



# Introduction

## Galileo and literature

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### Abstract

This focus concerns the wide and complex relation between “Galileo and literature”. Seven essays: from a study of Galileo’s *Library* to Brecht’s *Life of Galileo*.

### Keywords

Science and literature, Galileo Galilei – literary aspects, Galileo Galilei – works and fortune

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The aim of this focus is to draw attention to two specific issues of historical, literary and philosophical research. On the one hand, the objective is to explore how Galileo considered and used literature; on the other, to observe how past and current writers and intellectuals have tested and enriched their knowledge with Galileo's teachings.

To what extent did Galileo cultivate his interest in literature and what kind of literature was he passionate about? How much did his attention to literary aspects affect his way of writing philosophical and scientific works? To what degree do the diffusion and success of a book depend on the literary and rhetorical choices made by its author? As Galileo leaves the known paths and the traditional certainties, he identifies "speech" and "digression" as the privileged space for the representation of a new way of thinking.

However, when we talk of "Galileo and literature", we do not intend to limit our investigation to him. The horizon is much wider. In the past many scholars have shown that Galileo's discoveries have inundated and modified our image of literature in many different ways.

This 'Focus' section comprises seven essays. The author of the first essay is Crystal Hall and its subject is Galileo's library. This is a close investigation, extremely rigorous and scrupulous that suggests to reconsider the literary works in his collection. Specifically, Hall intends to explore the works printed in or after 1610, the year in which Galileo's *Sidereus Nuncius* appeared. The author of the second essay is Giuseppe Patota, who investigates what has been defined as Galileo's last literary work, a sonnet entitled *Enimma*, published in 1643, after the scientist's death. After examining the numerous interpretations of Galileo's composition, Patota tries to reveal who is hiding behind the guise of the "mostro più strano e più diforme" ("the monster strange in shape and form") that appears in the first verse of the sonnet.

What is the relationship that Galileo establishes between poetry and natural philosophy within the debate that pits him against Orazio Grassi regarding the comet controversy of 1618? This is the question at the center of Edward Chappell's essay, in which the author revisits the famous pages of the *Saggiatore*, framing this discussion into a broader context, which also features a friend of Galileo, the Florentine Leonardo Salviati, a prominent member of the Accademia Fiorentina and Accademia della Crusca as well as one of the strongest proponents of the superiority of Tuscany's vernacular. Chappell's essay is followed by that by Francesco Brancato and that by Elettra Capecchi, Elisa Spettoli Caselli and Duccio Tognini. The first one focuses on the debate proposed by authors such as Erwin Panofsky and Andrea Battistini on Galileo's relation to arts and, especially, to literature. The second examines the poetic production of Galileo's son, Vincenzo. Great attention is paid to his unpublished rhymes, here compared with his father's poetic production, so as to shed further light on the literary culture of the Galilei family, and to highlight at the same time some little-known aspects of Vincenzo Galilei's poetic work.

The last two essays focus on some aspects of the fortune and circulation of Galileo's scientific, philosophical and literary ideas between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Starting with Rosanna Lavopa's contribution that sheds new light on the philosophical and literary work of Francesco Lomonaco, an Italian patriot, writer, and philosopher who lived between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. Translator of Rousseau and Mably, the Enlightenment scholar Lomonaco actively took part in the experience of the Neapolitan Republic in 1799. Forced into exile, he took refuge in France, then moving to Milan and later to Pavia where, in 1810, at the age of 38, he committed suicide. Lavopa's article examines the *Discorsi letterari e filosofici*, in which Lomonaco re-employed Galileo's rhetorical model for his own theoretical discourse: the rhetoric of ego, the game of 'masks', the attitude to laughter. The last essay is signed by Alejo Stark who guides us through one of the most famous and fascinating dramas of the entire twentieth century: *Life of Galileo* by Bertolt Brecht. In particular, the author focuses on one of the most important scenes of the play, Scene 10, in which Galileo's innovative inventions are repurposed by political and artistic practices for their own emancipatory desires. In Stark's opinion, this is precisely the most enduring lesson of Brecht's *Life of Galileo*.

Of course, here we have only "touched upon" the wide and complex relation between "Galileo and literature". And this is precisely what we intended to do: to provide our own contribution to such a vast aspect of Galilean universe, which – today as yesterday – keeps crossing, like a karst river, quite infinite multiplicity of places and times.

