

Tentative Program

Rethinking the Italian Eighteenth-Century and Its Transnational Connections

Location: Pyle Center, 702 Langdon Street

Dates: April 4-5, 2025

Friday, April 4

2:30-3:00 p.m.

Opening Remarks

Florence Hsia, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research in the Arts & Humanities
Grazia Menechella, Chair, Department of French and Italian
Mario Alberto Bartoli, Italian Consul General of Italy in Chicago

3:00-5:00 p.m.

Panel 1: Music, Performance, and Aesthetic Debates Across Borders

Moderator: Anne Vila (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

Corie Marshall (Loyola University): "Eighteenth-Century Italian Tragedy:
A Transnational Perspective"

Guido Olivieri (University of Texas-Austin): "The 'Image' of Italian Culture Through the Debates on Music
National Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century"

Michael Weinstein-Reiman (University of Wisconsin-Madison): "Giuseppe Tartini: Singing on the Violin
During (and After) the Querelle des Bouffons"

5:00-5:30 p.m.

Panel Discussion

Saturday, April 5

10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Panel 2: Networks of Culture and Thought: Intellectual Crossroads

Moderator: Michael Martoccio (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

Margaret Butler (University of Wisconsin-Madison): "Operatic Celebrity and the Transnational in the
Eighteenth Century: Caterina Bonafini, the 'Aspasia of Modena,' and the Fame Trade"

Rebecca Messbarger (Washington University): "Women in the Room: The Italian Settecento's Making of
the Modern Public Sphere"

Pasquale Palmieri (Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II): "Transnational Crime Stories in Eighteenth-Century Italy"

12:00 -12:30 p.m.

Panel Discussion

12:30-2:00 p.m.

Lunch Break

2:00-4:00 p.m.

Panel 3: Transnational Literary and Theatrical Receptions

Moderator: Christopher Kleinhenz (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

Stefania Buccini (University of Wisconsin-Madison): "An American in Venice: William D. Howells's Perspectives on 18th-Century Italian Literature"

Clorinda Donato (University of California, Long Beach): "Rethinking the Transnational and Transhistorical Dimensions of Italian 18th-Century Theater: The Reception of Carlo Gozzi in Europe"

Ernesto Livorni (University of Wisconsin-Madison): "Foscolo's *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* as Transnational Novel"

4:00-4:30 p.m.

Panel Discussion

4:30-4:45 p.m.

Coffee Break

4:45-5:15 p.m.

Panel 4: Beyond Continents: The Italian Enlightenment and the Wisconsin Idea

Moderator: Leah Sandner

Graduate Student Readings

5:45-6:00 p.m.

Closing Remarks

Stefania Buccini, Symposium Organizer

ABSTRACTS

Panel 1: **Music, Performance, and Aesthetic Debates Across Borders**

Corie Marshall, Loyola University

Eighteenth-Century Italian Tragedy: A Transnational Perspective

This presentation proposes a reevaluation of eighteenth-century Italy's understudied tragic tradition by situating Italian tragedy and its major proponents within a transnational context that considers this tradition's links to a wider European tragic landscape. Despite the efforts of Vittorio Alfieri, Italy's most accomplished tragedian, traditional scholarship has often argued that eighteenth-century Italian tragedy was less developed than its better-known European counterparts, insular, and unsuccessful in making a lasting impact on the European stage. A transnational reconsideration of eighteenth-century Italian tragedy, however, paints a more complicated picture by revealing the two-way workings of literary influence and thus refuting the outdated vision of an isolated and inferior Italian tragedy. Italian tragedies, instead, were both influenced by and sources of inspiration for other traditions. The influence of other tragic traditions on Italian tragedy led to cultural, linguistic, and national anxieties as Italian tragedians sought to develop an authentically Italian tradition that could vie with the more established traditions of other European powers. In addition to these preoccupations, tragedians like Alfieri drew inspiration from Spanish and English history, as well as classical tragedy, to create works that both reflected an Italian approach to tragedy and a more cosmopolitan outlook. Italian tragedy's borrowings, however, must be considered alongside the reception of Italian tragic works beyond Italian borders, particularly among the British Romantic poets, who saw in Alfieri, in particular, both a model to emulate and an antimodel to disprize. After making a case for why eighteenth-century Italian tragedy should be studied alongside its more famous European counterparts, I will conclude by offering some ways to measure the transnational impact of Italian tragedy beyond the eighteenth century.

Guido Olivieri, University of Texas-Austin

The "Image" of Italian Culture Through the Debates on Music National Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century

Mobility of Italian musicians was a defining phenomenon in the whole 18th century. The myth of Italy as the cradle of music ("Italy may be compared to a tuning fork, of which Naples holds the octave"; Pierre Jean Grosley, 1774) was fueled by the widespread circulation of Italian music, the triumph of opera, and the success of Italian composers in European courts and theaters. Italian musical style thus became an inescapable archetype, an aesthetic model to be imitated, occasionally avoided, or often assimilated into a new synthesis, but always regarded as a paradigm against which other European musical cultures had to measure themselves. Indeed, Italian music played a decisive role in the creation and development of modern musical aesthetics and the new musical language of the century. This paper examines how the major aesthetic controversies and intellectual discourses surrounding music in the eighteenth century contributed to the formation of Italy's cultural identity and the construction of its European image. Central to these debates were competing visions of what constituted "Italian" music. Through a careful reading of these disputes, I reconstruct the image of Italian culture as it manifested itself in a series of dichotomies (Italian vs. German or French, passion vs. reason, vocal vs. instrumental music) and through some stereotypical views of Italian music traditions.

Michael Weinstein-Raimer, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Giuseppe Tartini: Singing on the Violin During (and After) the Querelle des Bouffons

In music-theoretical circles, the eighteenth-century pamphlet war over the palatability of Italian comic opera in Parisian high society—the Querelle des Bouffons, or the Quarrel of the Buffoons—is often portrayed as a debate over the following question: Which is more important to musical expression, harmony or melody? On one side of the debate was Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764), who, across a vast theoretical oeuvre, sought a foundation for an aesthetics of music that knitted natural harmonic principles to the affections. On the other side was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), who championed the merits of Italian opera as an extension of his philosophy of melody and its connection to language. This presentation sheds light on the contributions of another protagonist in this story, the violinist, pedagogue, and music theorist Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770), whose 1754 *Trattato di musica secondo la vera scienza dell' armonia*, deeply rooted in acoustics, approaches Rameau's epistemology. However, it was also cited approvingly by Rousseau in his articles on music for the *Encyclopédie*. I argue that Rousseau was drawn to Tartini's treatise not solely as a more cogent alternative to Rameau's, but also because of Tartini's renown as the eighteenth century's authority on cantabile, or singing violin technique, which accorded with Rousseau's own position during the Querelle.

Panel 2: Networks of Culture and Thought: Intellectual Crossroads

Margaret Butler, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Operatic Celebrity and the Transnational in the Eighteenth Century: Caterina Bonafini, “the Aspasia of Modena,” and the Fame Trade

After retiring from an international operatic career, the prima donna Caterina Bonafini (1751–1826) moved to Modena. There she convened a salon in the 1780s with gatherings attended by leading literary and political figures; Giuseppe Gorani referred to her as “the Aspasia of Modena.” Bonafini has much to teach us about operatic celebrity and its mechanisms, which were inherently transnational, communicating and facilitating reciprocities across borders.

The well-known border-crossing of itinerant opera singers might be termed a “fame trade,” one practiced by increasingly modern institutions that commodified and profited from them—theaters and music publishers. In an era when operatic music circulated primarily in manuscript, arias Bonafini performed were printed and sold internationally. These and others, marketed through singers' names, along with elements of Bonafini's biography, elucidate operatic celebrity and its construction. Bonafini, acquiring an unusual degree of wealth and independence, demonstrates women's increasing agency and autonomy during this time. She illustrates the relevance of celebrity studies' recent turn toward sociability and its related structures. Famous in her day but now practically unknown, she also exemplifies the reciprocity among media, publics, and celebrities that marked the experience of late-century Italian operatic divas and the ways we remember (or forget) them.

Rebecca Messbarger, Washington University

Women in the Room: The Italian Settecento's Making of the Modern Public Sphere.

In 1743, exactly twenty years after the Academy of the Ricoverati in Padua debated whether women should be educated, Goldoni's Rosaura—a clever maidservant and protagonist of *La Donna di Garbo*—delivered this provocative rhyme on stage. With her pointed critique of the “Great Debate” on women's learning and the male determination to stifle it, Rosaura personified a newly asserted female authority that had emerged in the two decades since the Paduan assembly. Increasingly, women from beyond the noble class claimed a voice within Italy's foremost cultural institutions: the university; the literary,

scientific, and art academy; the anatomy theater; the pages of influential elite and popular journals; the theater; and the publishing houses. As historian Paula Findlen has aptly observed, “Italy, more than any other region in Enlightenment Europe, offered learned women diverse circumstances in which to exercise and display their erudition.” Yet, women’s influence extended beyond the established intellectual milieu. In a climate of growing social liberality, men and women mixed more freely in public and semi-private spaces—most strikingly outside the constraints of marriage—in salons, theaters, masked balls, and coffee houses. These shifts caught the attention of Europe at large, spurring the fascination of Grand Tourists, and a prolific and dynamic discourse about women. Departing from the pivotal transformations of the early eighteenth century, this talk revisits the historic *querelle des femmes* staged by the Ricoverati to trace the complex origins and significance of women’s expanded visibility and authority in the Italian public sphere. Through a microhistorical analysis of select cases, I will highlight how the Italian example influenced and resonated across national boundaries, ultimately shaping the modern conception of the public sphere.

Pasquale Palmieri, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

Transnational Crime Stories in Eighteenth-Century Italy

Public interest in the accounts of famous trials was very high in the eighteenth-century throughout the Italian peninsula and the whole European continent, as it sparked new energy within a more general expansion of the print market. Rather, the representation of justice became all the more conspicuously mediated by competing modes of communication, thanks to widely circulated texts originally produced in the Italian states, but thanks also to Italian translations (or adaptations) of texts from abroad. The symbiotic relationship between the two is undeniable and is continually nurtured through uninterrupted circulatory activity that produces an unending stream of content. These profound transformations are well highlighted by the case studies that will be analyzed in this contribution: the stories of the papal secretary Giuseppe Pignata (convicted of heresy, capable of escaping from the feared prisons of the Roman Inquisition), of the “famous highwayman” Louis Dominique Garthause (also known as Cartouche), and of the “famous smuggler” Louis Mandrin (also known as the “Robin Hood of France”). News, writings, plays, speeches and songs about these non-fictional characters proved to be popular among both ordinary people and social elites. The whole media ecosystem – I argue – shaped perceptions about criminal behaviours through the use of literary conventions through the mixing of genres and rhetorical strategies, whether those perceptions originally derived from established powers (governmental agencies), cultural industries and sociable spaces (such as print shops, book shops, coffee shops, and barber shops), or the participatory impulses of the public (gossip, street theatre, and the like). In visual terms, I aim to show how the criminal became a privileged blank screen on which society projected its key concerns: the drives and emotions that ran through society lodged in the collective, but hardly uniform, representations of criminals.

Panel 3: Transnational Literary and Theatrical Receptions

Stefania Buccini, University of Wisconsin-Madison

An American in Venice: William D. Howells’s Perspectives on Eighteenth-Century Italian Literature

Serving as the American consul in Venice from 1861 to 1865, American author William D. Howells had a rare and invaluable opportunity to immerse himself in the richness of Italian culture, developing a refined and discerning appreciation for its literary tradition. This paper examines Howells’s critical reflections on eighteenth-century Italian literature, particularly as presented in *Modern Italian Poets: Essays and Versions* (1887) and *My Literary Passions* (1895). Howells’s analysis spans a broad spectrum

of poets from the early to the late eighteenth century, including the "Arcadian Shepherds" and the renowned Vincenzo Monti, with a clear chronological progression. In his exploration of recurring themes across their works, Howells emphasizes the influence of patriotism and the political upheavals that shaped both the poets' creations and the evolution of Italian intellectual life. Through his meticulous and innovative examination of selected texts, Howells offers a compelling and thought-provoking commentary that deepens the reader's understanding of these authors' literary contributions. A particularly noteworthy piece in Howells's body of work is his essay on Carlo Goldoni, the celebrated playwright for whom Howells held deep admiration. This essay stands out not only for its profound insight but also for the exceptional depth and perceptiveness with which Howells engages with Goldoni's legacy.

Clorinda Donato, California State University, Long Beach

Rethinking the Transnational and Transhistorical Dimensions of Italian 18th-Century Theater: The Reception of Carlo Gozzi in Europe

Count Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806) is often overshadowed by his contemporary, Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793), as an eighteenth-century Venetian playwright. Yet recognition of Gozzi's talents across several genres has accelerated in recent years, thanks, in particular to scholarship that assesses Gozzi's impact and resonance from a more European perspective. Indeed, the comic aspects of Gozzi's work received high accolades from Gozzi's many admirers in France, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One of Gozzi's greatest admirers was Swiss writer Germaine de Staël (1766-1817), and though highly critical of the Italian literature of her contemporaries, she greatly admired Carlo Gozzi, whose work, she found, best expressed the Italian imagination as she envisioned it, restoring Italian "buffoonery" and abandonment to "leaps of happiness". Considering the extent to which Staël admired Italian improvisation, which she immortalized in her 1807 novel, *Corinne, or Italy*, whose protagonist was based on Corilla Olimpica, the famous improvisatrice from the Arcadia Academy, it is not surprising to discover her desire to see the Italian theater continue in the sophisticated version of *Commedia dell'arte* that had become Gozzi's trademark. Gozzi's *Commedia dell'arte* preserved Arlecchino, Brighella, Tartaglia, Pantalone and Colombina. He imbued them with exotic, bizarre, and supernatural elements that made them even more appealing, thus creating the comic supernatural that dazzled Staël, and many others. In my paper, I will discuss how Gozzi's work inspired salient pages of Staël's 1807 *Corinne, or Italy*, a novel that embodied in its protagonist a performance of "Italie" that would inspire new generations of grand tourists while immortalizing a mediatic, Italian type.

Ernesto Livorni, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Foscolo's *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* as Transnational Novel

When he moved to England in exile, Foscolo published his novel *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* one more time in 1817, in an edition that was very close to his 1816 edition published in Switzerland. However, the edition published in England included the "Notizia Bibliografica," a long essay in which Foscolo outlined the debts and affinities, but most of all the differences and the distinctions, that his novel has vis-à-vis other literary works by German, French and British writers. In so doing, he also retrieved the principles of New Classicism while discussing the main tenets of Roman and especially Greek art. The paper discusses the positionality of Foscolo's novel in relation especially to Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in the "Notizia Bibliografica." The essay turns out to be not so much an apologetic document with which Foscolo promotes his novel, but rather a mapping of some trends in Western European literature between New Classicism and Romanticism (second half of

18th century and first half of 19th century). The paper aims at tracing the movement of literary, aesthetic and philosophical ideas from one culture to another, still within Western European countries, but ready to trade roles and functions with other countries.

Panel 4: Beyond Continents: The Italian Enlightenment and the Wisconsin Idea

Graduate Student Textual Readings

This panel will feature graduate students presenting selected passages in translation from the works of eighteenth-century Italian authors. These readings will underscore the progressive ideas that anticipate the mission of the Wisconsin Idea, offering a compelling glimpse into the intellectual currents that helped shape modern thought.