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EDITORIAL

It is, inevitably, with some sadness that the Editors announce that this issue of the *Bulletin of the Society for Italian Studies* is to be the last. Since 1967, over nearly four decades, the *Bulletin* has provided members of the Society with information about the activities of Italian Departments throughout the UK and Ireland, and has published articles and reports on many aspects of Italian Studies. In so doing, it has fulfilled an important function within the academic community, and one that will by no means cease with the demise of the *Bulletin* in its current form. Rather, this development will bring to completion the process initiated in 1997, when publication switched primarily to electronic form on the Society for Italian Studies website. The Staff List of teachers of Italian holding office in British and Irish Universities, traditionally associated with, though not a constituent part of the *Bulletin*, will continue to appear in both printed and electronic form. When the Society's website is re-launched later this year, it will include the information on conference and research activities, distinctions and awards, and on academic appointments and retirements, that have previously appeared in the *Bulletin*. An editorial team will continue to ensure that departments, conference organisers and other interested parties are invited to contribute such information to an updated website that will give the activities of the Italian Studies community of the UK and Ireland the wide publicity it deserves, not only among Society members, but among a global audience.

This valedictory issue of the *Bulletin* is published – as in previous years – on the Internet and in a limited print run. Although article submissions have been low in quantity, the quality of the single article that we present is evident: Ian Grainger's discussion of 'Trieste and the Foibe: Nation and Memory' is in fact also due to be published in Italy under the auspices of Prof. Giorgio Conetti, Chairman of the Commission on Italo-Slovene relations between 1880 and 1956. In the following sections of the *Bulletin*, our various Conference Reports, and the *Chronicle* section on Research Activities and Seminars, provide eloquent testimony to the continuing vigour of research in Italian Studies in the UK and Ireland, and of the wide variety of chronological and methodological approaches encompassed by Italianists. Charlotte Ross's report on her period of service as the SIS's Postgraduate representative further points to the promising future of the discipline as a whole, and underlines the professionalism, persistence and spirit of cooperation displayed by young scholars in the field.

We are aware that the *Bulletin* itself provides information on only a small proportion of the many important activities relating both to research

and to teaching carried out in Departments represented in the SIS. This is largely due to our dependence on the goodwill of colleagues in preparing reports and submitting information to us for publication. As always, the Staff List editor will appreciate your assistance in providing up-to-date information for next year's issue. We also take this opportunity to invite colleagues this coming academic year to submit to the editors of the new website sections all relevant reports, including news of interdisciplinary conferences and events in contiguous areas that will be of interest to the Italian studies community.

In its revised form, the SIS website will more than ever constitute an important resource for disseminating information on all aspects of Italian Studies, for publicising current and forthcoming events, and for offering a permanent record of activities and achievements through its report sections. We are sure that we can rely on our colleagues' collaboration in making the record of Italian Studies activities in the UK and Ireland as comprehensive as possible in coming years.

Information and contact details regarding the revised publication procedures for the SIS website, and deadlines for the Staff List, are included on the final pages of the *Bulletin*; we look forward to receiving your submissions over the course of the coming year.

In conclusion, I wish to express many thanks to colleagues who have helped in putting together this edition, and in discussing the status of the *Bulletin* and the revisions to the website. Thanks are due to former editors Katia Pizzi and Simon Gilson, and to Martin McLaughlin, Jenny Burns and the other officers of the SIS Executive Committee for their assistance in discussing the role of the *Bulletin* and its future electronic form. Katia Pizzi offered useful guidance for the immediate preparation of this final issue of the *Bulletin*, to which my co-editors, Ruth Glynn and Daniela La Penna, have contributed with an efficiency and commitment that merits especial gratitude.

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TRIESTE AND THE *FOIBE*: NATION AND MEMORY

Much recent writing on nationalism advances the argument that ‘nations’ are not natural facts and that ‘national identity’ has no pre-ordained substance or content. Rather, on this view, both concepts are discursive constructions.¹ A group commonly called a nation may bind itself together by promulgating positive notions about itself or negative notions about others. Indeed, the notion of ‘the Other’ occupies a central place in this kind of analysis – being anyone, or anything, whether within or without the society in question, which that society uses (through rejection) to define itself.²

This article does not attempt to question the theoretical validity of such models of national identity. Rather, in its first part, it attempts to explore the value and implications of such ideas by applying them to one particular place and time in Italian history, namely Trieste and its hinterland in the period before and during the Second World War. The choice of place will allow reflection on the proposition that the experiences, especially the fears and insecurities, of a border people can tell us much about the pre-occupations that lie at the ‘heart’ of a nation. The choice of period will allow reflection on the possibility that periods of upheaval are especially productive of such ‘eloquent’ fears and insecurities.

Memories of a historical event can themselves acquire (or be made to acquire) definitive significance in a nation’s view of itself and of ‘the Other’ and times of crisis, such as war, can be particularly productive of such memory-forming events. With such thoughts in mind, the second part of the article will consider the phenomenon of the Triestine *foibe* in 1945; attempting to examine why that episode has had such a strong hold on the Triestine (and general Italian) imagination, and how memories of it have become ‘divided’ and thus tools in the battle to promote particular views of what it means to be ‘Italian’.

Of course, one cannot begin in 1945 or even with the Second World War. As always, one has to go back a little.³ The lands at the head

¹ Particularly influential has been Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 2nd edn, 1991). See especially pp. 4-7. For Anderson, a nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as being both inherently limited and sovereign” (p. 5).

² For a brief but fascinating exposition in the context of British history, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1994), pp. 5-7. The word “forging” in Colley’s title is itself instructive.

³ On Triestine disinclination to do anything of the kind when speaking of the *foibe*, see Claudia Cernigoi, *Operazione Foibe a Trieste, come si crea una*

of the Adriatic are border country *par excellence*. Uniquely in Europe, they lie at a point where the continent's three great racial groups collide and mingle – the Germanic to the north, the Slav to the east, and the Romance (Italian) to the west. Unsurprisingly, therefore, their history affords many examples of what might be termed a 'classic' view of borderlands, as the cockpit for expansionist battles between warring peoples and states. Indeed, the region's history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can easily be interpreted in just such a 'classic' fashion – as a series of attempts by Italy to drive to the east (first, into Venezia Giulia and Istria during the Great War; then into Fiume under D'Annunzio; and finally into Yugoslavia in 1941).⁴ However, if borderlands have such a classic, or external, aspect, they also have an internal one, for they can equally constitute a battlefield for control *within* a state. It is on this internal aspect that I wish to concentrate – of which the history of these lands affords illuminating (and contrasting) examples before and after 1918.

In the years before the Great War, the Hapsburgs had employed two major tactics for maintaining control and order in Trieste. The first can be viewed (negatively) as their general policy of *Divide et impera*, or (positively) as a kind of wise tolerance. As Hametz puts it, 'In the pluralistic Hapsburg state ethnic sentiments were tolerated as a type of popular nationalism alongside official dynastic loyalty. [...] Hapsburg officials even used popular nationalism and ethnic sentiment to pit minorities against one another in the hopes of thereby strengthening the center'.⁵ The second tactic was the showering of trading advantages on the Empire's only great port. Whilst any idea of Hapsburg Trieste as a golden age of liberal multiculturalism is resolutely to be rejected, taken together, these two tactics not only allowed the Emperors to keep a lid on ethnic tensions in the city but also produced a rich commercial, cultural and religious hotchpotch.⁶

mistificazione storica: dalla propaganda nazifascista attraverso la guerra fredda fino al neoirridentismo (Udine: Edizioni Kappa vu, 1997), p. 19.

⁴ One can also view the *foibe* from such a 'classic' perspective, as being essentially an attempt by Tito's forces to lay the ground for Venezia Giulia's incorporation into Communist Yugoslavia. See, most importantly, Valdevit, 'Introduction', p. 9, and 'Foibe: L'eredità della sconfitta', pp. 19-27, both in Giampaolo Valdevit (ed.), *Foibe. Il peso del passato. Venezia Giulia 1943 – 1945* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1997).

⁵ Maura E. Hametz, 'On the periphery/At the frontier: the Triestines in the northeastern borderland', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 5.3 (2000), pp. 277-293 (p. 280).

⁶ Even the Jews were tolerated: it was to them that the great Triestine insurance companies owed their origins.

However, if this was how a multi-ethnic empire felt it best to deal with these borderlands, it was emphatically not how liberal or Fascist Italy chose to deal with 'l'agognata Trieste' after 1918. Rather, as Sluga puts it, the area became 'a focus for the most vigorous contestation and violent enforcement of an integral Italian national identity'.⁷ Under the Peace Treaties, Italy acquired substantial ethnic minorities (Germans in the north, Slovenes and Croats in the east), but these *allogeni* were perceived as a serious threat to the country's cultural homogeneity, to the unity, that is, of a fledgling nation already much troubled by its regional differences and the need to 'make' Italians. In the east, it was felt that Hapsburg multiculturalism had to be eradicated and the *italianità* of the region promoted, or (to use the contemporary expression) 'rediscovered'.

Undoubtedly, the chief obstacle to any such policy was the huge number of Slovene-speaking Slavs now within Italy's borders – ten times as many as before 1918. Space does not allow an exhaustive examination but it is worth considering official Italian attitudes to these Slavs at two levels – first, generalised (that is stereotypical) views of them; and second, certain specific policies adopted towards them.

At a general level, Slavs were viewed in one of two ways. They could be seen as 'honest peasants led astray by Austria' who were nevertheless 'worthy of becoming real Italian citizens, like other Italian rustics'.⁸ Seen in this light, they were to be assimilated into the structures of the Italian state. Alternatively, they could be seen as alien invaders, as the vanguard of a barbaric horde from the Bolshevik and Balkan East. In truth, these two views complemented each other. Italy was seen as embodying *civiltà* precisely because of its ability to assimilate and homogenise, whereas the Balkans (with their endemic minority problems) were seen as the exact antithesis of this. Both views were founded on a sense of superiority and, ultimately, of fear.⁹ Furthermore, such fears were self-fulfilling. The more vigorously Fascism sought to assimilate and destroy Slav culture, the more the Slavs resisted, ultimately violently. Thus, whether or not there was an external Slav threat to the *italianità* of

⁷ Glenda A. Sluga, 'Italian National Identity and Fascism: aliens, allogenes and assimilation on Italy's northeastern border', in Gino Beddani & Bruce Haddock (eds.), *The Politics of Italian National Identity: A Multidisciplinary Perspective* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 163–190 (p. 163).

⁸ Sluga, 'Italian National Identity', p. 171.

⁹ Compare Wanda Newby, *Peace and War: Growing up in Fascist Italy* (London: Collins, 1991), p. 57: 'In Trieste [...] the Slovene people were regarded as an inferior race. Many times, both when I was young and when I was older, I heard the word "slaves" – *sciavi* in Triestino, *schiavi* in Italian – used by Triestini to describe us.' (*Schiavo*, or *schiaivone*, is, of course, also a synonym for Slav, as in the *Riva degli Schiavoni* in Venice.)

Trieste when Fascism came to power, Fascist policies certainly succeeded in creating one.¹⁰

Turning to the specifics of these anti-Slav policies, one should stress that they began even before Fascism came to power. Imperial soldiers of Slav extraction returning from the front were often interned or otherwise roughly treated; and Italian nationalist groups (encouraged by the chauvinistic Triestine newspaper *Il Piccolo*) mounted various campaigns against Slovene journals, cultural groups, and political activists. Trieste was therefore an obvious seedbed for Fascism, the local *fascio* being founded only a fortnight after the San Sepolcro meeting in Milan in 1919. In July 1920, the Slav cultural centre in Trieste (the *Narodni Dom*, or ‘National Home’) and the attached Balkan Hotel were burnt down; and in 1921, in the Massacre of Strugnano, Fascists fired from a train on Slav children, killing two and injuring more.

Once the Fascists came to power, this anti-Slav pressure was intensified with the adoption of a whole range of assimilatory and repressive measures.¹¹ Place names were changed and the Slovene language suppressed – only Italian could be used in the *pubblica amministrazione* and, after 1923, in schools.¹² Wanda Newby’s account of her childhood in the Carso gives vivid examples of the impact of these policies on the Slovene-speaking population. Her parents spoke the local dialect of *Slovenska Spracha*, Triestino (but not pure Italian) and good German. Such signs of multiculturalism and the fact that her father was a teacher earned the family a number of midnight visits from Blackshirts in civilian clothes:

[They] woke my parents and searched the whole house, the school included, for subversive propaganda. Even the dirty linen basket was emptied, and downstairs in the classroom, all the papers and books were scattered about. This was the first of several such visits. The men left, as they came, saying not a word. My parents put a brave face on it while the search was in progress, but when it was all over my mother silently wiped away her tears. (p. 31)

¹⁰ Sluga, ‘Italian National Identity’, p. 172.

¹¹ For greater detail, see Sluga, ‘Italian National Identity’, pp. 169-177; and Cernigoi, *Operazione Foibe*, p. 20 et seq.

¹² Even before 1918, Italy had suppressed the Slovene language, in particular in the Valle del Natisone (the so-called *Slavia veneta*): see *I rapporti italo-sloveni fra il 1880 e il 1956. Relazione della commissione italo-slovena sui rapporti tra i due paesi fra il 1880 e il 1956* (Gorizia: Comitato Provinciale di Gorizia dell’Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d’Italia, 2003), p. 1. However, such suppression grew both in scale and intensity after 1918.

In 1930, Wanda's politically-active brother decided to emigrate to Buenos Aires; and in 1932, in common with a thousand other 'Slavonic' teachers, her father was compulsorily moved to another part of Italy, being replaced by a teacher from Naples, whom the locals regarded 'as something more or less from outer space' (p. 64). Arriving at Fontanellata, near Parma, Wanda's family were immediately dubbed '*tedeschi*', though this did not prevent Wanda being warmly welcomed at her new school (p. 71), in a fashion that reminds one of the arrival of the *ragazzo calabrese* in Edmondo De Amicis' *Cuore*.¹³

This strange mixture of assimilation and repression was no mere sideshow in a remote province. It tells us much about Fascism's views of 'the Other', and thus about its views of 'the nation' generally. For example, the burning of *Narodni Dom* was presented as one of Fascism's founding events: arms found in its ruins were displayed at the 1932 Rome Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution as evidence of the regime's vigilance against the threat from the Slav 'Other'.¹⁴ At the same time, Fascism sought to encourage *italianità* in Trieste by promoting its own 'positive' views of itself, particularly through the 'rediscovery' of the city's Roman past.¹⁵ In 1938, Mussolini himself visited Trieste, viewing the newly excavated *teatro romano* and laying the foundations for a new Fascist headquarters.¹⁶

Mussolini also took the opportunity of this visit to denounce the nationwide 'Jewish problem'; later in 1938, after the signing of the Axis with Berlin, discriminatory racial laws were introduced. These two developments – the racial laws and the Axis – saw the beginnings of two new practical roles for Trieste. One was, in Sluga's words, the city's transformation 'from the most prominent Italian centre of Jewish culture into an "epicentre" of fascist anti-Semitism'.¹⁷ The other role, as Europe

¹³ The arrival of the *ragazzo calabrese* is in the entry for October 22 in Edmondo De Amicis' *Cuore*, first published in 1886: for the text, see

http://www.liberliber.it/biblioteca/d/de_amicis/cuore/html/ (visited 7 September 2004). In connection with Wanda's welcome at her new school, it is interesting to note that the further from the 'heart' of Italy that one went, the more severe anti-Slav feeling and repression seem to have become. See Sluga, 'Italian National Identity', (quoting Rusinow), p. 184, footnote 10: 'In Trieste [...] the treatment of "Slavs" was not as bad as in Istria, nor as good as in Gorizia.'

¹⁴ Sluga, 'Italian National Identity', p. 172.

¹⁵ Sluga, 'Italian National Identity', pp. 176-177.

¹⁶ Staying with relatives, Wanda Newby saw the *Duce* on this trip. To her self-confessed shame, she was much moved by Mussolini's charisma: *Peace and War*, pp. 104-106.

¹⁷ Sluga, 'Italian National Identity', p. 178.

slid into war, was as the ‘bulwark of a new Italian Empire’, as ‘the bridgehead of Italy towards the East’.¹⁸ In 1941, Italy invaded and occupied large areas of Yugoslavia, already crumbling under German attack. The Italian military set up concentration camps *per scopi repressivi* and in 1942 an *Ispettorato Speciale di Pubblica Sicurezza* was established, charged with the repression of anti-Fascist, particularly Slav, activity. Trieste was the only province of Italy to possess such a secret police and it acquired a savage reputation for torture and for the rounding up of Jews well before the Germans arrived in 1943. Despite all of this, as Sluga observes, the extent of Italy’s racial and political aggression in the northern Balkans before and during the Second World War has failed to become part of general historical knowledge in Italy. In particular, ‘the attribution of the 1938 Fascist racial laws to Nazi influence has encouraged historical views of Italians as a characteristically *brava gente*, and [of] racism as an anomalous chapter in Italian history’.¹⁹

No similar amnesia has occurred in relation to the events in this area that followed the Allied-Italian Armistice of September 1943: on the contrary, interpretations of those events have come to form a major ingredient in some Triestine and Italian views of ‘the Other’. First in point of time came savage outbursts of anti-Italian violence in Istria, leading, according to Valdevit, to some 500 to 700 people being thrown – dead or alive – into the *foibe* (pits or chasms in the rugged limestone landscape). Less is known of these Istrian atrocities than of the similar events near Trieste and Gorizia in 1945. However, historians seem to agree that they lacked any overall organisation and were genuinely ‘spontaneous’.²⁰ These episodes came rapidly to an end when, in October 1943, the Nazis occupied Venezia Giulia and the Adriatic coastline. While the rest of northern Italy remained under the nominal control of Mussolini’s *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* based at Salò, these areas became a *Gau* of the Reich, under direct Nazi control. In Trieste itself, the SS and its local collaborators transformed the Risiera di San Sabba into Italy’s only concentration camp. Many of its victims were Slav nationalists.

However, it was not until May 1945, as Nazi-Fascist power finally collapsed, that the *foibe* atrocities occurred in the provinces of Trieste and

¹⁸ Sluga, ‘Italian National Identity’, p. 179.

¹⁹ Sluga, ‘Italian National Identity’, p. 181.

²⁰ ‘[Si tratta] fondamentalmente di ribellismo, di una pressione a lungo accumulata che trova rapidamente una via di sfogo’ (Valdevit, ‘*Foibe: L’eredità*’, p. 20); ‘un fenomeno in stile “jacquerie” di giustizia sommaria’ (Cernigoi, *Operazione Foibe*, p. 125); ‘una selvaggia rivolta contadina’ (Raoul Pupo, ‘Violenza politica tra guerra e dopoguerra: il caso delle *foibe* giuliane’, p. 43, in Valdevit (ed.) *Foibe: il peso*).

Gorizia. The ‘facts’ underlying these episodes, both as to the numbers and political affiliations of the victims, are, to put it mildly, highly contentious. More rewarding than an examination of wildly differing statistics are a consideration of why it is difficult to deal with such ‘facts’, and a review of the way in which they have become part of a contested but extremely powerful memory.

Suffice to say, then, that on 1 May 1945, the Yugoslav Army occupied Trieste. Allied troops arrived shortly afterwards but an Allied Military Government was not established until mid-June. In the interval, many hundreds, if not thousands, of Triestines were arrested by the Yugoslav military authorities and, to use a modern expression, ‘disappeared’. They were overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) Italian but their fate, their numbers, and their complicity in the Nazi-Fascist apparatus are all fiercely contested. However, the popular Italian image remains one of barbaric horror. Witness the following passage from Fulvio Martin’s novel *Giulin*:²¹

Numerosi vennero gettati nelle *foibe* (tipiche voragini verticali carsiche) con un macabro rituale. I condannati, in gruppi di 5 o 6 venivano portati sull’orlo della foiba, legati l’uno all’altro ai polsi con filo di ferro, quindi il primo della fila veniva colpito alla nuca con un colpo di fucile e questi cadendo, trascinava nella voragine tutti gli altri ancora vivi. (p. 56)

The inevitable difficulties of establishing the fates of so many ‘disappeared’ in these war-torn borderlands, during a period of unparalleled chaos and mobility, can be easily imagined. However, subsequent politicisation of the *foibe* has intensified such difficulties to a massive extent. Without descending into details, one should perhaps highlight three particular complicating factors.

First, the debate has been confused by serious problems of terminology. From *foiba* has been coined the verb *infoibare*, with its even more lurid forms *infoibati* and *infoibatori*. Those who seek to paint a picture of ‘ethnic cleansing’ by the Yugoslavs often use the word *infoibati* to describe not just those who ended up in the *foibe* but also those who were deported or imprisoned and who died elsewhere.²² Likewise, the word *civili* (whose appearance in contemporaneous documents is often cited as evidence of innocence of Fascist connections)

²¹ Fulvio Martin, *Giulin: dalle miserie nel Friul alle foibe carsiche* (Florence: L’Autore Libri, 1991).

²² See Valdevit, ‘*Foibe: L’eredità*’, p. 15; Pupo, ‘*Violenza politica*’, p. 35.

can in reality cover a multitude of sins in a city where collaboration was, inevitably, widespread.²³

Secondly, an already thorny debate over the numbers killed has been complicated to an impossible and unedifying degree by political motivations. One's impression here is that historians of the right have been unhealthily concerned to indulge in consideration of the numbers involved, those of the left less so: the latter, with a residual sympathy for the Yugoslav partisans, for communism, and for the 'punishment' of Fascism, seem more inclined to argue in terms of general principle.²⁴ However, confronted with endless detailed arguments involving the citation, criticism, and 'correction' of inaccurate and politically-inspired lists of *martiri dell'italianità*, the newcomer can frankly do little more than highlight the general difficulty.

Finally, debate over numbers and over the 'significance' of the *foibe* has been so heated that historians seem routinely to observe that memory (or myth) has become more important than fact.²⁵ The idea that what people feel about the past (or what they remember of it) is as much history as what actually happened has had a liberating and enriching effect in recent years, particularly in the realm of oral history. Here, however, one senses that one is in that treacherous territory where memory is being artificially prolonged, if not deliberately manipulated or created.

Against this tormented background, I turn to consider what it is about the episode of the *foibe* that has led to its enduring hold on the imagination, of Triestines in particular and of certain parts of Italian society more generally. I begin with a group of factors concerning the *foibe* themselves, their history and associations – because, even before 1943, these dark holes in a bleak landscape were regarded as fearsome and unpleasant places.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, they had already acquired various evil 'folk' associations. For example, Cernigoi cites a children's

²³ Glenda Sluga, 'The Risiera di San Sabba: Fascism, anti-Fascism and Italian nationalism', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 1.3 (1996), pp. 401-412 (p. 408).

²⁴ See, to this effect, Sandi Volk, in his Preface to Cernigoi, *Operazione Foibe*. Compare Pamela Ballinger, 'Exhumed Histories: Trieste and the politics of (exclusive) victimhood', in *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 6.2 (2004), pp. 145-159 (p. 150).

²⁵ See, for example, Valdevit, 'Foibe: L'eredità', p. 15; Pupo, 'Violenza politica', pp. 34-35.

²⁶ I have only visited one of the *foibe* – the *Pozzo della miniera* at Basovizza, which was in fact an abandoned mine-shaft and which is now closed-in. However, one gets a sufficiently awesome impression from the chasm in the *Giardino Carsico* at nearby Sgonico.

poem (praising Dante and the *Lega Nazionale!*) which was taught in Istrian schools during the *ventennio*. It ends:

Fioi mii, chi che offende
Pisin, la pagherà:
In fondo alla Foiba
Finir el dovarà. (p. 123)

This evil reputation was compounded by the uses to which the *foibe* had previously been put. Many of them contained abandoned Austrian military equipment from the Great War, or else had been used as a general dumping ground for rubbish. Thus, to throw a man into a *foiba* was not merely to consign him to history but to treat him as so much disposable trash.²⁷ There appear to have been other, even more macabre, associations. According to Cernigoi, the *foiba* at Basovizza ‘fù tristemente nota come meta di suicidi’ – a fact which gives added resonance to the already melodramatic ending of *Giulin*, where the Slovene Pina throws herself into the *foiba* in order to join the bodies of her Italian collaborator husband and her partisan son. Given this grisly heritage, one is only mildly surprised to learn that, in Istria, stories exist of black dogs being thrown into the *foiba* along with the victims, ‘in una sorta di rito pagano’.²⁸

A second factor contributing to the enduringly traumatic quality of memories of the *foibe* was the rapidity and openness of the apparently indiscriminate arrests, contrasting completely with the secrecy surrounding the eventual atrocities. However, a third factor (in no way undermining the second) was that the violence was not unexpected. Valdevit speaks of the *foibe* as being like a flash of lightning that suddenly revealed ‘un rovesciamento totale di valori e di comportamenti. [...] È una sciabolata di luce intensa che illumina per un momento la realtà: ha l’effetto di uno svelamento’.²⁹ So much may be true, but the Triestine *foibe* were not unheralded. In late 1943 and early 1944, the Fascist press had made full use of photographs of decomposing corpses

²⁷ Compare stories of the swapping of clothes between victims and *infoibatori* immediately before the victims were thrown into the *foibe*: Valdevit, ‘*Foibe: L’eredità*’, p. 16.

²⁸ See Pupo, ‘Violenza politica’, p. 56, footnote 14; and Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*, (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 133.

²⁹ Valdevit, ‘*Foibe: L’eredità*’, p. 17.

extracted from the Istrian *foibe*.³⁰ Thus, terrified expectations of what might happen should ‘the Red Slav’ take Trieste were doubtless already rife in the city. In short, if one must use poetic imagery, it might be more accurate to say that the Istrian *foibe* were the flash of lightning and the Triestine *foibe* the long-dreaded peal of thunder that followed.

A fourth and very significant factor appears to be a kind of persecution complex linked to the sense of isolation felt by border communities. Following the Second World War, with Trieste’s economy in decline and the city eventually being almost surrounded by Yugoslav territory, it is not difficult to imagine how such a complex might develop. Valdevit speaks of ‘un’estrema difficoltà [...] – difficoltà di una periferia – a farsi ascoltare da una nazione’. He suggests that ‘chi richieda attenzione (e non sia sicuro di ottenerla) si veda portato all’esagerazione’.³¹

However, unquestionably most significant in keeping these memories alive is the use that has been made of them politically in the continuing battle over Italy’s nature as a nation. The controversies over the *foibe* have become what Valdevit calls ‘un esempio di “uso pubblico della storia”: uso martellante’. In Trieste in particular, memories have become ‘una sorta di deposito di munizioni per le battaglie politiche contingenti’.³²

Two violently contrasting interpretations have predominated. One, espoused by exile groups and the far right and having much in common with all that had gone before in Triestine history, was that the *foibe* represented the barbaric destruction of all that was Italian and therefore civilised. In this version, it is constantly suggested that the victims were killed purely because they were Italian – they were *martiri dell’italianità*. The competing interpretation saw the *foibe* as a sudden, violent, but inevitable retribution for the evils of Fascism. In this version, initially put forward as the official Yugoslav explanation but later espoused with little

³⁰ According to Cernigoi, it is these early Istrian photographs which continue to be produced in right wing publications, whatever the particular incident under discussion: Cernigoi, *Operazione Foibe*, p. 125 et seq.

³¹ Valdevit, ‘Introduction’, p. 8. Compare the views of Katia Pizzi on *foibe* as ‘metaphors of border anxiety’ in ‘Silentes loquimur: *foibe* and border anxiety in post-war literature from Trieste’, *Journal of European Studies*, 28.3 (1998) pp. 217-229 (p. 220). In a broader context, Pizzi sees Trieste’s extreme cultural specificity – its *triestinità* – as stemming from this border anxiety, as ‘an “invented tradition” perpetuated by a nostalgic attention to its own past and identity’. It is a culture of ‘epic nostalgia and insularity [raising] questions of cultural decay’: see Katia Pizzi, *A City in Search of an Author: The Literary Identity of Trieste* (London & New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 32-33. (On the role in this context of the border generally and of the *foibe* in particular, see Chapter 2.)

³² Valdevit, ‘Introduction’, pp. 8-9.

alteration by Slovene minority groups and the Italian left, the victims were mostly Fascists or collaborators. On this view, Trieste's border Fascism, with its projects of *snazionalizzazione* and violent repression of the *popolazioni alloglotte*, met an inevitable end in the *foibe* of the Carso. Though regrettable, the violence was to be seen as 'un eccesso di reazione, uno di quegli eccessi che avevano accompagnato, anche in altre parti d'Italia, la liberazione dal fascismo'.³³

At a local level, these radically different interpretations of the *foibe* were preserved – as it were, in frozen animation – by Trieste's starring role in the Cold War; by the fact of several years of direct rule by the Allies; by initial uncertainty and eventual resentment over the location of the Italian-Yugoslav border; and by the exodus in the late 1940s and early 1950s of thousands of Italian Istrians, many of whom ended up in Trieste, further swelling existing nationalist resentments. Furthermore, just as the far right used the *foibe* to symbolise the dangers of Slav communism, so the left promoted the camp at the Risiera di San Sabba as emblematic of the links between Fascism (particularly in its violent and anti-Semitic local form) and Nazism.³⁴ *Foibe* and Risiera (and the actual or asserted links between them) thus became heated political issues in Trieste, and in due course in Italy generally. Throughout the 1950s, there was right-wing pressure for national recognition of the *foibe* sites, and in 1959 a memorial was raised at Basovizza, which became the focus of annual 'pilgrimages' by nationalist groups. The Risiera, in contrast, was made a national monument in 1965. In 1976, the Risiera trials of two German defendants not only provoked widespread calls for 'equivalent' justice for the *infoibatori d'italiani* but even produced an equation of *foibe* and Risiera from the magistrate himself – 'both exemplified the identical desire of Germans and Slavs to exterminate Italians'.³⁵ Eventually, in 1992, Basovizza too was made a national monument.³⁶

³³ Valdevit, '*Foibe: L'eredità*', p. 19. Valdevit's own view of the *foibe* as 'violenza di stato' is, of course, a third, less flamboyant and in some ways more 'classic', interpretation. There are doubtless elements of truth in all three interpretations.

³⁴ See generally on this topic Sluga, 'The Risiera'.

³⁵ Sluga, 'The Risiera', p. 407.

³⁶ Cernigoi's extraordinary polemic against the right is written from an avowedly Marxist background. However, her passage on Basovizza is particularly worth reading (pp. 140-146). In her view, only about 40 people actually ended up in the Triestine *foibe*, i.e. not just at Basovizza. How far this conclusion is from right-wing views (and how unreliable the latter) can be judged – if from nothing else – from Cernigoi's photographs of the old and new monuments at Basovizza, with their skulls and their vast (and growing) statistics. For the symbolic importance of Basovizza to the right and to exile groups, see Ballinger, *History in Exile*, p. 144.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, broader European and world events have conspired to bring argument over the *foibe* into the limelight of Italian political debate at a national and not merely Triestine level. Three (linked) events should be mentioned as having had this effect: the collapse of communism, ethnic wars in the Balkans, and the major realignments in Italian politics following the collapse of the First Republic. Taken together, these events have served to accentuate purely ethnic, rather than political or ideological, interpretations of the history of this part of Italy and of the *foibe* in particular.³⁷ Thus, the far right was quick to draw parallels between the *foibe* and recent ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the Balkans; and Istrian exiles who had previously been dismissed as Fascists or nostalgics found that they could now play to a national and not merely a Triestine audience. In 1998, the Priebke trial (of one of the German officers involved in the 1944 massacres at the Fosse Ardeatine near Rome) provoked pressure for ‘equivalent’ justice for the perpetrators of the *foibe*.³⁸ and after years of *inchieste*,³⁹ one prosecution at least recently came to court – of an 80 year-old Croat accused of killing three autonomist anti-Fascists in Istria.⁴⁰

Increasingly ethnic interpretations of the *foibe* also linked in with the various attempts to ‘rewrite’ the history of Italy’s wartime past that accompanied the collapse of communism, electoral successes by the right, and general calls for a ‘pacificazione’ (or rehabilitation of Italy’s Fascist past).⁴¹ Labelling the *foibe* as genocide served to support right-wing attempts to ‘debunk’ the Resistance and to achieve recognition for the ‘*bravi ragazzi*’ who had fought for the Repubblica di Salò.⁴²

Gianfranco Fini of the *Alleanza Nazionale* has been particularly astute in exploiting interest in the *foibe*, pressing for example to have 20 February elevated to a national day of mourning for the *foibe* victims, so as to parallel the 25 April *Festa della Liberazione* that essentially commemorates the partisans.⁴³ Particularly fascinating is Ballinger’s

³⁷ See Ballinger, ‘Exhumed Histories’, p. 154.

³⁸ Ballinger, *History in Exile*, p. 160.

³⁹ Reviewed (and denounced) by Cernigoi, *Operazione Foibe*, pp. 147-155.

⁴⁰ See ‘*Foibe*, un processo atteso da 50 anni’, in *Nuovo Oltreconfine*, (Attualità section), December 2000, <http://www.oltreconfine> (visited 5 January 2002).

⁴¹ See Ballinger, *History in Exile*, pp. 112-123.

⁴² On this vast but fascinating topic, see Francesco Germinario, *L'altra memoria: L'estrema destra, Salò e la Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999). Germinario nowhere mentions the *foibe*, but on the right’s attempts to ‘denationalise’ and ‘Balkanise’ the Resistance, see pp. 91-97, especially p. 94.

⁴³ This pressure finally bore fruit on 11 February 2004, when the Italian Chamber of Deputies passed just such a law. For the Slovenian government’s resulting

account of a meeting at Trieste University in 1998 between Fini and Luciano Violante, then President of the House of Deputies and a member of the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra*, or ex-Communists. The comments made at the meeting, she explains, demonstrate ‘the increasing convergence of discourse from “Left” and “Right” about the *foibe* and a new-found interest in Trieste on the part of national politicians who now see it as a vital link between the Mediterranean and Eastern worlds’.⁴⁴ Fini and Violante could not in fact agree on the need for any further protection of Italy’s Slovene minority – Fini taking the view that it was already more than adequately protected – but they did agree on the need to ‘ricucire una memoria strappata’ by recognising the dual tragedies of *foibe* and Risiera. Of course, the danger in any accommodation of this kind is that a broader perspective may be lost and that interpretation of these events may begin only in 1945, or indeed on some mutually agreed and mutually convenient basis, thereby downgrading or sidelining the already insufficiently appreciated history of earlier Italian repression in this area.

Naturally, world events have had repercussions east of the border as well as in Italy itself, not least in the emergence of a new and independent Slovene republic. A democratic Slovenia is a less threatening eastern neighbour than Communist Yugoslavia, but also one which it is easier to dominate, and to date, relations between Italy and the new Slovenia have had both hopeful and less hopeful aspects. Cross-border ventures ought logically to have flourished as a result of Slovenia’s application to join the European Union, an ambition realised amid much ceremony, particularly in the ethnically divided city of Gorizia, on 1 May 2004. However, not all cross-border ventures have been successful. For example, a proposed three-country bid (with Austria) to mount the 2006 Winter Olympics came to nothing, each country eventually putting in separate bids and the prize going to Turin. More particularly, in the context of the *foibe*, it remains to be seen whether the opening to scholarship of Slovenian archives will serve to exacerbate or to resolve the arguments over numbers and the ‘significance’ of the atrocities. Optimism seems reckless. Certainly, diplomatic ‘incidents’ linked to the problems of a shared past continue to break out between Italy and Slovenia.⁴⁵

protest, see its press release of 13 February at <http://www.sigov.si/mzz/eng/index.html> (visited 6 September 2004).

⁴⁴ Ballinger, *History in Exile*, pp. 163-165; ‘Exhumed Histories’, p. 156.

⁴⁵ On all of this, see Hametz, ‘On the periphery’, pp. 289-291.

Overall, one is driven to the view that no single interpretation of the *foibe* is wise or possible. Even to say that they were a savage retribution by those who had for years been repressed as Italy's 'Other' is to risk immediate political pigeonholing in Italian eyes. By way of conclusion, I therefore limit myself to the following simple observations. Throughout the Cold War, the *foibe* were repeatedly invoked as a weapon in various battles to identify and demonise some new political 'Other', whether it was the nightmare of Slav and partisan Communism or the evil heritage of Fascism. More recently still, they have come to play an important part in debates over the restructuring of Italian politics and in attendant, particularly right wing, attempts to re-evaluate Italy's own wartime history. In all of these ways, the intensely felt fears and neuroses of this border region have continued, just as they did in the inter-war years, to afford strong if indirect testimony of wider Italian notions about their 'national identity'. The controversies surrounding the *foibe* illustrate all too vividly how memories of historical events, and slanted and emotional versions of those events, can be used to mould ideas of what it means to belong to a nation.

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REPORT FROM THE SIS POSTGRADUATE REPRESENTATIVE

As postgraduate representative since January 2001, it has been my pleasure and privilege to coordinate the annual postgraduate colloquium. While completing my PhD research, I have found my interaction with the Italian Studies graduate community highly stimulating and rewarding on both an intellectual and a social level. The annual colloquium fosters a positive environment in which to share ideas, to compare and contrast approaches to different source materials and to discuss the complexities of research in general.

During my time as postgraduate representative, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with Italian departments at Leeds, Edinburgh and Leicester, and have been consistently impressed by the high quality and sheer variety of research projects in progress. Moreover, one can only applaud the tenacity of today's graduate students as they battle against a scarcity of funding, endeavour to balance the demands of language teaching with research activity, and confront the pressure to publish and establish themselves in a highly competitive climate. Thanks to the efforts of several committed individuals, several students have been able to publish articles developed from papers presented at the colloquia (see Monica Boria's report on the 2003 Postgraduate Colloquium for details about recent and forthcoming publications). In addition, those students involved in the colloquia have gained important experience, whether as organizers, hosts, speakers or session chairs.

Since I took over this role, I have noticed several shifts in focus with relation to current research projects, as interest in certain areas seems to have increased (especially in translation studies and gender studies), and many more projects are taking a broadly cultural studies perspective. Graduate students who present papers at the conference may be affiliated with Italian Studies, European Studies, History, History of Art or Translation Studies departments, among others, and this continuing interdisciplinarity promises further to enrich future colloquia. Perhaps in future years the colloquium will be supplemented by seminars and workshops, providing additional training and outlets for graduate students. In 2005 the graduate colloquium will be organized by Linda Risso at the University of Cambridge, who presented her work in both 2003 and 2004. I hope that many students and staff will be able to support the event and wish all current graduate students well in their research projects.

I would like to thank the Executive Committee of the SIS for giving me the opportunity to serve as postgraduate representative, and for its continuing support of the graduate community. I would also like to

thank all the staff and students who have contributed to the success of the postgraduate colloquia over the past four years.

Charlotte Ross
University of Warwick

Kate Mitchell, PhD student and Postgraduate Research Fellow in the Department of Italian, University of Warwick, has succeeded Charlotte Ross as SIS Postgraduate Representative from 2004/05.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Society for Italian Studies Interim Conference:
***In corpore. (Im)material Bodies in Italy, from the Middle Ages to
the Present Day***
**Institute for Romance Studies, University of London, 16-17
April 2004**

The body, in all its aspects and figurations, was at the centre of this year's Society for Italian Studies Interim Conference, organised by Loredana Polezzi and Charlotte Ross and held at the London Institute of Romance Studies on Friday 16 and Saturday 17 April 2004. The organisers' choice of a topic associated with some of the most vital and innovative areas of literary research was welcomed by many scholars from Britain, Italy, Ireland and North America. Postcolonial Studies, New Historicism, Gender Studies, Gay/Queer Studies, Psychoanalysis and Cultural Studies were only some of the fields of theoretical enquiry referred to during the conference. Yet, the high level of theoretical abstraction was never an aim in itself. What motivated many of the conference's participants was the wish to explore these disciplines in relation to Italian literature and culture, to extend the methodological range of traditional Italian literary scholarship, but also to challenge some of the tacit assumptions of theories that mostly reflected on other literary and cultural contexts.

Each of these aims was apparent in the debate following Germaine Greer's keynote lecture 'The Perforated Body'. While Greer's ease with different pictorial traditions and historical periods was admired, her deliberately polemical remarks about the limits of bodily self-fashioning were not as easily accepted by her audience. The remaining part of the conference was divided into ten parallel sessions, which were organised chronologically. Friday afternoon's first session focused on the artistic representation of 'deviant' bodies and social norms. Derek Duncan's paper about the critical reception of Mario Mieli's *Elementi di critica omosessuale* drew attention to Mieli's efforts to promote a less static vision of the male body as a zone of potentiality rather than as the site of identity. Eugenio Bolongaro's contribution explored the cognitive function of the homosexual male body in Pier Vittorio Tondelli's later writing and assessed its significance in relation to the author's efforts to sketch a 'phenomenology of abandonment'. Danielle Hipkins' presentation concentrated on Ferzan Özpetek's *Hamam* and on the discovery of the male body through the 'maternal space' of traditional Turkish society. Finally, Charlotte Ross offered a compelling interpretation of Isabella Santacroce's vision of the female body, which

challenged widespread critical assumptions about Santacroce's style and concerns.

In the parallel session, meanwhile, engagements with the body in Medieval and Renaissance Italy were being explored. Catherine Keen opened the session with an investigation into the personification of Florence as a woman in political verse from the mid-Trecento to the mid-Quattrocento. Next, Manuele Gragnolati's impressive analysis of 'The Gluttons and the Anthropology of Pain' examined links between the *Divine Comedy's* 'shade', a body of air with a shape and feelings, and the medieval concept of pain as something to be embraced and used for self-improvement and knowledge. Alessia Ronchetti spoke about sites of conflict between women and authorial doubles in Boccaccio as places where authorial control over interpretation is most violently exercised. Finally Guyda Armstrong looked at the figure of the divine female in several of Boccaccio's *opere minori*, identifying instances where Boccaccio draws inspiration from Dantean models but then creates his own template.

Later in the afternoon, the debate was enriched by three highly original contributions about different artistic media. Helen Beale's talk about Giacomo Manzu's *Monumento al partigiano* drew attention to sculpture, Erminia Passannati gave haunting cinematic examples from Pasolini's *Salò* and Betti Marenko ended the first day of the conference by presenting contemporary ideas about tattooing as a process of self-fashioning and self-healing. In the parallel session four thematically complimentary papers discussed physicality and corporeal representation in Renaissance narratives. Mark Davie interpreted the inappropriately physical language grafted into a serious religious passage of Pulci's *Morgante* as a religious statement reacting against Neoplatonist emphasis on the abstraction of the spirit from the body. Still on Pulci, Annalisa Perrotta read the materiality of the giant Morgante and the immateriality of the magician Malagigi as complimentary, if opposite, motors for narrative creativity. Lorenza Gianfrancesco's structural analysis of some of the *novelle* of *Lo cunto de li cunti* reflected on how the treatment of the female body embodies gender relations and human behaviour under extreme circumstances. Last, Ita Mac Carthy questioned why Marfisa's successful performance of masculinity in the *Orlando furioso* is undermined when the narrative pokes fun at her material difference/lack.

On Saturday morning, Giorgia Alù introduced her audience to early twentieth-century photographs of southern Italian bodies by Wilhelm von Glöden and Guglielmo Plüschow. Subsequently, George Talbot offered some interesting cases of clothing and nakedness in Fascist Italy, many of which were also referred to by Simon Martin in his inspiring presentation about football under Fascism. In the equally multi-

disciplinary parallel session Carlo Caruso posed the problem of whether the 'Venus victrix' of the Judgement of Paris should be represented *antica* or *postica* (front or back view). Timothy Campbell shifted critical attention for D'Annunzio's *Notturmo* from questions of style to a reconceptualisation of the relationship between 'the hand that writes and the eye that sees'. Luisa Carrer reflected on the ambivalent portrayal of Verga's *Eva* as material/actual and immaterial/idealised, concluding that the author, like Eva herself, is learning to sell himself to please his public.

Bodies as a metaphor of narrative texts were at the centre of the next session, which was opened by Federico Federici with a paper on Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* and Queneau's *Les fleurs bleues*. Florian Mussgnug spoke about dead bodies in High Modernist literary prose with examples from Beckett, Manganelli and Sanguineti and Liz Wren-Owens presented the results of a detailed research about ghostly and real bodies in Antonio Tabucchi. At the same time, Lindsay Myers analysed Antonia Pozzi's employment of metaphors from nature in her poetry. David Best looked at Carlo Cassola's *Paura e tristezza*, drawing parallels between its women's bodies, their social condition and the rural landscape they inhabit and work in. Finally, Sergia Adamo's fascinating interrogation of the media/public's fascination with crimes involving the mutilation of women took Zeno's admission of loving 'la donna a pezzi' in *La coscienza* as its starting and end point.

Another important argument of the conference, the representation of racial differences, was addressed by Federico Faloppa and Loredana Polezzi. While Faloppa's sprightly presentation explored the historical origins of the proverbial expression 'to wash an Ethiopian white', Polezzi's wide-ranging paper was concerned with the works of male Italian travel writers in Africa between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even the conference organisers' expertise and their enthusiastic and extraordinarily comprehensive call for papers could not have anticipated the suggestive theme of Saturday afternoon's final presentation by Jeffrey Feldman: a compelling history of x-ray photographs of bodies of Italian saints. The last Early Modern session ended on an equally high note with Jon Usher's erudite contribution tracing the conceit of the Renaissance as rebirth back through Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Virgil to Pythagoras of Samos' doctrine of metempsychosis. Medina Lasansky's paper on the 'topo-mimetic, multi-media' 15th-century pilgrimage site at Sacro Monte di Varallo evoked the performativity of the pilgrim experience and the site's anatomical and sensorial simulation of the passion of Christ. Finally George Ferzoco offered an intriguing reading of a newly discovered Massa Marittima mural displaying an assortment of women plucking phalluses from a tree

while strange winged creatures hover overhead. A worthy conclusion to a conference that succeeded in fulfilling everybody's high expectations.

Florian Mussnug and Ita MacCarthy
University College London and University of Durham

Society for Italian Studies Postgraduate Colloquium
University of Leicester, 5 June 2004

The annual Postgraduate Colloquium was hosted this year by the School of Modern Languages at the University of Leicester on Saturday 5 June. It provided postgraduates once again with a welcome opportunity to form new networks and to discuss their work in progress in a supportive environment.

Over twenty-five researchers attended, from universities within the UK, Italy and Ireland. The seventeen papers presented covered areas of medieval and modern literature, history, translation studies, gender issues, theatre and film, reflecting the wide range of topics currently researched within Italian studies. Several staff from the Italian Department at Leicester attended the event and their comments and support were much appreciated. The organizers (Monica Boria and Federica Cappello) felt that the friendly atmosphere and stimulating discussions confirmed once again that the annual Colloquium is a unique forum for postgraduates in Italian studies, who often work in isolation, to meet and discuss their research.

The Colloquium was opened by George Ferzoco, Head of the Italian Department at Leicester, who renewed his interest, as Series Editor of *Troubador Italian Studies*, in publishing a selection of papers from the conference. To this end, a bid for external funding has been submitted and it is hoped that this year too, following the trend inaugurated last year by Dr Ian Revie and Luisa Carrer at Edinburgh University, a refereed publication will ensue.

One innovation provided by the Colloquium this year consisted in the creation of a dedicated website where the call for papers, programme, abstracts and other information could be published and regularly updated (<http://www.le.ac.uk/ml/fc30/Call.htm>). Thanks are due to: George Ferzoco for his support for our efforts; Leicester's Arts Faculty IT team; Federica Cappello, who mastered the mysteries of administrative procedures and permits; and above all Dr Mukund Unavane, who helped with the design and maintenance of the website. A special thank you also to Federica, whose academic competence as well as organisational skills

have made our collaboration a truly enjoyable experience. The University of Leicester's catering staff and audio-visual services provided an impeccable service, and the venues put at our disposal were excellent and much appreciated by participants. Charlotte Ross, outgoing SIS Postgraduate Representative, provided us with crucial information and support; her enthusiasm and commitment will be missed as she gives up her SIS position. Good luck to her in her new career!

Finally, thank you to the Society for Italian Studies and the School of Modern Languages at the University of Leicester for their financial support, and to Anglia Polytechnic University for supporting me in this activity.

Monica Boria
Anglia Polytechnic University

Il romanzo italiano contemporaneo: la lingua e le tecniche

Corso di aggiornamento

Department of Modern Languages, Oxford Brookes University

5-6 December 2003

Il convegno, coordinato da Franca Pellegrini, Anna Proudfoot, e Elisabetta Tarantino, ha coinvolto un'ottantina di partecipanti (docenti e studenti) provenienti da dodici università britanniche, dalle università di Firenze e Pisa, da otto scuole superiori, e da varie associazioni italiane. A dare il benvenuto di apertura presentando il corso sono state Lina Panetta (Istituto italiano di cultura, Londra) e Anna Proudfoot (Oxford Brookes).

La giornata di venerdì è stata dedicata alle relazioni. Raffaele Donnarumma della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa ha dato una ricca presentazione del romanzo postmoderno italiano dal 1965 al 2000, rilevando in particolare i problemi posti dalle opere in questione (ad esempio crisi del realismo, incertezza epistemologica, creazione di miti generazionali, retorica dell'autenticità). È stata seguita da un intervento su Italo Calvino di Federica Cappello (Leicester), nel quale sono state esaminate le *Lezioni americane* come testamento letterario dell'autore: in primo luogo per estrapolarne un sistema di categorie, e in secondo luogo per applicare questo sistema alla produzione narrativa dell'autore. Le opere di Silvana Grasso sono state l'oggetto della relazione successiva in cui Sharon Wood (Leicester) ha spiegato, con una miriade di esempi, come l'autrice esponga in modo spietato e ironico gli eterni miti dell'identità siciliana. Franca Pellegrini (Oxford) ha esaminato due racconti interconnessi di Paola Capriolo ('Il gigante' e 'Lettere a Luisa'),

con l'obiettivo di suggerire una chiave interpretativa dell'opera della scrittrice, ossia la ricerca del senso, la decostruzione dei personaggi, il tema del doppio, le simmetrie, il citazionismo.

Nel pomeriggio, Martin McLaughlin (Oxford) ha svolto un bellissimo intervento su Antonio Tabucchi, in cui ha analizzato il ruolo dei rimandi intertestuali nelle opere più conosciute, quali *Piccoli equivoci senza importanza* e *Sostiene Pereira*. È seguita una relazione su Alessandro Baricco di Elisabetta Tarantino (Warwick) in cui si è discusso in primo luogo della posizione che lo scrittore occupa nel panorama culturale contemporaneo e quindi della presenza di elementi nelle sue opere i quali hanno acquisito un carattere mitico. Monica Boria (Anglia Polytechnic) ha parlato di Stefano Benni, del suo umorismo ormai definito classico, dell'intento politico del suo lavoro, dell'estro creativo (architettura narrativa, creatività linguistica, divertimenti stilistici, giochi di allusioni). Infine, Marina Spunta (Leicester) ha presentato una relazione su Gianni Celati, in cui ha riflettuto su alcuni dei principali nodi tematico-stilistici della sua narrativa, quali la musicalità e la struttura flessibile del testo, il misterioso 'richiamo' degli spazi aperti (le 'pianure'), e il corrispondente uso di una lingua 'orale'. Non per nulla questa relazione è stata posta alla fine: Celati stesso era presente, ed ha successivamente partecipato ad un incontro-intervista con Marina e con il pubblico, svoltosi con divertita ironia e non senza polemiche.

Una cosa che, almeno per me, è venuta fuori da questo convegno, a parte il piacere di poter discutere della narrativa contemporanea con i colleghi, è stata la nozione che gli autori discussi scrivono spesso non solo per il piacere/diletto di raccontare, ma anche per porre domande, per esplorare, per sapere, per indagare sia sui miti personali sia su quelli dell'intera società. Ma se è vero quello che ha detto Celati, 'il narrare non è spiegabile né insegnabile', quali speranze ci sono per accademici e critici...?

La cena del convegno è stata preparata e servita dagli studenti dell'istituto alberghiero dell'università, i quali, secondo me, meriterebbero una promozione a pieni voti.

La mattina del sabato, invece, è stata dedicata a due serie di seminari didattici: la prima proponeva un incontro con 'Calvino', con il *Doppio regno: il romanzo delle donne in Italia*, o con 'il romanzo postmoderno italiano'; la seconda offriva una scelta tra 'Baricco', 'Benni' (poi annullato a causa di problemi tecnici), e 'La generazione dei giovani scrittori'. I seminari, almeno quelli a cui ho partecipato personalmente, hanno fornito parecchi spunti e dato l'occasione per discussioni proficue e stimolanti.

Gli atti del convegno verranno pubblicati nel 2004 con il titolo *Il romanzo contemporaneo: voci italiane*, Leicester, Troubador Italian Series.

Gillian Ania
University of Salford

CHRONICLE

Staffing Matters

It was with great sadness and a sense of loss that colleagues in Italian at the University of Manchester reported the death of Professor Maggie Gunsberg on July 3rd 2004, after a three-year battle against cancer.

At the University of Birmingham, the vacancies created by the departures of Silvia Evangelisti, who has taken up a post in history at UEA, and Jacqueline Visconti, who has returned to Italy, have been filled by Charlotte Ross and Paolo de Ventura.

2003-04 has seen expansion in Italian at the Universities of Bristol and St Andrews. In Bristol, Catherine Keen has been appointed to a newly created medieval studies post; St Andrews has appointed two new lecturers, Rossella Riccobono and Claudia Rossignoli, and a new *lettrice di ruolo*, Rita Casarini. Also at St Andrews, Ronnie Ferguson has been promoted to the Chair of Italian.

At University College Dublin, temporary appointments have been made to replace staff on research leave for the academic year 2004-05: they are Claudia Boscolo and Daragh O'Connell.

The University of Leeds has witnessed a number of staff changes this year. The vacancy created by the departure of Catherine Keen has been filled by an appointment in the modern period – Catherine O'Rawe joins the department from the University of Exeter. Rhiannon Daniels has been appointed to a British Academy-funded postdoctoral fellowship. Peter Fuller has retired; it is understood that a replacement post will be announced in 2005.

At the University of Manchester, Chloe Stephenson has been appointed to a temporary lectureship in Italian cinema. A chair has been advertised, following the sad death of Maggie Gunsberg.

In Wales, 2004 has seen the retirement of two long-standing professorial members of the SIS, both to be replaced at lecturer level. Remo Catani has retired from the University of Cardiff after an academic career spanning 40 years. The vacancy created by his retirement has been filled at lecturer level by Guyda Armstrong; Vanna Motta has taken over as Head of Italian Studies. Gino Bedani is now fully retired from the University of Swansea; a replacement lecturer post has been advertised.

Research Activities and Seminars

'Dante and the Human Body' was the 2003-04 theme for UCD's 32nd annual Dante Lecture series which heard papers presented by Oliver Davies (Wales, Lampeter), Simone De Angelis (Berne), Manuele Gragnolati (Oxford), Vivian Nutton (UCL), Joseph Ziegler (Haifa) and

Marco Sonzogni (UCD). At the department's 12th annual series of research seminars, papers were delivered by Andrea Comincini, Ursula Fanning, Brian Moloney, Daragh O'Connell, and Jennifer Petrie. Edited by Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin and Jennifer Petrie, *Patterns in Dante: Nine Literary Essays* was published by the UCD Foundation for Italian Studies.

A newly initiated Italian Departmental Research Seminar at Leeds heard papers by Verina Jones and by internal staff and postgraduate speakers. A volume of essays in honour of Dick Andrews was launched in July at an event attended by a number of contributors and by former students and colleagues.

Bristol hosted the annual occasional lecture of the Society for Renaissance Studies UK, delivered by Bette Talvacchia (Connecticut). The department also heard an invited lecture from Giulio Lepschy (Reading).

At the University of Manchester, Paola Nasti is organising a conference with Claudia Rossignoli on 'The Dante Commentary Traditions: Forms, Foundations, and Figuration of Critical Discourse' (1-3 April, 2005).

This year's biennial SIS Conference will be jointly organized by Salford, Manchester, and Manchester Metropolitan Universities, and held at the University of Salford (7-10 July 2005).

Honours and Awards

In 2003-04 the prestigious title of Cavaliere della Legione d'Onore was conferred upon Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin (TCD), Catherine O'Brien (NUI Galway), and both Stephen Gundle and Arturo Tosi (Royal Holloway UL). At Leeds, Brian Richardson was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2003.

At Cardiff, Fabio Vighi has been awarded AHRB-funded leave for 2004-05 to work on a book on Italian cinema; at UCD, Paolo Acquaviva and Ursula Fanning have both won research awards for 2004-05 from, respectively, the Irish government and UCD. Rhiannon Daniels has been awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship to be held at Leeds.

Other News

The Italian ambassador to the UK visited the Italian departments of the Universities of Oxford, Oxford Brookes and Salford.

Ruth Glynn
University of Bristol

SUBMISSIONS TO THE SIS WEBSITE

In an effort to facilitate the gathering of information, we include a schedule for the submission of material to the SIS website that has traditionally appeared in the *Bulletin*. All material may be in either Italian or English and should normally be sent in the body of an e-mail message. Attachments (formatted in Microsoft Word 2000 or above) may be used for longer documents. Submissions may be edited slightly for publication on the website.

The website is currently housed at: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sis/>
Details of the new website address will be announced in this location, and circulated to SIS members, later this academic year.

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Submissions are requested on the following topics, and may be sent throughout the year; postings of information will probably appear on the updated website every 2-3 months. Details should be sent to Dr Glynn at the above address:

- Conference Reports: reports (500-800 words) are welcomed from conference organisers or participants on Italian Studies conferences, and on interdisciplinary and other conferences of interest to Italianists.
- Staffing Matters: news on departmental appointments, promotions and retirements.
- Honours and Awards: news on distinctions achieved by members of departments, and on grants and awards.
- Research Activities and Seminars: news of department-based seminars, workshops, lecture series and other local research-related activities.
- Reports or notices of collaborative ventures and Italian-related events from departments and other sources are also welcome.

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Submissions are requested for the updating of the SIS Staff List for 2005-06, which will appear as usual in printed as well as electronic form. Details for the academic year 2005-06 should be sent to Dr La Penna by **Friday 26 August 2005**.