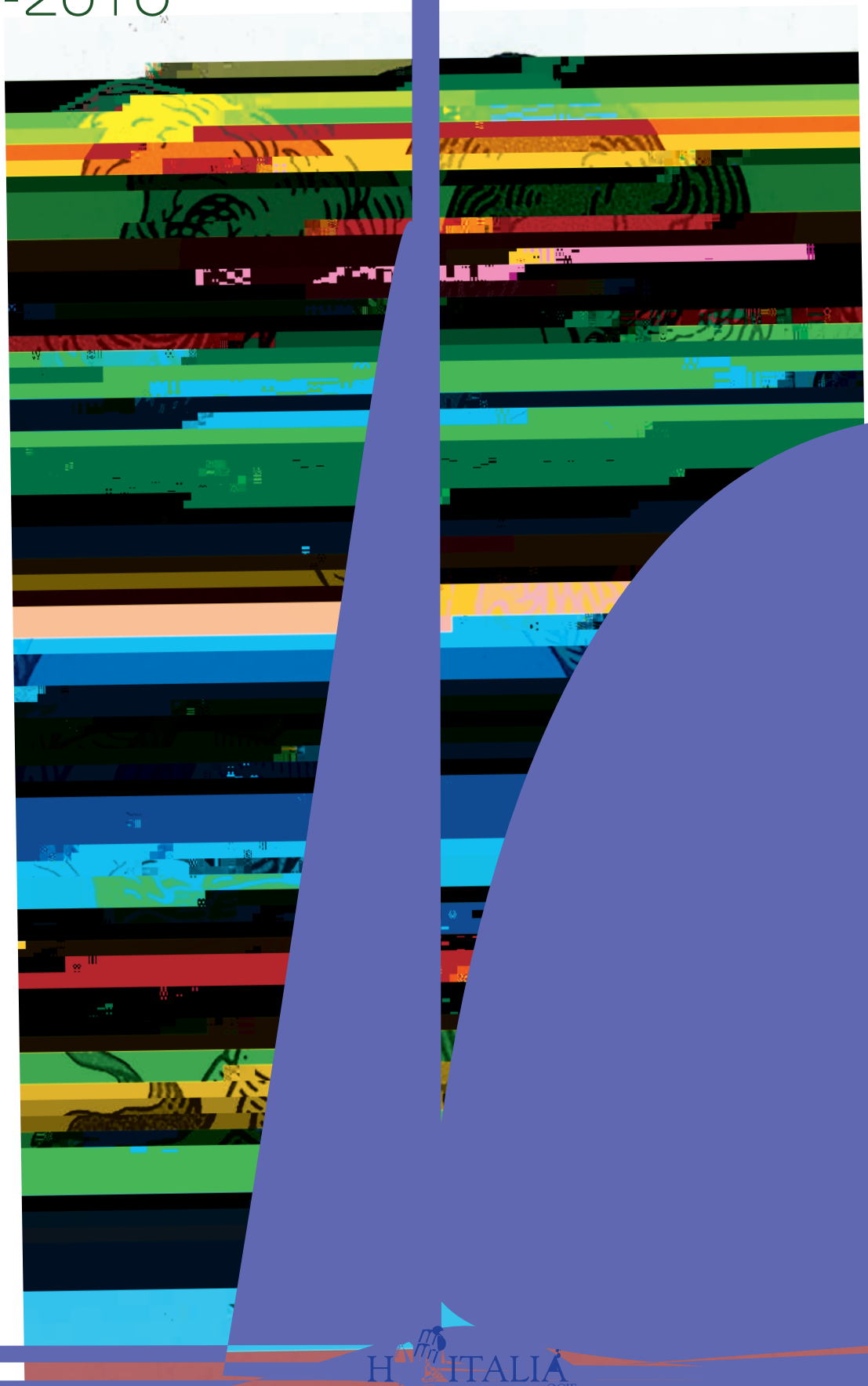
RIVISTA

2015-2016



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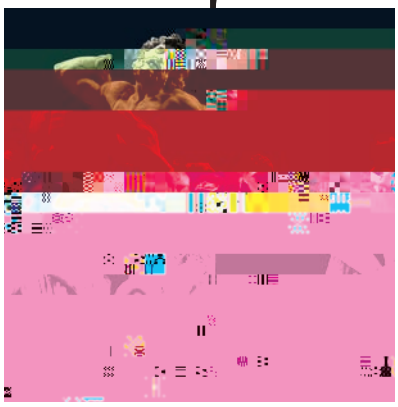
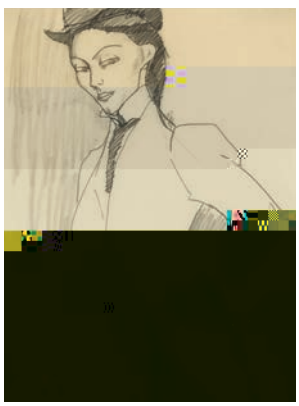
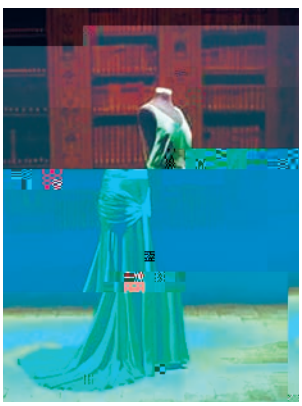
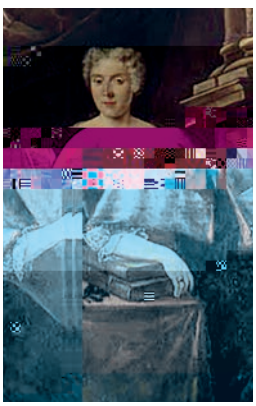


features

REVIEWS

British-Italian Society Year



[illegible]

by Mark Donovan

Matteo Renzi became Prime Minister in February 2014 after winning the leadership of the Democratic Party (PD) in December 2013. He had not been a Member of Parliament and was a youthful 39, compared with Berlusconi's 76. A telegenic and charismatic leader like the media multi-millionaire, Renzi was avowedly intent on generational change, 'scrapping' the old elites, not least in his own party. The PD turned to him following its failure to win the 2013 election despite the disarray of the right. This had seen the resignation of Silvio Berlusconi as Prime Minister in 2011, when he finally lost his long-haemorrhaging parliamentary majority amidst that summer's economic crisis. The meltdown of his party, which had begun in 2011, resumed after the election, leaving the right fragmented and rudderless. Indeed, from early 2015 Matteo Salvini's Northern League polled the

[illegible]

by Sandra Fox

and supplied the village with milk. Again there was the juxtaposition of new and old in both instances.

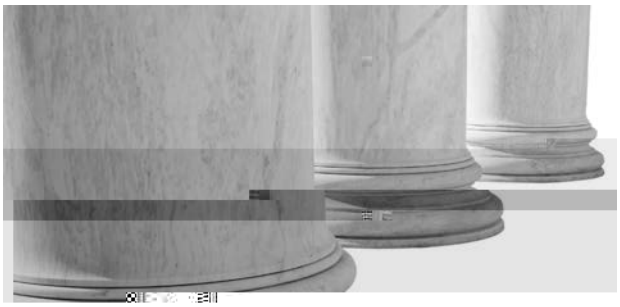
In the case of the wine, the village was too high to grow good grapes so some of the men would get together and go down to the market at Pisa where grapes were on sale from further south. These would then be mixed with the local grapes to make a palatable wine – or not as the case may be – some of it was very good for cleaning drains and some was heavenly! In the case of the cow, whilst she was milked by hand and presumably gave a certain amount of warmth in the winter to the living accommodation above, in the summer this beautiful animal with her long curly eyelashes, very similar in appearance to a Jersey cow, had to be cooled with a modern electric fan. After all, she was a source of income and had to be kept happy but I did not once see her outside her stall.

The richness of experience in the village was wide and varied. We experienced an earthquake; there was no way that a lorry could drive up the narrow [illegible] of not much more than a metre wide but this is what the noise and vibration seemed like. We later heard tales of the big, pre-WW2 quake, doubtless delicately embroidered for an English audience. We had a large trap full of rats thrust under our nose to demonstrate just how good our next door neighbour was at building them. We, fortunately, had two cats who would tackle anything. We ate [illegible] made from wild leaves which was so delicious it spoilt us for any other version; [illegible] at its best.

We had packages of food thrust into our hands for the journey back to England, after all it was many miles away. We experienced the joy of Sunday mass in the local tiny oratory when the singing was a cappella and superb, as the voices divided into parts for hymns and glorias. In fact one of the congregation, Maria, could easily have been an opera singer of considerable quality.

But in the end, the isolation of being the only foreigners in this hill village became too much. The call of the sea and the thought of a boat seduced my husband and a greater range of intellectual activity seduced me, so we sold up and moved elsewhere in Italy. We still have a parcel of land there and we visit an adopted family regularly but that is another story.

[illegible]



ıth

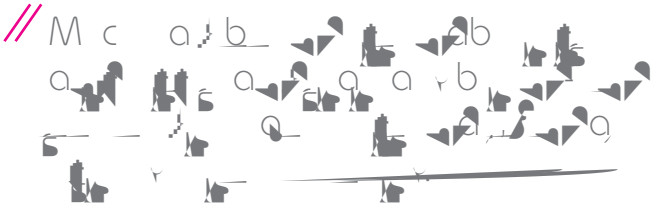
[illegible]

by John Shepherd

The very name Villa Wolkonsky tells you there has to be a story. There is; and its start is indeed exotic. The first heroine of the tale is a Russian princess, Zenaïde Wolkonsky. The Villa's isolated position lends charm but mystery too, feeding the still-strong local belief that the Germans imprisoned and tortured detainees there during the occupation of Rome in 1943-4.

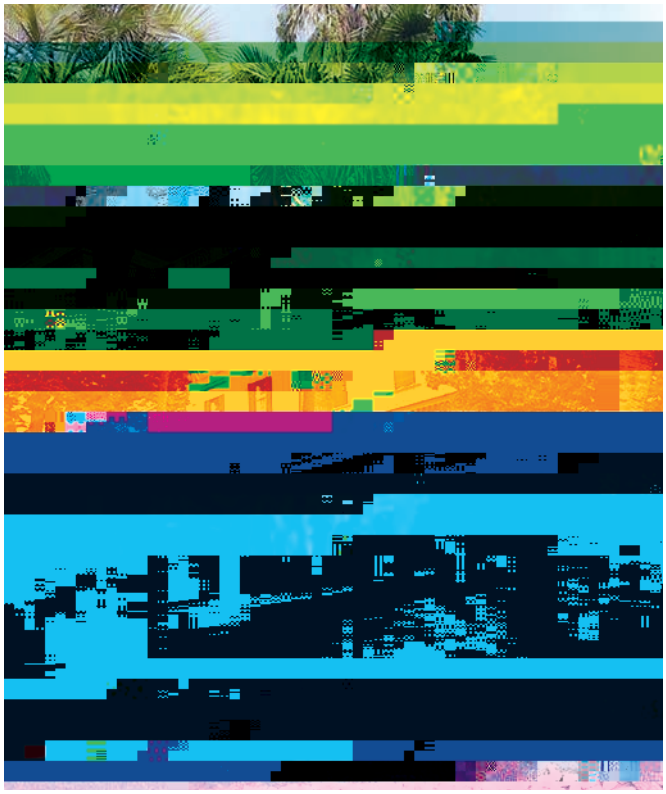
Having enjoyed living in the Villa for three years, I wanted to find out more. Much had been written about its antiquities and statuary but no-one seemed to have written a general history of the property. Many elements of the received wisdom about the Villa did not add up but had simply acquired the aura of historical truth by virtue of repetition.

So, to sort myth from reality and fill in many blanks, I embarked on the necessary archival research. This has taken me to Rome, Berlin and London, covering the modern property's three broad phases: family property of the Wolkonskys (1830-1922), German embassy (1922-1944), and British Embassy (1947-today). That research has disposed of many myths and yielded considerable new material, but much remains to be investigated. What follows is simply a bulletin on work in progress, with emphasis on the less known Wolkonsky phase.



What brought Zenaïde Wolkonsky to Rome is brilliantly told in the late Maria Fairweather's fully-researched biography, [illegible]. As Princess Zenaïde Beloselsky, a young lady-in-waiting to the mother of the new Tsar Alexander, she 'caught the Tsar's eye' in 1809; married an aide de camp, Prince Nikita Wolkonsky and bore him a son in 1811. She then travelled as a member of the Tsar's entourage to all the key capitals, as battles and conferences ended the Napoleonic wars. Gifted, especially as a singer, she was also subject to fits of depression – not helped by her husband's blatant infidelities – and of religious fervour. But she became a very close friend and confidante of the Tsar over several years.

At court Zenaïde came into contact with senior Roman Catholics (and was later to convert to Catholicism). She



Entrance to Villa Wolkonsky

visited Rome in 1815 (when the court was in Paris), in 1817 and again in 1820-3. When she left, she promised that, if she returned, she would not leave again. She did return in 1829 and sought a summer place where she could breathe fresh air in the spirit of the [illegible]. In 1830 she bought a vineyard, Vigna Falcone, complete with Roman aqueduct and a small vine-keeper's cottage. She immediately commissioned an architect, Giovanni Azzurri, to turn the cottage into a small house – the [illegible] where she was to entertain her many artistic friends from around Europe. They loved the romantic setting: the gardens dominated by roses on the aqueduct and its stunning views of two basilicas, the Aurelian walls and the Alban Hills.

Published accounts often repeat a claim that the vineyard was a gift from Zenaïde's father but there is no evidence for the assertion. Someone must have misinterpreted the way in which legal documents of the time identified the principals by reference to their fathers, with abbreviations denoting whether they were dead or alive. That is how the 1831 deed of sale was written, correctly noting that her father was dead (He had in fact died in 1809). The deed has much detail on money but, not surprisingly, no mention of a gift.

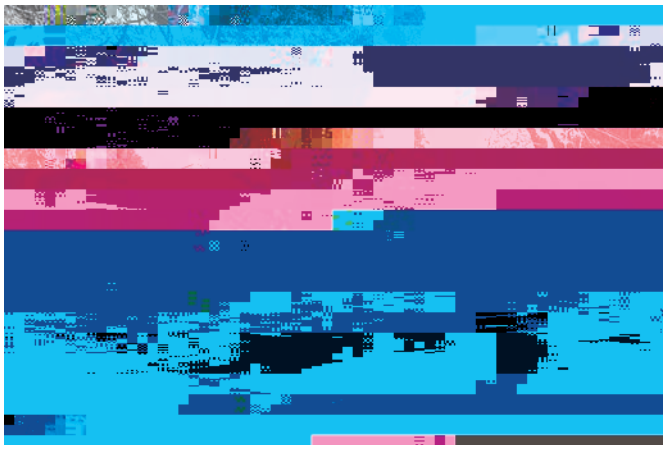
It also shows that the sellers were members of the princely Massimo family, who had bought it ten years earlier from the people habitually named in published accounts as the sellers to Zenaïde.

Zenaïde's husband joined her in 1840 but died in 1844. After that she devoted herself to charitable work, increasingly

- The Germans built the westward extension of the to house their Chancery offices in the early 1920s but thereafter managed to do only minimal work to the Villa, for lack of funds – Germany's economy was in a parlous state.
- The first resident ambassador, von Neurath, put a lot of his energy and private money into restoring the neglected garden.
- In 1939-40, the Germans combined long-needed modernisation with a dramatic enlargement. The swimming pool was added in 1942 – and yes, Hitler was marginally involved in that; and the entrance hall received its grand marble paving in 1943.
- In 1940-43 the Germans were working up a project to erect on land neighbouring the Villa a grandiose new embassy office. The project would have involved the destruction of the .

With the German occupation of Rome in September 1943 all that came to an end, and the embassy was withdrawn. Among the few officials who remained at the Villa was a small team of 'police attachés', some of whom moved to the new security service (SD) office, half a mile away in Via Tasso (now the Liberation Museum). Apart from an incident in early September 1943 there is little basis for Villa Wolkonsky's unsavoury reputation during this period, which the Museum perpetuates with a headline display linking the Villa to the activities in Via Tasso, for which, its staff admit, they have no evidence. It is improbable that the Villa was itself a Gestapo HQ or house of torture but possible that occasional detainees were held overnight before being moved to Via Tasso. Whatever the truth of that, what gave the Italian government the pretext to confiscate the property after the liberation of Rome in June 1944 was the use of the just after the occupation as the HQ of the German garrison commander. Foreseeing the risk of eventual confiscation, the German Foreign Office had succeeded in

Print showing the Wolkonsky property in the 1850s



Villa Wolkonsky in the 1930s

evicting the army from the property by the end of 1943, but too late.

The British tenure began with a bang. The embassy at Porta Pia was blown up on the night of 30 October 1946 by Irgun terrorists. Four Power agreement was rapidly obtained to the use of the (nearly) vacant Villa Wolkonsky, and the British embassy opened for business there on 19 January 1947. The completed purchase was confirmed by Presidential Decree in 1951. Much work was done over the years to keep the Villa and offices habitable, but the usual lack of resources was accentuated by doubts about whether to retain the property, as the UK still also owned the site of the old embassy at Porta Pia.

Eventually in 1971 the offices moved back to the new Basil Spence building at Porta Pia. But the much-touted move of the Ambassador's residence to a new house on the Porta Pia site proved unfeasible. So the residence has remained at Villa Wolkonsky, and in 1980 the enlarged was well converted back to residential use as staff accommodation: as it is now.

The biggest project of the early British years was the extensive restoration of the aqueduct between 1958 and 1960. After initial reluctance the project acquired the stature of a showpiece example of the work of the UK Historic Monuments Branch, who accepted the need to respect the concept which seemed to have inspired Zenaïde's garden – that the aqueduct and the antiquities were the central feature of a romantic garden, not just a monument to be stripped of its roses and displayed as in a museum case. But the fragments of antiquities Zenaïde placed around the garden inevitably deteriorated with time; their recent splendid restoration and removal to the safety of a converted greenhouse were much-needed.

Thus, the last 100 years have, almost by accident, ensured the preservation by two foreign governments of what the first 100 years of Wolkonsky ownership created. This is the tale I have to tell.

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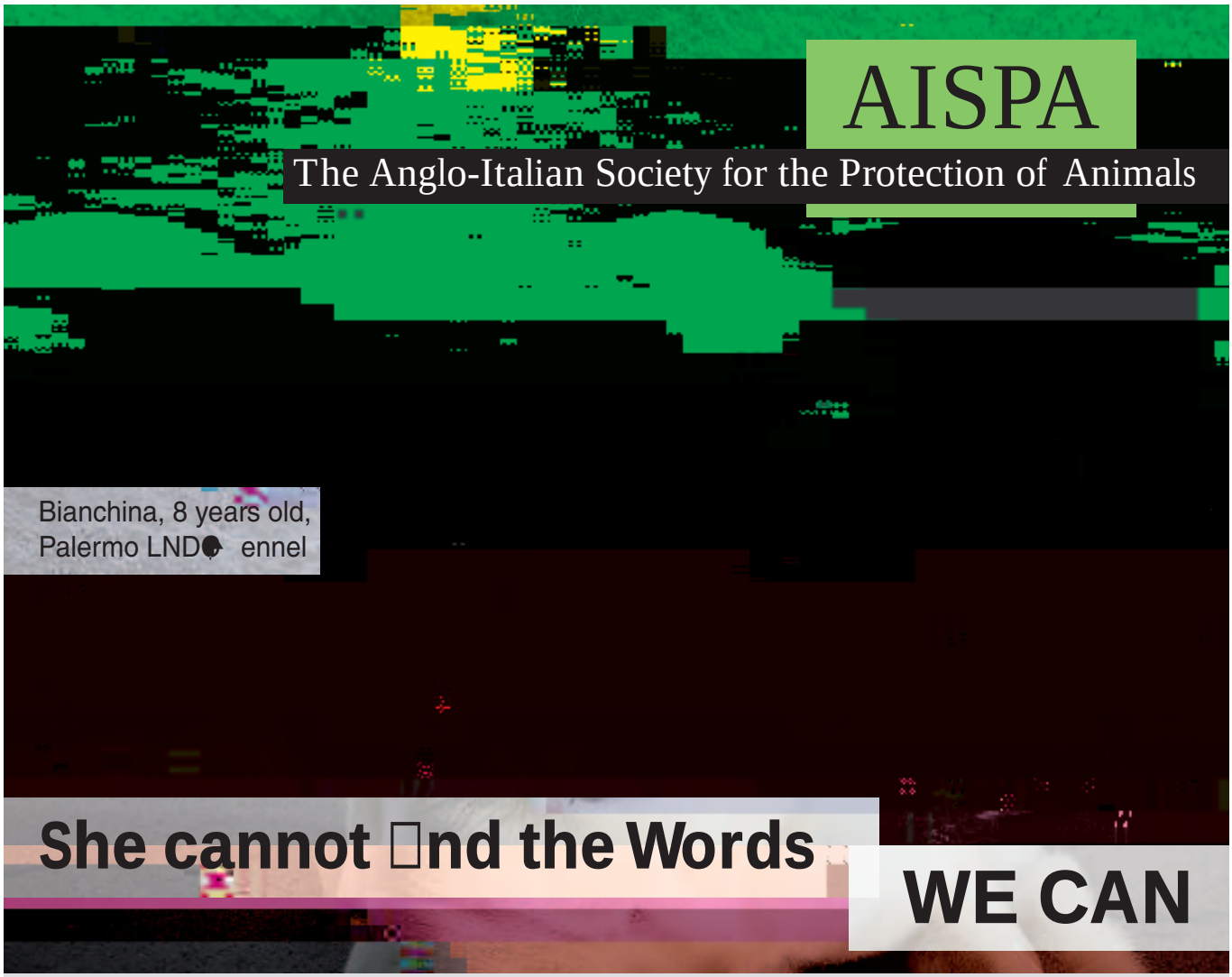

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by Mariateresa Wright

ilan is hosting the World Expo in 2015 and also a major Leonardo exhibition. So I would like to call this small homage: ‘My personal memory of Leonardo’.

Not that I did ever meet the man, you understand. But I grew up among his works in Milan at an impressionable age. He was the pin-up of my adolescent years, the avuncular sage that provided wise philosophical mottoes to a receptive teenager: [illegible] and many more.

My earliest memories are of the theatrical machinery in the Duomo that lowers one of the nails of the True Cross 42 metres from the apse onto the high altar. Once a year on 3 May (this ceremony is now in September), as a very young girl I would have my nose up into the great heights whence the [illegible] would descend amidst clouds of pervasive incense. I waited for it to happen as if from heaven. The present [illegible] is a baroque affair highly decorated with busy cherubs, but the original contraption that required 20 men on the roof to manoeuvre was almost certainly by Leonardo, for he was paid by the Duomo administrators at least three times for work done for the Cathedral.

I remember, with my small hand in my father’s, taking many a stroll along one of Milan’s systems of canals to which

2.

visit with my primary school, trying to find the Leonardo's knot in the more than intricate ceiling, designed by him, of the in the Castle and asking myself: why ? I could not see any. Obviously the had kept someone warm during one of Milan's bitter wartime winters. The ceiling is a wonder of intricacy, the branches of 16 trees with thick foliage all intertwining to form a pergola under which the guests of the Sforzas were entertained.

How did the Tuscan Leonardo end up working in Milan for 20 years?

There were problems in Florence and he was in need of a powerful employer. His long application letter (1482) to Lodovico il Moro, Duke of Milan, asking for employment at Court still exists and is fascinating in the light of what we now know about Leonardo. It is ten paragraphs long: nine of which refer entirely to his ability to construct war machines,

18 r : t t r

by Richard Simpson

The consort that she chose was Giuseppe Veratti, also a member of the Academy of Sciences, and as far as one can see it was an extremely successful union in all respects. They set up a teaching laboratory in their own home and for nearly 30 years she gave lessons in electrical phenomena. 1745 proved a pivotal year for her. Lambertini, now Pope Benedict XIV, decided to create a special group of academics within the Academy of Sciences - named the 'Benedettina' after him - dedicated to enhancing the quality and output of the academy. There were to be 24 members, 14 from the existing heads of sections and 10 to be elected by that 14. Initially Bassi's name was not amongst the 10, albeit that she was demonstrably

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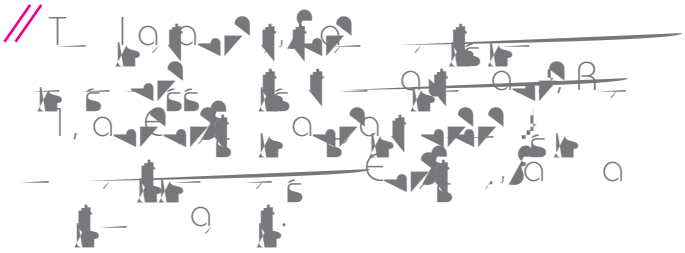
by Richard Bates

‘ ’ - that’s how novelist Alessandro Baricco once described a ruck in rugby. Now there’s a challenge for the students, I thought to myself, as I went along to teach my advanced translation class. English is less prone than Italian to adjectivise proper names, so one would have to weigh up whether to introduce the Trojan prince in some other way, or perhaps leave him out altogether and just translate the sense of the metaphor. After all, the classical reference is probably less familiar to an English reader but, when most of the students confessed they’d had to look it up, that argument soon collapsed. Either it was duffers’ night or Baricco had overstretched the cultural range of his readers.

The translation challenges that fascinate me most, though, are the ones involving wit and wordplay.



I’ve always loved, for example, the expression ’ as its silent transition from first person plural to second person plural sums up so economically the casual offloading on to some other poor sod the dangerous and dirty work you are invoking as a necessity. But how does one translate it into English? We make the distinction between ‘talking the talk’ and ‘walking the walk’, but for years I could see no way of mimicking the brazen double standards of the Italian phrase. The effect of the original is due to its being concentrated into two words connected with an ‘ ’. Try translating it literally and the whole thing goes to pieces: –‘let’s take up arms’, four words already, ‘and go’? But that’s hopeless as it sounds as if ‘let’s’ is governing both verbs and we’re saying . With ‘let’s take up arms’ and then ‘you go…off to war’ all the punch of the original has drained helplessly away. The Italian original exploits the terseness of its imperative and, Rule 1, an English translation needs to exploit the rules of English grammar with equal wit.

I worried away at the question intermittently until I remembered a popular book from the 60s on psychotherapy by Eric Berne, called . The book tried to show how much social interaction consists of a series of games whose implicit rules are understood and exploited by the parties involved. He calls one of the games ‘Let’s you and him fight’. In Berne’s book, the game is a ploy by which a woman gets two men to fight over her so she can decide which she wants, but remove it from Berne’s argument and it gives us the same idea of the shameless outsourcing of difficulty and danger as in ’. Linguistically it couldn’t be more different: there’s only one verb, and it’s a different verb to either of the two Italian ones, but the phrase enacts the same specious contradiction as the original, with the second-person and third-person pronouns cheerfully clashing with the bogus first-person invitation of ‘let’s’.

Italy’s heroic dubbing industry still performs wonders of this kind for the cinema. The George Clooney McCarthy-period film of a few years back, , contains a good example. One of the characters refers to the genuine historical figure of Fred Friendly, the TV news executive, in these terms: ‘I saw Fred yesterday. He wasn’t very friendly.’ What’s to be done? No chance of that play on words working in Italian. So, Rule 2: look elsewhere. If you can’t do anything with ‘Friendly’, can you do something with ‘Fred’? You can indeed. The dubbers rose magnificently to the occasion with: ’

An example from Italian into English is supplied by , Paolo Sorrentino’s film about Giulio Andreotti. The dialogue incorporates a number of examples of the Senator’s attempts at wisdom that his flatterers insisted was wit, one of which was [1] (if you want an explanation of Italy’s economic problems – look no further). Here – Rule 3 – the translator must decide to which of the two phrases he wants to give priority and build his version around. In this case the effect of the required a brutally colloquial phrase for dying that must in some way echo another phrase which could have various kinds of unheroic significance, of which survival was only one. I imagine the sub-titlers weighed the possibilities of ‘bite the dust’, ‘croak’, ‘cash in your chips’, ‘turn up your toes’, ‘hand in your dinner pail’, ‘pop your clogs’, ‘go west’, ‘kick the bucket’, ‘give up the ghost’, and many others before settling on ‘snuff it’, giving them the satisfactorily succinct ‘Better to bluff it than to snuff it’ – and better than the original too, I’m inclined to think.

And Baricco’s ’? I’m afraid in the end we ducked the challenge. ‘An inextricable tangle of arms and legs’ was the best we could come up with, so we didn’t cover ourselves with glory there. Oh well, [2] – now there’s a phrase I’d like to be able to translate.

1.

2.

18

by Charlie Hall

n the evening of 25 October 1913 Frederick Rolfe, aka Baron Corvo, left a restaurant, having put another dinner on his credit line, 'I'm running a tick at the Cavaletto, simply that I may eat and sleep' he pleaded in his final letter to the Rev Stephen Justin, his last benefactor. He walked to his apartment in the attic of a down-at-heel house, Ca' Marcello, in Santa Croce. Sitting on his bed, he bent down to unlace his boots and, with his chest constricted over a full stomach, he suffered a stroke that sprung him backwards onto the mattress.

He was found at 3 o'clock the next afternoon. His demise was cursorily reported in the in London which described him as 'a character curiously interesting and always mysterious who had written several novels in which was being exhibited an extraordinary amount of erudition poorly assimilated, dotted with penetration and apparent accuracy that impressed the critics.' And recorded that he was a man of extraordinary genius and versatility, a clever writer, musician and artist.

Little more was written about the passing of this man who had published very little during his lifetime, his being the extraordinary . The work was referred to by DH Lawrence as 'a clear and definite book of our epoch' and 'a novel of genius' by Graham Greene. It had an electric effect on the unsuccessful biographer and self-confessed aesthete, AJA Symons, 'I felt that interior stir' he remembered, 'with which we all recognise a transforming new experience… a feat of writing difficult to parallel: original, witty…. full of masterful phrases and scenes, almost flabbergasting in its revelation of a vivid and profoundly unusual personality.'

It was not until Symons published a peculiar and fascinating biography,

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had brought the ships back to the Mediterranean and thus back to Venice, its most northerly port.

In 1895, the Italian Government had signed a new convention with P&O, so that passengers coming from Australasia, India and Egypt would arrive in Europe at Venice. The city experienced something of an economic boom and became a fashionable venue. That same year the Venice Biennale was launched and the Lido became a destination for travellers, but despite the regeneration Venice was perceived as a city of degeneration. The writers who came to Venice at the century's turn were perhaps attracted to a city that appeals, as the American Consul at the time, Edmund Flagg, observed, 'to one aweary of the world, disappointed, chagrined, sick at heart and soul'.

This was the Venice that became home and final resting place for Frederick Rolfe, a man who adopted the name Baron Corvo following a dubious gift of the title from the Duchess Sforza Cesarini, another of his many patrons. A man whose writing talents were never in question, who lived a life in almost continuous poverty, failing to keep friends and who wrote to Richard Dawkins, the friend who brought him to Venice, 'My difficulty, however, is not to find friends as I get older, but to keep those whom the gods send me in such profusion.'

What Rolfe achieved in [illegible] is what many writers of Venice have possibly wished to do. Perhaps he was spurred on by his tribulations, perhaps by a genuine case of clinical paranoia, or maybe, as AJA Symons suggests, by his struggles with his homosexuality. Rolfe identified the petty, the priggish, the failed, as well as those who sought to relaunch careers and reputations on this tiny microworld, and saw them as flaccid and deathly, feeding off the noble body of [illegible]. Those whom he attacked tried to take out his claws with acts of generosity and kindness that usually took the form of clubbing together to purchase him a first class ticket back to England. He always refused and, as John Cowper Powys wrote 'in his prolonged destitution he was a universal embarrassment; in his brief affluence a public spectacle'.

He was determined to stay in Venice where he could 'forget all scruples'. At one point he opened a correspondence with a man who had befriended him, shared his taste in young men and had become yet another benefactor. He wrote a series of letters in which he recounts various assignations with young Italian men who were perfectly delighted, it would seem, to have sexual encounters with him. These are now published as [illegible], a slim volume described by AS Byatt as 'decadent, muscular pornography that would belong in any collection of erotica'. With a style of prose, certainly not intended for publication at the time of writing, Rolfe celebrates sex with a glorious abandon that is fantastic, daring and outrageous. Imagine the sensuous, slightly transgressive delight of the [illegible] or Caravaggio's [illegible] and you will come close.

He died as he had lived, heavily indebted to his many benefactors but maintaining with an extraordinary skill, his tightrope walk over the abyss of utter penury, maintained by his brilliance and his refusal to compromise at any moment.

by Alexander Estorick

Elizabeth David

t was their curious combination of monochromatic austerity and deliberate sumptuousness that made Guttuso's (1912–1987) illustrations for Elizabeth David's , the first book of Italian cookery in the English language, so appropriate to their time and audience. With publication coinciding, in 1954, with the end of food rationing in Britain, the artist offered a window into a tantalising world of plenty which belied the even greater deprivation in Italy at the time. It also underscored a very Italian refusal to compromise on quality or taste in even the direst circumstances.

The first show of 2015 at the Estorick Collection, entitled , included a number of works which similarly delighted in the rich produce of the artist's native Sicily. In both (1984) and (1986) the objects almost intrude on their surrounding space, an effect which is exaggerated by their saturation with colour. These images, as well as the earlier (1974), might easily be citations

Renato Guttuso, Neighbourhood Rally, 1975

Renato Guttuso, La Vucciria, 1974 (not in show)

from Guttuso's famous large-scale painting, also of 1974, of in Palermo. Now in the Palazzo Chiaramonte-Steri in that city, it is a work which has come to embody the essence of the fertile life of Sicily in its depiction of a marketplace in which people and food, lights and colours converge, in a practical symbiosis with one another. When viewed alongside the Estorick's permanent collection, Guttuso reveals the debt owed to his earlier 'revolutionary' compatriots. His eclectic style, which is nearly as varied as the many genres he worked in, tends toward a kind of swollen realism whose aggressive forms, such as the carpentry tools and oil cans of (1961), hold a pregnancy of meaning analogous to the 'metaphysical' collation of objects by Carrà and de Chirico.

Given that Guttuso was a committed communist from 1940 until the end of his life, indeed one who served two terms as a party senator in the 1970s, it is difficult not to read political symbolism into all of his imagery, watermelons and all. However, Eric Estorick, who had befriended the artist twenty years earlier, recalled:

Renato Guttuso, Death of a Hero, 1953

On purchasing Guttuso's (1953), originally titled by the artist himself, Estorick chose to downplay its specific political connotations, interpreting the prominent red flag more as an abstract 'symbol of the allegiance of the dead man to a belief'. This view was , to some extent, supported by the visual evidence of the show, in which the imposing (1975) functioned as a kind of political analogue to painted the previous year. Here the viewer is confronted by a crowd of people, including quotations from works by Picasso as well as Warhol's Marylin, within a provincial cul-de-sac. In the foreground a party dignitary (the artist-protagonist?) reaches out to address them. That he reaches over a raised red flag towards the spectre of Picasso (standing on a window ledge) is a calculated attempt by the artist to cement himself within a kind of Mediterranean communist lineage. However, when viewing the work in its totality, the red flag is clearly de-emphasised by the wealth of surrounding curtains and awnings in bold greens and yellows. Colour therefore reveals the tension for Guttuso between retaining his autonomy as an artist, and so the capacity to make formal decisions free from ideology, and his figurehead status within the party.

Exhibited alongside the show were a number of large drawings in charcoal by Peter de Francia, who shared a studio with Guttuso in Rome in 1947, and who was influenced by the older artist's own series of drawings, entitled (1944) depicting Nazi atrocities committed on Italian soil. De Francia himself never joined the British Communist Party, stating: 'I belonged to a generation who could not but be suspicious of the Soviets, yet I was immensely drawn to the ambitions of the Soviet Revolution. I have had to live with that contradiction, and still do.' These works, made between 1947 and 1953, are a revelation for their clarity and innocence, and unlike Guttuso, ultimately humanised by their apparent freedom from ideology.

by Susan Kikoler

2014 2015

by Charles de Chassiron

The annual Leconfield Lecture, the Society's principal event, took place at the Italian Cultural Institute in November 2014 with a further eight talks being held throughout the year. Summaries of all the talks are in the pages that follow. We enjoyed an excellent Christmas dinner at the Rocco restaurant in west London. In May we arranged a special evening at the Estorick Gallery centred on their current exhibition of Modigliani's drawings. Some members also attended a wonderful evening at the Italian Embassy where the Southbank Sinfonia performed an exhilarating programme of music under the baton of Sir Antonio Pappano raising £17,000 for the orchestra's activities, principally at two Italian festivals in summer 2015. A private view of an exhibition of the work of artist Marco Lusini, , to which members were invited was held at the Fiumano Fine Art Gallery in London.

The Trustees decided to continue the policy adopted in 2012/13 of devoting up to £5,000 (the investment income from the major Hawkins legacy received in 2012) to the support of worthy artistic, academic and social causes, in accordance with the Society's aims. They considered a number of applications and made grants as follows:

- Co-financing of the video 'Think Italy' produced by the Society for Italian Studies, now being used on the SIS website and in secondary schools, and intended to encourage the study of Italian language and culture at university level in UK (£500).
- A grant towards the publication in mid-2015 by the British School of Rome of a study by Dr. Laura Ambrosini of the Italian National Research Council (CNR) on the collections of Etruscan objects from the Galeassi Tomb in Palestrina held in the Villa Giulia Museum (Rome) and British Museum (London) (£500).
- A grant towards the holding of an exhibition of paintings by the Tuscan painter Marco Lusini at the Fiumano Gallery in London (£250).
- A third year's funding of the London-based orchestra Southbank Sinfonia, composed of young musicians, which will again play at the Anghiari Festival in Italy in 2015 (£1000).
- A grant to the Italian School in London, partly in payment for their housing of the BIS archives (£500).

On behalf of the Trustees I would like to warmly thank Dr Charles Avery who left the Committee after a number of years of exemplary service. The Society's Trustees would like to thank our Patron, H. E. Pasquale Q. Terracciano, the Italian Ambassador, and his diplomatic colleagues, especially Minister Vincenzo Celeste, Counsellor Silvia Limoncini, and Press and Public Affairs Counsellor Nicola Todaro Marescotti (replaced in February 2015 by First Secretary Dott. Federico Bianchi) for their unstinting support during the year. We also extend our special thanks to Dott. ssa Caterina Cardona, the Director of the Italian Cultural

Institute, and her staff, for allowing the Leconfield Lecture to be held at the Institute, the Society's traditional venue, in the midst of the Institute's own highly-intensive programme, and for other acts of generous support, such as making a room available for Trustees' meetings. Dott.ssa Cardona will be greatly missed. We would however like to extend a warm welcome to her successor Dott Marc Delogu, who arrived in July. We would also like to thank all the speakers who have so willingly and generously given the Society such a variety of interesting talks throughout the year.

Last but not least thanks go to our two excellent Secretaries, Elisabetta Murgia (Events) and John Jinks (Membership) for their dedicated and very effective work throughout the year.

Unfortunately we have also recently had to say farewell to our Treasurer Alessandro Iobbi, who decided to resign in the summer after five years in the role. We are all extremely grateful to him, and he has helped us find a worthy successor in Silvia Pieretti, who took over in August.

Finally, my Trustee colleagues and I were very sorry to learn in September of the recent death of John Cullis, who was Secretary of the Society from 1993 to 2001. I am sure that many longer-established members of the Society will remember him well, especially as he continued to attend meetings and in particular our AGMs in more recent years, and will recall his kindness, welcoming manner and keen interest in all things Italian. He will be remembered warmly.

Welcome one member

Mr and Mrs John Allan
Mr Federico Bianchi
Mrs Daphne Birch
Dr Bonnie Blackburn
Professor Richard Bosworth
Mr James Buckley
Dr Margherita Calderoni
Miss Rita Carta
Ms Anna Clark
Mrs Bruna Colombo-Otten
Mr Peter Crossley
Mrs Sharron Davis
Miss Anna L. Deavin
Mr and Mrs Terry Duffy
Professor Christopher Duggan
Lady Caroline Egremont
Mr Michael Fishberg
Dr Hendrika Foster
Miss Anne Garrihy
Miss Vivienne Gordon-Graham
Mr & Mrs Marco Gubitosi
Dr Leofranc Halford-Stevens
Mrs Claudine Hantman
Ms Hazel Hardy
Ms Emma-Louise Hayley
Mrs Linda Henry
Dr David Holohan
Mr John Hoenig
Dr Lucy Hughes-Hallett
Mr Grahame Hyland
Ms Susan Hyland
Mr David Jones
Mr Thomas Kidman
Ms Janine Lees
Dr Jeanne Magagna
Dr Anna Marra
Professor Joseph Mifsud
Mr Richard Nathanson
Dr Giuliana Pieri
Dr Katia Pizzi
Mr Christopher Pott
Miss Rossella Romano
Mr Alessandro Scasciafratti
Mr Stephen Senior
Ms Marjorie Stimmel
Miss Alice Sweeney-Carroll
Mrs Valerie Taylor
Mr Massimo Tosato
Ms Claude Vogel
Mrs Sara Wheeler
Mr and Mrs Gerald Williams

t the Travellers Club in September 2014, Enrico Franceschini, London correspondent of , kicked off the autumn series of talks with an entertaining look at the ties between our respective countries and the way in which we view the nationals of the other. He reminded us of the long history of English visitors to Italy, including those on the Grand Tour, as well as the many writers who found inspiration there: Byron, Shelley, Keats, DH Lawrence and EM Forster to name but a few. More recently politicians have also delighted in the country's charms, notably Tony Blair, who enjoyed a number of well-publicised holidays while Prime Minister, along with the many Britons who have established second homes in Italy.

The first visitors from the Italian peninsula to Britain came many centuries earlier however. The foundations of the City of London were laid by the Romans during their long occupation of the country, with the boundary of the Roman Empire extending as far north as Hadrian's Wall. And the Italians have kept coming. Mazzini and Ugo Foscolo made their homes in London in the mid-19th century where they were supported in their efforts towards Italian unification. Both before and after WW2 Italians were settling in the areas around Clerkenwell and Soho bringing with them a new restaurant and café culture, olive oil, espresso coffee and a whole new approach to food and cooking.

Enrico Franceschini estimated that there are approximately 450,000 Italians working in London and a total of 1 million

microcosm, which reflected the universe, or cosmos. In 18th century France, during the Enlightenment, she noted that things mechanical symbolised modernity.

The alluring story was first filmed by Giulio Antamoro in a silent movie of 1911, with Pinocchio played by Polidoro, and later, in 1940, by Walt Disney, with an un-mechanical Pinocchio. Just after the Millennium, Roberto Benigni produced a lavish, ironically 'Hollywood' production, with Collodi's narrative as a series of frantic adventures, running only up to chapter 15, Pinocchio's death, where the original serial had ended.

Returning to Collodi's book, Katia Pizzi noted that it is not a strongly moralistic tale in the tradition of many a folk-tale, for the puppet lies and challenges authority. The narrative seesaws from the real to the fantastic, for example, there are not many topographical references, with descriptions of richly furnished castles and so forth.

In 1855 Georges Sand met Collodi in Florence, sharing a Mazzini-like world view, and hoping for the Unification of Italy; indeed, Collodi was involved in some of the battles of the Risorgimento and became the official censor for the Grand-Duchy of Tuscany.

Futurism exploited and promoted mechanisation, with Boccioni calling it '[illegible]', while Marinetti was in 1909 totally enamoured of his motor-car. Later on, Pinocchio the puppet became transmogrified into a robot and finally, in the 21st century, he responds to modern biotechnology, and the digital world of virtual reality, remaining 'relevant' for our globalised, multi-cultural society.

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2014

r Bonnie Blackburn, Fellow of the British Academy, member of the Faculty of Music at Oxford University and General Editor of the book series , addressed the British-Italian Society on the theme of whether becoming a musician in Renaissance Europe was a good idea. She noted that many great artists at that time had learned to play an instrument proficiently when they were young but preferred to follow a different profession and not be known as a musician.

The idea for her lecture came from her reading of Giorgio Vasari's (first published in 1550), where she noted with surprise how often he mentioned artists who were talented as musicians when they were young but decided to turn to art. It made her think about becoming a musician in Renaissance Italy and whether it was a good career choice prompting a number of questions such as whether one should try to become a professional performer or play music simply for pleasure; just how far should a gentleman go in showing his musical expertise; was it acceptable for women to perform in public and how important was it for rulers to employ musicians?

She answered these questions with the aid of slides showing portraits of artists, works of art, musicians, musical instruments, music sheets and with five pieces of music written during the period and performed by the Marian Consort, the internationally renowned early music ensemble.

Her first example of the influences at play was inspired by the Renaissance artist Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography, which described the contest between him and his father, Giovanni, himself a musician and member of the city wind band in Florence from 1480 to 1514, engineer and maker of musical instruments belonging to one of the great guilds. He wished his son to follow in his footsteps and Benvenuto was forced to learn the flute as a child, but although talented, he refused to take up music as a profession and became a goldsmith and artist instead. Town musicians in those days made a lot of money welcoming important official visitors and entertaining at official banquets. However, the job was not necessarily secure and close proximity to high officials meant that musicians, who were treated as servants and therefore largely ignored, could overhear con37csi5ions wad

1506

rt Historian Hendrika Foster made an impressive start to the New Year with her talk on *1506:* held at Europe House, London by courtesy of the European Commission.

This marble sculpture depicts the Trojan priest, Laocoon, with his sons and is part of the papal collection kept in the Vatican Museums in Rome. With the exception of a brief sojourn in Paris as a reluctant guest in the booty of Napoleon (1797–1815), the magnificent sculpture has resided within the Vatican walls since its excavation in January 1506 during the pontificate of Julius II. The original Laocoon was restored with all missing limbs replaced between 1515-25 by Michelangelo's pupil, Giovanni Angelo Montosorli, at the request of Pope Clement VII.

The journey of this work of art starts in the Hellenistic period, possibly circa 140 BC or early 1st century AD. The most reliable version of the narrative is to be found in by Virgil, where the hero Aeneas describes the story of the fall of Troy to the Phoenician Queen Dido. Laocoon tried to warn his people against the Greeks but was punished for challenging the gods, who favoured the Greeks, and thus his fate was sealed. Snakes from the sea wound around him killing at least one of his sons. Some sources say the other son escaped.

It is possible that an original piece was in bronze, now lost. The marble version was mentioned by the Roman writer Pliny the Elder, who saw it in the Palace of the Flavian Emperor Titus in Rome shortly before the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 and wrote '… the Laocoon … a work to be preferred to all that the arts of painting and sculpture have produced. Out of one block of stone the consummate artists, Hegesandros, Polydorus and Athenodorus of Rhodes made, after careful planning, Laocoon and his sons, and the snakes marvellously entwined about them'.

What better time to reappear than in Renaissance Rome. The sculpture was excavated in a vineyard near the ancient Baths of Trajan in 1506. When Pope Julius II heard about it he sent his architect Giuliano da Sangallo to inspect it. Sangallo was an expert on Roman antiquity and classical literature and recalled Pliny's mention of the sculpture. The discovery of the masterpiece was such a great event that it was carried in procession

n 28 April the Society met at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art for a private viewing of the gallery's exhibition of paintings and drawings by Amedeo Modigliani (1884 - 1920): , and to hear a talk by Richard Nathanson, co-Curator of the exhibition.

Richard Nathanson explained that

out to extract timeless truths and to

highlighting both Italian industrial design and the striking colour combinations and wild prints of the new-look knitwear and stretch pants especially those of Emilio Pucci, an admirer of Futurism's unconstrained clothing and the USA.

In Rome the Fontana sisters designed the wedding dress for President Truman's daughter in 1956 and for a host of American film stars flocking to Cinecittà in the 1960s. Marcello Mastroianni's suits in influenced men's fashion with their narrow lapels, single-breasted jackets, slim knotted ties, smaller and more pointed collars and sleeker trousers, without turn-ups, worn lower on the waist. Famous socialites like Marella Agnelli or Lee Radziwill wore the clothes of previously unknown Italian designers to major events like Truman Capote's in New York in 1966.

Industrial manufacturing developed. In Reggio Emilia Max Mara began producing prêt-a-porter clothes for the working modern woman especially for the USA while Missoni, in Varese, in 1953 also looked to the US market.

Cinema and celebrity, a powerful international force, were harnessed by Milan-based Giorgio Armani when his designs were used in the film to display the body in a new way – the woman more androgynous, more empowered, the man more feminine. Minimalist, Armani used grey and beige tones, creating a softer, deconstructed, shape of men's jacket by removing the interlining.

Further key figures to emerge in 1978 were Gianfranco Ferre whose designs were influenced by his training as an architect and the flamboyant Gianni Versace who created a new modern and gay aesthetic, a kind of post-modernism. Versace mixed styles from 1960s fashion, such as Pop Art or men's tight trousers or pointed shoes, with classical motifs to create an aesthetic of excess.

Also in 1978 Miuccia Prada took over the family luxury goods firm in Milan to become hugely influential in women's fashion with her austere palate of black, grey or brown. In contrast Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana (Dolce and Gabbana) in Rome in the 1980s employed the prestigious Magnum group photographer, Ferdinando Scianna, on location in Sicily to create an image that combined neo-realism and nostalgia through black and white photos of models in 'peasant' dress, playing on the idea of Italy as held abroad, combining a new modernity with the old-fashioned idea of 1950s Italy.

Today the dialogue between Italy's fashion houses, cinema and the USA continues. Italian fashion designers vie to dress stars on the red-carpet on Oscar night. Some stars become 'The Face' of a fashion house as did Monica Bellucci for Dolce and Gabbana or Cate Blanchett for Armani. Other designers are inspired by particular films like Antonioni's while the Internet era has seen continued growth in the sales and influence of Italian fashion design worldwide.

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nce again, a lecture on garden history drew record numbers of BIS members. This time, the garden in question was that of the Villa Hanbury at La Mortola and our speaker was Charles Quest-Ritson, a well-known authority on Italian gardens and a founding member, in 1983, of the . Present for the event were Thomas Hanbury's great-grandson, Daniel, and his wife Carolyn.

The talk took us through the colourful history of the property in chronological order beginning when, one spring morning in 1867, the 35-year old Thomas Hanbury first laid eyes on the craggy promontory seven kilometres to the east of Menton. The young Clapham-born Quaker businessman had made a substantial fortune developing property in Shanghai and now was on the hunt for a place of his own to develop, preferably in a more inviting climate than that of China. Legend has it that he and his pharmacologist-botanist brother Daniel had engaged an oarsman to row them along the coast on their search until they caught sight of the limestone slope which would become theirs. Voracious woodcutters and grazing goats had reduced the area to a straggly state and the ravaged 'villa' looked no more promising: mules sought refuge there, sharing quarters with a host of bats and swallows. Yet Thomas immediately saw the potential and Daniel, equally convinced, soon was to record it in a watercolour sketch. By May, Thomas had bought La Mortola with its surrounding acres and persuaded his handsome older brother to assist in organising what would become one of the largest examples of an English garden abroad.

Daniel rose to the challenge. Given his professional background, plants with medicinal properties were of particular interest to him. Nevertheless, he seemingly fell in with his younger brother's tastes. Between them, a glorious mixture – flowers and fruit – began to be planted; the momentum would continue until Daniel's death, aged 50, just eight years after the property was purchased. Thirty-six rock rose plants brought from their father's property at Clapham, went in that July. But the two brothers, in fact, turned in other directions as well. Thomas imported from China every variety of citrus fruit then in existence. From