



DisComPoSE - Disasters, Communication and Politics in Southwestern Europe

Report of the conference *RACCONTARE DESCRIVERE INFORMARE - Il meraviglioso e l'inaudito nella prima età moderna (Reporting, describing, informing: the wonderful and unheard in the Early Modern Age)*

Naples, 23rd-24th May 2019

At the Società Nazionale di Scienze, Lettere e Arti in Napoli
e dell'Accademia Pontaniana (Via Mezzocannone 8)

On May 23rd and 24th 2019, in the context of the ERC project “Disasters, Communication and Politics in Southwestern Europe. The Making of Emergency Response Policies in the Early Modern Age” the conference “Raccontare Descrivere Informare. Il meraviglioso e l'inaudito nella prima età moderna” took place in Naples at the Società Napoletana di Scienze Lettere e Arti in Napoli. The conference was curated by Sergio Bozzola, Chiara De Caprio and Francesco Montuori, and co-organised by the Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici of the Università di Napoli Federico II in cooperation with the Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari of the Università degli Studi di Padova and the patronage of the Accademia Pontaniana. The conference focused on various elements linked belong them: the way alterity and amazement were expressed, with a particular interest in the description of discoveries of new lands, people and natural phenomena, together with the genres of public communication and the infotainment literature.

After the institutional greetings both from the Università di Napoli Federico II and Università di Padova, on the 23rd of May, Domenico Cecere introduced the conference expressing the necessity of a fruitful exchange between researchers of different fields, such as historians, linguists, and anthropologists, for disasters, is not only a natural event but a process where also social effects have to be taken into account. In particular, he



underlined the importance of philology and historical linguistics in order to seize metamorphosis and characteristics of the texts which perpetuated these marvellous events.



The first session covered the linguistic representations of the marvel and was chaired by Nicola De Blasi, who introduced the speech “La descrizione del meraviglioso nelle scritture di viaggio. I. Sintassi e testualità, II. Retorica e modelli rappresentativi”, which dealt with the description of the wonder into travel writing, and was delivered by Chiara De Caprio (Università di Napoli Federico II) and Sergio Bozzola (Università di Padova). In particular, they took into

account the experience of European travellers of new landscapes and civilizations which can be found into the word of the narrators of travel texts, who had the opportunity to experience the limits of European linguistic and cultural codes, but also to test the possibilities offered by the linguistic description of a unexpected and new reality. The aim of the scholars was to investigate the linguistic expression of difference and otherness, through an analysis conducted on a corpus of texts written by travellers to the New World and the East, from the mid-fifteenth century like Alvise Da Mosto, to end of the sixteenth century such as Francesco Carletti. In particular, De Caprio started from a theoretical survey on the statute and forms of the description, and then focused on the syntactic-textual characteristics of these texts, followed by an investigation about rhetorical and representative aspects of the marvel analysed by Bozzola).

Then, Patricia Bianchi introduced the second session, focused on the possibility of seeing through images and words. During this session, Rita Fresu (Università di Cagliari) presented a paper titled “«Pigliate il primo vicolo, che troverete in esso una cosa meravigliosa».

Descrivere, informare, narrare nella periegetica di età moderna”. She intended to underline the formal expedients and textual mechanisms that characterize the travel writing in the modern age, in order to enucleate a linguistic identification of the travel guide genre. In particular, Fresu held as a case of study a guide of the city of Rome which knew two different editions, the first in 1563 and the second in 1643, in order to state the



peculiar traits of this genre that along the time were fixed. Thanks to this analysis, she could observe that in the second edition it is possible to find a different approach to the travel since the explorer is invited to visit for example points of archaeological interest that are described as desirable. Furthermore, the scholar noticed how the text moves progressively away from the diary genre since the subjectivity is abandoned in favour of the impersonality that characterises this genre until nowadays. On the contrary, in her paper, “Emozioni e monumenti tra Europa e Nuovo mondo. Entusiasmo della scoperta e lamento per la Perdita”, Bianca de Divitiis (Università di Napoli Federico II) analysed some cases in which discoveries of artistic works were at the origin of an immediate circulation of news and literary responses of different kinds. The scholar took into account the case of Naples occupied by the French troops of Charles VIII and the cities of the New World besieged by the Spanish, such as the Montezuma Kingdom, in order to underline how the enthusiasm of the discovery could also concern entire civilizations, which can be found in the accounts of the conquerors overwhelmed by the astonishment towards the monuments and towards the most significant artistic expressions of the conquered lands. Finally, she also dealt with the dramatic stories of the destruction of works with great identity value, like the Capua portal by Federico II, starting from which real literary cases were generated.



The last session of the first day of the conference was moderated by Francesco Senatore and concerned the communication of wonder. Giancarlo Petrella (Università di Napoli Federico II), with the speech “Comunicare ‘novi et spaventevoli segni’. Disastri, prodigi e mirabili effetti nell’editoria italiana tra XV e XVII secolo” intended to delimitate, from a bibliographic point of view, the production of plaquettes

and pamphlets through which news of natural catastrophes, celestial prodigies and other wonderful events spread in the Early Modern Age. In particular, he showed that some themes and titles were recurrent in Italian editions between the seventeenth and the seventeenth centuries, pondering on the typographic solutions implemented in the various centres of production together with the communication strategies underlying this publishing genre. On the contrary, Giancarlo



Alfano (Università di Napoli Federico II) with “Congetture su una gamba di legno. Un celebre caso di impostura del XVI secolo” brought the attention on the case of the imposture of Martin Guerre. It was made famous in the 80s by the researches of Natalie Zemon Davis, and Alfano reconstructed the affair studying the sixteenth-century report by the judge Coras. In particular, he underlined that at the time, because of the lack of fingerprint analysis, tribunals had to rely merely on words, of the accused and of witnesses. Thanks to these words, invisible men and woman of an anonymous French village of the seventieth century could become someone to be remembered, but only as characters of an astonishing story of identity fraud. The last paper of the day was “Meravigliosi giochi di verità. Profezie e livelli di comunicazione nell’Italia della prima età moderna”, by Michele Lodone (Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia). Lodone intended to integrate the pioneering contribution on prophets in early sixteenth-century Italy by Ottavia Niccoli of 1979, in which appeared a list of editions of prophetic texts published in the peninsula in the century following the invention of typographic art. In particular, he wanted to shed some light on this kind of texts, exploring the relationship between the oral, handwritten and printed circulation of the prophecies. According to the scholar, this point of view, embracing the three-dimensionality of the phenomenon, permits to understand the real meaning of prophecies. In this perspective, particular attention was paid to the paratexts, to the chosen literary genres, and to the



different role played, in manuscripts and in printed editions, by the category of the marvel, taking into account the “truthfulness strategies” that interact with censorship, rational criticism or parodic overthrow.

The second day of the conference was opened by a session about information gateways and linguistic developments of non-literary printed Italian, chaired by Rita Librandi. Luca D’Onghia (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa), in his speech, “Relazioni, avvisi, bandi: sull’italiano non

letterario a stampa nel Cinquecento” attempted to point out the salient features of the non-literary Italian at the time of the explosion of the printing industry. He took into account, in particular, a series of administrative texts issued in Venice and Rome during the sixteenth century, reflecting on a possible relationship between these texts and the questione della lingua and whether or not is it legitimate to talk about “toscanization”. Furthermore, he problematized the influence of a local tradition on the linguistic characterization of these texts. Then, Laura Ricci (Università per Stranieri di Siena), with her “Nuove dal Cinquecento: informazione, propaganda e fake news negli Avvisi del XVI secolo” offered a panoramic about text genres of wide circulation and of modest external format which multiply with the full affirmation of the press, the so-called “casi” or “nuove”. These were brochures of a few papers, with a captivating frontispiece with the title of a piece of news deemed of particular importance, and with contents related to various subjects (war, politics, catastrophes...). The brilliant style - in some ways distant from literary models - makes these ancestors of linguistically interesting newspapers, both for the average level of writing and for the stylistic strategies adopted, not immune to techniques of persuasion and manipulation. Even in the history of publishing and culture, these documents, which have survived despite of their material precariousness, constitute one of the manifestations of the “piazza” literature, destined to immediate consumption by a popular public. After her, Francesco Montuori (Università di Napoli Federico II), focused on the narration of disasters in the Kingdom of Naples, in “Dinamiche linguistiche e lessicali intorno alle «compassionevoli tragedie» del Regno”. In fact, during the modern age, the press became a powerful medium through which transmit news; it also contributed to forming the perception and memory of events of collective interest. Among others, a very successful typographic trend on disasters was born, whose numerous texts show a certain structural disorder, since the composition very often consists of extensive forms of re-writing, with the introduction of variants, or small updates. The contribution offered an insight into the texts printed after the eruptions of Vesuvius between 1631 and 1779, on their proto-journalistic configuration and on the various level of processing facts that characterizes them. Some linguistic and lexical aspects of these texts were evaluated, related to the dynamics of the history of the national language.

The last session of the conference was presented by Laura Minervini, and concerned discursive and lexical strategies of the wonder, between prose and poetry. The speech by Fabio Romanini (Università di Trieste), “Aspetti



pragmatici, modalità discorsive e contaminazioni testuali nei resoconti di navigazione dei secoli XV-XVII” pointed out some recurring linguistic traits in the portolani genre, such as some introductory of direct speech and deictic of space. These characteristics appear to be frequently employed by expositive judicial texts but ended up labelling the authorship during the first



centuries of Italian linguistic history. In fact, according to Romanini paper, during the XVth and the XVIIth century the writers appeared in the texts with more authorship, still inscribing themselves into the features of their textual tradition. Finally, Giuseppe Polimeni (Università di Milano), who couldn't take physically part to the conference, sent his paper “«Scuotea dagl'imi cardini / le mura il gran tremuoto»: eventi e meraviglie in versi, tra XVI e XVIII secolo” to the organizers in order to give equally his contribute. The paper dealt with the theme of wonder regarding natural events (floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions) which crosses the Italian poetry of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He intended to offer a first overall picture of these testimonies, starting from some syntactic and lexical



surveys on texts considered as exemplary. In particular, what emerges from the analysis is a wide range of stylistic solutions and, in certain aspects, complexity: extraordinary events are described or mentioned in the “flying sheets”, in the verses of devotion and prayer, in the didascalic poems.