

Summer 2013

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Recommended Citation

Originally published as Guida, Denise Scannell. "Amanda Knox and Bella Figura." *Italian Americana*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2013, pp. 148–167.

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Amanda Knox and Bella Figura

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On the evening of December 4, 2009, I tuned in to CNN to learn the fate of a University of Washington student, Amanda Knox, who was standing trial for the heinous murder of her British housemate, Meredith Kercher, in Perugia, Italy. The story had initially shocked me, because, having spent two summers there, studying Italian language and culture at the Università per Stranieri (University for Foreigners), I had known Perugia to be a peaceful and safe hilltop city. In 2007 the Kercher case appeared to be open and shut. Over the next year, however, conflicting information and evidence continued to make headlines, each time triggering a media frenzy in Italian and British news and highly volatile blogs across several cultures. After a one-year investigation and a trial that attracted global media coverage, Amanda Knox was convicted of killing Meredith Kercher, and was sentenced by the Court of Assisi to twenty-six years in Italian prison. As I sat listening to the guilty verdict, I experienced a chilling moment, not because I was convinced of her innocence, but because I suspected another force at work.

This essay shifts the focus from the debate over Knox's innocence or guilt of the charges, and from the reversal of her conviction, to a subtle communication phenomenon, which, for many, manifests itself in the performance of Italian identity and culture. In this beyond a reasonable doubt scenario Knox can be found guilty of violating the Italian codes of conduct, which influenced the perception of her guilt in the public sphere. This essay considers the role of communication in performing *bella figura*, making a beautiful figure, and Knox's performance of *brutta figura*, the ugly figure, and *mala figura*, the bad figure. It gathers data from many Italian, British, and American news sources, along with many crime reports and books, Perugia Shock Blog, online petitions, and the Friends of Amanda Website, and uses this data to emphasize and

substantiate the characteristics of *bella figura* that are applicable to creating Knox's media identity in Italian and American culture. The *bella figura* and media framing discussed in this essay are only two variables that have influenced how people perceived Amanda Knox. We cannot assume that every Italian person believes in *bella figura* and or is influenced by the Italian media. Our orientation in the world and self-understanding, along with truths that speak to us, do not exist in monolithic human experience and minimal possibilities, but instead, in a fusion of dialogical communication and unpredictable, fluxing cultures and identities.

To Make a Beautiful Figure

Bella figura is reflected in everything from values and beliefs to language, customs, and civic life. The term is embedded in the grammatical variations and subtle nuances of the Italian language (verbal and non-verbal). It is idiomatic in that when Italians *fare bella figura*, they can be upholding social class, following codes of conduct, or showing appreciation, respect, and civility (Nardini 10). *Bella figura* is integral to Italian culture and identity, but as a cultural phenomenon, it is one of the most elusive concepts to translate (Nardini 7). The term is tossed around by tourists and international business people to identify customs to be honored (Severgnini), is acknowledged by social scientists and anthropologists to describe the national characteristics of Italians (Peabody), and is used in popular culture to depict cultural constructs, inherent in representations of the Mafia and *la dolce vita* (Nardini 6). Unfortunately, most people can only allude to the *bella figura*, describe it in a superficial manner, or naïvely limit it to a façade—separate from one's true self (Nardini 20). Among the various interpretations and references from foreigners and Italians there is not a single definition that captures the complexity of *bella figura* as a cultural phenomenon (Nardini 20). There is also little explanation of the term, its usages within Italian American studies, or its affects on Italian American culture.

Drawing upon Gloria Nardini's critical text, *Che Bella Figura!*, which defines the code as a central metaphor for understanding Italian life, and Hans-Georg Gadamer's understanding of self-consciousness and what connects us to the human world, I interpret *bella figura* as both a metaphor and a sense-making process within Italian identity and culture. For Gadamer, understanding is a mode of being, not something we consciously do or do not do. It

requires a pragmatic know-how, based on judgments and interpretations, which is revealed through the way in which we position our worldview (443). From this perspective, *bella figura* is a prestructure or prejudice by which Italians and some Italian Americans understand and interpret their linguistically mediated and historical world, and which does not disappear when Italians interacts with people from different cultures. Identity formation depends on creation and self-presentation, so the person is not lost in the making of the figure; the person is the figure (Nardini 20). This distinction changes the concept *bella figura* from a superficial act to a hermeneutic process, a dynamic interplay between ever-changing interpretations and symbolic interactions.

Bella figura is framed by self-presentation, performance, and display, all of which depend upon an audience to produce meaning and approval (Nardini 7). Goffman's dramaturgical theory of self-presentation suggests that the demands of social interaction require us to project a positive impression of ourselves, which in this case is situated in Knox's presentation of innocence or guilt. Goffman defines performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" ("Presentation" 15). He views performance as ceremony when it highlights the values of the society in which it occurs and in which the performance implies a learned appropriateness.

Since *bella figura* is deeply embedded within the subconscious structures of the Italian mind, performative communication is second nature to Italians (Nardini 33). Italy's reputation as a performance culture dates back to the Roman period (Nardini 21). The influence of Roman civilization upon Italian culture results in Italians' desire to uphold a particular aesthetic virtue as life itself. It was during the Italian Renaissance and Baroque periods, however, that *bella figura* was heightened by notions of high culture. People traveled great distances to experience the virtue of Italian art, food, decor, artisanship, dramatic music and theatre, ceremony, and overt emotions (Nardini 22). After centuries of spontaneous or scripted performative communication that permeates everyday life, Italians characterize one another by their ability to make a spectacle.

The *bella figura* is informed by three important cultural constructs that appear throughout Italian history and culture: *virtuosismo*, performing with great style (Barzini, 91); *sprezzatura*,

displaying an "artful artlessness" (Berger 9); and *disinvoltura*, exhibiting a graceful and inscrutable demeanor (Del Negro and Berger 82). All three terms are used to describe various forms of spectacles, illusions, façades, or adorned truths that "glide elegantly over the surface of life and leave the depths unplumbed" (Barzini 75). They also emphasize the virtues of appropriate manners and Western European Humanism. It is necessary to briefly address these concepts in order to fully trace the *bella figura*.

To perform with great style suggests a notion of high spectacle and high culture. Grandiose spectacles or ceremonies and the value placed on such spectacles and ceremonies are easily identifiable in the Carnevale of Venice, the Palio of Siena, the Coliseum of Rome, and countless other examples of ornate structures, adornments, feasts, and processions. Barzini explains that striving for effects is always present in things "made, adapted, or corrected" by human beings (74). The effects often combine forces of nature and majestic landscapes or include the authority of the Catholic Church (Ferraro 157). The goal is to make life acceptable and certain. Barzini writes, "Ugly things must be hidden, unpleasant and tragic facts swept under the carpet... Everything must be made to sparkle" (75). For example, Catholicism, with its Madonna and crucifix, cathedrals and stained-glass windows, papacy and magic ritual, is the ultimate *virtuosismo*, especially when set against the backdrop an impoverished village.

Virtuosismo also has a practical value and involves some level of skill (Barzini, 91). It is displayed by the operatic singer performing a difficult aria, the poet commanding his words to perfection, the mason carefully crafting a church frieze, or the cook turning simple ingredients into a dazzling dish. It can also be as common as the everyday ritual of the *passeggiata*. Del Negro and Berger contend that the relationship between the body and social order is revealed in the piazza (6). One's "attention to social dynamics is heightened and the presentation of self becomes more actively performative" (Del Negro and Berger 8). Ferraro claims that there is a particular Bakhtinian inverted sense of order about this pageantry in the piazza: appearances are distorted and the spectator can become the spectacle (157). Thus, *virtuosismo* is experienced in the grandest spectacles and most ordinary social interactions.

Disinvoltura is positioned on the other end of the spectacle spectrum. To be both graceful and inscrutable requires a delicate balance of behavior, such as knowing when to be silent and

insouciant, or to stay above the fray. It is also used to describe an ease of manners. In their study of promenade rituals, Del Negro and Berger refer to *disinvoltura* as an “aesthetic of reflexivity,” in which a strolling performance is judged by one’s clothes, hair, walk, appropriate eye contact and other bodily movement. There is an acute awareness of self-presentation and display in that the “performer must acknowledge that he or she is performing and that others are paying attention without drawing undue attention to either fact” (82). The performer is also an audience member, which makes the stroll a highly interactive and symbolic occurrence. The success of this self-conscious performance relies on one’s reflexive awareness of social norms, gender roles, power relations, and truths and contradictions that are central to Italian culture (82).

Disinvoltura is often linked to *sprezzatura* (nonchalance), although each term contains distinct meanings and usages within the Italian language. Sometimes they are combined so one can perform *disinvoltura sprezzata*. The idea of *sprezzatura* gains currency in the 16th century with Castiglione’s, *The Book of the Courtier*. According to Castiglione, a successful courtier amuses his ruler by skillfully making difficult tasks look easy. He manages to appear slightly mysterious and crafty by concealing the effort it took for him to learn how to do things without showing effort (9). The appearance of effortless effort transcends the mundane experiences of everyday life. There is an underlying deception involved with employing *sprezzatura* for personal gain, which Machiavelli addresses in his writing on ethics and morals (Gardaphé 48). For an aristocrat like Castiglione, who spent his life as an Italian courtier, a diplomat, and a prominent author, however, it’s the virtue of true art. His ideas influenced the standards for *sprezzatura*, especially within the realm of music, dance, rhetoric, etiquette, and athletics. The manifestation of grace and deception found in both *disinvoltura* and *sprezzatura* are forms of meta-communication that are essential to performing *bella figura* successfully.

The necessary components of these Italian concepts are an urban environment, life in a piazza, and an audience to judge members of the community. In this regard, *bella figura* is connected to one’s sense of civility—knowledge of social rules, class structures, and obligations that define daily interaction and public appearances (Silverman 39). Civility is the central theme in Habermas’s theory of the public sphere, where civic identity develops as part of one’s consciousness (82). Drawing from

Habermas, Silverman argues that integrity is based on one's civic sense of self, and that appearing happy, putting on a good face, even when life is unpleasant, is necessary for making a beautiful figure. One does not have to be Italian to be held to this standard or to make an ugly, *brutta*, or bad, *mala*, figure (Nardini 6).

The notion of self-presentation and performance is recognized in outdoor Mediterranean European cultures, which are characterized by Catholicism and codes of honor and shame (Nardini 17). The Latin word *onore* (honor) signifies respect, prestige, reward among ones' community, while *verecunida* (shame) refers to chastity, modesty, respect (Nardini, 6), and saving face (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi). Self-identity is developed and maintained through performance (Goffman, "Presentation" 15), and *bella figura* influences the way in which the self is publicly expressed in a shame culture. Honor and shame "create external constraints or boundaries in a society where the personhood is paraded in the piazza—rather than located in the inner self and bounded by guilt" (Nardini 17). It is not enough for one to place value on integrity and high moral standards; one's character must be reflected in the formalities of his or her civic behavior and public appearance, to achieve the figure status (Reich 2).

Perugia: Student Travelers and Locals

Sitting high upon the Umbrian hills, with panoramic views of an evocative landscape, Perugia is the oldest Etruscan city and the capital of the region of Umbria. Known as the "green heart of Italy," the small hilltop polis is tucked behind medieval walls that protect artistic treasures, religious artifacts, and ancient architecture. In the evening, the center of town pulsates with life, as hundreds of people gather to socialize on the steps of the *Cathedral of San Lorenzo*, stroll the *Piazza IV Novembre*, or patronize the many bars, discotheques, and restaurants along the *Corso Vannucci*. In the daylight, the scenic townscape and the university offer a peaceful and inspiring atmosphere for studying and relaxing. For strangers, it speaks of the possibility of feeling one is living the good Italian life, *la dolce vita*. Perugia satisfies the Anglo-American imagination of the sensuous Italy of Henry James, and the fantasies of a timeless, leisurely, and exotic culture that twenty-first century tourists seek (Edensor 199). The student traveler often wants to connect with the natural world in search of what Dean MacCannell (92) refers to as

front and backstage authenticity, to experience the smells, tastes, sounds, touch, and visual stimuli that are not located in a sterile classroom. Old European societies and outdoor cultures are duplicitous for student travelers, in that while they appear to be free spaces to live out fantasies of authentic cultural experiences, the local community can be more observant of its members' behavior and rigid about upholding customs, forms, and ceremonies. Misunderstanding local norms perpetuates the "ugly American" stereotype or the Daisy Miller complex. Amanda, like Henry James's character, is a young American woman whose avant-garde attitude leads her to a tragic ending.

Beneath Perugia's old world charm lies staunch Catholicism, parochialism, and codes of conduct that apply to both locals and visitors. For the tourist who travels half-way around the globe to view the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, to enter the Vatican City, or to reach the depths of the Roman Catacombs, Catholicism in its traditional iconic form provides a desirable atmosphere. What is not apparent to the tourist's gaze is that Catholicism in Italy is talismanic, and exerts authority over both public and private behavior. With Catholicism come rigid conventions for sexual conduct and public display, which can be perplexing for those who view Italian sexuality through a Fellini film, *Jersey Shore*, or the lens of their own culture. The student traveler may acquire information and observe the behaviors of local citizens, but it is rare for her to have insider knowledge or first-hand experience of these cultural norms unless, like Amanda, she finds herself in violation of the code. Local truths—for example, that Perugians' do not freely discuss the details of their intimate lives in public or that they frown upon romantic relations between Italian and foreign students—are not written in student guidebooks (Dempsey 116). Most students come and go from Perugia without ever knowing that any codes exist or why or how they are practiced. Thus, for foreigners, Italy can be an unpredictable and deceptive culture, in part, because the rules and performance of *bella figura* rely on "symbols and spectacles" that are not easily grasped (Barzini 90). As a result, many have miscalculated the social, political, and economic perspectives of Italians (Barzini; Severgnini). In 1985, social psychologist Dean Peabody conducted an empirical study of Italian characteristics and discovered an undertow of social distrust, which creates a discrepancy between appearance and reality. The discrepancy that Peabody observed is grounded in centuries of extreme economic,

political, and social conditions, and the more recent unification of Italy. As a means of survival, Italians have learned how to perform favorable appearances, which cannot be trusted.

Paradox of Appearances

The Amanda Knox media story has many twist and turns, each one conveniently organized and presented to viewers with a built-in understanding of motive and guilt. Media framing theory suggests that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning in ways that structures social norms and cultural values. Media frames are powerful enough to supersede the framing role of family systems, educational systems, and political systems (Goffman "Frame"; McCombs and Shaw), which makes them extremely dangerous when taken out of context. Among the many well-documented examples of media framing in the Knox case is the staging of her MySpace and Facebook profiles. Photographs of Knox dressed as a gangster and her adolescent nickname "Foxy Knoxy" were presented as signs of sexual deviance and violence. The *Corriere Della Sera* proclaimed, "Amanda Voleva Solo Sesso"—"Amanda Only Wanted Sex" (2009), while the *Cronaca* announced, "Gli Indizi Lasciati Sul Web"—"Clues left on Web" (2007). To exacerbate her situation, video footage and photographs captured Knox smiling at friends while she was incarcerated. Frozen in time is the appearance of a girl who either does not understand the graveness of her situation or thinks everything is a joke.

The obsession with Knox's sexuality and beauty (Burleigh) continued to cause "feverish media coverage" in British and Italian tabloids (BBC.co.uk). Every rumor about her sexuality that was leaked to the local press started a wave of reports from news sources around the globe. For example, authorities asked her to write down the names of all the men with whom she'd had sexual contact during her life. She complied with their request, without caution or regard to self-presentation. Days later, the Italian media falsely claimed she'd had sex with six men during the two months after she'd arrived in Italy, presenting an entirely fabricated image of promiscuity: "Too Many Men" (Corriere Della Serra.it). Later that year, her alleged prison diary was uncovered: "Secret Diary Reveals Foxy Knoxy Was 'Always Thinking About Sex'" (DailyMail.co.uk). Knox was branded a vicious "she-devil" and "sex-crazed Foxy Knoxy" in media around

the world (News.Sky.com). It was hypothesized that Knox's "vigorous sexual appetite" resulted in a sex game gone wrong (Bowman, 60). The press published imaginary, but graphic drawings and simulations of how Amanda killed Meredith after she refused to partake in an orgy and real footage/photographs of the crime scene and the victim before the trial began. The worst media headline read: "Foxy Knoxy Held Down Meredith During Deadly Sex Attack" (DailyMail.co.uk).

The fascination with Amanda Knox proved to be not just about sex or violence, but also about the continuing uncertainty over character as defined by sexual violence (Bowman 62). "Chi è davvero Amanda Knox?" (Primapagina.it). Similar to a horror film, the audience waited in suspense to find out if the real Amanda Knox was a victim, a villain, or a vixen (Burleigh "Victim"). When it comes to perception, reality "melts away, leaving us with the sense of uncertainty and danger," evoking emotions that Edmund Burke refers to as the sublime (Bowman 62). Amanda's constant lack of decorum contradicts her timeless beauty, thus instilling a degree of terror in our imagination, the idea that something dark lives within her.

Prosecutor Giuliano Mignini is a seasoned actor in the Italian legal system. He has a reputation for high theatrics, outlandish theories, melodramatic witnesses, and the ability to use Italy's sensational media to his advantage. In the book, *Injustice in Perugia*, Bruce Fisher details how Mignini manipulated the media, to spread misinformation about Amanda Knox to the public (206). He leaked to the press distorted facts regarding DNA evidence and Amanda's sexual deviancy. Mignini not only controlled the framing of her image, but the output of information. For example, he requested that Amanda and Raffaele be held without legal representation, and without access to the media until their trial. The trials, unfortunately, began one year later, which gave Mignini ample time to shape public and unsequestered jury opinion. Once the trial began, an eager audience filled the courtroom each day to witness first-hand accounts of Perugia's crime of the century.

Frank Sfarzo, local journalist and author of Perugia Shock Blog, writes, "The true drama played out in that courtroom, the shock of decades of conviction, that's what suddenly made people understand that there's no proof to convict Amanda and Raffaele, that we can't be certain beyond a reasonable doubt. Call it buyer's remorse. Worldwide." (Perugiashock.com). Sfarzo's sharp criticism

of Mignini began in January 2009, after he realized that the press had been duped. In May 2011, Mignini filed a defamation lawsuit against Sfarzo, which caused Google to shut down *Perugia Shock*. In addition to silencing an important source of information about the case and infringing on Sfarzo's freedom of speech, Mignini has filed suits against Amanda's parents, lawyers, and reporters, bullying his way through the Italian legal system. The overturned conviction of Amanda Knox in 2011 has many questioning Mignini's abuse of power and influence over the case. Why was his narrative more convincing than the forensic evidence that contradicted his line of reasoning?

From a performance perspective, it could have something to do with the way in which Mignini orchestrated drama in the courtroom and a guilty verdict. His performance took place in a theatrical civic space, set against the backdrop of Catholic symbols and remnants of Roman civilization. He played out his theories with style and *virtuosismo*. He satisfied the imagination of the audience, by drawing on taboo matters of sex and violence, and severe violations of *bella figura*, to present the image of a woman with poor character and questionable morals. The audience recognized guilt in her calm and expressionless face and poor demeanor. Thus, Amanda Knox was a victim of an investigation that was built on mistakes, not just forensic evidence and hypotheses, but mistakes in her self-presentation made early on and continually invoked by the prosecutor. The following discussion highlights some of Knox's ugly performances that occurred during the five days leading up to her arrest and during her first trial.

Act 1: Performing Grief

The hours following the brutal murder of Meredith Kercher were critical to the perception of Knox's innocence or guilt. On November 2, 2007, Knox made her first mistake by not acting like a grief-stricken friend and housemate in public. Instead of crying or making elegant gestures of sorrow, she was observed embracing, whispering, and kissing her Italian boyfriend while they waited outside what locals refers to as the "house of horrors" (Nadeau). For the media, the stage was set, the actors appeared, and the drama unfolded. Without prior knowledge of the events leading up to this moment, or of the mental state of these students, the Italian reporters said that they found their behavior peculiar, so they continued to film

them. Reporters could only interpret Amanda's and Raffaele's behavior through their own cultural lenses, which showed them a couple performing tasteless displays of sexual conduct, and breaking unspoken rules against inter-ethnic romances. The money moment, their pubic kiss was only seconds long, but video footage, framed in a specific context, played in a loop in the media and on the Internet. Although witnesses later testified that Amanda did appear sad and did shed tears in private, a British newspaper claimed, "Knox Joked and Laughed with her Boyfriend and 'Showed No Emotion' in the Hours after her British Flatmate was Found Murdered" (Telegraph.co.uk), while the Italian press branded her "Luciferina" (Dempsey 2010). Although the interpretation of this scene could also be interpreted as a young woman in shock, being consoled by her lover, the media portrayed Knox as a woman failing to meet cultural expectations for the performance of grief and mourning in Italy. According to Barzini's and Gardaphé's (48) description of the *bella figura*, a young woman crying in private for her roommate differs from her crying in public when she is aware that she is being watched. Her pubic crying should be exaggerated, so there is no doubt that she is a good and grief stricken friend. Amanda is not Italian, which begs the question of how a foreigner should look when expressing grief in Italy. If she had expressed too much grief, she could have been accused of going too far, and thus making a *brutta figura*. The performance requires a skillful, yet delicate show of grace or *disinvoltura* for believability, similar to strolling the *passeggiata*. Regardless, Amanda would have had to have a deep cultural understanding and reflexive awareness, of the way the code works in order to be successful.

Act 2: Upholding Decorum

At the end of the day, the police began to round up all the housemates, their significant others, and friends of Meredith, for the first round of *questura*, interrogations, at the police station. The stage was a waiting room, and the actors arrived at different times, some of them just having learned of Meredith's death. According to news reports, the process lasted until 5:30 in the morning. It was during this period that Amanda performed an ugly figure for an Italian and British audience, consequently offending people across two cultures. The rules of behavior in an Italian bureaucratic setting require a sense of etiquette, silence, and respect. Knox's behavior has been

described as hyperactive, angry, loud at times, conspiratorial, joking, emotionless, and obnoxious. Her performance was highly interactive and symbolic, but not in a manner that met the audience's expectations of the occasion or the setting. She failed to pay attention to her own performance and failed to acknowledge that others were paying attention to her. Her strange actions may have been a result of grief, but without doubt, they left an unsettling impression on those around her. The British students later testified that they were distrustful of Amanda and her relationship with Meredith.

Act 3: Expressing Sexuality

In Perugia, expressing sexuality in public is cutting a *brutta figura*, but expressing sexuality in public during a period of grief is much worse, making a *mala figura*. Within twenty-four hours of Meredith's death, she and Raffaele were observed shopping for undergarments, and allegedly joking about sex in front of a sales clerk, who then later notified the media of Amanda's distasteful behavior. The media promptly responded: "Knox-Raffaele, Shopping 'Intimo' (Corriere Della Sera, online, 2009). Knox claimed that she could not return to the apartment to pick up her personal belongings. The social context of her innocence or guilt was fixed in other people's stigmatizing perceptions and talk (Goffman "Presentation"). Mignini constantly depicted her as someone who never showed true grief for her roommate. Knox's alibi was also filled with sex--both she and Raffaele claimed to have stayed home and made love on the night of November 1, 2007. Both her actions and her explanations supported Mignini's allegations of Knox's being a sex-crazed predator.

Act 4: Possessing a Dirty Soul

Amanda Knox was accused of having a dirty and impure soul. For Italians, cleanliness is linked to long held distinctions between regions considered culturally high (North) and low (South). Cleanliness is a standard by which they measure their own degree of civilization. Thus, the suspicions of Amanda's cleanliness began with local authorities and their notions of self-presentation, which extended to an American woman. In the bathroom, there were small drops of blood on the floor and around the sink, the latter never seen by Knox. Authorities asked her why she took a shower once she

discovered blood in the bathroom. Her answer was childish and ill-mannered, exposing a young woman who had never lived on her own, much less lived in a foreign country, or faced murder. She simply stated that she thought it was menstrual blood on the mat, and then made a sound of disgust, “Ew,” bringing shame upon Meredith by suggesting she was dirty, and bringing shame upon herself by making a *brutta figura*. Not once did her cultural differences lead authorities to conclude that perhaps she might not read the situation the same way an Italian girl her age would. The only images of the bathroom that were published were the ones taken after forensic experts sprayed luminal from wall to wall, to detect blood and other substances. To the world, the glowing blue bathroom painted Knox as a coldhearted killer who took a shower after a bloody massacre.

One of her roommates, Filomena Romanelli, testified in court how strange she thought it was that Amanda had taken a shower, since she had also taken one the night before (Dempsey 274). It was all very suspicious. In old-world European societies, only prostitutes needed a good daily scrubbing (Ross 176). If Knox had cleaned her body, then perhaps she had cleaned the crime scene. Neither the judge nor the jury were convinced by the counter argument of the defense that the second shower was a matter of cultural differences in hygiene. Filomena also emphasized that Amanda was not very clean around the house. Her statement corroborated those made by Meredith's friends, who told the court there had been tension between the two women because of Knox's failure to flush the toilet and keep the bathroom clean. Mignini, who was quoted as saying “Amanda was dirty in her soul, just as she is dirty on the outside” (Burleigh 5), utilized the cleanliness metaphor as a way to portray Amanda as a filthy, immoral American girl, whose overshowering was not a sign of being next to Godliness, but of sexual deviance and murder.

Filomena continued to tarnish Amanda's reputation by insinuating that she had sinned. Filomena was said to have liberal views on premarital sex and recreational marijuana. When it came time for Filomena to testify in court, however, she publicly denounced her behavior and set herself apart from the American girl. Of course, some Italian girls freely express unorthodox opinions in private and engage in behavior that defies conventional public conduct; but they rarely do so in public. Although Filomena was not accused of a crime, she made a *bella figura* of her testimony by expressing shame and remorse for her actions. Filomena looked up at

the judge and said, "I have sinned" (Dempsey 274). The courtroom, with its hanging crucifix, was transformed into a confessional and the judge a priest. He absolved her of her sins by saying, "We all have" (Dempsey 274). The judge did not absolve Amanda for having committed the same sins. The difference between the two women lies in the perceived shameless manner in which Amanda self-disclosed her views and experiences.

Act 5: Cart Wheeling and Saving Face

Knox's final violations occurred on the evening of November 5th, after she was discovered making a *brutta figura* that investigators could not overlook. Knox carelessly turned cartwheels and did handstands in the police station while waiting for her boyfriend. She claims that she was practicing yoga as a means of reducing stress. Exercising in public is normal in the United States, and yoga practitioners have been known to posture freely in public. In Italy, however, exercise is usually confined to private spaces or public spaces designated for exercise. Knox was immediately hauled into an interrogation room for 14 hours, until she implicated Patrick Lumumba. For Italians, this was another display of disrespect for the victim's family and an admission of guilt (Telegraph.co.uk). Knox's insouciance toward the social rules shocked and angered people and attracted world-wide suspicion. One headline proclaimed, "Amanda Knox did Cartwheels after Meredith's Death" (Telegraph.co.uk). Not only did Knox act without caution, but also she clearly did not understand the notion of saving face. Knox falsely accused Lumumba of Meredith's murder, and as a result, defamed his character, a crime for which she was charged in December 2009. She ruined her credibility and her public image because she did not protect the other-face, the public image of the innocent man, during the interrogation. Lumumba, also an outsider to Italian culture, has made a dramatic public display, a *bella figura*, out of being publicly shamed. He has been interviewed by numerous reporters and appeared on Italian TV discussing his ordeal. The audience was sympathetic to his pain and his story, but it was not the story that needed to be performed in order for Knox to appear innocent in the public sphere. Unfortunately, she did not learn from Lumumba's behavior, and continued to make ugly figures in court. On one occasion, she wore a T-shirt bearing the Beatles song title "All You Need Is Love" to court. The Italian press described Knox's as having "the face of an angel but the eyes of a killer" (Cronaca.it). Amanda's

beauty, liberalism, and conduct were always judged against the backdrop of staunch Catholicism and provincial social codes (Dailymail.co.uk).

Some believed that Knox portrayed herself as a bright, self-confident American girl, who never lost her temper, cried, or got hysterical, but most perceived her lack of emotion as another sign of guilt. During the first trial, her tone was flat, and her testimony lacked passion, tears, or linguistic drama. At the time, her pronunciation and translation of the Italian language was poor. She could not carry the *virtuosismo* needed for using *belle parole*—beautiful words. It is documented that Knox, after two years of showing little emotion, made a high-pitched wail in the courtroom when the judge pronounced her sentence of twenty-six years in prison (Tribune.com.pk), thus once again violating the show of good face, grace, and integrity at all costs.

Conclusion

Perugia can be an arcane cultural environment, because specific verbal and nonverbal displays of *bella figura* are communally constructed through historical and linguistic regional practices of patrimony, *companilismo* and Catholicism. The overall success of a performance is also determined by highly complex notions of *virtuosismo*, *disinvoltura*, and *sprezzatura* that are integral to local, regional and national Italian culture. As such, Amanda Knox needed to perform a *bella figura*, with *disinvoltura sprezzata*, when expressing grief for Meredith. She needed to perform another *bella figura*, with *virtuosismo*, when expressing her innocence to the authorities and the judge, and in front of the most controversial and sensational media systems in Europe (Hibberd).

The paradox of Knox's appearance is multifaceted, because her behavior was first framed and interpreted within the *bella figura* metaphor by local individuals, and then reframed by the media. Knox's performance of the *brutta figura* took on a life of its own in the media. In early 2009, Knox was considered for nomination in a poll to establish Italy's 'personalities of the year' (Telgraph.Co.UK). Such sentiments suggest that she holds minor celebrity status as Italy's "most-loved of villains"—a significant leap from her gruesome image in 2007 (BBC.co.uk). Ironically, her *brutta figura* was performed with such style, *virtuosità*, that it evolved into a

beautiful performance of the ugly, *una bella figura della brutta*, which Italian audience members have come to embrace.

Chi è davvero Amanda Knox? Perhaps the answer to this question was revealed during the second trial, when the world observed a more human side of Amanda Knox. She polished her appearance, controlled her mannerisms, and spoke effortless Italian. She shed tears and expressed condolences to the Kercher family. The *disinvoltura sprezzata* with which she preformed could indicate that she has learned to present a good story, and has a better understanding of the *bella figura* and all of its ramifications.

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