Introduction

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Approaching Italian Studies

Constructing narratives about past and present experience is a distinctive trait of human communities. National histories are a powerful example of how such narratives can act as an essential element for the creation of a shared sense of identity. Academic disciplines, on the other hand, can also be described as historical constructs, with their own narratives, boundaries and communities. Combining both of these dimensions, the field of modern languages is structured by multiple layers of well-established narratives. Its subset of disciplines is largely organized according to national distinctions which follow geographic, historical and linguistic boundaries and which are, for the most part, modelled on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century maps of the world: French studies, German studies, Italian studies and so on. These are traditionally Eurocentric (with a few strategic additions), dominated by national and at times imperial logics, and based on a strong, homogenizing association between nation, territory, language and culture. All of these assumptions have come under intense scrutiny and are, if not outdated, at least under pressure in a world characterized by globalization, by increasing geographic and social mobility, by greater as well as faster connectivity across physical and virtual spaces, by the need to decolonize the curriculum, and by environmental concerns which transcend any geographic or political border. The present volume aims to address the need to rethink the discipline of Italian studies by asking key questions about the field, its specificities and its broader significance. What does 'Italian studies' stand for in this transforming world? What does it mean to 'study Italian' in today's academic context? And how can we define 'transnational Italian studies'?

The study of Italian at university level involves acquiring not only the ability to communicate with a high level of proficiency in the language: it also requires the ability to move between different linguistic and cultural codes. In most cases, the programme requires, therefore, an understanding of what is referred to as 'Italian culture'. In the majority of cases, as we will see, this is achieved through the study of history and the exploration of works of literary and artistic creation. Through engagement with cultural products and possibly also through periods of study abroad, the programme generally also requires the integration of what is learnt through academic study with a first-hand knowledge and experience of the reality of contemporary Italy, as well as an awareness of Italian culture outside the country itself. This exercise in adopting multiple perspectives involves the imagination as much as the intellect and requires an increasingly critical understanding of the constructed nature of what one considers to be one's own culture. Like any form of learning – if it is to be truly successful – these are processes with a marked meta-cognitive dimension which necessitates constant reflection on the skills that are being acquired, on the purpose of their acquisition and on their likely application both within the period of study and beyond it.

Furthermore, that which constitutes the object of study and the lens through which we see it do not stay still. In fact, they can change quite rapidly. Italian culture itself is in constant evolution – as are our perceptions of what we define as 'Italian culture' and how and in what context we use the term. The position we occupy informs our perspective. Are we looking at Italian culture from the viewpoint of an insider or an outsider? From a position of cultural and geographical proximity or distance (whether real or perceived)? Do we identify with it, directly or indirectly (for instance, through family heritage and personal connections), or not? New critical and methodological approaches also emerge and change our definition of what constitutes culture and how we examine cultural phenomena. The development, for example, of what is quite often loosely defined as cultural studies (discussed below) has had an enormous impact on the way in which researchers think about the nature of modern languages as a disciplinary field, and of Italian studies within that field. Similarly, the current emphasis of the link between linguistic and cultural translation is beginning to make itself felt in how we conceptualize and organize the study of cultural production and circulation. Thirdly, gradual changes in the patterns of cultural production and consumption can reduce the perceived topicality of a form or medium (literature, for instance, or, within that, a specific genre such as lyrical poetry) which was once deemed of unquestioned importance. Fourthly, changes within the structure of educational institutions such as

universities, the role that they perform within society, and their funding mechanisms inevitably affect the way in which they organize knowledge, produce research and deliver education. In the past, for example, Italian departments tended to be independent units and a large percentage of their students concentrated on Italian as a single or main subject of study. Increasingly, however, Italian studies forms part of larger units, such as schools of modern languages, and learners opt for degree programmes which combine multiple subjects.[1]

Growing stress is placed by universities on mobility, global citizenship and intercultural skills as key outcomes of higher education. This should, at least in theory, make linguistic and cultural knowledge more valuable and its acquisition less narrowly restricted to specialist programmes.[2] Similarly, there is greater emphasis than before on employability as a goal of education and this demands new ways of thinking about the nature of university courses and the preparation they offer for the world beyond the academy. At a time when it is necessary for subjects in the arts and humanities to explain their value to as wide a public as possible, modern languages finds itself in a peculiar position: on the one hand, the skill set it offers, principally in terms of language proficiency, may be easier to identify and quantify than those provided by other humanities subjects. On the other, this view promotes a limited, instrumental image of the field which often decouples linguistic abilities from cultural knowledge and subordinates the desirability of a language to its currency in a perceived global hierarchy of 'usefulness'. English vastly dominates that list at present, leading to its popularity among learners worldwide, but also to the false perception that familiarity with other languages does not constitute a desirable qualification, especially in the Anglophone sphere.[3] As for other languages, such as Italian, their value and appeal vary over time, often in relation to the relative cultural and economic capital associated

[1] See Clodagh Brook and Giuliana Pieri, 'Italianistica in Gran Bretagna: tra interdisciplinarità e tradizione', *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana,* 120.1–2 (2016), 207–16.

[2] On this subject, see The Salzburg Statement for a Multilingual World, https://www.salzburgglobal.org/multi-year-series/education.html?pageId=8543 [accessed 21 March 2019]. See also the policy report 'Transnational Modern Languages: Reframing Language Education for a Global Future', https://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/transnationalizing-modern-languages/ [accessed 5 May 2019].

[3] For evidence to the contrary, see for instance François Grin et al., eds, *The Economics of the Multilingual Workplace* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Gabrielle Hogan-Brun, *Linguanomics: What Is the Market Potential of Multilingualism?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

with the nations with which they are ostensibly affiliated. Hence Italian is often promoted as a high-prestige subject with a long and distinguished cultural history, but it struggles to hold its place against languages which are maintained to have a more prominent global profile, including ex-imperial ones such as French or Spanish, or those associated with growing economic powers, such as Chinese. A number of these assumptions require examination and are specifically called into question if we adopt different perspectives on both the nature of Italian culture and that of Italian studies.

The Development of Italian Studies

As with many other areas within modern languages, the principal object of research and teaching in Italian departments has, over a long period of time, been literature in Italian. In a study charting the development of the discipline within the UK, David Robey focuses on the subject association, the Society for Italian Studies, and its journal, *Italian Studies* (the first issue of which appeared in 1937).[4] He charts how the subject, establishing itself at university level, initially sought to emulate classics and concentrate on the language and literature of the past. While referring to the different currents within the growing subject area and the strength, but also the complexity, of its relationship with the study of Italian culture as constituted and carried out in Italy, Robey demonstrates the enduring centrality of literature as the primary object of study, whether addressed through critical, literary-historical or philological approaches. The path pursued by scholarship is closely reflected in the establishment of a curriculum which, though it has been substantially modified, still acts as a core structure, underlying the teaching of many, if not most, programmes in Italian. This 'traditional' curriculum stretches from the medieval period to the present and is based, more or less, on the study of the works of writers who are considered to belong to the canon of Italian literature. In other words, it focuses on the work of those writers who are believed to have exerted most influence on the direction that literary culture has taken.[5] Thus, in the medieval and Renaissance periods, it is the work of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Tasso, Ariosto and, recently, also Caterina da Siena or Vittoria Colonna which occupies centre stage, while

[4] David Robey, '*Italian Studies*: The First Half', *Italian Studies*, 67 (2012), 287–99. The website of the Society for Italian Studies, with links to the journal, is at: http://italianstudies.org.uk/the-society/.

[5] For a brief introduction to Italian literature, see Peter Hainsworth and David Robey, *Italian Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

in the modern period the canon has proved more flexible, incorporating the work of Ugo Foscolo, Giacomo Leopardi and Alessandro Manzoni in the nineteenth century and, in the twentieth century, the poetry of Eugenio Montale and Giuseppe Ungaretti, the plays of Luigi Pirandello and the fiction of a wide array of writers including Leonardo Sciascia, Natalia Ginzburg, Elsa Morante and Italo Calvino.[6]

While spanning a chronology which far exceeds the history of the nation state, this canon embraces the dominant post-Risorgimento narrative of the Italian nation through a celebration of its long and prestigious literary tradition, embodied in its founding fathers and their successive heirs (most of them also notably male). It is significant that, despite the markedly plurilingual nature of the Italian peninsula and of its literary production, the canon outlined above firmly privileges writing in Italian, the language of the future (and eventually present) nation, over all other forms of expression, including 'dialects' or minority languages. The emergence of Italian literature and of the Italian language are thus inescapably linked in what becomes a teleological storyline culminating in national unification and linguistic standardization. Yet, at the same time, both the epistemological construction and labour distribution associated with this configuration of the discipline of Italian studies promote a sharp distinction between cultural knowledge and language skills, as well as the teaching of them. A collateral (yet significant) effect of this organization of power and knowledge is the exclusion of translation from the study of literature and its relegation to a purely linguistic practice meant to assist the teaching of 'grammar'. Reading literature in translation is discouraged, translated texts are considered derivative and inferior to the original, and the powerful role of translation as a form of cultural production and dissemination is downplayed in favour of a vision of national literature which emphasizes internal continuities and the making of a national tradition (even *ante litteram*, before the historical advent of the Italian nation).

Within this national framework, the aim of the critical study of literature and of its history is to add both to our knowledge of the evolution of the work of a writer or group of writers and to our understanding of how their work has reflected, commented on and – in certain instances – changed the culture of which they were, or are, a part. This is to allow us to understand how aesthetic experiences are generated and the effects that they can exert both within the intellectual, emotional and imaginative life of the individual and, more

[6] For an introduction to the modern period, see Robert Gordon, *Introduction to Twentieth-Century Italian Literature: A Difficult Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005).

broadly, within society as a whole, creating the sense of a shared culture and, in the case of a national literature, a tradition which sustains the identification with the nation. The purpose of research on literature is not, however, only to convey new knowledge about the works of individual writers or literary movements, it is also to explore the means through which we attain that knowledge. An inquiry into the conceptual tools that we rely on to explore works of literature was, as Robey indicates, given considerable impetus with the development of literary theory from the late 1960s onwards.[7] Almost all courses are now accompanied by a strong theoretical component. Research should explore its own methodology, comment on the framework in which it is situated and seek to refine the series of analytical operations that lie at the core of that disciplinary framework. It should not only suggest new objects of study but new ways of studying, contributing to the range of questions that we can ask of texts and how, through critical scrutiny, they can reveal to us the forces that are at play in defining how people act, feel, think and behave in the world at a given time or in a given place.[8]

A disciplinary framework founded on the study of literature in Italian and which is set up to explore how that body of literature has developed over centuries, making an indisputable contribution to world culture, has a very strong appeal, both within Italy itself and elsewhere. It is an entirely coherent model in which the object of teaching and research is clearly identifiable, delimited and relatively easily accessible. It is based on the study of the multiplicity of strategies that texts deploy in order to convey a complex of interrelated meanings. And it promotes a 'marketable', prestigious image of Italy, its history, its cultural heritage, its contribution to knowledge and artistic creation. Closely associated with the study of the Italian language, the discipline, thus constituted, promotes an acute awareness of the intricacies of communication and how they can be manipulated. It shows us how we can see an individual utterance as revealing some of the deepest patterns of the cultural context to which it belongs. It also allows us to examine how a text has been received within a culture and to explore how its meaning changes according to the types of analysis to which it is subjected. The study of a literary corpus that stretches across centuries not only allows for moments of the past to come into focus, it also enables us to see how the way in which people experience and make sense of their lives depends on their performance of the roles and practices of their time and on their appropriation of

[7] See Robey, '*Italian Studies*', p. 294.

[8] On the importance of theory in literary analysis, see Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009).

the evolving set of concepts according to which their society was, has been, or is, structured.

Though it continues to underlie the teaching structure of many courses, this model has undergone a great deal of change over recent years. This is partly due to the nature of the model itself and the questions that one can pose of the coverage that it offers. The concentration on the major works of a literary corpus can be exclusionary, since the inclusion of a period or cultural phenomenon within the framework depends on whether that moment in the historical development of a culture has produced works deemed to be of note. By imposing strict standards of literary quality, we are also excluding from consideration large areas of less distinguished, but potentially highly revealing, cultural production. It is also true that cultural artefacts are both generated and consumed through a much wider variety of media, and we may wonder whether there is an overemphasis on literature within this kind of curriculum. Finally, as we have already noted, changing attitudes and priorities within the educational sector and society as a whole may also lead to questions about the value of humanities programmes (including modern languages degrees) and whether the training they provide could be more demonstrably attuned to the social and professional realities that students are likely to encounter upon leaving university.

Italian Cultural Studies

The desire to address issues arising from a disciplinary framework centred on the examination of literature, to expand complex textual analysis to new spheres of cultural production (including those associated with the notion of popular culture) and to explore the dynamics of that production in a way that is less intent on according an exceptional status to a work of creative writing, accounts in part for the development of cultural studies in language departments over recent decades.[9]

In the 1990s, Oxford University Press published a series of texts aimed at defining the meaning and approaches of cultural studies across modern languages. In their contribution to the series, the editors of the Italian volume, David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, set out to explore the different meanings that

[9] On the development of cultural studies, see Stuart Hall, *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79* (London: Unwin, Hyman, 1980) and Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds, *Cultural Studies* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1992). With specific reference to Italian studies, see Derek Duncan, 'Editorial. *Italian Studies: Cultural Studies*', *Italian Studies*, cultural studies issue, 65.3 (2010), 308–09.

the term 'culture' has assumed both within Anglophone and Italian academic contexts.[10] They pointed to how the term can be taken to mean, narrowly, a range of intellectual/artistic activities or, more broadly, a much more 'extensive range of practices characteristic of a given society, from its mode of material production to its eating habits, dress codes, celebrations and rituals'.[11] An essential point in their argument was that the nature of a particular branch of academic studies will, to a large extent, depend on the interpretation of the term 'culture'. Rather than suggesting that cultural studies is an academic discipline with a specific object of research and which follows a distinct set of interpretative procedures, they defined this area of academic study more as a cluster of disciplines that include the consideration of literature, social history, media studies, human geography, cultural geography and which are linked to a common set of concerns. Among these concerns, they enumerated: an approach to culture as a 'set of signifying practices and symbolic social forms', an endeavour to address a wide variety of cultural materials in a way that avoids pre-existing value judgements and the intention to bring new theoretical insights to our understanding of the meaning of culture.[12]

Italian Cultural Studies succeeded in demonstrating how questions concerning geography, identity, media, culture and society can be addressed through a range of disciplinary approaches that share a similar set of preoccupations. In showing the broad spectrum of new approaches to the study of Italian society and culture, the volume reflected the way in which the object of disciplinary enquiry has widened over a fairly lengthy period of time. This broadening of disciplinary inquiry is also reflected in an important institutional development: it is now common for specialists in Italian studies to be experts not just in literature but also in film studies, history, area studies – as well as linguistics, which has always occupied a firmly established position. There is now a greater diversity of courses on offer than ever before and students of Italian can derive enormous benefit from this range of topics and from the diversity of approach to which they are exposed.[13] Italian studies is a porous academic field in which distinct methods of inquiry are continually in contact with one another, suggesting new avenues of research

[10] *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[11] David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, 'Introduction: Approaches to Culture in Italy', *Italian Cultural Studies*, p. 2.

[12] Forgacs and Lumley, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[13] See Pieri, 'Teaching Italian Studies in the 21st Century'. The report is available under 'Higher Education Academy report on the Teaching of Italian Studies in UK and Irish HEIs (Dec 2014)' at http://italianstudies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Teaching-Italian-Studies.pdf [accessed 1 March 2019].

and teaching. This porosity of inquiry is fundamental to teaching as well as research and has become one of the basic conditions for very valuable forms of interdisciplinarity which sustain and demonstrate the openness of the field to developments across the humanities and social sciences.

The very diversity of the range of individual courses that are now on offer within Italian studies also poses some questions, however. In programmes founded upon the study of literature, the object of inquiry is clear and individual courses, linked by a similarity of approach, illuminate one aspect or another of a recognizable continuum. Where the nature of the material and the analytical framework in which it is considered differ from one module to another, it is less easy to draw connections. Or rather, it is less easy to see how the insights gained from one field of study can be sharpened when applied to another. It becomes more difficult to see how the accumulation of courses contributes to the development of an integrated system of critical operations that one can apply both to the immediate object of one's studies and to the reality in which one lives, works and, in whichever way, attempts to make a difference.

Though a diversity of approach without doubt opens windows onto many areas of human experience, there is a risk that, unless it is strongly coordinated, it can become confusing. It is perfectly possible to encounter students of modern languages who are highly appreciative of the depth and explanatory power of the individual courses they have studied, but who struggle to articulate the nature of the intellectual preparation offered by the programme *as a whole*. In a context in which programmes in the arts and humanities are under pressure, it is very important for the framework of a course to be clear and for students to be able to define – immediately and robustly – the underlying principles of their studies to their peers, to their future employers and, above all, to themselves.

At the same time, and despite this broadening of objects and methodology, programmes of study built on the Italian literary or cultural studies model retain an attachment to the national narrative. The field, in all its variety, continues to privilege the space of the nation and its internal channels of cultural production and distribution, associated with Italian as the national language. It is in fact largely the underpinning provided by the twin notions of national culture and national language that provides homogeneity and coherence to programmes in Italian. In recent years, however, this territorial emphasis and the associated stress on linguistic homogeneity have been challenged by the emergence of new voices and perspectives, especially in areas such as colonial, postcolonial and migration studies, as well as by the increasing attention paid to transnational and translational dimensions of sociocultural phenomena.

The National, the Transnational and the Italian Case

There are compelling intellectual, historical and institutional reasons for rethinking the epistemological and educational foundations of modern languages and the role of national cultures within them. And while some of those reasons can be broadly applied to any one of the individual disciplines within the field, others relate to the specificities of the cultures under examination, their histories and their internal as well as external sets of interconnections. The goal of such a reformulation is not to erase existing disciplines, traditions and approaches, replacing them with alternative ones, but rather to integrate those paradigms with new critical perspectives which both foreground the significance of the study of languages and cultures in today's world and underscore the intellectual cohesiveness of the field. In the case of Italian studies, this means substantially rethinking the subject's association with the space, time and language of the nation, and repositioning it in relation to both national and transnational processes of cultural production, circulation and consumption.

At institutional level – within higher education, within modern languages and within Italian studies – there is clearly a need to indicate the intellectual rationale of our programmes and how they promote a diversity of approach while allowing students to apply a range of connected interpretative strategies to the world in which they live. Articulating the specific set of competencies which we aim to develop is crucial in order to respond to the pressure to decouple linguistic and cultural knowledge and to promote a study of culture which does away with the hard work of language acquisition on the one hand and, on the other, the reduction of language learning to a predetermined and restricted set of decontextualized communication skills. Assumptions about the purely instrumental value of language competence go hand in hand, in the public domain, with the perception of linguistic diversity as a problem to be resolved, whether through the increasing dominance of a lingua franca such as international English or through technological advances which are meant to relegate translation to an instantaneous and mechanical operation. In an environment in which many people assume that it is possible to study a language independently of the cultural context in which it is embedded and which it also constructs and articulates, it is similarly imperative to demonstrate how courses in the Italian language interact, at every level, with learning that addresses themes of a cultural, linguistic or historical nature. Similarly, if one studies cultural phenomena without due attention to the language in which they are encoded, one risks embedding a form of chauvinism at the very heart of one's inquiry. The separation between the study of language and the study of culture remains pervasive within modern languages, but it is

detrimental both within the academic context and within public perception. It continues to sustain a negative representation of both linguistic and cultural diversity, promoting a vision of society in which difference is both hard to grasp and problematic, while globalization becomes closely associated with homogenization (with all the inequalities and power asymmetries this entails). This is a position which is out of step with contemporary reality and also with its most pressing concerns, from the relationships between global capital, mobility and social cohesion to the local *and* global dimensions of the environmental crisis.

Beyond institutional structures and disciplinary logics, there are powerful intellectual and historical imperatives which make desirable a restructuring of Italian studies beyond its traditional boundaries. These go hand in hand with contemporary reflections on the nature of the nation and of nationalism as both organizing philosophical principles and historical phenomena. A critical appreciation of the nation state is both a crucial and an inescapable component of Italian studies. In the conventional organization of the discipline, as we have seen, the object of research and teaching is Italian culture, mostly understood through its manifestation in literature written in Italian or through the events and processes that have shaped the geographical area that we refer to as Italy. In studying the historical events that occurred and the literary/artistic works that were produced before the creation of the Italian nation state in the mid-nineteenth century, however, one develops an understanding of the multiplicity of linguistic communities, regional power relations, modes of religious observance and locally determined practices that were brought together within the territorial, conceptual and administrative boundaries of Italy. When we come to the modern, post-unification period – whether one is working on literary or cultural studies – the elements which come into focus include such issues as the formation of the institutions of the state and their impact on people's lives, the friction or conflict between regionally based loyalties/practices and the imposition of an homogenized national model, the role that religion continues to play at local as well as national level, the range of movements and forms of political hegemony which have emerged in the country, the operation of power and the tension between different elements of society – and how all of these are both informed by and reflected in cultural products and practices. Far from appearing as a harmonic and homogeneous space, the Italian nation then becomes the locus of tensions articulated through political systems (from the liberal state to fascism and post-war democracy), linguistic policies (relating to a complex and constantly changing map of dialects, spoken and written standards, minority languages) or cultural practices (from neorealist cinema to the fashion industry).

In studying the specificities of Italian cultural history we are, therefore, also investigating the more abstract qualities that define the phenomenon of the nation: the ways in which, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, the nation, as an 'imagined political community', appropriates elements of the cultural systems that preceded its creation, develops an extremely powerful intellectual and emotional legitimacy, and serves as a means through which the functioning of the world is apprehended.[14] Phenomena such Italy's late unification, its short-lived foray into colonial and imperial expansion, its turbulent political landscape, its complex economic and linguistic composition, or its history of internal and external emigration as well as immigration are unique (and have even led to the identification of an 'Italian exceptionalism'),[15] yet they also point to the intrinsically transnational nature of cultural practices. Though we may construe them as national – fashioning powerful narratives of alterity and belonging, exclusion and inclusion in the process – cultural phenomena are never entirely contained within the frontiers of the state. Cultural processes exceed both the physical boundaries associated with territorial borders and more intangible ones, such as linguistic frontiers or the mapping of individual and collective memory.

This is not to deny the enduring power of the nation both as an organizational structure and as a force within the collective imaginary, but the study of a culture restricted by a geographical area and by the concept of the nation/national identity is becoming increasingly difficult to justify both on a theoretical level and in relation to contemporary social phenomena. If we make the assumption that cultures are contained within national boundaries, we are necessarily, though perhaps unwittingly, accepting a series of narratives of national belonging rather than exposing these narratives to critical scrutiny. We risk, further, becoming guilty of what Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller have defined as 'methodological nationalism'[16] and of implying that the condition of being monocultural (as well as, in close association, that of being monolingual) is the norm.[17] If the national is too solidly entrenched as the principle around which we organize our teaching

[14] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

[15] Simon Parker, 'The End of Italian Exceptionalism? Assessing the Transition to the Second Republic', *The Italianist*, 19.1 (1999), 251–83.

[16] Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, 'Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences', *Global Networks*, 2.4 (2002), 301–34.

[17] See David Gramling, *The Invention of Monolingualism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) and Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

and research, then we are clearly ill-equipped to address the phenomenon and consequences of mobility, the pressures of globalization and the potential meanings of the post-national. By opting for a perspective which focuses on the nation and treats national cultures as self-contained, we also render invisible (or at least dramatically underestimate) the fundamental porosity of knowledge and of human practices: the way in which they are constituted and disseminated through creation and recreation, through exchange and appropriation, through complex networks of communication which are intrinsically translational. It is through forms of linguistic as well as cultural translation that, in Homi Bhabha's words, 'newness enters the world',[18] just as it is through translation (or the denial of it) that states often (and mostly unsuccessfully, at least in the long term) attempt to exercise censorship, police the boundaries of the national culture, and restrict what is allowed to travel in or out of it.[19]

Italian studies – in common with other subjects within modern languages – faces the challenge of how a focus on the national can be combined with the study of the transnational and how the framework of the discipline can be more finely attuned to practices of human mobility and cultural exchange. However powerful the concept of the nation may be in defining how we see the world and our place within it, it is only part of a vastly more complicated reality. We live within economic, cultural and religious systems or, to use Clifford Geertz's term, 'webs of signification' that stretch back, in many instances, across millennia.[20] The need to consider the transnational encourages us to think in terms of longer temporalities and to perceive the entanglement of cultures, to become aware of forms of connection stretching across the boundaries of apparently stable imagined communities,[21] to see ideas – with their material consequences – circulating in different directions and to interpret cultures, to paraphrase Tzvetan Todorov,[22] as alluvial plains that are traced by the intermingling of the multiplicity of practices that is the inevitable consequence of human mobility.[23] The emphasis on

[18] Homi Bhabha, 'How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times, and the Trials of Cultural Translation', in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 212–35.

[19] On this topic see Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[20] See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[21] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[22] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*, translated from French by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

[23] For an analysis of the increasing attention towards the transnational within

practices is crucial here: as noted by Patricia Clavin, transnationalism is 'first and foremost about people: the social spaces they inhabit, the networks they form and the ideas they exchange'[24] – so paying attention to the transnational dimension of cultural life is to focus on what people do, not on normative or idealized notions of identity and belonging. Whether it addresses manifold forms of translation, the sharing of values across borders or the existence of multiple processes within the same space, academic inquiry of this kind emphasizes how the world that we create through our everyday activity – and which at the same time continually acts back on us – is defined by the inseparability of the national and the transnational.[25]

It is important to note that these two dimensions, national and transnational, are not mutually exclusive, or antithetical. As noted by Ulrich Beck, the national order was constructed on the opposition between 'national' and 'international'. In that model, space 'was divisible into a clearly defined inside and outside, at the centre of which the nation state rules and keeps order' while 'the international, located in the external sphere of experience, corresponded to the image of "multiculturalism", in which the national self-perception is reflected and confirmed in the distinction from and exclusion of strangers'. The notion of the transnational, on the other hand, 'blows open this entire framework of meanings from the inside', showing that 'national and international cannot be clearly differentiated, nor can they serve to separate homogenous entities from one another'. These orders are not exclusive but exist in tension, in 'an uneasy co-existence of transition, a new form of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous'.[26] To engage with the transnational does not mean to ignore the importance of the national, or to relegate it to the past, reaffirming a teleological vision of historical progress. Rather, it is to acknowledge the open, dynamic dialogic and relational nature of cultural forms and of our engagement with them.

If we place the inquiry into the way in which cultures continually shift and change as they come into contact with one another at the heart of the disciplinary field, then we are arguing that in studying Italian one is looking at an instantiation of the mixing of cultural practices.[27] In fact, we

Italian studies, see Emma Bond, 'Towards a Trans-national Turn in Italian Studies?', *Italian Studies*, cultural studies issue, 69.3 (2014), 415–24.

[24] Patricia Clavin, 'Defining Transnationalism', *Contemporary European History*, 14.4 (2005), 421–39 (p. 422).

[25] See Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, 'Introduction', in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 1–25 (especially, pp. 3–7).

[26] Ulrich Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan State: Redefining Power in the Global Age', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 18.3–4 (2005), 143–59 (p. 148).

[27] The endeavour to explore the interrelation of cultures lies at the heart of

could suggest – because of its position at the centre of the crossroads of the Mediterranean,[28] its physical proximity to Africa and to the Islamic world, its long history as a site of imperial activity, its relatively recent constitution as a nation state – that what we refer to as 'Italy' represents a highly concentrated space of intercultural contact and for that reason an object of study of indisputable relevance and importance. Moreover, if we develop an approach that seeks to ease the rigidity of the association between culture and territory, and if we focus on the history of Italian mobility or rather on Italy's many diasporas – to quote the title of Donna Gabaccia's influential volume[29] – we can explore the composition and working of communities throughout the northern and southern hemisphere, the continuities and discontinuities of their connection with Italy, the pace at which they develop new forms of cultural expression. Unmooring Italian culture from its rigid association with the national also means opening up Italian studies to cultural phenomena which emerge and circulate not only in other spaces but also in different languages, whether these are the national idioms of host communities as in the case of Italian American authors writing in English, the multiple dialects often used by both regional and emigrant writers, or the learnt variants of Italian which have become the elective tongue of numerous contemporary translingual authors (and, increasingly, film-makers). The study of Italian culture, when seen from this perspective, becomes a means of examining the modalities and the consequences of intercultural exchange on a global scale.

The Aims of the Volume

In the context of widespread change within university education and of disciplinary innovation across the arts and humanities, it is clear that we are at a crucial juncture in the development of Italian studies. We need a resilient yet flexible framework which can encompass the range of approaches that have emerged within the discipline, and provide a series of critical strategies that will both ensure the coherence of the subject and maintain its dynamic dialogue with other fields. An approach that focuses on the dialogic

the research project 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures'. On this subject, see also Teresa Fiore, *Pre-Occupied Spaces: Remapping Italy's Transnational Migrations and Colonial Legacies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017) and Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds, *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[28] The allusion is to Graziella Parati, ed., *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy* (Madison, NJ and London: Associated University Presses, 1999).

[29] Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 2000).

interaction between national and transnational perspectives, stressing the dynamic tension between the two, will allow us to make visible how cultures operate and evolve, in the past and the present, how they interact and how they define being human in the world. It will also foreground the translational nature of cultural practices and the constitutive role played by translation processes in the production, circulation and consumption of cultural goods. In the process, such an approach will also encourage greater integration between the study of language and culture, insisting on (but also evidencing and instantiating) the intrinsic connection and largely coextensive nature of the two. In a world of ever-increasing mobility and global interaction we need to combine the study of the national with the study of the transnational and, in the process, to demonstrate how inquiry into linguistic and cultural translation can form a basis of our branch of study as well as its core contribution to understanding the world we live in.

The aim of the present volume is to trace the underlying framework of this kind of transnational Italian studies, to show the interdependence of its various methodologies and to articulate a sense of its relevance and purpose in today's world. The work is part of the Transnational Modern Languages (TML) series, whose volumes collectively participate in redefining 'the disciplinary framework of Modern Languages, arguing that it should be seen as an expert mode of enquiry whose founding research question is how languages and cultures operate and interact across diverse axes of connection'.[30] The present volume is intended to be read with close reference to *Transnational Modern Languages: A Handbook*, edited by Jennifer Burns and Derek Duncan, which provides an essential introduction to the series as well as an extended and indispensable glossary of key terms and definitions.[31] Along with the other volumes in the series, *Transnational Italian Studies* is structured around a set of key organizational principles: it addresses the working of cultural and transcultural processes by focusing on four overlapping areas of inquiry, all of which centre on practices that are crucial to the way in which life is collectively structured and individually experienced and performed. The first section looks at language, translation and multilingualism as constitutive elements of cultural production and exchange; the second at the set of practices that make up a sense of location and of belonging to a geographically determined site; the third at the notions of temporality that obtain within and between cultures; the final section looks at how we can explore modes of

[30] For further information about the series, see https://www.liverpooluniversity press.co.uk/series/series-13275/ [accessed 14 November 2019].

[31] Jennifer Burns and Derek Duncan, eds, *Transnational Modern Languages: A Handbook* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, forthcoming 2020).

understanding subjectivity and alterity, together with the complex layering of their interrelations.

The contributors work across a range of countries and institutions, but all identify in some form with the field of Italian studies. The essays, deliberately, do not follow a rigidly determined pattern; underlying every contribution, however, is an attempt to address a set of connected questions that are of crucial importance in a volume that is primarily, though not exclusively, intended for a student readership. These questions include the following: How does one approach a given area of study, demonstrating the importance and intellectual excitement of pursuing a specific line of research? What are the issues of most pressing concern within that area of inquiry? How can one demonstrate the modes of inquiry that lie at the base of one's study? What types of approach bring the unfolding of transnational or transcultural processes most sharply into focus? In confronting these questions by drawing on their own research and experience, every author in the collection shows how we can develop and apply a closely related range of methodologies that allow us to consider Italian culture(s) of the past and the present in a transnational perspective.

A volume such as this cannot claim to offer a comprehensive introduction to a field that is as wide as Italian studies. Its ambition is rather to play a part within a growing economy of resources, all of which provide essential information and propose varying means of approaching what is an exceptionally rich, complex and dynamic object of study. What the volume does aim to do is to offer an account of the questions that lie at the heart of the study of Italian culture – understood as a current within world culture – as well as of the kind of approaches that students will pursue in the individual courses they study. The overriding consideration in the preparation of the volume has been, as indicated above, to demonstrate how the close connection between the different elements of such a course does not have to lead to a fully integrated and homogeneous approach to a field of academic inquiry, but rather to the acquisition of a powerful lens, or a theoretical and methodological toolkit through or with which one can see how cultural interaction, in all its forms and multiplicity of viewpoints, determines how people experience their environment, how they perceive both the past and the future, how they think of commonality and alterity, and how they develop a sense of self. The volume aims to show how distinct methodological strategies converge in the analysis of an extended range of objects of research, allowing deep-laid historical and cultural processes that function at a local, national and global level to come into focus. In attempting to train as sharp a light as possible on the densely interwoven network of critical operations that researchers employ in reading and deconstructing cultural exchange, from the medieval to the contemporary

period, the volume sets out, lastly, to provide a necessary statement of the value and purpose of Italian studies in the third millennium.[32] In the age of global capital, technological revolution and climate change, understanding how cultures are constructed through dialogical practices and how homes are built on the move is an increasingly vital ability – and one which modern languages can embrace and foster as a crucial skill.

The first section of *Transnational Italian Studies*, 'Language', begins with a chapter by Loredana Polezzi on the role of translation in the formation and circulation of Italian culture. Using examples which range from Dante's reception in nineteenth-century Britain to contemporary Italian American and Italophone writing, the essay charts the multiple journeys of images and ideas of Italy which take place in and through translation, tracing a map which is at once regional, national and transnational. In the following chapter, Andrea Rizzi continues to focus on translation, discussing Renaissance translators as agents of 'intertraffique', understood as the transnational exchange of ideas across Europe and beyond. He shows how the linguistic and cultural mediation of individuals such as Cola de Jennaro or Pietro Lauro, as well as their geographic mobility, affected the circulation of culture and fed a transnational trade in translations.

Shifting attention to the contemporary period, Stefania Tufi discusses the Linguistic Landscape of contemporary Italian cities. Using evidence gathered from urban settings in Italy as its empirical basis, the chapter exemplifies the construction of transnational identities in Italian public spaces, illustrating their multilingual, multimodal and multicultural dimensions and reading them against traditional understandings of citizenship and national identity. In the last chapter of this section, Naomi Wells uses fieldwork conducted with migrant communities in Bologna to illustrate how an interdisciplinary approach which combines ethnographic methodologies and linguistic analysis can illuminate contemporary migration patterns and the ensuing forms of societal multilingualism in today's Italy. The chapter addresses the challenges of studying language in an age of intensified cultural flows, explaining how this has led to the development of new sociolinguistic concepts such as 'translanguaging'.

The second section, 'Spatiality', opens with a chapter by Nathalie Hester on two representations of early modern Italian travel, the *Viaggi* (1650–63) by Pietro della Valle and *L'America* (1650) by Girolamo Bartolomei. Both works reflect on local belonging and identity while offering compelling responses

[32] See also Charles Burdett, Loredana Polezzi and Barbara Spadaro, eds, *Transcultural Italies: Mobility, Memory and Translation* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, forthcoming).

to imperial expansion, both geopolitical and religious, and Italy's role in that process. In the following chapter, Clorinda Donato applies the lens of transnationalism to the polycentric sites of knowledge production of the Italian eighteenth century. She explores how horizontal networks of erudition, sociability, fraternalism, travel, scientific exchange and friendship replaced the circumscribed loci of Renaissance courts and their entrenched systems of patronage with fluid, cosmopolitan, 'citizen of the world' mentalities and lifestyles. Moving towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and to one of the key sites of the Italian diaspora, Giuliana Muscio discusses the significant impact of Italian immigrant actors, musicians and directors – and the southern Italian stage traditions they embodied – on the history of Hollywood cinema and American media in the silent era. Exploring the perspective of the performers themselves, the chapter analyses transnational communication between American and Italian film industries, media or performing arts as practised in Naples, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

In the latter part of this section, Teresa Fiore looks at the shift from a national to a transnational model in the field of Italian studies as part of a recognition of Italy's intrinsic history and culture of mobility. Offering an overview of transnational forms of mobility, she addresses the pivotal role of cultural texts (literature, music, film, etc.) in connecting stories of outbound and inbound migration as well as colonialism. In the final chapter of the section, Jennifer Burns considers the ways in which spaces identified as 'home' by transnational individuals and communities connect multiple geographical locations to provide at once a stable reference point and an expression of mobile national, cultural and linguistic belongings. Analysing the objects and practices which structure the homing activity of migrants and mobile communities, and the narratives of home spaces assembled through fictional writing, accounts of community (print and digital) and cherished objects, her chapter brings to light the experience of being at once settled and unsettled that is articulated when homes become mobile.

The third section of the volume, 'Temporality', opens with David Bowe's chapter on how an understanding of time can inform our analysis of literary culture in premodern Italy and on the role of prenational texts in shaping a transnational reading of Italian culture. Focusing on the transition from the medieval to the early modern period and on key works by Guittone d'Arezzo, Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca, Bowe argues that the unstable and non-linear representation of time in the works in question undermines any straightforward narrative of the self. In her chapter, Eugenia Paulicelli argues that along with the process of imagining nations and national identity, a language of fashion was elaborated within sixteenth-century Italy.

Concentrating on the costume books by Cesare Vecellio (1590 and 1598) and Giacomo Franco (1610) and their relation to works of conduct literature such as *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione, she argues that costume books testify to the crucial role that visual and material culture played in considering both micro and global history.

Moving to the modern period, Donna Gabaccia investigates the challenge to the governments of both the United States and Italy caused by the movement of millions of migrants between 1880 and 1960. She analyses how, since many record keepers had limited or no knowledge of other languages, translation became an everyday dimension of record-keeping. The chapter focuses on the emerging bureaucratic languages of translation by examining records of mobility for 3,700 migrants who travelled between Sambuca di Sicilia and the United States between 1880 and 1960. In the following chapter, Charles Burdett argues that any consideration of the transnational has to take account of the colonial past and the extent to which the spectre of that past continues to haunt the world we inhabit. Looking at the course of Italian expansionism and at the period following the formal end of colonialism, the chapter concludes by exploring how works of fiction by contemporary writers have attempted to address the manifold legacies of the colonial past. In the final chapter of the section, Barbara Spadaro addresses how comics enable multimodal processes of cultural translation in a world of multiple memories and languages. She provides an introduction to the comics medium and to the thriving scene of the Italian *fumetto* by focusing on graphic journalism. The chapter concentrates on the work of two authors – Zerocalcare and Takoua Ben Mohamed – who help us to understand key aspects of Italian memory in the twenty-first century, namely its multilingualism, transnational dimension and production mechanisms through transcultural acts of mediation-translation.

The last section of the volume, 'Subjectivity', starts with a chapter devoted to Dante and his most well-known work, the *Divine Comedy*. In his analysis, Tristan Kay contrasts Dante's image as the 'father' of the Italian language and one of the pivotal symbols of national identity with a reading of his work (which emerged from a heterogeneous, fragmented and multilingual cultural and political reality) and of its subsequent fortune that is at once prenational and transnational. In the next chapter, Fabio Camilletti and Alessandra Diazzi turn to psychoanalysis, showing how Italian culture and Italian literature assimilated a theoretical model and a discipline coming from outside the nation, while at the same time challenging them and redefining them in line with established notions of 'Italian subjectivity'. This process of adaptation, they argue, is linked to the tension between regional identities and national unity, between political agency and civil responsibility, between the sphere of the private and political commitment.

Turning to cinema, Derek Duncan analyses Daniele Gaglianone's 2013 film *La mia classe* and its dramatization of how transnational mobility is experienced on a local, individual level. The film is set in the outskirts of Rome and focuses on an Italian language teacher (played by a professional actor) and his class of non-Italian language learners (who are played by non-professionals). Duncan draws on Mieke Bal's concept of 'migratory aesthetics' to investigate how the accented voice of the migrant is used to explore and expand our understandings of what is 'Italian' and also of what it means to be 'a citizen'. Monica Jansen then examines notions of post-national citizenship in relation to the violent events which took place in Genoa in 2001, while the Italian city was hosting that year's G8 summit. She juxtaposes three different documents – Christian Mirra's graphic novel *Quella notte alla Diaz* (2010), Carlo Bachschmidt's documentary *Black Block* (2011) and Daniele Vicari's film *Diaz – Don't Clean Up This Blood* (2012) – to show how the G8 events and their memory have come to constitute a watershed moment for the construction of a transnational and transgenerational subjectivity. Finally, in the last chapter of the volume, Serena Bassi applies a transnational approach to the field of queer Italian studies. Her essay takes us back to notions of translation and translingualism, examining the linguistic practices of members of the Italian Gay Liberation Movement in the 1970s. She recasts gay liberation activists as 'queer translanguagers', who resisted both heteronormativity and the notion of a standardized national language. In doing so, she also proposes an approach to translation as queer translingual practice and to queer Italian studies as a transnational object of enquiry.

This volume – and, in many ways, the whole Transnational Modern Languages series – would not have been possible without the help of the Arts and Humanities Research Council and its 'Translating Cultures' theme, which supported the project 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures'.[33] We wish to thank the AHRC as well as Liverpool University Press for their invaluable support.

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[33] For further information on the project, see https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/.