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Introduction

Cindy Stanphill, *Editor-in-Chief*

La logica dell'engagement [...] parte dalla certezza che la propria coscienza politico-letteraria del presente è il principio da cui dedurre un solo modo storicamente corretto di risolvere il rapporto fra realtà sociale, imperativi politici, forme letterarie.¹

Alfonso Berardinelli

Oggi, in genere, quando si parla di 'letteratura impegnata' ci se ne fa un'idea sbagliata, come di una letteratura che serve da illustrazione a una tesi già definita a priori, indipendentemente dall'espressione poetica. Invece, quello che si chiamava l'engagement, l'impegno, può saltar fuori a tutti i livelli; qui vuole innanzitutto essere immagini e parola, scatto, piglio, stile, sprezzatura, sfida.²

Italo Calvino

Parallel to the *littérature engagée* of André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus during the interwar and post-WWII period in French letters, Italian *letteratura impegnata* reflecting the country's rich, multicultural literary and political tradition emerged in tandem. Today, renewed interest in the concept of *impegno* in literature reconnects with that tradition in Jennifer Burn's recent *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative 1980-2000*. Here Burns traces the development of various political commitments in Italian literary history, from the early debates on committed literature in the works of Elio Vittorini, Italo Calvino and Pier Paolo Pasolini to contemporary texts by authors such as Antonio Tabucchi and Fabrizia Ramondino.³ Her innovative examination linking canonical texts of *impegno* to contemporary writers has sparked fresh consideration of the Italian *letteratura impegnata* at the cusp of the twenty-first century. In a similar vein, Pier Paolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, make a postmodern case for *impegno* while tracing its history in Italy as

“normally associated with a specific historical period — from the late 1940s to the 1960s — in which cultural and political actors converged on a communal project based on strict ideological premises and tied to emancipatory and potentially revolutionary action.”⁴ They challenge negative assumptions of Italian postmodernism, tracing instead post-hegemonic and post-ideological manifestations of ethical commitment within postmodernism aiming to free the notion of *impegno* “from any restrictive ideological embrace.”⁵ In this way, Antonello and Mussgnug also emancipate the notion of *impegno* from strict periodization.

In point of fact, the artistic and political commitment to social critique and change that characterize *impegno* had no less an illustrious precursor than Dante Alighieri and his *Divina Commedia*, written in the vernacular in a definitive act of commitment to the power of language and literature to change the world. Indeed, in the *Commedia*, Dante places those who failed to engage in the political and social issues of their day in a ‘nowhere’ zone, literally a non-place that lies just before the gates of hell:⁶

‘Questo misero modo
 tegnon l’anime triste di coloro
 che visser senza ‘infamia e senza lodo.
 Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro
 de li angeli che non furon ribelli
 né fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sé fuoro.
 Caccianli i ciel per non esser men belli,
 né lo profondo inferno li riceve,
 ch’alcuna Gloria i rei avrebber d’elli”
 E io: ‘Maestro, che è tanto greve
 a lor che lamentar li far sì forte?’.
 Rispuose: ‘Dicerolti molto breve.
 Questi non hanno speranza di morte,
 e la lor cieca vita è tanto bassa,
 che ‘nvidiosi son d’ogne altra sorte.
 Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa;
 misericordia e giustizia li sdegna:
 non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa’.⁷

For Dante, those who shy away from political and social obligations on earth are deemed unworthy of the pleasures of heaven, deserving only

the eternal punishments of hell in Dante's infamous spiritual cosmology — in fact, they reside just before the gates, not warranting their own circle in hell. Thus, Dante and Virgil dismiss these non-committal and lukewarm pilgrims as they pass on to the next vestibule. Dante's *impegno politico* constitutes one of the many literary intertextualities in the Italian tradition that continues to make *impegno* a rich topos for writers whose work responds to a specific set of historical and political conditions.

In consideration of Italy's long history of politically engaged and committed artists, we are pleased to present Volume Seven of *Carte Italiane* featuring work presented at the UCLA Italian Graduate Student Association's (IGSA) 2010 conference, *Forbidden Ideas: Controversial Modes of Engagement in the Italian Intellectual Tradition* held in Royce Hall, October 29–30, in honor of the 400th anniversary of the publication of Galileo Galilei's most influential work, the *Sidereus Nuncius* (1610). Although the groundbreaking ideas presented in this short treatise forever changed the perception of the universe in the intellectual and scientific world, Galileo was accused of heresy and faced torture and the Inquisition for the subversive potential of his words. In the spirit of Galilei's struggle, this issue of *Carte Italiane* analyzes controversial relationships between intellectuals and power structures throughout Italian history. The authors of this volume consider controversial *engagé* figures and intellectuals in Italy from the sixteenth century to the present day, including Giordano Bruno, Ferrante Pallavicino, and Antonio Gramsci as well as other, less-known figures who have occupied an important role in bringing to light Italian social and political issues.

The first two articles examine the work of Giordano Bruno and Ferrante Pallavicino, both of whom were executed for their provocative ideas. Heather Sottong's "Excess and Antagonism in Giordano Bruno's *Il candelaio*," makes a strong connection between Giordano Bruno's provocative ideas about the infinity of the universe and his literary works, specifically his ostentatious *Il candelaio*, a work highly denigrated by critics in Bruno's day for its transgressive style — including an excessive amount of prologues, clearly mocking the *commedia italiana* tradition of the double prologue. Sottong also explores how Bruno's comedy reflects the same 'radical tendencies' in his scientific and intellectual works, arguing that *Il candelaio*, often considered the end of the *commedia italiana* genre in Italy, is representative of Bruno's political antagonism and is a testament to his strident insistence on intellectual freedom. Roberto Risso's "'Una relazione delle mie calamitati:' La Lettera dalla Prigionia

di Ferrante Pallavicino (1641)” examines Pallavicino’s contentious works in the seventeenth century. Risso analyzes a prison letter written during the author’s confinement, a document, Risso argues, that warrants the status of “manifesto,” since its contents denounce the injustices and oppression of seventeenth-century Italian civil society.

Camilla Zamboni’s article “Il teatro come denuncia e strumento di espressione del popolo: *I Dialoghi* di Ruzzante e *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* di Dario Fo” bridges the gap between the commedia of the Cinquecento and the modern political theater of Dario Fo. She explores textual connections between Angelo Beolco’s *I dialoghi* and Dario Fo’s *Morte accidentale di un anarchico*, bringing to the forefront Beolco’s influence on Fo, specifically in the use of popular theater to provoke and challenge the status quo. Zamboni compares and contrasts the particular political and social commitment of each author within their specific contexts of reference, examining the reactions of audience and critic alike to their controversial works.

The next two articles address the ideas of power, hegemony, and communism as formulated by Antonio Gramsci and examine reactions to his work both within and outside Italy. In “Ruolo dell’intellettuale e ‘guerra di posizione:’ da Gramsci a *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo*,” Mauro Sassi traces the genesis of Gramsci’s *guerra di posizione*, or ‘war of position’ articulated in the *Quaderni del carcere*. Sassi follows the development of this concept of *guerra di posizione* in relation to other key aspects of Gramsci’s thought. He considers its adoption by the field of cultural studies through the lens of cultural critic Stuart Hall. Sassi then applies this analysis to Francesca Comencini’s documentary *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo*, to see how Gramsci’s concept of *guerra di posizione* facilitates an interpretation of this contemporary Italian documentary as a particularly counter-hegemonic move within a cultural struggle for hegemony. Placing Gramsci outside the confines of Italy, Xin Liu, in “Gramsci’s Presence in China,” examines the reception of Gramsci in China. Xin Liu examines the historical and intellectual complexities surrounding this reception and speculates on their contribution to the development of the modern Communist movement in China.

Andrea Hajek’s article, “Bologna and the Trauma of March 1977: The *Intellettuali Contro* and their ‘Resistance’ to the Local Communist Party,” discusses hegemonic power on a micro level in the death of a young activist student, Francesco Lorusso, shot by a police officer during the March 1977 student protests in Bologna. Hajek focuses on the social

and political ramifications of the shooting by discussing the controversial relationship that developed between intellectuals and the hegemonic powers in Bologna following the incidents of March 1977.

The role of women in political and artistic spheres during the 1970s and 1980s is the focus of the closing article by Alessandro Giardino. Female sexuality becomes increasingly fetishized in Italy during the 1970s and 1980s; intersecting at the same time with race and class, it raises new questions for feminist movements in Italy and also internationally. In “Liliana Cavani’s *La pelle*: Debunking the Fake Promises of Postmodern Sexual Emancipation and the Silencing Effect of Cultural Oblivion,” Giardino observes that Cavani’s relegation to oblivion results not only from the distance separating her from the Italian moral standard as a female director and experimental film maker, but also from her isolation within the increasingly sexist system of Italian cinema. Giardino traces the connections between the zeitgeist of the early 1980s and Cavani’s film *La pelle*, placing special emphasis on issues of aesthetics, politics, and sexuality.

I would like to personally thank the new editorial board — Brittany Asaro, Heather Sottong, Renata Redford, Nicole Robinson, and Camilla Zamboni — for their hard work and support in assembling this exciting volume of *Carte Italiane*. Heather Sottong is deserving of special praise for her attention to detail during the final editing process. On behalf of the new board, I would also like to thank former Editor-in-Chief Sarah Carey for her advice and vision in helping us continue to move *Carte Italiane* forward with the development of our online publishing site, *escholarship.com*. I extend my gratitude to both Professor Thomas Harrison and Professor Lucia Re for their guidance throughout the editorial process.

The success of the 2010 conference is due in no small measure to our keynote speakers, Professor Dana Renga, OSU Department of French and Italian, and her talk, “Screening ‘Confino’ Homosexuality and Internal Exile in Mussolini’s Italy” on the closeted lives of homosexuals in *confino* during Fascism, and Peter Stacey, UCLA Department of History, “Irony and Il Principe in Machiavelli’s Political Philosophy,” who captivated and charmed the audience. On behalf of the staff of *Carte Italiane*, I would like to thank Professor Massimo Ciavolella, who allowed us to hold our IGSA conference in conjunction with the symposium on Galileo, *Galileo in Hell* held on October 29, 2010. We would like to thank

all of the conference participants: Lynn Abell, Andrea Ottone, Roberto Riso, Marina Romani, Heather Sottong, Amit Wolf, Michele Rossi, Filippo Trentin, Peter Vanhove, Alessandro Giardino, Anthony Nussmeier, Caterina Sinibaldi, Chiara Montanari, Raffaello Palumbo Mosca, Luisa Garrido Báez and an extra special thanks to Camilla Zamboni who was the head organizer and made the event happen. Special thanks are in order to all of the conference organizers who were an integral part of the success of this year's conference: Brittany Asaro, Adriana Baranello, Erika Nadir, Heather Sottong, Cindy Stanphill, Monica Streifer and Emma Van Ness. We appreciate the generosity of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CMRS), the Center for European and Eurasian Studies (CEES) and Professor Massimo Ciavolella for their contributions of time and funds to success of the conference.

Notes

1. Alfonso Berardinelli, *Casi critici. Dal postmoderno alla mutazione* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2007) 66, quoted in Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Culture* (Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers: Bern Switzerland, 2009) 2.

2. Italo Calvino, *Saggi*, ed. M. Barenghi (Milan: Mondadori, 1999) 192, quoted in Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Culture* (Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers: Bern Switzerland, 2009) 12.

3. Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern University Press, 2001). Burns brings back into focus the Italian literary-political *impegno* extending the philosophical concept into the 1980's and 1990's.

4. Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Culture* (Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers: Bern Switzerland, 2009) 9.

5. *Ibid.*, 10.

6. See Mark Musa, Introduction to *The Divine Comedy Vol. 1: Inferno* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971, 1984) 89. In his brief introduction to I.iii, Musa refers to the vestibule of the *Ignavi* as a “nowhere” zone.

7. Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia: inferno*, ed. Anna Maria and Chiavacci Leonardi (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1991, 2005) I.iii: 34–51.