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The Virtues of Language
History in language, linguistics and texts

THE VIRTUES
OF LANGUAGE

HISTORY IN
LANGUAGE, LINGUISTICS AND TEXTS

PAPERS IN MEMORY OF THOMAS FRANK

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Thomas Frank in the Neapolitan Environment¹

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Following his studies in London and Oxford, Thomas Frank came to Naples in 1952 at the suggestion of the Italianist Cesare Foligno, who was at the time professor of Italian Literature at Oxford University. Foligno, who would then move to Italy to take up the chair of English Literature at the University of Naples, had invited him to accompany him as his collaborator. Frank was then twenty six years old and intended to stay in Naples for what he thought would be a short-term work experience. He was not to know that it would be for the rest of his life. In fact, in Naples he would marry and would work out his entire academic career (with the exception of a few months as Professor at the University of Bari, between March and October 1982). He worked as a teaching assistant in English at the *Istituto Universitario Orientale* and at the University of Naples; then, in 1963 he became permanent assistant to the chair of English Language and Literature at the University of Naples, taking on the position of temporary professor of History of the English Language in 1972 and finally permanent professor of History of the English Language in 1982.

It is not hard to imagine the reasons which could have prompted an Italian professor to suggest to a young Englishman that he go and look for work in Italy. A young scholar with a specialisation in a language and literature in search of his first job will often find more opportunities open to him abroad than at home. Of course the meeting (which took place a few days before his intended return to England) with Lucia Fornaroli who was to become his wife, consolidated his links with Naples. Other things, however, directly connected with Naples probably sealed Frank's fate in the city. The chair of English

¹ I want to thank Mrs Lucia Frank, Mr Federico Frank and my colleagues Stefano Manferlotti and Nicola Pantaleo for providing me with useful information for the preparation of this notice. I also want to thank Mr Cerbone, from the Staff Department of the University of Naples, for giving me details of Frank's academic career in Italy.

Language and Literature at the University of Naples, which Elio Chinol took over from Cesare Foligno, drew students of modern foreign languages and literature from all over southern Italy to enrol at Naples.

There was a strong following in linguistics at the Institute of Modern Philology, to which the chairs of modern foreign Languages and Literatures were affiliated. The Institute had developed around the chair of Romance Philology, a post occupied by Salvatore Battaglia until 1963 and then from 1964 by Alberto Varvaro. In the field of Romance Philology at Naples, existing studies in textual criticism were augmented in the fifties with lexicographic research and in the mid sixties with sociolinguistics and historical linguistics. What was then the Institute of Modern Philology (today the Department of Modern Philology) was a catalyst in Frank's career: he had followed courses in English philology, amongst other subjects, at Oxford. His interest in this field was already apparent in the mid sixties (with the volume *Dall'antico al medio inglese*) and would be strengthened in subsequent years. In a letter of congratulations to Nicola Pantaleo in 1985, on the younger colleague's nomination to the professorship of History of the English Language at the University of Bari, he says:

Non credere che una destinazione a Storia della Lingua Inglese sia in qualche modo un binario morto o una specie di "demozione" (esiste questa parola in italiano?), anzi è una disciplina da sviluppare, *fondamentale* in un corso di laurea in inglese... Quando sarai in Facoltà, battiti perché la componente linguistica (e non solo glottodidattica, disciplina spesso un po' arrangiata) abbia il posto che le compete... Se mi permetti una raccomandazione, non considerarla come una specie di insegnamento letterario di categoria B, o al massimo una forma di stilistica applicata (alcuni storici della lingua italiana tendono a vedere la loro disciplina in tal senso, ma fortunatamente non tutti!). Dal punto di vista professionale mi sento linguista, non un letterato più o meno fallito - anzi, con la piega che gli studi letterari hanno preso in questi ultimi tempi, sono ben lieto di esserne fuori.²

² "Do not think that a post in History of the English Language is in any way a dead end or some kind of demotion, rather it is a discipline that needs to be developed and is fundamental to an English degree course... When you are in the Faculty, do your best to ensure that the linguistic component (and not just language teaching, a somewhat makeshift discipline) has the place it deserves... If I may permit myself a word of advice, do not consider it as a sort of second grade literary instruction or, at most, a form of applied stylistics (some Italian language historians tend to see their discipline in such a light, but fortunately not all!). From a professional point of view, I consider myself to be a linguist, not a more or less failed man of letters; with the turn that literary studies have taken in recent times, I am rather glad to be out of that area".

These remarks reflect a typically Italian cultural situation, which has more or less explicitly favoured the study of literature over that of language. It is possible that Frank was at first surprised by this partition. If, on occasion, throughout his career he was embittered by it he never revealed the slightest sign of such a reaction. He was a man of utmost politeness and self-control. Typically British, with his "stiff upper lip" and "business as usual" approach, he always maintained his composure, even in difficult and painful moments, as when his state of health was failing in his last years.

He adapted easily to the Neapolitan environment, and his affinities were strengthened with the consolidation of his academic career in the south of Italy. Like many English people who came to Naples and stayed within the close-knit Neapolitan British community, in existence since the last century, he showed a natural ease in the way he integrated himself into the local environment. In the "Editorial" of the *Newsletter* of the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas (Issue no. 15, November 1990) announcing Thomas' death, Paul Salmon reported that Dr. John Robertson, a specialist in Italian history who had been a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at Edinburgh with Frank in 1986, had had the opportunity of visiting Frank at Naples:

He also knew Thomas in Naples, and notes how much he was at home in his adopted city through his profound sympathies for its cultural traditions, combined with a "quite unNeapolitan" calmness.

His sympathies for the people and the cultural traditions of the city were apparent in many ways in his lifestyle and his behaviour. He had friends in the Neapolitan British community (for example, Mr Andrew McKenna, who was for many years Director of the British Council in Naples), but also outside it. Although his personality was profoundly moulded by his British education, he was never the "foreigner" who lives confined to a close-knit social circle or who looks upon his surroundings with detachment. He was instinctively sociable: he sought conversation and contact with others, he had a strong feeling for *societas*, an important aspect of Neapolitan life and of certain circles in particular. His deepest friendships in the city were with representatives of the Neapolitan aristocracy, such as Prince Giorgio Castriota Scandenberg, descendant of an old Albanian family which had emigrated to southern Italy, and Baron Mariano Perillo, who was president of the law-courts of Naples. The Franks loved to receive friends in their home at the villa Kernot on the Posillipo hill, where they had lived for many years, and then in their beautiful house on the Piazza San Domenico, next to the 18th century Palazzo Corigliano, seat of the *Istituto Universitario Orientale*, and a stone's throw from the *Palazzo*

Filomarino, former residence of Benedetto Croce. This house represented the convergence of two cultures, so English in many of its furnishings, but at the same time so Neapolitan in its setting and its atmosphere. From the balcony of his study Thomas could see the *piazza*, dominated by the church of San Domenico. He liked that old world, so full of life. Although some of his best friends were elderly gentlemen of the Neapolitan aristocracy, it would be a mistake to think that Thomas was an aristocrat confined to the society of narrow elitist groups. Like his friends, those qualities so characteristic of the old southern Italian culture – grace and good manners, and the ability to put others at their ease – came naturally to him.

Frank was a professor much loved by his students. His modesty and kindness, his clarity of expression naturally attracted young people, who saw in him more than just a teacher, an old friend with whom they could speak unfettered by academic convention. His courses were followed by many students: over the years many continue to regard him with affection and regret. During the period in which he was professor of History of the English Language, a discipline that has unfortunately received too little attention in Italian academia, he worked intensively to develop the scientific and didactic activities of the chair: he had many graduate students, all scrupulously and attentively supervised; he organised various scientific conferences, inviting Anglicist colleagues such as Roger Lass, Frans Plank, Suzanne Romaine, Dieter Stein, and others to Naples. At the same time he established contacts with historians of the English language from other Italian universities. His education and the unobtrusive way he related to others made him a loved and respected colleague. He made it a point of honour to advance the cause of English linguistics at Naples, which had, thanks to him, become a centre for the development and growth of the discipline. Thomas was happy to see the increase in young people wanting to specialise in this subject. In April 1987, a large troop of Neapolitans led by Thomas participated at the International Conference of English Historical Linguistics in Cambridge. There were Gabriella Di Martino, Silvana La Rana, Gabriella Mazzon, Mara Messina, Valeria Micillo and from Bari Nicola Pantaleo. I was also in the group, and I could see that Thomas was as happy as a sand-boy with his cherished “southern” expedition to England. In fact, in a letter to Nicola Pantaleo in February of that year Thomas observed a propos the Cambridge Congress that “ci sarà una folta rappresentanza napoletana” (“there will be a strong Neapolitan contingent”). In his detached and reserved manner can be detected the acknowledgement of a small joy and an understandable feeling of pride.

Honoring Thomas Frank Introduction and Overview of the Contributions

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The contributions in this volume ranging from English historical linguistics via history to English literary history adequately reflect Thomas Frank’s scientific and real-life personality as so vividly depicted by Rosanna Sornicola in her contribution on Thomas Frank’s life in the preceding contribution. In fact, it is difficult to see how a scholar of the stature of Thomas Frank could be honored by contributions that do not straddle the boundaries between what are now considered separate disciplines.

The personality of Thomas Frank was iconic for his definition and practice of his science. As a towering figure in Italian (historical) English linguistics and on the international scene he remained a rock in a sea of one-dimensionality: just as he in terms of personality was a nobleman of broad outlook and broad culture, the practice and definition of his science was not given to the dismal and blinkered modularity that beset the discipline of English linguistics in much of the latter part of the ending millenium in several ways. For him there was no incommunicable split between linguistics and literature on the one hand and between synchronic and diachronic linguistics on the other - divisions that the discipline as a whole and the generations of students trained on it is by now increasingly regretting.

The contributions to the present memorial volume image Thomas Frank’s orientation in several ways. Not only did he repeatedly engage in battle over notorious unresolved issues in his field, not only did he engage in pursuits that cover the whole field in its entirety, but his interests are also mirrored in