

# Modern Italian narrator-poets: a new critical category\*

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## Introduction

In Italy, until relatively recently,<sup>1</sup> poetry had generally been favoured over fiction in critical estimation. One reason was the «stabile primato della poesia sulla prosa narrativa nel sistema classicistico dei generi letterari», as Amedeo Quondam has argued.<sup>2</sup> Another reason was the late development of the Italian novel, owing to various causes, among which the lack of a bourgeois reading public.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of a recognized novelistic tradition, the Italian literary canon was shaped in large part by the lyric poetry of Petrarch, thanks to Bembo's canonization of his verse. Yet even before the wide circulation of Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, Boccaccio, that relentless inventor of new literary genres in Italian, wrote much in verse.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that the prestige of poetry existed from the very beginning of Italian literature, and was not a mere effect of the two above noted facts, namely the lack of an established tradition of the novel and the subsequent literary canon centred on lyric poetry. Indeed, Boccaccio was not the sole canonical Italian narrator to turn to poetry. The other most famous pre-20<sup>th</sup> century Italian fiction

\* I would like to express my thanks to Carlo Caruso, Guido Mazzoni, Mila Milani, Fabio Pedone, Brian Richardson, and Chiara Sbordoni for their advice and comments on versions of this article.

1 Cesare Segre has argued that fiction became the center of critical attention, displacing poetry, only after the Second World War: C. Segre, *Tempo di bilanci: la fine del Novecento*, Einaudi, Torino 2005, p. 26.

2 A. Quondam, *Il canone dei classici italiani*, in *Dal Parnaso Italiano agli Scrittori d'Italia*, edited by P. Bartesaghi and G. Frasso, Bulzoni, Roma 2012, pp. 3-26: p. 21.

3 R. Ceserani, P. Pellini, *The belated development of a theory of the novel in Italian literary culture*, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian novel*, edited by P. Bondanella and A. Ciccarelli, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, pp. 1-19.

4 A new edition of his lyric poems has recently been published: G. Boccaccio, *Le Rime*, edited by A. Lanza, Aracne, Roma 2011. Other works are Id., *L'amorosa visione*, edited by V. Branca, Mondadori, Milano 2000; Id., *Caccia di Diana; Filostrato*, edited by V. Branca, Mondadori, Milano 1990; Id., *Ninfale fiesolano*, edited by A. Balduino, Mondadori, Milano 1997; Id., *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia*, edited by A. Limentani, Mondadori, Milano 1992.

writer, Alessandro Manzoni,<sup>5</sup> wrote a conspicuous amount of verse, which has, unlike Boccaccio's, been duly canonized.

The prevalence of narrators composing poetry is, moreover, not a consequence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century breakdown in both poetic form and aulic diction. It is a function of the prestige of poetry in Italian tradition. Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, Leopardi, and Montale are central figures in the Italian curriculum and therefore in the national Italian consciousness. If we accept, with John Guillory,<sup>6</sup> that the canon arises from the educational system, we can therefore see why writers perpetuate to a large degree the compositional genres of their predecessors, and therefore why Italian narrators write such an abundant amount of verse. As Romano Luperini boldly stated, «l'Italia ha un'ottima tradizione lirica, ma ben pochi prosatori di valore (e il Novecento non altera questa costante)».<sup>7</sup> However, with the explosion of the Italian poetic tradition in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with free verse, the prose poem, and *prosa d'arte*, the border between poetry and prose became much more fluid. The novel, of course, would overtake poetry in the Italian post-war period,<sup>8</sup> acquiring a certain amount of prestige that it had hitherto lacked.

### Category of "narrator-poet"

The category of narrator-poet can be clearly defined. Here are included writers whose main (or critically significant) output is fiction, yet who have published at least one volume of poems (including posthumously).<sup>9</sup> So, for example, this category includes writers as different as the novelist Paolo Volponi, the short story writer Dino Buzzati, the dramatist-narrator Luigi Pirandello,<sup>10</sup> the screenplay writer Cesare Zavattini, and the prolific belles-lettres writer Emilio Cecchi.<sup>11</sup> One must be careful to distinguish narrator-poets from poet-narrators: in general

5 The past decade has seen five separate editions of Manzoni's poetry: A. Manzoni, *Tutte le poesie*, edited by L. Danzi, Rizzoli, Milano 2012; Id., *Tutte le poesie*, edited by S. Blazina, Garzanti, Milano 2007; Id., *Le poesie*, De Agostini, Milano 2005; Id., *Le poesie*, edited by V. Marucci, Salerno, Roma 2005; Id., *Il cinque maggio, tutte le poesie*, edited by A. Polvara, Rizzoli, Milano 2003.

6 J. Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1993.

7 R. Luperini, *La questione del canone, la scuola e lo studio del Novecento*, in *Un canone per il terzo millennio*, edited by U.M. Olivieri, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2001, pp. 154-174: p. 169.

8 Segre, *Tempo di bilanci*, cit., p. 26.

9 Note that there I am making no distinction between the genre of poetry produced by the narrator-poet, whether lyric or epic.

10 I include Luigi Pirandello in the category of narrator-poet, since his modernist novels (and the wealth of his short stories) form a crucial part of modern Italian literature.

11 On the other hand, writers who publish predominantly works of a non-literary genre are not included.



there are two main differences. A narrator-poet publishes more volumes of fiction than poetry, while the opposite holds true for a poet-narrator. Second, a narrator-poet's fiction is recognized by critics as more influential and significant to the Italian literary tradition than his poetry (and contrariwise for poet-narrators). So, to take a couple of examples, Cesare Pavese published one volume of poetry during his lifetime,<sup>12</sup> and eight volumes of fiction. Scholars consider his fiction more important to the Italian literary tradition than his verse. Therefore we can classify him as a narrator-poet. Likewise, Aldo Palazzeschi, although publishing more than a dozen poetic volumes (14), published more books of fiction (20), and for this reason is considered a narrator-poet.

One of the main difficulties in establishing a critical category like narrator-poets is the mistaken impression that it is an ad hoc category, gathering disparate writers for no better reason than the genre of their work, despite their vast differences in poetics and careers. I will address this issue later on, when this criticism is rightly levelled at a well-known anthology of Italian poetry; but, at the outset, it should be clear that the reason I group fiction writers together is to look for overall trajectories, tendencies, and trends, which would otherwise be nebulous.

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### Gap in secondary literature

Critics have studied individual narrator-poets and narrators as poets, but have not undertaken a broad, wholesale examination of narrator-poets due to three principal reasons. First, critics often focus on fiction when analysing narrator-poets, minimising the importance of their poetry volumes. Second, the widespread tendency of novelists and short story writers to write poetry is rarely discussed. Third, the poetry written by many novelists does not fit into reigning literary trends. Indeed, the fact that a majority of modern Italian fiction writers composed and published verse raises a host of interesting issues, many of which can only be alluded to here.

### Theoretical methodology

The theoretical backbone of this work draws on three different sociological approaches: canon studies, as developed by Alastair Fowler and Wendell Harris; distant reading informed by quantitative methods, as theorized by Franco Moretti; and the book market and publishing studies, in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Gisèle Sapiro.

12 C. Pavese, *Lavorare stanca*, Edizioni di Solaria, Firenze 1936. This came out in a new and enlarged edition by Einaudi in 1943.

For our purposes, we will be referring to several canons classified by Fowler and Harris: the «selective canon», namely «authors and texts [...] in anthologies, syllabi»; the «potential canon», or «the entire written corpus»; the «accessible canon», that is «that portion of the potential canon available at a given time»; and the «critical canon», which is formed from «works or parts of works that are repeatedly treated in critical articles and books».

Meanwhile, Moretti's innovative perspective has applied quantitative analysis very effectively to the study of the novel, with his distant reading and materialist «sociology of literary form», most recently collected in his volume *Distant Reading*. Moretti's research, however, has focused only on prose, so I will be extending his approach to poetry.

In turn, Bourdieu's and Sapiro's approach towards book publishing offers a comprehensive framework for situating literature within the literary field and publishing market. Bourdieu's perspective on literature and publishing, most notably advanced in his *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* and *Une révolution conservatrice dans l'édition*,<sup>13</sup> provides a detailed structure for analysing a literary text within a broad sociological context. Gisèle Sapiro, professor at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, the same institution with which Bourdieu was affiliated, has significantly furthered Bourdieu's studies through a series of pioneering books and articles.<sup>14</sup> Naturally, while Bourdieu and Sapiro have studied the French publishing world, I will be applying their methods to the Italian book market.

I intend then to demonstrate the prolific nature of poetry composition by modern Italian narrators, the different trajectories poetry played in their careers, and their marginalised position in the Italian poetic canon, by broadening Moretti's analysis of novels to the large-scale production of poetic volumes within a Bourdieusian sociological framework of literary fields, agents, and publishers.

This essay is therefore divided into several parts. First, I outline the corpus of works on which the statistical results are based. Then I present

13 P. Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Seuil, Paris 1992; Id., *Une révolution conservatrice dans l'édition*, in «Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales», 126, 1999, pp. 3-28.

14 Gisèle Sapiro is Director of the Centre Européen de Sociologie et de Science Politique, Professor of Sociology at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, and Research director at the CNRS. She has published *La Guerre des écrivains, 1940-1953*, Fayard, Paris 1999 and *La Responsabilité de l'écrivain. Littérature, droit et morale en France (xix<sup>e</sup>-xx<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Seuil, Paris 2011; she has also edited *Translatio. Le Marché de la traduction en France à l'heure de la mondialisation*, Éditions du CNRS, Paris 2008, *Les Contradictions de la globalisation éditoriale*, Éditions Nouveau Monde, Paris 2009, *L'Espace intellectuel en Europe: De la formation des États-nations à la mondialisation. XIX<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris 2009, and *Traduire la littérature et les sciences humaines. Conditions et obstacles*, La Documentation française, Paris 2012.



the statistical results based on the examination of the corpus, showing who are the most prolific modern Italian narrator-poets as well as noting the frequent literary debut of narrators with poetry collections. Following this, I demonstrate the lack of critical recognition of narrator-poets within the Italian poetic canon, according to multiple perspectives: the (sparse) anthologization of Italian narrators' poetry; the publication history of their volumes according to prominent publishing houses; the representation of narrator-poets in the most prestigious Italian series of literature, the «Meridiani»; an analysis of how narrator-poets' poetry is mostly out of print; the marginalization of them in literary prizes; and the omitted reference to narrators' poetry in critical works.

### The Italian corpus

There is no standard dictionary, encyclopaedia, or anthology of 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian prose writers: the narrative canon is much more fluid than the poetic canon, which teems with anthologies of various sorts.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, I have subjectively chosen 150 Italian narrators, listed in histories of Italian literature and reference books (the list is included in the appendix to this article).<sup>16</sup> The earliest narrator, Matilde Serao, was born in 1856, and the youngest author, Rossana Campo, was born in 1963. The statistical mean year of birth is about a century ago, 1914.

I then catalogued every first edition<sup>17</sup> of verse that these 150 writers published,<sup>18</sup> relying principally on three sources: the Italian database of

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- 15 See the words of Romano Luperini: «Nel Novecento il canone della poesia è più stabile e definito di quella della narrativa» (Luperini, *La questione del canone, la scuola e lo studio del Novecento*, cit., p. 160). See also N. Scaffai, *Altri canzonieri. Sulle antologie della poesia italiana (1903- 2005)*, in «Paragrafo», 1, 2006, pp. 77-98.
- 16 I have excluded poet-narrators like Gabriele D'Annunzio, Marino Moretti, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, for the reasons listed above.
- 17 In book publishing, the concept of "edition" is clear. As Philip Gaskell ("the pied piper of bibliography") writes in *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (St. Paul's Bibliographies, Winchester 1995), p. 314: «An *edition*, first of all, is all the copies of a book printed at any time (or times) from substantially the same setting of type, and includes all the various impressions, issues, and states which may have derived from that setting». Gaskell goes on to say, «An impression of a book, then, means all the copies of an edition printed at one time [...] but can be very difficult to identify» (*ibidem*). However, as scholars of the Italian book market know, publishers often call new editions what in truth are simply "impressions". As Alberto Cadioli notes, «È consuetudine editoriale quella di definire come nuove edizioni anche semplici ristampe, o addirittura volumi "ricopertinati", dei quali si è solo sostituita la copertina e il foglio sul quale sono stampate le pagine con il frontespizio, il copyright, e a volte il titolo di collana, aggiornati» (A. Cadioli, *Le diverse pagine. Il testo letterario tra scrittore, editore, lettore*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2012, p. 170). Therefore, for our purposes, I count only first editions, and subsequent editions that are published by a different publisher, or explicitly listed as amplified editions with new material by the original publisher.
- 18 I did not include dramas entitled «poema tragico» like Amelia Guglielminetti's *L'amante ignoto* or Vitaliano Brancati's *Fedor, poema tragico*.

library holdings (opac.sbn.it) and the two exhaustive bibliographies, *La letteratura italiana del Novecento: repertorio delle prime edizioni*<sup>19</sup> and *Rarità bibliografiche del Novecento italiano: repertorio delle edizioni originali*.<sup>20</sup>

### Statistical Results

As we can see in the table below, a majority of 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian fiction writers published poetry, ranging from one to fifteen books: on average, each narrator-poet published four collections.

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Table 1. Statistical results about 150 modern Italian narrators

Total narrators in corpus	150
Poetry-publishing narrators	84
Total poetry collections <sup>21</sup>	349
Average number of volumes per narrator-poet	4
Narrators publishing 5 or more poetry volumes	28
Narrators publishing 10 or more poetry volumes	8
Narrators publishing 15 or more poetry volumes	1

Below are all the 27 narrators in our corpus who published five or more volumes of verse (Graphic 1).

A chart of number of titles can be misleading, because a book can be a chapbook of twenty pages or a hefty volume of a few hundred. But it significantly indicates the widespread tendency of Italian fiction writers to turn to another literary genre on a consistent basis.

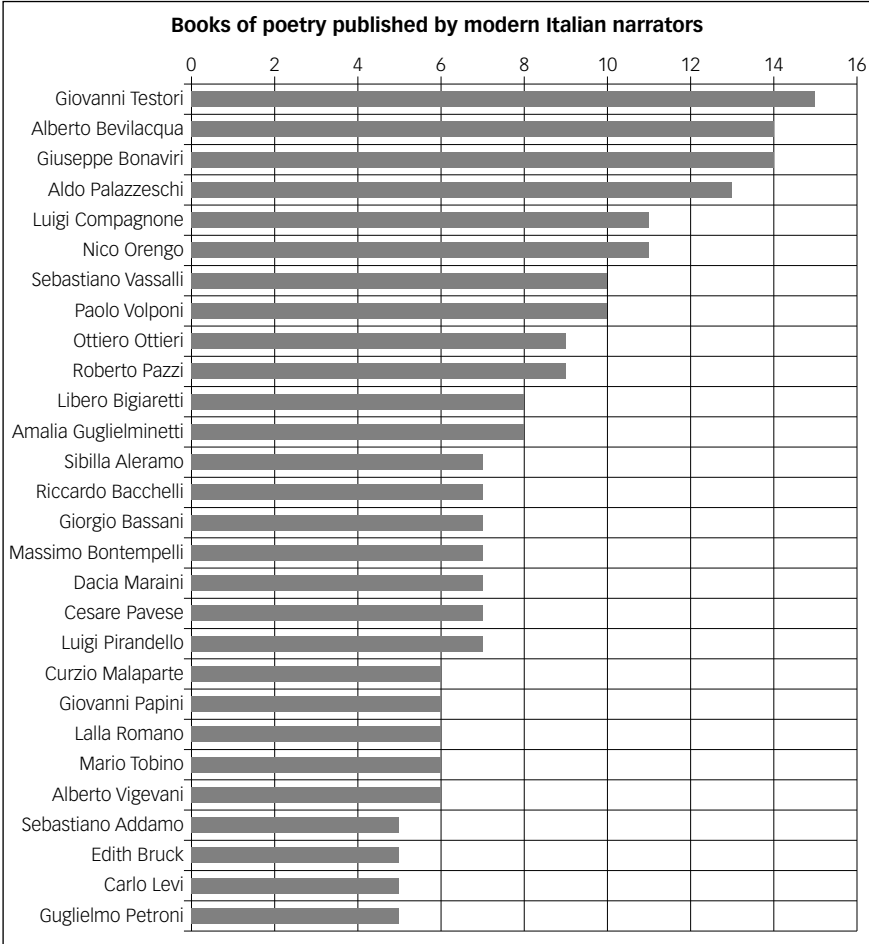
If we analyse books of poetry in another way, namely in terms of how many pages they contain, the order and classification shift. Below are the narrators who published more than 1000 pages of verse (Graphic 2).

There are three things to bear in mind here. First, quantitative measurements do not have a relationship with quality or value per se. How many collected books of poetry are worth a handful of sonnets by Petrarch, Shakespeare, Mallarmé, or Rilke? Second, pagination changes according to the publisher, edition, and format of the volume, so this is

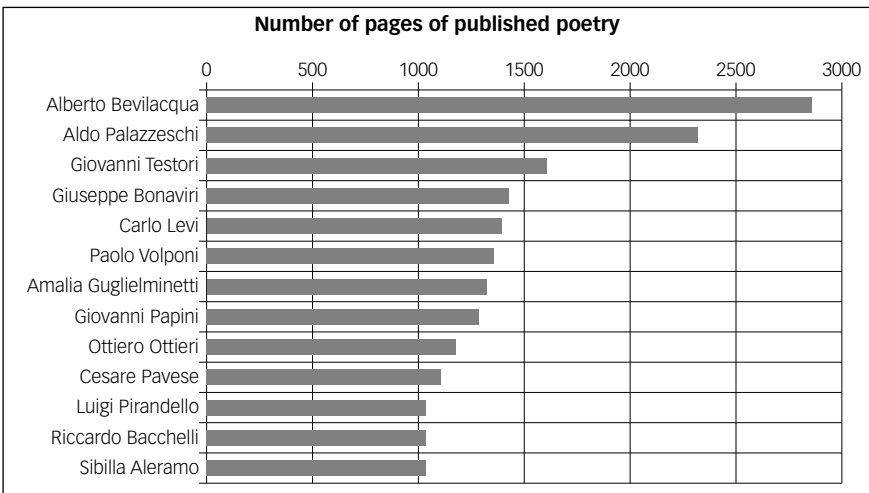
19 L. Gambetti, Franco Vezzosi, *La letteratura italiana del Novecento: repertorio delle prime edizioni*, Graphos, Genova 1997.

20 L. Gambetti, F. Vezzosi, *Rarità bibliografiche del Novecento italiano: repertorio delle edizioni originali*, Sylvestre Bonnard, Milano 2007.

21 This includes posthumous volumes.



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not a fool-proof method of comparing apples and oranges, so to speak. And third, an author may be represented with hundreds of pages, simply because his or her poetry is reprinted in various forms: e.g., Pavese, whose canon of poetry is much smaller than Bacchelli's, for example, even if he leads the latter in number of pages.

With all this said, it is certainly meaningful that Bevilacqua leads in terms of pages, showing off his prolific inspiration. While Testori published more volumes of poetry, many of his collections are *plaquettes* or poems accompanying paintings. Bevilacqua, on the other hand, consistently produces substantial volumes of poetry (which, it bears repeating, does not necessarily reflect on the aesthetic value of his work). Palazzeschi, who achieved as canonical a place in modern Italian poetry anthologies as anyone else, comes in second.

### Poetry debuts

Roughly one third of Italian narrator-poets (35%) initiated their literary careers with poetry. The following chart lists those narrators of our corpus whose first book publication was poetry (and does not, naturally, include narrators whose first published compositions may have been individual poems, like Primo Levi, for example) (Table 2, p. 317).

This initiation plays different roles in the life of a writer, and the following trajectories are simply indicative of larger patterns. Some writers compose a collection of poetry once in their youth and never again: for example, Nobel-Prize winner Grazia Deledda. Other fiction writers, like Sebastiano Vassalli, debut as poet, publish a long series of poetry chapbooks, and only then turn wholly to fiction. Other novelists, like Paolo Volponi, both debut with poetry and continue writing it alongside fiction throughout their careers. And still other novelists, like Goffredo Parise, only write poetry at the very end of their lives.

### Narrator-poets and the canon

The concept of the literary canon has changed through time. John Guillory has asserted that «the word “canon” displaces the expressly honorific term “classic” precisely in order to isolate the “classics” as the object of critique».<sup>22</sup> As W.J.T. Mitchell remarks, «the notion of the “canon”, as an exclusive body of texts whose members are absolutely fixed, is an authoritarian fantasy that no longer exists. There are now multiple canons [...]».<sup>23</sup> While literary scholars tended to conceive of

<sup>22</sup> Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Canon*, in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, edited by T. Bennett, L. Grossberg, and M. Morris, Blackwell, Oxford 2005, pp. 20-22: p. 20.



Table 2. Narrators whose first publication is a poetry collection

Narrator	Title of poetry collection	Publication year
Luigi Pirandello	<i>Mal giocondo</i>	1889
Amalia Guglielminetti	<i>Voci di giovinezza</i>	1903
Massimo Bontempelli	<i>Egloghe</i>	1904
Aldo Palazzeschi	<i>I cavalli bianchi</i>	1905
Emilio Cecchi	<i>Inno primo</i>	1908
Giuseppe Antonio Borgese	<i>La canzone paziente</i>	1910
Enrico Pea	<i>Fole</i>	1910
Federigo Tozzi	<i>La zampogna verde</i>	1913
Renata Viganò	<i>Ginestra in fiore</i>	1913
Curzio Malaparte	<i>Alla brigata cacciatori delle Alpi (51-52)</i>	1914
Giovanni Comisso	<i>Poesie</i>	1916
Corrado Alvaro	<i>Poesie grigioverdi</i>	1917
Mario Tobino	<i>Poesie</i>	1934
Silvio d'Arzo	<i>Luci e penombre</i>	1935
Guglielmo Petroni	<i>Versi e memoria</i>	1935
Libero Bigiaretti	<i>Ore e stagioni</i>	1936
Cesare Pavese	<i>Lavorare stanca</i>	1936
Alba De Céspedes	<i>Prigionie</i>	1937
Lalla Romano	<i>Fiore</i>	1941
Piero Chiara	<i>Incantavi</i>	1945
Paolo Volponi	<i>Il ramarro</i>	1948
Rossana Ombres	<i>Orizzonte anche tu</i>	1956
Stefano D'Arrigo	<i>Codice siciliano</i>	1957
Alberto Bevilacqua	<i>L'amicizia perduta</i>	1961
Nico Orengo	<i>Motivi per canzoni popolari</i>	1964
Sebastiano Vassalli	<i>Lui (egli)</i>	1965
Ferdinando Camon	<i>Fuori storia</i>	1967
Carlo Fruttero	<i>L'idraulico non verrà</i>	1971
Roberto Pazzi	<i>L'esperienza anteriore</i>	1973

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the canon as a static collection, it is more accurate to state that «a canon is not a closed, absolute system, then, but a dynamic, evolving entity that can be reopened, reinterpreted, and reshaped».<sup>24</sup> What must be kept in mind, as Guillory notes, is that «canonicity is not a property of the work itself but of its transmission, its relation to other works in a collocation of works».<sup>25</sup> In synthesis, the canon is «un'interpretazione del mondo».<sup>26</sup>

The modern definitions of the canon have been many and varied, but we will refer to Wendell V. Harris's list of 10 different canons, which in turn drew on a previous list of canons by Alastair Fowler. For Harris, they are the «potential canon», or «the entire written corpus»;<sup>27</sup> the «accessible canon», that is «that portion of the potential canon available at a given time»;<sup>28</sup> the «selective canon», namely «authors and texts [...] in anthologies, syllabi»;<sup>29</sup> the «official canon», or a body of works «institutionalized through education, prestige, and journalism»;<sup>30</sup> the «personal canon»,<sup>31</sup> which is based on a person's subjective evaluation; the «critical canon», which is formed from «works or parts of works that are repeatedly treated in critical articles and books»;<sup>32</sup> the Biblical «canon», namely a «closed, uniquely authoritative body of texts»;<sup>33</sup> the «pedagogical canon», that is, the «list of works commonly taught in high school and undergraduate classes»;<sup>34</sup> the «diachronic canon», which refers to the «the glacially changing core»<sup>35</sup> of the canon; and the «nonce canon»,<sup>36</sup> which alludes to the «rapidly changing periphery» of the canon. For our purposes, as outlined above, we will be dealing with the pertinent categories of the «selective canon», «potential canon», «accessible canon», and «critical canon».

### «Selective canons»: anthologies

The anthology, as Lucia Re states, «constitutes and reproduces a system of values within literary studies, while simultaneously contributing to the

24 *Ivi*, p. 21.

25 Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, cit., p. 55.

26 P. Cataldi, *La questione del canone e la "strana pietà" dei montalisti*, in *Montale e il canone del Novecento*, edited by M.A. Grignani and R. Luperini, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1998, pp. 417-424: p. 421.

27 W.V. Harris, *Canonicity*, in «PMLA», 106, 1, 1991, pp. 110-121: p. 112.

28 *Ibidem*.

29 *Ibidem*.

30 Here I quote Fowler's definition, which is clearer than Harris's: A. Fowler, *Genre and the literary canon*, in «New literary history», 11, 1, 1979, pp. 97-119: p. 98.

31 *Ivi*, p. 112.

32 *Ibidem*.

33 *Ibidem*.

34 Harris, *Canonicity*, cit., pp. 112-113.

35 *Ivi*, p. 113.

36 *Ibidem*.



hegemonic orientation of cultural codes in the wider field of social discursive practices». <sup>37</sup> Through the analysis of anthologies, we can see how the «selective canon» of modern Italian poetry has changed throughout the previous decades. Three excluded categories of poets have begun to find their way in, namely women poets, <sup>38</sup> dialect poets, <sup>39</sup> and poet-translators. <sup>40</sup> What concerns us here, however, is our newly theorized group of poets labelled «narrator-poets». If we look at their anthologization in eight principal anthologies of Italian poetry, we may be surprised (Table 3, p. 320).

The percentage of narrator-poets whose poetry is anthologized varies anywhere from 7% to 13%.

However, in the most recent anthology of Italian poetry listed above, edited by Cesare Segre and Carlo Ossola, merely 5 such poets, or 8%, are fiction writers. So the place and role of narrator-poets is far from stable. In fact, only 18 out of the total 84 Italian narrator-poets in our survey (or 21%) are represented in any of the eight above-listed anthologies of 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian poetry. <sup>41</sup> Moreover, as Table 4 shows, not one of these narrators appears in all of the anthologies <sup>42</sup> (Table 4, p. 321).

Certainly there are differences here in the reception of Italian narrator-poets: Aleramo, Cecchi, and Pea were chosen for 1950 anthologies, never to return; Primo Levi is seemingly discovered as a poet only in Segre-Ossola's 2003 anthology. Meanwhile, there are more substantial presences in the canon, such as Palazzeschi, Pavese, and Soffici, missing in only one or two anthologies. And then there are figures who are clearly on the margins, such as Bevilacqua, Bontempelli, Morante, Orengo, and Ottieri, all with only one or two appearances. Yet these are the only anthologised poets in our corpus: indeed, it's not too much to say that the poetry of the majority of 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian narrators – the other 66 out of 84 – has been forgotten. If the «potential canon» con-

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37 L. Re, *(De)Constructing the Canon: The Agony of the Anthologies on the Scene of Modern Italian Poetry*, in «The Modern Language Review», 87, 3, 1992, pp. 585-602: p. 585.

38 Sanguinetti's anthology contained no women poets; Mengaldo's only one; and the most recent, Segre-Ossola, includes only two. As Lucia Re writes, «One of the criteria all anthologists of modern Italian poetry share is the exclusion of women» (Re, *(De)Constructing the Canon*, cit., p. 588). See as well R. West, *Who's in, who's out*, in *Dentro/fuori, Sopra/sotto: Critica femminista e canone letterario negli studi di italianistica*, edited by A. Ronchetti and M.S. Sapegno, Longo, Ravenna 2007, pp. 25-38.

39 Sanguinetti's 1969 anthology contained no dialect poetry. The most recent anthology, edited by Cesare Segre and Carlo Ossola, contains 13 prominent dialect poets.

40 See my book: J.S.D. Blakesley, *Modern Italian Poets: Translators of the Impossible*, University of Toronto, Toronto 2014, and a related article of mine: J. Blakesley, *Poet-translators in Modern Italy: a statistical survey*, in «Testo a Fronte», 47, 2013, pp. 31-41.

41 Technically, the anthology edited by Maurizio Cucchi and Stefano Giovanardi covers only the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but I've included it in the table, since it is the only anthology that specifically mentions *narratori-poeti*.

42 One should, of course, keep in mind that not all of the narrator-poets in our corpus had begun writing poetry by the time of the first anthologies listed above.

sists of all that has been written, anthologies reflect both an «accessible canon», by offering texts of poems, as well as a «selective canon», by choosing one poem instead of another.

Table 3. Poets by category anthologized in eight anthologies of Italian poetry

Anthology	Number of narrator-poets anthologized	Number of total poets anthologized	% narrator-poets
<i>Lirica del Novecento: antologia della poesia italiana</i> , edited by L. Anceschi and S. Antonielli, Vallecchi, Firenze 1953	6: Aleramo, Bassani, Palazzeschi, Papini, Pavese, Soffici	53	11
<i>Poesia italiana 1909-1949</i> , edited by G. Spagnoletti, Guanda, Parma 1954 <sup>3</sup>	6: Cecchi, Palazzeschi, Papini, Pavese, Pea, Soffici	46	13
<i>Poesia italiana del Novecento</i> , edited by E. Sanguineti, Einaudi, Torino 1969	4: Boine, Palazzeschi, Pavese, Soffici	45	9
<i>Poeti italiani del Novecento</i> , edited by P.V. Mengaldo, Mondadori, Milano 1978	5: Boine, Bontempelli, Palazzeschi, Pavese, Soffici	50	10
<i>Poesia italiana del Novecento</i> , edited by P. Gelli and G. Lagorio, Garzanti, Milano 1980	8: Bacchelli, Bassani, Morante, Palazzeschi, Papini, Pavese, Testori, Volponi	76	11
<i>Poesia italiana del Novecento</i> , edited by E. Krumm and T. Rossi, Skira, Milano 1995	6: Boine, Ottieri, Palazzeschi, Pavese, Soffici, Testori, Volponi	87	7
<i>Poesia italiana del secondo novecento</i> , edited by M. Cucchi and S. Giovanardi, Mondadori, Milano 1996	6: Bassani, Bevilacqua, Morante, Orenco, Ottieri, Volponi	60	10
<i>Antologia della poesia italiana. Novecento</i> , edited by C. Segre and C. Ossola, Einaudi, Torino 2003	5: Boine, Primo Levi, Palazzeschi, Pavese, Soffici	59	8



Table 4. Narrator-poets anthologized in eight anthologies of Italian poetry

Author	Aneschi-Antonielli 1953	Spagnoletti 1954	Sanguineti 1969	Mengaldo 1978	Gelli-Lagorio 1980	Krumm-Rossi 1995	Cucchi-Giovanardi 1996	Segre-Ossola 2003
Aleramo	X							
Bacchelli					X			
Bassani	X				X		X	
Bevilacqua							X	
Boine			X	X		X		X
Bontempelli				X				
Cecchi		X						
P. Levi								X
Morante					X		X	
Orengo							X	
Ottieri						X	X	
Palazzeschi	X		X	X	X	X		
Papini	X	X			X			
Pavese	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Pea		X						
Soffici	X	X	X	X		X		X
Testori					X	X		
Volponi					X	X	X	

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Scholars like Giulio Ferroni have spoken of the resounding importance of poetry anthologies:

La storia della poesia del Novecento, la stessa possibilità di individuare linee e tendenze, la stessa riconoscibilità dei maggiori poeti, è stata spesso affidata alle antologie: le antologie sono state lo strumento privilegiato di sistemazione del quadro poetico, fino dall'inizio del secolo.<sup>43</sup>

43 G. Ferroni, *Presentazione*, in C. Vitiello, *Antologia della poesia contemporanea (1980-2001)*, Tullio Pironti, Napoli 2003, p. 5.

While Ferroni does not expressly mention the idea of canons here, it is implicit in the referral to the «quadro poetico» and the value-laden term «maggiori poeti». Indeed, that anthologies contribute to the establishment of the canon is a widespread idea: as Lucia Re again notes, «the anthology is a one of the fundamental means of forming and transforming the canon».<sup>44</sup>

One of the above-listed anthologies, the 1996 *Poeti italiani del secondo novecento*, edited by the late critic Stefano Giovanardi and the poet Maurizio Cucchi, includes a specific category of *Narratori poeti* for the first time in any Italian anthology. They anthologise, as we have seen, six narrator-poets: Giorgio Bassani, Alberto Bevilacqua, Elsa Morante, Nico Orengo, Ottiero Ottieri, and Paolo Volponi. Yet the hodge-podge nature of their choices has been noted by critics,<sup>45</sup> along with the weak rationalisations for their selection. The editors claim that

la campionatura qui offerta [the six narrator-poets] non è certo sufficiente a dar conto completo del fenomeno, troppo ampio per poter essere degnamente rappresentato in questa sede: e allora accontentiamoci di citare alla rinfusa, dando per scontate gravi lacune, la breve e circoscritta stagione poetica di Tommaso Landolfi, la produzione non episodica di Sebastiano Addamo, e poi Dacia Maraini, Ferdinando Camon, Stefano d'Arrigo, Gesualdo Bufalino, Alberto Arbasino. E si potrebbe, non c'è bisogno di dirlo, continuare per molto.

As Giuseppe Leonelli caustically noted in his 1997 review, entitled *Un catasto per i poeti*,

la logica che la costituisce è poco meno fantasiosa di una che dividesse i poeti in base al colore dei capelli o degli occhi. E poi qual è il senso di questo raggruppamento? Un puro capriccio o una scelta di valore? [...] non si capisce che cosa ha portato i curatori a preferire [Bevilacqua o Orengo] ad altri possibili, alcuni dei quali forse più meritevoli.<sup>46</sup>

Surely at this point, with Leonelli, the question arises: why these, and not others? Giovanardi and Cucchi themselves acknowledge the «gravi lacune».<sup>47</sup> The fact is that there is no real critical reflection upon what unites (and divides) narrator-poets; on the relationship between narra-

44 Re, *(De)Constructing the Canon*, cit., p. 586.

45 G. Leonelli, *Un catasto per i poeti*, in «La rivista dei libri», VII, 10, 1997, pp. 9-10; V. Esposito, *Poeti italiani (o padani?) del secondo novecento (1945-1995)*, in «Rivista di studi italiani», 15, 2, 1997, pp. 208-215.

46 Leonelli, *Un catasto per i poeti*, cit., p. 9.

47 S. Giovanardi, *Introduzione*, in *Poesia italiana del secondo novecento*, cit., pp. xi-lviii: p. xlv.

tive and poetry for these very figures; and the similarities and differences between their verse and the verse of poets *d.o.c.*

### The canon formation of Italian narrator-poets: publishers

Another way to trace the canon formation of modern Italian narrator-poets is looking at the publishing records at the most prestigious poetry publishers. Through this, we can examine the symbolic capital that publishers transfer onto authors and vice versa, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms. As the French sociologist asserted,

A publisher is a person invested with the extraordinary power to ensure *publication*, to confer upon a text and its author a *public existence* (*Öffentlichkeit*) along with the fame and recognition that this entails. "Creation" of this sort usually involves a *consecration*, a *transfer of symbolic capital* (analogous to the one accomplished by a preface), bestowed by the publisher not only upon the author but upon the publishing house as well, specifically upon its "list", the repertoire of authors, themselves more or less consecrated, that it has published in the past.<sup>48</sup>

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With this in mind, we will be looking at the placement of poetry collections in dominant Italian publishing houses, namely Mondadori, Einaudi, Garzanti, and then two small-scale, niche poetry publishers, Scheiwiller and Guanda.<sup>49</sup> In the last twenty years, there have been a startling number of mergers and acquisitions in the publishing market: four of the five above publishers are no longer independent. In 1994, Einaudi was controversially awarded to Silvio Berlusconi's Mondadori (in a trial in which he was later found to have corrupted the judge). Meanwhile, Garzanti and Guanda are now owned by the Gruppo editoriale Mauri Spagnol (dating back to 2006 and 2005, respectively), and Scheiwiller has been in the possession of Il gruppo 24 ore since 2007.

Mondadori, Einaudi, and Garzanti published 89 out of the 349 works in our corpus. This means that three out of every four books of poetry were published by other publishers, generally niche publishing houses like Scheiwiller (19 books) and Guanda (9 books), or larger publishers (Rizzoli and Feltrinelli) with non-canonical poetry series. Since the poetry written by narrators is often neglected both by critics and publishers, this aligns with what the literary sociologist Gisèle Sapiro has

48 P. Bourdieu, *A conservative revolution in publishing*, trans. by R. Fraser, in «Translation Studies», 1, 2, 2008, pp. 123-153: p. 123.

49 Other publishing houses which published 10 or more volumes by narrator-poets include Feltrinelli (14 volumes), Rizzoli (12), and Vallecchi (11).

written, namely that «commentators generally agree on the fact that small literary publishing houses are more qualified to play the role of “discoverer”, which is necessary in order to innovate in the domain of books of quality – all the more since the big and middle-size publishers, confronted with the competition of the groups, tend to abandon this function, preferring to confine themselves to reliable values».<sup>50</sup>

Mondadori, a publishing behemoth, has long had one of the most influential poetry series, «Lo specchio», which began in the 1940s,<sup>51</sup> but achieved its apex in the 1960s and 1970s under the poet-editor Vittorio Sereni.<sup>52</sup> Its «storia gloriosa», as Gian Carlo Ferretti notes, is «segnata da nomi illustri o tra i maggiori del Novecento». While there have been times, for example, during the 1950s, that there were «assenze di rilievo e una sostanziale carenza di nuova iniziativa e di vero ricambio»,<sup>53</sup> there has long been a cachet and prestige associated with publishing with them. As Sapiro notes about publishers in general, their name is «a “mark” that orientates the readers’ choice, the value of which is, therefore, inestimable»<sup>54</sup> (Table 5, p. 325).

17 narrator-poets published 35 volumes with them: on the whole, these literary figures were popular and often best-selling figures, not on the margins: one thinks of prominent writers like Borgese, Soldati, Palazzeschi, Bacchelli, Aleramo, Pratolini, and more recently Bevilacqua and Cerami.

Unlike Mondadori’s «Lo specchio», which was the most canonical series of poetry published in Italy, and which was set up explicitly as a nationalistic enterprise aiming to «“fight” against the success of foreign literature»,<sup>55</sup> Einaudi spread its poetry among more than one series. The publisher, moreover, «[ha] rinuncia[to] implicitamente a una linea di tendenza, segue la tradizionale predilezione einaudiana per i contesti misti».<sup>56</sup> One can see this very clearly in the various poetic styles separating Bassani from Gadda, Volponi from Bufalino, and Fenoglio from Bevilacqua (Table 6, p. 326).

50 G. Sapiro, *The literary field between the state and the market*, in «Poetics», 31, 2003, pp. 441-464: p. 455.

51 S. Santini, «Lo specchio» e la scelta della poesia, in *Libri e scrittori da collezione: casi editoriali in un secolo di Mondadori*, edited by R. Cicala and M. Villano, EDUCatt-Università Cattolica, Milano 2007, pp. 111-131.

52 G.C. Ferretti, *Poeta e di poeti funzionario: il lavoro editoriale di Vittorio Sereni*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 1999.

53 Id., *Storia dell’editoria letteraria in Italia. 1945-2003*, Einaudi, Torino 2004, p. 138.

54 Sapiro, *The literary field between the state and the market*, cit., p. 455.

55 F. Billiani, *Renewing a literary culture through translation*, in *Translation as intervention*, edited by J. Munday, Continuum, London 2007, pp. 138-160: p. 154.

56 Ferretti, *Storia dell’editoria letteraria in Italia*, cit., p. 194.



Table 5. Narrator-poets and their poetry collections published by Mondadori

Narrator	Title of poetry collection	Year
G. Borgese	<i>Le poesie di G. A. Borgese</i>	1922
S. Aleramo	<i>Poesie (1912-1928)</i>	1929
S. Aleramo	<i>Sì alla terra: nuove poesie</i>	1934
S. Aleramo	<i>Selva d'amore</i>	1947
G. Bassani	<i>Un'altra libertà</i>	1951
G. Borgese	<i>Poesie 1922-1952</i>	1952
G. Arpino	<i>Il prezzo dell'oro</i>	1957
M. Soldati	<i>Canzonette e viaggio televisivo</i>	1962
P. A. Quarantotti Gambini	<i>Racconto d'amore</i>	1965
A. Palazzeschi	<i>Cuor mio</i>	1968
A. De Céspedes	<i>Le ragazze del Maggio</i>	1970
R. Bacchelli	<i>Primo libro: La stella del mattino</i>	1971
A. Palazzeschi	<i>Poesie</i>	1971
R. Bacchelli	<i>Secondo libro: Bellezzà e umanità</i>	1972
A. Palazzeschi	<i>Via delle cento stelle: 1971-1972</i>	1972
R. Bacchelli	<i>Giorni di vita e tempo di poesia</i>	1973
G. Bassani	<i>Epitaffio</i>	1974
S. D'Arrigo	<i>Codice siciliano</i>	1974
M. Tobino	<i>L'asso di picche; con il seguito di Veleno e amore secondo</i>	1974
G. Bassani	<i>In gran segreto</i>	1978
G. Bassani	<i>In rima e senza</i>	1982
G. Testori	<i>Ossa mea (1981-1982)</i>	1983
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Vita mia</i>	1985
V. Pratolini	<i>Il mannello di Natascia e altre cronache in versi e in prosa</i>	1985
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Il corpo desiderato</i>	1988
G. Bonaviri	<i>Il re bambino</i>	1990
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Messaggi segreti</i>	1992
G. Bonaviri	<i>Il dire celeste e altre poesie</i>	1993
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Poesie d'amore</i>	1996
A. Busi	<i>L'amore trasparente: canzoniere</i>	1997
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Legame di sangue</i>	2003
S. Aleramo	<i>Tutte le poesie</i>	2004
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Tu che mi ascolti: poesie alla madre</i>	2004
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Le poesie</i>	2007
V. Cerami	<i>Alla luce del sole</i>	2012

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Table 6. Narrator-poets and their poetry collections published by Einaudi

Narrator	Title of volume	Year
C. Pavese	<i>Lavorare stanca</i>	1943
C. Pavese	<i>Poesie del disamore e altre poesie disperse</i>	1951
C. Pavese	<i>Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi</i>	1951
C. Pavese	<i>Poesie edite e inedite</i>	1962
G. Bassani	<i>L'alba ai vetri: poesie 1942-50</i>	1963
E. Morante	<i>Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini</i>	1968
R. Ombres	<i>L'ipotesi di Agar</i>	1968
P. A. Quarantotti Gambini	<i>Al sole e al vento</i>	1970
N. Orenco	<i>A-ulù-ulé: filastrocche, conte, ninnenanne</i>	1972
D. Maraini	<i>Donne mie</i>	1974
L. Romano	<i>Giovane è il tempo</i>	1974
D. Maraini	<i>Mangiami pure</i>	1978
P. Volponi	<i>Poesie e poemetti</i>	1980
L. Compagnone	<i>La giovinezza reale e l'irreale maturità</i>	1981
N. Orenco	<i>Canzonette</i>	1981
D. Maraini	<i>Dimenticato di dimenticare</i>	1982
G. Bufalino	<i>L'amaro miele</i>	1982
N. Orenco	<i>Cartoline di mare</i>	1984
P. Volponi	<i>Con testo a fronte: poesie e poemetti</i>	1986
O. Ottieri	<i>Vi amo</i>	1988
C. Pavese	<i>Poesie giovanili</i>	1989
C. E. Gadda	<i>Poesie</i>	1993
C. Pavese	<i>Le poesie</i>	1998
N. Orenco	<i>Cartoline di mare: vecchie e nuove</i>	1999
V. Cerami	<i>Canti di scena: concerto di parole e musica</i>	1999
N. Orenco	<i>Spiaggia, sdraio e solleone</i>	2000
L. Romano	<i>Poesie</i>	2001
P. Volponi	<i>Poesie: 1946-1994</i>	2001
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Piccole questioni di eternità</i>	2002
E. de Luca	<i>Opera sull'acqua e altre poesie</i>	2002
F. Ramondino	<i>Per un sentiero chiaro</i>	2004
B. Fenoglio	<i>Epigrammi</i>	2005
A. Bevilacqua	<i>Duetto per voce sola: versi dell'immedesimazione</i>	2008
E. de Luca	<i>L'ospite incallito</i>	2008
A. Vigevani	<i>L'esistenza: tutte le poesie 1980-1992</i>	2010
A. Bevilacqua	<i>La camera segreta</i>	2011



With the (hostile) takeover of Einaudi by Mondadori in 1994, Einaudi has suffered a loss of independence, to a certain degree. One might point to the fact that both Mondadori and Einaudi have published the poetry of Bevilacqua, Cerami, and Orengo, for example.

The third major publisher of poetry is Garzanti, which aimed to publish «i poeti che tendono almeno in parte a delineare un'alternativa all'asse istituzionale novecentesco»: <sup>57</sup> so, the «melodic» line of Caproni, Morante, Penna, Pasolini, and Bertolucci; and an outsider like Primo Levi. In the list below are the poetry collections by narrators published by Garzanti (Table 7):

Table 7. Narrator-poets and their poetry collections published by Garzanti

Narrator	Collection	Year
R. Bacchelli	<i>La notte dell'8 settembre 1943</i>	1945
E. Cecchi	<i>L'uva acerba</i>	1947
A. Palazzeschi	<i>Difetti 1905</i>	1947
F. Camon	<i>Liberare l'animale</i>	1973
A. Bevilacqua	<i>La crudeltà</i>	1975
V. Cerami	<i>Addio Lenin (1977-1980)</i>	1981
A. Arbasino	<i>Matinee. Un concerto di poesia</i>	1983
S. Addamo	<i>Il giro della vite (1978-1981)</i>	1983
P. Levi	<i>Ad ora incerta</i>	1984
G. Testori	<i>Diademata</i>	1986
R. Pazzi	<i>Calma di vento</i>	1987
E. Morante	<i>Alibi</i>	1988
S. Addamo	<i>Le linee della mano: 1983-1987</i>	1990
E. Bruck	<i>Monologo</i>	1990
O. Ottieri	<i>L'infermiera di Pisa</i>	1991
O. Ottieri	<i>Il palazzo e il pazzo</i>	1993
F. Camon	<i>Dal silenzio delle campagne</i>	1998

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Of these 14 narrators-poets, only 4 were also published by Mondadori, which gives an indication of the difference in publishing style and literary tastes.

Scheiwiller was one of the most refined small publishing houses in Italy, begun by Giovanni Scheiwiller (with the title *All'insegna del pesce d'oro*) and then continued by his son, Vanni. As Ferretti has put it,

57 *Ivi*, p. 207.

«Quasi tutti i più importanti poeti italiani del secondo Novecento passano per il suo catalogo». <sup>58</sup> Scheiwiller could not compete, however, with the economic dominance of Mondadori, and so it looked to publish «primizie, rarità, curiosità, scritti minori» <sup>59</sup> (Table 8):

Table 8. Narrator-poets and their poetry collections published by Scheiwiller

Narrator	Title	Year
A. Palazzeschi	<i>Viaggio sentimentale</i>	1955
S. D'Arrigo	<i>Codice siciliano</i>	1957
A. Palazzeschi	<i>Schizzi italofrancesi</i>	1966
G. Testori	<i>Crocifissione</i>	1966
G. Testori	<i>In trigesimo</i>	1966
V. Pratolini	<i>La città ha i miei trent'anni</i>	1967
L. Compagnone	<i>Che Puzo! epigrammi e nonsense</i>	1973
C. Zavattini	<i>Stricarm 'in d'na parola</i>	1973
C. Zavattini	<i>Toni Ligabue</i>	1974
P. Levi	<i>L'osteria di Brema</i>	1975
C. Bernari	<i>26 cose in versi</i>	1977
S. Addamo	<i>Il bel verbale</i>	1984
A. Vigevani	<i>Anche le più lievi: poesie 1980-1985</i>	1985
E. Flaiano	<i>L'uovo di Marx: epigrammi, satire, occasioni</i>	1987
A. Vigevani	<i>Piccolo bestiario</i>	1988
A. Vigevani	<i>L'esistenza: poesie 1986-1992</i>	1993
S. Addamo	<i>Alternative di memoria: poesie 1975-1983</i>	1995
G. Raimondi	<i>Poesie (1924-1982)</i>	1999
G. Bonaviri	<i>I cavalli lunari</i>	2004

So, for example, it published the little-known poems by well-known writers: the verse of Palazzeschi as well as the neorealist novelists Vasco Pratolini and Carlo Bernari; the first edition of Primo Levi's poetry; two tiny chapbooks by Giovanni Testori (then known for his art criticism, theatre, and stories); a selection of poems by Ennio Flaiano, much more famous for his cultural satire; and dialect poems by Cesare Zavattini, known above all for his screenplays.

The small publishing house Guanda, founded in 1932 by Ugo Guandalini, specialized in poetry, especially poetry in translation (in the

<sup>58</sup> *Ivi*, p. 116.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*.

series «La Fenice», headed for many years by the poet Attilio Bertolucci). In fact, no other publisher was so influential in publishing foreign poetry as Guanda, during its heyday, roughly from 1939 until the death of Guandalini in 1971.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless Guanda's publishing strategy for Italian poets is quite eclectic, and the narrator-poets do not command a wide following, outside of Orengo and Ottieri (Table 9).

Table 9. Narrator-poets and their poetry collections published by Guanda

Narrator	Title	Year
G. Petroni	<i>Versi e memoria</i>	1935
E. Bruck	<i>Il tatuaggio</i>	1975
F. Cordelli	<i>Fuoco celeste</i>	1976
G. Petroni	<i>Poesie (1928-1979)</i>	1978
G. Bonaviri	<i>Il dire celeste e altre poesie</i>	1979
E. Bruck	<i>In difesa del padre</i>	1980
O. Ottieri	<i>Storia del Psi nel centenario della nascita; Il padre</i>	1993
O. Ottieri	<i>La psicoterapeuta bellissima</i>	1994
N. Orengo	<i>Narcisi d'amore (poesie 1974-1994)</i>	1995

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Edith Bruck, for example, a Hungarian writer who immigrated to Italy after losing most of her family in the Holocaust, began writing prose in Italian before turning also to poetry. Giuseppe Bonaviri was a noted Sicilian novelist; Franco Cordelli wrote one book of poems before beginning a career as a novelist.

In conclusion, fewer than half of our 84 poets (39) were published by the three large publishers: Mondadori, Einaudi, and Garzanti, which suggests that narrator-poets have not clearly entered into the official canon of Italian poetry. The majority of them published with smaller publishers (e.g., Scheiwiller and Guanda), or large publishers (Feltrinelli and Rizzoli), whose poetry series lacked the prestige of others.

### The «potential canon» vs. the «accessible canon»

Another way to examine how the verse written by Italian fiction writers fits into the Italian poetic canon is by seeing what is currently in print in Italy.<sup>61</sup> This refers to what the critics Alastair Fowler and Wendell V. Harris have called the «accessible canon»,<sup>62</sup> in opposition to the «poten-

<sup>60</sup> *Ivi*, p. 118.

<sup>61</sup> The following results come from searches on the largest Italian bookshop, namely *ibs.it*, which sells more than 400,000 books in Italian.

<sup>62</sup> Fowler, *Genre and the literary canon*, cit., p. 98.

tial canon», constituted by all the published books of poetry by narrators.

More than a half of all narrator-poets surveyed, 43 out of 84, have no poetry volumes currently in print, even if they have collectively published 129 volumes. In fact, a substantial number of these 43 writers have even published five or more collections of verse.<sup>63</sup> This absence severely limits the «accessible canon» of modern Italian poetry.

The narrators with the most publications of poetry in print are A. Bevilacqua with seven, and then six narrators with three collections on sale: S. Benni, E. Morante, A. Palazzeschi, C. Pavese, N. Orengo, and O. Ottieri. Alberto Bevilacqua and Stefano Benni are bestselling authors (and both have books published in Mondadori's «Bestsellers» collection): their cultural capital is high, which certainly accounts for much of the fact that their poetry is continually reprinted. The case is somewhat different with Pavese and Morante. Pavese's most reprinted poetry collection is *Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi* (Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, somewhat unfairly, called it «[una] droga di intere generazioni di liceali»<sup>64</sup>), while both *Lavorare stanca* and his complete poems, *Le poesie*, sell well. Morante's three poetic volumes are sold singly, as her poetry has never been collected together into one individual collection, unlike Pavese. Meanwhile Palazzeschi is the sole narrator to have his poetry collected in an individual «Meridiano». What ties all these authors together is, as Gisèle Sapiro writes in another context, that their fame has led them to «achieve a name».<sup>65</sup> The public is open to buying works of a different genre – poetry – by such well-known writers as Palazzeschi, Pavese, Bevilacqua, and Benni. In addition, there are currently substantial anthologies of poetry by Giovanni Testori,<sup>66</sup> Paolo Volponi,<sup>67</sup> and Alberto Vigevani<sup>68</sup> in print.

### Narrator-poets and the «Meridiani»

Mondadori's series «I Meridiani», «la maggiore collezione di classici moderni»,<sup>69</sup> modelled after Gallimard's prestigious «La Bibliothèque de

63 S. Aleramo, G. Arpino, G. Bassani, C. Bernari, L. Bigiaretti, M. Bontempelli, G. Borgese, G. Bufalino, A. Busi, D. Buzzati, F. Camon, E. Cecchi, F. Cordelli, S. D'Arrigo, A. De Céspedes, F. De Roberto, G. Deledda, A. Delfini, C.E. Gadda, E. Flaiano, C. Fruttero, A. Loria, C. Malaparte, P. Masino, U. Ojetti, R. Ombres, G. Parise, E. Pea, G. Petroni, L. Pirandello, V. Pratolini, P.A. Quarantotti Gambini, G. Raimondi, F. Ramondino, D. Rea, A. Savinio, M. Soldati, G. Stuparich, M. Tobino, S. Vassalli, S. Veronesi, L. Viani, R. Viganò.

64 Mengaldo, *Poeti italiani del Novecento*, cit., p. 682.

65 Sapiro, *The literary field between the state and the market*, cit., p. 454.

66 G. Testori, *Poesie 1965-1993*, edited by D. Rondoni, Mondadori, Milano 2012.

67 P. Volponi, *Poesie. 1946-1994*, edited by E. Zinato, Einaudi, Torino 2001.

68 A. Vigevani, *L'esistenza. Tutte le poesie 1980-1992*, edited by E. Testa, Einaudi, Torino 2010.

69 P. Landi, *Come una Pléiade. Appunti per una storia dei «Meridiani»*, in «Rivista di letteratura italiana», 3, 2003, pp. 89-124: p. 108.

la Pléiade», was conceived by the poet Vittorio Sereni, editor for Mondadori, in the late 1960s. If «the publisher plays a major role in the process of legitimating literary products», the more authority and symbolic capital it has, the more it «consecrates» the author: as Sapiro declares, following Bourdieu, «to publish is to consecrate».<sup>70</sup>

The first two volumes of the series – the poetry of Ungaretti and the novels of Kafka – were released in 1969. If we examine the published «Meridiani»,<sup>71</sup> we find that a clear majority of Italian narrators in this series published poetry. The «Meridiani» number 37 twentieth-century Italian narrators, from Alberto Arbasino to Elio Vittorini, and 22 of these fiction writers, or about 60%, have published poetry collections, for an average of about four poetry books per writer. Once more, writing poetry is found to be a regular activity for novelists and short story writers. Yet the only «Meridiano» dedicated specifically to the poetry of a narrator is, as mentioned above, Aldo Palazzeschi's.

This authority on the part of the publisher also derives from the credit he or she is awarded by all participants in the recognition chain, ranging from writers to members of literary juries and literary critics. This naturally leads to the topic of literary prizes.

### Literary prizes and canon formation

In a recent book, *The Economy of Prestige*, James F. English has analysed the fundamental role of literary prizes, with their «powerful role in our contemporary processes of canon formation».<sup>72</sup> The number of prizes continues to proliferate, even out of control: at last count, there are almost 2,000 in Italy.<sup>73</sup> If we restrict the survey to the three most prominent awards for Italian poetry, *Premio Lerici-Pea* (1954-), *Premio Letterario Viareggio-Rèpaci* (1930-), and the *Premio Montale* (1982-),<sup>74</sup> 129 prizes have been distributed throughout the years. Only seven have gone to

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70 G. Sapiro, *Translation and the field of publishing: a commentary on Pierre Bourdieu's «A conservative revolution in publishing»*, in «Translation Studies», 1, 2, 2008, pp. 154-166: p. 155.

71 Published narrators are Alberto Arbasino, Giovanni Arpino, Giorgio Bassani, Maria Bellonci, Alberto Bevilacqua, Massimo Bontempelli, Vitaliano Brancati, Dino Buzzati, Italo Calvino, Andrea Camilleri, Carlo Cassola, Emilio Cecchi, Piero Chiara, Giovanni Comisso, Alba De Céspedes, Grazia Deledda, Federico De Roberto, Natalia Ginzburg, Raffaele La Capria, Luigi Meneghello, Elsa Morante, Ottiero Ottieri, Giovanni Papini, Goffredo Parise, Guido Piovene, Luigi Pirandello, Giuseppe Pontiggia, Vasco Pratolini, Domenico Rea, Mario Rigoni Stern, Lalla Romano, Enzo Siciliano, Mario Soldati, Italo Svevo, Giuseppe di Tomasi Lampedusa, Federico Tozzi, and Elio Vittorini.

72 J.F. English, *The Economy of Prestige*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 154.

73 A. Scarsella, *Literary prizes*, in *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, edited by G. Marrone, Routledge, London 2006, pp. 1067-1068: p. 1067.

74 This award has been called «il piccolo Nobel della poesia italiana»: see «Sette: Corriere della Sera», 40, 1993, p. 122. It was originally entitled *Premio «Librex-Montale»*, but was ended in 2007. The award was restarted in 2012 under the new name of *Premio «Choice-Montale»*.

Italian narrator-poets: Sibilla Aleramo;<sup>75</sup> Alberto Bevilacqua;<sup>76</sup> Tommaso Landolfi;<sup>77</sup> Rossana Ombres;<sup>78</sup> Roberto Pazzi;<sup>79</sup> Vasco Pratolini;<sup>80</sup> and Paolo Volponi.<sup>81</sup> Naturally a complex web of elements factors into the awarding of a literary prize, «which are controlled by publishing lobbies, that is, by a system consisting of publishers, members of the editorial staff, literary critics, television journalists, and so on».<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that so few narrator-poets receive these prizes suggests again that they have rarely found classical status within Italian literature. Moreover, the seven writers thus anointed rarely find their way into anthologies: Landolfi, Ombres, Pazzi, and Pratolini, for example, are entirely absent from them, and the last time Aleramo was anthologized was more than a half-century ago, not coincidentally a few years after winning the Premio Viareggio. This indicates that even such symbolic capital as given by a prize has not been enough to canonize many Italian narrator-poets.

### The «critical canon»

Let us now take a look at the «critical canon», namely the narrator-poets canonised by scholars. The most recent comprehensive encyclopedia of Italian writers is the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, published by Routledge in 2006. This «impressive encyclopedia» and «must-have work»<sup>83</sup> devotes an entry to 68 of our 84 narrator-poets. How does it measure up in terms of its critical bibliography, with esteemed contributors from universities all over the world? 60% of the time the bibliographic entries are deficient. In other words, for 41 of the 68 narrator-poets, one or more books of their poetry is unlisted. Only in 27 of the 68 entries do the bibliographic references correctly list all of the books of poetry published by narrators. There are numerous cases where narrators who have published poetry are listed as having published none, such as Flaiano,<sup>84</sup> Fenoglio,<sup>85</sup> Manganelli,<sup>86</sup> and Rea.<sup>87</sup> And

75 Premio Viareggio, 1948, for *Selva d'amore*, Mondadori, Milano 1947.

76 Premio Lerici-Pea, 1963.

77 Premio Viareggio, 1977, for *Il tradimento*, Rizzoli, Milano 1977.

78 Premio Viareggio, 1974, for *Bestiario d'amore*, Rizzoli, Milano 1974.

79 Premio Lerici-Pea, 1986.

80 Premio Viareggio, 1985, for *Il mannello di Natascia*, Mondadori, Milano 1985.

81 Premio Viareggio, 1960, for *Le porte dell'Appennino*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1960.

82 Scarsella, *Literary prizes*, cit., p. 1068.

83 <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781579583903> [accessed 17 May 2013].

84 E. Flaiano, *L'uovo di Marx: epigrammi, satire, occasioni*, edited by A. Longoni e V. Scheiwiller, Scheiwiller, Milano 1987; Id., *La valigia delle Indie*, Bompiani, Milano 1996.

85 B. Fenoglio, *Epigrammi*, edited by G. Pedullà, Einaudi, Torino 2005.

86 G. Manganelli, *Poesie*, edited by D. Piccini, Crocetti, Milano 2006.

87 D. Rea, *Nubi*, Società editrice napoletana, Napoli 1976.



there are other egregious examples where writers like Sibilla Aleramo and Curzio Malaparte are both wrongly listed as having published only two poetry collections (instead of seven and six, respectively). This is an obvious reflection of the fact that narrator-poets' verse is little considered, if at all, in many critical circles.

The same holds true if we look at the only critical reference work dedicated to Italian poets – the 1983 *Dizionario della poesia italiana*, edited by a noted poet, Maurizio Cucchi.<sup>88</sup> In this volume, there are only eight entries for narrator-poets (Bassani, Bevilacqua, Boine, Palazzeschi, Pavese, Soffici, Testori, and Volponi). This again demonstrates the absence from the Italian canon of the majority of narrator-poets, and is all the more significant since the volume is edited by a leading contemporary poet.

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### Conclusion

This essay proposed a new category of poets, defined by their primary literary genre of fiction. I have argued that the vast production of poetry by modern Italian narrators is not just a curiosity, but a widespread trend. While such verse is generally ignored or spurned by critics and the literary establishment, it nonetheless bears further examination. Surely poetry, however «minor», by eminent novelists and short story writers like Bufalino, Gadda, Landolfi, Manganelli, Morante, Romano, and Volponi can offer new perspectives on their own fiction, thematic and stylistic interrelationships and differences. Moreover, analysing the poetry produced by such authoritative figures can simultaneously enrich and complicate the history of modern Italian poetry. Finally, it is beyond doubt that the verse of many Italian narrator-poets deserves much more attention than currently received: it is my hope that this article may be a further step towards this goal.

### Appendix A: Narrators who published poetry

*Narrators who published 15 volumes of poetry:* Giovanni Testori.

*Narrators who published 14 volumes of poetry:* Alberto Bevilacqua, Giuseppe Bonaviri.

*Narrators who published 13 volumes of poetry:* Aldo Palazzeschi.

*Narrators who published 11 volumes of poetry:* Luigi Compagnone, Nico Orengo.

*Narrators who published 10 volumes of poetry:* Sebastiano Vassalli, Paolo Volponi.

*Narrators who published 9 volumes of poetry:* Ottiero Ottieri, Roberto Pazzi.

*Narrators who published 8 volumes of poetry:* Libero Bigiaretti, Amalia Guglielminetti.

88 *Dizionario della poesia italiana*, edited by M. Cucchi, Mondadori, Milano 1983.

*Narrators who published 7 volumes of poetry:* Sibilla Aleramo, Riccardo Bacchelli, Giorgio Bassani, Massimo Bontempelli, Dacia Maraini, Cesare Pavese, Luigi Pirandello.

*Narrators who published 6 volumes of poetry:* Curzio Malaparte, Giovanni Papini, Lalla Romano, Mario Tobino, Alberto Vigevani.

*Narrators who published 5 volumes of poetry:* Sebastiano Addamo, Edith Bruck, Carlo Levi, Guglielmo Petroni.

*Narrators who published 4 volumes of poetry:* Giovanni Arpino, Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, Antonio Delfini, Marco Lodoli, Rossana Ombres, Ardengo Soffici, Federigo Tozzi, Renata Viganò.

*Narrators who published 3 volumes of poetry:* Corrado Alvaro, Alberto Arbasino, Stefano Benni, Dino Buzzati, Ferdinando Camon, Emilio Cecchi, Vincenzo Cerami, Alba de Céspedes, Erri de Luca, Primo Levi, Elsa Morante, Enrico Pea, Vasco Pratolini, Cesare Zavattini.

*Narrators who published 2 volumes of poetry:* Carlo Bernari, Gesualdo Bufalino, Piero Chiara, Giovanni Comisso, Ennio Flaiano, Tommaso Landolfi, Anna Maria Ortese, Goffredo Parise, Mario Pomilio, Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini.

*Narrators who published 1 volume of poetry:* Giovanni Boine, Aldo Busi, Gianni Celati, Franco Cordelli, Stefano D'Arrigo, Silvio D'Arzo, Federico de Roberto, Grazia Deledda, Beppe Fenoglio, Carlo Fruttero, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Arturo Loria, Giorgio Manganelli, Paola Masino, Ugo Ojetti, Giuseppe Raimondi, Fabrizia Ramondino, Domenico Rea, Alberto Savinio, Leonardo Sciascia, Mario Soldati, Giani Stuparich, Sandro Veronesi, and Lorenzo Viani.

## **Appendix B: Narrators who did not publish poetry**

Sergio Atzeni, Antonio Baldini, Anna Banti, Alessandro Baricco, Bruno Barilli, Maria Bellonci, Giuseppe Berto, Luciano Bianciardi, Romano Bilenchi, Vitaliano Brancati, Italo Calvino, Andrea Camilleri, Achille Campanile, Rossana Campo, Paola Capriolo, Carlo Cassola, Ermanno Cavazzoni, Fausta Cialente, Bruno Cicognani, Vincenzo Consolo, Maria Corti, Andrea De Carlo, Oreste Del Buono, Daniele Del Giudice, Giuseppe Dessi, Francesca Duranti, Umberto Eco, Natalia Ginzburg, Giovanni Guareschi, Francesco Jovine, Raffaele La Capria, Gina Lagorio, Carlo Linati, Rosetta Loy, Emilio Lussu, Luigi Malerba, Gianna Manzini, Lucio Mastronardi, Luigi Meneghello, Alberto Moravia, Guido Morselli, Alfredo Panzini, Sandra Petrigiani, Guido Piovene, Antonio Pizuto, Giuseppe Pontiggia, Dolores Prato, Giorgio Pressburger, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Michele Prisco, Elisabetta Rasy, Mario Rigoni Stern, Francesca Sanvitale, Matilde Serao, Clara Sereni, Carlo Sgorlon, Enzo Siciliano, Ignazio Silone, Scipio Slataper, Italo Svevo, Antonio Tabucchi, Bonaventura Tecchi, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Fulvio Tomizza, Pier Vittorio Tondelli, and Elio Vittorini.