

2009-2010 Colloquia

November 17, 2009—Transatlantic Mafia Networks

At the November 17th Colloquium, Anthony Fragola, Professor of Media Studies, treated a group of colleagues from various disciplines to a verbal and video presentation on “Transatlantic Mafia Networks.”

In his discussion of the connections between the Sicilian mafia and the U.S. drug trade, Dr. Fragola focused on those who worked to disrupt the mafia's influence in Sicily. One of the main figures here is Peppino Impastato, the focus of Dr. Fragola's documentary film *A Beautiful Memory: A Mother and Her Sons against the Mafia*. Impastato organized rallies and broadcast satirical radio programs in opposition to the Sicilian mafia, to which his father and uncle belonged. Although the mafia murdered Impastato in such a way as to make his death look like a terrorist suicide, his mother Felicia Bartolotta Impastato took up the fight to clear his name and made significant progress in combating the mafia's power. Dr. Fragola also discussed the work of Giovanni Falcone, whose collaboration with the American FBI in following mafia money trails resulted in the Maxi—the arrest and trial of 474 mafiosi.

Dr. Fragola also showed attendees part of his current documentary *Another Corleone: Another Sicily* which examines the achievements and struggles in the modern-day city of Corleone. Although the city is best known in the U.S. as the hometown of *The Godfather's* fictional Don Vito Corleone, Dr. Fragola directs his attention towards those citizens who are struggling to make their town safe and free of the mafia's threats. In particular, Dr. Fragola shows his viewers an anti-mafia museum that operates freely in the open, and a community vineyard built on former mafia land and tended by citizens and international volunteers, which now markets its own wine. (View the YouTube trailer at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yr8EYLYt6TA>)

This emphasis on the need for attention on the lives of those struggling against the mafia continued in the full group discussion after the presentation. In particular, attendees discussed film portrayals of the mafia in *The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, and the 2008 Italian film *Gomorra*, about the Neapolitan Camorra, and compared these to portrayals of average citizens affected by mob violence, as seen in other Italian films like *The 100 Steps*.

March 17, 2010—Between Two Worlds: English Voyagers to America in 1700

At the March 17th AWRN Lunchtime Colloquium, Manuela D'Amore, Ricercatore of English Literature from the University of Catania in Sicily, visited the UNCG campus to share her research in a presentation titled “Between Two Worlds: English Voyagers to America in 1700.”

Discussing the “Grand Tour” tradition from 18th Century England, Professor D'Amore drew from the journals and travel documents of the British noblemen and women who recorded impressions of the countries they visited in journals and letters. These Tourists contributed to the philosophical debate of their time by recording their observations of the “natural man” in the

New World. Unlike the pre-Restoration explorers who were employed by merchant companies, the Grand Tourists were motivated by a desire to learn through experience in early America.

Professor D'Amore focused on those who visited the Carolinas in the 18th Century, including John Lawson, whose account *New Voyage to Carolina* (1700) became the first serious account of the territory. Although he was particularly specific when discussing the flora and fauna he encountered, Lawson devoted much of his narrative to descriptions of Indian culture, including their dress, family relations, and the possibility for Christian conversion. Back in England, Lawson's account sparked a nation-wide discussion of the American Indians in the newspapers and reviews, which often took a moralistic slant and portrayed the natives as brutish and savage. As D'Amore illustrated with excerpts from various journals and letters, this slant continued as new visitors came to the Carolinas, where the Tourists remained moved by the "savage" nature and repulsed by the lack of refinement of the Indians who lived there.

After Professor D'Amore's presentation, the attendees continued discussing the Tourists' conflicting depiction of the Carolinas. The attendees noted both the difference between accounts written by men and women, with the latter often focusing on the natural landscape and the former describing agricultural and commercial possibilities, and the difference between British writers and those from elsewhere in Europe, who often adopted a less condescending tone than did their English counterparts.

April 22, 2010—Reading Revolutions

At the final colloquium of the 2009-2010 year, Professor Karen Weyler of the English Department spoke about the printing, reading, and literacy practices in early America in her presentation "Reading Revolutions."

Dr. Weyler began her talk by situating the importance of her research in the context of today's reading practices in the United States. Using a handout with relevant figures, she briefly outlined the 2004 NEA Study "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America," pointing out that many academics and primary and secondary school teachers worry that "people don't read all that much or all that well." Dr. Weyler did specify that these figures refer to books and literary reading, not taking into account that people read quite often in many other media today.

Dr. Weyler then moved into her discussion of reading practices in early America, with the caveat that reading and printing practices in the various colonies varied widely. For example, the first Anglophone printing press in the New World belonged to the Massachusetts Bay colony (1638) and was used for printing religious material, while Virginia's first press did not exist until a century later (1730) and was used mainly for government documents. This information about printing presses (also included in a handout) is important because of Dr. Weyler's research premise that the material means of production influence reading practices in important ways. In early America, before the Revolutionary War, books were very difficult to obtain; therefore, colonists practiced what David D. Hall calls intensive reading, reading the same few books many times and becoming deeply familiar with their contents.

Dr. Weyler explained that a revolution in reading occurred at basically the same time as the

Revolutionary War, as paper became more available and printing presses could print not only books, which were more common now but still relatively expensive, but also newspapers, especially broadsides. People now began to read more widely, or extensively. Broadsides were very cheap to print and circulated freely: they were posted in squares, read aloud in taverns, and used as wrapping paper and drawer liners. One need not be literate to have exposure; one need not be literate even to author a broadside piece. These were often authored collaboratively—that is, a person with an idea for a story or opinion piece would go to a scribe and say, “write this piece with me,” and then they would then take it to the printer together, where the printer would also offer his own input. This makes broadsides very democratic. Dr. Weyler even said that, in terms of access, “it might not be anachronistic to state that broadsides were the internet of the eighteenth century.”