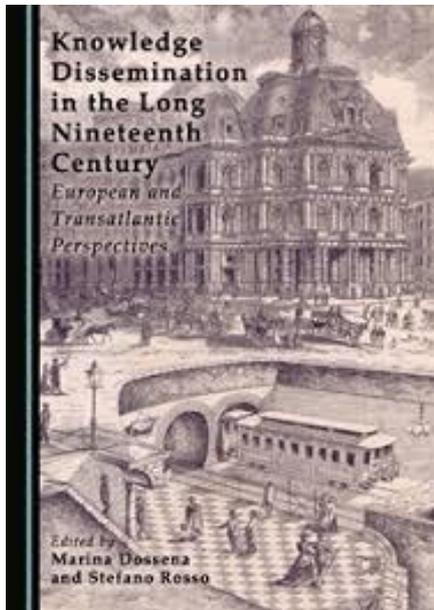




Knowledge Dissemination in the Long Nineteenth Century. European and Transatlantic Perception.

Edited by Marina Dossena and Stefano Rosso

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Review by Sara Corrizato*

The present volume originates from the workshop *Knowledge Dissemination in the Long Nineteenth Century* held at the University of Bergamo on 2-3 October 2014. Organized by Marina Dossena and Stefano Rosso, the event involved an international group of experts, well-known for their contribution in the field.

Within the opening contribution, Bruno Cartosio explains how visual arts, specifically painting, contributed to shaping popular attitude towards native Americans. By representing them as “blood-thirsty savages” (p. 13), e.g. J.M. Stanley (1845) and G.C. Bingham (1848), as “aggressors” (p. 18), e.g. C. Deas (1845) and C. Wimar (1856), or as “passive onlookers” (p. 18), e.g. F. Palmer (1868), explicit disparagement of the Natives inevitably influenced common people’s general opinion of them as uncivilized and violent individuals –in contrast with whites that symbolised integrity, progress and heroism (pp. 18-22 on The Battle of the Little Bighorn). As a result, these unfaithful representations, filtered by mythic stories rather than by historical reports, twisted the Old West and its inhabitants’ identity, promoting an overt racial anti-Indian “stereotypization”, which was also reinforced by Roosevelt’s and Turners’ works.

Zooming on the role dime novels played on popular perception of the West throughout the nineteenth century, Stefano Rosso analyses the different ways in which Western characters and themes became familiar to audiences, much earlier than audiovisual products did. The contextualization of the western sub-genre within the literary context of the period brings readers to understand the impact western novels have on popular culture. From Cooper’s hero to well-known figures, such as gold-diggers, gunmen, and sheriffs,

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Rosso's reflections investigate the heterogeneous, yet intertwined, strategies through which those stories unlocked readers' mind and created controversial yet ever-lasting stereotypes. While white Americans were glorified to the detriment of ethnic minorities, the concept of violence as a socially acceptable behaviour inevitably grew up to such an extent that its role remained unaltered even in the twentieth century.

By overturning the previous methodological perspective, Marina Dossena provides an up-to-date overview of how overseas heterogeneous popular sources influenced European readers in Scottish areas. In the third contribution, she takes into consideration four kinds of sources, mainly available in the *Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing* and the *Corpus of Nineteenth-century Scottish Correspondence*: public materials addressed to prospective emigrants, songs and ballads, diaries and travelogues, and private letters are examined to investigate the role they had in disseminating new information about North America in Scotland. Including detailed reflections on the possible limits the analysis of such a multifarious corpus can imply, this third contribution illustrates how both public and private sources deeply affected Scottish readers' perception of the New World, thus playing a primary role in the circulation of new terms in many fields, such as geology, geography and anthropology.

The fourth contribution, by Aileen Dillane, leads to a re-conceptualization of the meaning that *Music of Ireland*, published by Francis O'Neill in 1903, had within the socio-cultural framework of the first part of the nineteenth century. After contextualizing O'Neill's biography in late-nineteenth-century Chicago, which contributes to depict the famous collector of Irish music as a "wily investor and a consummate local entrepreneur" (p. 69), the author offers a detailed description of the volume. Although the eighteen-hundred traditional tunes included in the collection apparently combine some musical and social Irish nuances, the analysis demonstrates that the publication mirrored "the industrial city in which it was created" (p. 82). As an inevitable consequence, it contributed to developing new tastes and forms of entertainment, more linked to modernity rather than to the original Irish history and cultural background.

Sonia Di Loreto's observations aim at bringing experts of the field to reflect upon the American journalist Fanny Fern's "variety of letters" (p. 95). Giving prominence to private epistolary exchanges and advertisements of the author's articles in the European context, rather than to her contribution to the feminist literary panorama, Di Loreto concentrates on the impact Fern's written communication had on the audience of the Old World. By adopting a transatlantic analytical approach, this chapter highlights how brilliantly Fern succeeded in shaping sympathetic dialogic relationships with both editorial personnel and her audience.

The scenery in which Locatelli's reflections develop is completely different from the previous cases. The intricate connection among science, art, and philosophy is taken into account by shedding light on various controversial approaches that rose in the period – a post-Darwin era in which scientific progress and technological advancement were questioning traditional anthropological theories. Drawing on Tolstoy's *On the significance of science and art*, the author of the sixth essay offers an accurate analysis of how science was at the centre of irreconcilable debates in the European area as well in the New World. Interpreting language as complex as a living form (see Lecercle's elaboration of Wittgenstein's language-game theory, p. 112), Locatelli's contribution revolves around the interpretation of truth in the language game of science.

Relying on the assumption that "almost any attempt to produce and disseminate knowledge is doomed to failure" (p.127), Robert Luis Stevenson wondered how empirical observation could be successfully shared. Thanks to Robert-Luis Abrahamson's exploratory work, the Scottish artist's problematic inquiry for truth is accurately analysed and contextualised within the nineteenth-century framework. Focussing on a variety of Stevenson's essays, and particularly on his non-fiction work *A footnote to history* (1892), the author takes the three stages of communication knowledge – i.e. "producing that knowledge for ourselves, articulating it for others and having other digest that knowledge" (p.127) – as a starting point for reflecting on issues relating to information dissemination.

The next chapter thoroughly investigates how the provincial newspaper *Liverpool Mercury* shared knowledge about the USA. Leading readers throughout 1812, Nicholas Brownlees provides an accurate explanation of the way(s) in which information concerning various topics and places, with a particular emphasis on war, could be presented and made available to the contemporary public. Proposing interesting extracts from some issues of the newspaper, Brownlees highlights the relevance of analysing different text types such as editorials, letters to the editors and third parties, news reports and résumés of official speeches, to aim at fully understanding and contextualizing "the language adopted in the dissemination of American-related



news” (p.139). Importance is also given to the editorial board’s choice to divulge balanced and fact-based accounts, giving audiences a chance to elaborate their own view.

From the English newspaper the volume moves on to *The Mining Journal* with the essay written by William H. Milligan Jr. After the introductory section, in which interests in minerals of the period – specifically in copper – are contextualised, the author focuses in particular on the role academic and practical knowledge had in the nineteenth-century Ireland. The dichotomy between “practical miners” (p. 158) and experts in geology seems irreconcilable. Moreover, the author explores the situation concerning copper mining in Ireland by testifying its unprofitable economic nature. Providing excerpts from print source, he also recognizes the great reluctance of the journal to disseminate information about the weaknesses of the Irish mining industries.

Practical knowledge plays a key role in the essay by Polina Shvanyukova as well. Her aim is to examine specialised business-letter sections in a British and an American letter-writing guide. *The Universal Letter Writer; or New Art of Polite Correspondence* (1850[1770]), and its American version *New Universal Letter Writer* (1818 [1800]), are analysed in order to explore the pragmatic strategies included within each section. Through an engaging presentation of examples using different communicative strategies, Shvanyukova discusses the structure and the contents of the two sections, illustrating how both sources reflect the socio-cultural backgrounds in which they came into life and developed. Focussing on lingua-cultural maxims prospective businessmen were suggested to follow, she notes how information given can implicitly offer us details about the working community.

The last chapter, authored by Kirsten Lawson, adds to the focus on private correspondence as key for investigating knowledge dissemination. Combining epistolary discourse analysis theories and discourse-historical approach (DHA), Lawson analyses a corpus of letters written between August 1915 and January 1916 by a World War one sergeant in the Gordon Highlanders. The author provides a set of relevant examples and demonstrates how epistolary discourse embodies valuable information about trenches, daily life and physical/hygienic problems. Perception of *the other* as a (non)-enemy and the binary opposition between national pride and inner feelings are topics covered throughout this essay, a reflection on the role private correspondence generally has in transmitting knowledge from public to more intimate settings as well as from generation to generation.

To sum up, Dossena and Rosso’s volume provides researchers in the field with a collection of high-quality studies that cover a heterogeneous range of research areas. Different analytical perspectives and methodological approaches contribute to the creation of a valuable resource both for experts and readers interested in the topics. Extremely valuable are the useful examples provided by many contributors, providing a better understanding of the situational context taken into account.