

**studi
germanici**



English

2015

Editorial

Giorgio Manacorda

This editorial could well be dedicated to future change,

- given that it opens with an essay by Fabrizio Cambi describing the state of the art of Germanic Studies in Italy followed by an overview of current research by new scholars, the *Nachwuchs*, the future of the discipline;

- given that we are now in the process of finding a new President of the Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici (IISG).

A new generation in German Studies

Cambi's essay provides a broad overview of Germanic Studies and its most significant developments. Observing that changes in the discipline mirror changes witnessed elsewhere in the new millennium, he writes, "Between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new century, broad and structured reflection was carried out in Germanic Studies in Italy too." The identity of Germanic Studies was thus "under discussion". Indeed what happened? Both in terms of "what occurred" and "what came later"? To quote Cambi, "[T]oday we can grasp those theoretical and historiographical connections that went to form a critical juncture in Germanic Studies in Italy, as it came into necessary and productive comparison with the international discipline. At the same time we can also see the attempt to come up with new methods and topics within the university course reform implemented some fifteen years ago." For better or worse (and perhaps it is more for the worse), it is clear that the reform of Italian universities has, amongst other things, led to a rethinking of the criteria upon which the research and scholarship of Germanic Studies are based. This is also something that has affected other literary disciplines. Undoubtedly, "discussion of the move beyond the *Geisteswissenschaften* tradition" has involved "the abandonment of classic historicism



for a possible ‘neohistoricism’ sensitive to the changing historical situations and receptive of new criteria of philological and hermeneutic research.” However, the real tragedy is that “literature, literary criticism and writing in general have lost their central role” in the name of “a new ‘science of culture’ and of civilization through literary representation.” The fact is, however, that literature is not, or is only marginally, a “‘science of culture’ and of civilization”. There seem to be echoes of Lukács in this phrase, though the context here is not Marxism. It is as if literature were an epiphenomenon or a superstructure. The trend regarding literary geography also points in this direction, though nobody will ever convince me that the value of a text is dependent on the place where it was written. Just one example suffices: what does a category such as tragedy have to do with gender, with post-colonialism or with geography? Wasn’t the 20th century enough for us? Or the attempt on the part of the Modern to eliminate the tragic dimension? Although it is no longer discussed, without the tragic there is no literature. I believe that most lyrical poetry is nothing if it is not rooted in the tragic. It is not literature, if by this word, we intend ‘poetic’ worth. Poetic in the sense that it is what humans try (largely unsuccessfully) to know about themselves. Literature is the place in which the mind of humanity is mirrored. My impression is that a process has started whereby we are losing, or at least diminishing or misusing, our birthright and what it means to be part of our species and differentiates us from all other living beings. If this is the current trend, then I will try to say briefly what can, and perhaps must, be done to oppose such dangerous tendencies.

1. Literature is the living body of humanity and literature is its mystic body. It is what remains of, and what represents, humanity. Literature thus exists forever in time and space. It is the body of Christ, and we are Christ in that we are part of his body which, in turn, is us. Humanity (like Christ) always rises from its own ashes, as each actual historical member of the human race, being poetic (if that is what they are) nourishes the living body of literature. This transcends our humanity.



2. And it is sacred in that this is the location where the founding acts of meaning are preserved; it keeps them alive forever as they propagate meaning across time and space. They allow us to see humanity in action, poetry in action. They contain the *anthropos* (the single and the collective) at the apex of its being; the *anthropos*, and not any other species, which could never reflect and recognize itself *für ewig* in its own mystic body. In what is transmitted by hard (paper) copy, the literary ‘object of objects’.

3. Paradoxically, digital communication, the dematerializing of the literary object, causes the mystic body to materialize. In its non-materiality, it shows that it exists – as that it has always existed – in a world of things. Human material has always brought forth the non-material. Literature is akin to a digital ‘cloud’.

4. And what is this material composed of that remains after the death of the poet? The body of the poet is replaced by the literary body. Christ has become his church. Poetry, in the moment that it *is*, becomes part of its own church – and this goes by the name of literature. It is there that what appeared to be dead, the body of the poet, survives.

5. The literary body grows constantly over time and space (historically and geographically) and never diminishes in time and space (historically and geographically). Sappho and Leopardi are always present, awaiting the coming of Montale and so on.

6. History passes, but literature remains. History is not to be found in one place; it flows by in the river of time. The same water never flows by again. It only does so in literature, where the same water flows by time and again, though on each occasion it reveals different reflections and depths, even when our focus is on the same spot. The history found in history books is, at most, a tale – and if it is a tale then it is not history but a story. Real history books have just one point of view, and so other history books are necessary to say the same thing again. One poem is enough to say the same thing an infinite number of times.



7. The various ‘bodies’ that comprise the knowledge human beings produce are no more than collections, archives, quantities of items: the ordered list that a bibliography represents. They are libraries that exist and will always exist in time and space. Here there is ‘everything’ that has been produced on a certain subject, on one argument, from a certain angle for every discipline possible. But literature is not a discipline and it has no subject; therefore anything that presents itself as literature that is not real literature tumbles into the abyss of time, even though it might remain lodged in the present (merely taking up space). In the ‘cloud’ of literature there is Sappho, Leopardi, Montale and so on – but not all the names that are found in a library are here. Not all of those who aspire to, can actually *be* part of the mystic body, a part of other minds.

8. Not only does literature add to literature, making it a body that expands much like a universe expands. Literature also adds to the mythological body that forms the human mind, the human mind that has produced it. Indeed, literature continues in its eternal, continual enhancement of myths and mythologies (the sirens – but even more so – the cockroach or vulture in Kafka). Literature is the place where mythologies continue to be produced. Its archive, its library, is the human mind, the mind of minds; this is its disincarnate driving force through time and space.

I do not know if there is any sense in pitting this overview of literature against current sociological, neo-historical and geographical trends. But as I see it, the new generation is rather unquestioning in its acceptance of these passing fads. I realize, however, that the present editorial is not the place to discuss the sense, or the essence, of literature. We can only observe, as Cambi rightly does, that there have been some rather unedifying developments concerning the idea of what literature is.

And so to the general state of Germanic Studies. As we have seen, Cambi begins with the idea of an identity “under discussion”, while in the second section of his essay he asks if “a snapshot” of Germanic Studies is possible.



A process of doubt and enquiry seems to prevail here. Doubt and enquiry clearly make for potentially fertile ground, but this also allows a general sense of unease to flourish. It is as if the generational shock caused by this epoch-making shift is a liquid which is still far from being reabsorbed, while our discipline is immersed in it, just managing to keep afloat. On the one hand there is the older generation, fixed in its roles and its attitudes (and I obviously count myself among their number); on the other there are the young, often without a fixed position and therefore in search of a role (as well as pure survival). They have their different mindsets and ways of making use of the new technologies. Above all, however, I would say that the young have, gradually and inevitably, accepted a new way of doing research. By now, even scholars in the humanities have to be equipped to carry out research precisely like their counterparts in the 'hard' sciences. They have to come up with projects, and have the ability to find funds to carry them out, as well as finding the means to survive financially. It is with this in mind that the IISG has launched a training project for young people in fundraising methods. They should also realize that scholars of Germanic Studies are extremely lucky as far as Italian universities are concerned, as this is the only discipline in the humanities that can benefit from a specific national research body. Suffice to say that this year we have announced that there will be ten research grants – and this is only the beginning. However, in the future it will be increasingly necessary to have university departments providing a 50% co-financing of grants, just as it will be necessary for young scholars (albeit with our support, skills and organizational structure) to be able to draw on regional and European funds, as well as find any other potential financing for research. This is something that can only be done through the university (although this is by no means easy) or with a research body (which is easier).

We have thus supplemented the overview provided by Cambi with other considerations of what is going on with the younger generation – though this discussion is clearly not exhaustive, and is open to further debate. We have 26 researchers, 26 full biographical and bibliographical profiles and outlines of 24 areas of research. This the new generation of Italian scholars of Germanic Studies.



Passing on the presidency of the IISG

I have been an *ad interim* president, that is, the elderly board member whose job it was to lead the Institute after the resignation of Fabrizio Cambi. We had inherited a research body that was continually being threatened with closure, a research body that was burdened with substantial problems involving administrative propriety. It was an institute in default, both as regards the unavoidable institutional duties of any public body and, above all, as a research body, one of the twelve financed and overseen by the MIUR (the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research). All this duly led to reporting tax irregularities on the part of the previous administration to the national Court of Accounts. Indeed, it was important to draw a line between the responsibilities of the new board of directors and those of its predecessors. Draw a line and make a new start. This was essential in making a change from the old administration and the old way of doing things to the new administration and the new way of doing things. Ultimately, this was no more than a case of applying the laws, regulations and norms for the good of the research body and the success of its mission. Today, four years later, we can look at the Three-Year Action Plan which bore the following results:

1. Twenty four projects relating to six lines of research, organized chronologically according to 'ongoing' projects, 'new' projects and 'future' projects.

2. As IISG tradition dictates, the most important area of research regards literature, but this, it must be emphasized, is no longer organized in a way that was part of the Institute tradition. Indeed, 2011 saw the first award-grant project, "*La cultura germanica nell'Italia del Novecento. Istituzioni, ricerca, traduzione*", open up an area of research dedicated to literary mediation between Germany and Italy. In 2012 a FIRB (national research investment fund) project entitled "*Storia e mappe digitali della letteratura tedesca in Italia nel Novecento: editoria, campo letterario, interferenza*" added significantly to this field of research which continued with a second awarded grant project, "*La cultura*



tedesca in Italia 1946-1968. Contributi alla gestione del conflitto”. The first awarded grant project concluded in 2012 and the second will end in October 2015, while the FIRB project will come to a conclusion in 2018. In the meantime, there is a new research project dedicated to translated literature between Scandinavia and Italy. In addition, it is the Institute’s intention to launch a further research project regarding literary mediation dedicated to Giuseppe Gabetti, the first director of the IISG, whose archive we are in the process of acquiring.

3. All these projects form part of the ‘Translated Germanic Literature’ research unit.

4. Other areas of research, organized along various lines, regard linguistics, philosophy, history, cinema, music and the history of culture.

5. An important FIRB outcome is that the digital LT.it platform is now active.

6. We have begun to draw up an inventory of the IISG archive as regards its administrative and research activities, and, more generally, its cultural ventures. The complete legacy of the institute will finally be accessible to any interested parties.

7. The complete IISG library is now in the process of being catalogued according to OPAC parameters. Furthermore, work is beginning on saving the library; after much deterioration and damage from water seepage in basement storerooms, the books will be restored and moved to suitable rooms.

8. In 2011 the IISG had no researcher among its ranks. Today there is a full-time researcher (Dr. Bruno Berni), a researcher on a FIRB-financed five-year contract (Dr. Michele Sisto) and six scholars with research grants (Dr. Anna Antonello, Dr. Simone Costagli, Dr. Andrea Camparsi, Dr. Marialuisa Sergio, Dr. Massimiliano De Villa and Dr. Giuliano Lozzi), one of the grants being part of a con-



vention signed with the University of Tuscia. In addition, two more research grants are about to be assigned (one of which is with the University of Florence) as well as one research post (Dr. Diletta D'Eredità). This means that at the end of July 2015 there are a total of eight grants and one research post. A further research grant will be announced in November 2015.

9. “Studi Germanici”, a peer-reviewed (class A) journal, is issued every six months with online open access. Apart from being available to all scholars of Germanic Studies, the *Nachwuchs* in particular, the journal is also available in English, one of our aims being to spread an awareness of Italian Germanic Studies to the rest of the world. The same can be said for “Edizioni Studi Germanici”, our own publishing house. Starting from this year, these editions will also be peer-reviewed and available with online open access.

10. The new president will take up the reins of an institute that has been restored to full health, and will direct a proper national research body. A research body that not only no longer risks closure, but which can now boast many achievements and such robust management that the MIUR decided to increase its budget by 77% in 2014.

Translation from the Italian: Peter Douglas