

Doctoral Programme in Linguistic, Philological and Literary Sciences  
International Conference

## «Dall'ombre al chiaro lume» The Enigma and its declensions in Literature

PADUA, 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> MAY 2020

Nelle tenebre oscure è il mio soggiorno;  
chè se dall'ombre al chiaro lume passo,  
tosto l'alma da me sen fugge, come  
sen fugge il sogno all'apparir del giorno;  
e le mie membra disunite lasso,  
e l'esser perdo, con la vita, e 'l nome.

Galileo Galilei, *Enimma*\*

The International Doctoral Conference at the University of Padua is an interdisciplinary and bilingual forum which takes place every year. This year the conference is open to PhD students, researchers and scholars interested in the topic of literary and linguistic enigmas from a broader historical and socio-cultural perspective.

This year's conference grounds its interest in the enigma in the acknowledgment of two opposite forces, in both every-day and literary language, which drive written and oral communication: one of them aims at clarity and straightforwardness, the other at obscurity and ambiguity. These two tensions cause different formal approaches even in relation to the same discourse referent.

In his paper published in the «Asino d'oro» (1991), Fortini problematizes the notions of obscurity and complexity placing them at the extremities of the same formal segment. According to him, the difference between obscurity and complexity lies on the nature of "darkness", which «cannot and must ever not be [...] 'won' or 'overcome' since its *raison d'être* lies in being [...] a particular kind of 'figure of speech'». In fact, complexity implies at least one chance of effectively decoding the hidden meaning.

The enigma falls into the category of complexity. The term "enigma" generally identifies the whole literary process which, directly or indirectly, poses a question, whose solution is key to access the deepest meaning of the texts. Thus, in its final shape, the enigma calls for a kind of literature which welcomes complexity and uses it to conceal its meaning, whose existence is thus implicitly taken for granted («Should it prove that a second answer is

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\* «I stay in the darkness, / since if I get out in the light / my soul leaves me at once, / just like a dream disappears at dawn, / and my limbs detach, / and lose my own being with my life, and my name» (trans. GRECO 2018).

possible, in accord with the rules but not suspected by the questioner, then it will go badly with him: he is caught in his own trap» HUIZINGA 1980).

Even when written as a polysemous sentence with an autonomous – though often paradoxical – meaning, the enigma always poses to the addressee the challenge of overcoming conventional interpretations and readings. This can be possible through the reduction of the manifold elements of the enigma to few words, among which the revealing one must be identified. However, this process is not as straightforward as it may seem since the enigma prioritizes the performative function of language over its communicative one.

Lastly, the enigma always issues a challenge between who holds knowledge and who aims at acquiring it. This intrinsic hierarchical asymmetry can finally be altered by the addressee, as soon as s/he finds the solution and thus gains access to the addresser's cultural *élite*.

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Submissions related to the following areas of interest are welcomed: Ancient Greek and Latin, Romance, Italian, English and French literature and philology; History of Language and Linguistics; Comparative Literature and Theory of Literature. Paper proposals should be related to one of the following macro-areas:

#### 📌 THE SUBJECT OF THE ENIGMA

From the Eighties onwards, thematology has opened new research paths in literature studies. By prioritizing contextualization, it has helped analyze the subjects presented by enigmas within a broader historical and socio-cultural framework as well as reduce the risk of creating thematic catalogues based on sterile content-related criteria. The goal of this Conference is thus to highlight those links between the content of the enigma and the context from which it derives and by which is influenced both from a synchronic and/or diachronic perspective. Comparisons between different historical and cultural periods are highly appreciated.

Are there any signs of continuity in the development of the themes related to the enigma over time, ideally from Sophocle's to Bolaño's? Are there any variations in the themes mentioned in enigmas which mirror broader socio-cultural changes? Which literary genres have included the highest number of enigmas and in which historical period? Have coeval authors produced enigmas antithetical in content? If so, why?

This macro-area aims to analyze the declensions of the subjects related to the enigma within a broad historical and socio-cultural framework, which ranges from ancient times to close contemporaneity.

#### 📌 THE GENRE AND FORM OF THE ENIGMA

The notions of literary genre, style and language can be useful means to examine how an enigma can assume different forms, or masterplots. Such formal variations may affect the whole structure of the texts, as in the case of the development of a specific literary genre, or only some of its components (its style or language), as in the case of the use of a given figure of speech, metrical structure, or lexical relation between the title and the text of a poetical composition.

This macro-area aims to analyze the different forms the enigma can assume over time, especially from the point of view of its literary genre, style and language.

## 6 THE RECEPTION OF THE ENIGMA

Reception is the essence of any enigma and it thus significantly influences its formulation, especially in terms of genre, form and theme. However, the complexity of the code underlying the enigma affects the width of its audience. When the enigma is channeled through an accessible code, it attracts a large audience, as in the case of puzzle magazines, detective or *noir* novels. On the contrary, the enigma attracts a narrower audience when it is characterized by a more exclusive code. This choice may be caused by either extrinsic or intrinsic reasons: the former may aim to avoid censure, the latter to create an intellectual challenge with the addressee. However, enigmas can also be unsolved. An enigma can be referred to as unsolved, though still solvable, when the key to its code is missing. On the contrary, the enigma can be referred to as unsolvable when its key does not exist, probably because of an either intended or accidental internal contradiction in the formulation of enigma itself.

This macro-area aims to analyze the reception of the enigma, in particular the relation between addresser and addressee and the accessibility of the code characterizing the enigma from a historical, political, cultural and linguistic point of view.

The Conference will be held in Padua on 21-22 May 2020 and will host the following keynote speakers:

Stefano Bartezzaghi (IULM)  
Federico Bertoni (Università di Bologna)  
Salvatore Monda (Università del Molise)  
Christelle Reggiani (Sorbonne Université)

## PAPER SUBMISSION

All submissions must be written either in Italian or English and sent as PDF documents to [convegnoenigma.unipd@gmail.com](mailto:convegnoenigma.unipd@gmail.com). Each submission must include:

- ♦ A brief academic biography, which should mention the author's name, surname, academic email, current affiliation and selected bibliography (each biography should be no more than 200 characters);
- ♦ An abstract with a short bibliography (each abstract should be no more than 500 characters, bibliography excluded).

Notifications of acceptance or refusal will be sent out by February 15, 2020. Speakers will be given 25 minutes maximum each. Submissions imply the author's commitment to join the Conference. Registration also includes a lunch break on the second day of the Conference.

Accepted full papers will be published in the conference proceedings series.

For further information please contact [convegnoenigma.unipd@gmail.com](mailto:convegnoenigma.unipd@gmail.com) or visit the website <http://www.maldura.unipd.it/convegno-enigma>.

## IMPORTANT DATES

Deadline for submission: January 30, 2020.

Notification of acceptance: February 15, 2020.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

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