Caravaggio was a master artist and innovator of the Italian Baroque period, and for that alone he is worthy of note, but Professor Richard Spear made it clear that there is much more involved in the “Caravaggism” that currently characterizes studies and expositions of this artist. There has been an enormous up-tick in academic studies especially beginning in the last third of the 20th century, a century drenched in violence, self-absorption and sexuality and so perhaps ready to accept the intensely absorbed, realistic, and sexually ambiguous figures peopling Caravaggio’s canvases that shocked his contemporaries. From this earthly extreme we move on to the more sublime realms of Dantine spirituality in our November meeting. Of La Divina Commedia Professor Frank Ambrosio of Georgetown University says “Reading the poem is a journey of self-discovery, and My Dante allows each reader to create a personal record of that journey.” He is referring to an interactive digital incarnation of the medieval illuminated manuscript that he has developed: “My Dante fosters an entirely new type of contemplative reading experience. My Dante encourages readers to experience the poem in a way that is profoundly personal, while at the same time enabling a collaborative experience of a journey shared by a community of readers.” For we poor 21st century denizens of the planet, bereft of the concepts of heaven and hell, weakly cognizant, if at all, of the concept of “sin”, reading Dante for personal, perhaps moral, profit seems quite a challenge...let’s see what guidance Professor Ambrosio has in store for us!

On behalf of the Italian Cultural Society, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Professor Lucia Dalla Monta’ to the United States. Professor Dalla Monta’ assumes the duties of Education Director at the Italian Embassy here in Washington, replacing Professor Luigi De Sanctis. We wish the new Education Director every success in her mission. Please read more about Professor Dalla Monta’ in this issue.

Ron Cappelletti, president
PROGRAM OF NOVEMBER 21

Prof. Frank Ambrosio, of Georgetown University, will explore why the Divine Comedy, one of the greatest classics of the Western tradition, is able to reach beyond its historical situation and cultural context to speak to us today in our time and place, and touch the soul of our humanity. He will focus on how to read the poem for oneself with understanding and personal engagement. Jorge Luis Borges said no one should deny themselves the sheer pleasure of reading Dante. Ambrosio hopes to encourage and guide us in practicing Borges’ particular brand of hedonism, providing a good entree to first time readers and some compelling insights to those returning to the text.

Frank Ambrosio is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University. He is the founding Director of the Georgetown University “My Dante Project”, a web based platform for personal and collaborative study of Dante’s Divina Commedia. (http://dante.georgetown.edu)

“L’esperienze de questa dolce vita”

“Il cielo per quanto è bello... La notte del mar non so...”

ITALIAN AMERICAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE MONTH

A PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION

In the five centuries since Christopher Columbus, a son of Genoa, Italy, first set sail across the Atlantic Ocean, countless individuals have followed the course he charted to seek a new life in America. Since that time, generations of Italian Americans have helped shape our society and steer the course of our history. During Italian American Heritage and Culture Month, we recognize the rich heritage of Americans of Italian descent and celebrate their immeasurable contributions to our Nation.

Bound by enduring values of faith and family, Italian Americans have flourished in all areas of our public and economic life while preserving their proud Italian traditions. Upon arrival in the United States, the Italian American community faced racial, social, and religious discrimination. Yet, Italian Americans have persevered with hope and hard work to reach for the American dream and helped build our great country. As proud service members, they have also defended the liberty and integrity of the United States since the Revolutionary War.

Today, the legacy of these intrepid immigrants is found in the millions of American men, women, and children of Italian descent who strengthen and enrich our country. Italian Americans operate thriving businesses, teach our children, serve at all levels of government, and succeed in myriad occupations. Drawing on the courage and principles of their forebears, they lead in every facet of American life, dedicating their knowledge and skills to the growth of our country.

The Great Seal of the United States declares “out of many, one.” As we forge new futures as a unified people, we must celebrate the unique and vibrant cultures that have written the American story. Many determined individuals have sought our shores as a beacon of hope and opportunity, and their spirit of limitless possibility and example of resolve continues to inspire and guide our Nation. As we honor the long history and vast contributions of Italian Americans, let us recommit to extending the promise of America that they embraced to future generations.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim October 2010 as Italian American Heritage and Culture Month. I call upon all Americans to learn more about the history of Italian Americans, and to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of October, in the year of our Lord two thousand ten, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fifth.

BARACK OBAMA
MEMOIRS OF A SICILIAN BARON AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

by Francesco Scaduto-Mendola

A few years ago, I was surfing the internet in search of information about my "Mendola" family name. The Mendola branch, to which I am related, comes from Favara, in the province of Agrigento, in Sicily. I soon found that Carmelo Antinoro, an architect responsible for the oversight of the cultural resources of the Agrigento province, had written a book about the Mendola family, covering its history from the 17th to the 20th century. I was even more pleased to learn from Antinoro that he was publishing the memoirs of Baron Antonio Mendola. The memoirs, written during 1885-1908 in 14 diaries totaling some 7,000 pages, were dispersed when they were sold together with other books. Eleven of these diaries were rediscovered at an antique books store in Montepulciano, in Tuscany, in 2002. The diaries were purchased by the city of Favara and transcribed and condensed by Carmelo Antinoro.

Baron Antonio Mendola was born in Favara in 1828 and died in the same town in 1908. His life spanned the important historical transition period of the Risorgimento and the unification of Italy. Antonio Mendola lost a 19 year-old son in 1880, killed by pneumonia in a few days while studying at a university in Germany. To overcome his grief, Baron Mendola dedicated much of his fortune for the good of his fellow citizens. He funded an orphanage, a hospice for work accident victims, a nursery school, and the local hospital. He also donated land for the construction of a convent and a church. Baron Mendola built a personal collection of 14,000 books which he donated to the town, together with a small zoological museum. In addition to being one of the country’s top experts on wine growing, he was also the first to promote the use of chemical fertilizers in Sicily.

Baron Mendola’s memoirs are interesting not only for his reflections about his personal life and of his immediate family, but also because he was an acute observer and he described everything that was happening in his town. Particularly interesting are his detailed descriptions of the religious celebrations, more often occasions for social distraction given the few opportunities for entertainment in the town. The memoirs are also abundant with family scandals: seductions, elopements, adulteries, friars’...
Baron Mendola was particularly bitter about the abuses and dirt of local politics, where the fight centered between clericals and anticlericals. He described the interference of the Church, the Free Masons and the Mafia in the local politics and their intimidations of the local population. Baron Mendola received extortionary letters and lived in fear of being blackmailed by the local bandits. He covered many picturesque events in the town, such as: the dispute between two competing musical bands which crossed each other in the main square while each marching in front of a horse driven hearse; the first automobile in town, which broke down every few hundred yards; the forceful removal of a young woman from a convent by her relatives, to fulfill an arranged marriage, while the nuns and friars were trying to hold on to the arms of the girl.

Despite living most of his life in the town of Favara, Baron Mendola, did have extensive epistolary contacts with many important people in Italy. Particularly interesting was his encounter with Giuseppe Garibaldi in 1860, soon after the latter had liberated the city of Palermo from the Bourbon king of Naples. Baron Mendola, accompanied by some of his town’s most important people, brought a money contribution to Garibaldi for the liberation of southern Italy. The Baron describes in detail not only Garibaldi’s physical appearance, but also the long conversations he had with the “Hero of the Two Worlds” during his nine day stay in Palermo. Baron Mendola advised Garibaldi not to confiscate the funds of the main bank in Palermo to avoid a revolt of the city’s rich people and middle class: Garibaldi posted armed guards to protect the bank. The baron also advised against imposing the military draft in Sicily: It was the harvest season and the removal of the men from the fields would provoke a rebellion in the island. Mendola, instead, suggested to Garibaldi only to call for volunteers. Garibaldi raised an army of 25,000 volunteers which enabled him to liberate the rest of southern Italy.

Baron Mendola also met in 1891 Jessie White, a British widow of Alberto Mario and friend of Mazzini and Garibaldi. Jessie White had been a major fund raiser for the promotion of the Italian unification. Ms. White came to Favara to inquire on the social and working conditions of the sulfur mine workers. She visited the charitable institutions funded by Baron Mendola and had a long discussion with him about Darwin’s theory of evolution. Seeing a monkey in Baron Mendola’s property, she addressed the animal as if it were man’s human ancestor. Baron Mendola remained unconvinced about White’s enthusiasm for Darwin. He concluded with the following remarks in his memoirs: “I believe in man as man, not monkey. I adore God as supreme creator”.

The Baron’s memoirs describe a world bygone, but still vibrant for its numerous dramas, celebrations and many other events, personal, family, and collective, of a Sicilian town, rich in culture, passions, and traditions.

Francesco Scaduto-Mendola is a new member of the Italian Cultural Society. He retired a few years ago from the World Bank and lives in Chevy Chase MD.
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Tutti conoscono Torino come “prima capitale del Regno d’Italia” (di grande attualità nell’anno che viene), o come “la città dell’automobile” (ora un po’ in degrado con la FIAT sulla via della globalizzazione), o come la sede delle ultime Olimpiadi invernali. Ma non tutti la conoscono come “città del cinema,” titolo che le compete, perché all’inizio del ventesimo secolo fu il centro italiano più importante dell’industria cinematografica.

Tra il 1907 e il 1915, a Torino sorsero 21 case di produzione che facevano concorrenza agli studi romani e si impennevano in Italia e all’estero non solo per la creatività artistica, ma anche per l’organizzazione commerciale e finanziaria. È a Torino che il cinema diviene industria. Ed è a Torino che nasce un modello di “fare cinema” adottato poi in tutto il mondo.

Per rendersene conto, basta visitare il Museo del Cinema, inaugurato nel 2000 nell’edificio della Mole Antonelliana, un luogo bizzarro, coinvolgente e fantasmagorico, in cui sono conservati i documenti e gli artefatti dell’Età d’Oro del cinema torinese. Ma non solo. Il museo offre una ricostruzione di tutto il percorso del cinema mondiale, dalle lanterne magiche in poi. E per sostare, e sognare, dopo la lunga camminata nell’immaginario, ci si può sdraiare su soffici chaise longues nell’enorme atrio centrale e godere della proiezione di pellicole vecchie e nuove sulla volta dell’edificio.

Tra i tanti padiglioni situati attorno all’atrio, uno in particolare attira l’attenzione del pubblico. Il suo ingresso è protetto da un orrendo mostro, una colossale statua del dio Moloch con le fauci di fuoco spalancate e pronte al sacrificio della prossima vittima. Chi supera la paura ed entra nel padiglione può vedere il mostro in azione negli spezzoni del film Cabiria (1914), concepito e diretto da Giovanni Pastrone.

Non c’è forse figura più rappresentativa di Pastro ne per descrivere il cinema di quegli anni. Dotato di un ingegno multiforme, in gioventù si dedicò all’arte, alla scienza e al business in egual misura—si diplomò in violino al conservatorio, si dedicò alla costruzione di modelli aeronautici e conseguì un diploma in ragioneria. Quando scoprì il cinema, riunì le sue conoscenze ed intuizioni e le applicò alla nascente industria cinematografica.

All’inizio fu assunto come contabile dalla Società Carlo Rossi, che importava pellicole dall’estero. Ma impadronitosi del mestiere (facilitato anche dalla conoscenza del francese, tedesco e inglese), in breve tempo rilevò la ditta e, nel 1908, fondò la casa di produzione Itala Film.

Lo studio era situato in Corso Quintino Sella, sulla collina torinese, e ricopriva un territorio di ventidue chilometri quadrati. I suoi capannoni erano stati disegnati per sfruttare al massimo la luce del sole, perché Pastrone era un grande innovatore. Sperimentò con effetti di luce diffusa e riflessa e conseguì un modello di “fare cinema” adottato poi in tutto il mondo.

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si cimentò anche con un rudimentale sistema di sonorizzazione e colorazione della pellicola. Ma l’invenzione che segnò una vera svolta nel modo di far cinema, e rese Pastrone famoso in tutto il mondo, fu la tecnica del carrello. Questa tecnica stabilì il principio secondo cui la macchina non era più un occhio stazionario davanti al quale si svolgeva la scena, ma un agente dinamico dell’azione. La macchina “raccontava” la storia, aggiungendovi punti di vista ed emozioni.

Pastrone trovò soggetti adeguati alle nuove tecniche, che permettevano di sfruttare vasti spazi, scenografie grandiose e scene di massa. Fu l’inventore del “colossal” con centinaia di comparse e complesse azioni di battaglie e catastrofi. Ma insieme all’artificio, Pastrone conservò l’elemento realistico per dare verosimiglianza all’immagine. Per esempio, per il suo primo dramma storico, La caduta di Troia, fece costruire un enorme cavallo di legno. Non si accontentò di un modellino. E nel suo capolavoro, Cabiria, oltre alla superba scenografia del tempio di Moloch, introdusse effetti speciali per la rappresentazione dell’eruzione dell’Etna, portò elefanti veri sulle Alpi per girare la scena della calata dell’esercito di Annibale in Italia, e realizzò un enorme specchio esagonale sfaccettato per l’episodio di Archimede che manda a fuoco la flotta Romana. Per promuovere la campagna pubblicitaria, Pastrone si servì di nomi celebri. Affidò le didascalie a Gabriele D’Annunzio (pagandolo la strabiliante somma di 50.000 lire) e commissionò lo spartito musicale di accompagnamento a Ildebrando Pizzetti. Invece, come sceneggiatore e regista risultava uno certo Piero Fosco (lo pseudonimo che Pastrone ha sempre usato per sé stesso).

Cabiria ebbe una grande risonanza al di qua e al di là dell’oceano—è noto che anche D.W. Griffith si ispirò a questo film per un episodio di Intolerance. Hollywood si interessava ai lavori di Pastrone, sia per le tecniche di ripresa e di montaggio che per l’organizzazione industriale. Pastrone, infatti, gestiva la Itala Film come un’industria; alla produzione aveva aggiunto una rete di distribuzione e una catena di sale cinematografiche. Non è escluso che “la struttura integrata verticale” degli studi hollywoodiani sia stata suggerita dal modello italiano.

Dopo Cabiria, il “colossal” cominciò a declinare come genere cinematografico, fino a scomparire del tutto durante la Grande Guerra—fu poi ripreso con gran successo negli anni cinquanta e sessanta; sia in Italia che negli USA.

Ma un personaggio del cast di Cabiria continuò a vivere sullo schermo per altri dieci anni: il nerboruto Maciste, schiavo e guardia del corpo del patrizio romano protagonista della storia. L’interprete, Bartolomeo Pagano, uno scaricatore del porto di Genova, fu ingaggiato da Pastrone per quella parte grazie alla sua gigantesca statura e una muscolatura da Mr. Universo. La lunga serie dei film di Maciste non aveva nessuna relazione con Cabiria, né con Pastrone che si ritirò dall’attività nel 1919. Le avventure variavano e così pure le epoche (per esempio: Maciste Alpino, 1916; Maciste all’Inferno, 1925); ma il nome e la figura dell’eroe che lotta per il bene e la giustizia avevano sempre una grande presa sul pubblico.

Un altro genere che fruttò grandi incassi alla Itala Film fu “la comica.” In questo settore la concorrenza era accanita, sia in Italia che all’estero. Ma Pastrone ebbe un’altra geniale idea: sunlight, for Pastrone was a great innovator. He experimented with diffused and reflected light and took risks with a rudimentary system for sound and for coloring the film. But the invention that pointed to a real change of direction in how to make movies was the “trolley”. This technique established the principle whereby the camera is no longer a stationary eye before which the scene took place, but rather a dynamic agent of action. The camera would “tell the story”, adding points of view and emotions.

Pastrone found subject matter that suited the new techniques, which allowed the use of vast spaces, grandiose sets, and crowd scenes. He was the inventor of the “colossal”, with hundreds of extras and complex scenes of battles and catastrophes. But along with the artifice, Pastrone retained the realistic element to make the image look real. For example, for his first historical drama, The Fall of Troy, he had built an enormous wooden horse. He was not content with a small scale model. And in his masterpiece Cabiria, beyond the superb scenography of the temple of Moloch, he introduced special effects to represent the eruption of Etna, he brought real elephants to the Alps to shoot the scene of the descent of Hannibal’s army into Italy, and he created an enormous faceted hexagonal mirror for the episode in which Archimedes sets fire to the Roman fleet. To promote the film in the advertising campaign Pastrone used celebrities. He entrusted the titles to Gabriele D’Annunzio (paying the astonishing sum of 50,000 lire) and commissioned the score to Ildebrando Pizzetti. However, as screenwriter and director there was a certain Piero Fosco (the pseudonym that Pastrone always used for himself.)

Cabiria had great resonance on both sides of the Atlantic – it is well known that even D. W. Griffith was inspired by this film for an episode of Intolerance. Hollywood was interested in the works of Pastrone, both for the techniques of shooting and montage and for industrial organization. Pastrone in fact ran Itala Film as an industry; to the production he had added a distribution network and a chain of movie theaters. Not to be excluded is the idea that the “integrated vertical structure” of the Hollywood studios was suggested by the Italian model. After Cabiria, the “colossal” began to decline as a cinematographic genre, to the point of disappearing altogether during the Great War – it was then taken up again with great success in the fifties and sixties in both Italy and the USA.

But one character in the cast of Cabiria continued to live on the screen for ten more years: the muscular Maciste, slave and bodyguard of the noble Roman protagonist of the story. The actor, Bartolomeo Pagano, a dock worker at the port of Genoa, was engaged by Pastrone for his gigantic stature and Mr. Universe body. The long series of films on Maciste had no relation to Cabiria, nor with Pastrone, who retired in 1919. The adventures varied as did the epochs (for example: Maciste the Alpino, 1916; Maciste in Hell, 1925) but the name and the image of the hero who fights for the good and for justice always left a big impression on the public.

Another genre that yielded much revenue to Itala Film was “the comic”. In this area the competition was fierce both in Italy and abroad. But Pastrone had another clever idea: he stole a star of French cinema, André Deed, and transformed the very popular character of “Boireau” into “Cretinetti”. Deed
rubò una stella del cinema francese, André Deed, e trasformò il popolarissimo personaggio di “Boireau” in “Cretinetti.” Deed ritornò in Francia dopo due anni, ma in quel periodo la Itala Film produsse più di cento film di Cretinetti che ebbero uno straordinario successo.

Non fu mai chiarito perché Pastrone decise di ritirarsi nel 1919. Due anni dopo ritornò brevemente per rivilizzare la Itala Film. Dopodiché non si occupò più di cinema. Si dedicò invece a studi di medicina, alla ricerca dell’origine e della cura del cancro. Morì nel 1959.


Alla fine degli anni quaranta, anche la FERT chiuse i battenti e si concluse così uno dei capitoli più interessanti della storia del cinema italiano.

Prof. Anna Maltese Lawton insegna studi di cinema e di cultura visuale alla Georgetown University.

**WELCOME TO NEW ICS MEMBERS**

It is with great pleasure that I introduce those Members who have joined us recently. As I welcome them I hope that they will take advantage of all that the Society has to offer and that they will contribute with their knowledge and expertise to the success of the Society's mission.


**Chi vuol far l’ altrui mestiere**

*fa la zuppa nel paniere.*
Ms. Dalla Monta’ brings to her new position a wealth of experience in a wide variety of education activities, from music and English teaching early in her early career to her most recent assignment serving as director of the Italian school (primary through Liceo) in Madrid on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ms Dalla Monta’ was born in Vo’ near Padova and has spent most of her career in Veneto. She has both a Diploma from the Istituto Magistrale in Padova as well as a degree in Pedagogy from the University of Padova. Her work has included serving as expert in general pedagogy in the psychology department of the University, teaching and editing numerous training courses for early childhood education, middle and high schools, particularly involving integration of foreign students and equal opportunity, participating in the European Union projects “Preparing schools for a multicultural learning society” and “Certification and evaluation of students”. She has directed a middle school in Veneto, planned and directed a course for “cultural mediators” for immigrant communities, helped to implement education reform in Veneto, and has been engaged in other activities involving diverse educational experience such as in a hospital, and in an after school program for foreign students in music, sport, and intercultural orientation.

Ms. Dalla Monta’s complete biography, in Italian, can be viewed at www.italianculturalsociety.org

MOVIE OF THE MONTH

The Italian Cultural Society film of the month is Padre Padrone. This uplifting movie is based on the book by Gavino Ledda. His autobiography recalls the struggle of a Sardinian shepherd boy to overcome the cruel traditions of his patriarchal society. Omero Antonutti (El Dorado, Miracle at Santa Ana) turns in a tremendous performance as the merciless, abusive father who drags six year old Gavino (Fabrizio Forte) out of school and enslaves him to tend their flock in isolation. Fourteen long years pass until one day Gavino (Saverio Marconi) is ordered to do heavy labor for a village religious procession when someone passes an idea along that Gavino thinks will lead to his freedom. Will he break free to discover the outside world and his place in it?

The Taviani Brothers

Directors Paolo and Vittorio Taviani marvelously capture the beautiful landscape of Sardinia. Padre Padrone won best picture at the 1977 Cannes Film Festival and the Association of Italian Film Critics Silver Ribbon Award for best new actor (Saverio Marconi). In Italian with English subtitles.
Tony's birthplace is a little town about ten miles from the Ionian coast in the Province of Catanzaro, Calabria Region. From his town, on a clear day, one could see the Gulf of Squillace, named after Squillace, the ancient Greek city "Skyllation," which, legend has, was founded by Ulysses, shipwrecked on the Ionian coast.

The names Macri` and Sinopoli attest to a Greek ancestry dating back to the time when Calabria was part of Magna Graecia. Tony would like to think that his DNA traces him to Pythagoras or Archimedes; more likely he is a distant relative of some hardscrabble farmers who migrated to Calabria thousands of years ago bringing with them the Greco Bianco grapevines, figs and olive plants.

Tony migrated to New York State at 19. Service in the U.S. Army and a GED allowed him to enter college. In 1964, he graduated from Cornell University's College of Agriculture. After college his employment was with the Federal Government, principally as a Public Information officer with the Office of Naval Research (ONR), the Navy agency that funds basic scientific research at academic institutions. After retiring from ONR, he formed a company that imported and distributed educational materials for the Montessori system of education. His son took over the company a few years ago, and he 'retired' again.

Tony now divides his time performing long-neglected repairs to his house, organic gardening, small landscaping projects and participating in activities of "Green" Montessori schools, and of course in his work as ICS board member. He also spends a few days a month at "Our House," a group home for adolescents at risk, in Olney, Maryland. One of his wishful projects is the establishment of an organic vineyard or orchard on the land owned by Our House.

Tony and his wife, Pat, a Montessori teacher with advanced training in Bergamo, Italy, live in DC. They have a son and a daughter, both adopted at infancy in El Salvador.
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