

Abstracts

Andrea Battistini. *Comparing Two constructs: Literature and Science*

This essay seeks to delineate the crucial elements of these two constructs, literature and science, by referring to examples that are concrete and useful for possible methodological reflections. Starting with the principal functions of language, studied by Roman Jakobson, this essay seeks to show how the relationship between science and literature is construed, as far as the sender is concerned, from the point of view of the message and of the receiver. The essay will deal primarily with the cognitive constructs of literature and science; namely, the types of knowledge considered from the sender's point of view; the role of history in literature and science; the two types of language, or the different forms of the "message"; the ways in which statements made by science and literature are used, according to the perspective of a receiver; and the transition from science to literature.

Simon Gilson, *Science in and between Dante and His Commentators: The Case of Cristoforo Landino's Comento sopra la comedia di Dante Alighieri*

This article examines the extensive use of natural philosophy and scientific doctrine in Cristoforo Landino's Dante commentary, the *Comento sopra la Comedia di Danthe Alighieri* of 1481. The essay's aim is threefold: to assess Landino's indebtedness to the Trecento Dante commentary tradition; to examine closely those scientific glosses where Landino makes new interventions, expanding, or updating the earlier tradition; and to explore the extent to which such glosses may be shaped by a Quattrocento Florentine context, which witnessed a renewed engagement with certain scientific disciplines. The article also provides a running commentary upon the purposes of Landino's scientific glosses and considers whether Landino sees scientific ideas in the *Commedia* from a different perspective to that of Dante himself.

Alison Cornish, *"Not like an Arab": Poetry and Astronomy in the Episode of Idalogos in Boccaccio's Filocolo*

With the autobiographically based character of Idalogos in the *Filocolo* (1336), Boccaccio portrays his own educational initiation as instruction in astronomy by a teacher he calls "Calmeta," to whose lessons Idalogos devoted himself "not like an Arab." This paper addresses the possible meaning of that phrase by considering the associations of Arabs with science and learning, within the *Filocolo* and in its cultural context. The paper suggests that, because Arabs were considered primary sources of science, Boccaccio is here describing study with the aid of intermediaries, in keeping with his lifelong engagement with gloss, apparatus, commentary, and vernacularization.

Martin Marafioti, *Post-Decameron Plague Treatises and the Boccaccian Innovation of Narrative Prophylaxis*

Numerous fourteenth-century plague treatises accorded significance to the emotional realm by discussing the importance of maintaining spirits high, especially in times of contagion. As scholars have indicated, several prescriptive ideas from the medical manuals are present in the frame story of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, suggesting that the medical advice may have been influential to the fourteenth-century writer. In turn, my essay explores the hypothesis that the *Decameron* may have impacted the medical tradition that followed. This study reviews the plague manuals written after Boccaccio's *Decameron* was widely available, noting that many physicians advocated narrative/literary activities (à la *Decameron*) to promote the emotional balance needed for physical health and plague prevention.

Arielle Saiber, *Flexilinear Language: Giambattista Della Porta's Elementorum curvilinearum libri tres*

The love of spectacle and the spectacular, central to so much of Giambattista Della Porta's work, also appears in his only text dedicated to pure mathematics, the *Elementa curvilinea*. While the text — with its errors, its unoriginal material, and its claim to have done the impossible, namely, squaring the circle — was treated to a polite silence by contemporary mathematicians and fellow members of the Accademia dei Lincei, it is nevertheless a fascinating document for literary scholars in terms of its inventive use of language, its attempts to induce marvel in its readers, and as a lens into understanding why Della Porta claimed a mathematical instrument — the proportional compass — to be his personal emblem.

Marco Arnaudo, *Il microscopio aristotelico: ottica, religione, e retorica nel Seicento*

The invention of the microscope had a profound impact on seventeenth-century culture. By showing entire microscopic worlds, the microscope removed humans from the center of the universe. Pascal described this situation as disquieting and invited his readers to seek refuge in the Christian faith. Spinoza, Leibniz, Kircher and Picinelli sought to come to terms with the new discoveries by emphasizing the formal similarities between the visible world and the microscopic world. Segneri and Redi made a similar attempt by underlining the functional similarities between the different natural levels.

Paul Colilli, *The Astrological Signs Left to Posterity*

This article deals with the significance of the discipline of astrology as articulated by a contemporary thinker, Giorgio Agamben, and a figure from the Renaissance, Giordano Bruno. Astrology and the occult sciences in general played a key function in the foundational moment of modern science by unifying knowledge and experience in the new thinking subject. In Agamben's mind, astrology serves as an important example of how, before the advent of the Galilean and Cartesian methods, the scission between the Aristotelian *noûs* and *psyché* and the Platonic *Uno* and multiplicity were overcome, thus

setting the grounds for modern experimental science. For Bruno, however, astrology assumes different meanings, one of which can be glossed with a definition formulated by Aby Warburg: “Ultimately, astrology is no more than a form of onomastic fetishism, projected into the future” (566). This understanding of astrology arises out of Bruno’s “nova philosophia,” which pushed hermetic reason to its furthest degree by disassembling the ontological hierarchy that placed the hypostatic *Uno* at the highest point of the scale and matter at the lowest. However, it is equally true that while astral influence is not to be “superstitiously” calculated, it should, according to Bruno, be grasped and manipulated in the different ways he proposes in his magical works.

Dennis Looney, *Leopardi’s Il Copernico and Paradigm Shifts in Art*

In this essay I discuss a heretofore unnoticed source for Leopardi’s dialogue from the *Operette morali*, *Il Copernico*: the fragmentary Greek poem on truth and opinion, being and non-being, by the Eleatic philosopher Parmenides. The use of the classical source contributes to the dialogue’s ironic dramatization of the paradigm shift in cosmological models from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican system. But the use of Parmenides also signals a significant compositional shift in Leopardi’s own work, a move away from the Lucianic model for the philosophical prose of the *Operette* to a renewed philosophical poetry that culminates in the late poem, “La ginestra o il fiore del deserto.”

Norma Bouchard, *The Science of Literature: Revisiting Italy’s “Structuralist Equation”*

While there are frequent allusions to science in the work of Italian critics who embraced the structuralist method, their rhetoric of scientificity is often dependent upon a metaphoric, analogical use of the term science. Such is the case of Cesare Segre and Maria Corti, the founders, along with Silvio D’Arco Avalle, of arguably the most important journal of structuralist readings: *Strumenti critici*. Even in those rare cases where a literal interpretation of the word science can be located, as occurs in the theoretical pronouncements and critical practice of Luigi Rosiello, a main contributor to the journal *Lingua e stile*, one can locate a gap between the critic’s vision of science and the coeval developments in the field, where the emerging “new science” had begun to question the foundations and objectives of the Newtonian scientific method. Thus, rather than celebrating a reconciliation between the two cultures, Italian structuralism, regardless of its metaphoric or literal interpretation of science, ultimately failed to cross the enduring rift of “scientia” and “sapientia”; a rift that, despite the efforts of Italian post-war neo-rationalistic philosophical currents — neo-empiricism and neo-enlightenment — would endure for years to come.

Piero Pieri, *La persuasione e la rettorica e Zen and the Art of the Motorcycle Maintenance: le forme eretiche del tragico moderno e del nichilismo antiscientifico*

A rather strange, conceptual dialectic links a dissertation written in 1910 and an essayistic novel published in America in 1974. Both authors — the Mittel-European Carlo Michelstaedter and the American R. M. Pirsig — write a powerful negative critique of corrupt scientific endeavors. While their thought is always situated between the quest for

the Absolute and its concrete experience in the empirical world, their aporetic, at the same time philosophical and literary, experience, unravels as a negative ontology. The principle — ethical as well as ontological — of *Persuasione* and of *Quality* opens and closes in the nineteenth century the adventure of the mystics who find themselves out of place in their tragic clash with the forms of modernity, judged as “inauthentic.” Thus *Persuasione* and *Quality* symbolize a spiritual angst. Rational and nihilistic, supra-historical and anti-historical all at once, this angst is never unmindful of the ideological relations that govern proteiform kinds of existence. While dialogizing with pre-Socratic philosophers, Socrates and Buddha, and leveling equally strong accusations at conceptual falsifications of Plato and Aristotle, Michelstaedter and Pirsig outline the profile of an individual and a generation engaged in a dramatic debate with the academic system responsible for the transferral of knowledge.

Kerstin Pilz, *Literature as Cosmogony: Calvino’s Call for an Interdisciplinary Approach to Culture*

One of the foremost concerns of Italo Calvino’s work – both in his fictions and in his essays – was the quest to recuperate a unified view of knowledge, akin to the traditional cosmogony which preceded the (post)modern fragmentation of knowledge into separate branches and fields of specialization. Focusing on *Lezioni americane*, this essay analyzes Calvino’s concept of interdisciplinarity and the link he makes between literature and cosmogony as the earliest literary genre. Calvino called for literature to return to “its original specific vocation as ‘natural philosophy’”; namely, a cultural unifier that negotiates meaning across disciplines and genres. This essay demonstrates the extent to which the American lectures, which became the author’s literary testament, constitute an important example of literature’s role as a unifying framework situated within the broader context of emerging, new, interdisciplinary sciences, notably complexity science.

Pierpaolo Antonello, *La verità degli oggetti: la narrativa di Daniele Del Giudice fra la descrizione e testimonianza*

This essay examines Daniele Del Giudice’s books as one of the most interesting narrative examples of a “poetics of objects.” Inspired by the work of experimental writers like Calvino, Queneau, and Perec, Del Giudice’s novels (such as *Atlante occidentale* and *Staccando l’ombra da terra*) explore the role of objects in our contemporary cultural climate, both from an epistemological and ethical standpoint. Drawing his narrative examples from quantum physics or aviation technology, Del Giudice investigates the role of mediation that modern objects play, and through which they are defined, via the interaction with the human, in turn producing the constitution of quasi-objects — to adopt Michel Serres and Bruno Latour’s terminology; i.e., hybrids of nature and culture. Finally, the essay discusses the ethical nature of objectuality as a site for “memory,” engendering an “oblique” form of testimonial narrative based on the de-mystifying nature of objects as judicial evidence.