italian*

*beyond stereotypes

ZINE OF RUTGERS' ITALIAN DEPARTMENT

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RUTGERS—NEW BRUNSWICK
School of Arts and Sciences
Department of Italian
Index

3. Dear AI
4. Let’s Be Poets
10. Femicide
11. Calvino’s Invisible Cities
18. Interviews
23. Neorealism Cinema
31. Multilingual Poesia
34. Business Blog

Committee:
Prof. Carmela Scala
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Cover credits
Afro-American Venus, Tony Rubino
“In the image inspired by "La Grande Bellezza", Toni Servillo appears without handcuffs, a symbol of individual freedom. However, this freedom soon loses its meaning when one realizes that the surrounding environment is corroded and empty. The feeling of freedom slowly dissolves, replaced by the chains of apathy and ignorance, which tighten the heart and impede breathing. In a world where souls vanish without warning, freedom appears as a futile privilege, not essential to achieving true happiness.”

Alessandra Sansdone
be the magic you want to see
Student creative project of their interpretation of what “La grande bellezza” is.

Conversation through Cinema
Prof. Carmela Scala
Spring 2024
Se sei tormentato
Dalla tristezza
Ricordati solo
Della mia tenerezza.
Se hai un momento di bisogno,
Prova a trovarmi in un sogno.
Anche nel dolore,
Tu sei come un fiore,
E sarai per sempre
Il mio amore.
Anche nel dolore,
Tu sei come un fiore.
Bevi questo
E fumi quello,
Pensando che ti renderà felice.
Ma l'unico modo per salire in alto,
È scendere giù fino alla radice.
Metti via la sigaretta,
Fai un respiro profondo,
Chiudi gli occhi, e poi
Guardati intorno.
È qui che troverai la vera ricchezza;
È proprio qui che scoprirai la grande bellezza.
In one of the conversation classes, Prof. Scala reflected about “femminicidio” with special guest PhD student Diletta Pasetti. Students were asked to create a poster for a campaign to help stop violence against women. Dylan Freno created this: the female bodies that make up the flag are precisely the number of women who have been killed in Italy in 2023. He then added 2 simple yet powerful questions. “Is this your country?” “Are those your women?”
Collaborative translation project of a portion of Italo Calvino’s “Le Città Invisibili” from Italian into English. Students worked together in groups of three on the translation, creating a reflection paragraph after the assignment.

Intermediate Italian, 131, Spring 2023, Instructor: Diletta Pasetti
This translation project was definitely unlike anything we’ve done this semester. I found it very interesting, it provided a different type of challenge than usual. Some of the translations were more difficult than others, as some of those words are not used in typical modern Italian (therefore were not in any of the dictionaries I was referencing) and translations did not make sense if translated directly into English. “Zampilli” definitely threw me off, as the direct translation according to every dictionary I referenced was a conjugation of the verb “to gush”; it took me a few minutes to realize it was a more theatrical term for “fountain”. I had to infer several words and reword a few sentences so that they would flow better and make sense in English. I really enjoyed this project though, as it showed me a lot of vocabulary I was unfamiliar with and more complex sentence structures.
This translation project was interesting; it threw me off a bit as I tried to piece the sentences together. Though I was familiar with some words, the word was used in a different context that changed the entire idea. I found myself looking up meanings and synonyms of a few words to help me understand what exactly was being said, that way I can translate it in English. I can imagine that like in English and Spanish, some phrases or statements just make more sense in Italian and are best not to be translated, unless explained. I translated sentence per sentence, and I found that my section doesn’t make too much sense and it doesn’t entirely connect to the other two sections. Overall, I enjoyed this translation project and enjoyed learning new Italian words that could be rephrased.
Ipazia, Illustration by Alessandro Armando
This project was very interesting to do, especially since most of the language used here was more complicated than I thought it would be. As I was translating, I found myself confused by many phrases that I have never heard before. At the beginning of my section, there was a lot of equestrian language used that I was not familiar with. For example, words like “fruste” (whips) and “sella” (saddle). I even asked my dad what some words meant and he had no idea what I was talking about (he speaks fluent Italian from his parents, but he grew up in Brooklyn). After translating the text, I found my portion to not really make much sense alone, or at least the first half. When translating the latter half that has a lot of spiritual language, I found it easier to comprehend. I especially like the last sentence: “Non c’è linguaggio senza inganno,” which I translated as: “There is no language without deceit.” The word “inganno” can also mean “mistake” according to the dictionary, but I chose to translate it as “deceit” because I feel as though it matches the tone/atmosphere of the text more closely. Overall, I enjoyed the project and learning new words in Italian.
Advanced Conversation through Current Events

For this course, students had to interview a person, transcribe the text and then translate it into Italian. They also had to write a short reflection paper.
Gabrielle interviews Tara

G. Ciao a tutti, Sono qui con la mia amica Tara. Parla arabo e parleremo delle sue esperienze con la lingua e la giustizia sociale. Tara, Che lingua parli e cosa ti pensi? Pensi che qualcuno di questi sia più vicino a chi sei?

T: Parlo arabo e inglese, mi piacciono molti entrambi. E mi sento vicino a entrambi in modi diversi. Penso in inglese, perché sono cresciuta in America. Mi sento vicino alla lingua e al modo in cui le persone si esprimono tra di loro. Ma l’arabo, con tutti i miei parenti che parlano arabo, è una specie di famiglia. Sai, mi fa sentire vicino a loro.

G: In che modi hai esperito la marginalizzazione e discriminazione parlando in pubblico?

T: In America a volte mi guardano in modo strano, ma non direi di essere mai stato discriminata troppo, ma in Giordania so che se parlassi inglese vorrebbero alzare i prezzi... Quindi quando sono lì... praticamente non lo faccio. Parlo solo in arabo perché è la cosa migliore per le mie finanze.

G: Pensi che lo parleresti più spesso con la tua famiglia se avessi meno persone qui che guardano?

T: Generalmente rispondo a mia madre in inglese anche quando a volte mi parla in arabo. Sì, onestamente, probabilmente parlerei di più se avessi meno persone guardano.

G: Puoi a pensare a parole o frasi che ti fanno sentire a disagio in arabo o in inglese?

T: Oh sì, la parola terroristi? Sì, quello. Forse è davvero l’unico.
Le riflessioni di Gabrielle

Tara viene da South Brunswick, NJ ed è una studentessa in biotecnologia microbica. È molto coinvolta a scuola e studia sempre per la sua prossima esame. Tara lavora in uno studio medico e ha programma di frequentare la scuola di Medicina per diventare pediatra. Nel tempo libero le piace disegnare, leggere, ed allenarsi. Sono contenta ... di imparare la sua esperienza come qualcuno che parla arabo. È giordana e ha imparato l’arabo crescendo con la sua famiglia.... Nel South Brunswick, c’è una popolazione significativa di lingua araba, quindi dice che le sue esperienze sarebbero diverse se fosse cresciuta con meno persone arabe. Se c’è mai stato un momento in cui qualcuno l’ha trattata in modo diverso, non si senta troppo alienata perché c’erano altre persone come lei. A volte, usavano la parola “terrorista” o la gente diceva “Allah Akbar” in modo cattivo per deridere la sua cultura. Tara dice che alle scuola medie oppure ginnasio e al liceo, sull’11 settembre (9/11), le persone facevano commenti terroristici. Durante l’intervista, Tara ha detto che ad alcune delle domande non aveva mai pensato prima riguardo al parlare arabo.
Mi chiedo se con la discriminazione che dovuto affrontare, ha imparato a reprimere i sentimenti di discriminazione come meccanismo. Come intervistatore, volevo essere chiara con lei, e con l’argomento, nel caso era a disagio. Non volevo forzare delle risposte se non aveva subito discriminazioni, ma sono contenta che era molto aperta. A volte è stato difficile perché non parlo mai di questi problemi con lei come mia amica. È stato interessante ascoltare le sue esperienze e ho imparato di più non solo di lei, ma anche sull’esperienza di un lingua araba negli Stati Uniti.
Buongiorno, classe. questa è la mia intervista con la mia mamma. Che lingua parli e cosa ti pensi? Pensi che qualcuno di questi sia più vicino a chi sei?

Parlo tre lingue. Inglese e gujarati, che è la mia lingua madre e l'hindi che è la lingua nazionale dell'India.

E senti che qualcuno di questi linguaggi è più vicino a chi sei come persona?

Si, credo che il Gujarati sia molto vicino al mio cuore, la mia patria. Vengo dal Gujarat, uno stato dell'India. La lingua che parliamo laggiù è il gujarati e il gujarati è molto vicino a me. Mi porta alla mia patria, alla mia cultura e sono orgogliosadi parlare questa lingua.

hai mai sperimentato l'emarginazione in questo paese?

Negli anni '80 quando sono venuta in questo Paese e avevo circa 10 anni. Non conoscevo la lingua. E non riuscivo ancora a parlare.

C'erano frasi o detti che ti facevano sentire particolarmente a disagio?

Si, dal momento che non eravamo i bianchi, non parlavamo la loro lingua, non ci adattavamo ai loro vestiti...quindi si, c'era tempo in cui ci chiamavano con parole come un "Dot Buster" o come "hey you Hindu come over", e sembrava davvero inferiore. Mi sentivo molto triste. E dato che ero nuova nel paese e non sapevo parlare inglese non riuscivo ad esprimermi. Non potevo combattere allora e tornavo a casa molto triste.

Pensi che l'atteggiamento che le persone hanno usato lo abbia fatto sentire ancora peggio perché?

Oh sì, sicuramente. All'inizio degli anni '90 era una grande cosa contro gli indù o gli indiani. Penso che anche loro fossero gelosi. Gelosi perché abbiamo avuto successo anche se non parlavamo inglese, li abbiamo superati e penso che ci fosse una sorta di gelosia che non potevano sopportare.
Le riflessioni di Anuj

Per il nostro progetto finale, alla mia classe è stata assegnata un’intervista con un individuo che si sentiva emarginato in una comunità. Io ho scelto mia madre perché conoscevo le sue sfide come immigrata. Lei è arrivata negli Stati Uniti quando aveva 10 anni. È venuta in questo paese conoscendo un inglese limitato con 3 fratelli e i suoi genitori. Nell’intervista parla del suo tempo in cui era vittima di bullismo e si sentiva insicura. Questo è stato fatto da compagni studenti e colleghi. Tuttavia, il sistema scolastico è stato di grande sostegno e gli insegnanti l’hanno aiutata a imparare l’inglese. Ricorda anche che l’università era molto accogliente, ma anche difficile. Parla anche di come alcune parole e frasi la facessero sentire a disagio come "Hindu". In tutto, sentiva che essere un’immigrata era dura, ma oggi è grata di essere qui.

Comunque, per me questa intervista è stata difficile. Ascoltare le storie di mia madre che si sentiva a disagio era strano da capire. È sempre stata positiva e trovare un momento in cui si sentiva negativa è stato davvero un peccato. Oggi sono cambiati i tempi, gli immigrati affrontano meno discriminazioni perché la società è più accogliente, tuttavia in passato non era così. Sono grata di aver compreso la sua storia da una prospettiva unica e per le sfide che ha superato nel corso della sua vita.
A journey inside the Italian Neo-neorealist cinema. Student Yazan Mohammad’s paper is a powerful reflection on who is the other through a reading of Corpo Celeste (Rohrwacher) and Tommaso (Ferrara).
Italian Cinema and Fear of the Other
Yazan Mohammad

The search for the “real” is an essential component of all art, whether it be direct, life-like imitations of reality or abstract reconstructions of the mind's perception (itself an attempted recreation of reality). In the realm of cinema, no movement is better known for its pursuit of the real than Italian Neo-Realism. And while the original movement’s time has ended, its strong influence can still be witnessed today in contemporary Italian cinema. Italian directors are seeking to capture reality in their own unique ways, and while neither all films nor all of their realities are the same, one particular theme often pops up time and time again: the fear of the unknown, a fear of the other.

My argument is that there is a trend in contemporary Italian cinema in which “the other” is given a voice, or, at the very least, a depiction that deviates from the traditional and one-dimensional stereotypes often associated with them that make them fear-inducing. This claim can be validated through an analysis of the films Corpo Celeste (Rohrwacher, 2011) and Tommaso (Ferrara, 2019) and the ways each film deconstructs the fear of the other by showing “the other” in a new light. Additionally, this trend further helps to depict reality by showing a complex and nuanced view of those who are different, placing them beyond simply being an imagined threat or an outcast and instead giving them the humanity that they deserve.

Looking at Alice Rohrwacher’s Corpo Celeste, the spectator can see that there are multiple “others” that can be identified within the film. There are, of course, the Moroccans, a group who is repeatedly referred to as being undesirable. They are first mentioned as Marta, our young protagonist, has dinner with her family and her aunt voices her concerns about buying fish from the Mediterranean due to the dead human bodies constantly being found in the sea. Marta’s uncle looks at her and sneers, “They’re aliens,” before her aunt corrects him saying, “No, they’re Moroccans.” While the uncle seems to be joking, the cut to Marta’s face and her visible discomfort show a bias forming within her. With her introduction to Moroccan people being based on a description of them as corpses and aliens, Marta understands them as unpleasant people to keep away from.
Indeed, her uncle’s words appear to have affected Marta, when she later tells Don Mario that she does not eat fish. Based on the original connection between dead Moroccans and seafood, it is safe to assume that Marta’s distrust of fish comes from the fear of Moroccans that is normalized around her. Shortly after her uncle’s comments, Marta witnesses the Moroccans for the first time—albeit from very far away—as they pick up old furniture left out as trash and drive off. Marta later sees them again from much closer as she watches them pick up more large pieces of trash under the highway. An additional distrust of Moroccans is shown at another point in the film when Don Mario warns Marta’s mother that he is protecting the community and that “[t]here are so many bad types around.” While Don Mario does not explicitly mention which people are the “bad types,” the previous comments and moments in the film highlight immigrants from Morocco as a special concern in the film.

Rohrwacher’s choice to use the group of Moroccans as “the other” is a relevant selection, with Moroccan immigration being so common in Italy. As noted by Luciana Borsatti’s article for ANSAMed titled, “Moroccans largest non-EU immigrant community in Italy,” “Moroccans have been immigrating to Italy since the 1980s, with an increase of 346,000 people between 2001 and 2012. They now total 513,000, and they are concentrated in the northern Lombardia and Veneto Regions, as well as in the southern Calabria region.” With Corpo Celeste being released within the 2001-2012 timeframe, it makes sense that Moroccan immigration would be a notable issue in the minds of many Italians. Unfortunately, as the film demonstrates, with increased immigration often comes increased resentment and fear as the immigrants are “othered.” In Elif Çetin’s 2012 paper, “Exclusionary Rhetoric Expansionist Policies? Right-wing Parties and Immigration Policy-making in Italy,” he explains that “immigration issues tend to generate remarkably high public concerns in the country” and that electoral and government coalitions between the centre- and the far- right lead to the incorporation of certain elements of the far-right anti-immigrant rhetoric by the mainstream. This process enables the gradual legitimisation of the far-right agenda within the context of an expanded right-wing bloc.
With anti-immigration views becoming more popular during a period of increased Moroccan immigration, it is understandable that they would make up a community of “others” in Corpo Celeste.

But while the native Italians’ concerns about them are shown repeatedly in the film, the Moroccans never appear to pose any threat. Both times Marta watches them, she does not seem afraid of what she is seeing. There are no threatening events taking place, but rather a case of Marta simply being intrigued by the oddity of seeing people constantly picking up trash. At the very end of the film, when she finally meets the Moroccans, Marta sees firsthand that they are not a “bad type” but a welcoming group constructing a make-shift home near the shore. The same people whom Marta knew nothing about—aside from the negative descriptions she had heard—show her kindness as a boy immediately welcomes her and shows her a sort of sea creature, out of the water but still alive. Despite her previous dislike of sea creatures, Marta holds and embraces it. In this moment, as the film closes, Marta’s previous fears of Moroccans and sea life both vanish into the seaside air.

And similar to the way the Moroccans—a group that Marta had known so little about beyond the idea that they were not part of the same group as her and somehow “bad”—in the end are depicted in opposition to the claims made against them in the film, Marta too is depicted differently than the claims made against her. She too is “othered” in her own dual communities of home and the church, places where Marta is not accepted and consistently shown to not belong. At home, she is suffocated by the oppressive and aggressive force of her sister, who constantly scolds and screams at Marta for seemingly no reason, and within the church, Marta is isolated and mistreated while other students are not. For example, the dinner scene discussed earlier where her uncle refers to the Moroccans as “aliens” ends with Marta’s sister shouting at her for wearing one of her bras and refusing to eat a cake she had made. It appears as though Marta’s sister uses her relative power as an older person to mistreat her, making Marta’s age and less life experience often the source of her attacks. Looking at the church, at one point Marta is slapped by Santa, the unholy woman who works within the parish, after not believing in everything the church teaches her and is later made to sit all by herself during the confirmation ceremony.
In fact, considering that Marta is the protagonist of the film, the entire story is told from the perspective of “the other.” Marta is never accepted within her own communities, finding that she cannot assimilate at the church or at home. With both the Moroccans and Marta, the film depicts “the other” as misunderstood and unworthy of the unfair treatment and attacks they receive. The two are ostracized for things they cannot control like their ethnicity and culture, in the case of the Moroccan immigrants, and their age and beliefs in the case of Marta. The film’s portrayals of Marta and Moroccans offers a fresh perspective of those who are “othered,” in which acceptance from the dominant group is not the marker of one’s moral righteousness.

Abel Ferrara’s introspective film Tommaso offers another perspective on the theme of fear of the other, but in a remarkably different way. While the protagonist, Tommaso, is clearly the film’s “other,” being both an American immigrant who cannot fully speak Italian as well as an isolated person within his home, the most intense discomfort stemming from Tommaso’s differences seem to come from within himself.

Many times within the film, Tommaso’s fear of the other can be seen as his fear of being the other. The film makes it clear that Tommaso feels isolated in his life. At the very start, he is taking Italian lessons, in which he is shown to be able to perform simple conversations but yet not fluent enough for complex discussions. By opening with an Italian lesson, the issue of language barriers is immediately set up. Language barriers exist within Tommaso’s home as well, as he cannot understand the things his wife and daughter say to one another in Romanian. After coming home from his lesson, Tommaso passive aggressively complains, “I can’t understand shit,” and, “When I speak to you in Italian, help me! Please don’t answer in English, huh?” So while Tommaso struggles with the language barrier of being a non-Italian speaker in Italy, he also struggles with not being able to be a part of all the conversations within his home.

The isolation felt by Tommaso is heightened in a few shots shortly after the dialogue concerning his language deficiencies. First, he works on his screenplay and makes dinner in a dark kitchen as the camera pans left to show his wife and daughter together, playing and speaking Romanian in a bright room nearby.
The camera then pans back to Tommaso in the kitchen, looking annoyed. After this, the three of them have dinner together, his wife and daughter seated together in the light while the camera pans left to show Tommaso seated in the dark, isolated and alone. Finally, Tommaso washes dishes in the kitchen, still alone and in the dark, as his wife and daughter watch TV in a language he cannot understand, possibly still Romanian, still together and bathed in light. This sequence repeatedly demonstrates Tommaso’s isolation within his home, understandably causing him to fear his status as “the other.” In Hannah Arendt’s book, The Jewish Writings, she describes the importance of language on people in a new country. Arendt states, “We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings.” Being unable to express himself and hold natural conversations within or outside of his home, Tommaso cannot easily connect with many people, making his position extremely difficult and uncomfortable.

Another factor which makes Tommaso feel isolated and othered is his age. Being significantly older than his wife, he feels quite insecure and imagines her cheating on him with a younger man. This is first shown when he is at the park with his daughter, as he daydreams about his wife with this man. The man appears several other times throughout the film and is a symbol of Tommaso’s own insecurity within his relationship with his wife. This lack of security can be clearly seen in two scenes. First, when he yells at his wife for not answering her phone while at her mother’s house with their daughter, and second, when Tommaso berates his wife for making food for herself and their daughter without offering him any. In both of these instances, Tommaso insultingly refers to his wife as a child, highlighting the disconnect caused by their ages. In the first exchange, Tommaso says, “You know, don’t act like a fucking kid, you know?” and during the kitchen fight he says, “So I have two children now?” These scenes both demonstrate the strain on Tommaso’s marriage caused by his insecurity about the large age difference.

Ultimately, Ferrara depicts a fear of the other in the form of Tommaso’s insecurities as a destructive force, and Tommaso’s relationship with his wife and daughter crumbles.
At the end of the film, Tommaso’s wife leaves, taking their daughter with her as he runs after them yelling, “You’re the problem!” Tommaso’s wife decides to end their relationship and Tommaso again chooses to place blame on her. Before this, however, in an interesting moment in the film, Tommaso walks through a subway while his voiceover narrates the scene:

“Everything that exists is capable of eliciting pleasure in your mind, but you are narrow. Your mind has neurotic obsessions, such as, ‘I only like things that are purple.’ For you, only purple things are beautiful. This sort of neurotic, dualistic, unrealistic way of thinking only gets you into trouble.”

Before this scene, Tommaso had been shown cheating on his wife, kissing one of his students. Once he exits the subway, he again sees the made-up younger man whom he imagines his wife cheating with. The narration can be understood as Tommaso’s way of understanding his insecurity about age, as he has a preference for younger women and assumes that his wife shares the same views about younger men. Since Tommaso equates youth with beauty, and youth is what seems to give him pleasure, he fears his own aging and feels unworthy of his wife, resenting her as he assumes that she feels the same way. With the differences in language and age that Tommaso experiences in his life, his insecurities about these differences create a fear of being the other, ironically making him react by pushing away those closest to him. In the case of this film, Tommaso is both “the other” and the one who is fearful of the other, making the film’s depictions of him and his fears different from his own. His voice is given, but in contradiction to what is being said about him.

Fear of the other is only natural. We are social beings and we have evolved to take comfort in being around what we know and can easily identify with. Unfortunately, we can hurt ourselves and others with these fears, causing isolation and baseless assumptions. The two films discussed here depict the dangerous results of fearing the other by showing the fear from “the other’s” side or, at the very least, showing the reality which contradicts the fears. In Corpo Celeste, fear of the other is wielded against Marta and Italy’s Moroccan immigrants, both of which are depicted positively to contradict these superficial assertions.
In Tommaso, Tommaso himself fears his position as the other, being someone who feels isolated by his language and age. Tommaso’s fears create insecurities which destroy his relationship with his wife and his daughter. The film’s portrayal of Tommaso combats the idea of the fear of the other by demonstrating the flaws of “the other,” in this case Tommaso, as he is the one with the fears. In the end, both films seek to capture reality and, by giving these insights into the truth behind the fear of the other, they more accurately depict the complex and nuanced world in which we live.

Works Cited
Students created poems using all the languages they know. Then, they peer-translated them into English and Italian.
Cos'è una casa?
Dónde está la mía?
Camino casa a casa, ma non la tengo.
Solo edificios, ladrillos, legna, vetro por el que miro.
È la famiglia que has superado?
O amici che no llaman?
O una casa en mi?
Una mia casa sola.
Soy casa.
La casa mia que è vacía.

Emily Mautone, 102 Elementary Italian, Spring 24
WHAT IS A HOUSE?
WHERE IS MINE NOW?
ON MY WAY HOME,
I DON’T HAVE IT.
ONLY BUILDINGS,
BRICKS, WOOD, GLASS,
I’M LOOKING AT.
IS THIS THE FAMILY YOU’VE OVERCOME?
OR FRIENDS WHO DO NOT CALL?
OR A HOUSE ON ME?
ONE OF MY OWN.
I AM HOME.
MY HOUSE IS EMPTY.

MAYA GROVE’S ENGLISH TRANSLATION

CHE COS’È UNA CASA?
DOV’È LA MIA?
CAMMINO DI CASA IN CASA,
MA NON RIESCO A TROVARLA.
SOLO EDIFICI, MATTONI, LEGNO, VETRI
ATTRaversO I QUALI GUARDO.
È LA FAMIGLIA CHE AVete SUPERato?
O GLI AMICI CHE NON CHIAMANO?
O UNA CASA IN ME?
IO SONO CASA.
LA MIA CASA CHE È VUOTA.

PAULA MARTIN’S ITALIAN TRANSLATION
Final project for Italian for Business course, where students were asked to work on a creative project related to business content. Briella Payami created this blog dedicated to luxury shopping in Italy, doing an amazing job.

CLICK HERE TO EXPLORE THE BLOG