THE TEACHING OF ITALIAN IN THE UNITED STATES

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ITALIAN
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CHAPTER VIII

MISCELLANEA

1. THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ITALIAN

At the Modern Language Association convention held at Iowa City in 1921, the first discussions were held in the course of the meetings of Italian I and II on the feasibility of organizing teachers of Italian for the purpose of achieving efficient cooperation in developing the study of Italian. A planning committee was appointed consisting of Professors Goggio (Toronto), Cavicchi (Brown), Agnes Ridell (Wheaton) and Altrocchi (Chicago). At the MLA Convention in Philadelphia in 1922 organization of the proposed association was further discussed and a new and enlarged committee was appointed to report at the 1923 meeting in Ann Arbor. This committee consisted of Professors Grandgent (Harvard), Shaw (Toronto), Roselli (Vassar), Ridell (Wheaton), Wilkins (Chicago), with Professor McKenzie, then at the University of Illinois, as chairman. It drew up a tentative constitution for the society which was carefully discussed at the gathering. Professor McKenzie became its first president, Wilkins and Shaw vice-presidents, Altrocchi secretary-treasurer and editor of the Bulletin of the American Association of Teachers of Italian. Roselli, De Salvio (Northwestern), Vaughan (California) were named councillors, Lipari (Wisconsin) and Phelps (Minnesota) consulting Editors. Professor Grandgent was named Honorary President. The organization started with 99 members, 74 active and 25 associate, the difference consisting in the fact that the active members were teachers of the language while the associate members were not teachers of Italian but otherwise interested in it. Our new constitution, adopted in 1958 during the presidency of Prof. A.T. MacAllister, incidentally, no longer makes this distinction. It also provides for the creation of chapters of which there are now ten: Detroit, Chicago, ITA
TEACHERS

Invention held at the feasibility of achieving the prosperity of Italian. A. Convention in the association committee was held in Ann Arbor. This (Harvard), Shaw, Wilkins (Chicago), and Illinois, as for the society. Professor and Shaw vice-editor of thechers of Italian (California) were elected Honorary members, 74 active the fact that the hile the associate otherwise interested 958 during the tally, no longer the creation of the, Chicago, ITA (New York), Long Island (New York), New England, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Northeastern Ohio, Northern California, Pacific Northwest, Southeastern states.

Membership has grown from 99 to approximately 1500.

The organ of the Association, re-named Italica in 1926, has had as its editors Rudolph Altrocchi, 1924-28, N. D. Austin, 1928-33, John Van Horne, 1933-42 and Joseph G. Fucilla since 1943. It started as a notiziario of twelve pages and has gradually expanded as membership and subscribers have increased to more than 100 pages per issue. One of the valuable features it contains is the quarterly analytical bibliography which, over the years, has been prepared by J. E. Shaw, J. G. Fucilla, C. S. Singleton, Vincent Luciani (AATI President 1953) Armand L. De Gaetano (AATI President, 1966-68), and is presently in the hands of Beatrice Corrigan and Julius Molinaro. The periodical has sought to keep its scholarly standards high and has had at various times among its contributors teaching in the American universities such eminent colleagues as J.E. Shaw, McKenzie, Spitzer, Hatzfeld, Kristeller, Ulrich Leo and Wilkins. Some of the distinguished foreign scholars who have also been contributors are Momigliano, Migliorini, Giuseppe Toffanin, Emilio Santini, Natali, Ettore Alldoli. The secretary—treasurers upon whose shoulders most of the hard work in the organization has fallen have been Hilda Norman, Angelo Lipari, Luigi Passarelli, Domenico Vittorini, Camillo P. Merlino, Elton Hocking, Joseph Rossi, Alfred Galpin, Norma Fornaciari and Herbert Golden. Ernest Falbo is the current secretary treasurer.

The AATI is now solidly established and is already a vital force in the propagation of Italian culture in this country.

2. THE ITALIAN TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

In view of its existence as an independent organization for a number of years and its important role in the teaching of

1 Professor Austin also deserves to be remembered for his valuable lexicographical studies on the Divine Comedy. He taught at Princeton
Italian in our schools in the twenties and thirties, a few words on the Italian Teachers' Association are apropos here.

It began to function in New York City in 1912, but temporarily halted its activities with the outbreak of World War I. The group was re-activated in 1921 and adopted a constitution with a two-fold aim: 1) To encourage the teaching of Italian and 2) To encourage solidarity among teachers of the Italian language and Americans of Italian extraction engaged in the teaching profession. Professor Mario E. Cosenza, later Dean of Brooklyn College, was elected President, and Dr. Leonard Covello, first head of the Italian Department at De Witt Clinton High School and later Principal of the Benjamin Franklin High School, Vice-President. Both of them were retained in these offices for some twenty-five years.

In 1922 the ITA was successful in securing from the New York Board of Education the same parity for Italian that had been enjoyed by French, German and Spanish, thus paving the way for the rapid introduction of the language in many of the New York City and many other high schools.²

Until 1938-39 the Association published Annual Reports dealing with useful information on the study of Italian and on Italian culture. With the Third Annual Report (1923-24), the yearly list of high schools and colleges in the New York metropolitan area and the State of New York was extended to include other institutions in all parts of the United States, and gradually grew to the point of presenting a virtually complete picture of the country-wide enrollment in Italian from year to year. As the only faithful record we have on the status of the language from 1923 to 1939 the value of the lists is inestimable. The ITA is now a chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Italian.

² See the chapter on the Public Schools.
3. THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION

The story of the Modern Language Association can be read in William Riley Parker’s “The MLA 1883-1933” (PMLA, LXVIII, 1933, p. 2, 3-39) and in George Winchester Stone’s “The Beginning, Development and Impact of the MLA as a Learned Society, 1883-1958” (PMLA, LXXIII, 1958, No. 5, Pt. 2, 23-44). We, therefore, need not go into this subject in any detail.

Its founder was A. Marshall Elliott of The Johns Hopkins University. The first meeting was held at Columbia University in 1883. The official organ of the group which appeared in 1885, was called The Transactions of the Modern Language Association, but commencing with the fourth volume it assumed the name of The Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA).

In the early years the organization took a keen interest in pedagogical problems and a “Pedagogical Section” was regularly a part of its program until 1903. By 1911 the advancement of research had already become the Association’s predominant objective and this was made official in 1927 by changing the original statement of purpose, “the advancement of the study of modern languages and their literatures,” to “the advancement of research” in these fields.

As those who have gone through the files of the PMLA well know, initially the Modern Language Program was not divided into groups and sections as it is now. Instead there were sessions which varied in number from year to year and naturally increased with the growth of the Association. With few exceptions the papers of each of the sessions were miscellaneous in character. Those dealing with Italian were not infrequent, but, in accordance with the trend of the time they concerned for the most part the older writers and linguistics. The first paper to be delivered on an Italian subject was given at the 1887 meeting at Philadelphia by A. Marshall Elliott on “The Earliest Works on Italian Grammar and Lexicography Published in England.” Publication of studies in Italian started with Volume IV, 1889, which contains three of them, still the largest number to appear in any one year. They are “Dante’s Paradiso:

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(1910-11), University of California (1920-43). Biblical sketch on him and dictated to him.
Cantos XXIV-XXVI," by Edward E. Walter of the University of Michigan, "Italo-Keltisches" by Richard Otto, Ph.D from Munich, and "Italian Poetry and Patriotism at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century" by Frederick N. Page of the University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn.

In 1900 the annual MLA meetings split into an Eastern and Central Division and up to 1911 met at Union Meetings only twice. Union and Sectional Meetings alternated till 1923 after which the Association has met as one unit.

Partition of the languages into English, German and Romance Sessions prevailed from 1904 until 1921, when the Romance Language Session was divided into the present French, Italian and Spanish groups. Plans to bisect Italian into Group I (Medieval-Renaissance) and Group II (Modern Italian Literature) were set in motion in 1921 at the Eastern Division meeting in Baltimore and the Central Division meeting at Iowa City where both groups met in continuous session. They kept meeting in continuous session in 1922, 1923 and 1924, when it was realized that there was too much compression, only one hour being allowed for both. Hence more time was requested. However, the request was ignored until 1936 when, at the Richmond-Williamsburg convention, our two groups appeared scheduled separately and they have remained separate ever since. Outside these groups papers dealing with Italian have been offered frequently in the Medieval and Comparative Literature IV (Renaissance) Sections, and occasionally in the Romance and other Sections.

AATI members who have been Presidents of the MLA are C.R. Grandgent (1912), Edward C. Armstrong (1918-19), Milton A. Buchanan (1932), Ernest H. Wilkins (1942), Hayward Keniston (1953) and Morris Bishop (1964).

For teachers of Italian the two most important practical contributions of the Association are 1) the Italian section of its annual International Bibliography (1957) whose hundreds of titles, approximately 2,000 in the May 1966 PMLA, have served to keep scholars thoroughly posted on the most recent books and articles that have appeared in the field of literature and linguistics and 2) the MLA Materials Center. This branch
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publishes a catalog of publications of interest to teachers of Modern Foreign Languages which lists brochures available on the numerous and varied projects undertaken through the sponsorship of the MLA Foreign Language Program—Teacher Preparation, Teaching Techniques, Linguistics, The Elementary School, Language Laboratories, Literature, NEC Reports of the Working Committees of the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, etc. In 1961 the Center published an *MLA Selective List of Materials For Use by Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages in Elementary and Secondary Schools* and a *Supplement* for French and Italian in 1964. In 1961 the Chairman for Italian was Elvira Adorno of the John Adams H.S., Ozone Park, N.Y., and in 1964 the General Chairman was Prof. Olga Ragusa of Columbia. With the assistance of a corps of experts they have supplied elementary and high school teachers with valuable evaluations of materials in the following classifications: Basic Texts, Books of Culture & Civilization, Books of Songs, Conversation Books, Dictionaries, Discs & Tapes: Cultural, Discs & Tapes: Language, Elementary Readers, Integrated Programs, Literary Texts, Periodicals, Supplementary Materials, Teachers Course Guides. The Center is also responsible for a series of integrated program language texts, the A-LM, which are now extensively used in our high schools. Available in Italian are *Level One* and *Level Two*. The material consists of a student text, teaching texts, practice record set, class-room/laboratory record set, classroom/laboratory tape set, teacher's manual and teacher's desk materials. “This total program approaches language study through authentic speech and structural pattern drills which provide a basis for later development of reading and writing skills” (*Supplement*, loc. cit., 51).

4. THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Quite belatedly, in 1914, it was realized that there was a need for a journal exclusively devoted to modern language teaching and for a national organization composed of teachers
at the school and college levels. This gave rise to the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations. From time to time group of organized teachers have joined it as constituent associations, which presently include The American Association of Teachers of French, The American Association of Teachers of German, The American Association of Teachers of Italian, The American Association of Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Languages, The American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, as well as a number of regional and state language associations. Since 1914 both state and regional meetings have annually taken place under its auspices.

E. W. Bagster-Collins, the first editor of the Journal, made the announcement in Volume I, 117, that “before all else it intends to help the secondary school teaching of modern languages,” which has remained the major aim of the periodical even though the articles are mostly written for and not by the secondary school group. Many have profited from the pedagogical data that has appeared in it, but rather than primarily through their own contributions the teachers of Italian have benefited mostly indirectly through those on the sister languages. This is because virtually all the college teachers are interested in its literature, while most of those in the high schools, like their fellow-teachers in other languages, have tended to accept the tools and methods on hand as worked out by their linguistically and pedagogically-inclined college colleagues, rather than to carry on original experiments of their own. With the Modern Language Association and the Office of Education entering the field of methodological research individual initiative along these lines has, unfortunately, come almost to a standstill in all the modern foreign languages.

Five members of the AATI have served as editors of the Modern Language Journal—J.P. Wickersham Crawford, Henry Grattan Doyle, Camillo P. Merlino, Julio del Toro and Robert F. Roeming. Four of our Association members have held the presidency of the Federation—J.P.W. Crawford, Ferdinand F. Di Bartolo, Julio del Toro, and Norma V. Fornaciari. The president for 1967 is Ernest S. Falbo.
gave rise to the National Teachers' Associations. From among these have joined it as ly include The American Association of Teachers of Slavic and American Association of Teachers of Italian. As well as a number of others. Since 1914 both states y taken place under its editor the Journal, made clear that before all else it is the teaching of modern languages that is the periodical written for and not by the pedagogical to which the public have been exposed. Italian have benefited the sister languages. This is particularly true in the high schools, like those worked out by their modern language colleagues, benefits of our colleges and academies that it owes its introduction in quite a number of our schools.

5. ITALIAN IN THE SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

Italian, the language of music, has naturally been the preferred modern language studied by American students interested in voice culture. It is indeed, to the music departments of our colleges and academies that it owes its introduction in quite a number of our schools.

Among the institutions of higher learning that function as independent music schools, one of the best known is the New England Conservatory (Boston). When Italian was first offered there in 1883, it was taught by M. B. Berlitz, founder of the Berlitz School. The catalog for that year informs us that the method of instruction is what is known as the ‘Berlitz method’; a system that has produced for the four years past, quite unparalleled results... Lessons will be given in small classes or privately. There will be special hours devoted to the study of elocution in the foreign languages, for those who learn to sing in these tongues. Lectures in German, French and Italian are delivered when the number of advanced students will warrant. It is also the purpose of the Director to have special tables in the dining-room reserved for conversation exclusively in French, German and Italian.”

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