

RESEARCH REPORTS

BALSDON FELLOWSHIPS

doi: 10.1017/S006824622300017X

Stasera in TV: *Italian variety television and its stars 1954–74*

Varietà during the first twenty years of Italian television broadcasting was a staple of the small screen. Light entertainment shows like *Un, due, tre*, *Studio Uno* and *Milleluci* attracted large numbers of viewers and acted as a platform for introducing and rendering familiar many faces who would become Italy's television stars in this period. These star figures reveal much about Italian society and culture of the period, thanks to their function as cultural symbols and conduits for ideas about gender, values and national identity (as Stephen Gundle argues in his work on cinema stars). But they also shed light on the accepted ways of behaving, dominant ideologies and the social and cultural status quo of the period in question. Given that Italian television was state-controlled until the mid-1970s, the intersection of the star figure with the medium of television and the political and cultural context of Italy in this period reveals the systems of cultural value and the wider established ideologies and ways of behaving at work in Italian society in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

To explore better this intersection and its significance, I immersed myself in the television broadcast context of the period by rewatching the *varietà* preserved in RAI's audiovisual archive, accessible at the *Discoteca di Stato* in Rome (now the *Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori ed Audiovisivi*). I also consulted a range of magazine publications of the period to explore how the programmes and stars of the moment were presented to audiences. *Radiocorriere* became an important source, as did magazines like *Gente* and *La Domenica del Corriere*. The COVID-19 restrictions that were still in place in Italy in 2021 limited my access to the audiovisual archive, but the programmes that I was able to view highlighted how star figures were used by television for political means in this period.

For example, the series *Un, due, tre* that aired between 1954 and 1959 showcased the film and theatre actors Ugo Tognazzi and Raimondo Vianello, making them even bigger names during the decade. The series played an important role on the Italian small screen in establishing the nature of light entertainment programming and shaping the audience's expectations regarding comedy performances on television. But because the series focused on and satirized the popular television programmes of the same period, it also functioned to educate viewers about television more broadly and so underlined the importance of the medium in the period. As the hosts of the series, Tognazzi and Vianello became the embodiment of these functions and acted as the vehicles through which the audience's entertainment and education might take place, echoing in fact the aim of Italian television in this period was to inform, educate and entertain (an aim borrowed from the BBC). Their status as stars was crucial to fulfilling this aim, and the way in which they addressed the audience and referred to programmes and events with which viewers were familiar served to create a community of Italian television viewers, an important political aim for the nascent medium in this period.

I am enormously grateful to the BSR for the opportunity to undertake this research in a stimulating and supportive environment. The conversations with scholars and artists that are an intrinsic part of life at the BSR helped to shape and reshape my thinking and I rediscovered the joy of being part of a scholarly community after the challenges of 2020. The foundational research that I was able to complete allowed me to be successful in securing a British Academy Small Research Grant that will enable me to complete my viewing of archived programmes in Rome and to produce a general-interest podcast on Italian television to mark the 70th anniversary in 2024.

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doi: 10.1017/S0068246223000181

Sanctity and the refashioning of early modern Catholicism: Saints and their causes between Rome and locality

Why did the Catholic Church, a faith defined by its cult of saints, find it so difficult to create new ones at the time of its greatest crisis? Historians have long noticed a long gap in saint-making following the Reformation. After 1523 there were to be no new saints for 63 years, a situation Peter Burke memorably attributed to a ‘failure of papal nerve’. The hesitant resumption of saint-making in 1588 created the modern machinery of canonization, but few benefited. The path to sainthood was beset by bureaucratic hurdles and roadblocks, which remained in place until Pope John Paul II transformed canonization into a veritable assembly line. The first post-Reformation saint, Carlo Borromeo, was not created until 1610; in 1634 a papal bull *Cælestis Hierusalem Cives* imposed further restrictions targeted explicitly at other *beati moderni* and was followed by another nearly 25-year pause.

So why was saint-making so difficult? I arrived at this question as a result of my interest in a group of Netherlandish martyrs, a diverse group of seventeen priests who died in 1572 and who were beatified by Pope Clement X in 1675. The witnesses who testified during their canonization proceedings offer valuable and vivid testimony of the violence of the Dutch Revolt, but I quickly realized that what set their cause apart was the fact it was successful at all. The so-called martyrs of Gorkum were the only Catholics killed by Protestants to be beatified — beatification was also part of the seventeenth-century reorganization of saint-making — before 1700. *None* were canonized. Only one other martyr, Fidelis of Sigmaringen, was successful before the mid-nineteenth century. The absence of such martyrs is a mystery. Narratives of martyrdom, of extreme violence and exemplary victimhood, stood at the centre of early modern religious conflict. Why were the martyrs of Gorkum the exception rather than the rule?

A comparative approach must be key to answering all of these questions. On the one hand, causes competed against each other — they could not all be successful at the same time. On the other hand, they were also cumulative, setting precedents that later causes could cite. My Balsdon Fellowship allowed me to move beyond the trial documents I already knew and explore the causes of other aspiring saints, in particular other