

A LAND OF SCOUNDRELS, RUFFIANS, AND MISERABLE

how Italian RPG Brancalonia mediates culture

BACKGROUND:

This research aims to analyze the representation of Italian culture in role-playing games created by Italian authors, focusing on the case of **Brancalonia**, a setting book for the fifth edition of Dungeons & Dragons published by Acheron Books. The imprint - specialized in Italian genre fiction books and game-books - is the creator of the **Spaghetti Fantasy project**, a multi-author effort aimed at renew interest in the **Italian Fantastic** genre. "*Zappa e Spada*" (hoe and sword) is a mock on the term "*Cappa e Spada*" (*swashbuckler novel* or *roman de cape et d'épée*).

The study is of particular interest as the publication of this volume, which has received numerous international awards, stands at a **historical moment of the re-evaluation of fringe RPGs as a possible starting point for other mainstream narrative products**, such as audiovisual products like the Amazon series *Tales From the Loop*.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What are the **worldbuilding strategies** used in Brancalonia to mediate the Italian culture into products that aim to be mainstream?
- How the **intertextual references** are negotiated and intertwined with other contemporary fantastic tropes?

METHODS:

From a methodological point of view, this study uses **textual analysis** and **close reading** of some of the intertextual references presented in the volumes that constitute Brancalonia canon and the metatexts and peritexts that are used in order to answer the two research questions.

RESULTS:

RPGs nowadays have a wider currency in popular culture, their tropes and terms bond players through shared discourse. Brancalonia, successfully financed through a Kickstarter campaign, is an unicum in the sector of fantasy RPGs - historically dominated by settings derived from Anglo-Saxon and Norse mythology - exploiting an underground strand rooted in cult movies, stereotypes, and a rich cultural tradition in order to build a italianish low fantasy D&D setting. In particular:

- the **metatextual and peritextual elements** are critical to **deliver italian stereotypes, and cultural references** to an international audience (see the box on the right);
- the choice of a **low fantasy setting** deviates strongly from the standard RPG canon, allowing the authors to use **irony to convey culture**;
- the **new game mechanics** introduced, such as rules for brawls and non-lethal fistfights and the low level cap, are an **integral part of the italianish setting**;
- **intertextuality** in Brancalonia is not only a form of allusion to other texts but a **foundational element** on which the authors base the whole work.

CONCLUSIONS:

Brancalonia stands at the intersection of numerous Italian cultural texts: among the others, the films of Monicelli; those of Bud Spencer and Terence Hill; the masterpieces of Italo Calvino, Carlo Collodi, Dante Alighieri and other Italian authors; popular and cultural images repertoires, including advertising. It is possible to read Brancalonia as a **literary text devoted to intentionally spreading italian culture** through the skilful manipulation of **metatextual and peritextual elements** and **specific game mechanics**. Traditional elements from the italian canon are introduced to make the game more attractive internationally.



MAP OF "IL REGNO DI TAGLIA" (THE KINGDOM)

REFERENCES:

- Zagal, J. P., & Deterding, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Role-Playing Game Studies*. Transmedia Foundations. Routledge.
- Ilieva, A. (2013). Cultural Languages of Role-Playing. *International Journal of Role-Playing*, 4, 26–38.
- Jara, D. (2013). A Closer Look at the (Rule-) Books: Framings and Paratexts in Tabletop Role-playing Games. *International Journal of Role-Playing*, 4, 39–54.



Notable characters from movies and theatre



Popular and literary references



Paintings and engravings



Cap. Cardoni.

Maramao.

CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTARY INDUSTRY IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

My research focuses on the **contemporary Italian documentary industry**. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the **new modes of production and distribution** of Italian documentaries since 2004 (*Sky Italia* and *Decreto Urbani*)



BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Media Industry Studies (Production Studies and Political economy)

Absence of bibliography (only historical, philosophical and aesthetic studies)

Analysis: qualitative (*in-depth interviews* with stakeholders) and quantitative (Ministry data, ANICA annual reports, box office numbers)



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the **financial, production and distribution practices** of the Italian documentary industry?

Do Italian docs respond to a **market** or are they completely detached from it?

What are the **new demands** of broadcasters and VOD platforms?

What are the **future prospects** for the Italian documentary?



STATE OF RESEARCH

Previous step: *Literature review* (history of Italian documentary and contemporary doc. studies)

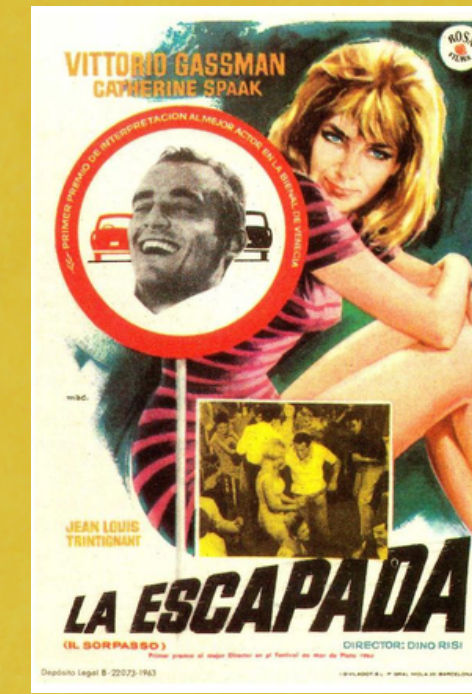
Next step: collection of quantitative and qualitative data.

RELATED LITERATURE

BERTOZZI MARCO, *Storia del documentario italiano: immagini e culture dell'altro cinema*. Venezia: Marsilio, 2017.

DOTTORINI DANIELE, *Per un cinema del reale: forme e pratiche del documentario italiano contemporaneo*. Udine: Forum, 2013.

SØRENSEN EJBYE I, *Documentary in a Multiplatform Context*. Kbh.: Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen, 2012.



IL SORPASSO – THE ITALIAN POST–WAR NOUVEAU RICHE

BACKGROUND

- Post-war context: reconstruction, social upheaval, intra-migration
- Technological development: personal automobile, film production, speed, modernity and accessibility
- Artistic context: *Commedia All'Italiana*, internationalisation, social realism, modernism/Antonioni

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What did *Il Sorpasso* predict about Italian contemporary culture/society/media? What didn't it?
- What is the film trying to say? Who or what does it criticise?
- How do we position the film artistically? To what movements does it respond to, and why?

RESULTS

- Consumerism, social mobility and (self?)-destruction
- Modernity, ennui and existential crisis
- Against (a different type of) boredom – the need to laugh, the need to shock
- The (re)writing Audiences of time and place – varying receptions, diverse interpretations, differing influences



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Looking at US from Afar

Representations and Manipulations of Italian Culture in Podcast Storytelling

Background

- Issues with fruition of podcasts across international boundaries and different-language-speaking communities
- The role of Media conglomerates and multinationals
- Wondery's Bunga Bunga

Research leading questions

- How podcasts storytelling represent and mediate Italian culture globally?
- What is the image of Italy given in Bunga Bunga?
- May the Italian translated version of Bunga Bunga have an impact on Italian listeners' perception of Italy?



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Results

- Unmentioned parallelism between Silvio Berlusconi and Donald Trump
- Italy as a dystopian and distorted version of the American Society
- The Italian translated version has no form of localization, therefore it sounds parodic and lacks of authenticity

Methods

Post-classical narrative analysis. Marie-Laure Ryan media - conscious narrative theory. Jillian DeMair narratological approach to analysis of podcasts.

References

Whitney, Cummings, host. *Bunga Bunga*. Wondery, August-September 2020.
Tempest, Nadia, host. *Bunga Bunga*. Wondery, April-May 2020.

Ask if anyone has seen film / heard of it

Background

Historical context - WW2, 20 years of fascism, migration abroad but also intra-migration (South to North - show family sidecar scene?)

film shows journey of Roman and Milanese from Rome to coast ("The artists and poets are Roman, while the Milanese 'support' them"), ends in Bologna, with main character switching to Bolognese dialect)

Technological innovation - personal automobile, "four-wheeled man", aspiration for mobility that mirrors social mobility ('it feels like we're in England' - show imdb image), boat the ultimate 'sign you've made it'

Artistic context - Commedia dell'Italiana (need to laugh after WW2), social realism, modernity but not modernism (compared to aesthetic distance, alienation and poetic imagism of Antonioni)

Research questions

Prediction - consumerism, consumption but lack of work ethic, surrounded by destruction and historical residue ('piles of debris everywhere' - Godard?), society based around transport, change in class, Berlusconi (prediction of media? Gassmann's character based on eccentric film producers) - mobility vs social mobility?

Position Il Sorpasso - questioning Commedia dell'Italiana? Jolt of ending, critique of social realism/modernism? Antonioni? L'Avventura (a journey without conclusion?) - "race to nowhere, that ends in oblivion" (Ettore Scola) - 'criticism of both old and new Italy' - Remi Fournier Lanzoni

Show ending scene?

Results

Destruction - what is destroyed at the end, three main characters, who and what survives

Modernity, ennui, existential crisis - compared to Antonioni/Fellini - crisis of consumption/class (Gassmann) and of ennui (Trintignant)

Reception - French-Italian co-production (Trintignant), highlight different posters/titles, different markets (Success in France, Argentina, USA (loved by Scorsese, who saw Gassman's journey as a sort of question mark))

Sorpasso - car overtaking another car - a type of person, a bully who falsely boasts about themselves (fanfaron - French title) - sorpasso means someone cocky in Argentina

Links to Easy Rider (An American Il Sorpasso - Ettore Scola), director influenced by Il Sorpasso

Leftovers

Horn - led to mass sales in the thousands, banned as causing a public nuisance
Commedia Inglese - look up this term