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The Canon of the Classics: Italian Writers and Romantic-Period Anthologies of Italian Literature in Britain

During the Romantic period, the experience of exile in England decisively influenced the flourishing of anthologies of Italian literature that could represent both a link with the homeland and a form of consolation for the difficulties of cultural and linguistic isolation. The first modern instance of a chrestomathy of Italian literature published in England dated back to Giuseppe Baretti's *Italian Library* (1757), a selection based on such discriminating factors as the correctness of the Tuscan language, the preponderance of poetry, a limited selection of texts from the early ages, and reservations about seventeenth-century literature. These criteria inspired and directed most eighteenth-century and Romantic-period selections of Italian literature until, in 1828, Antonio Panizzi, professor of Italian at London University, published an anthology of Italian prose writers. After 70 years, the supremacy of verse decreed by Baretti was overthrown. And, against the emphatic pronouncements of other exiles, Panizzi's choices reveal an unmistakably and concretely useful way of understanding tradition and presenting its landmarks to the readers of his adoptive country.

The conspicuous presence in Britain of Italian political exiles, from such areas as Lombardy, the Veneto and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, was one of the decisive influences on the burgeoning of collections of Italian literary texts in the Romantic period. Indeed, such anthologies could represent a link with the abandoned homeland and, simultaneously, a form of spiritual support that would help the exile face the difficulties of a precarious life in an environment which was often seen as hostile, as well as of conditions of isolation not infrequently caused by language, as in Ugo Foscolo's exemplary case. As is well known, British society generally welcomed exiles, but also showed diffidence towards those groups which, often in conflict with each other, resisted the idea of leading unhappy and ineffectual lives armed with courage and common sense. As a result, many political exiles in the early years of the post-Napoleonic period experienced existential difficulties rooted in their inability to become used to British customs, the related tendency to limit their acquaintances to their own fellow countrymen, and the habit of deploring their unhappy situations while conjuring up consolatory images of a lost Italy through poetry and letter-writing.¹

1 On these issues, see *L'esilio romantico: forme di un conflitto*, ed. by Joseph Cheyne e Lilla Maria Crisafulli Jones (Bari: Adriatica, 1990); *L'exil et l'exclusion dans la culture italienne. Actes du colloque franco-italien, Aix-en-Provence, 19-20-21 octobre 1989*, réunis par Georges Ulysse (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1991); *Expériences limites de l'épistolaire: lettres d'exil, d'enfermement, de folie. Actes du Colloque de Caen, 16-18 juin 1991*, textes réunis et présentés par André Magnan (Paris: Champion, 1993); the special issue on 'Exile Literature' in *Annali d'Italianistica*, 20 (2002). For England, in particular, see Margaret Wicks, *The Italian Exiles in London, 1816-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1937), and my own 'La lettera dall'esilio', in *Scrivere lettere: Tipologie epistolari nell'Ottocento italiano*, ed. by Gino Tellini (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002), pp. 41-81. For specifically literary aspects, see Remo Ceserani and Donata

This desire to defend the national literary tradition and, at the same time, to find comfort in its poets explains the anthological vocation of at least two generations of exiles after 1815. Nonetheless, it is also true that the first modern instance of an Italian chrestomathy published in England dated back to half a century before, when London was visited, for the most different reasons, by a large number of Italian polygraphs such as Filippo Mazzei, Paolo Rolli, Lorenzo Da Ponte, and Giuseppe Baretti. And it was Baretti who, during his two long periods in England (1751-60 and, with various interruptions, 1766-89), published an *Italian Library* (1757) intended as an introduction to his complex strategy for the promotion of Italy and organized according to the decisive discriminating factor of the ‘buona favella toscana’, the proper Tuscan language. Indeed, language was a crucial feature for someone like the Turinese Baretti, who wished to distance himself from a linguistically hybrid education such as the one he had received in a Piedmont ruled by the House of Savoy.² It is thus significant that the volume opens with a ‘History of the Italian Tongue’ which is also a literary anthology full of untranslated excerpts, already deploying some fundamental criteria for the selection and definition of a literary canon of outstanding authors. What is immediately evident is that Baretti’s ‘anthology’ comprises almost exclusively poetic texts – a practice common in Italy, too, at least until Girolamo Tiraboschi’s systematization in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1772-93). With two excerpts, Marco Polo is the only prose-writer in Baretti’s collection which, conversely, gathers a few poets from the *Duecento* and *Trecento*; three brief passages from the *Divina Commedia*, a choice limited to twenty-six *terzine* in keeping with Dante’s not altogether unanimous popularity in eighteenth-century Italy; a sample of Petrarch’s lyrical poetry, so ‘tender’ that he seems ‘effeminate in many places’, a judgment expressed also in the 1764-67 Petrarchan *Mémoires* of Jean-François de Sade (by contrast, the visionary Petrarch of the *Trionfi* presents a very different pattern of diffusion in the early nineteenth century); and a wealth of chivalric poets and, above all, comic ones, who had been widely imitated by Baretti in the years of his literary *apprentissage*. The section on epic poetry opens with a few octaves by Luigi Pulci, followed by Matteo Boiardo’s *Orlando innamorato* (although not in the original, but in the Tuscan *rifacimento* by Francesco Berni, ‘the modern Catullus of Italy’), the episode of Orlando’s madness from the *Orlando furioso* (Ludovico Ariosto being ‘the greatest poet that my poetical country ever produced’), and eventually Torquato Tasso with a passage, Alete’s speech to the Christian army, from the second canto of the *Gerusalemme liberata*.

Some of these choices appear to have been dictated by ‘personal opinion’, a criterion that is constantly highlighted by Baretti, for instance in the case of the four hundred lines from the *Quadriregio* by the Umbrian bishop Federico Frezzi, a cumbersome early fifteenth-century allegorical poem, here generously defined as ‘little inferior to *Dante* himself’, which had become available again after an edition was published in Foligno in 1725. However Baretti also devotes a large portion of his anthology to the modern age and living

Meneghelli’s survey ‘La letteratura inglese e americana e l’Italia’, in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, gen.ed. Enrico Malato, vol. XII: *La letteratura italiana fuori d’Italia* (Rome: Salerno, 2002), pp. 681-741 (especially the first three chapters, pp. 681-95).

2 *The Italian Library: Containing an Account of the Lives and Works of the Most Valuable Authors of Italy. With a Preface, Exhibiting the Changes of the Tuscan Language, from the Barbarous Ages to the Present Time* (London: Millar, 1757).

authors: among these, his ‘honest friend’ (and, like him, a member of the Milanese Accademia dei Trasformati) Gian Carlo Passeroni, with twenty-two octaves from his vast and still incomplete descriptive poem *Cicerone*, and Metastasio, with an epithalamion (1722) and his famous song ‘La libertà’ (1733) often set to music and translated throughout Europe (one of the French versions has been attributed to Rousseau).³ Baretti’s method was based on the absolute primacy of poetry, a limited selection from the earliest ages of literature, a preference for long poems, a cautious attitude towards the seventeenth century, and eclectic choices for the modern age. Yet these premises are only partially validated by the extensive information organized in the approximately one thousand bibliographic profiles placed in an appendix which, reaching the age of Baroque, also comprises prose writers, although they are still in a secondary position in comparison with the poets. In addition, Baretti’s anthology included a chapter about ‘poetry by Ladies’, which is interesting especially in the light of later developments in Italian women’s writings, and presenting about ten women poets especially from the *Cinquecento*.⁴

Baretti had close contacts with English society, and was a personal friend of Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, David Garrick, and Joshua Reynolds who, in 1769, witnessed in his favour during a trial for the murder of a pimp. He was the author, among other things, of a *Dictionary of the English and Italian Language* (1760), a parallel grammar of the two languages (1762), a controversial *Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy* (1768) written in reply to foreign travellers’ ‘mistakes’ and malevolent judgments and mainly aimed at counterattacking Samuel Sharp’s *Letters from Italy* (1767). Thus Baretti played a major role in the revision of ideas about Italy and Italian culture in mid- to late eighteenth-century England.⁵ His protracted propaganda activity had begun in 1755 with his *Introduction to the Italian Language*, containing literary passages in literal translation complete with grammatical annotations ‘for the use of those who, being already acquainted with grammar, attempt to learn without a master’. The twenty-seven authors (twenty-eight if we include John Milton, one of whose ‘Italian sonnets’ was added on the advice of Dr Johnson) are fairly distributed between poets and prose writers, although, in keeping with the didactic nature of the book, there is a great prevalence of instances of ‘proper style’, principally derived from sixteenth-century authors and with very few glimpses of the other centuries. Besides Petrarch and Boccaccio, however, Baretti also includes Galileo and a few seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poets, the Tuscan Francesco Redi with his dithyramb in

3 ‘A History of the Italian Tongue’, in *The Italian Library*, pp. xxi (Petrarch, with the song ‘Che debb’io far? che mi consigli, Amore?’), *Canzoniere* CCLXVIII), xxxix (Berni), liii (Ariosto), lxxxv (Passeroni); the mention of the *Quadriregio* is contained in the bibliographic repertoire (p. 58) which also features a positive assessment of Boiardo as ‘the greatest inventor’ among Italian poets.

4 *The Italian Library*, pp. 83-84.

5 *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy; with Observations on the Mistakes of Some Travellers, with Regard to that Country*, 2 vols (London: Davies, 1768), now in Giuseppe Baretti, *Dei modi e costumi d’Italia*, pref. by Michele Mari, trans. and commentary by Matteo Ubezio (Turin: Aragno, 2003). For Baretti’s other works see Luigi Piccioni, *Bibliografia analitica di Giuseppe Baretti* (Turin: Società Subalpina Editrice, 1942), pp. 13-15.

praise of wine, some figures from the Bolognese Arcadia (Eustachio Manfredi and Giampietro Zanotti), and the inevitable Metastasio.⁶

In view of such premises, there was not much difference between these important antecedents and the overall structure of the English collection of Italian verse published anonymously in London in 1798 (nine years after Baretti's death) and offering translations by 'admired English authors'. This volume opens with one of the most widely admired passages in Dante's *Commedia*, that of Paolo and Francesca from canto V of the *Inferno*, which provides further concrete evidence of the poem's popularity in Protestant nations, in some respects more precocious and widespread than in Italy where, for a long time, it was the object of resistance, prejudice and political, aesthetic and religious misunderstandings.⁷

As different political and institutional regimes succeeded one another in Italy between the *ancien régime* and the post-Napoleonic *Restaurazione*, educational authorities felt the need to modify the instruments with which students – and not exclusively in a school environment – read, studied and enjoyed the literary heritage. Thus, one of the most popular eighteenth-century anthologies was edited by Baretti's mentor, the Modenese Girolamo Tagliazucchi, and was employed in the Kingdom of Piedmont for at least a century since 1734. This was followed, or accompanied, by the textbooks published in the Napoleonic age and based on new and revised principles: the *Raccolta di lirici italiani* (1808) by Robustiano Gironi of the Milanese Accademia di Brera; the *Antologia italiana* (1810), in two versions for the 'lower' and 'upper' schools of Humanities of the Kingdom of Italy; and, later, the textbooks published after the Congress of Vienna, with specific didactic structures and frontispieces bearing the government's seal of approval, or organized according to principles such as loftiness of diction and purity of style. In some cases, these works were principally aimed to provide 'solievo degli adulti' ('adults' enjoyment'), as Francesco Brancia stated in the introduction to his *Antologia italiana* published in Paris in 1823, and still dominated by Baretti's rhetorical distinction, which would also soon re-emerge in Giacomo Leopardi's much more significant *Crestomazia* of prose writings (Milan, 1827).⁸

6 *An Introduction to the Italian Language, Containing Specimens both of Prose and Verse [...], with a Literal Translation and Grammatical Notes* (London: Millar, 1755).

7 *Extracts from the Works of the Most Celebrated Italian Poets with Translations by Admired English Authors* (London: F. and C. Rivington and J. Hatchard, 1798). Some brief remarks on Dante as a 'modello della cultura romantica' in Europe are in Gustavo Costa, 'Il risveglio dell'attenzione alla cultura italiana', in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. XII, pp. 567-71 (see note 1 above); for the presence of Dante in British Romantic literature, see Diego Saglia, 'Translation and Cultural Appropriation: Dante, Paolo and Francesca in British Romanticism', *Quaderns: Revista de traducció*, 7 (2002), 95-119, especially pp. 101-08.

8 Girolamo Tagliazucchi, *Raccolta di prose, e poesie a uso delle Regie Scuole divisa in due tomi* (Turin: Mairesse, 1734; to my knowledge, the last reprint of this textbook was by Fiacadori, Parma, 1834); *Raccolta di lirici italiani dall'origine della lingua sino al secolo XVIII*, compilata da Robustiano Gironi (Milan: dalla Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1808); *Antologia italiana ad uso dell'umanità maggiore [minore] nelle scuole del Regno d'Italia* (Milan: dalla Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1810; fourth edition 1822); *Antologia italiana del cav. F. Brancia* (Paris: dai Torchi di Didot Maggiore, 1823; the quotation is taken from the 'Avvertimento preliminare' (pp. v-xv), p. xiv; Brancia also published a *Tesoro della poesia italiana antica e moderna* (Paris: Baudry, 1840); *Crestomazia italiana cioè scelta di luoghi insigni o per sentimento o per locuzione raccolti dagli scritti italiani in prosa di autori eccellenti d'ogni secolo per cura del conte Giacomo Leopardi* (Milan: Stella, 1827), followed by his *Crestomazia italiana poetica cioè scelta di luoghi in verso italiano insigni o per sentimento o per locuzione, raccolti, e distribuiti secondo i tempi*

As a consequence of this publishing activity, the period between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries saw the increasing consolidation of a national literary canon: Dante's limited reception, at least before the revival sparked off by Vincenzo Monti; the reduced selection of texts from the *Trecento* and *Quattrocento*, a period that even Leopardi saw as the barren age of literature (Gironi's *Raccolta*, for instance, only features Lorenzo de' Medici);⁹ the attention devoted to sixteenth-century grammarians and authors of treatises (Giovanni Della Casa's *Galateo*, seen as a fundamental instrument to learn Italian, is sometimes printed in its entirety), the re-awakening of interest in Baroque poetry with a moralizing tone (Giambattista Marino and his followers are generally condemned for their excessive use of rhetorical artifices); and a limited interest in modern authors, as collections in general only reach as far as the earliest poets of the Arcadia and, specifically, Alessandro Guidi or Giambattista and Faustina Zappi (only Leopardi, in 1828, devoted the largest part of his anthology to eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century poets).¹⁰ These criteria are reflected in the exiles' anthologies, which were often pocket-sized so as to be easily carried around. For instance, the pro-Napoleonic Venetian Antonio Buttura, exiled in Paris since the Treaty of Campoformio (1799), published two selections of lyrical poetry in Italian including some fourteenth-century women poets (apart from Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna).¹¹ Similarly, in London the Piedmontese lawyer Carlo Beolchi, sentenced to death after the 1821 revolution, issued a series of Italian-themed anthologies with the publishing house of his fellow countryman Pietro Rolandi, such as a collection of *Fiori poetici* which ran to three editions by 1839.¹²

It is evident that, also in Britain, Italian lyrical poetry continued to be seen not just as a mine of beautiful or elegant verse, but also as a useful repertoire of moral reflections and precepts providing effective support for the exiles' troubled souls. This is confirmed by two volumes edited by Pietro Luigi Costantini – a small collection of maxims and *sententiae*

degli autori, dal conte Giacomo Leopardi (1828). Both Leopardi's works have appeared in modern editions by Giulio Bollati and Giuseppe Savoca, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1968). A further series of collections was published under the collective title of *Antologia italiana*, and with different subtitles specifying their variable targets, in Verona (Mainardi, 1815, for 'classi di grammatica'), Turin (Stamperia Reale, 1828, for 'scuole inferiori'), Cremona (Fezzi, 1859, for the 'prima classe ginnasiale'). Among the textbooks that closely followed governmental instructions, see the *Antologia italiana approvata dall'eccellentissimo Magistrato della Riforma per le scuole superiori* (Turin: Stamperia Reale, 1829). For further information on the 'genre' of the anthology and Italian nineteenth-century collections (principally on the very popular *Lecture italiane* by Giosuè Carducci and Ugo Brilli, 1883), see Lorenzo Cantatore, *Scelta, ordinata e annotata: l'antologia scolastica nel secondo Ottocento e il laboratorio Carducci-Brilli* (Modena: Mucchi, 1999).

9 This judgment was expressed by Leopardi in 1817, at the beginning of *Zibaldone*; see Giuseppe Pacella's edition, 3 vols (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), I, p. 4 (and the *Raccolta di lirici italiani* by Gironi, pp. 21-31).

10 *Crestomazia italiana poetica*, pp. 199-510.

11 *Scelta di poesie italiane d'autori antichi* (Paris: Baudry, 1840). The editor had died in 1832. See pp. 212-13 for a madrigal by Ricciarda de' Selvaggi (or Selvaggia dei Vergiolesi, who was Cino da Pistoia's beloved) and a sonnet by Ortensia di Guglielmo. In the same year, and with the same publisher, see *Scelta di poesie italiane d'autori dell'età media (dal 1500 al 1700)*, containing three sonnets by Colonna and one by Gambara (pp. 48-50 and 80). By contrast, it features only two sonnets by Marino (pp. 242-43). The two volumes, accompanied by some brief closing remarks, are in 16°.

12 *Fiori poetici scelti e illustrati da Carlo Beolchi* (1839). See also his *Saggio della poesia italiana* (1825). Further information is offered in his autobiography *Reminescenze dall'esilio* (1830; later, Turin: Biancardi, 1852).

gathered in the exiles' environment and published in the fateful year 1821 and, slightly later, a selection of poems by 'celebri autori antichi e moderni' ('famous ancient and modern authors') with strong pedagogic motivations.¹³ At the turn of the century, a peculiar case is represented by the English author most active in popularizing Italian poetry, Thomas James Mathias, a member of the Roman Arcadia with the name of 'Lariso Salaminio', and a member and correspondent of the Florentine Accademia della Crusca and the Accademia Pontaniana of Naples. Among various other titles, he also published the three-volume *Componimenti lirici de' più illustri poeti d'Italia* in London in 1802 (and again, with a substantial 'Aggiunta', in 1808), reissued in Naples, where Mathias died in 1835, in four volumes of over a thousand pages. He also composed a sizeable number of original prose and poetical works in Italian, as well as translating Edmund Spenser, James Thomson, and William Mason into Italian, and works by living Italian writers into English, such as Monti's *Bassvilliana* translated in 1793, the same year of its publication in the original language. Just as crucial was Mathias's English edition of Giovan Mario Crescimbeni's century-old attempt at a systematization of Italian literature with his *Comentarj intorno all'istoria della poesia italiana* (1698).¹⁴ These different and, indeed, highly unusual contributions earned Mathias the praise of the Italian Romantics and, specifically, that of Pietro Borsieri who, in the heated climate of the anti-Classicist *querelle* of 1816, presented the Milanese public with a fragment of a song by Mathias in praise of Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, and Alessandro Guidi (the 'pavese alto e gagliardo' of the late *Seicento*, in the English poet's definition) and expressing the wish that British universities would create chairs of Italian literature so that the 'italiana favella' might acquire 'uno stabile e permanente domicilio' also beyond the national boundaries.¹⁵

Nonetheless, methods for promoting the 'toscana favella' in England had to follow other, not exclusively poetic, paths in the more restless, post-Napoleonic climate of conspiracies and political struggles. Thus in 1828, the same year as Leopardi's poetic *Crestomazia*, the thirty-year-old Antonio Panizzi – exiled in Liverpool and then in London from 1823, and Professor of Italian at the new London University – published a six-hundred-page collection of Italian writers entirely dedicated to prose writers. Innovatively, Panizzi's *Extracts from Italian Prose Writers* reversed the primacy of poetry sanctioned by Baretti and

13 *Morale poetica italiana: scelta di massime e sentenze tratte da' più classici poeti italiani* (London: Treuttel and Wurtz, 1821); *Nuova scelta di poesie italiane, tratte da' più celebri autori antichi e moderni con brevi notizie sopra la vita e gli scritti di ciascheduno*, 2 vols (Paris, London: Bossange, 1823).

14 *Componimenti lirici de' più illustri poeti d'Italia*, 3 vols (London: Becket, 1802). The Italian edition was published in Naples by Nobile in 1819 (4 vols); and *Aggiunta ai componimenti lirici de' più illustri poeti d'Italia*, 3 vols (London: Becket, 1808). Mathias's *Poesie liriche toscane* were published in Florence by Piatti in 1817. There were numerous reprints in Naples, by the publisher Aniello Nobile, between 1818 and 1824, until the 'new edition' of *Poesie liriche e varie* of 1825, by the same publisher, in three volumes: the first containing 'poesie originali', the other two comprising 'poemi di scrittori illustri inglesi recati in verso italiano'. The three volumes of Crescimbeni's *Comentarj* were published by Becket in London (1803).

15 See my edition of Pietro Borsieri's *Avventure letterarie di un giorno o consigli di un galantuomo a vari scrittori* (Modena: Mucchi, 1986), pp. 76-77. See also Mathias's letter *Agli eruditi e culti inglesi amatori della lingua della letteratura e della poesia italiana*, and his song to William Lort Mansel, 'dottore di sacra teologia' at Cambridge, in *Aggiunta ai componimenti lirici de' più illustri poeti d'Italia*, II, pp. 4 and 52, later in *Poesie liriche italiane, inglesi e latine* (Naples: Nobile, 1822), pp. 12 and 37.

strengthened by dozens of anthologies. Without any apparent preferences for poetical works, Panizzi had the clear, and all but celebratory, aim of offering a useful instrument that might facilitate the (not very numerous) London University students who, contrary to traditional practice, did not have to tackle the works of ‘poetical writers’ but rather the ‘prose compositions’ of a tradition which Panizzi sought to highlight in its closest links with British culture. The exiled intellectual was still embittered by a political persecution that he considered unjust, as demonstrated by the letters, pamphlets and essays he wrote in those years in almost flawless English. At the same time, he tried to distance himself from his fellow exiles in order to conform entirely to English society (he became a British subject in 1832). In his *Extracts*, therefore, Panizzi did not make any reference to contemporary events, and limited himself to listing, in a mere two-page preface, the English authors that had been inspired by Italy, from Shakespeare and Spenser to Milton, up to Edward Gibbon, Lord Byron (‘that noble Bard’), and the historian William Roscoe who, being still alive, is merely mentioned through the titles of his works.

The scanty annotations in the anthology, reduced to English translations of titles and brief remarks, are completely functional to the excerpts. In addition, the collection features a homage to Parini, defined ‘a generous patriot’ in a note to the well-known passage in Ugo Foscolo’s *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (Milan, 4 December 1798). Unlike Baretti’s anthology of 1757, this book does not follow any scheme of rhetorical organization, nor any distinction based on literary merit or chronological precedence. The thirty-one authors are presented in alphabetical order from Alfieri to Vasari, although Galileo Galilei’s twenty-five pages are placed outside the alphabetical list and represent an undeniably significant recovery of his work. Just as important are the sections reproducing Algarotti’s travels in Germany; Metastasio’s letters, the literary value of which is precociously acknowledged by Panizzi; the *novelle* of the *abate* Michele Colombo, one of Panizzi’s tutors; and the legal prose of Gaetano Filangieri that must have been deeply familiar to Panizzi, who had taken a degree in law at the University of Parma in 1818. His 1828 anthology is thus underscored by a rigorous selection based on a few significant names which may usefully convey a new idea of Italy: from Machiavelli, at eighty pages the most abundantly excerpted author, up to Manzoni. The latter’s presence in the book is surprising, if nothing else for chronological reasons, as the writer had only recently chosen to prefer the modern instrument of prose to poetry. Panizzi devotes twenty pages to the recently published *Promessi sposi* (1825-27), excerpting the portraits of Fra Cristoforo and Cardinal Federigo.¹⁶ Such features confirm that Panizzi’s anthology is an unusual product, and not just in the context of the English

16 Antonio Panizzi, *Extracts from Italian Prose Writers for the Use of Students in the London University* (London: Taylor, 1828), pp. ix-xi (Preface), 1-23 (Alfieri), 24-32 (Algarotti, with the second part of letter VIII from his *Viaggi di Russia*), 157-62 (Colombo), 182-95 (Filangieri), 213-27 (Foscolo), 532-58 (Galileo), 308-87 (Machiavelli; see also, in the appendix, his epistolary exchange with Guicciardini of May 1521, pp. 387-94), 404-27 (Manzoni), 427-58 (Metastasio, with about ten letters), 518-32 (Vasari). The importance of this anthology was highlighted by Carlo Dionisotti in *Un professore a Londra: studi su Antonio Panizzi*, ed. Giuseppe Anceschi (Novara: Interlinea, 2002), pp. 95-119 (the piece on ‘Panizzi professore’ dates back to 1980), pp. 109-13.

literary market. For, apart from a handful of basic grammatical textbooks, also in Italy prose collections were extremely rare in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

Whereas Panizzi had only selected three living authors (Manzoni, Michele Colombo, and Ippolito Pindemonte, whose death occurred in the same year, 1828), his successor to the chair of Italian at London University, the ‘Deputy Professor’ Carlo Arrivabene, was much better disposed towards contemporary writers. In 1855, nearly thirty years after Panizzi’s anthology, Arrivabene published a collection based on the unfaltering faith in the superiority of poetry over prose. By that date, Panizzi had chosen the much more gratifying profession of librarian, and a few months later was to be nominated ‘Principal Librarian’ of the British Museum. Imbued with patriotism and conceived as a ‘historical survey’ of the glorious evolution of national poetry, Count Arrivabene’s *Poeti italiani* (1855) gathered an imposing crowd of authors (eighty-two names, with particular attention, among modern ones, for those who had preferred ‘to rend the strings of their lyres rather than submit them to the senseless scissors of Austrian censorship’). The collection thus aimed to prove the excellence of an Italian Parnassus revitalized by a large group of still active writers (Cantù, Dall’Ongaro, Guerrazzi, Andrea Maffei, Mamiani, Manzoni, Niccolini, Aurelio Saffi, Carlo Pepoli, Tommaseo), and significantly featuring also Goffredo Mameli and his ‘Canto nazionale’. Arrivabene’s approach is justified by the new political conditions of Italy and is clearly expressed in the thirty-odd introductory pages and voluminous annotations, especially those referring to the last of the nine period sections of the book, which, taking up over a third of it, comprises the ‘most illustrious authors of our own age’. Thus it is not surprising that the ‘innocent’ Leopardi was here unexpectedly enlisted among the bards of the new Italy, for, as with the rest of the *Risorgimento*-era poets, he is said to have had Italy’s tormented plight ‘in cima d’ogni suo pensiero’.¹⁸

Before the Unification in 1860, exiles had generally produced collections of Italian literature aimed at British readers with the intention (often animated by a form of excessive

17 One of the most famous collections of prose – published, however, after Panizzi’s *Extracts* – was edited by Giuseppe Monterossi: *Scelta di prose italiane tratte da celebri scrittori antichi e moderni* (Imola: Galeati, 1830; and later: Forlì: Bordandini, 1843).

18 *I poeti italiani: Selections from the Italians Poets, Forming an Historical View of the Development of Italian Poetry from the Earliest Times to the Present*, with Biographical Notices by Charles Arrivabene, Deputy Professor of the Italian Language and Literature in the London University College (London: Rolandi-Dulau, 1855), pp. 517 (the volume was printed by the Florentine Gaspero Barbèra, about whom see the 1883 *Memorie di un editore* [Florence: Barbèra, 1954³], p. 120). Quotations are from the Introduction (dated April 1855), pp. 6 and 28; the section about the nineteenth century is at pp. 341-507 (Mameli’s ‘Canto’ is at pp. 425-26, whereas Leopardi’s works are at pp. 399-407, with his canzone ‘All’Italia’ and the second and third stanzas of ‘La ginestra’, ll. 52-157). More than in the contemporary anthologies by Niccolò Tommaseo (*Lecture italiane, con prefazione e note letterarie e morali*, Milan: Reina, 1854) and the young Carducci (*L’arpa del popolo: scelta di poesie religiose, morali e patriottiche cavate dai nostri autori e accomodate all’intelligenza del popolo*, Florence: Tipografia Galileiana, 1855), Arrivabene’s collection finds its Italian correlative (albeit published after the Unification) in Ferdinando Bosio’s *Poesie di illustri italiani contemporanei*, 2 vols (Milan: Guigoni, 1865). This collection presents a comparable number of poets (sixty-one) and numerous duplications (as, for instance, Leopardi who is present with his early songs, the ‘Consalvo’ and the ‘Palinodia’ dedicated to Gino Capponi, I, pp. 257-90). A facsimile reprint of Bosio’s anthology was published in Trento (La Finestra, 2002), and edited by Luana Salvarani, who discusses Leopardi’s case in the introduction, pp. xxvi-xxviii.

critical subjectivism) of making the national literary heritage relevant to the present. By contrast, Panizzi was perhaps the only one among them to have clearly realized that the cause of Italian culture was not exclusively furthered through patriotic feelings or an exasperated nationalism. In other words, for him the literary texts were never the *loci* for an expression of personal affliction, polemical resentment or unappeased rancour. This attitude is confirmed by his choice, on this and later occasions, to employ English publishers (Taylor, Pickering, Boone, Whittingham), whereas the other exiles usually turned to Italian printers in London in order to strengthen the patriotic connection, such as for instance Pietro Rolandi, who was also a friend of Panizzi's.¹⁹ Further confirmation is provided by the latter's aim to give pre-eminence, among the many poets that made Italy famous, only to those belonging to a period – Humanism and the Renaissance – which had been long appreciated by British readers. Thus, more than the tormented Tasso, his fellow countrymen Boiardo and Ariosto (both, like him, from Reggio Emilia) seemed more suited to promoting the image of a Northern Italian culture centred on the courts of the Po Valley, rooted in ancient traditions, and divorced from improvisations and declamations. In other words, a culture capable of eroding current evaluations of contemporary Italy. This vision is also the starting-point for the monumental nine-volume edition of the poetry of Ariosto and Boiardo, published by William Pickering in 1830-34 and marking the beginning of Panizzi's protracted activity as a philologist and a scholar of incunabula and ancient prints.²⁰ Then, at the end of these three decades of studies, in 1858, and soon after taking over the direction of the highest British cultural institution, Panizzi published his invaluable one-volume reproduction, funded by Lord Vernon, of the first four editions of Dante's *Commedia*, accompanied by a mere sixteen-page preface and carried out according to the strictest historical and bibliographical erudition.²¹ That memorable quarto, dedicated to the members of the Accademia della Crusca and printed in just a hundred copies, was his indirect reply to a whole series of apologetic studies, published in England, on Dante as the first poet of exile. These studies approached Dante with passionate dedication, yet also often produced uneven results and spawned long-winded commentaries in allegorical and sectarian forms. Such are, for instance, the commentaries by Gabriele Rossetti and Foscolo who, nevertheless, had initiated Panizzi into Dantean research with the collation of codices from the Bodleian Library

19 See Eric Reginald Vincent, 'Pietro Rolandi', *Italian Studies*, 16 (1961), 84-95, and Mario Nagari, *Pietro Rolandi da Quarona Valsesia (1801-1863), libraio ed editore in 20, Berner's Street a Londra* (Novara: Tipografia La Moderna, 1959; facsimile reprint by Comune di Quarona, 2001).

20 *Orlando Innamorato di Boiardo: Orlando Furioso di Ariosto, with an Essay on the Romantic Narrative Poetry of the Italians*. Memoirs and notes by Antonio Panizzi, 9 vols (London: Pickering, 1830-34). In particular, after three centuries, Panizzi's edition returned Boiardo's poem to its original *lectio* against Francesco Berni's Tuscan *rifacimento*.

21 *Le prime quattro edizioni della Divina Commedia letteralmente ristampate per cura di G. G. Warren lord Vernon* (London: presso Tommaso e Guglielmo Boone, 1858). The introductory note, bearing the date 'Museo Britannico, il 31 Luglio, 1858', is at pp. v-xx, and is followed by five facsimile illustrations from the editions of Foligno (1472), Mantua, Jesi (or, more likely, Venice) and Francesco Del Tuppo's Neapolitan edition that Panizzi thought had been issued before April 1477.

and Holkham Hall library in 1825-26. Then, still a young exile, Panizzi followed his mentor's example and significantly saw in Dante 'il miglior conforto dell'esilio'.²²

Whereas in Italy the importance of Panizzi's studies on epic and narrative poetry was acknowledged only at the end of the century, in England the reaction was prompter, although not devoid of polemical aspects linked to the scholar's nationality and doubtful origins. Indeed Panizzi was still an exile, with the added aggravation of being Italian and, above all, a 'delinquente di Stato', a state criminal on whose head hung the infamy of a death sentence. Traces of an early British appreciation of Panizzi's work are found in *Stories from the Italian Poets* (1846) by the eclectic James Henry Leigh Hunt, one of the most unusual anthologies of Italian poets published in the early nineteenth century. Dedicated to Shelley's son, it opens with a celebration of the genius of Dante and a generous prose summary of the *Commedia*. This summary constitutes a quasi-novelistic narrative in the style of Leigh Hunt's re-elaboration of the tale of Paolo and Francesca in *The Story of Rimini* (1816) and connected to Dante's poem by a few stanzas reproduced in the annotations. Through his narrative of the *Commedia* and an appendix of texts which are only partly translated, Hunt offers the conciliating vision of a liberal and Romantic Dante, an unhappy though undaunted exile, in whom the reformer of the Church coexists with invocations to Christian charity and Giuseppe Mazzini's universalistic yearnings. Nevertheless, what matters particularly is Leigh Hunt's repeated praise for Panizzi, the author of the 'admirable edition of the combined poems of Boiardo and Ariosto' capable of writing 'an English almost as correct as it is elegant'. Thus a hundred pages in *Stories from the Italian Poets* are dedicated to the two Emilian authors (as many as those for Pulci and Tasso), although with a few moralistic provisos. Indeed Hunt omits, because unsuitable to an age 'unaccustomed to the old romances', the octaves in the twenty-fourth canto of the *Furioso* on the terrible effects of Orlando's madness who, 'squarciati i panni', destroys herds, disembowels bears and wild boars, and slaughters shepherds and peasants.²³

Twenty years later Edmondo Cavalleri situated his own series of 'readings' from the major poets by confirming Dante's and Petrarch's absolute supremacy²⁴ and the importance of

22 Letter to Foscolo, 25 February 1826, in Ugo Foscolo, *Epistolario*, raccolto e ordinato da Francesco Saverio Orlandini e da Enrico Mayer, 3 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 1852-54), III, pp. 460-61.

23 *Stories from the Italian Poets: with Lives of the Writers* (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1846). The collection is dedicated to Percy Bysshe Shelley's son, Percy Shelley, who is said to combine 'a love of the most romantic fiction with the coolest good sense', and to be capable of moving 'from the driest metaphysical questions to the heartiest enjoyment of humour' (p. v). The 'Critical Notice' on Dante and the plot-summary of the *Commedia* are at pp. 1-95; a portion of it is reprinted in *Italian Poets and English Critics, 1755-1859: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. with an introd. by Beatrice Corrigan (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 208-24. Boiardo and Ariosto are discussed at pp. 135-230 (on Panizzi, see pp. 135 and 141-42; and, for a remark on his omissions in the *Furioso*, see p. 210). The Appendix is at pp. 295-334. The parallel London edition in 2 volumes (Chapman and Hall, 1846) bears the same title. See also *Stories from the Italian Poets: Being a Summary in Prose of the Poems of Dante, Pulci, Boiardo, Ariosto and Tasso; Occasional Passages Versified, and Critical Notices of the Lives and Genius of the Authors* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846).

24 Foscolo, Rossetti and other refugees devoted themselves to the commentary of Dante's and Petrarch's works, yet almost always from a conspicuously subjective standpoint. On Romualdo Zotti's (London, 1808-09 and 1811) and Niccolò Giosafatte Biagioli's (Paris, 1818-19 and 1821) editions of Dante and Petrarch, see Roberto Tissoni, *Il commento ai classici italiani nel Sette e nell'Ottocento (Dante e Petrarca)* (revised edi-

the chivalric tradition, although, at the same time, he introduced a gap in Leigh Hunt's 'epic' sequence through the exclusion of Boiardo. This is hardly surprising, as it is evident that the author of the *Innamorato*, writing in a Northern Italian *koiné*, had not yet been sufficiently reinstated by Panizzi's complex critical operation in the eyes of an Italian who was faithful to Tuscan standards.²⁵ Moreover, besides the variations indicated here, the definition of the primacy of Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso, destined to take over also in England, had already been codified at the end of the eighteenth century. In his *Vita* (1783) Alfieri discusses them as 'i quattro nostri poeti', creating a formula that would re-emerge in his sonnet 'Quattro gran vati' three years later.²⁶ Later, in the Romantic period, different Italian publishers issued a sequence of anthologies that presented the works of the 'four great bards' under the title of *Parnaso classico italiano*: one appeared in Florence in 1821 (Poliziano is added), another in Padua in 1827, and finally another in Venice in 1836.²⁷ A similar development emerged in France where Antonio Buttura published the major works of the four canonical Italian poets. Later collected in one volume, Buttura's edition enjoyed widespread diffusion even after his death, as did an anonymous *Parnaso* published in Lyon in 1842.²⁸

Panizzi's philological choice seemed to be ahead of its time not just for the tradition of chivalric poetry, but also within the field of Dantean exegesis. In effect, it was soon countered, and not just in England, by a critical approach that mixed sentimental issues, patriotic motivations, a certain amount of mysticism and old-fashioned rhetorical attitudes. The most significant example, almost a reply to Panizzi's slim edition of the *Commedia* three years before, was published in London in 1861 within the busy cultural circle of the Rossetti family, the symbol of the Italian exiles in Britain. The patriarch, Gabriele, died in 1854, and was thus spared the professional triumph of his worst enemy, Panizzi, on whom he had for a long time poured a pathological form of hatred which had induced him to see Panizzi as a 'negromante' or an incarnation of the devil.²⁹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti's voluminous selection from the 'early Italian poets' is still worthy of attention as one of the most copious collections of early Italian poetry and the *stil novo*: fifty-eight authors ranging from major (Dante is represented by the entire *Vita nuova*, entitled *The New Life*) to minor and marginal, for a

tion, Padua: Antenore, 1993), pp. 98-104. The already mentioned Antonio Buttura also published a three-volume edition of Petrarch's *Rime* (Paris: Lefevre, 1820).

- 25 *Italian Readings from the four poets Dante, Petrarca, Tasso, Ariosto, with English Translations and Notes by Various Hands, Collected and Arranged by Edmondo Cavalleri* (Turin: Stamperia di compositortipografi, 1865), pp. 77.
- 26 *Vita*, IV, 10, and *Rime*, CXLI. See also Arnaldo Di Benedetto, 'I quattro poeti', in *Vittorio Alfieri aristocratico ribelle (1749-1803)*, catalogo della Mostra di Torino, Archivio di Stato, 5 ottobre 2003-11 gennaio 2004 (Milan: Electa, 2003), pp. 41-42.
- 27 *Parnaso classico italiano* (Florence: All'insegna di Pallade, 1821; later Padua: Tipografia della Minerva, 1827, and Venice: Antonelli, 1836).
- 28 *I quattro poeti italiani: con una scelta di poesie italiane dal 1200 sino a' nostri tempi* (Paris: Lefevre-Baudry, 1833), a collection which also comprises Tasso's *Aminta* (reprinted 1836); *Parnaso classico italiano: contenente Dante, Petrarca, Ariosto e Tasso*, 4 vols (Lyon: Cormon and Blanc, 1842).
- 29 See Tobia R. Toscano, 'Introduzione' to Gabriele Rossetti, *Carteggi*, edizione progettata e diretta da Pompeo Giannantonio, ed. by T. R. Toscano, Philip R. Horne, Alfonso Caprio, John R. Woodhouse, 4 vols (Naples: Loffredo, 1984-95), II, p. xv (among Rossetti's many letters against Panizzi, see those addressed to Charles Lyell on 24 July 1835 and 14 September 1840, III, p. 527 and IV, pp. 419-20).

grand total of nearly two hundred poems.³⁰ Each of these poems is translated ‘in the original metres’ and presented with a typographic clarity that brought the editor to dispense with footnote indices and that cumbersome apparatus of ‘verbal analysis’ which, in his opinion, was an unnecessary burden in other anthologies. This work exemplifies Rossetti’s staunch commitment to family traditions and, simultaneously, constitutes a training ground for his own later Pre-Raphaelite poetic and pictorial activities. A very successful volume, it was reprinted in 1874 with a different title, and was republished in 1892 by William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel’s younger brother, who, in his lifetime, was the keeper and popularizer of the writings of his father and siblings.³¹

With its ample selection from the early poets, Rossetti’s anthology clearly deviated from the publishers’ established practice and their tendency to publish already popular texts, as well as from the readers’ presumable expectations, as the latter could not necessarily be expected to favour such difficult and remote materials. Nonetheless, with his aristocratic erudition, Rossetti also countered the confirmed canon of the four major Italian poets. The rigorous Panizzi had treated two of these *auctores*, Dante and Ariosto (the latter translated by William Stewart Rose in 1823) with the strictest philological accuracy, whilst linking them (and that was his greatest merit) with his fellow countryman Boiardo, of whom he had not only published the chivalric poem, but also the lyrics (unpublished since 1501) in 1835.³² As Panizzi wrote to a friend in 1845: ‘Vivo del resto nella miglior società di Londra. [...] Non mi occupo più che di cose Inglesi e in tutto e per tutto fo come un Inglese’.³³ Encoded in these words is a polemical reaction against the coldness with which, Panizzi felt, his countrymen treated him and his own commitment to the national cause. This contrast with his country of origin was destined to deteriorate further, and would not be improved even by the Milanese reprint of his collection of Boiardo’s lyrics in the same year.³⁴

30 *The Early Italian Poets, from Ciullo d’Alcamo to Dante Alighieri (1100-1200-1300), in the Original Metres together with Dante’s Vita nuova Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861).

31 William Michael Rossetti published Dante Gabriel’s *Family Letters* in 1895, the English version of his father’s autobiography in 1901, his sister Christina Georgina’s *New Poems and Poetical Works* in 1896 and 1904. See also William Michael Rossetti’s *Some Reminiscences*, 2 vols (London: Breron Langham, 1906). His edition of Early Italian Poets is entitled *Dante and his Circle: With the Italian Poets Preceding him (1100-1200-1300). A Collection of Lyrics Translated in the Original Metres by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Part I. Dante’s Vita nuova, etc. Poets of Dante’s Circle. Part II. Poets Chiefly before Dante*. A New Edition with Preface by William M. Rossetti (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1892). The editor’s introduction is at pp. 1-29; the section on Dante, with a selection of his lyrics, is at pp. 30-115. A modern edition of Rossetti’s *Early Italian Poets* was edited by Sally Purcell (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981). See also *The New Life, Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, introd. by Michael Palmer (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002). On the links between poetry and painting in Rossetti, and especially his interpretation of Dante’s medieval world, see Giovanna Silvani, ‘La religione dell’eros nella pittura verbale di Dante Gabriele Rossetti’, *La questione romantica*, 9 (2000), 41-60.

32 *Sonetti e canzone del poeta clarissimo Matteo Maria Boiardo conte di Scandiano* (London: Whittingham, 1835). The edition, issued in fifty copies, was dedicated to Thomas Grenville.

33 Letter to Giuseppe Levi Minzi, 1 May 1845, in Antonio Panizzi, *La catena di seta: lettere a Giuseppe Levi Minzi (1822-1873)*, ed. by William Spaggiari (Rome: Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano-Archivio Guido IZZI, 1998), p. 50.

34 *Sonetti e canzone del poeta clarissimo Matteo Maria Boiardo conte di Scandiano* (Milan: dalla Società Tip. dei Classici italiani, 1845). The volume was printed in two hundred and fifty copies, and in fifty copies ‘in carta grande’.

Panizzi's inflexible choices in the case of Dante, Boiardo, and Ariosto were an affectionate tribute to the culture of his own country in its most glorious phase between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Yet, these choices also unequivocally indicate that, in contrast with the other exiles' loud and emphatic attempts, Panizzi supported a concretely useful approach to the Italian literary tradition as a means of furthering the introduction of its masterpieces to the audiences of his adoptive country.³⁵

35 The chronological limits of this essay exclude any examination of the variations in the canon of Italian writers in later anthologies. However, an interesting comparison can be drawn between the two most relevant collections published in the early twentieth century: *Selections from the Italian Poets*, with critical introductions by Ernesto Grillo (London, Glasgow, Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1917), and the more famous *Oxford Book of Italian Verse*. In the case of the latter anthology, the first edition, published in 1910 and edited by St. John Lucas, contained 345 poems by about a hundred authors; whereas the second edition, 'revised with twentieth-century supplement' and edited by Carlo Dionisotti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) contains 23 new poems, but the number of authors is practically the same. Indeed Dionisotti excluded, among others, Cielo d'Alcamo ('hardly comprehensible without a full commentary, even to experienced Italian readers', p. vi), Annibal Caro, Alessandro Tassoni, Angelo Mazza, Luigi Carrer, Francesco Dall'Ongaro and a few more minor poets; yet, at the same time, compensated these absences by including Leon Battista Alberti, Tommaso Campanella, Giovanni Fantoni and, among modern poets, Giacomo Zanella, Sergio Corazzini, Carlo Michelstaedter, Vittoria Aganoor Pompilj, D'Annunzio, Gozzano and Pascoli, the latter represented by a dozen excerpts. The dominant figures are still those of Dante (22 excerpts), Petrarch (33) and Tasso (20), together with Leopardi (14). The significant presence of 8 samples of Boiardo's lyrical output could then be seen as a positive influence of Antonio Panizzi's early nineteenth-century re-evaluation. Ernesto Grillo's 1917 anthology presents similar dimensions and a similar list of authors as the *Oxford Book of Italian Verse*. Nonetheless a few relevant figures are visibly absent from it (Francesco Redi, Galeazzo di Tarsia and Ottavio Rinuccini); *Risorgimento* and post-Unification poets (Antonio Fogazzaro, Olindo Guerrini, Mario Rapisardi, Giovanni Marradi, as well as Ada Negri and Arturo Graf, besides the already mentioned Carrer and Dall'Ongaro) are more numerous than those from earlier periods (notable absences are those of Cecco Angiolieri, Guittone d'Arezzo, Iacopone da Todi, Antonio Pucci, Giacomino Pugliese and Rustico di Filippo). Even so, it must be observed that the editor later corrected these omissions with the publication of *Pre-Dante Poetical Schools*, 'with critical introductions' (London: Blackie and Son, 1920). Further observations may be made by comparing the summaries and indices of the *Oxford Book of Italian Verse* (pp. v-vi and 605-16) and Grillo's *Selections* (pp. vii-xvii and 607-18).

The first and shortest section, entitled 'Setting the Scene: Literary and Cultural Intersection', contains two essays: William Spaggiari's 'The Canon of the Classics: Italian Writers and Romantic-Period Anthologies of Italian Literature in Britain', and Gian Mario Anselmi's 'Shelley and the Italian Lyrical Tradition'. Spaggiari's is particularly interesting in that it tracks how deeply the experience of Italian exiles in Britain shaped the British understanding of Italian language, literature, and culture, first through Giuseppe Baretti's anthology of Italian poetry, and later, through Antonio P Italian literature is written in the Italian language, particularly within Italy. It may also refer to literature written by Italians or in Italy in other languages spoken in Italy, often languages that are closely related to modern Italian. Italian literature begins in the 12th century when in different regions of the peninsula the Italian vernacular started to be used in a literary manner. The *Ritmo laurenziano* is the first extant document of Italian literature. Italian literature and the related sciences of language and Aesthetics show these defects conspicuously. The Humanists turned Latin, which had been a living tongue in the Middle Ages, into the "dead language" which the schoolboy now abhors. The Italian Renaissance dictated to the whole world the canons of literary criticism which prevailed practically unchallenged down to the Romanticism of the nineteenth century, and which survived in large part even that attack. The discussions grew in large part around the "Poetics" of Aristotle, his analysis of the "kinds" or "genres" of poetry, and the rules governing the construction of each. The 17th century in Italian literature was traditionally described as a period of "decadence" in which writers who were devoid of sentiment resorted to exaggeration and tried to cloak the poverty of their subject matter beneath an exuberance of form. (In this period, it is said, freedom of thought and expression was fettered by the Counter-Reformation, by the political supremacy of Spain, and by the conservatism of the Accademia della Crusca, whose aim it was to ensure the hegemony of Florence by promoting the "purity" of the Tuscan language. Considered by some critics to be the most original poetry in Italian literature of the period, the collection includes madrigals, sonnets, conventional love poems, and metaphysical hymns.