



## OSCAR WILDE'S ITALIAN DREAM

RENATO MIRACCO IN CONVERSATION WITH PROF. GINO SCATASTA & PROF. LAURA BENEDETTI

By Derek A. Ginoris

Our talk with Renato Miracco about his book “Oscar Wilde’s Italian Dream: 1875-1900” (Damiani, 2020) was extraordinary and intriguing. In an engaging conversation with Professor Gino Scatasta of Università di Bologna and Professor Laura Benedetti of Georgetown University, Miracco gave spectators an enlightening look at Wilde’s photography during his journey to Southern Italy following his exit from London in the late 19th century.

Miracco began the talk by discussing his initial interest in Wilde, which sprung from various exhibitions he viewed around the world that primarily discussed his literature. He began asking himself why exactly Wilde persists in today’s society and what traces his photographic works leave on contemporary society now more than 100 years after his death. In fact, many interviews with Wilde surfaced long after his death, as writers and contemporaries of the time were often constricted to hide their work in fear of being exploited, shamed, or even imprisoned for their content.

Miracco’s book is dedicated to this later chapter of Wilde’s life in Italy, a period in which he experienced newfound freedoms originally denied to him during his life in England. He mentions that it is necessary to discuss Wilde’s role as a controversial comedian and writer whose amorous relationships contributed to social conflict at the time. Particularly problematic was his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, son of the 9th Marquess of Queensberry, who strictly forbade the relationship and accused Wilde of perverting his son. Going against his wishes, Wilde refused to stray from his romantic path and was incarcerated due to gross indecency for consensual homosexual acts.

It wasn’t until his release from prison and escape from England that Wilde was able to experience true sexual freedom, which he sought in the Mediterranean. The idea of Southern Italy as a symbolic place of refuge for contemporaries of the time spread around the world and visitors would typically spend time between Rome, Naples, and Sicily. These ideas stemmed from Thomas Cook’s communications of Italy as a place of liberation and exploration which was connected to ancient Roman ideals and expression. In this period, Italy marked a place where a gay man was able to live with a romantic partner without as much trouble and negative attention as a conservative place like London. Following a question from Prof. Benedetti,

Miracco makes a stark distinction between the social climate of Northern Italy, which condemned acts of sexual lust against nature, and Southern Italy which delicately balanced sexual differences. He expresses that this dynamic had long existed in the Southern Mediterranean while the phenomenon began garnering attention in England only in the 1850s thanks to research conducted by Oxford on Greek love between those of the same sex.

One of the first photographs discussed was that of the Neapolitan Boy who represented Wilde's adoration for what he categorized as the Italian masculine. The young man he makes his muse in this picture represents a sort of idol which he considered to be emblematic of the perfect male physique. The following pictures discussed highlight Wilde's

arrival to Capri, which was an extremely difficult destination to reach at the time. One photograph features islanders dressed in white welcoming Wilde with a stunning landscape in the background while another features the Grotta Azzurra or the "Blue Cave" which displays the dramatic beauty of the island. These recently discovered photographs address Wilde's pursuit for a land in which the unique delicateness and beauty of society mimicked the gorgeous landscape within which he was immersed. For Wilde, Southern Italy represented not only a landscape that offered sexual freedom, but one in which he was reborn and invigorated. Even today, the lifestyle, scenery, and values embodied by Southern Italy continue to inspire, attracting writers, artists, and scholars from across the globe.

## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Dear ICS Members,

We are coming into February with the hope that we will finally start to gather in person in the next month and resume some sort of cautious normalcy. We are very much looking forward to our in-person classes as well. We feel it will be a new spring for us all, blooming with a plethora of events, classes, and the opportunity to grow and to serve our mission.

Our February 20th cultural event will still be online. We are happy to welcome Professor Laura Benedetti in conversation with Prof. Reem Bassiouney from American University in Cairo. Laura Benedetti is a beloved figure to our organization where she has generously presented many times as a scholar of Italian as well as a fiction writer.

This time she will transport us back in time between Venice and Egypt in a fascinating exploration of what it meant traveling with a diplomatic mission. She will present her new book, entitled *Mediterranean Diplomacy in the 16th century: Zaccaria Pagani's From Venice to Cairo*. Set in 1512, it tells us of Venetian ambassador Domenico Trevisan's journey to Cairo and of his attempt to restore a diplomatic relationship between the Venetian republic and the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt. His mission came to light from the diary of a member of his retinue, Zaccaria Pagani. Zaccaria proves to be an invaluable witness to how commercial, diplomatic and cultural ties were established and functioned in the civilizations living around the Mediterranean Sea.

Regretfully, due to the spread of Omicron we felt it was safer to cancel our traditional Festa di Carnevale.

However, this year—on April 2nd and for the first time—Villa Firenze (the residence of the Italian Ambassador) will open the doors to what promises to be a mythical Easter egg hunt. The event will be, of course, outdoors and with the presence of some of our children's teachers to supervise and to coordinate Easter egg hunt. Soon our website will have information on how to register for what is sure to be a super fun event, an exclusive opportunity for a limited number of guests. ICS Members will have priority.

*Annelise Brody Morani*  
Chair of the ICS Board of Directors





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# ITALIAN LANGUAGE PROGRAM & MORE

By Francesca Casazza, CEO & Executive Director

## February 2022

Winter term started well, with courses online, in person, and hybrid. More courses are about to start for Session 2 (February 16th):

- A new Beginners 1, in person, Tue/Thu at 10:00 am-12:00 pm
- Elementary 1, in person, Tue/Thu at 10:00 am-12:00 pm
- Elementary 2, online, Mon/Wed 10:00 am-12:00pm
- Intermediate 2, in person, Mon/Wed 2:30-4:30 pm
- L'Italiano vien leggendo, hybrid, Tue/Thu 10:00 am-12:00pm

And there are other almost-full classes which are about to start. Please visit [our schedule](#). Do not miss our new Chef's lesson, on traditional dishes from Milano and regione Lombardia! Next [cooking class](#) is Saturday, February 19th from 3:00-5:00 pm on Zoom.

[The next CELI Exam](#) (to evaluate your level of Italian, and necessary for citizenship) will take place on March 14, but enrollment is required by February 8th. A preparation course of 10 hours will start February 10th.

Check our [Kids classes](#): a new course for 3-6 years old is opening in Fairfax, a beginners class for middle schoolers is opening online, an advanced level for kids 1st-2nd graders is continuing at the Whittle school, open to everyone. Fiorenza Castelli will offer a fun workshop for [LA FESTA DEL PAPA'](#) Friday, March 18th, from 6:30 to 9:30. A great opportunity for children to learn with us, while parents enjoy a night out.

Summer Camps registration [is now open](#). Reserve your spot for up to six weeks of learning Italian language and culture while having fun.

Finally, you can try [Tango](#) and [Yoga in italiano](#) on a drop-in basis or for the rest of the semester.

We look forward to having you back in our classrooms!

*Francesca Casazza*  
CEO & Executive Director

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Cultural Society  
of Washington D.C.



## SUMMER CAMP

for kids 4-11 yrs old and teens 12-18



### COST PER WEEK

**Full-day** 9:00am-3:30pm  
\$390/child; siblings \$350, ICS members \$360  
**Half-day** 9:00am-12:30pm  
\$280/child; siblings/ICS members: \$260  
Daily drop-ins: \$80 (full-day); \$50 (half-day)

**Register before April 1st and get an extra \$20 discount.**



### DAILY SCHEDULE

9:00am-9:15am: Drop off  
9:15am-10:00am: Language class: reading, writing, singing, building vocabulary and grammatical structures (outdoors)  
10:00am-11:00am: Outdoor activities + snack  
11:10am-12:30pm: Indoor creative project  
12:30pm-1:00pm: Outdoor Lunch  
1:00pm-1:30pm: Outdoor playing  
1:40pm-2:50pm: Indoor or outdoor games and Story time  
2:50pm-3:30pm: Video - Dismissal

Extra activities will include a DAY AT THE ZOO, and a DAY AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART/Picnic at the Mall. Each day will have a theme: cooking, art, science, music and more.

- Upon request possibility of earlier drop off and later pick up.
- Kids are to bring their own lunch and snack.



# CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WITH AN AUTHENTIC ITALIAN DINNER AND FUNDRAISING

Le D.I.V.E. (Donne Italiane che Vivono all'Esteri) invites you to celebrate International Women's Day with a special dinner prepared by "Divina Pasta", a group of Italian friends who are passionate about cooking.

For the occasion of celebrating women around the world, "Divina Pasta" offers the opportunity to purchase a dinner whose profits will be entirely donated to support organizations that help Afghan women and children in this urgent time of need.

The dinner will be prepared for two and will include a salad, a handmade main pasta course, and a dessert typical of the Italian regional cuisine, all for the cost of \$100. Submit your order by Friday February 18th, for pick up starting on Sunday, March 6th at Westmoreland Church, Bethesda.

More info [here](#) or on the website [ledive.org](http://ledive.org)



## MEDITERRANEAN DIPLOMACY IN THE 16TH CENTURY ZACCARIA PAGANI'S FROM VENICE TO CAIRO

On Sunday, February 20th join us for our online Cultural Event: Mediterranean Diplomacy in the 16th Century, Zaccaria Pagani's *From Venice to Cairo*. Prof. Laura Benedetti, Georgetown University, will present her book in conversation with Prof. Reem Bassiouny, American University in Cairo.

Between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, the centuries-old partnership between the Republic of Venice and the Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo was put to the test by events that upset the traditional balance of power in the Mediterranean.

The opening of a new route to the Indies by the Portuguese, as well as the emergence of the charismatic Shah of Persia, Isma'il I fueled mistrust and tensions that exploded with the decision of the Sultan of Cairo, al-Ashraf Qansuh al-Ghuri, to imprison Venetian consuls and merchants and to suspend political and commercial relations with the Serenissima.

In an attempt to resolve the crisis, the Venetian Senate authorized the sending of a large representation and entrusted the leadership to Domenico Trevisan. His mission to Cairo, which took place between January and October 1512, is described in detail by one of the participants, Zaccaria Pagani, in a compelling manuscript. The volume is accompanied by letters and reports, partly unpublished, at the hands of other protagonists and witnesses of the expedition, such as Marco Antonio Trevisan, son of the ambassador and future doge, and Vincenzo Tiepolo, commander of the escort galley in charge of protecting the Venetian envoys in the most dangerous phase of their itinerary.

These different perspectives converge in outlining a fascinating picture of Domenico Trevisan's journey, rich in specific information on diplomatic protocols and navigation techniques. The subtle psychological and cultural annotations return the image of a Mediterranean furrowed by common interests, secular rivalries, and

surprising alliances, in a network of relationships and dependencies that denies any easy dichotomy and highlights the possibility and advantages of the communication, rather than confrontation, between civilizations.

More info and RSVP for this event [here](#).





## RACCOMANDAZIONI LETTERARIE DEI NOSTRI STUDENTI

# UNA BARCA NEL BOSCO

Di Carlos Franzetti

Il libro “Una barca nel bosco”, scritto da Paola Mastrocola, racconta la storia dolce, amara e divertente, di Gaspare Torrente, un ragazzo tredicenne, figlio di un pescatore di una piccola isola del sud Italia, delle sue avventure e disavventure a Torino dove, date le sue straordinarie doti per tradurre dal latino e dal francese, la sua famiglia decide di mandarlo a studiare al Liceo.

Gaspare arriva al nord accompagnato da sua madre ed entrambi vengono ospitati nella casa della zia Elsa, la sorella vedova della madre. Fin dall'inizio del romanzo, l'autrice fa una forte critica del sistema scolastico nel Liceo torinese e degli insegnanti, semplici burocrati che non sanno riconoscere il talento di Gaspare.

Il professore di latino, quando Gaspare trova gli esercizi di grammatica troppo elementari e propone di fare una versione, rifiuta e gli risponde che è ancora troppo presto e che forse se ne parlerà alla fine dell'anno scolastico.

Gaspare ha la stessa esperienza con la professoressa di francese quando le dice che sta leggendo le poesie di Verlaine e lei risponde che Verlaine non gli serve a niente e che d'ora in avanti dovrà limitarsi a seguire le sue lezioni e ad imparare frasi del tipo “Come ti chiami?” e “Che ore sono?”.

Gaspare è deluso e scontento. Si sente “diverso” e isolato come “una barca nel bosco”, cerca di emulare la banalità dei suoi compagni seguendo i loro schemi e le mode del momento, finisce per vergognarsi di sua madre che per mantenerlo a Torino apre una gastronomia dove cucina e vende polpette, e da ragazzo tranquillo e studioso diventa un ragazzo ribelle e superficiale.

Nel suo libro, la Mastrocola parla anche dell'universo degli affetti di Gaspare, del suo innamoramento platonico con una ragazza francese e della conseguente delusione, della sua amicizia con Furio un ragazzo molto diverso dagli altri, come lui stesso, della passione di Gaspare per le piante e per gli alberi e delle diverse possibilità che avrà nella vita dopo aver finito il Liceo.

Insomma si tratta di un romanzo molto interessante che mi pare concentrato sulla critica dei sistemi d'insegnamento che puntano verso il basso e ignorano gli studenti migliori.



## BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OUR STUDENTS

# A BOAT IN THE FOREST

*By Carlos Franzetti*

This book by Paola Mastrocola tells the sweet, sour, and entertaining story of Gaspare Torrente, a 13-year old boy, son of a fisherman from a small island in the South of Italy. It deals with his adventures and mishaps in Turin where, given his extraordinary gifts for translation from Latin and French, his family decides to send him to study at the Liceo.

Gaspare arrives North in the company of his mother and they both host with Aunt Elsa the widowed sister of his mother. From the very beginning the author is very critical of the scholastic system of the Liceo in Turin where bureaucratic teachers are unable to recognize Gaspare's gifts.

His Latin teacher, when Gaspare proposes to start doing some translation, because he finds the grammar exercises too elementary, tells him that it is too early and that translation will be dealt with by the end of the scholastic year. Gaspare has the same experience with his French teacher who, when he tells her that he is reading the poems of Verlaine, responds that Verlaine is of no use for him and that from now on he should limit himself to follow her lessons and learn phrases like "What is your name?" or "What time is it?"

Gaspare is unhappy and disillusioned. He feels different and isolated like "a boat in a forest," as a result he tries to emulate the banality of his classmates, following them on their pranks and fashions, he ends up feeling ashamed of his mother who, to provide for his support in Turin, opens a food shop where she cooks and sells meatballs, and from being a quiet and studious boy Gaspare becomes rebellious and superficial.

In her book Mastrocola also deals with the universe of Gaspare's feelings, with his platonic love for a French girl and his consequent disillusion, his friendship with Furio, a boy who like Gaspare is very different from the others. She describes Gaspare's passion for plants and trees, and the subsequent life options that open to him after he has finished the Liceo.

Summing up, this is a very interesting book that, seems to me, is quite critical of the teaching systems that being focused on the lower levels end up ignoring the best students.





# IL PANE PERDUTO BY EDITH BRUCK

REVIEW BY MICHAEL W. FARRELL

*Il Pane Perduto*, which will be translated into English before long, is the latest book by Edith Bruck, a ninety-one year old Italian writer and survivor of Auschwitz. Bruck was born Hungarian but settled in Italy after the war and has been an Italian citizen for more than sixty years. She learned to write Italian, she has stated, as a shield or defense against the cruelest memories of her adolescence and early adulthood under Nazi persecution. Her writings include novels and plays, partly accomplished during her years of association with RAI as a director and screenwriter.

Bruck's latest work, an autobiography of no more than one hundred pages, tells of her childhood in a Jewish family living comfortably in the rural village of Iszabercel near the Ukrainian border, until one day a sudden pounding on the door by Hungarian fascists led to the herding of the family and all of the Jews of the village into cattle cars at the nearby railroad station. From there began a harrowing journey to Auschwitz and other extermination camps. (The book title *Il Pane Perduto* marks the anguish of Bruck's mother (her repeated cries of "the bread!" "the bread!") at having to leave the unfinished Passover bread in the oven as the family is forced out of the house -- a vivid symbol for Bruck of a family past lost suddenly and irretrievably.

Bruck recalls in brief but graphic strokes her internment in the camps while still a teen, the death of her parents -- mother at Auschwitz, father at Dachau -- and the atrocities suffered or witnessed by Edith and her siblings, all but one of whom (a brother) survived to tell about it. Just how deeply the experiences became engraved in her mind is illustrated by a visit she made later to the Vatican's Sistine Chapel where she gazed at God's image on the ceiling pointing to Adam: it brought back involuntarily her memory of another index finger, that of Mengele as he pointed "links" or "rechts," left or right, dictating the fate of so many unloaded prisoners at Auschwitz.

Bruck's autobiography tells also of her long wanderings through Europe and Israel in the chaos of the post-war years, until almost by chance she settled in Italy. There she eventually became a forceful voice for preserving the memory of the Shoa. *Il Pane Perduto* is a book unlike Primo Levi's earlier, unforgettable renderings of the Holocaust. In *Se Questo e' un Uomo*, for example, Levi lengthily details the horrors of Auschwitz and Birkenau in the clinical and precise manner of a scholar, seemingly (but not really) remote from the painful immediacy of events. Bruck, by contrast, speaks passionately in the intimate, first-person voice of a witness

or participant still there, reporting events seemingly small in importance but powerfully significant in her memory. An example is when, on the long cattle-car passage, her famished father and the children cannot bring themselves to eat the only remaining food available, pork sausages, because in the mother's eyes they can see the pain this would cause her.

That memory and similar vignettes in Bruck's story symbolize in miniature the persecution not of her family alone but of an entire people of Europe cast into the nightmare of Nazism.





# IL PANE PERDUTO DI EDITH BRUCK

REVIEW BY MICHAEL W. FARRELL

*Il Pane Perduto*, che verra' tradotto in Inglese fra breve, e' l'ultimo libro della novantenne Edith Bruck, una scrittrice di romanzi, spettacoli e tra le direttrici della Rai TV per molti anni. Bruck e' ungherese di nascita, ma cittadina italiana da almeno sessant'anni. Lei dice di aver imparato l' Italiano quasi per difendersi dai ricordi peggiori della sua adolescenza e degli anni successivi: di tutto questo racconta in questo libro autobiografico ma narrato da qualcuno col dono del romanziere.

Bruck nacque con il nome di Edith Steinschreiber, figlia di genitori ebrei, e crebbe in un villaggio rurale dell'

Ungheria. Visse un'infanzia ed una vita da ragazza innocente, protetta nell'abbraccio della sua famiglia - fino a quando nel '44 vi fu un rastrellamento dei fascisti ungheresi: durante i rastrellamenti veniva data la caccia a tutti gli ebrei del villaggio. I fascisti bussavano con forza alle porte delle case e poi mettevano gli ebrei 'rastrellati' sui vagoni bestiame dei treni.

Nel libro Bruck descrive in vignette grafiche le fasi della deportazione ad Auschwitz ed in altri campi di sterminio. Nel corso dell' internamento, i suoi genitori ed un fratello furono ammazzati. La sorella e due fratelli, benché sopravvissuti, vennero sottoposti a maltrattamenti dai tedeschi che rimasero incisi nella memoria di Bruck fino ad oggi. Un esempio: anni dopo, in una visita alla Cappella Sistina al Vaticano, Edith riguarda l'immagine del Dio sul soffitto accennando - con l' indice - ad Adamo: questo richiama per lei involontariamente un indice visto prima, quello di Mengele mentre indica "links" of "rechts," sinistra o destra, sigillando ad Auschwitz il destino dei prigionieri appena scaricati dai vagoni.

Il Pane Perduto racconta peraltro anche dell' emigrazione della stessa Bruck, del suo girovagare - appena adulta - nel caos dell' Europa del dopoguerra. Infine lei mise radici in Italia dove col tempo divenne una voce importante per "la memoria", per non dimenticare la Shoah. Questa autobiografia, che conta appena cento pagine, si distingue nitidamente dalle opere di Primo Levi sullo stesso argomento. Levi, in libri come l'unico 'Se Questo e' un Uomo', descrive gli orrori di Auschwitz in dettaglio nella maniera clinica, obiettiva, dello studioso, quasi staccato dai ricordi immediati. Bruck invece parla con una voce intima, personale; racconta in prima persona eventi che sembrano piccoli ma sono pieno di significato per Edith. Un altro esempio: durante il lungo viaggio nel vagone bestiame, la famiglia ha fame e non rimane altro cibo se non la salsiccia di maiale, che il padre ei figli sono disposti a mangiare; tuttavia non riescono a mangiarlo perche' vedono negli occhi della madre il dolore che questo le causerebbe.

Piccole scene come questa simbolizzano per Bruck in miniatura la brutalizzazione non soltanto della sua famiglia ma di un intero popolo gettato nell'incubo del nazismo.



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## ABOUT ICS

The Italian Cultural Society of Washington D.C. (ICS) is your home for cultural and social events in the Washington metropolitan area, and for courses to learn or improve your Italian. Our community is growing and involving the entire US.

### OUR MISSION

The Italian Cultural Society promotes the appreciation and knowledge of the Italian language and culture by creating opportunities through language programs, cultural events, and partnerships.

### OUR HISTORY

Founded in 1953 by Professor Salvatore J. Castiglione, Chairman of the Italian Department of Georgetown University, the Society launched its Italian Language Program in 1974, with contribution of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

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