

# “The Art of Slow Reading”: A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg

Edited by Emilio Mari and Mikhail Velizhev

◇ eSamizdat 2023 (XVI), pp. 11-19 ◇

*“eSamizdat” We would like to begin with your personal relation to the Slavic world. Could you tell us a bit more about your family history?*

**Carlo Ginzburg** My father, Leone Ginzburg, was born in Odessa. After the Revolution his family moved first to Berlin and, later on, his mother and siblings arrived in Turin. He was almost bilingual – his mother tongue was Russian, but he spoke and wrote in Italian, and he also translated Russian authors and wrote essays on them. He became a professor at the University of Turin, where he had studied. However, when he was required to swear allegiance to the Fascist regime, he refused: in the published letter he sent to Ferdinando Neri, scholar in French and Head of the Faculty of Italian, my father said that he would have never accepted for his job to be conditioned by non-technical impositions and that for that reason he would never swear allegiance. His academic career ended then. Soon after, he was arrested for being a member of the antifascist group *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Freedom), where he met Carlo Rosselli, who was leading such group from his exile in Paris. My father was in Paris because he was working on his dissertation on Guy de Maupassant. He then started to write for Justice and Freedom’s journal under the pseudonym M.S., standing for Maria Segré, the woman who raised him in Viareggio. So, my father was arrested and spent two years in prison, accused of conspiring against the Fascists. His trial was quite important since the agency that broke the news to Italian newspapers wrote that “a group of antifascist Jews was eradicated in Turin”. That was the first time that Judaism and antifascism were linked. After that, Italian

fascism came into conflict with German nazis because of the Austrian issue, and I believe that that episode had some relevance because the issue of Judaism later disappeared. Anyway, my father was sentenced to four years in prison, but he only spent two years because of a general amnesty. He then returned to Turin, where he founded the Einaudi publishing house, together with Giulio Einaudi and Cesare Pavese, a close friend of his. When the war broke out, my father saw his Italian citizenship revoked and he thus started his underground activity. As Vittorio Foa pointed out to me once, my father became part of the conspiracy only after becoming an Italian citizen. Foa was one of his close friends and he was a member of Justice and Freedom himself. After losing his citizenship with the racial laws in 1938, my father was sent into exile in Pizzoli, a small town in the mountains of central Italy, near L’Aquila, as soon as Italy entered the war beside Germany in 1940. And it is in that town that I have my first memories. My mum joined him with two children, my sister Alessandra was born in L’Aquila and I have very vivid memories of Pizzoli. We stayed there until the fall of fascism. In 1943 my father returned to Rome to continue his antifascist activity, which turned underground because after the armistice of 8 September 1943 Rome had been occupied by the Nazi army. My father became the director of a clandestine newspaper and he was arrested again. In the meanwhile, we had also come to Rome with our mother. My father was arrested, tortured, and died in prison on 5 February 1944. I have very clear memories of my father during my early childhood.

*“eS”. So, you grew up in an environment where Russian culture was very present. What were your*

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\* Translated from Italian by Claudio Russello.

*first readings and, later, which Russian or Slavic authors were the most influential in your education as a scholar?*

**C.G.** When I was still a child, in Turin, I read *War and Peace*, a book that really impressed me and that I barely understood. I re-read it several times later on in the translation by Enrichetta Carafa d'Andria, revised by my father in Pizzoli. In his letters, published by Luisa Mangoni and sent to Einaudi from Pizzoli, my father constantly refers to his work on *War and Peace*. I had the opportunity to read a copy of the translation he revised, with an introduction he signed with an asterisk, because as a Jewish person his name could not appear... Now surely *War and Peace* was one of the most significant books for me and, as I say in my essay *Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It*, included in my book *Threads and Traces*. Retrospectively I believe that it contributed to my conceptualisation of microhistory in that aspect that Tolstoi presents almost paradoxically, i.e., the idea that, in order to write about something abstract or about a battle, we need to tell the lives of all who took part in it. It is an impossible quest, but also a challenge that I feel I somehow took on. For me, this formulation of Tolstoi's was really important. I kept on reading books. Unfortunately, I have never learnt Russian and I am deeply sorry for it, therefore I have read Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, Chekhov in translation. What I understood after a while is that there is another element in them that was really important for me. I understood this by Viktor Shklovskii's reading of Tolstoi, i.e., the concept of 'estrangement', about which I wrote an essay included in the volume *Wooden Eyes*. What I tried to do in that essay was to encapsulate that extraordinary reading that Shklovskii made of Tolstoi and of *War and Peace*, and on the other hand the reading of *Kholstomer*, and therefore to interpret estrangement. I still remember my shock as I was reading in *War and Peace* the description of Natasha at the theatre. The theatre scene she is watching is described through the eyes of someone who does not understand what is going on onstage, just like Natasha's, still shaken by what had hap-

pened to her. The idea of describing a scene without understanding its meaning, as something opaque, is not shocking from the perspective of the reading experience, but it can become, as Shklovskii does in his analysis, the springboard for a deeper knowledge. I think that this idea has some long-term effects in my experience as a reader, but also as a researcher. The person that does not understand – and this is where Tolstoi's formidable paradox lies – could be, for example, a horse that understands some obscure things exactly because it looks at them from the horse's perspective, and not from a human one. In that essay, I tried to reconstruct the pre-history of this concept, and this pre-history also includes authors that Tolstoi had probably never read. On the other hand, Marcus Aurelius was fundamental for Tolstoi. Marcus Aurelius' element of estrangement was fundamental for Tolstoi, especially when he writes "The *laticlave*, the senators' robe, the royal purple is a bit of juice from a mollusc". In other words, what interested Tolstoi was this idea of reducing social phenomena to their material essence, demystifying them. Therefore, I followed this path through Montaigne, for example, through his idea of Brazilian savages who arrived in France and were surprised both by the people who owned nothing and by those who were too rich and wondered why the poor didn't assault them. This demystification of social conventions really impressed me. The first part of this essay, I mean, the re-construction of this pre-history, revolves surely around Marcus Aurelius and his reception. In the second part, on the other hand, I think I found and added something that diverges from Shklovskii's perspective, moving the focus from Tolstoi to Proust. In fact, another novel that was fundamental to me was *In Search of Lost Time*. In Proust's case, Dostoevskii appears unexpectedly.

**"eS".** *In your essay Making Things Strange you do explore the relationship between Proust and Crime and Punishment.*

**C.G.** I do quote an extraordinary passage from *In Search of Lost Time*, where the narrator quotes a

letter from Madame de Sévigné, an important writer for Proust. In that letter, there is a description of a snowfall, characterised by unusual shapes. Basically, it is the contrary of the description that returns the picture we would expect. It says: “Monks, piled up people...”, a very unusual description. Even more unusual is the fact that this is the Dostoevskiiian side of M.me de Sévigné. Proust gets back to this, because this aspect of M.me de Sévigné is then associated to Elstir, a painter with an invented name, a combination of Manet, Monet, and maybe De-gas. Elstir, just like Dostoevskii, does not portray the causal relationship of things, but rather their appearance. Their appearance is what troubles our expectations. There is this sort of triad – M.me de Sévigné, Dostoevskii, and Elstir – which is developed in a beautiful page of *Time Regained*, where Saint-Loup says: “War is not strategic”. So, at the end of my essay, I argue that if one wants to imagine how history should be written, one should think of it in terms of Elstir’s modality of painting and, we can further add, also in terms of Dostoevskii’s modality of character representation, because this is what Proust himself argues in the end. It would be interesting to draw a parallel between Svidrigailov and Charlus, because the reader in both instances has to face two incomprehensible characters and there is an unexpected development. I believe that Proust kept Dostoevskii in mind. I did not explore this in my essay, however Walter Benjamin said something about Charlus, that is, that Proust had two models for that character. Someone identified two real people as the source of inspiration for Charlus’ character. In fact, there are more than two. Moreover, there is also this element that Benjamin did not discuss, that is, the breaking of causal relationships. This is what makes the character unpredictable and incomprehensible. When Svidrigailov appears, the reader is disoriented, just like with Charlus throughout the whole novel, because, despite his many returns, he continues to be a mysterious character somehow.

**“eS”.** You mentioned Shklovskii, but it seems that you were influenced also by another important formalist, Vladimir Propp. In a 1985 essay,

*you said that you found in Propp a synthesis of morphology and history, represented by his two books Morphology of the Tale and Historical Roots of the Wonder Tale respectively. How did Propp influence your view of history?*

**C.G.** I read *Historical Roots of the Wonder Tale* in Italian translation, and only many years later I found out how it was published by Einaudi. I think that that was the very first translation in any language, and probably it is one of the very few existing translations.

**“eS”.** So much so that Lévi-Strauss, when he replied to Propp in his essay *Structure and Form*, had not the chance to read it beforehand.

**C.G.** Exactly. Franco Venturi, who was in Moscow as a cultural *attaché*, wrote to Einaudi suggesting the translation of this book. His letter has been published. I had the pleasure to meet Venturi and get to know him personally. He had met my father in Paris. His father, Lionello Venturi, was one of the professors who had not signed the Fascist oath. Venturi was educated in Paris and in the first edition of his book *Roots of Revolution* he mentioned my father, saying that in him “the *animus* of *narodniki* found a new and original embodiment”.

Venturi was ideologically far from Propp, and I find formidable the fact that he understood the great relevance of this book and suggested it to Einaudi. And then, Cesare Pavese accepted it for the so-called ‘purple series’. What I discovered many years later and that I said in my essay *Medals and Shells*, afterword to the new edition of *Ecstasies*, is that Propp’s morphology was a dynamic morphology, and not, as I had previously thought under the influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss, a static one. We don’t know much about Propp’s life, but the chronology of his life reveals that his book on historical roots was a sort of compromise, a defence against the Formalists’ attacks. I wonder if Propp’s case is one of the very few cases in Soviet history in which censorship contributed, unwillingly, to the development of interesting ideas.

**“eS”.** *Bakhtin was also another important Russian author for you. When did you start engaging with his work?*

**C.G.** That happened many years later. I read the Italian translation of his book on Dostoevskii and it truly impressed me. I believe that that was the very first translation ever. I also remember that, years later, while I was in Sweden for a conference, I had the chance to discuss that book with a Bakhtin scholar. I mentioned a comparison Bakhtin does between the dialogic element in Dostoevskii and in Plato. He told me: “No, that’s not in the first edition”, and I replied: “Therefore, when he met Bakhtin, Vittorio Strada translated a book that was revised by Bakhtin himself”. Of course, we should go check the texts, but I was surprised to hear that the scholar could not see any Plato in there, when that element is clear in the Italian translation. Like many other readers, Bakhtin’s influence over me was twofold. Chronologically, the dialogic element came first, but it resurfaced later on stronger than ever. And then, there is Bakhtin’s importance for the study of popular culture.

**“eS”.** *You often discuss the circularity between high and popular culture. In the great book Rabalais, there’s an aporia, an apparent methodological contradiction, that is, the idea of studying popular culture through literary mediation, a really sophisticated one.*

**C.G.** I have highlighted this quite paradoxical element of Bakhtin’s, i.e., the reconstruction of popular culture, as you’ve just said, by a highly educated writer. In the preface to *The Cheese and the Worms*, I argued that the case of the Friulan miller Menocchio pointed to the circularity between low and high culture. This argument was harshly criticised, also by Paola Zambelli. In her essay *Uno, due, tre, mille Menocchio?* [One, Two, Three, a Thousand Menochios?], she claimed that Menocchio’s ideas were actually coming from Paduan Aristotelianism. Indeed, the essay title plays with the “One, two, three,

a thousand Vietnams!” slogan, which was very common at the time, and which I employed to argue that in the Inquisition archives one could have found many other examples of cultural circularity that unexpectedly appeared in Menocchio’s discourses. In fact, this circularity implied a filter, which is what shows us a spiral instead of a circle. I returned to this from different perspectives. When I published *The Cheese and the Worms*, Edoardo Grendi responded to it on the journal “Quaderni storici”, arguing that the evidence I used represented an exception and could not be used to draw more general lines, not even hypothetically. Afterwards, Grendi changed point of view, coming up with the wonderful oxymoron “exceptional-normal”, based on an idea I suggested in the preface to my book. In an article I wrote with Carlo Poni, *Il nome e il come* [The Name and the How], we quoted Grendi’s oxymoron, later become famous. The debates in *The Cheese and the Worms* contributed to the construction of the idea of microhistory, which actually never appeared in that book.

**“eS”.** *In fact, it had been written before.*

**C.G.** When we talk of microhistory, it is important to understand what we mean by the prefix ‘micro-’. It does not refer to the actual or symbolic dimensions of the research subject, but to the microscope. It is clear that we can put anything under the microscope lens, be it a piece of elephant skin or the wings of a dragonfly.

**“eS”.** *In fact, you have been working on widely different topics, from peasant culture to the art of Piero della Francesca.*

**C.G.** Yes, exactly. And the fact that the “Microhistories” series of books starts with a volume on Piero della Francesca should already explain this apparent contradiction. As for the issue of generalisation, I explored it further in my essay *The Bond of Shame*, which is translated in English, Japanese, and French, and it was published again in the journal “New Left Review”. This essay’s first claim is

that our country is the one we can be ashamed of. The level of shame varies from country to country; nevertheless, shame implies a sense of belonging. I remember that I wrote this essay in Los Angeles, and my reaction to what was happening in the Guantanamo prison was horror, indignation, but not shame. However, at the same time, I was feeling ashamed of something less serious that was going on in Italy, so I wondered why I was feeling shame for it. It was not guilt, but proper shame. I thought about this and, in the end, after briefly exploring this trajectory of shame, I advanced in a short paragraph an idea, possibly not the most original, of the individual intended as the intersection of several sets. Take myself as an example – I am an element of the *Homo Sapiens* species, of its male half, of a group of professors born in Turin and now retired, and so on. There is also a set with just one element, that one created by my fingerprints. Now, this last set, of which I am the sole element, makes sense in some specific contexts, but for a historian, thinking about an individual means to analyse the interaction of generic and less generic sets, as well as this one-element set. I do not think this is obvious. And I say this while thinking back to Menocchio, whose reaction to Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and to other, very different books, I reckon, implies a filter linked to the oral culture, and he was not the only member of it.

**“eS”.** *You often discussed the relationship between philology and history. In your opinion, how can the use of literary sources help the historian, and what are the pros and cons of using subjective testimonies?*

**C.G.** This is a topic I have thought about and worked on a lot. Probably, it all started with the post-modern neo-scepticism often associated with Hayden White. I had a verbal disagreement with him in Los Angeles, when at the end of a conference I made a comment that sparked a lively debate, respectful yet heated. This debate then continued because my friend Saul Friedländer, who was among the audience, suggested to organise a new conference to dis-

cuss how this neo-sceptical tendency approached the Shoah. That conference took indeed place some months later, and I took part in it along with Hayden White and many other scholars. My presentation was titled *Just One Witness: The Extermination of the Jews and the Principle of Reality* and it was first published in English and later included in Italian in a volume alongside other essays of mine, titled *Threads and Traces*. In that presentation, I didn’t discuss the issue of works of fiction; I did, however, respond to Hayden White’s argument that fictional works and historical works do not differ substantially and that both employ rhetoric tools. I was later invited to open a series of conferences in Jerusalem, with a presentation titled *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*. Discussing White’s attention to the centrality of rhetoric, I realised that, in fact, there were two traditions of rhetoric. One began with Aristotle and continued with Quintilian, Lorenzo Valla, etc. According to this tradition, the discussion of proofs is central. The other tradition is explicitly anti-Aristotelic, and started with Nietzsche and his followers and epigones, according to whom rhetoric is the opposite of proof.

What differentiates the two traditions is the search for truth, which is clearly rejected by the Nietzschean tradition. However, if the historian seeks the truth, how can they use fictional texts? In my essay *Paris, 1647: A Dialogue on Fiction and History*, also included in *Threads and Traces*, I discuss *On the Reading of the Old Romances*, a text by Jean Chapelain, author of a poem about Jean d’Arc, mocked by Voltaire. In this text, Chapelain imagines a dialogue between himself and a friend who caught him while reading a medieval novel, *Lancelot du Lac*. The friend asks him: “Why are you reading such dreadful stuff?” Chapelain answers by suggesting an antiquarian reading of the medieval novel, identifying, beyond the fiction, those elements that reveal unwillingly something about society and about the period in which it was written.

**“eS”.** *It’s like an ‘oblique’ reading, as if backlit, of the literary text.*

**C.G.** Exactly. In a text I read several times, *The Historian's Craft*, Marc Bloch says that Saint-Simon's *Memoirs* are important not only for what they say in terms of actual events, but also for what they say about the writer himself. In my talks in Jerusalem, I tried to face the most challenging issue: the *blanc* in Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, which Proust considered (rather ambiguously) to be the apex of Flaubert's work. I set to read this *blanc*, this blank space, not only from an aesthetic perspective but also from a historic one. Fictional works can be used as involuntary testimonies, a claim I explored further in my latest book, *The Letter Kills*.

**“eS”.** *Another aspect we wanted to explore with you is the spread of microhistory in Slavic countries. You have been in Moscow and Saint Petersburg; have you also been invited in other countries in Eastern Europe in the past fifteen years?*

**C.G.** Some ten years ago, I was invited in Tartu, Estonia. It was a rather emotional visit, knowing what Tartu meant for the history of Russian culture – and not just Russian, as you know. Another equally impactful journey, even if for very different reasons, was one in Georgia. In both cases, I found people who had read some of my works in translation, and were really keen on discussing them with me.

**“eS”.** *In The Letter Kills you wrote that international reception of microhistory could be read through a political lens. Do you think that this delay in the Russian reception of microhistory, which followed the collapse of the USSR and the reopening of borders at a moment of revisionism of Soviet history, could be somehow linked to the possibility for microhistory to subvert political and historiographical narrations?*

**C.G.** I would like to say so, but I wouldn't know. I am however surprised that a book like *The Judge and the Historian* has been translated very recently. This is a bit odd because it is the only book I wrote in-

tended as an immediate practical intervention, which has failed. The success of this book therefore is absolutely surprising and somehow, unintended. It has been translated into several languages, soon also in Russian. I can only imagine what the reaction of Russian readers to such a book will be.

**“eS”.** *Taking into consideration the political context in Russia, there is little to be surprised of. A colleague of ours, Vera Milchina, scholar of French and Russian, after reading the translation of your book The Judge and the Historian, told us: “This is exactly what an intellectual should do in front of injustice”. This feeling of deep injustice is now dominant in Russia and it explains, according to us, the success of your book, which appeared in Italy many years ago in a completely different context. Ironically, the contexts are getting more and more similar, and the same type of injustice seems to dominate, i.e., the fact that despite the evidence, people are still jailed. And this issue is becoming every day more pressing.*

**C.G.** When I was talking about the geopolitical aspect of microhistory, I was actually thinking about something different, but still compatible, that is that the so-called peripheral countries could, through the work of microhistory, find their place at the centre of academic debates. I was thinking about Malinowski's quote: “It does not matter which tribe you want to study, what matters is the questions you ask this tribe. And I see here some elements of that dialogue between anthropology and history that was very intense during the 1970s and that now has become much weaker. My journey towards microhistory went through the reading of specific cases, and cases necessarily imply a reflection on generalisation. I analysed this issue in my first essay, *Witchcraft and Popular Piety*, later included in the collected volume *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, which is soon to be re-published in an expanded edition. At the end of this essay, I wrote that the case I had analysed, “notwithstanding its highly specific features, could assume a somewhat paradigm-

matic meaning". I read that essay again some years ago and I thought: "Sure, paradigmatic – Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions!*", but I was wrong because my essay was published in 1961, whereas Kuhn's book came out in Chicago in 1962. So, I used the term 'paradigmatic' in one of its many meanings, i.e., 'exemplary'. What impresses me is that I presented as exemplary a completely anomalous case. The farm girl accused of witchcraft, Chiara Signorini, said that she saw the Virgin Mary, "beautiful, rosy, and young", and that the Virgin took her under her protection and comforted her. During the trial, as the inquisitor put pressure on her and tortured her, she had to finally confess that whatever appeared to her was the Devil instead of the Virgin Mary. However, that trial is still anomalous. Many years ago, I was interviewed by a Brazilian historian, Maria Lúcia Pallares Burke. During that conversation I mentioned Isaiah Berlin's book *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, saying that I look like a fox, but in reality, I'm only a masked hedgehog. Despite the variety of issues I tackled, I believe that in my intellectual journey there are strong elements of continuity – first of all, my interest for anomalous cases.

*"eS". And it seems that this interest of yours towards anomalies was a constant throughout your epistemological activity, and that it would still be relevant in philology, first of all to re-think the concept of literary canon, taking into consideration its inherent complexity that cannot be reduced to easy simplifications.*

**C.G.** I totally agree with you. Teaching in the United States, I found out that all the debates about the canon, as well as about the anti-canon, did not really interest me. It is true, however, that behind this idea of the anomalous case there are also other scholars such as Spitzer, Auerbach, and Contini. Especially Spitzer and Auerbach, in order.

*"eS". Going back to the reception of microhistory in Eastern Europe, there is the case of Hungary. What impressed us was the fact that half of the members of the Microhistory Network is*

*indeed Hungarian. How would you explain this extraordinary success of microhistory there?*

**C.G.** I think this depends on geopolitical aspects because in Hungary, there is a linguistic anomaly, the Hungarian language, which maintains its own diversity in an area fully surrounded by completely different languages. I went to Budapest several times, I have dear friends there who invited me to the Central European University (now mostly based in Vienna) to take part to a series of lectures in honour of Natalie Zemon Davis. This is another testimony of the Hungarian interest towards microhistory.

*"eS". Lastly, could you tell us about your relationship with Memorial?*

**C.G.** Of course. I was invited to Moscow for a conference, and I received a phone call from Memorial, asking me to hold a public debate with them. Of course, I was honoured to be invited, as I heard very good things about them, but at the same time I was surprised. So, I asked what the debate would be about. "On your essay *The Inquisitor as Anthropologist*", they replied. During the discussion, they suggested to use my oblique reading of the Inquisition trials to analyse the Stalinian trials during the 1930s. I don't know if anyone has ever attempted something like this. The discussion was really moving, as well as my visit to the Memorial archive. Some years later, I proposed that the 'Vittorio Foa' Prize, a prize assigned in Formia, city where he spent his last years, be given to Memorial and to Arsenii Roginskii, who came to Formia. I really have wonderful memories of that meeting. Afterwards, Memorial was closed.

*"eS". It was closed two months before the war in Ukraine. It was a hard blow. That leads us to the last question, on philology and its role against the empire of fake news.*

**C.G.** One of the lectures in honour of Natalie Davis that I gave at the Central European University was titled *Fake News? An Old New Story*, and

it will soon be published. The use of lies for political purposes has a long history, but the internet technology is new. However, I do believe that the internet could be used to unmask fake news. In general, I think that it is possible to combine the internet speed with philology: the art of slow reading, as Nietzsche called it, who was a philologist before becoming a philosopher.



◇ “*The Art of Slow Reading*”: A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg ◇  
 edited by Emilio Mari – Mikhail Velizhev

**Abstract**

Interview with Carlo Ginzburg.

**Keywords**

Carlo Ginzburg, Microhistories, Slavic Literatures, Philology, Literary criticism.

**Authors**

*Carlo Ginzburg*, historian, was born in 1939. During his rich academic career, he taught modern history at the University of Bologna and the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, and in the United States, at the universities of Harvard, Yale, Princeton and the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), where he became professor (now emeritus). Ginzburg’s field of research is extremely large: he has published several articles and monographs in history, from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century, philology, history of the arts, history of literature, history of philosophy and political philosophy. Another of his major scientific interests is the methodology of the human sciences. Ginzburg is best known as one of the founding fathers of microhistory. Together with Giovanni Levi, he directed the “Microhistories” series published by Einaudi in the 1980s. His awards include the Aby Warburg Prize (1992), the Prix Antonio Feltrinelli per le scienze storiche (2005), the Humboldt-Forschungspreis (2007), the Balzan Prize for European History, 1400-1700 (2010), and the Tomasi di Lampedusa Prize (2019). His bibliography include such books as: *I benandanti* (1966), *Il formaggio e i vermi* (1976), *Indagini su Piero* (1981), *Miti, emblemi, spie* (1986), *La storia notturna* (1989), *Il giudice e lo storico* (1991), *Gli occhiacci di legno* (1998), *I rapporti di forza* (2000), *Nessuna isola è un’isola* (2002), *Il filo e le tracce* (2006), *Paura reverenza terrore* (2013), *Nondimanco. Machiavelli, Pascal* (2018), *La lettera uccide* (2021) which have been translated into over 20 languages.

*Emilio Mari* is Assistant Professor of Russian Studies at Sapienza – University of Rome, where he graduated with honors in 2012 and 2013. In 2017 he received his Ph.D in Literary, Linguistic and Comparative Studies from the University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’ and in 2019-2021 worked as a Research Fellow at the International University of Rome – UNINT. His areas of research include: the semiotics of space and the relationships between Russian literature, architecture and landscape; Russian popular culture, folklore and mass culture; microhistory of the USSR, politics and practices of everyday life (leisure studies, material culture and consumer studies); critical theory and cultural theory; Russian theatre and performing studies. He is a co-editor of “eSamizdat. Journal of Slavic Cultures” and the author of the books *Between the Rural and the Urban: Landscape and Popular Culture in Petersburg, 1830-1917* (2018) and *A Cruel Romance. Aesthetics and Politics of Folklore in 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia* (2023).

*Mikhail Velizhev* is a specialist in Russian and European intellectual history and history of Russian literature. He holds two doctoral degrees – from the State University of the Humanities (2004) and the University of Milan (2006). In 2007-2008 he was a Max Weber fellow at the European University Institute in Fiesole (EUI). Until 2022 he was professor of Russian literature and culture at the Higher School of Economics University (Moscow, Russia). His field of research includes history of Russian literature and culture, Russian intellectual history, history of political thought, methodology of human sciences, microhistory. Velizhev is one of the editors of the “Intellectual History” series of the “Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie” publishing house, which also contains two special series devoted to microhistory and Italian studies. He published several articles and books, in particular *Civilization, or War of the Worlds* (2019) and *Chaadaev’s Affair: Ideology, Rhetoric and Power in Russia in the Epoch of Nicholas I* (2022).

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