

# lettere aperte

Number 2, Winter 2014/15  
www.lettereaperte.net

## ***Italo-America. Transatlantic Connections and Italian (Cultural) Studies***

The discussion of Italian literature and culture within Italian Studies has been for a long time restricted to the geographical boundaries of Italy itself. The last decades have shown, however, an opening towards a broader vision, especially in the context of theoretical approaches such as Postcolonialism, Cultural Translation, and TransArea Studies. Analogous to Francophone and Hispanophone Studies, Italian Studies has begun to also focus on the so-called ‘guest worker’ and Migration literature, a genre which includes not only the literature of authors who migrated to Italy, but also ‘Italian’ literature originating in countries like France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Strikingly, up until now, literature and media originating in the Italo-American context have been studied much more frequently in other fields of research, such as American and Canadian Studies, than in Italian Studies. This edition of the open-access journal *lettere aperte* will for that reason be dedicated to Italo-American Culture from the conceptual perspective of Italian Studies.

The presence of Italy in North America is, for a range of reasons, especially fascinating for an intercontinental conception of Italian Studies. One such reason is the long history of emigration from Italy since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, offering a massive quantitative presence of Italians that predates the beginning of other ‘mass migrations’ to the U.S. (e.g. from South America and South Asia). Italian migration has thus influenced North American culture not only in the sense of typical migrant sectors (e.g. gastronomy) and tourist clichés, but has also shaped American popular culture in a new, transcultural and transatlantic way. An emblematic example is *The Rat Pack*, of which the legendary Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. were members. The group toured throughout the United States and Europe between the 1960s and 80s. However *The Rat Pack* is an example of only the most popular conformation of Italo-American culture. Hollywood of the 1960s and onwards is inconceivable without directors such as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and Sergio Leone, figures who epitomize Italo-American culture with movie genres like the Spaghetti Western (beginning with Leone’s *Once upon a Time in the West / C’era una volta il West*, 1968) and gangster films such as *The Godfather I-III* (1972/74/90). These genres and directors, with Scorsese and Coppola receiving Academy Awards for their work, became ‘national’ representatives of North American popular culture.

*Lettere aperte*’s 2<sup>nd</sup> edition aims to follow this transatlantic thread in a multi-faceted way: We would like to analyze the presence of Italo-American popular culture on the level of prototypical genres and artists, while also taking into account that Italian culture, at least that of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, cannot be disconnected from American culture. Mass migration has generated transatlantic networks and experiences, which have fundamentally transformed the cultural landscape of the ‘old continent’. One only needs to think of the Postwar Italian film industry, which is clearly under American influence. Many films of the era demonstrate the intercontinental shape of Italian cinema in that directors filmed in both the United States and Italy. Striking examples are Luchino Visconti and Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci and Emanuele Crialese. One could pose a similar argument regarding Italian literature of the (post-) modern period in terms of both content and esthetics, which is clearly influenced by American prose. Whether in the evocation of the American Dream, accounts of concrete experiences in America, translation and editing

practices, or through mention of esthetic interactions, the influence is unmistakable. Italo Calvino, Eugenio Montale, Alberto Moravia, Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini, as well as Alessandro Baricco and Melania Mazzucco, can be considered in this respect as interesting case studies.

Similarly fascinating is the personal engagement of several musicians, poets, and directors with the theme of migration. Beyond profitable genres such as crime fiction and thriller, many Italo-American artists have dedicated themselves to innovative, esthetically diverse artistic production. Films such as Martin Scorsese's documentary *Italianamerican* (1978) or Paul Tana's experimental films *La Sarrasine* (1992) and *Souviens-toi de nous / Ricordati di noi* (2007) are based on the directors' own family and migration histories. They intertwine Italo-American everyday experiences with media memories (e.g. TV archives of italoophone broadcasts) along with literary and 'high' culture imaginary of Italy (e.g. adaptations of epic poems), including alternating regional dialects with Standard English, French or Italian. This technique can be observed not only in America, but also among artists living in Italy such as Melania Mazzucco. Her novel *Vita* (2003), which has been translated into several languages including English, French and German, centers on her own family history and innovatively deals with Italian migration history in the form of a docufiction. Furthermore, the Italo-American axis has a clear cultural and regional impact on specific migration movements. For example, there is a strong presence of authors from the region of Molise in certain provinces of Canada. In Montréal and Toronto the poet and songwriter Tonino Caticchio as well as the artists Antonio D'Alfonso and Marco Micone have a prominent role in the Canadian intellectual scene (e.g. by editing bilingual anthologies, collaborating on the journal *ViceVersa* as well as on italoophone radio broadcasts and publishers). They are also a good example of the transatlantic impact of Italo-American literature: authors such as Caticchio have written literature in standard French and Italian as well as in the regional dialect of Molise (mainly poetry), although the reception of the latter is often closely linked and restricted to Italy. In other words, these diverse socio-cultural connections and narratives can be read as results of processes of transfer and transformation. They have shaped both the everyday and the 'high' culture of the transatlantic as well as having revived Italo-American imaginary. Thus they are essential to the foundation of transatlantic American culture, a role which is especially defined in the 1960s and 80s (in terms of Italo-American literature, *The Rat Pack*, and the Spaghetti Western), and which also may be read as an anticipation of the impact of Latin American culture and the processes of creolization.

Please send abstracts in English, Italian, French or German (not more than one page) by September 31, 2014 to [sabine.schrader@uibk.ac.at](mailto:sabine.schrader@uibk.ac.at) and [d.winkler@uibk.ac.at](mailto:d.winkler@uibk.ac.at). The final articles should not contain more than 40.000 signs (space characters and footnotes included) and must be submitted by December 21, 2014. In addition to academic essays, contributions in audio- or video format, interviews, literary texts, and reviews of other scholarship, may also be submitted.

#### Selected Bibliography

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