

## INTRODUCTION

### **National dialogues and transnational exchanges across Italian periodical culture, 1940–1960**

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Literary and cultural periodicals of different sizes and orientations almost inevitably produce national and transnational dialogues, and such activity occurs regardless of whether their aim is to obtain a national or an international reach. In producing these dialogues, they contribute to the shaping of a given relevant field in aesthetic, political, or cultural terms.

Beginning from this point, in this special issue of *Modern Italy* stemming from the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project ‘Mapping Literary Space: Literary Journals, Publishing Firms and Intellectuals in Italy, 1940–1960’ (2012–2015), we discuss those broad issues concerning cultural exchanges as they developed in the Italian context. The six articles here collected address both the transnational dialogue between intellectuals inspired and maintained through the periodical press between 1940 and the late 1950s, and how periodicals engaged nationally with the cultural challenges posed by the reconstruction and the post-1948 cultural politics of the Republic. As in other European countries, if, in Italy, the urgency for cultural reconfiguration was felt after geopolitical crises of the magnitude of the end of the Second World War and the 1956 Hungarian crisis, the periodical press also had to respond to nationally-specific political concerns, such as the establishment of a new state system after the fall of the Fascist regime, the negotiations with consolidated super-powers (U.S.A. and the Soviet Union), and the 1948 elections, which significantly determined the future polarisations within the political arena. By looking at the interconnections amongst several journals, we argue that from 1940 to 1960 Italian periodicals played a significant role in reflecting, activating and developing central debates around leadership and the new core values of intellectual communication, which had the specific function of transgressing boundaries between aesthetic practices and political praxis. Such boundaries marked a set of cultural and ideological propositions – ranging from *Crocianesimo* to realism and dialectical Marxism – which Italian intellectuals and writers felt had to be renegotiated by creating fresh interpretative synergies and cross-cultural pathways. Thus in this special issue we demonstrate the vital role played by Italian journals in producing national and transnational discourses, which were fundamental in the consolidation of post-war Italian culture.

This edited collection follows an established and ongoing trend in periodical studies in so far as it looks at periodicals as culturally embodied agents of transformation (Binckes 2010; Rogers 2012; Thacker-Brooker 2013). However, it challenges recent work, which either neglects to account for the diverse intellectual forces engaged in the genesis of a periodical or places excessive emphasis on typologies which tend to neglect the intrinsic peculiarities and nuances of any cultural object both from a national or a transnational perspective (Lathan-Scholes 2006). Our work aligns

with those studies which place meticulous archival work at their centre, and which privilege punctual qualitative evaluation over straight quantitative data analysis (Horrock and Edwards Keates 2015). In this project, as well as in the essays here presented, we understand periodical culture as a manifestation of multiple and simultaneous intersecting narratives, which tend to escape artificially drawn typological approaches. Rather than constructing paradigms, we believe in the importance of revealing the porous and malleable nature of cultural manifestations through a data-driven and conceptually arranged analysis (Billiani, La Penna and Milani 2016). Such an approach places emphasis on the granularity of the available data (sourced from both a rigorous scrutiny of individual components of the journals and archival inquiries) as well as on the contradictory and often idiosyncratic choices of the agents involved.

In respect to both the intellectual agenda and the methodological choice these essays uphold, the opening article by Anna Antonello is a case in point. Antonello's contribution looks at the role played by the Mondadori-backed *Tempo* and the German journal *Italien* in the cultural dialogue between Italy and Germany during the war years (1940–1944). Both wide-ranging in sketching the cultural context and precise in investigating how these periodicals contributed to the reception of Elio Vittorini in Germany, this article shows that, while supported by a state-controlled institutional infrastructure, these journals contributed to the projection of an image of Italian literary culture far less stultified than the one expected to emerge from a Regime-sanctioned literary practice. Daniela La Penna's article examines the adversarial discourse surrounding the figure of Benedetto Croce and his entourage from 1944 to 1947, to look closely at how the Communist intelligentsia and the Liberal intellectuals used the periodical press to engage in a political discussion on the responsibility of the intellectual class under the regime. By analysing a number of key episodes of intellectual exchange in the pages of *Aretusa*, *Rinascita*, *Società* and *Belfagor*, La Penna casts new light on the strategies adopted by the PCI's leadership to dent Croce's standing in the intellectual field in order to promote Antonio Gramsci as the embodiment of authentic anti-fascism.

Mila Milani's article accounts for the translational dimension of periodicals as cultural agents. Milani offers a subtle and enlightening reading of the transnational aspirations of the short-lived and yet significant Neapolitan journal *Sud*, often considered as the southern riposte to Vittorini's *Il Politecnico*. By weaving together hitherto neglected archival evidence and the published contents of the journal related to foreign literary experimentation and cultural debates, the article enriches our understanding of how the diverse intellectual networks surrounding *Sud* used translation as a means of self-legitimation. Sara Sullam's piece is equally supported by scrupulous archival research and shares with Milani an interest in matters related to transnational exchange. Sullam's work centres on Marguerite Caetani's Rome-based *Botteghe Oscure*. This journal was instrumental in promoting literary praxis and culture of distinction and experiment, whilst rejecting any form of political engagement. The absence of position pieces and the favouring of carefully selected original writing in five different languages defined the journal's endeavour as both exclusive and cosmopolitan. To account for such singularity, Sullam's study assesses the significance of the presence of British literary culture in the journal in respect to the creation of its wide-ranging intellectual network and 'eccentric' profile.

Marzia Maccaferri and Francesca Billiani's concluding pieces move the focus of the critical inquiry back to the national stage and add Bologna to the edited collection's geographical span, alongside Rome, Naples, Turin and Milan. Maccaferri's article details the foundation of *Il Mulino*, one of the most long-lasting and influential political journals of the post-war period. By charting the intersections of the intellectual personalities and financial backers that contributed to the journal and the connected publishing house, Maccaferri's contribution offers an insight into the

mechanisms through which *Il Mulino*'s political discourse developed. She demonstrates how it engaged with the mobilisation of the intellectual forces that were critical of the PCI, and that revolved around the left wing of the Democrazia Cristiana party. The literary counterpart of the milieu detailed by Maccaferri is provided by Francesca Billiani's contribution on *Officina*. This short-lived, yet ambitious, journal sought to reformulate topical debates affecting the profile of Italian culture, to re-read notions of literary periodisation, and to promote a heretical stance against cultural orthodoxy in both the communist and the philo-Crocean ranks. By weaving together evidence emerging from personal correspondence and published contributions, the article contributes to refining our understanding of how *Officina* conceptualised engagement through literary practice.

These six articles offer a varied image of Italy's periodical culture from 1940 to 1960 by asking bold questions about its potential failures as well as successes, while demonstrating the viability of a methodological archival turn in periodical studies.

### References

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