

## Introduction

### Literature and Science

“At the beginning God made heaven and earth”: The first lines and pages of what the western world has come to call the book par excellence bring together belief and science; the spoken word and the written language; the world of human sentiments, images, and beliefs together with the world of things, matter, and facts. Not only from time immemorial, as the Bible and classical literature attest, but also since the Italian language’s earliest documents, literature has represented the findings of science as proposed by each epoch, while science, with its ever changing theories, probings, and discoveries, has always challenged, and still challenges, the human mind’s virtually infinite ways of literary and poetic representations.

Thus St. Francis looks up to the sky and invites the entire universe, and all human creatures within it, to praise the “bon Signore”; enthralled by the world’s immensity, Dante likewise admires “[l]a gloria di colui che tutto move [...]”. By contrast, centuries later, a more skeptical spirit, Guicciardini, casts a doubt on his predecessors’ strong beliefs (“Erra chi crede che la vittoria delle imprese consista nello essere giuste e ingiuste [...]”); still later, Leopardi sees the world’s “immensità” as a nothingness where his “pensiero” enjoys “naufragar”; and finally, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Calvino investigates the intersections between the power of the human imagination with scientific discourse, and quotes Giordano Bruno, who describes human beings’ *spiritus phantasticus* as “‘mundus quidem et sinus inexplebilis formarum et specierum’ (un mondo o un golfo, mai saturabile, di forme e d’immagini).” Calvino thus formulates his position on these issues: “Ecco, io credo che attingere a questo golfo della molteplicità potenziale sia indispensabile per ogni forma di conoscenza” (*Lezioni americane*).

Within this interconnected context that seeks to represent and explain reality, both visible and invisible, *Annali d’italianistica* devotes its twenty-third issue to the perennial, at times uneasy, rapport linking literature and science in its unfolding throughout Italy’s literary culture. The volume’s contributions investigate, not just the presence of science in literature, but rather the epistemological and philosophical reasons for this presence, as well as the poetic manner in which scientific data, theories, and hypotheses are configured in literature; the ways in which these two disciplines exploit all human faculties — imagination, reasoning, intellect, etc. — in their respective and interrelated pursuits and discoveries, as well as the written language employed in communicating them; the ever changing challenges that new scientific data and discoveries present to literature, which has always sought to interpret and reconfigure science, whereas science seems to disregard, neglect, or even question the theoretical, ethical, epistemological, and intellectual possibilities inherent in every poetic discourse; in brief, the many areas in common and contrast between poetic and scientific discourse. Andrea Battistini, the author of many studies on literature and science, most appropriately writes in this volume: “The best attitude seems to be to fight in order to overcome artificial boundaries, for doubtless they exist as a Romantic and idealistic legacy, but, all in all, to recognize in literature and science the particular and specific qualities of their cognitive constructs, their discourse, their use, and their aims.”