

Literature, Theatre and the Arts in the Italian Academies, 1525-1700

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The Italian Academies 1525-1700: the first intellectual networks of early modern Europe

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This interdisciplinary one-day conference was the last in a series of three conferences organized by the AHRC-funded Italian Academies project team. It followed the successful conference on 'Science, Learning and Censorship in the Italian Academies' (Royal Holloway, London, 2011) and the 'Italian Academies' international conference (British Library, 2012).

The conference provided a stimulating exploration of the significance of the Italian academies as cultural laboratories in the development of new literary, visual and theatrical forms and practices. The eight speakers from Italian and UK institutions presented wide-ranging and new, interdisciplinary insights into how academies stimulated the production of innovative and often hybrid literary and theatrical genres, and the complex interrelations between literary works, the visual arts and spectacle across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The plenary speaker, Roberto Gigliucci (La Sapienza, Rome) began the discussions with an extremely rich exploration of the frequently interconnected academic contexts for the creation and production of new literary genres, such as the new novel, the libretto and tragicomedy so as to 'demonstrate the creative relevance of Academies at the dawn of Italian literary modernity'. Papers by Valentina Gallo (Padua) and Dario Donetti (Scuola Normale, Pisa) looked respectively at linguistic questions in connection with academies in Ferrara and the place of the artist in Florentine academies, engaging with issues of institutional vs. individual identity, and the academy's relations with the court. A team of researchers from Milan presented an in-depth and varied analysis of this still less explored context, drawing on their findings as part of a project based at the Università Cattolica. Papers were also presented by Paola Tosetti Grandi and Raffaele Tamalio of the Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana, Mantua, offering a detailed exploration of the historical evolution of academies and their associated works. Themes emerging during the day were discussed in the lively closing round-table led by Stefano Jossa (Royal Holloway, London).

The day was a full one and offered plenty of opportunities for convivial exchange of research at the Whiteknights campus of the University of Reading, with delegates from institutions in the USA, France, and Canada, besides the UK and Italy. It was particularly encouraging to note the number of younger scholars attending and participating, some in receipt of AHRC-funded project travel bursaries.