

APRIL 2020

A Message from Dr. Donato

Dear Friends of the George L. Graziadio Center,

As many of you know, we were planning a spring full of wonderful lectures and events, all of which we have had to either cancel or postpone. But newsletters, like *Il Postino*, allow us to communicate at least some of our good news, and maybe bring a little cheer, during the dreary days that have us all locked in at home. And being a center for Italian studies, we, at the Graziadio Center, are keenly aware of the ways in which the coronavirus has ravaged Italy, her citizens, residents, migrant population, visitors, and admirers. We are devastated by the pain and suffering that fill our computer and television screens with familiar monuments and sites that have temporarily become places of desperation and despair. But as Boccaccio did so long ago when he wrote the *Decameron* in reaction to the Bubonic plague of the fourteenth century that decimated the population of Florence, we turn to literature, and by extension, art, music, and theater, as places where the human spirit, no matter how ravaged, may seek, and find, solace. That is the power of the arts, and of literature in this particular case, for what Boccaccio wrote some seven hundred years ago comforts us as readers who are today living a strikingly similar reality to his.

We faculty members in the field of literature at CSULB, as writers and scholars of writers, celebrate and interpret the ongoing and evolving relevance of writers who have contributed stories that continue to sustain us. Sometimes, they are authors who have yet to receive the recognition they deserve, observers of the human condition through a particular prism that draws us so forcefully into their world that we laugh, cry, denounce, and extoll along with them in a virtual gesture of recognition. West coast Italian American writer, John Fante, is one of those authors, and his masterpiece, *Ask the Dust*, was to be feted on April 23, 2020 at the CSULB Karl Anatol Center. On that day, a book launch of John Fante's "Ask the Dust": *A Joining of Voices and Views*, edited by Stephen Cooper, English, and myself,

published by Fordham University Press, was supposed to take place. The event would have featured several of the contributors to the volume, which collects a multiplicity of reflections and readings of John Fante's classic novel, offering testament to the work's impact on readers—past, present, and future. Well, the event is being postponed until the Fall, but the book is out, and below you can see Steve, holding it up proudly, in a photograph taken the day our copies arrived in the mail! We shared a virtual clink of glasses as we reflected on five years of hard work, and all of the people, literally the world over, who contributed and want to see John Fante receive his due.

You may hold up a virtual glass yourselves as you gaze at this photo—or you may wait until the Fall. In any case, the testimonials for recognition of Fante's classic are now in print, ready for the reading, along with *Ask the Dust* itself.

Another piece of good news our program would like to share is the selection of graduate student, Emily Cota, to the 2020 College of Liberal Arts, Dean's List of Graduating Master Students, University Scholars and Artists. Emily's accomplishments reflect superbly on our program as a whole and are representative of what hard work and talent, when combined, can produce. This celebration, too, must be postponed, but that takes nothing from the enormity of the accomplishment!



And speaking to the achievements of our MA students in Italian, let me proudly share a photo of five students who presented papers at the Italian American Studies Association conference in Houston, October 31–November 1, 2019.



Left to right: Emily Cota, Abigail Gonzalez, Brandon Bisby, Alessandra Balzani, and Leslie Chavez. Not pictured: Bria Pellandini, who presented virtually from her study abroad program in Rome.

Finally, let me comment briefly on what I found to be one of the most uplifting moments in this entire crisis: the speech, in Italian, by the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, on the tarmac at the airport of Tirana, where he sent off a group of thirty doctors and nurses departing for Italy to assist in the fight to save lives. His words resonate with commitment and solidarity:

"Non siamo privi di memoria: non possiamo non dimostrare all'Italia che l'Albania e gli albanesi non abbandonano mai un proprio amico in difficoltà. Oggi siamo tutti italiani, e l'Italia deve vincere e vincerà questa anche per noi, per l'Europa e il mondo intero"

(We are not without memory. We cannot back down from showing Italy that Albania and the Albanians never abandon a friend in need. Today we are all Italians, and Italy must, and will win this battle, for us, for Europe, and for the entire world).

Until we meet again,

Clorinda

Faculty Profile: Sienna Hopkins



Dr. Sienna Hopkins

Sienna Hopkins has been a lecturer of Italian at CSULB for 10 years, teaching a range of courses from Italian 101A to Italian Civilization. The vibrancy of the Italian department has been transformational for her scholarship, which has recently taken a pleasant digression from her primary field of research (Italian Renaissance biography) to Italian immigrant literature and history. This new trajectory finds its origins in the memoirs and stories

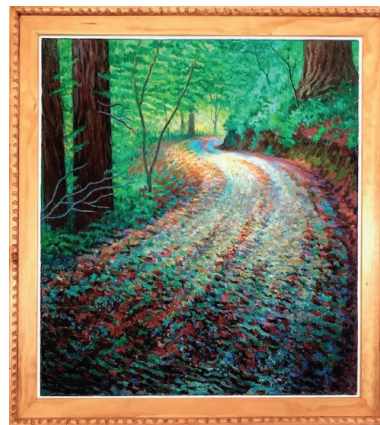
that form the backbone of a course she teaches on the Italian American Experience, but it is also a response to the steady stream of acclaimed Italian-American scholars that have, as a result of Graziadio support, brightened our classrooms over the years, such as Lawrence de Stasi, Joseph Sciorra, Laura Ruberto, Fred Gardaphé, and Teresa Fiore.

As Dr. Hopkins continues to deepen her understanding of the Italian immigration story, she cannot not help but see correlations with her own “country-bumpkin” roots, roots that are buried deep into her sense of beauty and belonging. She did not grow up on paved roads, but meandering dirt roads in majestic Humboldt county, where Redwood trees reach for the skies, and the Eel river stubbornly meanders North (one of a few rivers in the world to do so). She came to Los Angeles for college and never left, but each time she returns home, her heart overflows with emotion at the sight of the golden hills, and the foot-feel of the soft, red, forest bed of the Old-Growth Redwood groves. These feelings quickly turn to heart-pangs, however, with the knowledge that she must return to the city, or what she refers to as “cement-land.” While reading Italian-American fiction and memoirs, she began to notice that the Italian-immigrants from the turn of the 20th century had a different eco-response to their homeland, one that was less driven by affection and longing, but was instead steeped in a wariness, or even fear, of nature. So began her foray into the world of eco-criticism, a branch of literary criticism that has been gaining steam over the past few decades. Her approach particularly strives to shed light on the experience of the Italian diasporic community through the lens of eco-nostalgia, and to demonstrate how nostalgia for one’s homeland is complex, especially for those who, as a result of poverty and pressures from the natural world, felt forced to leave.

She presented her research on this topic at the recent PAMLA (Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association) conference in San Diego, and an article on the subject is currently in the works for the Italian American

Review, a peer-reviewed journal of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute. The current working title for her article is: “From Sun and Space to Pavement Constraints: An Ecocritical Approach to Italian-American History.” She continues to publish in the field of her first love, Italian female Renaissance biography, and will be presenting her work on female Renaissance eulogies at the annual Renaissance Society of America Conference in April, 2020, research that asks her readers and listeners to consider these questions: What is considered a worthy life? What most solicits admiration and praise by others after one’s death? How does this differ throughout the centuries, especially for women of the Renaissance?

Dr. Hopkins considers curiosity to be the foundation of learning and, as such, continually challenges her students to ask questions of themselves and others. Perhaps the most apropos question for those reading *Il Postino* is this: which memoir or novel on the Italian-American Experience have you still not read? Is it *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant*, Jerre Mangione’s *Mount Allegro*, Mario Puzo’s *Fortunate Pilgrim*, or John Fante’s *The Wine of Youth*? Ideally, your answer will prompt a swift, and decisive trip to the virtual bookstore.



“Gravel-Road,” a painting by Sienna’s father extraordinaire, artist Steve Ladd, of the road leading to his home. When Sienna’s family turns off the Avenue of the Giants onto this road, they always sing a song her husband wrote when their children were young, titled “the doo-doo forest.” This is the name her children gave the forest surrounding their grandfather’s home, because it was mysterious, dark, and a little scary. The song is of course written in a minor key.



Steve Ladd, “River Bar” – The South Fork of the Eel River is a dominant and breath-taking feature of the natural environment of Southern Humboldt County.

Student Profile: Bria Pellandini

Bria Pellandini is a student in the Italian Studies MA Program. Outside of her studies at CSULB, Bria works as Executive Assistant to Chelsie Hill (founder of the Rollettes Dance Team) and as the Chief Operating Officer for Rollettes Los Angeles. The Rollettes' mission is to "empower women with disabilities to live boundlessly and shift perspective through dance." As Chief Operating Officer, Bria manages the day to day operations and finances of the Rollettes and helps design and create their marketing campaigns. She also plans their annual conference, the Rollettes Experience. The Rollettes



Experience brings together women from all over the world for a weekend-long women's empowerment conference in Los Angeles. Bria also travels with the team to different performances and speaking engagements. Last year, Bria found her studies and work coming together in a way she says she never imagined. After several months of planning, she was able to travel with the team to Italy for the annual

Festival Internazionale delle Abilità Differenti. Her ability to communicate in Italian with the organizers of the festival helped make the trip possible.

When asked about her business experience in Italy, Bria said, "To be honest, I felt some pressure to translate well since a lot of people were counting on us. The team was the main performance of the festival. Part of me wishes that trip was now instead of almost a year ago because my language skills have improved so much since then."

During their trip to Italy, Bria helped the team deal with the tiny Italian elevators in their hotels, the struggle to find accessible restrooms, and performing on a traditional Italian stage which had to have a ramp installed for the first time; all of which are things that most able-bodied people do not consider while traveling. Despite these obstacles, the trip and the performance went very well, and the team often talks about returning to Italy.

For Bria, being able to communicate with the event organizers in Italy and participate in the event itself helped create lasting connections for both herself and the team. They expect to see some of the women they met from Milan, Venice, and Lake Como at the event they are hosting this summer. After this experience, Bria has become inspired to learn more about how to help companies build bridges between the United States and Italy.

Student Profile: Mariana Barrios

Welcome to the Italian Studies MA Program, Mariana!

Mariana graduated from San Diego State University (SDSU) with a BS in Statistics (emphasis in Actuarial Science) and a minor in Italian Studies. She was always passionate about learning Italian as a child and began taking classes at SDSU where she studied it formally for four years before deciding to pursue and advance degree in Italian.

Choosing CSULB's Italian MA Program was not a difficult decision for her. After meeting with professors at SDSU and CSULB, she quickly learned that the Italian Program at CSULB not only had a wide range of course offerings but also gave graduate students the opportunity to teach lower-division Italian classes, study abroad in Italy, and carry out research under the guidance of faculty mentors. For three summers, Mariana worked as an English tutor in Italy where she stayed with host families to fully immerse herself in Italian culture. She hopes to teach Italian while she's at CSULB and eventually become a professor after obtaining a PhD that can tie in her mathematics background.

Regarding the program, Mariana said, "I find my classes very interesting and captivating, I really like all of my professors and my classmates' support has been wonderful. Since my first class, I found everyone very helpful and friendly which has helped me a lot with feeling happy and comfortable in a new school." We are happy to have her with us and are excited to see where her studies take her. In bocca al lupo, Mariana!





Student Profile: Vittoria Ambruso

Former Italian Studies student, Vittoria Ambruso, recently graduated from the University of Gastronomical Sciences in Piedmont, Italy. In August, she began working as an intern at Eataly Florence in the didactic and events department, where she has been teaching international students about Eataly's business model and marketing strategies, as well as hosting food culture events about wine, pizza, pasta, and more. We hope to receive more updates soon and wish her the very best in her future endeavors abroad! Buon lavoro, Vittoria!



Club Italia would like to give a warm welcome to its newest officers, Bria and Mariana! This semester's officers are:

- **Joanna Tatro (President)**
- **Emily Cota (Vice-President)**
- **Diego Brol (Treasurer)**
- **Leslie Chavez (Secretary)**
- **Bria Pellandini (Social Media Coordinator)**
- **Mariana Barrios (ASI Liaison)**

Mariana will be working with ASI to help secure funding for the club and foster collaborations with other organizations.

Bria's goal in her new position is to help the club reach more students on campus. Her outreach efforts have already generated interest among students, student organizations, and even the local Italian American community. Her knowledge of marketing will help the club grow. If you would like to see what she is doing and what the club is doing throughout the semester, follow us on Instagram @clubitalia.csulb or on Facebook at Club Italia CSULB.

The club is currently planning food events for next year in which attendees can enjoy refreshments and eat delicious food, while learning about what they are eating. The club hopes to inaugurate the beginning of a mini food series that will grow with the club. Stay tuned for more information!

Lastly, Club Italia would like to thank all the professors of Italian for their continued support and for encouraging their students to practice their Italian outside of the classroom and to attend the cultural events put together by the club.