

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION

January 8-11, 2026
Toronto (Canada)

Academic Freedom, Institutional Constraints, and the “Family” of Italian Letters

Panel Sponsor: Forum on 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-Century Italian Studies

Proposal Abstract:

Academic freedom and representation have become central concerns in contemporary discussions about higher education and intellectual discourse. But these questions are not new: throughout history, institutions—whether academies, royal courts, universities, or the Church—have shaped, constrained, and even self-regulated the production of knowledge. Like families, such institutions create networks of support, transmission, and continuity, yet they also impose norms that may lead to self-censorship, exclusion, or the suppression of dissenting voices.

This panel seeks to examine how intellectuals, writers, and artists working in Italy from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries navigated the tension between institutional affiliation and personal expression. What were the limits of academic and artistic freedom within structured, often hierarchical communities? How did institutional belonging affect what could be said, written, or circulated? How did figures working within academies, universities, and other cultural institutions reconcile personal convictions with the expectations of their intellectual “family”? And how might these historical examples shed light on our own position within academic institutions, including the MLA itself?

We invite papers that explore, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- The role of academies, courts, universities, and religious institutions in shaping intellectual discourse
- Self-censorship and strategies of coded, veiled, or indirect expression
- Patronage and dependency: intellectual autonomy within structured hierarchies
- The circulation and suppression of dissenting ideas
- The consequences of expulsion, exile, or ostracization from institutional networks
- The construction of intellectual genealogies and the limits of scholarly “families”

This panel welcomes interdisciplinary perspectives from scholars of literature, history, philosophy, and cultural studies, inviting a critical reexamination of the relationship between intellectual freedom and institutional belonging.

Submission Deadline: 17 March 2025

Please send an abstract of no more than 300 words to Michael Subialka (msubialka@ucdavis.edu) or Bradford Masoni (bradford.a.masoni@gmail.com).

Family Resemblances: Genealogies of Influence in Italian Literature and Culture

Panel Sponsor: Forum on 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-Century Italian Studies

Proposal Abstract:

The idea of *family resemblances* extends beyond kinship and biology; it shapes intellectual, artistic, and cultural lineages. In the context of 17th- to 19th-century Italian studies, how do we trace genealogies of influence across literary traditions, artistic movements, and intellectual histories? How do writers, thinkers, artists, and institutions assert, obscure, or reinvent their ties to past traditions? This panel explores the concept of resemblance—both real and constructed—as it manifests in literature, philosophy, art, and cultural discourse in early modern and modern Italy.

We invite papers that explore, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Literary, philosophical, and artistic inheritance: how writers claim or reject their intellectual ancestry
- The role of dynasties, academies, and institutions in shaping cultural memory and identity
- Transnational influences: Italy's intellectual connections with other nations and traditions
- Pseudonyms, literary doubles, and the construction of authorial identity
- Political and ideological legacies: contested histories and rewritten genealogies
- The evolution of genre and stylistic and/or artistic traditions across time
- Linguistic and dialectal continuities as forms of cultural “family resemblances”

This panel encourages interdisciplinary perspectives and welcomes contributions from scholars working in literature, history, philosophy, art history, and cultural studies. By examining the ways in which familial, intellectual, and artistic connections are forged, imagined, or erased, we seek to illuminate the dynamic interplay of tradition and innovation in Italian studies.

Submission Deadline: 17 March 2025

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Intellectual Lineages: Mentorship, Kinship, and the Shaping of Italian Studies

Roundtable Sponsor: Forum on 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-Century Italian Studies

Proposal Abstract:

Mentorship is central to academic and professional development, shaping intellectual traditions through systems of kinship, trust, and resemblance. Like familial structures, mentorship networks sustain disciplines by fostering knowledge transmission, yet they also risk reinforcing exclusivity, self-replication, and insularity. In the field of Italian studies, how have mentorship relationships—past and present—defined scholarly identity, disciplinary growth, and pedagogical approaches?

This roundtable discussion brings together scholars at various career stages to reflect on mentorship as both a historical phenomenon in 17th- to 19th-century Italy and a present-day practice in Italian studies. How did Italian academies, salons, *botteghe*, and universities structure mentorship, and how do modern mentorship models continue or diverge from these traditions? What are the benefits and challenges of structuring academic relationships around intellectual affinity and professional lineage? How do we ensure that mentorship fosters diversity and innovation rather than exclusivity?

Participants will share experiences, insights, and concerns about mentorship's role in shaping research, pedagogy, and professional networks. Topics for discussion may include:

- Mentorship structures in historical Italian institutions (*accademie*, universities, literary circles)
- Patronage and apprenticeship as intellectual transmission models
- The risks and rewards of scholarly “families” in disciplinary development
- The influence of mentorship on research directions and institutional cultures
- Addressing diversity, accessibility, and equity in mentorship today
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This roundtable welcomes scholars from literature, history, philosophy, and cultural studies, fostering an open dialogue on the evolving role of mentorship in Italian studies and beyond.

Submission Deadline: 17 March 2025

Please send an abstract of no more than 300 words to Michael Subialka (msubialka@ucdavis.edu) or Bradford Masoni (bradford.a.masoni@gmail.com).