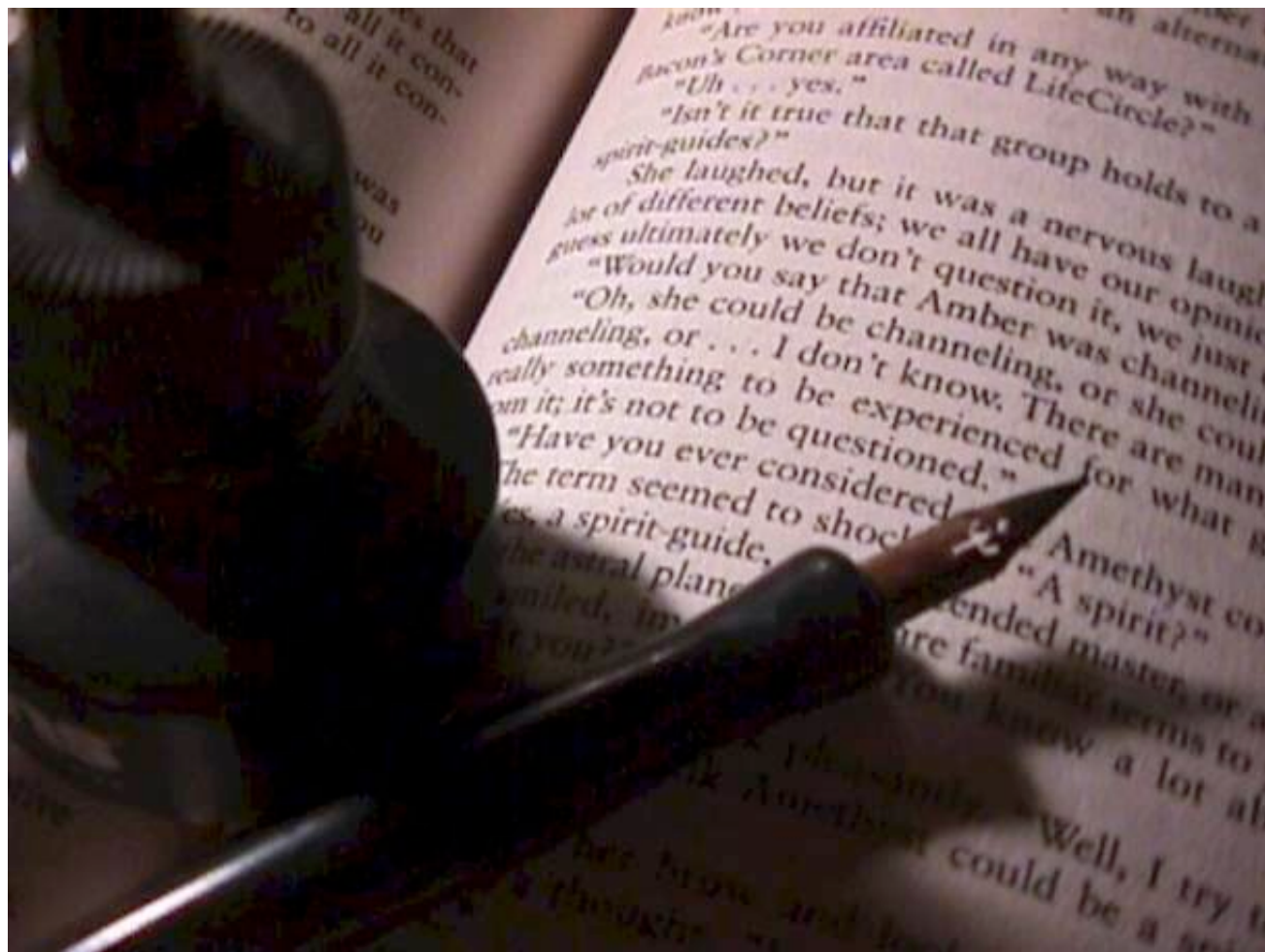


Columbia Opens its Doors to Three Italian Literary Promises

Marcello De Marco (March 29, 2011)



On March 23, at the Italian Academy of Columbia University, a conference tried to prove that, at least on some level, young people have to opportunity to succeed in Italy: three young and successful Italian writers presented their novels, acclaimed by both Italian critics and the public.

When it comes to Italy, rivers of ink have been spilled about its qualities, but at least equally much has been written about its flaws.

One of the main criticisms aimed at the Italian system is that it doesn't give enough opportunities to young people.

On March 23, at the [Italian Academy](#) [2] of Columbia University, a conference tried to prove that, at



least on some level, this situation is changing: three young and successful Italian writers presented their novels, acclaimed by both Italian critics and the public.

Present at the event, with the three Italian talents, were Consul General of Italy Francesco Maria Talò; David Freedberg, Director of the Italian Academy; Claudio Angelini, President of the New York Dante Alighieri Society – host of the event; and Paolo Valesio, Chair of the Italian Department at Columbia. Furthermore, the discussion was moderated by Michele Rossi, Fiction Editor of the Italian publisher [RCS Rizzoli](#) [3] and discoverer of these new stars of the Italian literary landscape.

The opening remarks focused on the importance of young talents for the future of Italian literature, and the necessity of creating a dialogue between the old school and the new school of Italian writers. From such a dialogue there would surely spring enrichment to both classes of authors.

Mr. Rossi, on the other hand, was more focused on the works that were presented at the conference.

He underlined how fiction is often the process of disassembling reality into its building blocks, reconstructing such blocks into a work that is, of course, a work of fiction, but also something able to represent today's reality in an unadulterated, crystal clear form, sometimes truer than reality itself. Through this process writers are able to present the problems of society in a very effective and incisive way.

After the introduction, the authors were given the opportunity to read an excerpt from their works.

Silvia Avallone, winner of the Campiello Opera Prima Prize, and finalist of the Strega Prize, was present with her book "Acciaio" [Steel], a story revolving around the steel mills of the small city of Piombino and the social situations that arise in this kind of village-sized companies, that have a very peculiar and organized internal social/political structure.

Giuseppe Catozzella presented "Alveare" [Beehive], his work about the often ignored (more or less on purpose) problem of organized crime – specifically, 'Ndrangheta – in Northern Italy, especially Lombardy.

Barbara Di Gregorio read from her "Le Giostre Sono per gli Scemi" [Carousels Are for Morons], the bittersweet story of a child, later a teenager, looking for his lost brother.

After the readings, the public had time to interact with the panelists in what turned out to be a very stimulating debate.

Among the various topics touched, an interesting remark about Italian society came from Silvia Avallone. According to her, some of the problems of Italy stem from a generational gap of talent. The generation born at the beginning of last century (our grandparents, she colloquially defined them) was skillful and resourceful, and was able to create the economic boom after WWII. Their children, however, (our parents) somehow sit on their laurels, enjoying the wealth created by their parents but unable to improve on it. Silvia hopes and thinks that the current generation of young Italian men and women can find the spark of two generations ago and help fix at least some of the shortcomings of today's Italy.

Considering the topics touched in Alveare, it was no surprise that Catozzella was asked about a possible comparison with the other famous recent Italian mafia book: [Gomorra](#) [4]. He pointed out that, of course, the topic is very similar, but while Gomorra is more of a non-fiction work, Alveare is a work of fiction, though based on true facts. Actually, he recalled a traumatic episode of his childhood that may be one of the causes that prompted him to write this book. When he was 14, he witnessed a mafia-perpetrated double homicide. Two by-passers were killed, while the targets, unharmed, were notoriously part of a rival family.

Catozzella underlined that this kind of violent crime is much more rare in Northern Italy than in the South. The 'Ndrangheta in the North is much more subtle and, thus, much more dangerous.



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