

**Preliminary event: Director's Seminar****25 May 2021, 5:30 – 7 pm**

Ulrich Langer (University of Wisconsin-Madison), "Praise, Virtue, and Fiction of the Court"

Workshop: 28 May 2021, 2pm – 7 pm**"Reading the Virtues: Literary Culture and the Good Life in Europe, 1450-1750"**

The close link between ethics and "literature", in the wide sense of *litterae*, is one of the defining features of early modern culture. The emphasis on the good life and on self-cultivation, typical of early modern ethics, required differentiated sets of genres and readerships, stimulating their readers intellectually, while also involving them emotionally in the process of moral refinement. This workshop will investigate how virtue, language, and learning belonged together. How did literary culture provide guidance in institutional contexts (e.g. language academies and literary societies), through material features (e.g. books as artefacts with their own mediality), literary aspects (e.g. genre and narrative), and philosophical discussions concerning ethical issues in literature and literary *topoi* in ethics? Furthermore, this workshop will explore the thoroughly European dimension of early modern literary and moral culture: How did key notions, genres, and forms of life circulate in Europe? How were they communicated, and by whom? What role did translations, intermediary figures, and semantic differences in key words play in shaping the development and reception of these debates?

Programme**14:00 – WELCOME (Sara Miglietti & Matthias Roick)****14:10 – SESSION 1. Literature and Ethics in the Renaissance: Foundational Remarks**

Matthias Roick (University of Göttingen): 'Two Paths to Ethics: Philosophy and Literature in the *Ethica* section in Wolfenbüttel'. With a response by Jill Kraye (Warburg Institute).

Today, we are used to seeing ethics mostly as a philosophical discipline, theorizing about norms and rules or applying these norms and rules to specific problems and domains. The profile of ethics in the Renaissance was different, however. Together with philosophy, literature was seen as another important path to ethics. While philosophy worked mainly on a direct, conceptual level, employing precepts, the literary treatment of ethics was construed as more accessible to readers (especially younger readers), using an indirect approach and availing itself of examples. My paper will take a closer look at the specifics of this "two-way" model. I will examine the bibliographical literature of the time, discuss to which extent this model had a special connection to the tenets of early modern virtue ethics, and examine how it was implemented in the specific context of the *Ethica* section in Wolfenbüttel.

Claudia Rossignoli (University of St Andrews): "Non merita il nome di scrittore, non che di poeta, chi non inseagna i buoni costume": Reading the Virtues in Renaissance Poetic Theory'. With a response by David Lines (University of Warwick).

As a result of the overpowering influence of the Aristotelian tradition on sixteenth century Italian poetic theory, our collective reflection on these critical materials has naturally clustered around the specific aspects that define Aristotle's discourse in his *Poetics*, and the ways in which Renaissance theorist, interpreters and commentators engaged with the idiosyncrasies of this challenging treatise. In tracing the ascendancy of Aristotelian criticism, we often endorse the implicit construction of a progressive but inaccurately binary narrative, in which an earlier and more Horatian moment is superseded by an increasingly Aristotelian framework that brings a radical change of focus. Yet ethical concerns, concisely encapsulated in the Horatian precept of '*miscere utile dulci*' and as such associated with his supposedly superseded poetic conceptualisation, continue to inform poetic considerations and theorizations in meaningful ways. Focusing on a number of significant examples



(including Capriano, Varchi, Piccolomini, Tasso), this paper will examine the substantial influence of ethical reflections in theorizations about poetics and literary writings. It aims to demonstrate on the one hand that notions of literary writing were discussed and elaborated within a complex and stratified conceptual framework. On the other, that the evolving discourse on poetics (and on the *Poetics*) in sixteenth-century Italy remains inseparable from its broader philosophical substratum, and cannot be resolved with the limits of an exclusively literary discourse.

Cecilia Muratori (Università Ca' Foscari, Venice): ‘A “Mirror for Promoting Good Behaviour”: Physiognomics as Ethical Practice’. With a response by Valentina Lepri (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw).

Physiognomics is often viewed as a deterministic discipline which claims to be able to understand a person’s character by reading bodily signs. As such, physiognomics has been lately accused of being intrinsically racist, paving the way for fascist ideologies. Yet, in the Renaissance physiognomics was recognised as a branch of philosophy which focuses on the varied interactions of the body and the soul, not only giving instruments to the practitioner to recognize certain character traits by examining bodily features, but also providing information on how to intervene on the body in order to trigger certain changes at the level of the soul. The thesis of this paper is that as such physiognomics was inherently rooted in ethical reflection. I will analyse physiognomics’ bearing on ethics by emphasising the varied genres in which physiognomic reflections were presented, ranging from large treatises (such as Della Porta’s) to short manuals intended for a broad audience, which were often made available in multiple languages on the European market.

16:10 – Break

16:30 – SESSION 2. From page to stage: ethical themes in Renaissance novellas and plays

Enrica Zanin (Université de Strasbourg): ‘Reading the Virtues in the Stories of Vices: Ethics and Poetics in Early Modern Novellas’. With a response by Micha Lazarus (Trinity College, Cambridge / Warburg Institute).

Although early modern novellas, as Bandello wrote, are *disonestissime*, according to Pontano they promote good manners (*ad bonos mores institutae*). This paper aims to resolve this paradox by reading early modern European novellas through the lenses of Aristotelian ethics and considering the reading strategies of Renaissance readership. The novellas are not only regarded as a pleasure reading but also as a source of ethical knowledge. However, at the end of the sixteenth century, the collections of novellas by Boccaccio, Bandello and many others are forbidden and considered as a dangerous reading, not only in Italy, but also in France, in Spain and in England. The novellas can no longer be both *disonestissime* and *moratae*. I will try to explain this change, by considering the evolution of writing practices and reading strategies.

Daniela D’Eugenio (University of Arkansas): “Ingegno spesso, e alta virtude.” Reading the Virtues in *Le cento novelle*’s Day VI’. With a response by Simon Gilson (Magdalen College, Oxford).

Vincenzo Brusantino’s *Le cento novelle* (1554) represents a reinterpretation of Boccaccio’s Decameron in octaves of hendecasyllables and with a new ethical orientation. The most evident addition to the original text includes the one-hundred allegories and proverbs at the beginning of each novella. Those of Day VI focus on virtue and courtesy as applied to rhetorical shrewdness. They determine a set of rules for respectful behaviors and appropriate verbal manners that inform the relationship between characters and guarantee the well-being of society. In *Le cento novelle*, memorable and clever replies illustrate the infinite possibilities of verbal ingenuity provided that the speaker is skilled enough to use them effectively and moderately. Brusantino recognizes the authority of the introductory proverbs’ message and supports it through his textual emendations to Boccaccio’s

stories. These emendations generally adhere to the novella's ethical objective instead of explaining it etiologically, through the stories' events and characters.

Eugenio Refini (New York University): 'Staging the Virtues: Allegory, Drama, Spiritual Practice'. With a response by Ullrich Langer (University of Wisconsin-Madison).

If it is true that, in early modern culture, virtues were often read (that is, they were made the object of reading and interpretation), this paper looks at instances in which virtues were staged. The staging of virtues – for instance, within the context of Renaissance and Baroque allegorical drama – was indeed a form of reading: on the one hand, the translation of virtues (and vices, for that matter) into allegorical personifications did entail interpretive dynamics that made the staging of a given performance comparable to the reading of a book of morals; on the other hand, most allegorical plays – moralities, in particular – were eventually destined to be consumed as texts to be read, rather than performed. By looking at the interplay of performance and reading, I aim to show that the theatrical model provided early modernity with powerful tools for the crafting of moral codes and the promotion of confessionally-inflected spiritual practices.

18:30: Concluding remarks and future prospects