**CHINED IX: UPDATED ABSTRACT PROPOSAL**

**(Re)defining Women’s Role for the Promotion of Well-Being in the Early 18th Century: Evidence from Letters to the Editor in British and American Weeklies (1720-1740)**

Elisabetta Cecconi

University of Florence

In my paper I shall carry out a comparative discourse analysis of early 18th-century Letters to the Editor (LTEs) published in British and American weeklies on the topic of women’s role and condition in their relation with men as experienced and/or conceived of by both male and female correspondents of the time. Drawing upon Habermas’s view of LTEs as a space of civic engagement where the national pulse emerges through exchanges of ideas upon matters of public significance (Habermas 1989; Jones 1996), my analysis centres around forms of content-presentation and evaluation in relation to women’s (and men’s) rights and duties as outlined through the correspondents’ personal narratives and reflections. My aim is to identify discursive similarities and differences in the way in which British and American readers represent, discuss and problematize the women’s position within a patriarchal system in the attempt to promote well-being both at personal and societal levels. To this purpose, I shall examine forms of lexical and grammatical evaluation. In particular, I shall apply Martin and White’s appraisal theory (2005) focusing on the correspondent’s attitude, engagement and graduation. Whenever possible, the transnational comparison will be intertwined with considerations on the gender of the correspondents so as to complement the findings with insights into gender-based forms of identity construction in discourse (Koller 2012).

 British LTEs are selected from the *17th- and 18th-century Burney Newspapers Collection* with a particular focus on weeklies for ladies such as *The Visiter* (1723-1724) and *The Parrot* (1728), whereas American LTEs are taken from the *Early American Newspapers (1690-1922)* archive. Unlike Britain, early Colonial America did not feature weeklies specifically addressed to female readers until the end of the 18th century (Stearns 1933). For this reason, LTEs are extracted from colonial *Gazettes* published between 1720 and 1740 with a special attention to those edited/published by women (such as *The Rhode Island Gazette* and *The South Carolina Gazette*) and those modelled on British essay periodicals (e.g. *The Maryland Gazette*).

Selected References:

* Batchelor, J. and Powell, M.N. (2018) *Women’s Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2018.
* Cavanagh, A (2019) “Letters to the Editor as a Tool of Citizenship”. In: Cavanagh, A and

Steel, J, (eds.) *Letters to the Editor: Comparative and Historical Perspectives*. Palgrave

Macmillan , pp. 89-108.

* Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
* Jones, Aled (1996). *Powers of the press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth*

*Century England.* Aldershot: Ashgate

* Koller, V. (2012) “How to Analyze Collective Identity in Discourse – Textual and Contextual Parameter”. *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines,* 5(2): 19-38.
* Martin, J. R. and White, P. R.R (2005) *The Language of Evaluation. Appraisal in English.* Houndmills: Macmillan.
* Stearns, B.M. (1933) “Early New York Magazines for Ladies”. *New York History*, 14 (1): 32-41.
* Stearns, B.M. (1933) “Early English Periodicals for Ladies (1700-1760). *PMLA* 48(1): 38-60.