EXPLORING DR. VIRGINIA JEWISS’ ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF DANTE’S VITA NUOVA

By Derek A. Ginoris

This month was packed with a variety of cultural events that filled our members with renewed appreciation for Italian literature. On February 26th, the ICS had the pleasure of hosting Dr. Virginia Jewiss for a wonderful presentation on her recently published translation of Dante's Vita nuova in conversation with Dr. Annelise Brody-Morani. The Vita nuova, which roughly translates to the “new life” (but may also mean “bizarre life”) refers to the many lives Dante led as a man, a poet, and a lover.

Dr. Jewiss began her presentation by giving the audience a brief overview the sommo poeta’s work, one that can be described almost as an autobiography in which Dante not only recounts his journey of mastering the art of writing, but also his first encounters with his beloved Beatrice. Writing in line with the style of courtly love poetry, Dante realizes that he must adopt a new style that can attest to the unique beauty of Beatrice with whom he becomes completely enamored by the time he is 18 years old. In fact, Dr. Jewiss later recalls that Dante breaks away from this tradition in which divine love and human love are two different entities and invites his readers to consider the fact that one may see God through the human, rather than turning away from the human. Unfortunately, things take a turn for the worst and Beatrice perishes, leaving Dante to mourn her presence in order to love again. However, Beatrice comes back to Dante after her death, giving him the cold shoulder for having loved another in her absence. Unlike the Beatrice of the Divina commedia who speaks to Dante in a very eloquent manner, she is not given dialogue in this work. In accordance with the style of courtly love, the poet shields his lover’s identity from the public in order to prevent any gossip – he simply refers to her as “the screen woman,” “la donna dello schermo.”

Approaching the work proved to be a daunting task, as it is a composite of various forms of poetry and prose, revealing a young Dante exploring his literary talents. While these diverse forms are intermixed with one another in the original work, the reality is that Dante probably wrote all in one style before moving onto the next, then stringing the pieces together afterwards. Therefore, Dr. Jewiss decided to first focus on translating all of the poetry sections before going onto translate the prose, which proved to be a useful technique. Dr. Jewiss decided to publish a parallel text, in order to stay as true to the original work as possible; that is, the critical edition curated by Donato Pierovano for the 700th anniversary of the poet’s death. Nevertheless, Dr. Jewiss reminds the audience that the work is very much so “unresolved”, as is the case with all non-autograph works; in other words, non-original works (she reminds us that even today, not a single written word from the poet’s hand has reached contemporary Dante scholars). Therefore, the work is very much considered an “open text,” one that is not fixed in a solid form. In this way, one can never be completely satisfied with the translation of the work, but Dr. Jewiss assures us that the process only brings the translator closer to the poet, something that has brought her a great sense of satisfaction.
Our Sunday February 24th event, a special screening of *CINEMA PARADISO*, Giuseppe Tornatore’s heartwarming film, in collaboration with AFI Silver Theatre was a great success, with over 340 people participating! We thank AFI Theatre for this collaboration and our sponsors FERRERO and Marramiero + Cantiniere Import & Distributing Inc. for the chocolate and wine.
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Dear ICS Members,

March has been a very busy month for us. We have proudly hosted our Italian classics book translation series. Virginia Jewiss translated Dante's New Life, Aaron Jacob Spatz Leopardi’s Cantos and Michael Moore’s Manzoni’s Betrothed. We feel that it is a fantastic opportunity to introduce our community to the pillars of our literary culture, meet the translators and have a chance to ask them questions.

Michael Moore's event is scheduled for Sunday, March 19th while you can still enjoy the others on our Past Events webpage.

We happily announce that last year's favorite event among the children is returning, in collaboration with the Embassy of Italy. The annual Easter Egg Hunts for to children 12 years and under will take place at the residence of H.E. the Ambassador of Italy, Mariangela Zappia (more info can be found on our website).

On the same day, not to be missed, in collaboration with AFI Silver Theater, we will enjoy the screening of another great classic: Fellini’s La Dolce Vita. Two screenings: at 4:15 and at 8:00 pm. In between, from 7:00 to 8:00, we are offering the current dolce vita habit: an Italian style aperitivo with Aperol Spritz, offered by CAMPARI and snacks offered by Pinstripes. Many thanks to our generous sponsors. It will be a fun Saturday night!

The registration for the annual ICS trip to Italy in collaboration with Bethesda's travel has also open. This year we are diving into the beauty of art and food of Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, stopping in Italy's capital of food, i.e. Bologna, of course.

As a native of Emilia Romagna, I am looking forward to welcoming you in this very special tour!

Happy Spring!

Annelise Brody Morani
Chair of the ICS Board of Directors

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

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Happy Spring!

Annelise Brody Morani
Chair of the ICS Board of Directors

ANNUAL ICS TRIP

ICS TOSCANA & EMILIA ROMAGNA TRIP: ITINERARY & SUMMARY

AUG/SEP
31 – Airport check in for projected flight from Dulles: AZ619 16:20 IAD-FCO 07:05 (next day)
01 – Arrival in Rome and hit the road to head north to Siena, stop in Orvieto for lunch and a visit. Check-in NH Siena or similar (4n). Welcoming dinner. Benvenuti in Toscana! (L,D)
02 – Hotel breakfasts included. Morning Siena orientation guided city tour. Free time to rest and explore on your own this afternoon. Group dinner. (B,D)
03 – Full day in the Val d'Orcia today: visits to charming countryside Pienza and Montalcino, wine tasting lunch (B,L)
04 – Head to Chianti today: Radda, San Gimignano, a hands-on cooking class of Tuscan specialties, and a wine tasting lunch (B,L)
05 – Depart for Bologna with a full day in Florence en route. Guided visits to the Accademia and Uffizi Museums plus free time for shopping and exploring. Evening arrival in Bologna at the Royal Carlton or similar (4n) dinner. (B,D)
06 – Guided visit to Bologna’s historic center including San Petronio and the Archiginnasio. Free time this afternoon for shopping and exploring. Independent meals (B)
07 – Early morning excursion today to Parma to see how Parmigiano Reggiano is made, learn about Parma Prosciutto production, and for a specialty lunch. Independent dinners back in Bologna. (B,L)
08 – Visit an acetaia today (Balsamic vinegar producer). Free time for lunch in Modena, followed by a visit to the Ferrari Museum in Maranello. Farewell dinner at the hotel (B,D)
09 – Early morning transfer to Bologna airport for flight home, projected AZ 1312 BLQ 06:30-07:30 FCO connecting to AZ618 FCO 10:20-14:20 IAD
Dear ICS Members,

I’m very pleased to share our Spring Schedule, aimed to prepare you for traveling to Italy, enjoying Italian food, cinema, fiction, news, art history and more.

Language courses, starting at the Beginners level are offered both online and in person. Some Intermediate and Advanced level courses also have the hybrid option.

Additional highly qualified instructors joined our team, and new courses are offered, like Italian Through Cinema - The Rossellini War Trilogy: Classic Neorealism (B1-C2); Italy today: reading listening, and conversation on current events (A2-B2); Parliamo di Arte – also for Italians, The collection of the Barberini Palace in Rome (B2-C1), Passeggiate nella grammatica (A1-B1), just to mention a sample of our long list of classes. In particular, I would like to point out a course with Dr. Deigan, Ph.D.: I Promessi Sposi, to read and comment Manzoni’s famous historical novel, recently translated by Michael Moore, who will join us on Sunday March 19th.

We will also offer the mini-courses in English and in Italian focused on different regions: Discover Puglia, Sardegna, Veneto, and Liguria.

Try Yoga in Italiano, if you didn’t yet, Latin (Beg. 2 and Advanced level for this term) and Cooking classes: March 15th in a private home in DC NW, Campania Region Specialties and on Zoom, March 18th, Baking with Simona.

The Spring Schedule outlines additional courses, including book clubs, conversations, and cultural classes also in English. Registration is open. The starting date for our Spring Term is March 27th.

Early Bird discount for Summer Camps ends on April 1st, so sign up soon! And do not miss Fiorenza’s themed workshop: La Festa del Papà, on March 17th. Please visit the Kids and Teens’ page.

Buona primavera a tutti!

See you this Sunday at 2:30 to talk about Alessandro Manzoni with Michael Moore.

Francesca Casazza
CEO & Executive Director
“The first English translation in more than fifty years of Alessandro Manzoni’s masterpiece, a work of foundational Italian literature on par with the Divine Comedy and the Decameron.”—The Wall Street Journal

“An exemplary historical novel” (The New Yorker) from the father of modern Italian literature, The Betrothed receives its first new English-language translation in fifty years, hailed as “a landmark literary occasion” by Jhumpa Lahiri.

ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR: The New Yorker

Michael F. Moore’s dynamic new translation of The Betrothed brings to life Manzoni’s timeless literary masterpiece.

Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) is best known for his novel The Betrothed, which ranks among the masterpieces of world literature. It was first published in 1827 and then in 1842 in a revised edition. Manzoni was also a poet, prolific essayist, and playwright. In his life and in his writing, he was committed to the cause of Italian independence and the forging of a modern Italian identity, culture, and language.

UPCOMING EVENT: BOOK PRESENTATION

THE BETROTHED – MICHAEL MOORE PRESENTS HIS TRANSLATION OF ALESSANDRO MANZONI’S “I PROMESSI SPOSI”, IN CONVERSATION WITH FEDERICA DEIGAN

Sunday, March 19th at 2:30 pm ET at the ICS Headquarters + Webinar

“In the fall of 1628, two young lovers are forced to flee their village on the shores of Lake Como after a powerful lord prevents their marriage, plunging them into the maelstrom of history. Manzoni draws on actual people and events to create an unforgettable fresco of Italian life and society. In this greatest of historical novels, he takes the reader on a journey through the Spanish occupation of Milan, the ravages of war, class tensions, social injustice, religious faith, and a plague that devastates northern Italy. But within Manzoni’s epic tale, readers will also hear powerful echoes of our own day.

Michael F. Moore’s dynamic new translation of The Betrothed brings to life Manzoni’s timeless literary masterpiece.

RSVP for the event here. Purchase a signed copy of the book here.
EMBASSY OF ITALY
Easter Egg Hunt 2023

Benefiting a local children's charity:
Center for the Advancement of Innovative Health Practices

APRIL 1, 1:30-4:30 P.M.
Villa Firenze – Washington D.C.

An invitation-only event for AIFC and ICS members and friends. Kids up to 12 years old accompanied by up to two adults can attend the event. A minimum donation of $50 per child is required for admission.

https://italianculturalsociety.org/egg-hunt/
Domenica 12 marzo 2023, alla sede dell’Italian Cultural Society a Bethesda, ho avuto il piacere di partecipare alla presentazione del volume: Giacomo Leopardi’s Cantos, translated by Aaron Jacob Spatz. Il traduttore (nonché editore) del volume ce lo ha presentato.

Jacob è, tra le altre cose, uno studioso indipendente che ha dedicato anni (dal 1998) allo studio e alla traduzione delle poesie di Leopardi, il poeta lirico dell'Ottocento più amato dagli italiani. Jacob ha raccontato che mentre era a Firenze come studente di un'università americana ha preferito apprendere l'italiano traducendo poesie italiane in inglese, cominciando con i poeti “ermetici” come Giuseppe Ungaretti e Salvatore Quasimodo, i cui componimenti sono brevi e linguisticamente semplici. Poi Jacob ha raggiunto un livello linguistico avanzato attraverso la lettura e la comprensione delle poesie di Leopardi, che la sua professoressa di italiano gli aveva proposto un giorno come un lavoro di traduzione più difficile ma assai necessario, visto che le poesie di Leopardi sono molto amate ma poco conosciute o apprezzate in lingua inglese. Così per Jacob è cominciato l’amore di una vita, l’amore per la poesia e la poetica leopardiane, un amore che si è tradotto in un lavoro intenso e lungo. Possiamo credergli quando ci dice che ha numerosissime versioni di ciascuna delle sue traduzioni che ancora gareggiano nella sua testa con quella che alla fine ha deciso di includere nel volume da dare alle stampe.

Domenica, per cominciare, Jacob ha letto per il suo pubblico le poesie giovanili di Leopardi, di ispirazione patriottica, per mostrare come Leopardi fosse, come molti suoi contemporanei, indignato per la mancanza di un patria -- un'Italia unita e libera -- negli anni in cui si trovava a vivere e a scrivere, che sono gli anni del Risorgimento.

Poi Jacob ha letto le poesie più famose, "L’infinito" e "A Silvia".

Questi sono stati i momenti più belli dell’evento: le traduzioni finemente cesellate -- da tutti i punti di vista, incluso quello ritmico e sonoro -- la perfetta dizione inglese di Jacob, la sua voce calda e pacata insieme -- tutte queste cose hanno prodotto una lettura fortemente emozionante per il pubblico. Il perfetto silenzio degli astanti -- alcuni italiani di nascita, altri di adozione culturale -- e poi l’applauso alla fine sembravano dire che I Canti di Leopardi non avrebbero potuto essere “cantati” in modo migliore in traduzione inglese.

Non ho ancora avuto modo di leggere e studiare il volume, ma ad un primo esame mi sembra ottimo: le traduzioni hanno il testo a fronte, cosa importantissima, particolarmente per poesie liriche. Inoltre, l’introduzione e l’apparato di note sembrano raccomandarsi per ampiezza e precisione critica. In conclusione, credo proprio di aver assistito domenica alla presentazione di un volume che avrà un decisivo impatto sulla ricezione di Leopardi in America.
On Sunday 12 March 2023, at the headquarters of the Italian Cultural Society in Bethesda, I had the pleasure of attending the presentation of the book: Giacomo Leopardi’s Cantos, translated by Aaron Jacob Spatz. The translator (as well as publisher) of the volume presented it to us.

Jacob is, among other things, an independent scholar who has dedicated years (since 1998) to the study and translation of the poems of Leopardi, the nineteenth-century lyric poet most loved by Italians. Jacob said that while in Florence as a student at an American university he preferred to learn Italian by translating Italian poems into English, beginning with “hermetic” poets such as Giuseppe Ungaretti and Salvatore Quasimodo, whose poems are short and linguistically simple. Then Jacob reached an advanced linguistic level through the reading and comprehension of Leopardi’s poems, which his Italian teacher had proposed to him one day as a more difficult but very necessary translation work, since Leopardi’s poems are much loved, but little known or appreciated in English. This is how the love of a lifetime began for Jacob, the love for Leopardi’s poetry and poetics, a love that has translated into a laborious and long linguistic work. We can believe him when he tells us that he has numerous versions of each of his translations that still compete in his head with the one he finally decided to include in the printed volume.

On Sunday, Jacob first read Leopardi’s the patriotic-poems of the poet’s youth to show how Leopardi was, like many of his contemporaries, outraged by the lack of a homeland -- a united and free Italy -- in the years in which he found himself living and writing, which are the years of the Risorgimento. Then Jacob read the most famous poems, “L’infinito” and “A Silvia.”

These were the most beautiful moments of the event: the finely chiseled translations -- from all points of view, including rhythm and sound - Jacob’s perfect English diction, his warm and tranquil voice -- all these things filled the audience with deep emotion. The perfect silence of the participants – some Italian by birth, others by cultural adoption – and then the applause at the end seemed to say that Leopardi’s Songs [Cantos] could not have been "sung" in a better way in English translation.

I have not yet had the opportunity to read and study the volume in its entirety, but at first glance, it seems excellent: the translations have the text opposite, which is very important, especially for lyrical poems. In addition, the introduction and apparatus of notes seem commendable for their breadth and critical precision. In conclusion, I think that on Sunday I had the opportunity of witnessing the presentation of a volume that will have a decisive impact on Leopardi’s reception in America.
Rivalry and revenge. Whispered accusations. And a true heart driven to madness.

VERDI’S

OTELLO

MDLO returns to Strathmore with the fourth production in its 2022-2023 Season of Verdi, Otello. A passionate retelling of Shakespeare’s great tragedy of jealousy, deception, and murder, Verdi’s fiery score penetrates the darkest reaches of the soul, from the heart-stopping crash of the storm at the opera’s opening to Otello’s tortured descent into murderous madness. Bravura singing, tremendous scenes for the MDLO Chorus, and a brilliant, thriller-paced adaptation of Shakespeare’s text make Otello an edge-of-your-seat must-see.

GREGORY KUNDE
Otello
“Passionate, beautiful… clear, strong, focused tone…genuine nobility” (The New York Times)

ELENI CALENOS
Desdemona
“A performance for the ages” (Opera News)

MARK DELAVAN
Iago
“Half-divine, half-human voice” (Wall Street Journal)

PHILIPPE AUGUIN
Conductor
“A strong, ardent and often meltingly beautiful reading of the score” (The Washington Post)

Pre-performance discussion with legendary star
SHERRILL MILNES
Friday, March 3 at 6:15 pm
Sunday, March 5 at 12:45 pm

Friday, March 3 at 7:30 pm  |  Sunday, March 5 at 2:00 pm

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