

# JOHN FANTE: THIRTY YEARS AFTER

December 11-12, 2025  
Ca' Foscari University of Venice



  
Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice  
Department of Linguistics  
and Comparative Cultural Studies

With the collaboration of

*il dio di mia parte*  
**John  
Fante  
festival**

Organizers: Elisa Bordin and Enrico Mariani

This conference is part of the PRIN (Research Projects of National Relevant Interest): "Literary California 1884-2022: Spaces of Exception, Spaces of Disaster," funded by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) in the context of the plan Next-GenerationEU – PNRR, Fondo per il Programma Nazionale di Ricerca e Progetti di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale (PRIN) – CUP N.H53D23007010006.

  
Finanziato  
dall'Unione europea  
NextGenerationEU

  
Ministero  
dell'Università  
e della Ricerca

  
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## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Thursday December 11 | SALA TESA 1 (Zattere)

### ROUNDTABLE

**Brando Francesco Bonsanti (Roma Tre University)**

**“A New (Anti)Hero: Ambition, Irony and Failure in John Fante’s *The Road To Los Angeles*”**

This paper aims to demonstrate how, in the novel *The Road to Los Angeles*, the protagonist (and author’s alter ego) Arturo Bandini embodies a set of traits that clearly exemplify the differences between the first and second generations of Italian immigrants in North America.

The analysis begins with a comparison between Arturo and the main characters of the serialized novels of Bernardino Ciambelli, the most prominent and prolific popular novelist of the Italian Colony in the United States between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. If, as Antonio Gramsci’s insights on popular literature suggest (*Quaderni del carcere, Volume secondo. Quaderni 6-11*) – later also taken up by Umberto Eco’s *Il Superuomo di massa* –, the character of detective Boni in *I Misteri di Mulberry Street* (1893) can be understood as a full-fledged “Superman,” Arturo Bandini instead represents, in many ways, a complete subversion of this particular feuilleton-type hero. The novel offers numerous examples, all of which are tied to the huge contrast between Arturo’s perception of himself (“Superman Bandini”, “Dictator Bandini”) and the reality he faces, which subject him to a seemingly endless series of daily failures. Among these, three episodes are particularly significant: his “war” against an army of crabs, his working experience in a cannery, and his attempt to write a novel—a work that not only echoes many features of the serialized novel but also has a protagonist who is the idealized, Americanized and superhuman version of Bandini himself.

These contrasts – between the Superman and his opposite, between an “heroic” representation having the clear goal to challenge certain stereotypes and a parodic one – reveal much of the distance that, from a historical, cultural, material and social point of view separates the first Italian immigrants in the United States from their American-born children, and seem to provide confirmation to the distinction proposed by Daniel Aaron in his seminal essay *The Hyphenate Writer and the American Letters*. But Arturo Bandini’s exaggerated ambition and distorted self-perception are also relevant for another key aspect: his dreams are channeled into the desire to become a writer (“John Keats Bandini”), that is, to exercise a profession that is distinctly different from what he unequivocally considers humble occupations. Through, then, a comparison between Arturo’s attitude toward labor – marked by multiple, short-lived and failed experiences – and the work ethic that instead characterizes the literary depictions of Fante’s father (Svevo Bandini in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, Nick Molise in *The Brotherhood of the Grape*), it will thus be possible to add further important elements to the differences existing between the respective generations in terms of both their perception of the world and of their own positioning within it.

**Giuseppe Chiavaroli (University of Modena And Reggio Emilia)**

**“John Fante as Screenwriter: Realization and Recognition in the Shadow of Writing”**

John Fante’s activity as a Hollywood screenwriter, spanning roughly three decades, remains a relatively unexplored field within the broader spectrum of Fante studies. Nevertheless, an in-depth examination of his scripts – produced and unproduced alike – can significantly deepen our understanding of his literary imagination, his reflections on writing, and his complex relationship with Italy, his father’s homeland. This intervention aims to highlight Fante’s critical stance towards the act of writing itself, a theme notably echoed in his midlife novella “My Dog Stupid” (included in the posthumously published collection *West of Rome*, 1986), which explicitly critiques the Hollywood screenplay format as artistically stifling. In a revealing 1979 interview with Ben Pleasants, Fante discusses screenwriting projects which, despite being particularly meaningful to him, were never produced. Among these scripts, *King of the Wind* (1958-1960), praised by

Fante himself as “beautiful,” and *The Roses* (ca. 1960), a screenplay set in Naples exploring cross-cultural romantic relationships, stand out as examples of his unfulfilled cinematic ambitions and personal attachments to Italy (Pleasants, 1979).

According to Neil Gordon (1993), Fante’s career in Hollywood reflects a fundamental paradox between his artistic realization and the industry’s demands, epitomizing the conflict between literary authenticity and commercial constraints. This tension, intensified by Fante’s need for financial stability, ultimately restricted his full artistic expression, relegating many of his finest works to posthumous recognition. Furthermore, Gordon underscores that Fante’s early literary rejections and prolonged periods of professional obscurity significantly shaped his ambivalence towards Hollywood and its pervasive materialism.

Fante’s scripts, particularly those with Italian settings, also illuminate his relationship with his cultural origins and immigrant identity. The recurring Italian backdrop in his screenplays, as demonstrated by *The Roses*, is indicative of a personal, almost nostalgic dialogue with his father’s homeland, further enriching the biographical and autobiographical elements present throughout his literary corpus. This intervention, therefore, will analyze Fante’s screenwriting activity not merely as a commercial detour but as a critical space reflecting key tensions in his artistic journey – between novelistic freedom and cinematic constraint, artistic ambition and economic necessity, and between his Californian present and Italian heritage. The analysis will rely on interviews (Pleasants, 1979), critical essays (Gordon, 1993), and textual examination of Fante’s screenplays, ultimately offering new insights into his multifaceted legacy.

#### **Giovanna Di Lello (Independent Scholar and director of the John Fante Festival “Il dio di mio padre”) “John Fante: Voices of a Transclass”**

John Fante’s work, particularly his novels, offers significant insight into the transclass experience, as elaborated by French philosopher Chantal Jaquet. This paper aims to analyze how much the transclass condition of John Fante, is present in his work and how it determines his style, particularly the point of view of the narrator. Several works will be examined, including *Full of Life* and *The Brotherhood of the Grape*, in which the figure of the father is predominant and his Italian origins are highlighted. This contribution is part of the debate on Italian American identity and representation.

The term transclass, developed by Jaquet, refers to someone who has distanced themselves from their social origins to integrate into social class, and in doing so avoids reproducing their class of origin. This concept defines above all the transition, that often takes on a narrative value, given the trials and tribulations a person must endure to escape their condition. This is very present in Fante’s work. The driving force behind this passing in his novels and in his life is literature, becoming a writer. The essence of transclass is that of a double distance from the milieu of origin and arrival, which determines a double narrative perspective, an ambivalence that defines Fante’s style.

John Fante’s main characters, as transclass individuals, experience a profound existential conflict. On the one hand, they are proud of their origins, but on the other, they feel attracted to a world that seems to promise opportunities and recognition. It is manifested through the relationship of the main characters with his fathers and their origins. This bond reveals the social disadvantages of their family and is also a critical viewpoint on society. This perspective allows for an exploration of the social structures that influence individual destiny, emphasizing how the non-reproduction of one’s social class occurs through exception. Shame and guilt, both feelings make the transition of the transclass possible. In Fante, these two feelings are very present and determine a narrative pause in his works that leads to reflection, often evoked through irony or other rhetorical tropes.

To free himself from the affection of shame and guilt, the main character must confront his past and reconcile with his origins. This process is not only personal, but collective: his identity is complex and plural, the result of trans-individual interactions and dynamics. His experience becomes representative of a broader condition, highlighting how the individual journey can reveal the social and cultural tensions of an entire generation. Fante manages to reveal the social forces that shape the human experience, making his work still relevant today.

**Sostene M. Zangari (Independent Scholar)**

**“Goods Vs Gods: John Fante’s Literary Journey to Regain Paradise”**

The literary career of John Fante can be read through the lens of two contrasting categories, which might be labelled as “Goods” and “Gods.” As a marginal American, John Fante was trapped between the two opposing forces, outlined by Werner Sollors, of consent and descent, with the former taking the shape of adaptation to consumer culture (“the goods”), while the latter being a complicated relationship to his heritage and, more broadly, to the marginal identity (“the gods”). In the early novels in particular, Fante’s literary double Arturo Bandini reacts to the social marginality marked by his Italian origins and working-class status with a pronounced tendency to create for himself strong, successful fictional personae, which sublimate the character’s impulse to “get even” with the marginal position where mainstream US society relegates him. However, far from providing viable alternative identities, these phantasies come across as naïve longings of a hypertrophic unadjusted ego and do not provide relief from the nagging feeling of exclusion. Further, these identities witness the character’s imprisonment in an understanding of American identity marked by conspicuous consumption, with people fashioning themselves as a goods on display. With women in particular, Bandini is quite self-conscious about their failure to conform to American standards of Hollywood womanhood, and is therefore trapped within alternate impulses of attraction and rejection.

On the other hand, relationship to the “Gods” themselves is similarly problematic, providing a parallel dialectic of attraction and rejection. The few moments when Fante’s early protagonists show appreciation for their families and their simple peasant ways look like metaphorical unspoilt Edens peopled by characters (“the Gods”) who resist the pressures of the larger American scene. Yet, later works such as *The Brotherhood of the Grape* show a final rapprochement to family roots and readjustment to the status of ethnic American.

**Friday December 12 | AULA BARATTO**

**KEYNOTE LECTURES**

**Stephen Cooper (California State University, Long Beach)**

**“My Other Life of John Fante”**

Stephen Cooper’s keynote address, “My Other Life of John Fante”, offers a historical perspective on the evolution of Fante studies and casts a vision for the discipline’s future directions. Beginning with a personal account of Cooper’s discovering of *Ask the Dust* in 1974 and his organizing of the “legendary” John Fante conference in Long Beach in 1995, the talk will trace the emergence and development of critical scholarship on the author, culminating in the publication of *John Fante: A Critical Gathering*. The presentation will then pivot to explore John Fante’s “shadow writings”, a body of unpublished, unfinished, or even unwritten works. It will examine unproduced stories such as “Circumstances,” “Fish Cannery,” and “The Cat,” and the extensive collection of produced and unproduced film and television screenplays, teleplays, and treatments housed in the Fante collection at UCLA Library Special Collections will also be analyzed. Particular attention will be paid to “shadow works” like the tantalizingly unfinished novel *The Little Brown Brothers* and the “artful absences” in his published works, such as the unmentioned, yet crucial, “repatriation” of brown-skinned people in *Ask the Dust* as a key causal factor for Camilla’s desperation. The television project *Saints Alive* will also be explored as an example of Hollywood’s unfulfilled dreams. Through the analysis of these materials, the address aims to highlight the richness of the “many different biographies” of Fante that can still be written and the innumerable possibilities for future academic work, stimulating a discussion on the prospects of Fantean criticism.

**Fred Gardaphé (John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, Queens College/CUNY)**

**“What’s So Funny About Fante: Humor And Irony In The Writings Of John Fante”**

Most of John Fante’s works concern the development of the social and aesthetic consciousness of a child of Italian immigrants and the contribution of that consciousness to the child’s fantasy of assimilation into mainstream American culture. The subject of much of his writing is the relationship between the individual and his family and community and the subsequent development of a single protagonist’s American identity, development that requires both an understanding and a rejection of the immigrant past represented by parents and grandparents. Fante’s early writings focus on how development of an American identity distances his characters from their Italian and working-class roots. Because of this focus Fante concentrates more on the personal, and thus ethnic, rather than on political and class-based dimensions of his characters’ lives. Not having been born or raised in an urban Little Italy, Fante, as most of his writings bear out, became hyper-aware of ethnic differences between his family and families of the surrounding community.

Fante’s creation of fiction is based on the particulars of his life and its origins through his parents, and through his writings, we can better understand why Italian Americans of his generation developed a very different tradition of humor than we see occurring in most other marginalized American ethnic groups. From his earliest stories, many of which were published in H.L. Mencken’s *American Mercury* magazine, through every novel he published, Fante uses humor as a self-sacrifice to the gods of assimilation. Fante uses humor to relieve the tensions between immigrant ancestors and their children through ironic criticism of the protagonist’s attempts to become a “great” writer. Through humor and irony, Fante not only entertains audiences, but educates readers as to the complexities of realizing an Italian American identity.

## PANELS

**Andrea Acqualagna (University of Bergamo)**

**“Debunking the Myth of The Garden in John Fante’s *The Brotherhood of the Grape*”**

The *topos* of Arcadia, or in Henry Nash Smith’s terminology, the myth of the garden, has been used to define the meaning of America ever since its “discovery.” The pastoral image of an imaginatively boundless virgin land where the earth offers mankind its fruits in abundance is however threatened by the advancement of urbanization entailed by the process of westward expansion. “Part legend, part land,” argues Paul Skenazy, California “is to America as America once was to Europe, that mythological ‘world elsewhere’” (“Behind the Territory Ahead” 113). It is the last frontier before the pioneer spirit runs up against the ocean, hence the last spatial dimension where Arcadia could be materialized. The making of a garden exemplifies an anthropogenic project: an historical, cultural, and political program which entails the conquest, domestication, and commodification of the region’s natural dimension. This project is imaginatively reevoked and deconstructed in the symbolic depiction of the idyllic space of the vineyard among the Northern Californian mountains in John Fante’s novel *The Brotherhood of the Grape*.

Placing considerable attention to the element of wine, Fante’s novel not only foregrounds Italian culture and identity but also draws on California’s symbolism, natural history, and mythological foundations. In its juxtaposition between the seemingly idyllic space of Angelo Musso’s vineyard and the gloomy and dangerous Sierra Nevada mountains, *The Brotherhood of the Grape* proposes an image of nature that oscillates between the pastoral garden and the yet untamed natural dimension emerging as a counterforce to this anthropogenic project. Whereas the vineyard initially appears as an idyllic, Mediterranean-like haven – that imaginatively reconstructs an idealized vision of the Italy left behind –, it gradually reveals itself as a fragile and illusory construction, traversed by a latent sense of unease, underscored by the ominous presence of bees and the looming Sierra Nevada mountains.

Ultimately exposing the domestication of California’s natural landscape into a pastoral ideal as a flawed ideological construct bound to unravel, Fante’s novel simultaneously resorts to and demystifies the allegorically imbued symbolism of the region’s environmental history and mythology. Through an analysis of the role of wine, mountains, and bees represented in the novel, the paper aims at highlighting the author’s attention to the specificities of place and his recourse to and simultaneous ironic subversion of the symbolic elements associated to the Californian natural landscape. Moving from Fante’s representation of the seemingly idyllic vineyard, this interpretation of the novel essays to emancipate it from the often-restricting categorization of Italian American literature and to liken it instead to the regional literary tradition featuring the debunking of California’s symbolism and advertised environmental exceptionalism.

**Ryan Calabretta-Sajder (University of Arkansas)**

**“Reimagining the Maternal: Feminist and Gendered Readings of the Mother Figure in John Fante’s *Dago Red*”**

John Fante’s 1940 short story collection *Dago Red* has often been examined through the lenses of ethnicity, religion, and the immigrant experience, yet its representations of gender and the mother figure remain underexplored in existing scholarship. This paper interrogates the complexities of feminism and gender within *Dago Red*, focusing especially on the maternal presence and its narrative function. Drawing on Maternal Critical Theory – which foregrounds the practices of preservation, nurture, and conscience as forms of resistance to patriarchal violence – this study argues that Fante’s depiction of the mother figure operates as both a site of Oedipal fixation and a locus of transformative, counter-patriarchal authority.

Through close readings of key stories, the analysis reveals how Fante’s protagonist negotiates conflicting impulses: the fetishization and idealization of the mother, the tension between masculine self-assertion and vulnerability, and the displacement of libidinal energy onto objects and rituals within the domestic sphere. While Fante’s narratives are marked by ambivalence – oscillating between reverence for and rebellion against maternal power – they ultimately unsettle traditional gender hierarchies by rendering the mother as an agent of both stability and disruption. This approach situates *Dago Red* within broader

debates about gender in Italian American literature, challenging the assumption of a monolithic masculine universal and inviting a reevaluation of Fante's work through a feminist and maternal lens. By foregrounding the maternal imagination and its capacity for reciprocal encounter, this paper contends that Fante's stories offer a subtle, yet potent critique of patriarchal norms, positioning the mother figure as central to the negotiation of identity, memory, and cultural belonging.

**Francesco Chianese (Independent Scholar)**

**"Italian, American, or Italian American Los Angeles? A Comparative Reading of John Fante, Andrea De Carlo And Chiara Barzini"**

Italian, American, or Italian American? In 2019, I posed this question to a group of scholars I invited at the Los Angeles Italian Cultural Institute for a symposium on Italian American culture, where the case of John Fante was accurately scrutinized. Fante's prominence as a writer in both Italy and the United States has more often situated him within the American cultural context rather than the Italian one. Nonetheless, in recent year his case as an Italian American author has garnered increased attention within the broader context of transnational Italian studies. Meanwhile, three seminal volumes of studies on Fante have been published in Italy and the United States: these include Elisa Bordin's monograph *Un'etnicità complessa* (2019); Stephen Cooper and Clorinda Donato's collection *John Fante's Ask the Dust: A Joining of Voices and Views* (2020); and Giovanna Di Lello and Toni Ricciardi's *Dalla parte di John* (2020). In other words, three decades after the seminal John Fante Conference held in 1995 at California State University, Long Beach, the debate surrounding the position of writers such as Fante persists. In this contribution, I will share the most recent findings from the research I carried at CSULB, which I started during my time as a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, and I continued as a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow. My paper will draw from the intricate and multifaceted history of Italian migration to the United States, particularly the influx of Italians to Los Angeles, to compare John Fante's experience to the more recent works of Italian writers such as Andrea De Carlo and Chiara Barzini, who have addressed their period in Los Angeles in their literary works. A special focus will be held on Barzini's *L'ultima acqua: Il sogno perduto di Los Angeles* (2025), which has recently been published in Italy. Although the emphasis remains on the Italian experience, the argument also explores the interaction of Italians within the multicultural prism of urban areas where diverse communities have encountered each other, such as Bunker Hill and the San Fernando Valley. In this manner, the investigation of elements of Italian culture and identity emerging from Fante's profile continues to be expanded through the experiences of writers who are more recognizable as belonging to modern Italian culture.

**Clorinda Donato (California State University, Long Beach)**

**"Making Fante French: *Mon Chien, Stupide*"**

The French have always loved John Fante, identifying in him and his autobiographical protagonist, Arturo Bandini, the traits that both afflict and celebrate the male writer in his quest to achieve artistic greatness. After *Ask the Dust*, one of the narratives that has resonated the most with French artistic sensibilities and the male ego is "My Dog Stupid" published posthumously in 1986 in *West of Rome*, together with another novella, "Orgy". In 2019, "My Dog Stupid" was made into a film by Israeli French filmmaker Yvan Attal, titled *Mon chien Stupide*. In the film Attal also stars as the protagonist, with his wife in real life, Charlotte Gainsbourg, in role of the writer's wife, with two of their own children appearing in the film as well. The paper I propose will not only address the themes that appeal to French intellectuals in Fante's novella, but how the theme of the waning of artistic energy, male resentment, and female empowerment within the family dynamic reference complex intertextualities that invite us to explore how the couples John and Joyce Fante, Yvan Attal and Charlotte Gainsbourg, and Charlotte's famous parents, Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin, are all evoked in this film. The paper will explore how the film truly makes of Fante's personal and family drama a post-modern "family romance" with a layering of psychological complexities that carry a special significance for French audiences, ultimately succeeding in "making Fante French" as my title suggests.

**Alan Gravano (Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions)**

**“Confession and Identity: The Interwoven Lives of Italian American Fathers in John Fante’s ‘My Father’s God’”**

John Fante’s “My Father’s God” is a compelling exploration of Italian American identity through the intricate interplay of family dynamics, religion, and cultural heritage. The novella centers on the lives of two prominent figures: the Sicilian Father Bruno Ramponi and Nick, the narrator’s father, a stonemason from Abruzzi. Fante delves deep into the complexities of faith, confession, and the immigrant experience through these characters. Nick, a hardworking stonemason, embodies the quintessential Italian American immigrant. His unwavering commitment to his craft and family reflects the traditional values of the Abruzzese community. Nick’s identity is deeply rooted in his Italian heritage, yet he grapples with the challenges of assimilation into American society. The struggle to balance these dual identities is a recurring theme in the narrative, offering readers a poignant look at the sacrifices and resilience of Italian American immigrants. In stark contrast, Father Bruno Ramponi, a Sicilian priest, serves as the narrator’s spiritual guide and mentor. His character is emblematic of the profound influence of Catholicism on Italian American communities. Father Ramponi’s interactions with the narrator reveal the complexities of faith and confession within the immigrant experience. The act of confession, a central tenet of Catholicism, becomes a powerful tool for exploring themes of guilt, redemption, and cultural identity.

The novella examines how religion provides comfort and conflict for Italian Americans. For Nick, religious observance is intertwined with cultural traditions and familial obligations. His relationship with faith is pragmatic, rooted in the rituals and customs passed down through generations. However, Nick’s pragmatic approach to religion often clashes with Father Ramponi’s more doctrinal perspective, highlighting the tension between personal faith and institutional religion. Father Ramponi’s role as a confessor and moral authority adds another layer to this exploration. His interactions with the narrator underscore the importance of confession to navigate moral dilemmas and seek forgiveness. Through Father Ramponi, Fante illustrates the enduring significance of religious guidance in the lives of Italian American families. However, the priest’s rigid adherence to doctrine also exposes the limitations of institutional religion in addressing the unique challenges faced by immigrants. Fante’s portrayal of these characters underscores the multifaceted nature of Italian American identity. The novella delves into how cultural heritage, faith, and personal experience intersect to shape one’s sense of self. Through the lens of Nick and Father Ramponi, readers gain a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience and the enduring impact of religion on Italian American communities. “My Father’s God” depicts Italian American life, weaving together themes of faith, confession, and identity. Fante’s nuanced portrayal of Nick and Father Ramponi offers a compelling exploration of the immigrant experience, highlighting the enduring influence of cultural heritage and religion. The short story serves as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Italian American families as they navigate the complexities of their dual identities.

**Stefano Luconi (University of Padua)**

**“John and Nicola Fante in the Political Arena”**

The paper intends to reconstruct the political allegiance of John Fante and his father Nicola in the interwar years as well as its stimuli against the backdrop of the average stance of the members of Italian American communities in the United States. John had no particularly deep-rooted political beliefs and tended to exploit partisanship to promote his own literary career. For example, he posed as a supporter of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the eventually fruitless effort to secure a position with the Federal Writers’ Project. Yet, he thought that the New Deal as a whole was a ridiculous program that would have made the Founding Father laugh and did not perceive significant differences between the Democratic president and the latter’s Republican opponent in the 1936 race for the White House. John also lashed out at communism not for ideological reasons, but because an alleged Marxist editor had rejected one of his short stories on the ground that its contents were pro-Catholic. John’s attitude was not quite dissimilar to that of many Italian Americans that voted for Roosevelt in the 1930s in the hope of benefitting from the patronage and political spoils of the



Democratic Party. Nicola was, in his son's own words, "a pro-Mussolini man but a might democrat." The contradiction was more apparent than real. Indeed, as in the case of a number of fellow immigrants from Italy who had been discriminated against for years since they supposedly belonged to an inferior people by Wasp standard, Nicola basked in the glory of the *Duce's* alleged accomplishments that had seemingly turned his own native land into a powerful country that inspired awe worldwide. Nicola's admiration for fascism was not based on an ideological commitment, but it resulted from ethnic redress and, as such, was consistent with a democratic faith. Overall, therefore, both John's and Nicola's political behavior reflected the orientation of many Italian Americans at that time.

**Enrico Mariani (Ca' Foscari University)**

**"Mary Osaka is not Japanese. She is American': John Fante's Asian Connections"**

Despite the little critical attention and general negative appraisal, John Fante's "Asian writings" manifest – beyond their sometimes-problematic form – a genuine interest of the author for Los Angeles' Asian communities in a historical period, the 1930s and 40s, made of sharp contrasts, but also of inter-diasporic allyships and reciprocal interests, as Suzanne M. Roszak points out (2021). The "Asian writings" also speak of Fante's literary interest in socio-political issues, since he witnessed in first person the turmoil of racial divisions and discriminations between Japanese and Filipinos in post-Pearl Harbor Los Angeles: the Philippines were colonial allies of the US, whereas Japan attacked the US from the Pacific. Those discriminations were something he could relate to, due to the renewed WWII anti-Italian sentiment spread by the targeting of Italians as enemy aliens. The paper will read the short story "Mary Osaka, I Love You" (1942), which adapts the romantic Romeo & Juliet trope to Asian Southern California, first as Fante's attempt of overcoming editorial ethnic expectations (Elisa Bordin 2019) – which forced ethnic writers to reduce their literary expression to an ethnological documentation of their own group – , then as an attempt of extending an inter-diasporic literary solidarity. Secondly, the paper reads the short story as one of the most politically driven in Fante's production, as it addresses implicitly the internment camps for Japanese Americans. I also argue that the story is inspired by Mary Oyama's piece "Los Angeles" (1942) which was published on *Common Ground*, the multi-ethnic, militant magazine founded by Fante's friend Louis Adamic. The paper, thus, allows to discover a Fante that was renewing and enlarging his artistic spectrum in the light of social and ethnic reconfigurations and solidarity in early 1940s Los Angeles.

**Nicola Paladin (D'Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara)**

**"Between Discovery and Revival: The Role of Maria Martone in the Italian Reception of John Fante"**

One of the most recent and crucial thresholds of John Fante's fortune in Italy can be identified between 1988 and 1989 and associated with the figure of Francesco Durante. His translation of *Dreams of Bunker Hill* was published in 1988, soon followed by his Italian versions of *The Road to Los Angeles* (1989) and *The Brotherhood of the Grape* (1990). These translations participated in, and probably paved the way for, a significant revival of Fante's writings and fortune in Italy. This renewed success interrupted a long editorial *blackout* that characterized the author's Italian circulation ever since Elio Vittorini publicly downsized his appreciation of Fante in *Diario in pubblico* (1957). Within the Italian literary field, Vittorini was the name that was most associated with John Fante; their connection became evident when Vittorini's translation of *Ask the Dust* came out in 1941 and when the Sicilian author included an excerpt of *Wait until Spring, Bandini* in his notorious anthology, *Americana* (1942).

Whereas Fante's Italian trajectory can be situated between Vittorini's and Durante's activities, another figure was relevant, and yet overlooked, in the Italian reception of John Fante's works: Maria Martone Napolitano. Within the massive amount of her translations, Fante cannot be reasonably considered as one of "her" authors, yet several of her translations of Fante's short stories crossed over different editorial positions along the years, including literary magazines (for example, in *Omnibus* or *Noi donne*), anthologies (*Novellieri inglesi e americani*), and volumes (*Una moglie per Dino Rossi*). Ever since Vittorini's partial disavowal of Fante's writings, for a significant part of the Second half of the 20th century, in Italy Fante was not critically

legitimated as an author that could compete with newer writers and literary forms or movements. Building on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary fields, this paper wishes to reconstruct Fante's literary trajectory in Italy and argues that Martone's role contributed to spread the Italian American writer's fame within the commercial circuit between Vittorini's discovery and Durante's rediscovery. Although her contribution did not reinstate nor influence Fante's Italian consecration within the so-called "restricted production field," this paper contends that his circulation and commercial appreciation were functional to his recent rehabilitation in terms of "pure production."

**Mariangela Paone (University of Sussex)**

**"Beyond Bandini: Gender, Genre, and the Politics of Italian-American Life Writing"**

Like John Fante's father, I, too, am an immigrant from Abruzzo. But unlike him – and unlike Fante himself – I am a woman. My personal experience as an immigrant scholar studying Italian-American women's literature mirrors the very themes I research: displacement, identity, belonging, and the ways in which gender shapes one's place in the world.

This paper explores the intersection of gender and the *bildungsroman* in John Fante's *Bandini* novels, asking whether his protagonist's journey of self-discovery aligns with – or diverges from – the conventions of the traditional coming-of-age narrative. While Fante's fiction constructs masculinity through rebellion, ambition, and the pursuit of an elusive American dream, memoirs by Italian American women – including Louise DeSalvo, Mary Cappello, and Kym Ragusa – trace parallel yet distinctly gendered trajectories. By placing the linear, fictional autobiography of Arturo Bandini in dialogue with the fragmented, relational forms of women's memoirs, this paper argues that memoir functions as a feminist space of resistance, re-invention, and cultural critique.

Drawing on Susan Fraiman's critique of the *bildungsroman* as a historically gendered and exclusionary form, alongside Fred Gardaphé's work on Italian-American masculinity and narrative tradition, I demonstrate how these memoirs challenge dominant models of self-making rooted in individuation, mastery, and assimilation. Instead, they foreground memory, and life-writing as alternative foundations for identity formation. In doing so, they not only extend and revise Fante's legacy, but also expand the canon of Italian-American literature by centering gender as a critical force in shaping both narrative structure and cultural belonging.

**Nicoletta Peluffo (New York University)**

**"Reading and Interpreting John Fante Through Paratextual Elements"**

The concept of threshold (Genette, 1987) considered as an undefined zone, a "vestibule" that lies between the inside and the outside of a text, provides the framework for analysing two of the most popular novels by John Fante, *Wait Until Spring*, *Bandini* and *Ask the Dust*. The two novels, published respectively in 1938 and 1939, were well received by the public after their appearance, but then, for various reasons, their reception came to a standstill. The paratextual apparatus of the two books in their re-issued versions present different visual (book covers) and paratextual elements (introduction, epigraphs, to name a few) that have contributed to influence their reception. In 1978, the poet Charles Bukowski referenced his debt to John Fante in an autobiographical preface to *Ask the Dust*, thereby reinforcing the paratextual element of the novel and giving new strength to the circulation of the work. In his conceptualization of paratext, Gerard Genette suggests the idea that these liminal spaces guide the reader and influence the reception, interpretation, and meaning of literary works. Furthermore, Fante's storytelling is modelled on the concept of threshold perceived as a perpetual state of being "in between" – between aspirations and reality, action and stagnation, self-belief and doubts. In what ways is this internal concept of liminality reflected in the paratextual apparatus of the two novels? How has this apparatus changed over time? How do subsequent editions of the two novels adapt and change their paratexts? The paratextual element in different editions of the aforementioned novels is examined in this paper. The paratext, in its function of threshold that mediates the text to off-text components, represents a conglomerate of information, it complements and extends the text and, at the

same time, it has a determinant role in textual reception. A parallel exploration will be conducted on the Italian versions of the two novels in the following editions: *Il cammino nella polvere*, tr. Elio Vittorini, Milano, Mondadori, 1941. *Chiedi alla polvere*, tr. Maria Giulia Castagnole, Milano, SugarCo, 1983, prefazione di Charles Bukowski. Milano, Marcos y Marcos, 1994. Torino, Einaudi (Stile libero), 2004, prefazione di Alessandro Baricco e Prologo a *Chiedi alla Polvere* di John Fante; *Aspettiamo primavera*, Bandini (*Wait Until Spring*, Bandini), tr. Giorgio Monicelli, Milano, Mondadori, 1948. *Aspetta Primavera*, Bandini, tr. Carlo Corsi, Milano, Leonardo, 1989. Milano, Marcos y Marcos, 1995. Torino, Einaudi (Stile libero), 2005, prefazione di Niccolò Ammaniti.

**Megan Rose Meylor (California State University, Northridge)**

**“Fante’s Fallout: Literary Atmosphere and Environmental Injustice in *Ask The Dust*”**

Part of my book project, *Something in the Air: Literary Atmospheres of Los Angeles*, this proposal argues that John Fante’s novel *Ask the Dust* (1939) offers readers a rare, working-class perspective on the environmental conditions of early twentieth-century Los Angeles. While Fante’s novel has received a growing amount of attention in recent years, critics have yet to analyze it through an ecocritical lens. As Stephen Cooper and Clorinda Donato write in their introduction to the collection *John Fante’s Ask the Dust: A Joining of Voices* (2020), “surely there are essays in the fertile field of ecocriticism waiting to be written on the novel’s ecological aspects, all that dust permeating the orange blossom-and gasoline-drenched air” (6). In this chapter, I fill this gap by examining the novel’s representation of the air and environment, contributing to a more realist literary atmosphere than its moody *noir* counterparts. More specifically, I argue that *Ask the Dust* illuminates smog’s polluted precursors, the embodied conditions and atmospheric injustices prior to freeway construction. Through the struggling figures of Arturo (Italian-American) and Camilla (Mexican-American), the novel reveals the emerging relationship between racialization and environmental harm in 1930s Los Angeles.

**Edvalda Torres Paes Guizzardi (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais)**

**“‘A Lover of Man and Beasts Alike’: Animal Agency and Posthuman Disruption in John Fante’s ‘My Dog Stupid’”**

This paper offers a reading of John Fante’s “My Dog Stupid” through the lens of animal studies, arguing that the novella – often dismissed as comic or minor – contains a serious critique of human exceptionalism, domestic authority, and patriarchal identity. While Fante criticism has historically focused on his realist portrayals of Italian-American life, this essay turns to one of his lesser-analyzed works to explore how the disruptive presence of a dog destabilizes not only the family unit but the very category of the human.

Drawing on Jacques Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Cary Wolfe’s posthumanist theory, Donna Haraway’s concept of companion species, and Erica Fudge’s work on animal unknowability, the essay positions Stupid not as a symbol or comic foil, but as an autonomous presence that resists domestication, interpretation, and control. Stupid’s refusal to behave as a “good pet” undermines the authority of the protagonist, Henry Molise, whose collapsing identity as writer, father, and man mirrors the breakdown of the human/animal binary. Wolfe’s critique of liberal humanism frames this collapse as structural rather than personal, while Haraway’s model of co-constitutive companionship is challenged by the dog’s rejection of relational roles. Fudge’s account of the animal’s resistance to meaning clarifies how Stupid’s opacity becomes an ethical confrontation.

In the novella’s final movement, the dog’s disappearance and return – alongside a pig he has chosen as a mate – offers a bizarre but powerful rejection of species boundaries and social norms. Henry’s decision to abandon his own fantasies of escape and spend his money to reunite the unlikely pair marks a quiet ethical shift. Ultimately, “My Dog Stupid” stages a refusal of anthropocentric systems and opens space for a recognition of animals not as metaphors or reflections of human concerns, but as beings in their own right.