



Academic Event Report

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Event: 2024 Society for Italian Studies (SIS) Postgraduate Colloquium
“Memory and Italian Culture”

Venue: University College Cork

Date: 6th December 2024

In 2024, the Department of Italian at University College Cork (UCC) and the Society for Italian Studies (SIS) collaborated to bring to fruition a postgraduate colloquium entitled “Memory and Italian Culture”. The Department of Italian at UCC has a long tradition of organising annual conferences to promote the work of the international postgraduate Italian Studies community. The SIS is an organisation that furthers the study of Italian Studies in the United Kingdom and Ireland, which holds an annual colloquium for its postgraduate members. The 2024 colloquium was organised by PhD students Noreen Kane (UCC) and Francesca Nieddu (UCC), with the support of SIS postgraduate representatives Dario Galassini (UCC), Silvia Vari (University of Warwick) and Elisa Vivaldi (University of Edinburgh). The event was generously funded by the SIS.

The colloquium consisted of three panels and two keynote talks focusing on national and transnational Italian memory across a range of contexts and media. The papers that were presented focused on issues such as mass emigration, Italy’s twenty-year Fascist dictatorship, violent colonial expansion, the Holocaust, political violence, gender inequality, police brutality, and environmental destruction, all of which have shaped Italy’s tumultuous twentieth-century history. Papers explored the role of cultural products in mediating these difficult histories. Nine participants travelled to Cork from both Ireland and abroad, including Italy, the UK and the US,

with one speaker joining online. Keynote lectures were given by senior scholars Professor Silvia Ross (UCC) and Professor Stefania Lucamante (The Catholic University of America and the University of Cagliari). Participants had the opportunity to share their work, engage in meaningful discussions, and receive valuable feedback from keynote speakers and peers.

Opening Address and Panel 1

The colloquium opened with a warm welcome from Dr Daragh O’Connell, Head of the Department of Italian at UCC and Director of the Centre for Dante Studies in Ireland. The first panel, titled “Problematising Postcolonial, Migratory and Marginalised Memory”, was chaired by Silvia Vari (University of Warwick), and featured three papers. Michele Baldaro (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice and Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt) presented a paper that investigated how the figure of the doctor in postwar colonial texts challenges the *italiani brava gente* (“Italians—good people”) myth and highlights the inclination to exoticise the colonial Other. Elisabetta Visaggio (King’s College London) followed with a paper that explored the oceanic journeys and memories of economic migrants from Southern Italy who travelled to North and South America between 1890 and 1930. The final paper of the first panel was delivered by Francesca Passasseo (University of Texas at Austin) and focused on the Wages for Housework Movement, a 1970s campaign led by Italian feminists, combining theoretical perspectives with insights from her archival research.

Panel 2

The second panel of the colloquium, “From the Second World War to the Present Day: (Re)mediating Memory and Historical Trauma”, was chaired by Dr Chiara Giuliani (UCC). The panel commenced with an online intervention by Irene Ros (University of Edinburgh and University of Strathclyde), titled “Performing the Collective Memory of *Stragismo*

[terrorist violence]”. Ros juxtaposed the portrayal and spectacularisation of political violence in 1970s Italy with contemporaneous oral histories of women. Following this, Matilde Piu (University of Pisa) presented a paper on intergenerational trauma in Włodek Goldkorn’s Holocaust memoir *Il bambino nella neve* (*The Child in the Snow*), examining how the literary imagination serves as an intervention in processing trauma for the post-memory generation. The panel concluded with a paper presented by Cristian Bergonzo and Giuliana Pala (University of Bologna), who explored the concept of intermediality and the dynamics of multidirectional memory in the work of political philosopher Massimo Palma. Their discussion investigated the relationship between music, text and memory.

Keynote Address 1

The first keynote address, “The Natural History of the Dead: From Ernest Hemingway’s WWI Narratives to Contemporary Historiographical Novels: History through the Lens of Nicoletta Verna and Ilaria Rossetti”, was delivered by Professor Stefania Lucamante. In her talk, Professor Lucamante offered thought-provoking reflections on literature as an epistemic field in its own right. She emphasised the power of literature to create alternative interpretations of the past, enabling readers to actively reimagine pivotal historic moments and explore what might have been. The historiographical novels discussed also highlighted the prominent—yet frequently overlooked—role of women in the world wars.

Panel 3

The third and final panel, “Reshaping the Past and the Future through the Urban Environment”, was chaired by Elisa Vivaldi (University of Edinburgh). Zoe Fox (University of Birmingham) opened the panel with an intervention that focused on the Fascist use of Romantic imagery depicting a vanishing Rome. This was followed by Claudia Sbuttoni’s (University of Gastronomic Sciences, Pollenzo) paper on memories of the resettlement of Istrian Italians to Villaggio Giuliano, an urban development on the outskirts

of Rome after World War II, when Italy was forced to cede its former territory to Yugoslavia (1947–1954). To conclude the panel, Giulia Bernuzzi (UCC) presented an intervention on the role of memory and resistance within the futuristic urban setting of Venice as depicted in Antonio Scurati’s 2011 dystopian climate novel *La seconda mezzanotte* [*The Second Midnight*].

Keynote 2: Closing Address

The colloquium was brought to a close with a second keynote address, which further explored the theme of memory and the urban environment, delivered by Professor Silvia Ross, “Re-membering World War II through Ruins: Wounded Bodies, Memory and Regeneration in the Postwar Florence of Aldo Palazzeschi and Michael Ondaatje”. The expressive possibilities of “wounds” in the urban environment were explored.

Conclusion

Throughout the colloquium common themes emerged among the papers. These included the agency of individual memory in relation to prevailing memory narratives, the ability of cultural products to engage the reader or viewer in an active interpretative process, which can potentially inspire change in the present and future and, finally, the relationship between the urban environment and both dominant and resistant memories.

The colloquium provided the opportunity for ample conversations in formal and informal contexts on memory and Italian culture. Meaningful connections were forged and participants were invited to submit an article to the 2025 special issue of *Notes in Italian Studies*: “Memory and Italian Culture”. The event concluded with a group trip to local Cork pub Fionnbarra, where participants, organisers, and keynote speakers enjoyed a pizza and pint in a relaxed atmosphere, with attendees commenting that it was one of the friendliest conferences they had attended.

NOREEN KANE has just completed a PhD in the Department of Italian at University College Cork (UCC). Her thesis, entitled “Transgenerational Trauma and the Gendered Body: Postcolonial Women’s Writing in Italy” was funded by Research Ireland and a National University of Ireland Travelling Doctoral Scholarship. She has published articles in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (2024), *Quaderni d’italianistica* (2025), and *Atlantic Studies* (forthcoming). She currently teaches Italian language at UCD and lectures on contemporary Italian women’s writing in UCC.