

## Connecting the Dots. Italian Literature in a Global History of Literature

---

BART VAN DEN BOSSCHE

Research Group MDRN, Arts, University of Leuven/KU Leuven, Blijde Inkomststraat  
21-3311, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium. E-mail: bart.vandenbossche@arts.kuleuven.be

The goals and methods of a global history of literature may not always be easily reconcilable with those pertinent to local ('national' or 'regional') literary traditions; however, behind the, at times, lengthy or painstaking discussions on the criteria of selection, emphasis, and on more or less necessary nuances, there are also a number of deeper and more fundamental issues at stake in a global history of literature that can be fruitfully approached through the looking-glass of a local literary tradition. Even characteristics of a particular tradition of literature that may seem specific, even highly specific, can give rise to intriguing questions bearing on some of the wide-ranging issues tied to a global perspective on literature. More in particular, with regard to Italian literature, three issues come to the fore: the way literary history deals with the question of agency, the connections between literary history and cultural repertoires, and the question of canonicity and ideology in literary historiography.

### Agency

In a broad sense, the question of *agency* has to do with the ways authorship and textuality are treated as prime objects of literary history, and more in particular with the fact that both authors and texts very often construct or rewrite, directly or indirectly, to a limited or to a large extent, a particular literary-historical framework as well as a specific position within this framework. This can be a matter of interpreting features of literary texts in terms of implicit or explicit positioning of texts (and their authors) vis-à-vis a literary context (predecessors, literary fathers, dominant genres, models, repertoires and so forth), but it may also have to do with the fact that in some cases the (dominant) history of a genre, a period, a repertoire has been written (often in very explicit ways and to a significant degree) by the authors themselves, in their creative textual production as well as in their ideas on literature. Authors write their own version of literary history in their creative work, because certain textual features can and do establish strong associations with literary devices and repertoires that reach far beyond the immediate literary context (the 'neighbours' of the texts) and that articulate a 'historical perspective' of their own, in

the form of a specific position within a kind of *longue durée* of literature. But in many cases, the authors themselves have actively elaborated upon this ‘historical perspective’ in their own works or in the works of their fellow writers or their literary opponents. Italian literary history provides some striking examples in this direction.

Dante, for instance, can rightly be called the first historian of Italian poetry (of Italian literature at large even), as his treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia* contains a short comparative sketch of recent poetry in *lingua d’oc* and in the vernacular.<sup>1</sup> This view on the development of poetry written in *volgare illustre* has also been incorporated in the *Commedia*, and in particular in the *Purgatorio*, where Dante meets one poet after the other, from Casella to Sordello, from Statius to Bonagiunta Orbicciani, from Guido Guinizzelli to Arnaut Daniel.<sup>2</sup> Dante’s vision on vernacular poetry is of course far from disinterested, since the historical and typological overview sketched in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* is at least in part a self-canonization, and the encounters with poets in the *Purgatorio* are occasions to come to terms with his own past as a lyrical poet. What is at stake in the *Purgatorio* is both Dante’s position within the history of vernacular poetry as a champion and practitioner of the *dolce stil novo* and his subsequent endeavours to move beyond lyrical love poetry towards the *Commedia*. Since the Risorgimento canonization of Dante and in particular since the publication of Francesco De Sanctis’ *Storia della letteratura italiana* in the 1870s, Dante’s vision on poetry has itself become the dominant, canonized vision on the poetry of the Italian Duecento. The poetical school known ever since as the ‘*dolce stil novo*’ or ‘*stilnovismo*’ is actually a formula used by Bonagiunta Orbicciani in *Purgatorio* XXIV to define the poetical style of Dante, his opponent. While this view has been challenged on various occasions, it still remains the backbone of the most widely spread ideas on the evolution of vernacular poetry in Italy.

Another quite well-known example in Italian literature is Pietro Bembo’s codification of Italian literary language proposed in his dialogue *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525). This codification is based on a particular approach to the history of literary language that essentially comes down to two important points. First of all, in order to identify and understand the qualities of good literature (or, for that matter, the best of literature), it is vital to assess the qualities of its language (or, to be more precise, to assess the relationship between the qualities of the topic/subject matter and the qualities of language). Secondly, and more importantly, the historical development of literary language is characterized by a kind of *longue durée*, crystallizing in certain eras (or centuries) in a cluster of highly valuable writers and outstanding masterpieces that realize the aesthetic possibilities of language in its highest form and should therefore be considered as a norm for future generations. For Latin literature, this is beyond any doubt the era of Cicero and Virgil, whereas for vernacular literature, it is the literature of the middle of the *Trecento* (more precisely Petrarch’s poetry and Boccaccio’s prose).<sup>3</sup> It would be hard to consider Bembo’s treatise as a truly historical work, since his intentions were overtly prescriptive, and what he was after was primarily a grammar or even a manifesto on what the best literature should look like. Nevertheless, the normative poetics of the *Prose della volgar lingua* are rooted in a narrative of history, a history based on what could be defined as a logic of unequal distribution of talent and on lucky encounters of genius and the

evolution of language. Furthermore, the lasting influence of Bembo's work is not just a matter of allegiance to the specific model of literary language Bembo advocated (an allegiance that would be responsible for the remarkable stability of the Italian [literary] language from the Renaissance well into the 19th century and even beyond), but it was also, and in a more fundamental way, a matter of the underlying narrative of history. In fact, elements of Bembo's approach to literary language and vernacular literature can be traced in the way countless authors and critics from the Cinquecento until well into the 20th century perceive Italian literary history and articulate their own position within it.

The dominant take on the development of Italian literature could be summarized as an endeavour to *reculer pour mieux sauter*, a tendency to propose a modernization by criticizing the recent past and referring to (or canonizing) authors from a more remote past.<sup>4</sup> Similar attempts to innovate contemporary literature through references to distant tradition can be found in the extremely articulate debate on the *romanzi cavallereschi* in the second half of the 16th century. Questions regarding the literary legitimation of the genre (on which Bembo remains more or less silent) give way to lengthy discussions on the relationship between the genre and its historical predecessors as well as on the stylistic and narrative implications of these relationships. These debates will in turn influence to a considerable degree the specific choices made by some (or even almost all) of the main authors active in the genre, from Ariosto's strategic choice to apply Bembo's ideas on poetical language for his final version of *l'Orlando furioso* to Tasso's narrative choices in his *Gerusalemme liberata*, founded on moral and even theological arguments discussed subsequently in his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (1587). The constant intertwining of literary creation and historical interpretation, of stylistic and narrative choices and their legitimization has had a profound influence on the way the history of epic poetry of the Renaissance has been represented in later periods, both in terms of (implicit or explicit) aesthetic preferences and in terms of the historical development of the genre within the context of Italian literary culture at large.

A third example is the construction of a national literary canon during the Risorgimento. In this case, too, the explicit preferences expressed within the context of individual poetical programmes have given way to the creation of a national canon, which in its turn has laid the foundations of an elaborate view on the historical development of Italian literary tradition. Ugo Foscolo's views on Italian literary language and literature and his endeavours to identify and promote a pantheon of literary and artistic father figures of the nation have contributed considerably to the establishment of a literary canon.<sup>5</sup> In the long run and within a broader perspective however, the interest he and his fellow travellers of the Risorgimento took in the national literary tradition also provided the framework for an interpretation of literature as part of Italy's cultural and spiritual life. Literature therefore became a broad category closely linked to the arts, culture, science and other expressions of national life. Precisely this conception of literature as *vita nazionale* is the basic pattern of Francesco De Sanctis's highly influential *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870–71),<sup>6</sup> which addresses the task of literary historiography understood as a narrative reconstruction of how a nation has expressed itself in very different bodies of writing.<sup>7</sup> This model is still influential today, for even recent Italian literary histories devote large sections to genres that may and do fall outside the scope of

other national literatures, such as scientific prose, philosophical treatises, historiography, and so on.<sup>8</sup> For the same reason, the importance of language as a criterion of demarcation of Italian literature, namely Latin (or neo-Latin) literature, is quite often of a secondary importance, if not entirely neglected. Italian literary histories contain extensive sections on authors who wrote the bulk (if not all) of their work in Latin (this goes in particular for the Quattrocento and Cinquecento), whereas other literary histories seem to be much more hesitant to do so.<sup>9</sup>

Similar phenomena are to be observed in other literary traditions as well, but in the case of Italian literature one is left with the impression that contemporary histories of Italian literature continue to be inspired by an unremitting and critical engagement with the poetics of authors of the past. Within the scope of a world history of literature, this raises the question how and to what extent similar forms of agency should be accounted for, and how justice should be done to the richness and variety of practices of continuity, recuperation and re-elaboration, and *Arbeit* inherent in our literary-historiographical endeavours. It seems only right to acknowledge that literary authors from the past and literary historiographers are not just partners in crime, but that the frameworks of reference of the latter are still indebted to the aesthetic programs of the former.

These observations may sound like a plea for transforming literary history into a history of literary values or even a history of the mechanisms of production and control of literary value. There may be other and more fruitful ways of dealing with these phenomena. On a basic discursive level, it is first of all a matter of acknowledging the fact that literary history (including world history of literature) is a narrative that interacts with other narratives and that tries to make sense of a quite heterogeneous body of previously told narratives, a situation that puts literary historians in the position of the Readers in Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, trying to come to terms with the different stories that cross their path. An emphasis on the metanarrative dimension of literary history would also yield possibilities to cut across too rigid (and utterly artificial) distinctions between 'immanent' and 'contextual' literary histories, for, within a more metanarrative setting, the textual chains of transformations and oppositions reconstructed as 'immanent' factors of literary change would appear much more as active constructions and manipulations of not just a literary context but also of cultural paradigms tied to the broader social frameworks. Such a perspective may be particularly interesting in a world history of literature, precisely because a broader geographical and diachronic framework enables us to grasp the distinct narratives.

### Repertoire

A second important issue to be addressed from a specifically Italian perspective on global literary history has to do with the ways a world history of literature may want (or need) to deal with the rewriting of literary and cultural repertoires (and mainly with the 'scale' of some of these repertoires). Such forms of rewriting are not so much a matter of intertextuality, but more of phenomena we could indicate with terms such as 'architext' or 'macrotext', for the rewriting of repertoires is not so much (or not in the first place) a matter of distinctive intertextual relations between particular and clearly identifiable

individual texts, but concerns first and foremost the way in which sets of intertextual relations fit into relations between less easily identifiable and locatable literary and non-literary repertoires or even cultural paradigms in which these patterns and relations are embedded. A good case in point is classical mythology, since the rewriting of a myth often involves a triangular relation between two texts and one repertoire: the literary target text, the literary source text (i.e. the literary version in which the myth has been transmitted), and the myth as architext (i.e. a body of versions, interpretations, connotations, artistic representations and cultural categories attached to them). Renaissance versions of the Orpheus myth such as Poliziano's *Orfeo* (1480) or Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607), require not just reference to well-known classical intertexts such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Virgil's *Aeneid*, but also to shifts (or striking continuities) in the interpretation of the myth of Orpheus in Renaissance Italy, including the role of adaptations, translations and other forms of textual and artistic mediation. In the 15th and 16th centuries, for instance, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are read to a considerable extent through a late 14th-century translation in the vernacular of an early 14th-century Latin paraphrase of Ovid by a then influential Bolognese scholar.<sup>10</sup>

Let us return to Dante's *Commedia* for a first more specific example. The presence of Virgil (and of the *Aeneid*) in Dante's *Commedia* plays a decisive role in the overarching allegorical system of the *Commedia*, but it also has important implications with respect to the question of the identity of the *Commedia* in terms of textual, stylistic and cultural typologies. In fact, when Dante in the *Inferno* resorts to the term 'commedia' (or to be more precise, 'comedia') to label the work he is writing,<sup>11</sup> the use of this term is clearly set against the definition of Virgil's *Aeneid* as a *tragedia* ('l'altra mia tragedia', as Dante has Virgil call it only a couple of lines before the second mentioning of the *comedia*<sup>12</sup>). The term *comedia* was never meant to be an actual title of the work, but is clearly used to identify a number of its general characteristics that would be recapitulated in the famous (and probably only partly authentic) *Letter to Cangrande della Scala*. Dante's text is a 'comedy' because of stylistic reasons (especially in the *Inferno*, in order to describe the harsh and vulgar reality of the underworld, the style cannot be exclusively tragic); moreover, Dante's work is situated in a universe that through Christian Revelation can aspire to a happy ending, whereas Virgil's *Aeneid*, given the structural impossibility of redemption in pre-Christian times, cannot but belong to a tragic universe. What we have come to consider as the 'title' of Dante's masterpiece is in fact more of a broader genre category, that in its turn is inseparably linked to overarching literary and cultural paradigms of the 'tragic' nature of classical pre-Christian culture and the 'comical' nature of the Christian world. In this respect, the second term Dante uses further on in the work, 'sacrato poema' or 'poema sacro',<sup>13</sup> is also a genre indication, but it is certainly more specific and – given the point in the work where it is used – a more definitive identification of the work, pointing out Dante's intention of writing a 'Christian epic' as a necessary complement to Virgil's pre-Christian epic.<sup>14</sup>

For this reason, the allusions to mythological characters throughout the *Commedia* are not just a tribute to classical culture and its inspiring literary *auctoritates*, but reflect also, through their strategic distribution and specific elaboration, the relationship between cultural paradigms I have just mentioned: as a 'historical' presence, classical myth is

concentrated in the *Inferno* (both among the *dannati* and among the guardians of the circles of hell); however, as a literary and rhetorical resource, recycled within the representation of Dante's providential voyage through the Christian hereafter, classical myth is present throughout the *Commedia* – with Dante even going so far as to compare the journey through the *Paradiso* to the expedition of the Argonauts (Par II, 1–18).

For a second specific case we can turn to Ariosto's use of myth in the *Orlando furioso*. The fusion of mythological repertoire and chivalry epic (ennobling the repertoire of the chivalry epic by conferring a classical dignity to it) is one of the aspects that turn the *Orlando furioso* into a crucial text in the reception of and discussions about the genre of the *romanzo cavalleresco* (its nobility or popularity, its striking modernity, or its roots in ancient tradition). Yet at the same time Ariosto's text stands out for the remarkably playful handling of myth, and especially the subtle manipulation (and at times overt denial) of allegorical interpretations. The myth of Perseus and Andromeda, for instance, is quoted in two distinct but parallel episodes, the liberation of Angelica by Ruggiero in canto X and the liberation of Olimpia by Orlando in canto X, with a number of minor transformations of the Greek myth that eventually turn both episodes into a playful and at times burlesque manipulation of intertextual echoes that obstructs the traditional allegorical readings of the episode, foregrounding the importance and the centrality of the writer, and claiming the right of free manipulation of literary repertoire.<sup>15</sup>

Within a global history of literature, it would be hard to do justice to all the hermeneutical subtleties of similar kinds of rewriting of literary and cultural repertoires, yet the scale of a world history of literature may also be seen as an advantage, for it may offer the possibility to pinpoint the broader and long-term mechanisms (the *longue durée*) of these kinds of manipulations of literary repertoires. In an almost paradoxical way, precisely the ability to deal with similar long-term perspectives of cultural repertoires may help to articulate the basic historical differences and paradigm shifts between various periods, thereby avoiding the danger of overemphasizing continuities within European or western literary history of the past centuries, and highlighting the way local conflicts and positions can fit into a global perspective. To put it in another way, with a focus on the large-scale rewritings of cultural repertoires it may become slightly easier to show how the 'rat pack' of dead white European males that make up the core of the European Literary Canon did not just have differences of opinion but how they were sometimes profoundly divided and used different frames of reference.

### Ideology and Canon

A third (and admittedly a more thorny) subject is the representation of the interaction between ideology and literary canon. The literary canon of a certain period or cultural area can be contextualized as the expression and self-representation of a web of institutional and power relations controlled by certain communities or groups. But if David Perkins is right in pointing out the more complex (and often reciprocal) nature of relations between canonicity and ideology, it could also be said that an existing canon of literary works can also become (and often does become) the bedrock and matrix of a web of actual institutional and power relations, because of the very fact that they belong

to the canon, because of the possibilities of symbolically embodying power relations of their ideological appropriation, and because of the peculiar match between both these factors.<sup>16</sup> In this respect, the Italian Risorgimento constitutes a striking case in point.

As has been emphasized in the numerous essays and scholarly publications on Risorgimento culture that saw the light in the build-up towards the celebration of Italy's 150th anniversary in 2011, Italy was a literary community long before it became an actual political entity, and the Italian literary canon played a highly significant role in the nation-building processes before and after the unification of Italy. This literary canon, constructed by the first and second generations of Risorgimento writers (the generations of Foscolo and Leopardi), incorporates the classical (and classicist) tradition from Petarch over Bembo until 18th century neoclassicism within a broader perspective, recuperating for instance Dante as a true icon of high moral standards, and inclusive of authors whose contributions to the greatness of the national past are to be located outside the *belle lettere* in the more narrow sense of the word (Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Galilei). The various political movements of the Risorgimento are to a considerable extent inspired by and dependent upon the authors and works, themes and structures, of this literary canon,<sup>17</sup> just as the actual construction of the newborn state of Italy (the construction of its institutions, of its educational system, the implementation of a language policy, the redesigning of cities, the renaming of streets and squares) is to a remarkable extent based on this literary canon. The connection between literature and national identity established by Risorgimento culture has been so influential that Italian literary history is still under the spell of this conception of a literary canon as the quintessence of national life, as is illustrated by the large sections on scientific and philosophical writing, on political thinkers and historiographers in recent Italian literary histories – regardless of whether they wrote in Italian or in Latin.

Most of these observations may be applied to a certain extent, and *mutatis mutandis*, to other literary traditions and historiographies rooted in 19th-century definitions of nation and national identity. What the case of Italian literature eloquently illustrates, is that within a global literary historical perspective the description of the establishment, distribution and transformation of literary canons offers an excellent opportunity to show how these canons have actively contributed to shape historical contexts, political constellations and ideological forces that usually tend to be perceived as their external causes. The history of post-unitary Italian literature may be quoted as a further illustration of the multiple ways literary canons and identity formations interact. As has been stressed by various scholars and critics,<sup>18</sup> the creation of a national literary canon during the Risorgimento was not just a straightforward assimilation of literary models and themes into a cultural canon, but led also to a new phase in the century-old tension between what could be called the 'literary Italy' and the 'political Italy', between the ideal literary community and the harsh reality of political division, corruption and decay. As disappointment about the newly created nation-state arose and grew stronger, writers criticize what is seen as the artificial and estranged nature of the new State and its institutions, opposing this failure to the 'literary Italy' as the only authentic representative of an age-old community of minds and souls guided by a corps of eminent *literati*. The literary Italy was seen as the only 'true' Italy and 'real' Italy, an Italy that the

unification process has failed to translate into adequate institutional structures, an Italy that eventually feels betrayed. The history of modern Italian literature could be described as that of a community that remains caught in this rift between the cultural self-image of Italy and the nation-state under construction, with Italian authors trying to set their own 'true' and 'authentic' stance as a community of ideas and aspirations against the false, artificial, and hideous reality of the unified state.

### References and Notes

1. See *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, II, ii–xiv.
2. See Purgatorio II, 76–117 (Casella); VI, 58–75 (Sordello da Goito); XXI, 76–131 (Stazio), XXIII, 37–133 e XXIV, 1–33 (Forese Donati), XXIV, 34–63 (Bonagiunta Orbicciani), XXVI, 88–135 (Guido Guinizzelli) e XXVI, 136–148 (Arnaut Daniel). See R.R. Martinez (1995) Dante and the two canons: status in Virgil's footsteps (Purgatorio 21–30). *Comparative Literature Studies*, XXXII(2), pp. 151–175.
3. On Bembo see C. Kidwell (2004) *Pietro Bembo. Lover, Linguist, Cardinal* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press).
4. On the recurrent application of similar interpretative patterns in the history of Italian literature, see S. Jossa (2006) *L'Italia letteraria* (Bologna: Il Mulino), pp. 46–56.
5. On Foscolo and the establishment of a literary canon, see E. Elli (2006) *Un'idea di canone. Foscolo, Carducci, Pascoli* (Novara: Interlinea).
6. F. De Sanctis (1959) *Storia della letteratura italiana*, first edition in two volumes 1870–71; an English translation is *History of Italian Literature* (New York: Basic Books.)
7. The most striking example is chapter XIX of the second volume of De Sanctis' *Storia*, called *La nuova scienza*, dedicated to scientific and philosophic writings of Galilei, Campanella, Muratori and the lot.
8. To quote just one example: the 14-volume *Storia della letteratura italiana* directed by Enrico Malato (Roma, Salerno editrice, 1994–2004) dedicates large sections to historiography and scientific literature, in particular in the volumes on the 15th, 16th and 17th century.
9. See for instance the attention devoted to humanists and to neo-Latin literature in the volume on the Quattrocento of the above-mentioned Malato's *Storia della letteratura italiana*; histories of other European literatures, tend to deal far less extensively with local neo-Latin literature (in histories of Dutch literature, for instance, Erasmus is discussed basically for his influence on the literary culture of the Low Countries, but not as a writer considered to be part of Dutch literature).
10. Giovanni Del Virgilio's Latin paraphrase of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was translated in vernacular by Giovanni Bonsignori in 1375–77, and for more than a century and a half Bonsignori's version was the most important mediation text for the *Metamorphoses*. In 1522, Niccolò degli Agostini published a version in verse of the *Metamorphoses* based on Bonsignori's prose version. An important testimony of the widespread use of the text can be found in Giulio Romano's frescoes for the *Sala dei Giganti* in the Palazzo del Tè. The presence of monkeys on the fresco goes all the way back to an error by Giovanni del Virgilio, who had misinterpreted a verse of Ovid. See on all this: B. Guthmüller (1997) *Mito, poesia, arte. Saggio sulla tradizione ovidiana nel Cinquecento* (Roma: Bulzoni), pp. 291–307. For a critical edition of Bonsignori, see G. Bonsignori (2001) *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, ed. crit. a cura di Erminia Ardissino (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua).
11. '[...] e per le note/di questa comedia, lettor, ti giuro, s'elle non sien di lunga grazia vòte, /ch'i' vidi per quell'aere grosso e scuro/venir notando una figura in suso [...]'



- (*Inf* XVI, 127–131); ‘Così di ponte in ponte altro parlando/che la mia comedia cantar non cura, /venimmo [...]’ (*XXI*, vv. 1–3).
12. ‘Euripilo ebbe nome, e così ‘l canta/l’alta mia *tragedia* in alcun loco:/ben lo sai tu che la sai tutta quanta’ (*Inf*. *XX*, v.v 112–114).
  13. ‘Se mai contenga che ‘l poema sacro/al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra, sì che m’ha fatto per molti anni macro, /vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra [...]’ (*Par*, *XXV*, 1–4); ‘sacrato poema’ (*Par*, *XXIII*, v. 62).
  14. See on this matter A. Casadei, *Il titolo della Commedia e l’Epistola a Cangrande. Allegoria*, **60**, pp. 167–181.
  15. See on this topic D. Javitch (1978) *Rescuing Ovid from the Allegorizers. Comparative Literature*, **30**(2), pp. 97–107. D. Javitch (1991) *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
  16. D. Perkins (1992) *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), pp. 129–130.
  17. See for instance Lucy Riall’s excellent book on Garibaldi – L. Riall (2007) *Garibaldi. Invention of a Hero* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press) – in which the author convincingly shows how Risorgimento literary canon contains a kind of script for the creation of a Risorgimento hero, and how Garibaldi was cast into this role.
  18. See for instance S. Jossa (2010) *L’Italia letteraria* (Bologna: Il Mulino) F. Bruni (2010) *Italia. Vita e avventure di un’idea* (Bologna: Il Mulino); G. Ferroni (2009) *Prima lezione di letteratura italiana* (Bari: Laterza). On the formation of a national literary canon, see E. Elli (2006) *Un’idea di canone. Foscolo, Carducci, Pascoli* (Novara: Interlinea).

### About the Author

**Bart Van den Bossche** is Professor of Italian literature at the University of Leuven. His main interests are modern and contemporary Italian literature, and particularly the relationships between myth and literature, modernism and avant-garde, realism and macrotextual aspects of poetry and short story collections. He published a monograph on Cesare Pavese (*Nulla è veramente accaduto*). *Strategie discorsive del mito nell’opera di Cesare Pavese*, Leuven-Florence, 2001) and a book on myth in 20th-century literature (*Trasformazioni ed elaborazioni: il mito nella letteratura italiana del Novecento*, Leuven-Florence, 2007). He has published widely on various topics and authors, mainly from the 19th and 20th centuries (Leopardi, Pirandello, Svevo, Marinetti, Vittorini, Carlo Levi, Calvino, Eco, Tondelli, Palandri), but also on Petrarch and Pietro Bembo. He is editor-in-chief of ‘Civiltà Italiana’, the series of AIPI (Associazione Internazionale Professori d’Italiano), and of ‘Il corvo di Mizzaro’, a series of Pirandello studies.