Session 3

From the Plate to the Screen: Representations of Food in Cinema

Unique in its scheduling of undergraduate students alongside seasoned scholars, the third session of the conference invited speakers to redirect their critical lens from the book page to the silver screen. Our authors explore representations of gastronomy in cinema, illustrating how the inclusion of food and drink in critical scenes often performs a symbolic function loaded with significant implications about a director’s filmography, the film’s narrative, or even the historical and cultural moment at large.

In “Eat First: Motherhood and Italian American Gastronomy in the Films of Martin Scorsese,” Chiara De Santi analyzes the films of Martin Scorsese with a particular attention to those in which the Italian American director repeatedly cast his own mother, Catherine Cappa Scorsese, in the role of a mother character. De Santi’s evaluation of gastronomy and motherhood throughout Scorsese’s filmography reveals that the figure of the mother undergoes a redefinition over time, but nevertheless remains a constant identifier of ethnicity in all his works.

In “The Food and Hunger behind The Hunger Games,” Silvio Lioniello examines the symbolism of food in Suzanne Collins’ multimedia franchise The Hunger Games. With reference to Collins’ trilogy of novels as well as their film adaptations, Lioniello shows how gastronomy is strategically deployed in certain scenes to highlight themes such as hope, sacrifice, and rebellion that are integral to the narrative conflict of the fictional world of Panem.

In “Big Night: An Analysis of a Deeper Conflict between Italian Cultures,” Tony (Yuhao) Yang explains how the 1996 film Big Night uses contrasting appearances of gastronomy, music, and art to reveal a chasm between traditional Italian values and the new Italian-American culture that emerged in America during the 1950s. Yang suggests that the film’s two protagonists, Primo
and Secondo, find themselves on opposing sides of this conflict and immigrant experience as they struggle to find a place for themselves, and their restaurant Paradise, in the New World.