RIVISTA

2021

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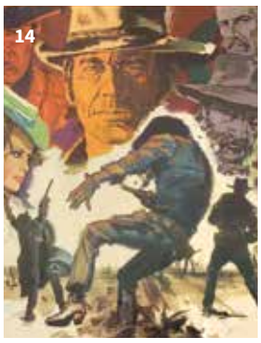
Riva in the movie

London between the two World Wars

The women who liberated Italy

Gaetano Donizetti

BIS British Italian Society



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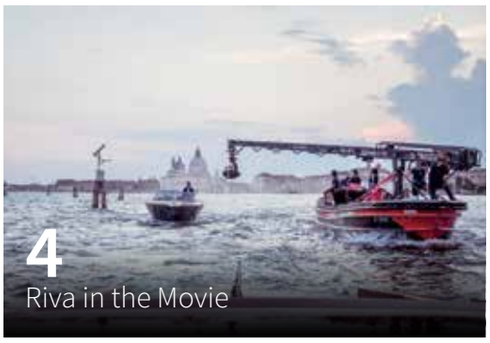


Disclaimer

Cover photo: Actor Pierfrancesco Favino and crew filming "Riva in the Movie" [see p.4]

Review of the year

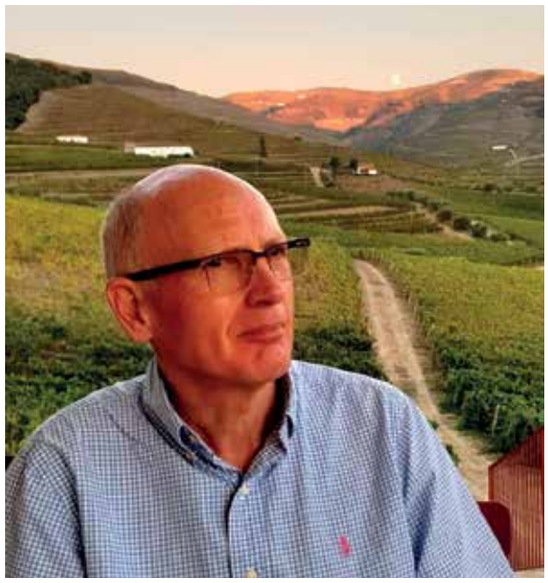
Richard Northern looks back on the year

As 2021 at last drew to an end, we were at last able to arrange events at live venues again (albeit with restrictions). We met in October to hear Susan Kikoler and Caroline Moorehead in conversation about Caroline's recent novel set among women partisans in Northern Italy. Many of us stayed on to dine together – for the first time in more than 18 months. This was followed by another outstanding Leconfield Lecture in November. Sir Christopher Grayling spoke about the making of the great Spaghetti Western films. Before that, we were fortunate to be able to host a series of stimulating and expert speakers on Zoom for our programme of virtual lectures. Themes ranged from *Riva in the Movie*, a delightful piece of cultural history and *fantasia*, to a first hand account of life in Bergamo at the height of pandemic and the way in which a local museum radio station reacted. More conventionally, we covered Donizetti and Bel Canto opera, the Italian language, a history of Freemasonry in Italy and political tensions and family life in the Italian community between the wars. Talks on cultural hubs in Italy and on the Pompeii@Madre exhibition showed lively developments in contemporary art in Italy building on cultural history. Carla Gambescia opened our autumn programme with a virtual quiz, which was great fun and full of unusual and entertaining facts about life in Italy through the ages.

We plan to record our lectures from now on, and to make the recordings available to members who are not able to join us at events in London. We will also continue to offer lectures on zoom from time to time.

The Society made a number of grants during the year to support worthy artistic, academic and other projects in line with its aims. These included:

- a donation of £500 to the Literary & Philosophical Society of Newcastle for a series of celebrations of Dante in December 2021.
- a contribution of £500 to the Keats Shelley Memorial Association in part sponsorship of the Keats Shelley Young Romantics Prizes in 2021.
- a donation of £500 to i Musicanti as a contribution towards the costs of recording Giovanni Bottesini's four quartets to mark the composer's bicentenary in 2021.
- a donation of £300 to the Italian School in London, partly in payment for their housing of the BIS Archives.



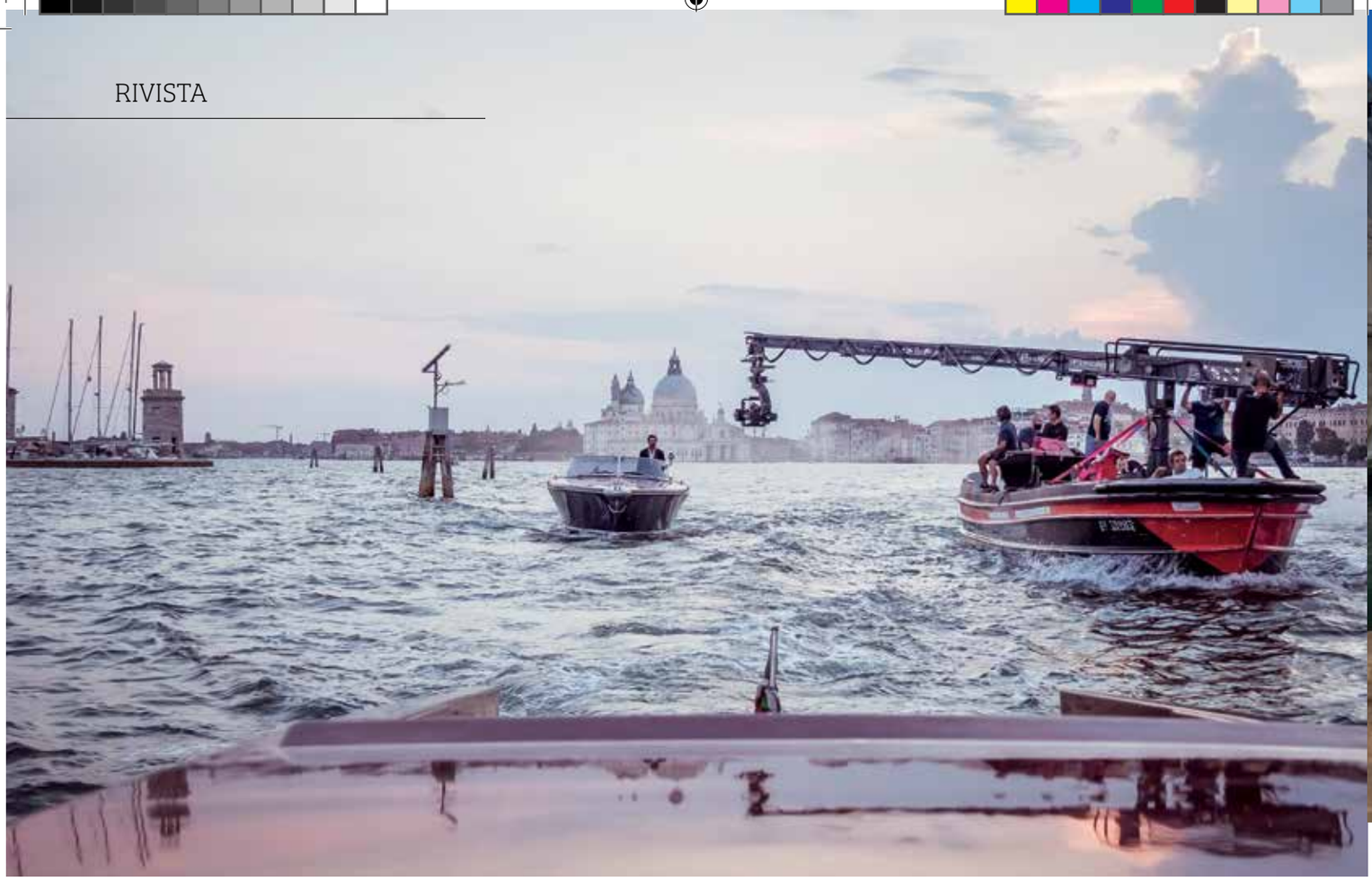
Richard Northern, BIS Chair

The Society again sponsored two national student prizes for translation from Italian in October 2020. The competition was organised by Warwick University. The winners were Ellie Tippett-Wilson of Durham University (first prize) and Ruby Kelman of Edinburgh University (second prize). The scheme was a great success, and the standard of entries high.

We are grateful, as always, to our Patron, Ambassador Raffaele Trombetta, for his support. We also thank Dr Katia Pizzi, the Director of the Italian Cultural Institute and a long-standing friend of the Society, for her active collaboration. Thanks are also due to our President, Olga Polizzi, for her wise guidance and generous support during the year.

I would also like to thank Rhuna Barduagni, who continues to provide an excellent service to the Society and its members, and Philippa Leslie, who has managed to produce another outstanding magazine in challenging circumstances.

We look forward to welcoming all *Rivista* readers to our new season of events in 2022.



KEEP DREAMING:

Riva in the Movie

Richard Northern on a fascinating talk

What could be a better antidote to a winter evening of enforced confinement at home during the pandemic than to be transported to Venice for a celebration of Italian creativity, beauty and 'imagination without limits'?

Michele Mariani, Executive Creative Director at the Armando Testa Group, and his colleague Raffaele Reineiro, brought us a very professional and inspiring presentation over the internet from their homes in Turin. They began, and ended, by presenting an award-winning short film, first shown at the Venice Film Festival in September 2020. The film, *Keep Dreaming: Riva in the Movie,* is a tribute to cinema, the Seventh Art, and its power to shape our dreams. It evokes memorable scenes, characters and soundtracks from classic Italian post-war films, especially those of Federico Fellini. The child who appears at the climax of the film, which was released in the year of the centenary of Fellini's birth, is even dressed to resemble pictures of the celebrated director as a child.

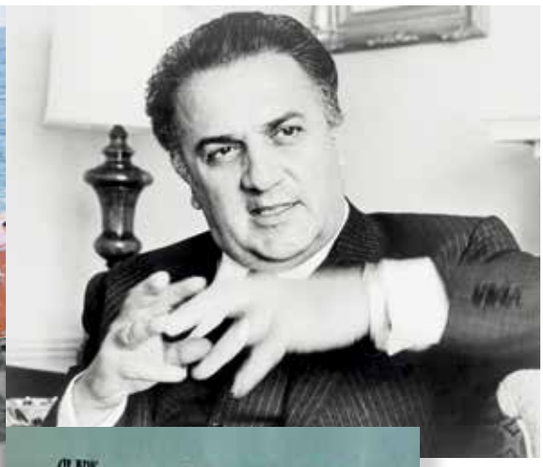
The film is also a tribute to the flair, elegance and excellence of Riva powerboats. The reputation and appeal of Riva vessels, especially the Aquarama (1962), have given the brand mythical status in Italy and beyond. Riva's appeal, like that of Italian cinema, reached a peak in the 1960's, during the period of the economic miracle and *la dolce vita.* Any film made in Italy at the time containing scenes shot on the coast or lakes or on the canals of Venice inevitably featured celebrities in a Riva speedboat.

> the flair, elegance and excellence of Riva powerboats

Enchanted Venice

But, above all, the film is a tribute to the beauty of Venice itself. The city appears enchanted. When the film was made at the end of the first period of lockdown in Italy, Venice was almost deserted, without tourists or commercial activity. As Raffaele explained, normal life appeared to have been suspended; silence reigned; and the low evening light gave the city a soft atmosphere of mystery and magic. A perfect setting for evoking dreams and wonder.

Michele explained how he and his colleagues came up with the ideas for the project, how they brought all the elements together, and how they achieved the overall impact. His presentation included an informative series of recorded explanations from key members of the team, including the film's Director, Federico Brugia and its protagonist, one of Italy's leading and most recognisable actors, Pierfrancesco Favino.



All images courtesy Ferretti Group except Pellini: Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1304085

Main photo and above: Pierfrancesco Favino and crew on location; centre: Brigitte Bardot on location for "Le Mepris"; Sophia Loren and Clark Gable on location for "La Baia di Napoli"; right: Carlo Riva; top right: iconic film director Federico Fellini, who is remembered in the film; bottom right: poster from "La Baia di Napoli"; right: Riva – the Book.

Raffaele introduced a short account of the history of the Riva company, from the early days of repairing fishermen's boats on Lake Iseo in 1842 to a description by the late Carlo Riva, great grandson of the founder, of how he moved the company upmarket in the 1950s and 1960s to produce luxury wooden yachts designed to outclass American competitors in design, elegance and quality. The Aquarama was the result. Its success was founded on high quality materials, artisan skills and attention to detail, but also on imaginative design and a commitment to excellence.

Riva the Movie

The storyline of the film develops around a book, *Riva the Book,* a genuine publication, which is now on sale. It contains a compendium of appearances by Riva speedboats in films over the years and of their association with famous actors, actresses and other celebrities. Photographs from the book, screened onto landmark Venetian buildings and set to Nino Rota's rousing score from *Otto e Mezzo*, provide the climax to *Riva the Movie*, as Favino looks on in wonder at the iconic images from the deck of his Aquarama on the Grand Canal.

The second showing of the film gave us a chance to appreciate the ingenuity, creativity and technical skills of Michele and his team. In conclusion, Michele and Raffaele said that the project was not just a celebration of Italian flair for creativity and design. It was also an attempt to bring people together at a time of enforced separation, and to encourage wider reflection. Above all, it was an invitation to set our imaginations free. We parted, amid festive greetings, repeating to each other the inspirational theme of the evening: *non smettere mai di sognare /keep dreaming*

Richard Northern

Richard Northern, the Society's Chairman, is a former diplomat and consultant

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Cultural innovation in Italy

How vision, creativity and determination are reversing decline

Professor Pier Luigi Sacco

We sometimes see news stories of houses in the North East of England selling for £17,000 and think what a bargain they are. The property is often in a sooty former miners' terrace staring across a deserted street under a leaden sky. At the same time we see stories from Italy showing a house in a lovely hilltop village with a medieval castle under a cloudless Mediterranean sky being sold for one euro. How can it be? Why do the Italians not appreciate their good fortune? Well, Italians will soon puncture our idealised view of their world. In the inner areas of Italy remote from the large cities the collapse of the local economy, poor infrastructure and a lack of basic services have led to a drying up of human presence. A nepotistic or mafia stranglehold on jobs, short-term poorly remunerated work for even the best qualified and the disaster of earthquakes have all led to massive emigration.
No wonder the Italian presence in the UK is growing and thriving as those with brains and initiative desert their lovely country. The greater the challenge the greater the need for vision, creativity and determination to reverse this trend.

In his fascinating talk on 8 February, Professor Sacco gave us three examples of how different adversities have affected three towns in Italy and how cultural initiatives, sometimes against great opposition, have been instrumental in revitalising them. The towns he chose were Favara near Agrigento in Sicily, San Sepolcro in Tuscany and L'Aquila in the Abruzzo; Favara, a run-down ugly little town of 30,000 citizens and controlled by the mafia; San Sepolcro, where an empty barracks was destined for oblivion and L'Aquila, faced with a mass exodus and decline following the devastating earthquake of 2009.

Favara becomes a tourist attraction

The story of Favara is perhaps the most miraculous of the three. Andrea Bartoli, a notary and his wife Florinda and their two little daughters live in Favara. Andrea did not want his daughters to grow up in a run-down unloved shanty town dominated by the mafia. He dreamt of transforming the town into a visitor attraction second only to the tourist attraction of the Valley of the Temples nearby. Fantasies are made of this. Andrea set about buying up unwanted properties in town, which included seven courtyards. Inspired by the experience of the rust-belt city of Detroit and Moroccan Kasbahs he invited local unknown artists to treat the facades of houses as blank canvases to make them attractive to people who would never go to an art gallery. He encouraged street markets and events. The elderly of the town became his fans, but it was when he set up a school of architecture called the Sou School of Architecture to teach children how to use public spaces that the movement began to accelerate. The children would go home and ask their parents to support change in the town. The mafia-controlled city hall tried to kill the initiative to create a cultural park but

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Main photo: ancient buildings of Favara

were overridden when 70,000 signatures supporting it were handed in. There are now 120,000 visitors a year to Favara, second only to the Valley of the Temples, just as Andrea and Florinda had wished. The Sou School of Architecture now has several branches in cities throughout Italy and the Farm Cultural Park's success has encouraged others in the town to start

> The fortunes of the Italian countryside may now be at a turning point

their own initiatives. "Architecture is for All" is now a powerful movement in Italy and Andrea and Florinda have attracted 20 million euros of investment in their projects and have created a company "For Good Deeds" whose purpose is to create a return by investing in socially beneficial projects.

San Sepolcro attracts famous artists

San Sepolcro is a depopulating town deep in Tuscany with the 18th century Palazzo Muglioni, an abandoned former Carabinieri barracks. With no funds and only her vision, a local artist and art history teacher Ilaria Margutti and her friend Laura decided to reclaim the space. They met with no opposition and turned the rooms of the palazzo into labs for young creatives to curate exhibitions. This rejuvenated the spaces by unleashing artistic energies that would have otherwise lain idle. Like Andrea Bartoli, Ilaria and Laura sought to reverse the declining fortunes of San Sepolcro through cultural initiatives. The success of the venture attracted famous artists which in turn encouraged the youngsters and the town developed an affection and pride in the Palazzo, so when the wiring of the palazzo failed local electricians offered their services to get it working again. Their exhibition "Super Beauty" attracted many famous Italian artists who gave their support and they have won prizes and offers to finance the development of their venture.

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Buildings in the historic centre of L'Aquila are propped up during reconstruction

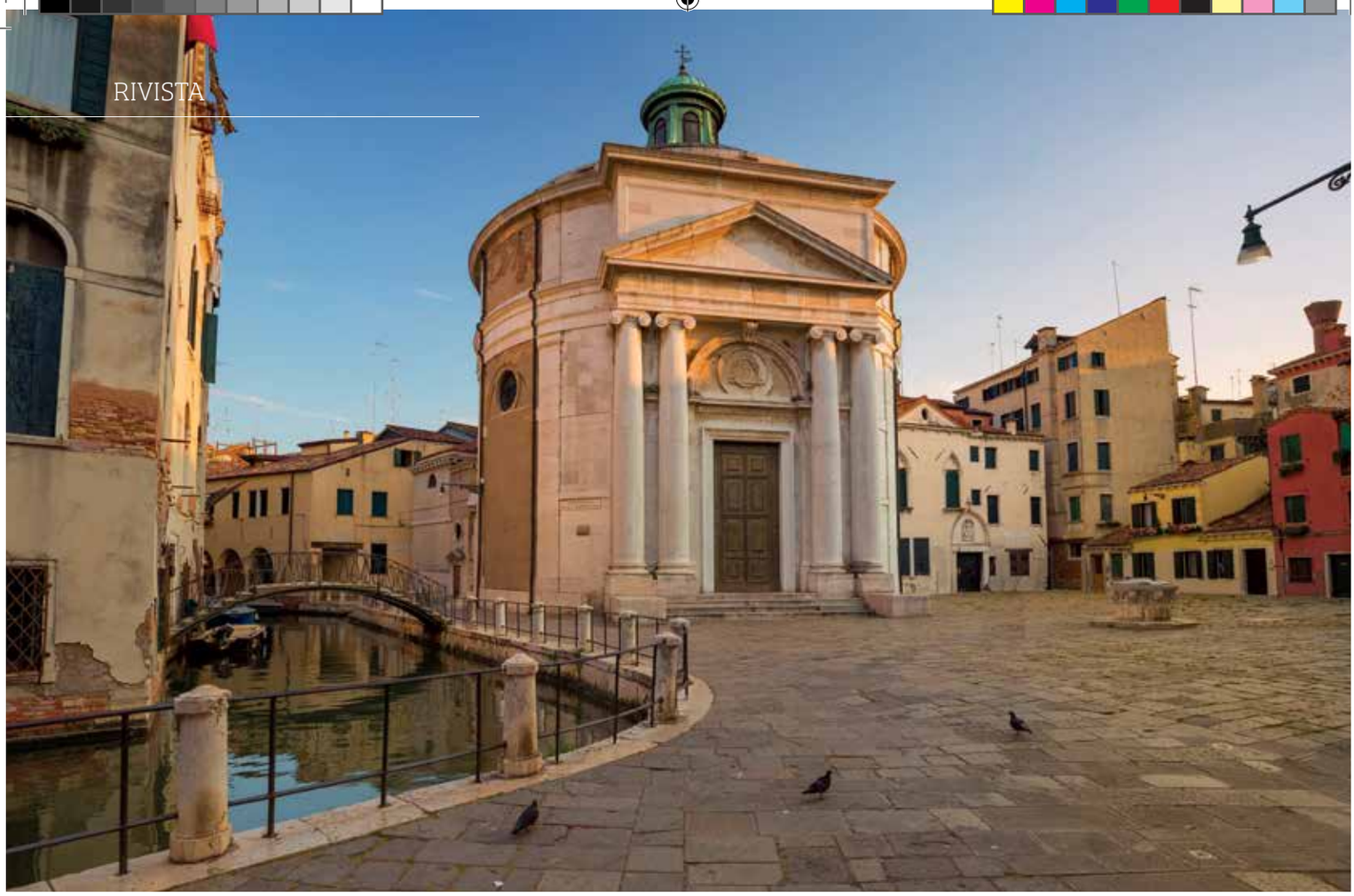
L'Aquila's new quality of life after the 2009 earthquake

The case of L'Aquila is quite different in the sense that it had been destroyed by the earthquake in 2009 and funding for its regeneration was provided by the State. The principles applied to the reconstruction were inspired by Kintsugi, the Japanese art of reconstructing broken pottery while retaining evidence of all the fractures. L'Aquila is now developing its new narrative around knowledge and culture. It is a university city, home to the famous Gran Sasso National Laboratory and is surrounded by the largest green belt in Italy. Many residents left after the earthquake but L'Aquila is now attracting newcomers with its excellent quality of life, earthquake resistant new buildings, innovative architecture and low cost of living. Cultural innovation has paid off.

Professor Sacco is himself involved in the L'Aquila project, has a keen interest in the arts and has a distinguished international career as a cultural economist. As he said at the outset, the fortunes of the Italian countryside may now be at a turning point. The pandemic has made teleworking the norm and the trend is to leave cities to seek a better quality of life. Thanks to the vision of Andrea, Florinda, Ilaria, Laura and Professor Sacco himself, Favara, San Sepolcro and L'Aquila are now more desirable destinations than ever.

Peter Crossley is a retired former journalist and entrepreneur married to Beatrice.

San Sepolcro and medieval city walls



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A mysterious craft

The strange history of freemasonry in Italy

Tom Richardson

John Dickie, professor of Italian studies at UCL London, has just published a book (*The Craft*) on freemasonry's contribution to the modern world. He treated the British Italian Society to a talk on the distinctive Italian version. When I think of modern British freemasonry, the images I have, maybe inaccurately, are of solid businessmen meeting and dining in clubs, making new contacts, helping each other and giving generously to charity. As Dickie said towards the end of his talk, "a lot of Italian freemasons are thoroughly decent people". I'm sure that my main masonic acquaintance in Italy, a lawyer from Taranto, was not about to plot the overthrow of the Italian Republic. Yet by some accounts, and however amateurishly, Licio Gelli and his P2 were fluttering around that flame in the 1980s.

Dickie sketched the history of masonry, which he traced back to the reign of James VI and I of Scotland and England. Christopher Wren was an early mason. In 1717 a Grand Lodge was founded in Britain and a rule book established. That was the springboard for freemasonry's expansion through Europe, North America and many parts of Asia. Its morality and goals during this early age of the Enlightenment could be defined as brotherhood, equality (at least formally), charity, mutual assistance, religious tolerance (at times bordering on a vague deism) and the century's growing belief in the power of reason and innovation. Many were the lodges but there was never a single organisation, nor a single leader. Rituals and layered oaths of secrecy were central to masonic practice, and they have come to dominate outsiders' perceptions.

> A certain aura of mystery surrounds Italian freemasonry

In Italy where, both before and after the French Revolution and Napoleon autocratic Catholic states largely ruled, masonry's distinctive elements were a hatred of the Roman Church and an intense and secretive opposition to the Austrians and other rulers of the Italian peninsula. That usually meant masonic support for the various French rulers of the peninsula between the 1790s and 1815, and Murat of Naples had used masonry as a political tool to attract the new men, the ambitious climbers, and the genuine reformers, both civil and military. After 1815 there were many ex-soldiers who plotted against Italy's restored dynasties, and a close offshoot of the masons, the Carbonari or charcoal-burners, soon slipped into revolutionary violence and

Main photo: Santa Maria Maddalena church (La Maddalena) in Venice showing the Eye of Providence, a masonic symbol, above the door; below: statue of Garibaldi in Rome.

demands for Italian unification. They were especially strong in Southern Italy.

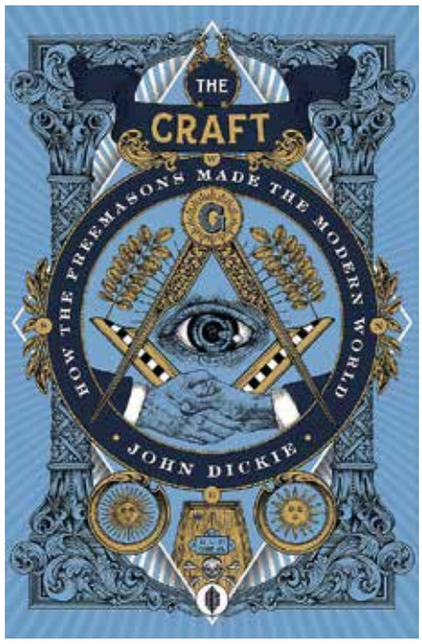
The Church had taken a stand against freemasons ever since Clement VII's excommunication of them in 1738. They were denounced as heretical, subversive, sodomite, egalitarian and morally questionable. (Dickie reminded us that Benedict XVI had repeated Clement's excommunication in 1983.) But then came Italy's unification, and freemasonry flourished. Prime Ministers like Crispi and Depretis – otherwise political opponents – were freemasons, and masonry became both "the antechamber of power" and a major source of corruption, for example in Rome's construction boom once it became the capital. Garibaldi, a mason himself, surveyed Rome provocatively from his huge statue on the Janiculum. It was a culture war against religion, and Dickie noted that up to the First World War the education ministry almost always went to an anti-clerical candidate. Though he didn't have time to mention it, changes were nevertheless in the wind: the liberal state, beleaguered by rising socialism on the left and nationalism on the right, started concluding electoral pacts with lay Catholic leaders.

Rapprochement between the state and the church

With fascism, this rapprochement between the state and the church took shape. For fascists, masons were the emblem of the corrupt and hated liberal regime of united Italy. Any secret society that wasn't fascist was automatically suspect. Mussolini came to recognise that a reconciliation with the Vatican, fascism's only serious remaining rival for popular support, was both necessary and possible. In the aftermath of attempts on Mussolini's life, in 1925 freemasonry was banned, and four years later the Lateran Treaty between church and state was signed. (The late Christopher Duggan's book, *Fascist Voices*, has several telling quotes from that period: the Vatican's equation of demo-liberalism and freemasonry, and a fascist's view of the coming conflict that "will end with the destruction … of Judaism, Freemasonry and plutocracy".)

The postwar period and P2

Dickie concluded with some brief remarks on the postwar period. The 1947 Republican constitution prohibited secret societies but did not mention masonry by name. This ambiguity – no doubt deliberate – remains today, and the two Grand Lodges still exist. As the Cold War developed, some people thought that freemasonry could provide (in Dickie's words) "moral stiffening" against a possible communist takeover in Italy. The then Grand Master entrusted to a relatively obscure ex-fascist and (in his words) "puppet-master", Licio Gelli, the job of making friends among the corridors of power. That became the notorious P2 list. The years of countless public enquiries that followed, the Banco Ambrosiano scandal, Sindona, Calvi's "suicide" under Blackfriars Bridge, all helped to destroy freemasonry's image in Italy. But the enquiries fizzled out, and it was never entirely clear whether P2 was a serious threat to democracy or a sleazy association of careerists, or a bit of both. What was undeniable, both then and now, were the continuing links between parts of southern Italian freemasonry and the secret societies of the Mafia, Camorra and Ndrangheta, the last of which is currently indicted in a maxi-trial. Dickie noted

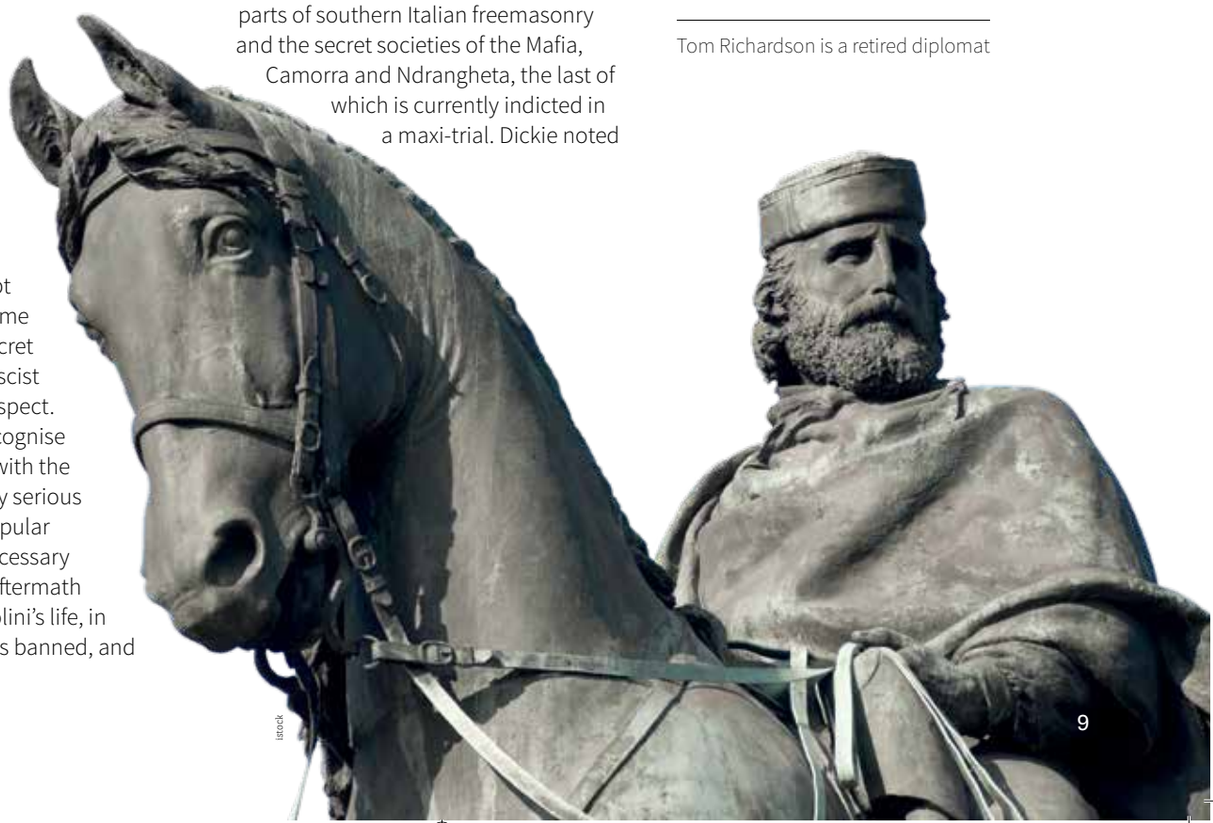


John Dickie's book

that organisationally all these groups' structures were very similar: the families, the cells, the oaths of secrecy and the penalties for their violation.

This was a fascinating talk, and inevitably we ran out of time. There is still a certain aura of mystery around Italian freemasonry, and John Dickie made it clear that much remains to be discovered. Maybe the British Italian Society could consider a follow-up talk at some future date on the narrower subject of Italian postwar freemasonry – the good, the bad, and the yet to be discovered?

Tom Richardson is a retired diplomat



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Live from Bergamo:

How the 'museum' Radio GAMeC faced the storm of coronavirus

A talk by Leonardo Merlini, 19 April 2021

While the Covid pandemic was still imposing lockdown restrictions in most of Europe, including Italy and the UK, Leonardo Merlini – Italian journalist, art and literary critic – shared with the British Italian Society, via Zoom, his experience as one of the initiators and protagonists of Radio GAMeC. The project was cited by UNESCO as one of the best museum initiatives in the world to have been born during lockdown.

Leonardo recalled the sequence of events: the first case of Covid in Italy was identified on 21st February 2020. On Saturday 7th March the Government decided to close the region of Lombardy completely: Lombardy became a 'red zone' and nobody knew what was going to happen. On 9th March the Government decided to close the entire country in a nationwide lockdown, the first in the world. To stress how difficult understanding the situation was, Leonardo mentioned that until mid March face masks – which later became compulsory almost everywhere – were not used yet. In this context, the Radio was created almost spontaneously in March 2020 in Bergamo – the city in the north of Italy which became the pandemic epicentre in Europe – by Lorenzo Giusti, the director of Bergamo's small but energetic Galleria d' Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAMeC).

Behaving like a radio: the voice from the frontline!

On 17th March Giusti contacted Leonardo, and then press consultant Lara Facco, saying he wanted to create a radio from Bergamo: he wanted to respond to the pandemic by becoming the voice of the area. In just five days they decided to do the most simple thing possible: to use Instagram Live, which allows the broadcasting of videos to your Instagram followers in real-time. They called themselves a radio and behaved like a radio. It was this intuition that made all the difference. Their aim was to raise money for the local hospital, which was in urgent need of supplies, to provide information about the pandemic, and address the horror of the situation. They wanted to be what Radio London was during WWII: the voice from the frontline, as was Bergamo during the first wave of the pandemic, in the eye of the storm.

> Lombardy became a 'red zone' where no one knew what was going to happen

In one of the intense emotional moments of the talk, Leonardo showed the most iconic image of the period. It went right round the world. It was the image of military trucks driving the coffins of the dead out of Bergamo, as there was no more space in Bergamo cemetery. It was a vision from hell, from the end of the world, and in fact at that time in Bergamo and across Italy tragedies were happening every day in every house. People were dying at home and in hospitals, often without knowing they were dying because of the virus, as there was little information about the virus itself.

A much needed message of hope

At the start — the first Radio episode took place on 22nd March — Radio GAMeC literally used Leonardo's mobile phone and their address books of contacts. They experienced technical issues, like guests not able to join because of poor internet connections. However, they wanted to provide a sense of community engagement, entertainment, and a much needed message of hope. Soon, their thirty-minute broadcast which went out every day at 11 am became a point of reference for so many listeners in Bergamo and around Italy that the public continue to thank them today for what they did: an example of what imagination and determination can achieve. It is in line with the Nike slogan 'Just do it'.

In fact, in its series of Instagram Live conversations, Radio GAMeC – which was a sort of fiction as Leonardo was actually physically in Milan and not in Bergamo, and Radio GAMeC was not a real radio – was able to attract a variety of national and international personalities, familiar and less familiar names: artists,

GAMeC

Lorenzo Giusti, director of Bergamo's Galleria d' Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAMeC).

GAMeC

Niccolò Caranti, CC BY-SA 3.0, commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=26564222

Radio GAMeC

Radio GAMeC guest ex Italian PM Enrico Letta; exhibition space at Galleria d' Arte Moderna e Contemporanea; Radio GAMeC outside broadcast unit; Nic Cester & The Milano Elettrica

curators, politicians, doctors, designers, scientists, musicians, writers and athletes, who were invited to talk about a range of topics – culture, movies, cinema, books, politics. Their guests included Giorgio Gori, Bergamo's mayor; ex Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta; Italian pop star Lorenzo Giovannotti; Swiss artist Thomas Hirshhorn, who gave his versions of the present and rethought the present from an artist's point of view; English writer Tom McCarthy, who talked about how difficult reading and writing was during that period, as people were buying books but not reading them; American Lebanese artist Simone Fattal; German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans; Italian artistic duo Masbedo; a dancer and performer with physical disability, Chiara Bersani; a priest who worked with the poor on the streets of Bergamo; ex Italian cultural Minister Giovanna Melandri; the Italian pop TV star Jerry Scotti; and the Olympic gold medallist Michela Moioli.

One morning their guest was a physician from the emergency ward in Bergamo's main hospital, in the centre of the emergency, in the hell of the hospital theatre, knowing what many did not yet know. Another morning they invited an 'influencer' with thousands of followers on Instagram: Leonardo did not know what to ask her, it was his most difficult interview; however he wanted to have her point of view, as he wanted Radio GAMeC to open its doors to the widest possible audience,

> ...the opportunity to understand something different...

to all different kinds of culture, both high and low, and including popular culture. As a literary critic, Leonardo started every episode with a reading and finished with a poem. The reading he chose for the first episode was from the Israeli philosopher Yuval Noah Harari:

'Humanity needs to make a choice. Will we travel down the route of disunity, or will we adopt the path of global solidarity? If we choose disunity, this will not only prolong the crisis, but will probably result in even worse catastrophes in the future. If we choose global solidarity, it will be a victory not only against the coronavirus, but against all future epidemics and crises that might assail humankind in the 21st century.'

– Yuvai Noah Harari

The talk finished with what Leonardo defined his most 'dadaist' moment: reading Dante's Canto XIII, where Dante pushes Filippo Argenti away, as if he were struggling with himself and his incapability to be a better person, as if he were pushing away his bad character and behaviour. And he concluded that — if we are not afraid of reading Dante — we should not be afraid of contemporary culture, of what it seems we do not understand, of entering museums of contemporary art, of thinking about museums in a different way; we should not be afraid of giving ourselves the opportunity to understand something different, something we had not understood or felt before.

Silvia Badiali, BIS Director of Cultural Programme

Gaetano Donizetti:

triumph and tragedy in the world of bel canto opera

A talk by Jonathan Keates

Jonathan Keates' forthcoming biography of Gaetano Donizetti will be the first full-length biography of the composer in fifty years. It springs from a boyhood discovery of Donizetti through the opera *Linda di Chamounix* and the realisation that there was something about Donizetti's music that "spoke" to him. On May 19th Jonathan Keates' continuing contagious delight in the music was evident to everyone privileged to attend his Zoom lecture, delivered with verve and exuberance.

Gaetano Donizetti was in his time the most successful Italian opera composer in Europe but after his death and by the beginning of the 20th century only three out of his almost 70 operas were still in the regular opera repertoire – *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *L'elisir d'amore* and *Don Pasquale*. Interest was revived only after World War II when *Anna Bolena, Poliuto, Roberto Devereux*, *Maria Stuarda* and *Lucrezia Borgia* were revived to showcase the *bel canto* talents of Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland and Montserrat Caballé. Once overshadowed by his rival Bellini, Donizetti today is once again a staple of the opera house repertoire worldwide.

Gaetano Donizetti was born into great poverty in Bergamo in northern Italy in 1797 but had the good fortune to study as a pupil in the charity school for poor boys set up by Simone Mayr, an internationally famous Bavarian opera composer who recognised Donizetti's musical talent even in his early compositions. Mayr decided his protégé should continue his studies in Bologna where Donizetti composed a one-act opera *Il Pigmalione*. This in turn led him to be invited to the Teatro Goldoni in Venice and then to Naples, a city he came to love. For Naples he wrote *La Zingara* and incorporated Neapolitan comedy tradition in his operas with roles for dialect performers too.

> In his time, the most successful Italian opera composer in Europe

In 1824, after a disappointing failure in Milan mainly due to problems caused by the uneasy political climate of the time, Donizetti achieved success in Rome with *L'ajo nell'imbarazzo*, later re-worked for Naples as *Don Gregorio* and popular throughout Europe. An attempt to run the Palermo opera house as both impresario and composer in 1825 proved unfortunate and by 1827 Donizetti had returned to Naples.

In 1828 Donizetti finally married Virginia Vasselli after a prolonged betrothal resulting from the opposition of his father to the match, and then gained further operatic success in Rome with *L'esule di Roma* starring the great dramatic bass Luigi Lablache (later Princess Victoria's singing teacher).

Exploring a romantic and tragic style of opera

In composing *Anna Bolena* Donizetti then explored a more Romantic and tragic style of opera creating roles that challenged both the dramatic as well as vocal talents of the acclaimed soprano Giuditta Pasta in the title role and leading tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini as Percy. However this kind of Romantic opera with its tragic story of forbidden love was also the forte of the Sicilian, Vincenzo Bellini, who became bitterly jealous of his rival. Despite this Donizetti himself remained generously disposed towards Bellini and even wrote a requiem to commemorate his death.

This was a triumphant time for Donizetti with *L'elisir d'amore* and *Lucrezia Borgia* produced in Milan and *La Parisina* a triumph in Florence. However Donizetti could occasionally fall foul of local censors especially after Queen Maria Christina of Naples was scandalised by the colourful epithets hurled in the confrontation scene of *Maria Stuarda*!

Rossini was a great admirer of Donizetti's work and in 1835 invited the composer to Paris. (Donizetti conducted the first performance of Rossini's *Stabat Mater.*) Although not achieving success in his first opera there, Donizetti was influenced by the French music scene, becoming a friend of Adolph Adam who, in turn, writing his ballet music for *Giselle*, may have been influenced by the mad scene in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

This was a time of great success and status for Donizetti. He even owned his own carriage for travelling. Then tragedy struck. Two of his children died and in 1837 he lost his beloved wife Virginia together with their third child. Donizetti was distraught and buried himself in work.

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Gaetano Donizetti, lithograph by Roberto Focosi

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Above: Bergamo, where Donizetti was born in 1979. He was buried in Bergamo's Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore (right) in 1848

istock

He returned to Paris in 1838 where *Poliuto*, based on a Corneille story of a Christian martyr, failed due to the censor's disapproval of its theme. However a later re-working of the opera as *Les Martyrs* was a success. Donizetti's greatest success at this time was *La Favorita.* Richard Wagner, living in Paris at the time, hated Donizetti. Yet he earned money by transcribing the music from *La Favorita* for the piano and Wagner's own operas, such as *Tannhauser* and *Tristan and Isolde*, are clearly influenced by the Italian composer's writing. Giuseppe Verdi was a great admirer of Donizetti and his influence on Verdi's compositions can be seen in *La Traviata, Simon Boccanegra, Otello* and the Overture to *Nabucco*.

Brilliant career, tragic end

In 1842 Donizetti travelled to Vienna to take up the post of Court Composer but tragically, at this point, he was in the grip of tertiary syphilis which destroys the brain and spine. Donizetti's mood swings and erratic behaviour could no longer be ignored. His last letters were totally incoherent.

In 1845 Donizetti was committed to an asylum outside Paris until 1847 when his nephew, Andrea, brought him back to Bergamo. He died there on April 8th 1848 at the age of 50 – a tragic end to such a brilliant career. He was buried in Bergamo in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore next to the German composer Simone Mayr.

Gaetano Donizetti's output was huge and varied. He produced nearly seventy operas of varying lengths, both comic and tragic, Church music, symphonies, numerous string quartets, songs, sonatas and chamber music and according to the conductor, Mark Elder, was an excellent orchestrator.

Perhaps Felix Mendelssohn should have the last word. When hearing Jenny Lind perform in Donizetti's popular *La Fille du Régiment* Mendelssohn hailed the opera as a work of genius and said he only wished he could have written it himself.

Susan Kikoler

Susan Kikoler is a cultural historian with a focus on Sicily. She is Honorary Director of the British Italian Society

'Once Upon a Time in the West: Shooting a Masterpiece'

Professor Sir Christopher Frayling delivered the 65th Leconfield Lecture

Dr Jonathan Punt

Dr Katia Pizzi (Director, Italian Cultural Institute) warmly welcomed a live audience, and emphasised the shared mission of the Institute and the Society in maintaining and strengthening mutual cultural objectives.

Introducing Sir Christopher Frayling, Richard Northern (Chairman, British Italian Society) thanked the Society's patron, His Excellency Raffaele Trombetta, (Italian Ambassador to the UK) for his support.

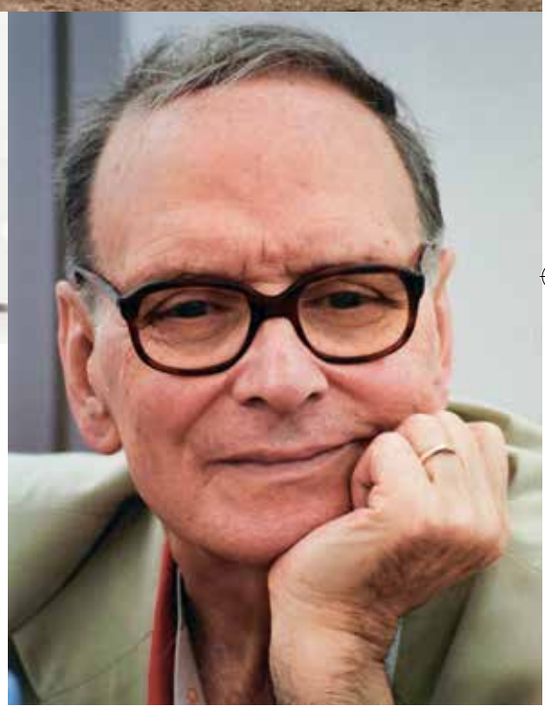
The Leconfield Lecture was inaugurated in 1963 by the then Chairman, Sir Ashley Clarke (former United Kingdom Ambassador to Italy and Chairman of Venice In Peril) in memory of Hugh Wyndham, later Lord Leconfield, the first Chairman of the Society.

Sir Christopher Frayling's wide-ranging achievements in the fields of contemporary and modern art, design, film, and the history of ideas include extensive publications and commentaries on 'Spaghetti Westerns': his analysis of Sergio Leone and his *capolavoro* '*C'era una Volta il West* [Once Upon a Time in the West]' (1967), are amongst the most authoritative and definitive studies in the field.

> Sir Christopher delivered gems at a rate equivalent to the fastest of Leone's gunslingers, enhancing the audience's knowledge to a level equal to the body counts in any of Leone's five Spaghetti Westerns!

Sir Christopher delivered gems at a rate equivalent to the fastest of Leone's gunslingers, enhancing the audience's knowledge to a level equal to the body counts in any of Leone's five Spaghetti Westerns! The first meeting (1964) between a cigar-smoking Leone and Clint Eastwood provoked analogies of Michelangelo and blocks of marble respectively in the two men's minds, signalling a spectacular showdown on the silver screen. What was unpredictable was the pronounced change in opinion over the next 30 years as to the merits and status of these productions as serious cultural references to be regarded as 'author' films rather than 'genre' films: in particular the Italian elements being more interesting than the American, to the point that Italian Westerns are more

Almeria/Shutterstock / Morricone: CC BY-SA 3.0 wikipedia.org/wiki/Ennio_Morricone#/media/File:Ennio_Morricone_Cannes_2007.jpg



Main photo opposite: Original Italian film poster; top right: Almeria in Spain – the iconic location used in many Westerns; Clint Eastwood on set; composer Ennio Morricone in 1975

fashionable than the American item. By transmuting American myth through the genius of Italian imagination, Leone created a cultural hybrid that has had more influence on World Cinema than that of any other Italian film director.

The 'Western all'italiana'

The term 'Spaghetti Western', coined in 1967 as a shorthand descriptor drawn from the names given to cheap, cheerful, inauthentic eating houses outside Italy, was anathema for many years in Italy. Ennio Morricone so vilified the appellation that he would threaten to disengage from interviews if it were uttered. Leone could not understand what the term was intended to convey, even questioning whether a parallel between a piece of spaghetti and a lasso was intended. '*Western all'italiana*' is the preferred nomenclature.

In the 1960s Westerns were declining in popularity and production in the USA, but were popular in Italy where they were seen mainly at cinemas, television not being widely available, especially in the South. Part of the brilliance was the production of films at very low cost: for example, $200,000 for '*Per un Pugno di Dollari* [A Fistful of Dollars]' (1964). Italian finance, interiors shot in Rome ('*Hollywood on the Tiber*'), and exteriors shot in Almeria, Spain, were part of the magic formula.

Sir Christopher cited Umberto Eco in *Reflections on the Name of the Rose* (1994) as characterising the post-Modern attitude

as an *'era of lost innocence*'.

Sir Christopher has previously identified three fundamental plots in Italian Westerns: the Goldoni-derived '*The Servant of Two Masters*' (1746), as referenced in '*Per un Pugno di* Dollari'; second, its variant which introduces historical features; and third, the 'Zapata-Spaghetti' plot, as in Leone's fifth and final Western '*Giù la testa*' [Duck, You Sucker/ A Fistful of Dynamite] (1971). '*C'era una Volta il West*' lies in the second category. Leone's cinematic background came from early exposure in his youth to US Westerns, followed by a flood of US films into the Italian market, and the debased coinage of US television programmes in the 1940s to 1960s; the production of US-directed epics in Italy on account of fiscal reasons; his disillusionment upon meeting US troops in occupied Italy; and the final closure of the US frontier that came with the railroads and capitalism.

> Part of the brilliance was the production of films at very low cost: for example, $200,000 for '*Per un Pugno di Dollari*' [A Fistful of Dollars]

'*C'era una Volta il West'* had its origins in the occasion of the first public showing of '*Il Buono, il Brutto, il Cattivo* [The Good, The Bad and the Ugly]' (1966), in Rome on 21 December 1966. Attendees included Dario Argento and Bernardo Bertolucci, who met Leone immediately after the screening. Bertolucci praised Leone's depiction of horses as '*a chorus of backsides*' as more impressive than the camera angles habitually deployed by other directors, drawing from Leone a proposal that they make a film together. The result was that, in early 1967, Leone, Argento and Bertolucci conferred intensively, studying countless Westerns, gangster films and contemporary cinema: thus was born the ultimate Italian Western. It is unsurprising that the resulting film contained no fewer than 35 references to older Westerns. Notable among these are the opening sequence – '*High Noon*' (Fred Zinnemann, 1952); and the following two sequences – '*Shane*' (George Stevens, 1953), and '*The Searchers*' (John Ford, 1956). The *ingenio* of Leone was the irony of reversing many of the references by inverting the clichés.

Italian film poster for "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" (1966)

The resultant *soggetto* of approximately 100 pages, written by Leone, Argento and Bertolucci, was converted into the *sceneggiattura* by Sergio Donati and Leone within a month. Filming of exteriors was principally in Almeria, Spain, with only a short scene shot in Monument Valley, Arizona-Utah, from which buckets of red sand were taken to the olive-coloured sand of Almeria. The construction of a three-floor wooden ranch building in the tree-less Almeria desert was assisted by the presence there of a large quantity of wood remaining from Orson Welles' film '*Chimes at Midnight*' (1965). The casting of Henry Fonda as the killer with ambitions to become a businessman, giving him the same name (Frank) as the vengeful criminal of '*High Noon*', added to the shock of audiences in an early scene in which Frank completes the slaughter of an entire family by shooting a child. Clint Eastwood declined the rôle of the lone avenger (Harmonica), taken by Charles Bronson, whose '*face like Mount Rushmore*' matched Leone's concept. Sir Christopher cited the intense close-ups of the main protagonists, shot in Techniscope, leaving exquisite facial movements to do the acting, as exemplifying Umberto Eco's reference to '*the cinema of frozen archetypes'* partying amongst themselves – single archetype would have resulted in a terrible film: 100 were, indeed, sublime.

Indelible images

Sir Christopher gave special credit to the production designer, Carlo Simi, an archetypal Italian design polymath, being also an architect and a costume designer. The reference to archive photographs in the design of the railway station in the opening sequence with the use of railway sleepers; the deployment of a Spanish locomotive; the detail of the interior of the ornate railway carriage used by the dying Morton (the businessman who fancied himself as a gunfighter); the long leather coats of Cheyenne (the romantic bandit) and his men; all these features resulted in indelible images.

As with his 'Dollars Trilogy', Leone's creativity benefitted from Morricone's atmospheric composition. Crucially, the score was composed before the film was shot and laid on after, but a guide track was played during the shooting, no doubt adding to the balletic effects as seen in earlier Leone Westerns, notably the denouement in '*Il Buono, il Brutto, il Cattivo*' (illustrated in the lecture). Morricone, unsatisfied by his composition for the opening scene of '*C'era una Volta il West'*, drew upon an item heard at a concert of avant-garde music to create an accompaniment of amplified other sounds. Sir Christopher included a unique filmed record of this component of the production taken from a German documentary '*Leone in Rom*' (1967, Bayerischer Rundfunk).

A myth about a myth

The Hollywood Western was born from a myth: the Italian Western was a myth about that myth, in which the guile, ingenuity and street-wisdom of misanthropic protagonists were contrasted against the heroic qualities and epic tones portrayed in US Westerns. The message of '*C'era una Volta il West'* is to be found in the proper understanding of the Italian title, namely '*There once was a West*'. In his introductory remarks, Sir Christopher likened the drama and starkness of Italian Westerns to the art of Caravaggio, whose own life had some similarities to that of Leone's characters. '*C'era una Volta il West'* was Leone's gift to America. This memorable Leconfield Lecture, only the second devoted to Italian cinema, was a gift to the British Italian Society, illuminating features of Italian *ingenio* and *invenzione*.

Dr Jonathan Punt

Former Consultant and University Senior Lecturer in Neurosurgery. Recently retired from second career as a Barrister at Law.

The Pompeii Commitment project

'Pompeii has always been contemporary'

Andrea Vilani and Stella Bottai on a cooperation between the Naples MADRE Museum and the Archaeological Park of Pompeii

This webinar on 5 July provided a fascinating outline of the new approach to appreciating the ruins of Pompeii. Richard Northern, British Italian Society Chairman, introduced Dr. Andrea Vilani and Dr. Stella Bottai and the Pompeii Commitment project, which is the result of the cooperation between the Naples MADRE Museum and the Archaeological Park of Pompeii.

Andrea Vilani, joint creator and co-curator of the Pompeii Commitment, is artistic director at the MADRE. Stella Bottai, a co-curator, has served on numerous international panels and co-curated the 2019 Venice Biennale.

The POMPEII@MADRE vision

Andrea Vilani reminded us that following its "reappearance" in the mid-18th century, Pompeii rapidly became a key stop on the Grand Tour. Its visitors re-lived Pompeii through the filter of their own experience, creating their own versions of the city. In this way Pompeii has always been multi-faceted, with as many existing contemporary visions of Pompeii as there are visitors.

The city has suffered three great tragedies, fighting back after each one: the major earthquake in AD 62, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 and in August 1943, two nights of air raid bombing (World War II "collateral damage") which seriously damaged the city again.

In 2017 Vilani consulted with Massimo Osanna, then Director of Pompeii's Archeological Park (*currently Direttore Generale dei Musei del Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività)*. Osanna was convinced of his field of study as contemporary: "Pompeii has always been contemporary". He asked Vilani to help reaffirm the uniqueness of Pompeii not only as a tourist attraction but as a site which has been destroyed, regenerated, and transformed by nature. Vilani proposed hosting an exhibition in a contemporary art museum to showcase the abiding value of Pompeii's archaeological ruins and to celebrate the transformation and recurring new lives of Pompeii, over time.

The exhibition: re-interpreting the ruins

In preparing the exhibition Vilani and Osanna visited the hidden part of Pompeii: the storage rooms where organic and inorganic fragments are kept. They decided that this humble material should be a key element of the project, presented as inspiration for new interpretation by new artists.

It is the source of a continuous flow of learning, and the range of its material can inspire contemporary artists

Vilani took us on a virtual tour of the exhibition, which presents Pompeii's history in various artistic interpretations. These included Piranesi etchings, drawings by Le Corbusier, watercolours by early British and German tourists, analogue and digital photographs, a novel by Susan Sontag, and even a recording of a Pink Cloud concert held at Pompeii in the early 1970s with no audience, honouring the city's dead. All these works sought not to document Pompeii's remains but to reinterpret them.

One gallery exhibits a copy of Andy Warhol's painting of Vesuvius erupting, based on sketches he made on site and transformed. The walls are hung with views of Vesuvius by international artists, and two plain white central structures hold the 'archaeological matter'.

In celebrating the transformative potential of Pompeii, where death and life have been present so dramatically, the exhibition illustrates not only how the city's past can become our present but how our present existed in the past.

The Pompeii Commitment – a living research centre

Stella Bottai described the Pompeii Commitment – the ambitious, brilliantly curated project which realises the MADRE vision, and for which she became co-curator at the invitation of Andrea Vilani.

Pompeii itself is not a heart breaking ruin – it is very much alive as a research centre where archaeologists, botanists and other experts study its organic and inorganic remains. It is the source of a continuous flow of learning, and the range of its material can inspire contemporary artists.

Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina

Above and right: Inspiration in archaeological artefacts: top right: The eruption of Vesuvius by Pierre Jacques Volaire (1776); right: The Mdre (Donnaregina Contemporary Art Museum)

The Pompeii Commitment represents the first time Pompeii's Archaeological Park has led a contemporary programme. It is structured in two phases: the development of a research centre which studies physical remains but works to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between artists and the professionals working at Pompeii, and in the longer term, the creation of a collection of contemporary art.

In the first phase the curators have developed a method by which artists can engage with Pompeii. They guide the commissioning exercise, seeking a balance between the art forms presented – sculpture, textual, aural and digital – to ensure that works commissioned are by artists accessible to younger generations. They invite artists to contribute work from a range of approaches – age, gender, nationality and culture – to allow for reflection on Pompeii from a diversity of angles.

The curators are inspired by the hope that this major multifaceted study will challenge the view we have of that past, and even perhaps provide a vision of the future. Via the Pompeii Commitment's portal (pompeiicommitment.org) the project offers a direct experience, providing virtual access to the knowledge and art that Pompeii has generated over time.

The second phase of the project, the creation of contemporary art works, is clearly illustrated in the portal. Multiple timelines, spaces, art forms, materials, make Pompeii's history more accessible – it is the Pompeii Commitment.

The portal provided a stream of new research and new art until the end of December 2021. Some of it will form part of Pompeii's own contemporary art collection or join the collections of other museums. The art so created is not destined for the art market.

Bottai scrolled through the portal, showing many valuable elements from the Inventario of hundreds of objects from the store rooms, in most cases never before published.

She also mentioned a collaboration between the Commitment and

London's Serpentine Gallery, a shared understanding of the interweaving between nature and culture. Artists from the Serpentine's General Ecology Programme have contributed to the Commitment's portal.

The Commitment project is mainly funded by the Pompeii Archaeological Park (ie, the State), with some private funding. Major sponsors are appreciated partners, visionaries who can challenge the management with their own views. At the end of this year, the Pompeii Commitment will publish all contributions. Although it is not yet clear where the project will lead in 2022, the portal will remain open.

Andrea Vilani reminded us of the national and international relevance of Pompeii@ MADRE and the Pompeii Commitment. Nationally, it offers Italians the opportunity to re-visit and reflect on their cultural heritage. This heritage, economically, politically and culturally vital, has little value if it is not shared, viewed, discussed and constantly updated. MADRE has brought artists, intellectuals, professionals, and other viewers together to this task. In an international context, it has considered what cultural heritage can mean to us today, and presented contemporary art as a key contributor. The Pompeii Commitment has formalised this approach with immense boldness and success.

Marilyn Clark

Marilyn Clark lives in London, Luxembourg and Italy. She and her husband David bought an old olive mill in the foothills of the Monti Sibillini (Marche) decades ago.

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A house in the mountains:

the women who liberated Italy

Susan Kikoler talks with author Caroline Moorehead

Susan Kikoler opened the 4th October evening as a particularly happy celebration – the Society's first live event since lockdown receded. And additionally, the occasion celebrated a return visit from the renowned author Caroline Moorehead, OBE, FRSL, who last spoke to us about '*A bold and dangerous family*' – the brave and tragic story of the Rosselli brothers. In welcoming Caroline, Susan explained that '*A house in the mountains*'* is an immensely moving book, which covers the period July '43 – April '45, and looks at the lives – and risks – of inspiring women in time of war.

Susan asked why this topic? Caroline said that it was really by chance. In researching the murders of the Rosselli brothers in 1937, it became apparent that there were many women working in the Resistance in northern Italy, but that little was known about them. Of the 600,000 partisans, around 70,000 were women, most very young. Their mothers knew what they were doing but saw it as honourable – although some stopped their daughters from taking part, more because they were thus saving themselves.

The perfect partisan country

In writing the book, the focus was to look into the histories of some of these women, which took Caroline to the Resistance Archive in Turin. There she found a diary by Ada Gobetti who had written of her experiences as an activist, all the while looking after her small son. Other women we meet are Bianca, a lawyer, Silvia, a student and Frida, an administrator. Susan asked: what was the role of women under Fascism. Caroline explained: when Mussolini arrived in 1922, women did not have the vote. And under Fascism, which was deeply anti-feminist, the lives of women diminished. Why centre her work on Turin? It was because it was at that time the intellectual capital of Italy. It was full of cafes, leftist literature writers and supporters, and it was a large Jewish city. The hinterland was perfect partisan country.

In her preface, Caroline chooses the date of 12 March 1945 as being highly significant. On that day, three young partisan women who were at home were taken by young fascists to a canal where they were shot (one was pregnant, she survived, but died nine months later). 2000 women from Turin attended the funeral, following the caskets to the cemetery.

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Main photo: the iconic image used on the book cover

They all wore red. Moves toward Liberation were in the air.

The women of the book – Ada, Bianca, Silvia, Frida – had their own stories. Ada, small, feisty, the widow of Piero Gobetti, had kept a diary since 1941. She emerged as a leader. Bianca, about 24/25, was a law student and the girlfriend of Primo Levi. Silvia was a young doctor. She lived with some of her medical colleagues, and had a young son. Frida, the fourth portrait, was interested in local government and saw the role of these Resistance women as women concerned about the future.

The '*staffette*' – fearless, courageous women

The wonder was that these fearless, courageous women, who were risking their lives, also had young children to look after. Their support for the Resistance was very often as *staffette* – the runners who carried messages on bikes from location to location. But they began to see they could do more. One was Lisetta, seven months pregnant when she was picked up by a band of young fascists whose leader had a torture centre in Milan. Extraordinarily, she was rescued by distracting the guards and escaping (her daughter is the eminent historian, Anna Foa). Many of the *staffette* took first aid courses and the partisan men were very reliant on these women, who were their only contact with headquarters and with their families. One 14-year old *staffetta* was Oriana Fallaci.

An important question: what was the

An exciting, but brutal time

Allies' attitude to the partisans? Caroline explained that she had researched the war reports here, and found them to be very disparaging, referring to the partisans as the 'maccaronies' who shouldn't be taken seriously. The American and the British had different attitudes – the British were bitterly opposed to Communism, but the Americans were more sympathetic. There was a growing standoff between them, and the Communist partisans in Turin rose up against the British Commandant who had changed his orders to take Turin. At the time, Ada, who was in charge of the *staffette* in Turin, gathered them together

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Above: Staffette relaxing together; right: Ada Gobetti practising firing a gun

Public domain

in her house. It was a very exciting but brutal time! The Fascists in the north hanged or shot partisans. But at the end of the war many of them were punished. What happened to traitors? The partisans shot them, or arrested them. In 1948 Togliatti declared an amnesty and so the Fascists were released. But the tide had turned against the partisans. To celebrate the end of Fascism, there was a march organised on 6 May. But there were no women marching: they were not allowed to. The few who defied orders were hissed at as they marched.

After the war, Ada went back to being a teacher. The others went back to leading normal lives. Only in the 1970s did women begin to write their memories. One concerns Matilda di Pierantonio, a 20-year old who kidnapped German soldiers and ransomed them! Another is Suor Giuseppina, difficult, demanding, challenging, who was the director of women in the main Turin prison. Many were sent to Auschwitz, but she managed to save their children by hiding them and then arranging to get them out of the prison.

The Allies wanted Italy to keep out Communism, but the Allied Commission was aware that a lot of the politically sympathetic teachers, judges, lawyers, would have to be left in place. Plus – Mussolini was a god and it was too complicated to remove every reference to Fascism – such as the EUR suburb of Rome. Rome is full of Fascist architecture. Today, there is not much Mussolini nostalgia. In contrast, it is noteworthy that all northern Italian cities have partisan institutes, very well documented.

Philippa Leslie

Philippa Leslie works in international communications. She is editor of Rivista

A house in the mountains: the women who liberated Italy. Part of the Resistance Quartet Series, London, Chatto and Windus, 2019.

Italy's outstanding courage:

Il magnifico coraggio degli italiani

The story of a secret civilian army in World War Two

Even in modern times, there is perhaps a perception that however brilliant Italians may be at music, food and fashion, they are not very brave.

Those of us who have studied the Partisan War between September 1943 and early May 1945 know this is not true. My father, who as an escaped prisoner of war in Italy led a partisan band for eighteen months, had a deep appreciation of the courage of the Italians who served with him, and I am glad to say that he passed on that appreciation to me. It was with enormous pleasure, therefore, that I made a discovery in 2014 in the US National Archives, Washington, of documents recording very many thousands of acts of courage by the non-Fascist Italians who helped Allied escapers between 1943 and 1945.

Since 2000, I had known that there were files in the Washington Archives which recorded help that had been given. In 2001, I had the pleasure of presenting one of my father's greatest friends and fellow combatants, Dany Bucchioni, with a King's Medal for Courage that Buckingham Palace [to whom he had written] had confirmed that he had won. He was later created an Officer of the British Empire for his heroism and support of the Allies. My discovery in the Archives led to two more visits in 2015, further research in London, and the writing of a book.

> … 'outstanding, magnificent, superb and indomitable courage'

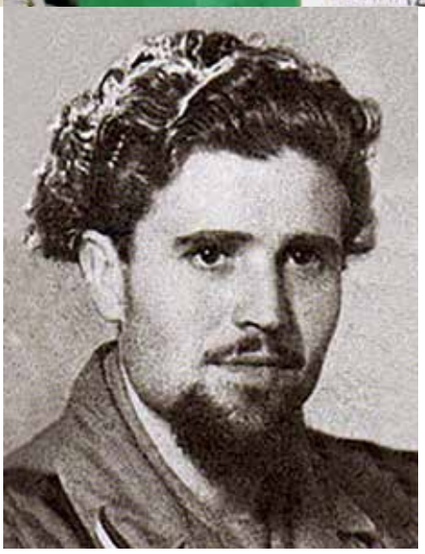
I stumbled upon an approved register of medals to be awarded to Italians, together with a register of Italians proved to have given their lives for the Allied escapers. Following this up, my later research revealed that 62,000 awards were made after the war by the Allied Screening Commission to Italians who had helped Allied escapers and evaders. These were mostly financial awards in compensation for what it had cost them to shelter, feed and often clothe the escapers, accompanied by what became known as Alexander Certificates of thanks. However, official Commendations were made to many, which were similar to a British 'Mention in Despatches', and at least 149 medals were awarded for cases of "outstanding, magnificent, superb and indomitable courage" – words taken from the citations drafted by senior British officers which speak of the courage of Italian men and women.

An escaper who was re-captured would usually be returned to a prison camp. For an Italian helper who was caught, the penalty was normally death, destruction of the family house, and seizure of the family's goods. There was a penalty worse than execution – that was to be sent to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, to be worked, starved and beaten to death over weeks or months in the most appalling of conditions.

Heroism confirmed and endorsed

Disgracefully, because of a political decision taken by the British Government which was finally confirmed in 1947, no British medals were allowed to be presented to Italian nationals. As a result, many of the intended recipients, and their

Brian Lett



Main photo: Gordon Lett [with walking stick] and some of his partisans of the International Battalion. Monte Picchiara 1944; Left: Dany Bucchioni, second from left, wearing his King's Medal in Rossano, May 2001; Dany in 1944

families and descendants, did not know until the book was published that their heroism, or that of their relative, had been confirmed and endorsed.

Having obtained copies of the registers, my task was to get every supporting file, and where possible, the official citations for the medals. Research in London showed that when the citations were received by MI9 from the Allied Screening Commission in Italy, the proposed awards were very carefully considered before approval. On some occasions the citations were amended slightly, on others, awards of Commendations were increased to King's Medals. My book has become a dictionary of courage. Here, I cite just two examples out of the 149 which are documented.

Emidio Azzari was a reasonably successful pastry chef who owned and traded from a shop in Rieti. He was an anti-Fascist civilian, who allowed his anti-Fascist views to become known after the fall of Mussolini in July 1943. Once the Germans took possession of Italy and restored Mussolini as Dictator, Azzari found himself in great danger. He was threatened with death, and had to leave Rieti. Undeterred, he became one of the principal helpers of Allied escapers in the area, organising an escape route through the Gustav Line (the main German defensive line, from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Adriatic). He was recruited by A Force, the MI9 escape organisation, and did excellent work for them. Azzari became a hunted man, and was eventually captured on 14 May 1944. He held vital information about A Force and its escape routes, but despite the most brutal of sustained torture, both physical and psychological, Azzari remained silent, thereby enabling A Force to continue its work. He was regularly threatened with death, and was forced to watch the execution of fellow prisoners. In October 1944 he managed to escape and went into hiding, gravely injured. Emidio Azzari was awarded the George Medal, but because of the political embargo in 1947, he never received it.

Guiglemina Petrelli was a nineteen year-old girl living in Mogliano, Macerata. She and her family had been helping escaped prisoners of war in her village. Two of the prisoners were Sergeant Jack Ford and Gunner T. Webster. One day, Fascist militia came to the village hunting for escapers. Two armed militiamen confronted Ford and Webster, and threatened them with pistols. Seeing what was happening, Guiglemina Petrelli rushed forward to distract the two militiamen. The militiamen opened fire, shooting Sergeant Ford dead. Guiglemina threw herself in front of Webster, and took the bullet intended for him, enabling him to escape. She was grievously injured, but survived after many weeks in hospital. Her act of totally unselfish heroism saved Webster's life. She was awarded a King's Medal for Courage, but like Azzari and the others, never received it.

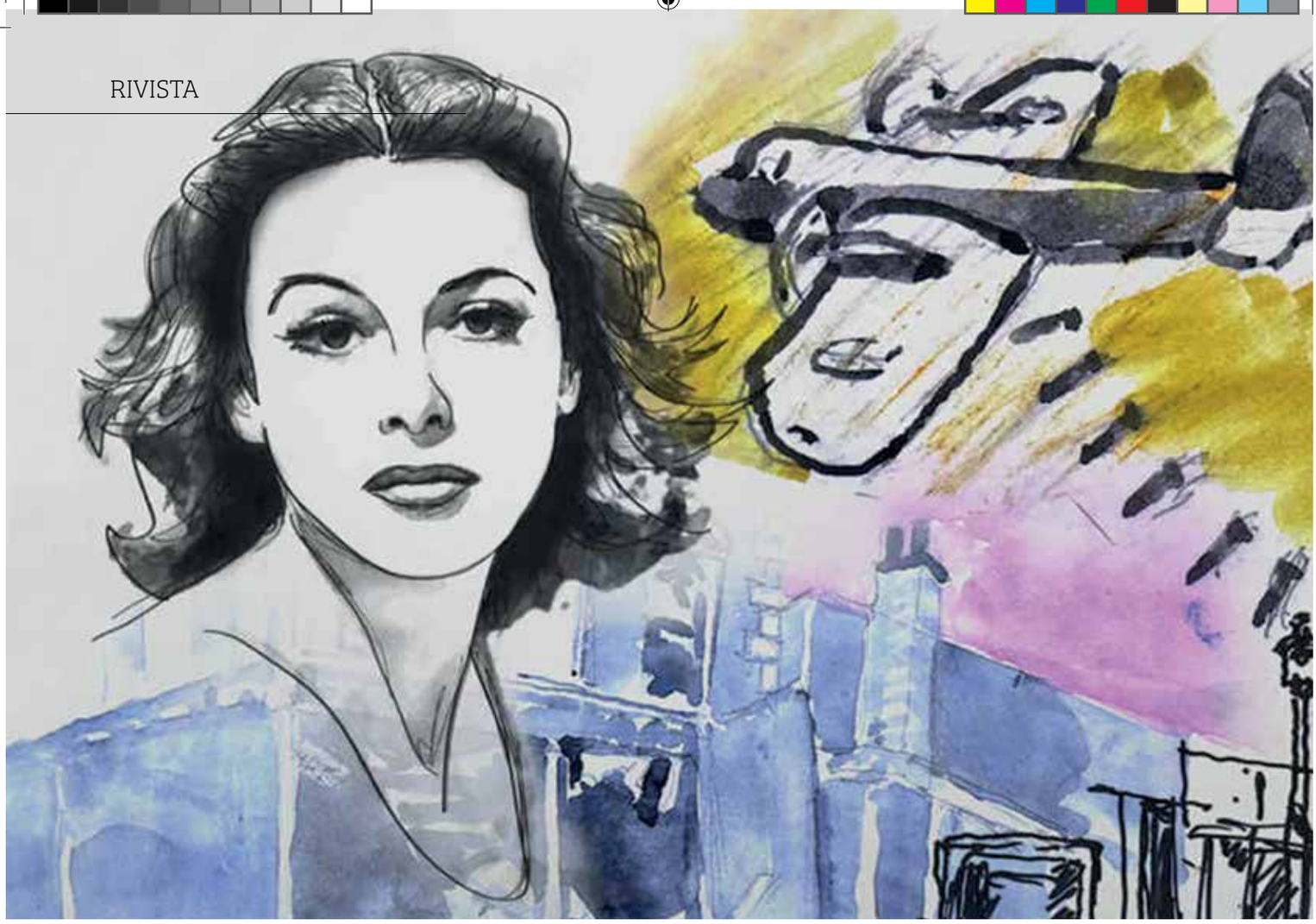
There are many moving testaments to the courage of the Italian helpers. An example is from New Zealander Arch Scott, who had been looked after by the Franzin family in San Stino di Livenza, Venice. Luigi Franzin was caught, arrested, and died in a Nazi concentration camp. Scott wrote: "[After his capture] Franzin knew where we all were, and didn't hand us over. Even after he was imprisoned he could have obtained his freedom by saying where we were and thus return to his wife and kiddies. Who can understand the spirit that urges these northern Italians to protect their "enemies", even to sacrificing their wives and children to this end…Up to the present he has not returned, doubt now that he ever will. What will happen to his wife and kiddies? Men such as this deserve recognition."

With the book now available in Italian, all Italians can learn of the outstanding courage of their forefathers.

Brian Lett

Brian Lett is a retired QC, author and historian

Commendatore Brian Gordon Lett QC Italy's Outstanding Courage – the Story of a Secret Civilian Army in World War Two. © HBG Lett, 2018.



Caught between two worlds

The Italian community in London between the two World Wars

Andrea Del Cornò

At certain times in history, events occur of such magnitude that they turn individual lives upside down and scar entire communities for generations. The British Italian Society's online event *Caught between two worlds: the Italian community in London between the two World Wars*, introduced by Richard Northern, its Chairman, brought together author and script-writer *Melanie Hughes and actress Nadia Ostacchini for a memorable and engaging evening. Part book presentation, part discussion on the Italian community in London during the two World Wars, the talk drew on dramatic historical events.

The presentation was based on Melanie's novel *War Changes Everything* (Patrician Press, 2017), whilst Nadia, artistic director and producer of the *Tricolore* Theatre Company, read extracts from the book which focused on the London Italian community. The novel's characters were vividly brought to life and, for a moment, the past was nearer than the present.

The book – also a historical novel – narrates the story of a young girl, Juanita, growing up in London in the '30's to the outbreak of the Second World War. Juanita has a difficult childhood, blighted by poverty, a violent stepfather, and feeling an outcast.

A large, lovable, noisy Italian family

Central to the narrative is Juanita's enduring friendship with Yolanda. Yolanda is from a large, loveable, noisy Italian family, the Barroni, who live in Camden Town and own a food business in Soho. Mama Barroni warms to the young, neglected Juanita, and Papa Barroni helps Juanita find a job in the catering business, thus earning enough to support her mother. It is through the free-spirited Yolanda that Juanita is introduced to the vibrant and welcoming Italian community in London, *Little Italy*, a 'fragment of the far away Fatherland' – a close-knit, openhearted community where people supported and helped each other.

Italians brought to London a new way of life which influenced those around it. As Juanita says: "The Barroni family taught me something that would define my future. That the world was a bigger, brighter place than the one I had known, full of emotions they were not afraid to feel and ideas they were eager to explore."

The rise of Fascism in Europe, the Spanish Civil War, Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirts brought social tensions. In a city sliding deeper into war, air raid alarms became frequent, and the unreal atmosphere of the Phoney War cast a dark cloud on all Londoners. Juanita and Yolanda actively take part in political activities and debates, often at the '*King Bomba*', the Italian

Main image: Illustration from the book cover; right: author Melanie Hughes; Mussolini visiting London in 1922; actress Nadia Ostacchini

Melanie Hughes

delicatessen at 37 Old Compton Street, Soho, run by anarchist and businessman Emidio Recchioni. The name of the shop is an ironic reference to Ferdinand II, King of the Two Sicilies – *Re Bomba* – but also a reference to anarchist bombs.

In portraying a dramatic picture of a community deeply injured by historical events, Melanie carried out extensive research, including using her own family archive. *War Changes Everything* is based on real events and real-life characters. The '30s and '40s were fraught and turbulent times. In Britain, the sudden fall of France and the menacing stands of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy warranted action on all fronts, including the internal one. The predominant fear was that foreign communities sheltered spies or saboteurs and might act as 'enemies within'.

'Enemy aliens' overnight

At the time, the Italian community in London numbered about 15,000, mostly living in Clerkenwell and the surrounding areas. In June 1921, London saw the establishment of the first *Italian Fascist Abroad* organisation which, under the ambassadorship of the Fascist Dino Grandi, pursued an active policy of recruitment and control over the Italian community. In December 1922, when Mussolini visited London, a group of Italian Fascist Blackshirts lined up at Victoria Station to give the Duce the Roman salute whilst singing '*Giovinezza*', the Fascist marching anthem. In 1939, Fascist Italy signed a political and military alliance with Nazi Germany – the 'Pact of steel'. It was in this context that following Italy's declaration of war on France and Great Britain (10 June 1940), the ill-judged order 'collar the lot' attributed to Winston Churchill – although it is doubtful he ever exactly pronounced these words – was put into practice. Italians in England became 'enemy aliens' overnight. In the turmoil that followed, many Italian men but also some women were hurriedly deported or sent to internment camps. This indiscriminate policy caused grave sufferings, concerns and disagreements, soon raised at the highest levels and a vetting process was later introduced. For many, however, it was too late.

Over 470 Italian deportees perished in the Arandora Star, a prison ship sunk on its way to Canada by a German U-Boat. Many others went through the trauma of being 'rounded up', deported or interned with no justifiable reason. Italians were now regarded with suspicion and, at times, became the target of hate and unprovoked violence. This changed attitude towards the Italian community is invoked in Melanie's novel. In London, several incidents and disturbances were recorded. George Orwell witnessed the aftermath of the so-called 'Battle of Soho' at the heart of the Italian colony, during which some Italian shop windows were smashed. Among Italians there was a feeling of betrayal and being unjustly treated by their adopted or native country. Nevertheless, London became the refuge for several high-profile Italian antifascists or critics of Mussolini's regime from all political angles, among them the former diplomat count Carlo Sforza, historian Gaetano Salvemini, the Roman Catholic priest Luigi Sturzo, the Dantist scholar Uberto Limentani (a victim of the 1938 Fascist anti-Semitic laws and later a survivor of the Arandora Star tragedy), the Socialist Treves Brothers, and the intellectual and economist Piero Sraffa.

> hardworking and enterprising Italians have contributed to London's cultural and economic life

The evening concluded with numerous questions from a responsive audience, demonstrating that interest in the history of the Italian community in London remains lively and certainly not only among those with an Italian background.

Since the 19th century, hardworking and enterprising Italians have made their contribution to London's cultural and economic life. Perhaps inevitably all expatriates and emigrants live through an undefined sense of loss for something known before, which is often romanticised. It is the conscious and counter-intuitive acceptance of this 'loss' that widens our horizons and, almost in a contradictory way, represents an enrichment to our identity.

Andrea Del Cornò

Nadia Ostacchini

Andrea Del Cornò is the Italian Specialist at The London Library.

*Melanie Hughes's novel War Changes Everything is available for purchase on Amazon and the publisher Patrician Press website.

Il Postino / Franco Di Giacomo

“La Piu Bella Lingua del Mondo”

The Charles de Chassiron Memorial Lecture on 22 June 2021

Michael Nathanson reports on a fascinating talk

Charles de Chassiron was a very fine man and great friend of Italy. He had been the Commercial Attache at the British Embassy in Rome and then the British Consul General in Milan. In both capacities he did a magnificent job promoting British interests, always greatly supported by his much loved wife, Britt-Marie. On returning to the UK at the end of a distinguished diplomatic career Charles took various appointments, one of which was as Chairman of the British Italian Society which he held for some 10 years. He loved Italian opera, literature and the Italian language and it was entirely appropriate that for this year’s Charles de Chassiron Memorial Lecture the topic chosen was *‘Italian, the Most Beautiful Language in the World’.*

The lecture was given by zoom from Rome by Dr Stefano Jossa who had met Charles on several occasions and affectionately referred to him as “an English aristocrat”. Stefano is currently Reader in Italian at Royal Holloway College, University of London and he has held positions at a number of other prestigious international universities. His lecture drew upon material from his latest published book *La Piu Bella Del Mondo.*

> ...the angels in the sky speak Italian...

Down the ages many things have been written about the Italian language and Stefano in the course of the evening gave several examples: “This is the language of which love makes his boast” (John Milton); “There is no doubt that angels in the sky speak Italian. It is impossible to believe that these blessed creatures use a less musical language” (Thomas Mann); “Italian is the language of music… it is the fittest language in regard of the fluency and softness of it… you have not a word that ends with a consonant except some few monosyllables, conjunctions and propositions and this renders the speech more smooth which made one say that when the confusion of tongues happened at the building of the Tower of Babel, if the Italian had been there Nimrod had made him a plasterer” (James Howell, “Epistolae of the Elianae”); “It

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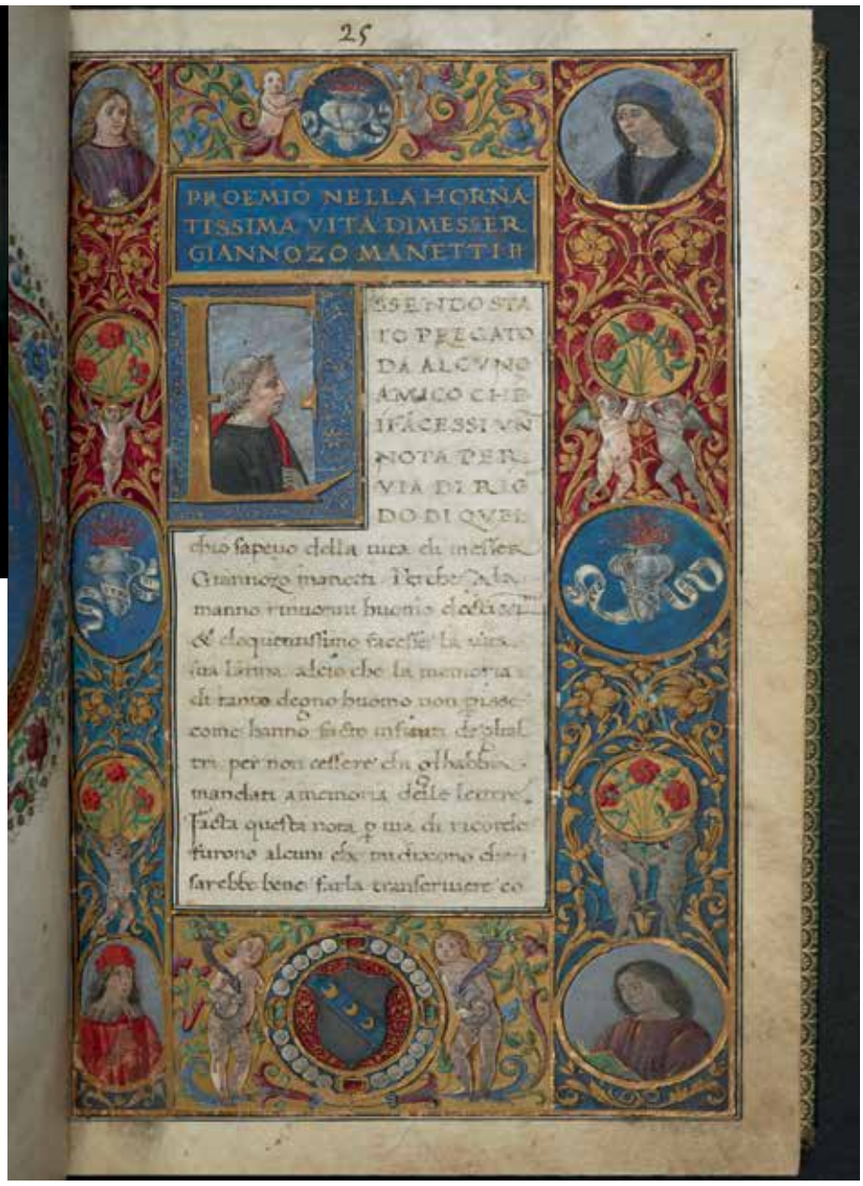

British Library

Main photo: Still from "Il Postino" (1994); above: Portrait of Italian poet, novelist and philosopher Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) by Francesco Hayez; right: A page from Vespasiano da Bisticci's collection of biographies of illustrious men.

is the softest, the sweetest, the most harmonious that only of modern tongues but also beyond… it seems indeed to have been invented for the sake of poetry and music (John Dryden); "I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women and German to my horse" (Charles V).

Not all agree…

There has however also been criticism levelled at the Italian language, Stefano informs us. Etienne Pasquier wrote in *Recherches de la France* (1566) of the Italian language "an all effeminate and sweet vernacular… almost all their words end in five vowels and moreover they wanted to scrape the meeting of two consonants that were too hard for their delicate ears." In 1579 Henri Etienne considered the superiority of the French language and in 1761 Voltaire argued that the intermingling of consonants and vowels, as in the French language, produces a nobler and far more harmonious sound than the Italian emphasis on vowels.

But then…

Stefano Jossa would have none of this and retorted that "Italian is a literary language built by writers in order to produce a common language for Italians". The most important of these writers were Dante Aligheri (*De Vulgari Eloquentina* (1303-5), Pietro Bembo (*Prose della Vulgar Lingua*) and Alessandro Mansoni (*Della lingua Italiana* (1847). To illustrate his argument as to the musical superiority of the Italian language Stefano cited and showed extracts of the delightful film *'Il Postino'.* It focuses on an island off the Bay of Naples where the only source of income is fishing. A famous Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, is living there in exile and is befriended by Mario, an uneducated fisherman. Mario becomes the village postman and delivers such post as there is to Neruda at the top of a steep hill overlooking the sea. Mario is gradually captivated by the beauty of the Italian poetry of Neruda and himself starts composing poetry. With this poetry Mario wins the heart of the island's most beautiful girl, Beatrice, who is in turn mesmerised by the lyricism of the Italian poetry. It was very clever of Stefano to vary the pace and intensity of his narrative by using extracts from dreamy *Il Postino* to further his arguments as to the beauty of the Italian language.

I can but conclude that Stefano wins the argument. Italian is indeed the most lyrical and romantic of languages… I know, because I proposed to my wife (now of some 45 years) in Italian in Italy by the sea.

Michael Nathanson

Michael Nathanson is a lover of all things Italian for much of his 72 years and fervent admirer of those Italians who in 1943 at great personal risk to themselves and their families rescued, cared for and helped escape from Italy into Switzerland, his Father.

On the 1472 Foligno edition of Dante's Divine Comedy

'Nel mille quattro cento septe et due ...'

An introduction to the 1472 *editio princeps* of Dante's Divine Comedy and the history of early printing in Foligno by Andrea del Cornò

In 1470, Johann Neumeister, a German wandertrucke, and Emiliano degli Orfini, a goldsmith, established a printing press in the small Umbrian town of Foligno. It was the sixth such to appear in Italy[1]. In 1472, somewhat surprisingly, the enterprise produced the first printed edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* to which the Orfini-Neumeister press owes its lasting fame.

Almost certainly, Johann Neumeister had learned his trade in his native Mainz as an assistant to Gutenberg. He later spent time in Subiaco, where the German proto-typographers Sweynheym and Pannartz had been active since 1464. Johann Neumeister's work is distinguished by the high quality of its craftsmanship.

Foligno, a small bishopric town south-east of Perugia and close to Assisi, known to the Romans as Fulginium, developed along the banks of the Topino river. It is connected to major arterial routes via the Via Flaminia and was not only a vital commercial channel, but the pilgrim route to destinations such as Rome, in primis, Loreto and Assisi. During the early fifteenth century, Foligno – at the time part of the Papal States – enjoyed relative peace, and under the rule of the Trinci Family became a vibrant artistic and cultural centre. The patronage of the Trinci attracted men of letters, artists and painters. Scholar and librarian Monsignor Faloci Pulignani spoke convincingly of a Trinci Court, and its prestige is celebrated in the *Quadriregio*, a poem by Federico Frezzi, Bishop of Foligno, inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

In the area, the hydraulic energy provided by the Menotre, a fast-running river and tributary to the Topino, was exploited from the early thirteenth century. The river, a few miles from Foligno, cascades onto the plains below. Oil and wheat mills were built along its course. A 1371 notary deed certifies the presence of paper mills.

Only three works were printed by the Orfini-Neumeister press in the short span of its activity. The first book, printed in 1470, was an edition of the *De bello italico adversus Gothos*, written by humanist Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo around 1441.

Foligno, part of the history of early printing in Italy

The second, almost certainly printed in 1471, was Cicero's *Epistolae ad familiares*. In its colophon Johann Neumeister is praised as an *almanus recte qui plura peregit*, a 'German of talent who accomplished much' and states that the print run was two hundred copies, printed in *laribus Emiliani*, the dwelling, possibly the house, of Emiliano degli Orfini.

The first printed edition of Dante's Divine Comedy

The third book was the first printed edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* of which between two and three hundred copies were completed. It is thought that Johann Neumeister was taken to the local village of Pale by Emiliano degli Orfini himself to select the reams of paper for printing[2].

The final printed text was probably never subjected to a systematic revision. Several misprints are scattered throughout the pages and later corrections appear to be too sporadic to suggest the intervention of an editor. Mistakes and misprints are more frequent in the Paradiso – an indication that the work was possibly hastened to completion. The main flaw is the lack of two tercets (49-54) in canto XX of the Paradiso and of one tercet (46-48) in canto XXI. The lack of the tercets is supporting evidence that the original manuscript used for printing was one of the so-called Danti del Cento which has an identical omission. Blank spaces were left at the beginning of the three cantiche and at each single canto. These were intended to be decorated and filled in by a rubricator. Several questions arise from the colophon:

> *Nel mille quattro cento septe et due / nel quarto mese adi cinque et sei / questa opera gentile impressa fue / Io maestro Iohanni Numeister opera dei / alla decta impressione et meco fue / Elfulginato Evangelista mei*

First, the date of printing, indicated as 11th April 1472. This date is not universally agreed upon. But it is established that the Foligno edition preceded two other editions, one printed in Mantua, the other in Jesi in the same year. Some scholars, however, prefer to speak of three *editiones princeps* in Anno Domini 1472.

A second series of disputes arises from the absence of any reference to Emiliano degli Orfini, and from the words *Elfulginato Evangelista mei* with which the colophon ends. It has been argued unconvincingly that *Elfulginato Evangelista mei* was a poetic image referring to Emiliano degli Orfini, with the meaning of patron and recalling the motto *Pax tibi Marce, Evangelista meus*. A different explanation identified *Elfulginato Evangelista mei* with an equally obscure figure known as Evangelista Mei of Foligno. It is now accepted that Evangelista Mei is to be identified with Evangelista Angelini, a printer operating in Trevi and later Foligno,

1 *However, see Piero Scapecchi, 'Subiaco 1465 oppure [Bondeno 1463]? Analisi del frammento Parson-Scheide', in «La Bibliofilia», Anno CIII (2001), 1-24*

2 *Cfr. Michele Faloci Pulignani, 'Le antiche cartiere di Foligno', in «La Bibliofilia», Anno XI (1909-1910), 102-107.*

Above: Opening pages and spine of the first edition; right: Dante Alighieri by Sandro Botticelli, 1495; one of the many watermills of Foligno; Andrea Del Cornò (inset)

Shutterstock

Andrea del Cornò

and a business associate of the Orfini-Neumeister press.

Finally, the lack of any reference to members of the Orfini Family has raised doubts as to whether the Orfini-Neumeister partnership had already ceased to operate. It would have been unlikely for it – if still in existence – to have remained inactive and silent between the printing of the *Epistolae ad familiares* in 1471 and the Divine Comedy in 1472. The Orfini-Neumeister partnership might have already been dissolved.

In 1474, Emiliano degli Orfini was called to Rome to take up service as papal mint-master. Neumeister, having left Foligno and following a short stay in Perugia, was imprisoned in Rome for insolvency. In 1479, he was back in Mainz, where he printed a *Meditationes Joh. de Turrecremata*. He then moved to Bâle in Switzerland, at the time an important centre for book commerce and production. His fortunes, however, appear to have declined rapidly. Finally, he settled in Lyon where he died a pauper around 1522.

The significance of Neumeister's work firmly puts Foligno on the map of the history of early printing in Italy. In a short proemio the Italian Vate, Gabriele d'Annunzio, poetically describes the printing of the very last leaf of the Foligno Divine Comedy and imagines that all the dignitaries of the town had gathered at the Orfini Palace to witness the historical moment:

«Penso che tutti tacessero, e che non s'udisse quivi se non stridere il legno tra mastio e chiocciola, fuori garrire qualche balestruccio, e l'infinito anelito della primavera a quando a quando. […] Come Dante congiunge talora per similitudine una visione misteriosa del suo spirito all'immagine franca d'un atto corporeo, così quell'incognito indistinto si raccoglieva nel tremito delle mani occupate a trarre pianamente di sotto il torchio il fresco foglio che solo mancava alla perfezione dell'opera, mentre il socio zecchiere e gli astanti si facevano alle spalle curve del Mastro per leggere su l'ottima carta di Pale i caratteri intagliati coi punzoni alemanni.

L'Amor che muove il Sole e l'altre stelle»

Andrea Del Cornò is the Italian Specialist at The London Library

Italian Cultural Institute

‘We are on the same mission’

Katia Pizzi, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, in conversation

Philippa Leslie

The year of the pandemic threatened the activities of the Institute. Director Katia Pizzi explains what they did – and the interesting results.

With the impact of the pandemic, the Institute – which had planned a full programme of events for 2020/21 – was faced with the challenge of maintaining it. They took language courses online. They set up live streaming, coordinating some of the events and the international discussion groups (tavole rotonde) which linked into Europe, America, Australia. Those discussions were complicated technically and for the time zones too. But ‘this new step served us well’. Although online events obviously go wider, the impact of the physical presence of a VIP, an artist, a film maker, whatever, is not the same when presented online, Katia observes.

There have been compensations, however. For example, the award-winning writer, translator and critic, Gianni Celati, who died early in January, lived in Brighton and an online conference the Institute held in his honour meant that the Institute has that recording for posterity.

For a long time, as we recall, there was no cinema, theatre, any live events. So Katia brought to London seven films from the International Venice Film Festival and had them shown at the Curzon cinema in Mayfair. The project had appreciable impact. ‘There was a great response, a great desire – it was evident that people had hungered for the experience of going to the cinema. This hunger was something that came out of covid – the appreciation of the physical experience, the intentional choice to participate.’

A 'soft' transition: blending online and live events

Since last summer the Institute has been presenting events in the building, as a 'soft transition' stage between online only, and a combination of online and live. 'In 2020 we hosted 188 events. In 2021, it was approximately 140, with the online/live mix.' The Institute hosts events in London, but also in other parts of the UK, supporting other cultural activities too, such as festivals, cinema, opera, conferences – with support such as financial sponsorship, administration, network contacts – for example, support for the Sheffield Documentary Festival, LICAF, the Comics Festival of Kendal, the British Centre for Literary Translation, University of Norwich and the Estorick Museum in London, where part of the cost of the current exhibition catalogue was covered. The latest project at the Institute is running reading groups for adults and children, both online and in person.

Dr Pizzi's two-year appointment has just been extended for another two. She explains how the system works: to make the appointment, an in-depth research is undertaken in Rome, and the selection panel is made up of cultural and business experts who consider whom among the candidates might best represent the spirit of the time. Interviews are extensive. Katia is not the first academic to hold this post, but it made sense at this point in time to appoint an Italianist and a scholar also rooted in local culture.

ISTITUTO italiano DI CULTURA

> Reinforcing the relationship between the two cultures

The role has two main strands: the cultural and artistic side, together with the challenging task of being the manager of a listed building. From the outside, these combined tasks are invisible, but both demand attention.

Katia was born in Bologna, and notes with a smile the Bolognese tradition of the 'culto di buon mangiare' – which all tourists are delighted about, too. After studies in Italy, she came to Britain, taking her PhD at Cambridge. She reflects that one makes choices which have unforeseen consequences, which create a pattern for one's life. She immersed herself in English culture, including 'And I wore Laura Ashley! I was an Anglophile!' Her researches looked into cultural differences between European cities. An early subject was Trieste, which blends several cultural interfaces – Austro-Hungarian, Italian, British – observing that these conflicts make creativity more interesting.

'We are on the same mission'

We conclude with Katia recalling that she has given two talks to the British Italian Society – one on Pinocchio, the other on Italian/Slovenian relations. She has a particular fondness for the Society. 'We are on the same mission. We are friends and collaborators. We are reinforcing the relationship between the two cultures. We are two peas in a pod!'

Philippa Leslie

2021 British-Italian Society Prizes

The British-Italian Society and the Society for Italian Studies have announced the latest winners of the biennial BIS Prizes.

The winner of the **2021 Postgraduate Prize** (£500) is **Dr Claudia Dellacasa** of Durham University (above left) for her thesis, *Italo Calvino in Japan, Japan in Italo Calvino: A Cross-Cultural Encounter.*

The **2021 Undergraduate Prize** (£250) was awarded to **Freya Cazalet** (above right) of Cambridge University for her dissertation, *The Sleeping Guards: Depictions of the Resurrection in Trecento Italy.*

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the competition again attracted a large number of entries from students at British and Irish Universities on a wide range of Italian cultural themes. The judges strongly commended the winners for producing highly innovative and impressive pieces of work.

The judges also awarded joint runner-up prizes to two candidates in each category. In both cases, two candidates had scored similar high marks for impressive entries. In the Postgraduate category the runner-up award was shared between **Dr Anna Lisa Somma** of Birmingham University and **Dr Maddalena Moretti** of Leeds University. At Undergraduate level, the runner-up prize was shared between **Isabelle Ragnetti** of King's College, London and **Ella Powell** of Birmingham University.

Our warmest congratulations go to all the prize-winners, who also receive one year's honorary membership of the Society. We look forward to welcoming them to an event in 2022.

Finding Renaissance Bronze Founders & Sculptors in The Veneto

Joseph De Levis and Il Bresciano

a talk by Charles Avery

Monday 21 February 2022

Time: 6:45 pm (A drinks reception will follow the talk)

Burlington House, Society of Antiquaries of, London W1J 0BE

Price member: £20; Price guest: £25

Formerly a Trustee of the British-Italian Society, Charles Avery is a specialist in European, particularly Italian, sculpture. A graduate in Classics from Cambridge University, he obtained a Diploma in the History of Art at the Courtauld Institute and a doctorate for published work from Cambridge. Charles was Deputy Keeper of Sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum (1966-79) and a Director of Christie's for a decade. Since 1990 he has been an independent historian, consultant, writer and lecturer.

Charles' books include Florentine Renaissance Sculpture (1970), Donatello: an Introduction (1994), Giambologna, the Complete Sculpture (1987), Bernini, Genius of the Baroque (1997 – paperback, 2006), The Triumph of Motion: Francesco Bertos (1678-1741) and the Art of Sculpture (2008), A School of Dolphins (2009) and Joseph De Levis & Company: Renaissance Bronze-Founders in Verona (2016). His latest book is Il Bresciano: Bronze-caster of Renaissance Venice.

A JOINT EVENT WITH THE VENICE IN PERIL FUND

BIS British Italian Society

VENICE IN PERIL

BOOK ONLINE AT https://www.british-italian.org/future-events/

Global Finance and the Migrant

The story of Amadeo Peter Giannini, Founder of Bank of America

a talk by Valentina Signorelli and Cecilia Zoppelletto

Tuesday 15 March 2022

Time: 7:00 pm (A drinks reception will follow the talk)

Farm Street Church, 114 Mount St, London W1K 3AH

Price member: £15; Price guest: £20

This event will reflect on the unsung power of every migrants' savings and their contribution to society's development through the inspiring story of AP Giannini, a common migrant, whose lifelong commitment to social mobility led him to found and grow Bank of America against all odds.

Valentina Signorelli (PhD) Course Leader BA Media and Communication, University of East London, UK. Co-founder and Creative Producer of Daitona, awarded the most innovative Italian production house of 2018 and its advertising division DOGODOT.

Cecilia Zoppelletto (PhD) Visiting Professor of Film Studies, Académie des Beaux Arts Kinshasa, DRC. Founder of Preston Witman Productions, documentary filmmaker and factual content producer, she has worked for the Italian national broadcasting company RAI and AntennaTreNordest.

BIS British Italian Society

BOOK ONLINE AT https://www.british-italian.org/future-events/

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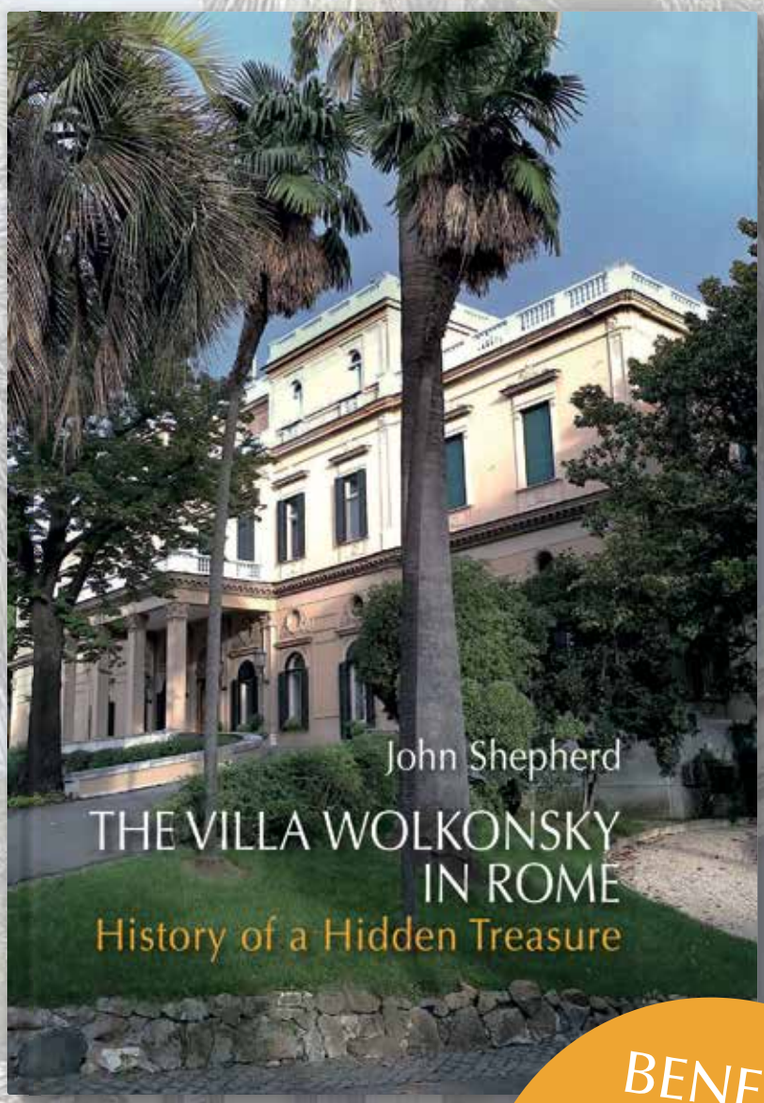

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