international three-day conference on 'Leopardi and the Book in the Age of Romanticism' in October 1998, attended by over seventy delegates. The proceedings of the conference are to be published by Bulzoni. At Strathclyde Antonio Scuderi of Ohio State University gave a paper on Dario Fo. A detailed report on *Gruppo 62* initiatives is contained elsewhere in the *Bulletin*.

Degree Schemes and Courses

Undergraduate In October 1998 an Italian section was set up within the Department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex by Ignazia Posadinu. Italian is offered both as part of a 4-year degree scheme and as an outside option for first, second and final-year students. Currently courses are offered for both beginners and students with A Level. At the University of Wolverhampton Italian Studies has been upgraded from a Minor to a Joint subject (provisional) in

the modular scheme. In spite of recent difficulties, the Italian section at Aberystwyth continues to offer Italian as part of degree schemes in Single Honours in European Languages (combining at least three languages), Combined Honours (Major/Minor with any other subject) and special schemes with Law, Management and Business and International Politics. The European Languages Department at Aberystwyth is also considering the introduction of a BA in Modern Languages without the rigid structures of present schemes (Joint Honours/Single Honours/Major and Minor).

At Hull a new Arts Faculty Level 2 module, *Landmarks of European Children's Literature* has been set up for introduction in 1999-2000 with Ann Lawson Lucas of the Italian Department as convenor. The module will provide for a chronological examination of two prominent traditions within the history of European children's literature: fairy tales (introduced through the Fables of Aesop and the early literary tales of Straparola and Basile) and stories of adventure (stemming from Defoe). Texts will be read in translation in what is a comparative literature module, but language students will be encouraged also to examine the original. At Swansea a Level 3 module in *19th and 20th Century Italian Social History* has been set up by Jonathan Dunnage. The module looks at the process of transition from an agricultural to a modern industrial society particular to Italy, examines the development of political sub-cultures and considers state intervention in such areas as the family, welfare and education. In analyzing these areas, the module places particular emphasis on `familism`, the role of women and the present reappraisal of the *Questione meridionale*.

Postgraduate At Birmingham a research M.Phil with some taught elements has been created in `Language, Law and Literature in Modern Italy'. The programme draws on the research expertise of the department, especially in the analysis of legal language, and expects to enrol its first students in September 2000. At University College Dublin the Italian Department reached the unprecedented total of 20 postgraduate students.

We are very sorry to have to report the decision to close the Italian Department at Queen's University, Belfast, though there is some hope that it will continue to exist on a minor scale. On a more cheerful note, the Italian section at Southampton is re-opening, though no appointment has as yet been made.

Links with Italian Universities

A three week reciprocal undergraduate study exchange was successfully established in the summer of 1998 between the Italian section of the University of Central Lancashire and the ESU (Azienda Regionale per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario) of Verona. Following this, links between the two universities have been strengthened by the establishment of an Erasmus exchange agreement to commence in the academic year 2000-2001. Other Erasmus partner institutions are the Università degli Studi di Torino and the Università degli Studi di Cassino.

Jonathan Dunnage
University of Wales Swansea

Conference Reports

1999 SIS Conference at Bristol

The biennial conference of the Society for Italian Studies took place in Bristol on 9-11 April. Fittingly, given its Italian connections, the venue was Clifton Hill House, now a University hall of residence but once the home of eminent Victorian aesthete and Renaissance enthusiast, John Addington Symonds. I hope colleagues who attended will remember the elegance of the refurbished eighteenth-century public rooms rather than the less doubtful pleasures of the late twentieth-century student bedrooms.

The conference was attended by over 120 delegates. These were principally colleagues from UK and Irish universities but the event also attracted scholars from Italy, Switzerland, the USA, and South Africa, while the large number of postgraduates attending and offering papers is an encouraging sign for the future of the subject. We were also pleased to welcome two guest speakers, Anna Dolfi, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of Florence, who offered a paper on 'Il gioco del romanzo tra highmodern e modernità', and Erminia Dell'Oro, the Eritrean-born writer now based in Milan, whose fourth novel, *La gola del diavolo*, has just been published by Feltrinelli. Dell'Oro spoke about her work in a session devoted to Italian writing about Africa.

There were eighty-three papers in all, covering a wide range of topics organized in four parallel working sessions over the three days of the conference. As it is not feasible to list all the participants and as it would be invidious to mention just a few individuals, I will limit myself to listing the session titles (colleagues who were unable to attend the conference but who would like a copy of the programme are welcome to contact me): Dante and Cino da Pistoia; three Renaissance sessions; Sette/Ottocento; Ottocento; Modernism; political prose; the 1940s; Africa; Italian writing from the margins (an effort to combine Swiss-Italian poetry with Guttuso, Sciascia and Consolo); Calvino/Vittorini; two women's writing sessions; children's literature; two film sessions; twentieth-century literature; twentieth-century theatre; twentieth-century poetry, and two sessions on contemporary literature. There were, in addition, two well-attended linguistics sessions, one on morphology and syntax in Italian and in the dialects of Italy, and the other on lexical, socio-linguistic and textual issues. The breadth of topics covered in the programme reflects the intellectual range and vigour of Italian Studies nationally and internationally. This, together with the quantity and quality of the postgraduate contribution, augurs well for the future of the discipline and makes an annual SIS conference a viable and welcome possibility.

In addition to the academic work of the conference, delegates explored the architectural and natural delights of Clifton including the Avon Gorge and Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge, and attended a chamber concert at Clifton Hill House based on a programme devised by Janie Cole, a postgraduate student at Royal Holloway, to whom particular thanks and congratulations are due. Entitled 'Il lamento della ninfa', the programme consisted of late Renaissance and early Baroque Florentine music inspired by the poetry of Michelangelo Buonarroti 'il giovane'. The performers were Lindsay Bramley (mezzo soprano) and Lynda Sayce (lute and theorbo). The former has a wide repertoire ranging from early music to the contemporary scene while the latter has performed and recorded with most of the major period instrument ensembles in Europe from the Academy of Ancient Music to the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

The Department gratefully acknowledges once again the help and support of the officers of the Society for Italian Studies, particularly the Hon. Treasurer, Mark Davie, and the generous assistance

of the Italian Cultural Institute, the University of Bristol Alumni Foundation, the University of Bristol, the British Library, and Waterstone's.

Judith Bryce

University of Bristol

Disastro! Disasters in Italy since 1860: Culture, politics and society, Yale University, June 1999

The Disastro conference, held at Yale University in June 1999, brought together historians, sociologists, political scientists and geographers to discuss various research projects dealing with myriad aspects of Disasters in Italy since 1860. The papers presented at the conference were all of a very high standard and the rich discussions saw the opening up of questions that have been ignored for too long by those who study modern Italy. In many ways, the leitmotiv of the conference proved to be Stefano Magistretti's masterly account of the representation in the Italian press of the Sarno mud-slide disaster in May 1998. Magistretti described how the genre of disaster coverage tends to pick up on the same old themes, namely: the blame attached to the State, the corruption associated with reconstruction and civil protection, the excuses and visits of the politicians, the arrival of profiteers ('jackals') and the generosity of helpers (as well as the classic survival stories, repeated again during the recent Turkish earthquake). David Forgacs's companion paper analysed the media representation of a different kind of disaster - the Albanian immigrations after 1989 - and the ways in which the boat-people of the first wave came to be viewed as dangerous criminals, locked in Bari's old football stadium, only months later. The relationship between media and disaster proved to be a fascinating one and of crucial importance in understanding the memories and perceptions of Italy's many disasters.

Earthquakes provided the basis for a series of papers. John Dickie's work on the massive 1908 Messina earthquake laid bare patriotic myth-making and situated the cultural response to the catastrophe in relation to fears of social collapse. Dickie's paper (only a small part of an extensive and wide-ranging research project on this disaster) led to a long discussion on the relationship between the Italian state, disasters and national identity which was also provoked by Catherine Brice's work on the monarchy (in this case Umberto I) and a series of disasters in the 1880s. Brice showed how the royal family were able to achieve great popularity through their reaction to disasters and through the spread of 'touching', personal stories of charity and heroism in the face of disease, epidemics and personal danger. The illustrated press was crucial in the dissemination of these stories, which by-passed the traditional blame attached to the state for each and every disaster.

Judith Chubb's work on three earthquakes (Belice, 1968; Friuli, 1976; Campania, 1980) outlined the different reconstruction solutions and reactions to these three disasters. Chubb was very careful not to fall into the trap of a straightforward north-south explanation for these differences and instead looked towards articulated accounts based on the role of institutions, the choices over rebuilding or new developments and the presence or otherwise of corrupt intermediaries. David Alexander's encyclopaedic knowledge of Italian disasters and state responses towards them provided a salutary dose of realism amongst all the theorising over identity. Alexander outlined the difficulties in the organisation of a national civil protection service in Italy and the bureaucratic obstacles preventing quick and efficient responses to all types of disasters across the peninsula.

In a session dedicated to war, Giovanna Procacci provided an impressive history of one of the most emblematic of all Italian disasters - Caporetto. Procacci showed how the responsibility for the disaster became a political issue both during and after the war and the Caporetto Inquiry developed into a powerful weapon in the hands of both the Socialists and the Fascists (for very different reasons) after the war itself. Roger Absalom recounted the reaction of the Italian peasantry to the *sfascio* of the Italian army and state after 8 September 1943 and the attempts by country-dwellers to maintain order and normality in a situation of crisis and collapse.

Frank Snowden's elegant and incisive paper revealed how a disastrous disease such as malaria could have unexpected effects - in this case the rise of a feminist movement and the acceptance of medical science in areas previously either suspicious of or hostile to such institutions and organisations.

Finally, my own work on the *strage* of Piazza Fontana (December 1969) looked at the debates and divisions introduced in the city of Milan by this traumatic event. I analyse in some detail the complicated tale of the plaques dedicated to the various protagonists of that period - the bomb victims, Pinelli, Calabresi - and the representations of the tragedy in the theatre (Dario Fo) and art works (the controversial work of Enrico Baj, banned in the city in 1972). This work takes the study of memory as its key theme - looking at anniversaries, concrete memory and forgetting (in recent years) as a way of understanding recent Italian history and the city of Milan itself.

The conference opened a number of questions for future research. Is it possible to summarize the general effects of disasters in different contexts? Are disasters conservative or radical events? Why is the state always blamed for the consequences of Italian disasters? What is the special relationship between the south, the southern question and disasters? It is hoped that some of these questions will be investigated further in a planned volume based on the conference proceedings.

For further information about this conference and the various papers, please contact John Dickie (J.Dickie@ucl.ac.uk) or John Foot (J.Foot@ucl.ac.uk).

John Foot

University College London

Gruppo 62

The 'Gruppo 62' is a consortium of Italian departments in the north of England. It organizes a programme of talks for staff and students.

Programme for 1999-2000

GRUPPO 62 ONE-DAY CONFERENCE: MAY 2000

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