De afdruk van het Italische stempel. De literaire kritiek van Vincenzo Gioberti en de wording van de nationale literatuurgeschiedenis
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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis analyses the vision of the Italian philosopher and politician Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852) on Italian national literary history and discusses the reception of Gioberti's ideas in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

In Chapter 1, I show that the problems that beset literary historiographers at the start of the nineteenth century stemmed from the need to systematise and classify the mass of available information (authors and works). I distinguish three specific categories: the assimilation of erudition in a 'philosophy', the demarcation of the domain of 'Italian literature' and the 'structure' of literary history. An important example of one such philosophy is the dissertation by the patriot and exile, Francesco Saverio Salfi, on the distinctive qualities of the Italian 'genius' or character. Salfi's theme connects directly with Gioberti's ideology, which, after all, centres on the genio nazionale. Another link to Gioberti's views is the axiom on 'letteratura come espressione della società' ('literature as the expression of society') proffered by the critics of Romantic literature (Foscolo, Ginguéné, Sismondi).

The demarcation of the domain of 'Italian literature' involves chronological, geographical and linguistic dimensions as well as thematic elements. For instance, Tiraboschi, the first Italian literary historian, places the starting point of Italian literature a thousand years earlier than Corniani. The literary historians also had to decide whether the Latin literature of the Italian Humanists formed part of Italian literary history. Gioberti takes a 'restrictive' view on these questions, arguing that Italian literature did not begin until 1200 at the earliest and that it is solely in Italian.

The question of 'national' literary history also arises in this domain. Although this reached its peak precisely in the nineteenth century, it was still guided by a more 'cosmopolitan' ideal formulated by Mazzini. Gioberti's view of Italian national literary history also has a distinct universal or cosmopolitan component. This is directly related to the universality of the Catholic Church with its nerve centre in Italy.

The 'structure' theme embraces obvious topics such as period specification and genre classification, and more specifically, the age-old cycle of 'rise, flourish and decline'. Since Tiraboschi's time, the discussions on this topic have concentrated mainly on determining whether the 'causes' of this decline were largely moral or physical. The question of what constitutes 'good taste' is also relevant here. Decadenza (decadence) is a major theme in Gioberti's work, but his position is not unequivocal: sometimes he describes the causes as 'objective' and at other times as 'subjective'. Again, it is Salfi who offers an original interpretation: the much-maligned 'decadence' of the seventeenth century is not decadence at all but rather an 'innovation'. This theory has no validity in the traditionalist philosophy of Gioberti.
In Chapter 2 I outline the intellectual climate in which Gioberti was educated and which may have been one of the inspirational sources behind his philosophy. Under the general heading 'from cosmopolitan to national consciousness' I successively address the concept of 'nation' and the associated ideas of *genio nazionale* and *nazionalità*; the idea of 'primato' with a brief account of its history and some examples of its poetic expression; the ideas on historical development and progress – in which Vico plays a prominent role; and some theories on the function of the writer. It will become evident that Gioberti was not 'original' in any of these fields. His originality lay rather in his ability to borrow ideas from others and merge them convincingly into his own 'national ideology'. This was fuelled by his ambition to weaken the intellectual and cultural hegemony of France. Gioberti's ideology was based on a deeply held belief that the Italian nation, with its resplendent history and driven by a national consciousness partly inspired by writers and poets, was destined to exercise the *primate morale e civile* over other nations.

I shall pay particular attention to the role of Giambattista Vico, as it was he who conceptualised the notion of the 'ancient Italian wisdom' which lies at the heart of the whole of western civilisation. In addition, Vico started a tradition of Italian cultural and literary history, which claims that Italy distinguishes itself from all other countries by virtue of its own philosophy, literature and art. Gioberti was an essential link in this tradition, as was Vincenzo Cuoco, author of the politico-philosophical novel *Platone in Italia*.

There are two main reasons for the importance of the Vico tradition in literary history. First, it was Vico who, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, initiated the 'rediscovery of Dante', who was considered the 'founder of Italian literature', also by Gioberti. Second, the national consciousness that was awakened by Vico carried over into the Italian national movement at the start of the nineteenth century, thereby influencing the further development of national literary history.

In Chapter 3 I explain Gioberti's 'national ideology' in the light of the central concepts of *genio nazionale* and *stampa italica*. Gioberti's definitions of the Italian national character are not entirely consistent. When referring to the 'origins' of this character, he mentions cultural factors such as 'ethnicity', 'religion' and 'language' at one moment and geographical factors such as 'territory' and 'climate' at another. His definitions of the intrinsic aspects of the national character are also ambivalent. The qualities of 'clarity', 'masculinity' and 'equilibrium' that should distinguish Italian literature from other national literature are not always applied as critical criteria. This is evident in the case of the seventeenth-century author, Giambattista Marino, who belonged to the *decadenza* period.

An example of the 'application' of Gioberti's national ideology appears in his reflections on Romanticism, though the reasoning cannot be described as consistent here either. Romantic literature is characterised by the fact that it stems from the *genio nazionale*, whereas classicist literature is an 'imitation' of Greek and Roman literature — at least this is what he says in his early work. Later — in the *Primato* — he distances
himself from the Romantic Movement and reproaches it for being led astray by German and English influence.

Gioberti's ideas on literary history are particularly evident in his vision of Dante and his exposition of the *Commedia*. Gioberti projects onto Dante everything that is represented by the *genio nazionale* and the *stampa italica*. Dante is the founder of the nation as well as the language; the national character and the Italic imprint find full expression in his work. As Dante is the touchstone for Italian literature, any revival after the age of decadence inevitably implies a 'return to Dante'. Moreover, the Catholic and the cosmopolitan elements come to the fore in the characterisation of Dante as the founder not only of Italian literature but of the whole corpus of European literature as well.

It becomes evident that the notion of the 'Italic imprint' has no clearly defined meaning, when Gioberti applies it to such widely divergent authors as Dante, Ariosto and Leopardi. Its function seems to be eulogistic rather than substantive.

I also draw attention to the concept of 'letteratura nazionale-popolare', as a quotation from Leopardi prompts Gioberti to raise his standards higher than ever before in his last work, the *Rinnovamento*. Though only prose is concerned here, Gioberti's judgement is still deeply critical. It appears, however, that Gioberti's literary criticism is guided more by aesthetic than ideological considerations.

Gioberti assigns similar qualities to language as to literature. For example, he cites 'clarity' and 'precision' as the characteristics that separate the Italian language from all others. Gioberti's ideal of literary Italian is the 'eloquent prose' exemplified by Paolo Sarpi, author of *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino*, and especially by the non-rhetorical style of Niccolò Machiavelli. This, at least, is the theory; in practice, it is rhetoric that ultimately seems to dominate Gioberti's own 'eloquent prose'.

Another of Gioberti's concepts is the *scrittore ideale*, which he uses to designate writers whose work is guided by an 'idea' of national or religious significance.

The third chapter ends with an outline of literary history along the lines of Gioberti. The structure is determined by the flourish-decline-rebirth cycle in which each stage is dominated by Dante, Metastasio and Alfieri respectively. However, the decadence has already set in with Petrarch, who is, after all, responsible for the 'pauperisation' of the Italian language that was still so rich with Dante. Gioberti's position on Ariosto is ambiguous because, on the one hand, he praises him for the 'Italic imprint' in *Orlando furioso*, and on the other, uses him to exemplify the loss of the Christian 'Idea'. Gioberti describes the decline of literature as a 'downward curve' which goes hand in hand with political and religious decadence. From Alfieri's time, Gioberti sees an upturn in the curve thanks to the salutary 'return to Dante'. Like Dante, Leopardi is ranked as one of the 'sculptor-poets', specifically for his 'natural' and 'simple' language. This judgement again expresses Gioberti's repudiation of Romanticism.

The analysis shows that the national ideology of Gioberti is not unequivocal and that it serves a more pragmatic function: namely, to glorify Italian literature as a corpus that distinguishes itself by its 'unique' combination of qualities.
In Chapter 4 I discuss the reception of Gioberti’s national ideology in the Italian literary historiography of the last 150 years. I address the manuals of Emiliani Giudici, Cantù and Settembrini, the Lezioni and the Storia della letteratura italiana of De Sanctis, the various discorsi of Carducci, and a selection of twentieth-century literary histories ranging from Rossi to Asor Rosa. The national theme is a fairly constant factor in the manuals, but we cannot ascertain the exact extent of Gioberti’s influence in this. We can find a clearer example of reception in De Sanctis and – surprisingly – even more so in Carducci. The literary histories that have appeared since then retain Gioberti’s canon of writers with Dante in the eminent position. However, the characterisation is no longer embellished with the terminology of italianità and stampa italica.

The literary critics adopt a somewhat different stance. Both Croce and Gentile reach positive judgements on Gioberti’s theories despite the fact that Croce has fundamental objections to his philosophy. Gramsci is a clear example of receptivity, even though this pertains solely to Gioberti’s contribution to the theories on the concept of letteratura nazionale-popolare. The philological critics (Calcaterra, Sgroi, Wellek, Foti, etc.) have a deep respect for Gioberti.

At the end of this chapter I discuss two initiatives by Asor Rosa: Scrittori e popolo, the study on Italian populist literature, and the monumental Letteratura italiana. Like Gramsci’s work, the first can be considered a landmark in the reception of Gioberti, even though Asor Rosa also pays specific attention only to the letteratura nazionale-popolare, and not to Gioberti’s reflections on literary history. The collective work Letteratura italiana, which is not a true literary history (though ‘Opere’, the two subsequent parts, are in fact a concession to the traditional genre), has only retained Gioberti’s legacy in some smaller, historical studies on, amongst others, the concepts of ‘italianità’ and ‘primato’.

My conclusion is that Vincenzo Gioberti contributed to the evolution of the genre of national literary history by drawing attention to ideological and philosophical factors. This attention manifests itself in Gioberti’s works through the complex concepts of genio nazionale, italianità and stampa italica. In practice, appreciation for Gioberti seems to be based on more aesthetic considerations. In the reception of Gioberti, it is the aesthetic aspects which prevail, while the ‘ideological’ aspects are pushed more into the background. Nonetheless, these criteria still play a role in literary historiography. Time will tell whether they can function in a supra-national, European or global literary history.