

THE LAND OF OUR RETURN

Diasporic Encounters with Italy

APRIL 23-25, 2009

The John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, CUNY) announces its Annual Conference to take place in Manhattan, April 23-25, 2009, on the theme of "The Land of Our Return: Diasporic Encounters with Italy."

For Virgil's Aeneas, Italy was "the land of our return," the place his ancestor Darnanus left generations earlier. *The Aeneid* is thus an epic recounting of the Trojan hero's return, or *nostos*, to Italian soil. This poetic conceit offers numerous possibilities to explore the political, economic, social, and cultural impact of historical and contemporary travel and communication by Italian emigrants and their descendants to Italy.

Italian emigration was one of the largest movements of free labor in world history with over twenty-six million people immigrating from the 1870s to the 1970s. Italian emigrants' objective was, for the most part, to make enough money to return home. Forty-nine percent of the emigrants traveling to the Americas returned between 1905 and 1920. According to historian Donna Gabaccia, "The paese had created its diaspora, but the diaspora in turn transformed the paese." What was the impact of returning immigrants and their descendants on the home society?

The political dimensions of return are evident in the transnational movement of anarchists, as well as Risorgimento and later anti-fascist refugees. Religious belief and practice have long been a critical aspect of immigrant return, with remittances sent as donations pinned to the processed religious statue and post-World War II workers visiting the hometown during the annual *fiesta*.

After World War II, Italian Americans traveled to Italy increasingly as tourists and by the 1970s tourist companies began catering to this "ethnic roots" market. There they experienced the disparity between personal connections to an ancestral paese and the ever changing reality of the larger nation. In recent years, a growing number of descendants of Italian immigrants are reclaiming their Italian citizenship.

The imagined and actual "return" has historically been a source of creativity in all genres, from comedian Eduardo "Farfariello" Migliaccio's 1917 song "Pascale e' Turnato d'all'Italia" to author Helen Barolini's 1979 novel *Umbertina*, to director Frank Ciota's 2002 film *Ciao America*.

This interdisciplinary conference is open to authors, cultural studies scholars, filmmakers, literary critics, performers, social scientists, and visual artists. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- ♦ Return migration
- ♦ Economic impact
- ♦ Return of political refugees
- ♦ Return as religious pilgrimage
- ♦ Reclaiming Italian citizenship
- ♦ Metaphoric and mediated returns, e.g., radio, film, television, web sites.
- ♦ The senses of return, e.g., nostalgia, curiosity, displacement, etc.
- ♦ Return as "ethnic roots" tourism
- ♦ Italian reception of cultural imports by artists such as Fante, Piazzolla, Scorsese
- ♦ Return as creative inspiration, e.g., literature, photography, cinema
- ♦ Reclamation of folk culture, e.g., music, dance, storytelling
- ♦ Comparative experiences from different diasporic communities

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: SEPTEMBER 1, 2008.

Papers should last no longer than twenty minutes. Email abstract proposals (up to 250 words, plus audio-visual requirements, and a brief curriculum vitae) by September 1, to calandra@qc.edu, to whom inquiries may also be addressed. Include title, name, affiliation, and postal and email addresses as part of the submission. Authors will be advised of their acceptance or otherwise by November 15, 2008. English is the official conference language. The conference will result in a publication of refereed essays from papers delivered.

Send all correspondence to:

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