Offstream: Minority and Popular Cultures

The history of Italian culture, language, and literature presents us with various productions that are considered to be offstream, or non-canonical, with respect to the traditions of the period in which they appear. These productions are channeled in various ways and are secondary to more institutionalized forms. They include vernacular literature and theatre, popular novels, multimedia productions, comic books, and expressions by minority groups.

The field of Italian Studies has, in the last few decades, begun to focus on these offstream currents. Our conference aims to trace a status quaestionis by exploring the multiplicity of Italian artistic expressions and concentrating on those that have been deemed to belong outside the canon. By analysing aspects of minority and popular cultures, we hope to highlight the presence of movements that are considered to go “against the tide” because they represent important lived realities and ideas. We will shift our gaze towards a literary, linguistic, and artistic landscape that harbours expressions often subjugated by cultural hegemonies. At the same time, we will observe forms of popular culture – while these are often mass phenomena, they are nonetheless marginal with respects to established institutional criteria. This conference will strive to add to what Umberto Eco defines as “mixed contributions” to “a sociology of popular narrative [...] to a study of ideologies expressed in the form of the history of ideas” that refuse conform to a “true or specious demand for formalization at all costs” (1976).

It is also important to recognize that mainstream and offstream are, in and of themselves, historical categories. In light of this, we will consider to be offstream all those expressions related to language, social identity and artistic output that are marginal within the cultural era in which they arise. This conference aims to highlight the presence and usefulness of diversity within the Italian cultural context, while, in turn, also testing the boundaries of this very context.

Contributions should follow one or more of these themes:

- Popular culture and literature
- Novels by instalment
- Dialects, regional, and minority cultures
- Minority languages and multilingualism
- Women’s Studies and literature
- Gender and sexual diversity
- Ethnic and religious minorities
- Migration literature
- Diaspora and transnational communities
- Colonial and postcolonial identities
- Otherness and discrimination
- Alternative/underground cultures and practices
- New media, cross-media and transmediality

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Prof. Marco Arnaudo
Professor of Italian, Department of French & Italian, Indiana University, Bloomington

Prof. Antonia Arslan
Writer and Scholar, Professor Emerita of Modern Italian Literature, Università di Padova

Prof. Eugenio Bolongaro
Associate Professor of Italian, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, McGill University

Please submit 250-word proposals by 31 July 2017: gsaisuoft2017@gmail.com
Specify your affiliation and contact information, and include a short biography.

Papers presented at the conference will be published, with the Keynote Presentations, in a volume sponsored by the Emilio Goggio Chair in Italian Studies at the University of Toronto. Publication criteria will be communicated at the conference.

Graduate Students’ Association of Italian Studies

Organizers: Paola Bernardini, Paolo Frascà, Sara Galli