



ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA DIRITTO E LETTERATURA

## AIDEL REPORT ESSE 2012

Several AIDEL members participated in the 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Society for the Study of English, which took place at Bogazici University, Istanbul/Turkey, from 4-8 September 2012. In particular AIDEL members were involved in two seminars strictly interconnected: “Performances of the Body in the Renaissance Period” (hosted by John Drakakis and Sidia Fiorato) and “Fashionable Subjects/Fashionable Identities in Law, Literature and Society” (hosted by Leif Dahlberg and Chiara Battisti). The two seminars adopted the body as a privileged perspective to reflect on the construction of individual identity as the product of power relations written on and with the body through the language of literature and the visual language of performing arts and fashion.

The first seminar focused on the Renaissance period, in particular on the normative aspect of the body as a place of regulation, which is shaped by social and political ideologies, and on the dichotomy between the body politic and the body natural. Such aspects were re-articulated and re-interpreted in the light of the concept of sovereignty and in the context of the representation of individual identity and the shaping of the legal persona. Literary expressions and the performing arts emerged in their ability to absorb and retain the effects of political power as well as to resist the very effects they appear to incorporate in structures of parody, irony, and pastiche.

The second seminar explored the ways in which fashion articulates the subjectivities and aesthetic characteristics of a given culture from a social and political perspective, as well as how it communicates across temporal and spatial divisions offering a significantly deeper understanding of texts, their contexts and their innovativeness. The seminar underlined how fashion does not refer simply to clothes but to clothes in relation to the body, to identity and society; therefore, exploring the ways in which clothing performs in literature implies recognizing that our material, political, legal, psychological and even intellectual lives are woven into fashion's fabric.

The papers covered a wide variety of issues and examples in the above mentioned contexts.

Leif Dahlberg (Royal Institute of Technology-Stockholm) looked at dress codes in courts of law from a comparative perspective, focusing primarily on the fresco “L'allegoria del Buon governo” in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena, Italy (XIV century). Apart from its artistic value, the fresco represents the first example of a political declaration made to the entire community and of an effective use of colours and clothing as a privileged representation of the law. The fresco is articulated on three levels: at the top the divine elements, in the middle the institutions and at the bottom the citizens. At all levels, clothing plays a key role by indicating the different social classes, the different professions and legal authority. The balance of colours in the clothes, the characters' attitudes and the general atmosphere of the fresco create a serene effect that is reflected at the political level. The fresco also represents the perception of justice in contemporary Siena, which did not only refer to the judgment of rights and wrongs, but also to business relations.

Referring to the Renaissance period, Daniela Carpi's and Cristina Costantini's papers focused on the body and the dressed body as a repository of social relations and as an important factor in the construction of identity.

Daniela Carpi (University of Verona) analysed clothing as a metaphor of power in the portraits of Elizabeth I. These paintings, together with other iconological representations of Elizabeth's sovereignty, embody her strategy to advertise her own power and keep her subjects

within the fascination of her figure. The symbols interwoven with the dresses which enwrapped the Queen were shown to convey both the social situation of the period and Elizabeth's will to impose her figure as divine so as to stress her legitimacy to the throne. The problem of power, legitimacy and legality appear to be all intertwined in the dresses. Clothes in some way also inscribe themselves upon a person: thus Hamlet wears an "inky cloak" and becomes himself what his clothing represents, that is a melancholic character and embodied grief. Clothing also denounces racial diversity: it is the case of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Garments therefore can convey conflicting cultural and religious identities. They also convey an economical meaning: in fact clothing reveals the owner's wealth: jewels were sewn and inserted into clothing, thus clothing also represented circulating commodities. The fundamental function of clothing in making and unmaking a person's role inside society is made evident by many passages in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* where clothing is patently connected to authority. Clothing is the central device in the taming process.

Cristina Costantini (University of Bergamo) unveiled the subtle strategies of figural representation adopted in the context of English Reformation, in particular the contentious relationship between the physical body of Queen Elizabeth I, conceived as unique, virginal and unbreached, and the papal effigies, visualized as plural, corrupted and artificial. The paper underlined how representational signs of medieval Catholicism were reinterpreted to present Elizabeth's accession to the throne as the advent of an incarnated katechon to resist against Antichrist's pretensions typified by the simulacra of papal crown. The apocalyptic myth was thus transformed into a corporeal confrontation. As a consequence, textual interpretation, legal imagination and aesthetic sensibility, supporting the polymorphous consistence of sovereignty, were presented by Costantini as the privileged means of expression of a nationalized, sacred ontology.

Paola Carbone (IULM University of Milan) focused on the Indian context at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1931 the official flag adopted by the Indian National Congress to represent Indian independence (Purna Swaraj) was a tricolour with the traditional spinning wheel in the centre symbolizing Gandhi's goal of making Indians self-reliant by fabricating their own clothing. Indian traditional clothes became thus ideal symbols of Indian cultural, spiritual, legal, and political identities. Starting from these premises, Carbone observes how in many postcolonial novels the inextricable connection between fashion and identity plays a fundamental role in shaping the cultural generation gap. It actually happened that second generation migrants asserted their own belonging to "one" country by wearing clothes either following the occidental or the oriental fashion. Such issues were investigated in particular in Deepa Mehta's film trilogy *Fire, Earth and Water*, and in the novels *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *East is East* by Ayud Khan-Din.

Moving to the contemporary context, Maria Aristodemou (Birkbeck College of Law, London), together with Carlo Palombo, focused on Abercrombie & Fitch's 2003 catalogue "Back to School". Aristodemou underlined how the catalogue is adorned not only with the obligatory images of contrived listlessness and lustfulness of beautiful teenage bodies, but also with scattered commentary by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek. Following Lacan's assertion that "clothes are essential to our nudity" so our "nakedness can never be naked enough", Žižek claimed that "Not only under our dress are we all naked - we are truly naked only under our clothes." The paper presented a reflection on these issues also in relation to the contemporary political and legal debates on the prohibition of the burka or niqab.

Mara Logaldo (IULM, Milano) shifted the perspective to the field of augmented Reality (AR), which is increasingly changing our perception of the world. Fashion has been among the most responsive domains to the new technology by making frequent use of AR applications, from the introduction of Magic Mirrors in department stores to the use of QR tags and 3D features in fashion magazines, from the ideation of augmented fashion shows to advertisements consisting exclusively of more or less magnified QR codes. Logaldo highlighted how in this context bodies are thus, at once, *augmented* and *replaced* by the tags themselves: they are tagged and encrypted

according to an aesthetics of superposition and concealment.

Francesca Vitali (University of Verona) participated in the seminar “Galactic Empires and Cultures: SF Visions from Asimov to Iain M. Banks” (hosted by György Szönyi, Rowland Wymer and Martin Procházka). Her paper underlined how technoethics and roboethics deal respectively with the ethic dimension of technology and with robotics by considering them central elements in human existence. As a result, although human beings are born deficient, they can be seen as artificial beings since they possess the liberty to shape themselves by means of artificial instruments. Despite the role played by Bank’s novels “Minds” and “Culture” in the creation of a new, positive attitude towards robotics and technology, it is undeniable that the issues raised by Bank’s novels lead to destabilizing questions on the essence of human beings.

Valentina Adami (University of Verona) participated in the seminar “Rhetoric of Science: Linguistic Approaches to National Traditions and Global Norms”, hosted by Josef Schmied, Maria Freddi and Marina Bondi. Since the birth of ecolinguistics in the 1990s, the relationship between language and the environment has been transformed by the growth of the new media, which rely heavily on images. This has made it necessary to take into account the visual aspects of the rhetoric of environmentalism. In this context, Adami examined the diachronic development of ecolinguistics in the period of transition between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focusing mainly on two key ecolinguistics studies, *Ecospeak* (edited by Killingsworth & Palmer in 1992), and *Ecosee* (edited by Dobrin & Morey in 2009). The different but complementary perspectives of these two works served to demonstrate Adami’s assumption that ecolinguistics is moving beyond the analysis of the verbal language, shifting from a purely verbal to a multimodal, verbal-visual, analysis of environmental texts.

The AIDEL seminars integrated themselves with the IASEMS seminar “Offstage and onstage: Liminal Forms of Theatre and their Enactment in Early Modern English Drama” (hosted by Carla Dente and Jesús Tronch). The seminar investigated certain early modern 'theatrical' practices which normally took place in the square or on the fairground. Some of these (performances of mountebanks, jugglers, wrestlers or acrobats) were aimed exclusively at entertaining; others (the public 'shows' of healers or fortune-tellers) contained spectacular elements with aims of individual persuasion; a third group (executions, funerals, manifestations of religious sentiment) had apparently performative though edifying dimensions.

In the context of this seminar, Roxanne Barbara Doerr (University of Verona) focused on representations of order and chaos in Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*. Doerr underlined how the comedy depicts life at the fair and its fluctuation between the Pie-powder law and that of the streets; in particular, its stalls and shows represented a liminal space for the questioning and misunderstanding of authority. The Fair was shown to possess a subverting quality by which social classes are equalized: the powerful are ridiculed, the unlawful are crafty and the mad are sought out and praised until the final act, where a puppet show becomes a court-like dispute and a stage for the law’s “show” of self-affirmation and undermining.