



BLOG



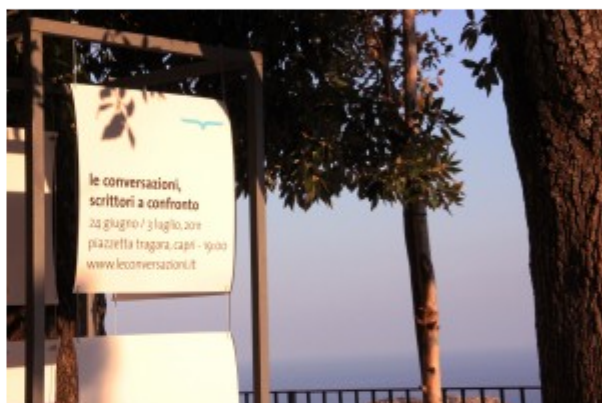
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Aperitif: At the Blue Hour, Conversations in Capri

By Heather Hartley | June 28th, 2012 – 08:00 am

Although Capri is not really in anyone's backyard, especially because it's an island, Antonio Monda and Davide Azzolini are working to bridge Anglophone and Italian cultures with their international literary festival, **Le Conversazioni**. The first year, 2006, brought together an impressive lineup including Zadie Smith and David Foster Wallace. Every year since then, Monda, a writer, film director and professor at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, hosts a group of eight to twelve Anglophone and Italian writers for two weeks in early summer to discuss themes ranging from this year's "Politically Correct" to "Deadly Sins" to "Memory."

Le Conversazioni opens this year with Philip Gourevitch and Pierrluigi Battista on June 29th and concludes with Jamaica Kincaid and Federico Rampini on July 8th. The festival is in between many things—June and July, land and sea, English and Italian, day and night—at the blue hour, when evening and events begin. (You may already have some summer events planned in Portland if you're heading to our **Tin House Writer's Workshop** next month.)



A passionate supporter of Anglophone literature, Monda says, "We want to share conversations about important themes with the public." Casual and intimate, events are free and open to the public. (True, you do have to get to Capri first.) Evenings begin with a writer reading an unpublished piece about the festival's theme and the conversation continues with Monda who moves easily between the two languages. All discussions and audience questions are translated in both language directions and there's a complimentary bilingual theme-based anthology of writers' essays and short stories. Of this year's theme, Monda says, "Political Correctness was intended to civilize language and attitude, however its neutrality can lead to a serious pathology for every art."

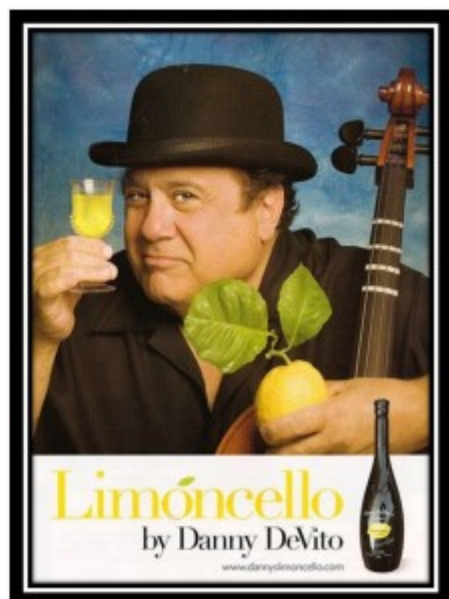
And on the subject of civilization, Capri, first settled by the Greeks in 8th century BC, has the tradition of being a resort since Roman times, long before it became the rec room of the rich and famous in the 1950s and 60s for the likes of Clark Gable, Sofia Loren and Brigitte Bardot. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis simply carried on a time-honored custom established during the reign of Emperor Tiberius.

Possibly better known for its tomato and mozzarella salad and the chic, slim-fitting pants made famous by Grace Kelly and others, Capri was a political and literary refuge for intellectuals and exiles including Maxim Gorky and Pablo Neruda. Graham Greene, more of a voluntary exile, bought a house on the island in 1948 and returned every year for over four decades.



Capri has the reputation of being exclusive, expensive, a little bit snobby and touristy: it lives up to the stereotype and gracefully moves beyond it. Le Conversazioni explores Anglophone literature and just as significant, introduces English speakers to Italian writers and emphasizes the importance of literature in translation, a very small sector of the book business in the States. There's so much happening in English all over Europe, and particularly in Paris, that the other 27 countries of the European Union—and their 23 official languages—can be overlooked.

Monda is energetic for future festivals; among his ideal invitees are Philip Roth, Alice Munro, Cormac McCarthy and Don DeLillo. He also organizes events in the States, including "Films of My Life," an ongoing series held at the Morgan Library and most recently featuring Martin Amis and Ian Buruma. "There's a new event in New York on November 29th, then we are planning to extend Le Conversazioni in other cities," he says.



This month my heart is in Capri, but my bills are at home so although it might not be possible to make the traghetto tomorrow, there's still time to:

– grab some lemons and 100-proof vodka, add sugar, water and stir with thirst to make bootleg Limoncello in your own backyard

–support local retailers by investing in a pair of Capri pants

–start up a conversation about books. It still doesn't cost a lot, and it's particularly delightful at the darkening blue hour.

*Heather Hartley is Paris editor at Tin House. She's the author of **Knock Knock**, released by Carnegie Mellon University Press. Her poems have appeared in Post Road, Drunken Boat, Forklift Ohio, Mississippi Review and elsewhere. She's a Co-Director of the Shakespeare and Company Bookshop literary festival and lives in Paris.*