

IHSS Research Seminar Program 2025

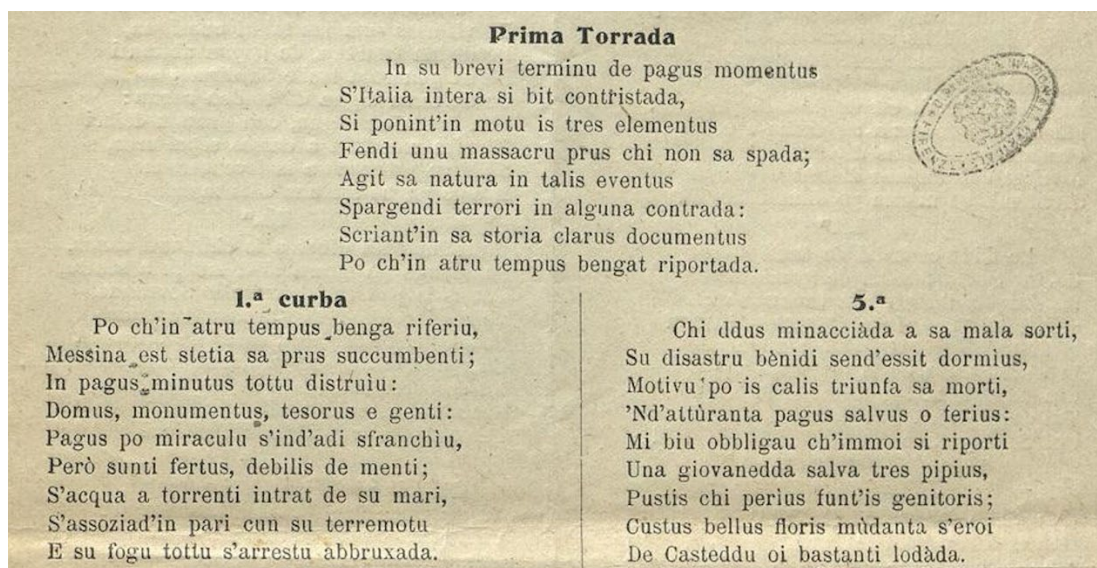
Disaster, Poverty, and Marginalised Languages in Printed News Ballads

Dr Una McIlvenna (ANU)

Chairs: Assoc. Prof. Nell Musgrove (NSAH) & Dr. Sarah Bendall (IHSS)

Thursday 5 June, 1-2pm AEST

To be held in MEL-412-1-01, Arts Precinct, 36-38 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy and online via [Teams](#)



Why do some languages become dominant and others become marginalised? And what challenges are presented to researchers when their source material is in a language they're not only unfamiliar with but which is, in fact, dying out? This paper is an exploration of the earliest research to come out of my Future Fellowship, a project looking at ballads about news events from the 16th through the early 20th century. Ballads were a common media format in which the news of the day could be widely broadcast, and my project looks at ballads in English, French, German, Italian, and Dutch. The first category of news to be explored is disaster ballads, which has produced, surprisingly, a deluge of ballads in languages which I not only cannot speak or read, but which are considered to be marginalised. In this paper I consider the reasons why this might be so, and explore the connections between poverty, disaster, and marginalised languages.

[Una McIlvenna](#) is Australian Research Council Future Fellow 2023-2027 and Senior Lecturer in English at the Australian National University, where she researches the tradition of singing the news. She has published about news-singing in *Past & Present*, *Renaissance Studies*, *Media History*, and *Huntington Library Quarterly*. Her most recent book, [Singing the News of Death: Execution Ballads in Europe 1500-1900](#) won the 2023 Katharine Briggs Award from the Folklore Society. She has been awarded research fellowships from the Newberry Library, Chicago; the Marsh Library, Dublin; The Renaissance Society of America; the Lewis Walpole Library; and the Descartes Centre, Utrecht University. She is the founder of the international Song Studies Network, and is on the editorial board of the 'Song Studies' book series with Amsterdam University Press.