

L'Italianistica fuori d'Italia: nuovi strumenti di ricerca

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Conceived for both the general reader and the specialist, the *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, published by Routledge (New York and Oxford) in December 2006, is the first comprehensive reference work on Italian literature and culture to be published in English that offers a synoptic overview of the present state of the field through a wide array of critical perspectives. While there are some notable dictionaries and literary companions that contain useful biographical and cultural information on Italian authors and their works, there is currently no encyclopedia that informs readers about Italian literature—its writers, its various schools and styles, movements, critical traditions and historical contexts—in a series of substantive essays. This two-volume encyclopedia honors the figures and the legacy of canonical Italian literature, while also accommodating new developments in genre, media and interdisciplinary writing, in its catalogue of the many forms literary creativity may take over time and of the various critical approaches by which the achievements might be understood and evaluated. Representativeness and inclusiveness have been the principles that have guided editorial policy and decision-making. As a result of that policy, anyone consulting this encyclopedia will find a broad and eclectic array of critical perspectives in the presentation of writers, individual works, literary movements, literary critics and critical schools, and more general literary topics. A research project of this magnitude and complexity necessarily has involved enlisting the help and expertise of many scholars and critics. The *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies* represents the authoritative work of some 220 scholars and critics from Italy, Europe and the Anglo-American countries. These contributors share the responsibility of providing expert evaluations of their subjects that represent the current state of research in their designated fields.

The editorial team has worked to eliminate possible overlaps and inconsistencies among individual entries, but it has not attempted to enforce uniformity of style or to dictate a single critical approach.

Altogether this encyclopedia contains some 800 critically substantial entries on authors, works, themes, genres, and schools.

Embracing the whole of Italian Literature from the 13th-century to the present, it privileges the notion of

modernity and critical approaches that have a cultural, aesthetic, or socio-historical dimension. Thus, unlike similar and more narrowly defined literary reference works that strictly limit the selection of authors and fields to "major" figures, or that offer comprehensive but essentially introductory descriptions, this encyclopedia enlists and displays a wide variety of approaches that define Italian studies both in Italy and in the Anglo-American critical and scholarly communities.

Any project of this kind, no matter how broadly it defines its scope, cannot hope, however, to be exhaustive or all-inclusive. Italian literature is a universe in constant expansion; as it continues to develop in a number of vital directions, the number as well as variety of subjects proliferate as well. The editors therefore had to

be selective in the authors and topics chosen for inclusion. Although we regret those authors and topics we finally decided to exclude, we are pleased to represent those writers and subjects which traditionally have been neglected or overlooked by critics because they did not seem to meet the standards associated with the traditional literary canon or the traditional literary establishment.

We have tried in our selection of authors, works and movements, to represent fully the traditional literary canon, but also to pay special attention to contemporary culture and literature, women's voices, theatre, philosophical and historical writing, and similar topics of interdisciplinary interest. The encyclopedia also aims to give broader representation to genres and literary fields. Our focus, however, is on the individual author's contribution to

Italian literature and culture. Ample space is devoted to canonical figures from Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio to Calvino, Morante, and Primo Levi. Individual essays are meant to provide as comprehensive an account as possible, one that places an author in a historical and cultural context, including some information about critical reception. We have also included a series of topical essays designed to comment on national, regional, intellectual, gender, and artistic traditions. We hope that the inclusion of these far-ranging essays will give those who consult the encyclopedia a fuller as well as better understanding of the multiple and overlapping

contexts which Italian literature reflects and out of which it emerged.

These entries thus serve two main purposes: to introduce the general reader to Italian literary history and to provide information on writers or groups of writers who do not have individual entries in the encyclopedia. In addition, the entries on a number of women writers, artists-writers, and filmmakers are meant to give readers a sense of the artistic affinities and collaborations that more conventional literary histories, dominated by the example of canonical authors, have often overlooked completely.

In recent times, there has been an attempt to re-write the literary and cultural history of Italy. New fields of study have emerged; many figures have been re-evaluated, others have been discovered. Cultural globalization has led to a different distribution of authors and movements across the literary and cultural landscape. Thus we have included a number of authors who traditionally were relegated to more specialized or less visible fields but who today have become familiar names thanks to international exposure, translation of their works, and the media. While acknowledging the rapidly expanding horizons of contemporary literary criticism, and working to ensure that the discoveries and rediscoveries of scholars and critics have been included, we also kept in mind authors unanimously recognized as dominant figures and shapers of the Italian literary tradition and its contemporary offshoots in regional studies, gender studies, film and other media.

Given the size of the project, tough decisions were unavoidable. Our board of editorial advisers, selected to represent the broadest spectrum of diversified literary and ideological backgrounds, had to vote on the inclusion or exclusion of particular authors, works, and topics, as well as to propose creative suggestions. The encyclopedia reflects this collaborative approach within and between various fields and hopes it will prove a sensible solution for negotiating the conflicting demands of various specialized groups. Even more problematic that the selection of authors for inclusion in the encyclopedia were the categories representing our topical entries. We devised topics that would group together authors who could better be studied as individual writers in more highly specialized publications (Castellani in *sacra rappresentazione* or Magalotti in *Science*). Women authors, who have historically been relegated to "period" or group histories, are represented by individual entries rather than under the general rubric of "women writers."

Filmmakers were selected because of their relation to literature, because of the nature and scope of their literary adaptations or because of their connections to literary and cultural trends, not because of their place or importance in the history of Italian or world cinema. We also agreed on including essays that addressed innovative tendencies in the field. Topics such as Feminist Theory, Lesbian and Gay Writing, Migration Literature, Fashion, Television, Technology, Terrorism, and Photography were duly considered by the editorial board in the interest of representing the complex status of Italian studies today.

Cities, like Rome or Florence, are included only if they have given birth to and are associated with major cultural and literary traditions. Without pretending to cover every author, work, and cultural development, the Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies attempts to be both informative and critical; it aspires to be a significant reference source that provides both a rich description of tradition and a useful account of more recent literary and multi-cultural developments. While it is assumed the most English-speaking readers may have some previous knowledge of Italian literature and culture, we have also tried to serve the needs of those who do not by translating all passages cited in Italian and clarifying words, including titles, which are idiomatic or obscure. Criticism is normally quoted only in English. Titles of Italian works are followed by their date of publication and a translation of the title in parenthesis. Wherever possible we have adopted and cited known published translations. We have also noted the date of composition of works whose publication was delayed and provided the date of first performances for theatrical pieces. The bibliographies appended to each entry are designed both to elucidate the critical approach of each essay and to reflect the current state of international scholarship in the field.

This encyclopedia represents a unique international venture. I hope its readers will come to share the enthusiasm and appreciate the effort that have gone into its making. Most importantly, we hope that general readers as well as students and specialists will benefit from a work in which they can learn about writers and movements enshrined in the traditional literary canon, but also satisfy their interest in those less canonical or more recent figures whose contributions to Italian literature and culture, both classical and contemporary, deserve to be recognized.

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