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Italica, The Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Italian: Past and Present

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Italica is the official organ of the American Association of Teachers of Italian. The quarterly publishes original studies on all aspects of Italian language, linguistics, and literature as well as articles concerned with the teaching of Italian language and culture. Interdisciplinary and comparative studies are also considered for publication. The journal is receptive to all scholarly methods and theoretical perspectives. After Dante Studies, founded in 1882, Italica is the oldest journal in the United States dedicated to Italian language and literature.

The American Association of Teachers of Italian was organized at the annual meeting of the Italian section of the Modern Language Association of America, held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, December 28, 1923. Earlier discussions among MLA members on the feasibility of organizing teachers to achieve efficient cooperation in developing Italian studies in North America had taken place at the 1921 MLA convention at Iowa City in 1921 and at Philadelphia in 1922. At the 1923 meeting a constitution was adopted and the first officers elected. The executive council appointed the Secretary-Treasurer, Rudolph Altrocchi, to act as editor of the Bulletin of the new association. The AATI started with 99 members: 2 life members, 74 active teachers of Italian designated as members, and 23 associate members.

In the Bulletin ample space was accorded to anecdotal documentation, biographical data and professional activities of instructors, publications of textbooks, and research in progress. Nonetheless, the contributions had an important role in removing well-rooted cultural biases and introducing in North America some of the main literary figures and new trends of contemporary Italy. Understandably, the size of the original Bulletin, renamed Italica in 1926, and the membership of the AATI have grown enormously in the last seventy years. The forty-two pages of Volume I have grown by 1994 to six hundred pages and the membership of the Association has risen to over fifteen hundred.

The first histories of the teaching of modern languages in this country, authored by C. H. Handschin (1913) and E. W. Bagster-Collin (1930), were mainly concerned with French and German and barely mention Italian. One must wait almost four decades for the first scho-
larly monograph entirely devoted to Italian, Joseph G. Fucilla’s *The Teaching of Italian in the United States*. The book is well-written, amply documented, and full of new and valuable observations. The author demonstrates the inaccuracy of the historical myths that the teaching of Italian in the United States is of recent date and that the extension of the teaching of Italian has been limited to certain regions of the country. As regards *Italica*, the centrality of the role the periodical played in promoting Italian studies in North America can be best understood by reading the thorough and perceptive, if somewhat polemical, survey published by Irving A. Portner in 1984.

It has been said that the quality of a periodical depends by necessity on the contributors. Since its founding, *Italica* has sought to keep its scholarly standards high and has had among its early contributors such distinguished American and Canadian Italianists as James E. Shaw, Kenneth McKenzie, Leo Spitzer, Paul O. Kristeller, Robert A. Hall Jr., Howard R. Marraro, Mario A. Pei, Ernest H. Wilkins, Charles S. Singleton, Allan H. Gilbert, Angelina H. Lograsso, Domenico Vittorini, Vincent Luciani, Thomas G. Bergin, Vincent Cioffi, and Beatrice M. Corrigan. Equally impressive is the range of contributions by Italian scholars: Giuseppe A. Borgese, Attilio Momigliano, Bruno Migliorini, Giulio Natali, Giuliano Bonfante, Giuseppe Toffanin, Vittore Branca, Aldo Vallone, to cite but a few.

A glance at the cumulative indexes compiled through the years by Anita G. Dente, Irving A. Portner, and Robert J. Rodini can suggest the treasures to be found in the volumes of *Italica*. Any one of the volumes published will serve to indicate the character and substance of the periodical. To illustrate this point with a recent example: the total number of printed pages of Volume 71 (1994) was 660; the contents were twenty-five articles, one review article, one note, sixty-one reviews, two sections of “Brief Notices,” and two instalments of the “Bibliography of Italian Studies in North America.”

As the steward of the journal, the editor must publish the contributions of both established scholars and budding Italianists without sacrificing the standards of quality the members have come to associate with *Italica*. Of the authors of major contributions appearing in Volume 71 mentioned above, nine were full professors, four associate professors, ten assistant professors, two lecturers, and two had no academic affiliation. At present, only approximately thirty percent of the articles submitted are accepted, often after substantial revisions. To those who have not published in a scholarly refereed journal before, the selection process may appear mysterious, even capricious. In fact, it is neither. It is a well-defined, two-stage process consisting of an external evaluation
and a copy-editing process. Of the two stages, the external review is unquestionably the most crucial. The author’s peers, who specialize in the field, serve as reviewers. Submissions are evaluated by two readers, more often by three, at least one a member of the editorial board.

If the quality of a periodical depends on the contributors, its direction and character are shaped by the editor, and *Italica* has been fortunate in the choice of its editors. Since its inception the AATT was able to secure the services of scholars of the stature of Rudolf Altrocchi (1924-1928), Herbert D. Austin (1928-1933), and John Van Horne (1933-1942). The career achievements of each of these “founding fathers” have generally been well described in the homages dedicated to them. Joseph G. Fucilla served as editor of *Italica* from 1943 to 1968. During his long stewardship, the once modest bulletin of the AATT developed, mainly through his vision, into a highly respected scholarly journal. His lifelong dedication to his work and his willingness to share his knowledge and experience with his students and his fellow Italianists have been formally recognized. North American Italianists owe a debt of gratitude also to Olga Ragusa for taking the journal to new heights of quality during her sixteen-year tenure at its helm (1968-1983). Not surprisingly, for the value of her accomplishments as an editor and a scholar Ragusa was paid an official tribute with a special number in her honour (61.3, 1984); furthermore, in 1990 she was appropriately awarded the AATT Distinguished Service Award. In his ten years as editor (1984-1993) my predecessor, Robert J. Rodini, has given *Italica* both new energy and purpose, and his dedication and high professionalism have made a good journal even better. When I took over the office of editor, I inherited a widely recognized journal with a clear profile and a loyal readership.

To be sure, a number of institutional changes were introduced in 1982. A constitutional revision reinstated the original appointed status of the editorship of *Italica*, which had become an elected position from 1960. At present, the editor serves for a five-year term and not more than two terms. Also, in 1982 it was decided that the editor was expected to name, in addition to the editorial staff, an editorial review board. Any new editor of *Italica* has to proceed by looking to the future while at the same time reaching back to the best of the journal’s tradition in a constant effort to innovate. As editor I have taken the new editorial policy a step further by appointing associate editors charged with specific responsibilities (reviews, pedagogy, bibliography, production). I also introduced the practice of term appointments for members of the review board in order to rotate the most qualified readers available.

While institutional journals associated with professional organizations may seem to enjoy a privileged status, this status requires a certain
eclecticism to the type of materials they can publish. As the official organ of an association the journal must reflect an open editorial policy that should not exclude areas of interests and approaches to scholarship and teaching common to its membership, nor should it risk alienating its membership by not including material of relevance to a variety of readers. The editor of Italica cannot lose sight of its primary mission, namely the promotion and improvement of the teaching of Italian language and literature. This service commitment has been a major concern for all the editors of Italica. As early as 1937, John Van Horne reported that “Our new president, Professor Moore, is anxious to increase the utility of Italica to secondary school teachers”.

Substantial progress in this direction was made in recent times during the editorships of both Ragusa and Rodini. When I became editor of Italica two years ago I promised myself to address as forcefully as possible the concerns and interests of our high school and college instructors who teach exclusively or mostly elementary and intermediate language courses. Language teaching has long accounted for the majority of course offerings at large state universities, as well as liberal arts colleges in our country. This has been particularly true during the last decade with the decline of Italian language instruction at the secondary school level, even in regions that traditionally had strong Italian programs. College students interested in Italian studies learn Italian in their first and second year of college. And language courses in large universities are generally staffed by teaching assistants with limited teaching training and experience.

In view of this new situation, as editor I have tried to devote at least one number of each volume of the journal to articles and reviews on language, language pedagogy, and linguistics. I can think of no better words to justify this decision that the ones that Ragusa gave to justify her preference for special topical issues. “They”, she wrote, “give greater visibility to the works of the contributors; they are more frequently cited; and they often provide students with an initial bibliography for their own research.” Issue 4 of Volume 72 (1995) of the periodical bears witness to the blend of continuity and change that has marked the journal’s long history. The table of contents is typical: an introduction to the LIP (Lessico di frequenza dell’italiano parlato) by Maria Emanuela Piemontese of the Università di Roma “La Sapienza”; a useful overview of the available language manuals for the teaching of first year Italian signed by Gabriella Colussi Arthur; and the first scientifically conducted survey of pedagogical software use in Italian in North America prepared by David P. Bénétreau, Leslie Z. Morgan, and Roberta Sinyor. In the field of linguistics we find an article on the lexicon of Leon Battista Alberti by Michael Vena and a study of the languages of the Italian
Canadians by Jana Vizmuller-Zocco. These contributions illustrate not only the issue’s range of interests in language pedagogy, dialectology, history of the language, and applied linguistics, but also the quality of contributors Italicca is able to attract. I am understandably pleased to announce that issue 4 of Volume 73 (1996) will be dedicated to the use of linguistics in the Italian classroom.

With regard to institutional service, one of the less noted but highly significant areas in which Italicca has proved indispensable is bibliography. The “Bibliography of Italian Studies in America” includes books, articles, bibliographies and reviews published by scholars residing in the United States or Canada, as well as reviews of their writings. It also includes articles and books of foreign scholars which are published in North America. In recent years, coverage has included comparative literature studies, translations, and publications on art, music, philosophy, history, cinema, folklore, where these are closely related to language and literature. Also covered are studies pertinent to the Italian-American and Italian-Canadian experience. Over the years, the quarterly bibliography was prepared by well-known scholars such as James E. Shaw, Joseph G. Fucilla, Charles S. Singleton, Vincent Luciani, and Armand L. De Gaetano. Beatrice M. Corrigan and Julius A. Molinaro were charged with the rubric from Winter 1963 through Autumn 1967. Molinaro continued to serve as AATTI bibliographer through 1973. During his tenure, with the second issue of volume 46 (1969), the “Bibliography” introduced a number of changes, including a new arrangement of the entries by area of interest and centuries. For over fifty years the bibliographies of pertinent works appeared in quarterly instalments. Since 1983 the frequency of the rubric, which now requires over fifty pages of print, has been semi-annual. These innovations have enabled recent compilers, John C. Cherubini (1974-1993) and Paolo A. Giordano (1994-), to turn the “Bibliography” from a simple list of publications into a useful tool for scholarly research. Moreover, since Italicca has enjoyed exceptional longevity and wide circulation, a record such as the “Bibliography” provides also a witness to the evolution of Italian studies in North America since 1924.

During his editorship, Fucilla dedicated homage numbers of the periodical to well-known Italianists such as Ernest H. Wilkins (23.4, 1946) and Ulrich Leo (37.2, 1960). Ragusa expanded this practice in another direction by publishing a significant number of special issues devoted to particular themes: Anglo-Italian Studies and Italian Literature in Translation 53.4 (1976), Comparative Aspects of Italian Literature 57.1 (1980); to specific genres: Theatre 55.2 (1978); to periods: Renaissance 57.4 (1980) and 59.4 (1982); to the twentieth century: 56.2 (1979); 58.4 (1981) and 60.1 (1983); and to authors: Dante 56.4 (1979) and 59.1 (1982),
Verga-Pirandello 52.2 (1975), Montale-Svevo 55.4 (1978). Under Rodini's stewardship of *Italia*, there were an equally high number of special issues on: Linguistics: Theoretical and Applied 64.3 (1987); Literature and Opera 64.4 (1987); Women's Voices 65.4 (1988), Perspectives on the Novecento 68.1 (1991); and Discoveries: The Columbian Quincentennial 69.3 (1992). Since joining the editorial staff in 1994, I have organized a number on theatre 71.3 (1995). There is still plenty of scope for similar initiatives, and a special issue on film is in gestation.

This brief sketch of a long and fascinating story does *Italia* scant justice, but limitations of space prevent me from citing yet further achievements of the periodical in the promotion of Italian studies in North America. In sum, I am convinced that the journal's rich heritage will no doubt inspire both contributors and editors to come to serve members of the AATI and other friends of things Italian through the publication of articles, reviews, announcements, and surveys on Italian enrolments, which have recorded the institutional development of the AATI. It must be noted that in order to strengthen these functions and to address other professional needs, the AATI also publishes a *Newsletter*. This semiannual publication features information about new publications, forthcoming conferences, events, contests and awards. It also provides a forum for discussion on pedagogy and teaching strategies, short articles, and brief notes dealing with direct classroom experiences and teaching tips. As its readers will admit, the *AATI Newsletter* is hard to classify. It is not a review for scholars, nor is it primarily a bulletin, but an indispensable supplement to the quarterly journal.

We have learned at this conference that the Italian government is considering investing additional resources in the promotion and diffusion of Italian language and culture in the North America. While teaching and research are the responsibility of educators, certainly the Italian government can provide valuable support to our mission. As to which resources are most needed, my personal wish list would be:

1. the publication of a newsletter or journal aimed specifically at the American readership and dedicated to all aspects of Italian contemporary life and culture;

2. facilitating contact between Consulates and Cultural Institutes and schools or colleges for the purpose of supplying useful didactic materials such as press releases with up-to-date information, radio and television programs, films, popular music, etc.;

3. joint editorial ventures such as sponsorship of proceedings of conferences organized by the various professional organizations of teachers of Italian language and culture. Over the last twenty years the AATI has successfully undertaken a number of initiatives to
encourage the active participation of officials of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education in its activities.

The Italian government's commitment to preserving and promoting Italian language and culture in the United States could be furthered also in more general ways. For one thing, its agencies should encourage and coordinate efforts directed at educating the general public as to the reality of contemporary Italy, at improving the image of the new Italy that is an integral part of the modern world. It has been said with reason that Italy is the most visited country in Europe, and probably the least understood. The more positive the public image of Italy in our country, the more likely it is that students will choose to study Italian; conversely, the more students that study Italian, the more likely it is that Americans, all Americans, not only those of Italian origin, will have a positive attitude toward Italy.\textsuperscript{13}

The AATI and associations such as the National Italian American Foundation, co-sponsor of this conference, should be concentrating on the awesome task of changing the general attitude toward foreign language learning in our country. As I have said in other occasions, in the United States we are still debating whether to require high school and college students to have some instruction in one foreign language.\textsuperscript{14} The scarcity of Americans, not only political and business leaders but also professional people, who can handle any foreign language well is a standing joke in international circles. I do not mean to underestimate the importance of the improvements in foreign language instruction attained in the three decades I have spent as a member of the profession (improvements in the technology of language teaching, in teacher competence, in the slow but consistent spread of language requirements, in the introduction of programs in non-Western languages). Yet, we can have the best teachers and equipment available and still not provide our students with the language fluency and cultural sophistication necessary to communicate effectively with the rest of the world. In order to overcome this attitude of self-imposed linguistic isolation and cultural parochialism, we must acknowledge first that foreign language competence is not just a mechanical, but rather a cognitive skill, a way of looking at the rest of the world, a means of better understanding others and, therefore, ourselves. Second, we must recognize that all languages have equal status. Those who learn and use modern Greek, Arabic, Korean or one of the regional Italian dialects spoken by their ancestors should not be made inferior to those who learn Spanish or French. We want to be able to communicate with the new immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries and our current major business partners, but also to understand and live with other cultures in the world.
Notes


3. The publication of this rewarding study, still essential though in need of updating, was made possible by the joint sponsorship of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, the America-Italy Society, the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, and the AATI. Cf. Armand L. De Gaetano’s review in Ittica 45.3(1968): 377-84.


7. Information pertaining to Fucilla’s professional achievements are contained in the September issue of volume 45.3(1968). Among its contributions, see especially Vincent Luciani, “Joseph Fucilla” (275-80) and “A Bibliography of the Publications of Joseph G. Fucilla” compiled by Julius A. Molinaro (281-96).

8. The original constitution stipulated that the Executive Council was to appoint annually an editor and two Consulting Editors. See Ittica, 1.1(1924). Ragusa appointed an Assistant Editor for Pedagogy; Rodini a Book Review Editor and an Associate Editor for Pedagogy.


10. For Ragusa’s editorship, see Portner 54; for Rodini’s, his “Cumulative Ten-Year Index, 1984-1993,” 427-87.

