Roma Tre

Dottorato in *Civiltà e culture linguistico-letterarie dall'antichità al moderno*

DIPARTIMENTO DI STUDI UMANISTICI

Doctoral Conference

Rome, May 5th-6th, 2027

WHAT REMAINS

The Potential of the Unfinished between Antiquity and Modernity

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The doctoral candidates in the Ph.D. program in *Linguistic and Literary Civilizations and Cultures from Antiquity to the Modern Era* at Roma Tre University are pleased to invite you to participate in the third edition of the Department of Humanities' Ph.D. Conference, open to doctoral candidates and Ph.D. graduates. The theme of the conference, to be explored within the fields of Classical Studies and Italian Studies, is *"What Remains: The Potential of the Unfinished between Antiquity and Modernity*."

The unfinished represents a constitutive dimension of both ancient and modern cultural transmission: works left incomplete by their authors, fragments that have survived the collapse of tradition, texts known only through indirect tradition, interrupted or damaged manuscripts, and anthological selections that operate by subtraction. Through this lens, it is possible to examine the mechanisms of loss, selection, reconstruction, and reinterpretation that characterize philology, the history of tradition and language, and the reception and study of texts - or of what remains of them.

It is precisely in this state of textual incompleteness, however, that a "potential" lies. The unfinished or fragmentary work does not close in on itself in a definitive and immutable form, but remains open, offering scholars the space to intervene, reconstruct, hypothesize, and interpret. Through philological, codicological, paleographic, linguistic, exegetical, and critical work, gaps and interruptions become opportunities to deepen meaning. The author's text is continually expanded in its interpretive possibilities, transforming the unfinished work from a deficiency into an interpretive resource and an opportunity for renewed engagement.

Below are some possible lines of research:

Classical Studies

As for the art of storytelling and the mimetic art of verse (poetry), it is evident that it must structure narratives like those of tragedies—that is, based on action, and on an action that is unified and complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end—so that, like a living being in its entirety, it produces the effect of pleasure that is proper to it.

Aristotle, *Poetics* 1459a 23, 1–5

In this passage from *the Poetics*, Aristotle, taking the genre of tragedy as a model for poetry, identifies unity and completeness as fundamental criteria for the aesthetic judgment of a literary work. In the reflection of the philosopher from Stagira, therefore, a close correlation emerges between the organic nature of the poetic text (structured in its entirety like a living organism, whose parts are precisely defined and connected to form a whole) and its quality.

The authority of Aristotle's recommendation has not, however, prevented unfinished works—those not completed by their respective authors—from becoming genre models and indispensable points of reference for subsequent generations, rising to *the status* of classics: such is the case with Virgil's *Aeneid*, Thucydides' *History*, and Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.

However, the concept of incompleteness is not limited solely to the design aspect of the work. It can also pertain to the material dimension of the transmission of texts and, consequently, to their survival and reception even long after they were written; as the sociologist Marshall McLuhan indeed intuited, the *medium* of communication significantly influences the characteristics of the message conveyed and, consequently, the recipient's reception of the content itself. In this sense, consider the transition from scroll to codex, and then from papyrus to parchment, in late antiquity, which acted as a filter on the survival of Greek and Latin literature, much of which has come down to us only in fragments or through indirect tradition. The loss of portions of texts or works, and the mutilation of manuscripts, papyri, and other writing media, should not, however, be attributed solely to the vagaries of tradition. In fact, this was often the result of an intentional choice: it occurred in the case of palimpsests, where previous layers of writing were scraped away to make room for a new text. Therefore, the unfinished does not represent a setback, but rather a starting point for reflections that contribute to deepening and improving our understanding of an author, a work, or a historical-cultural period.

The following is a tentative list of possible research topics:

1. Unfinished literary works and their editorial status (e.g., issues regarding *the reconstruction* of unfinished texts and those with provisional drafts);
2. Unfinished manuscripts (e.g. ,texts left incomplete, the absence of rubrics or miniatures in their respective spaces) or mutilated manuscripts, *"membra disiecta*," reused fragments, and papyrus fragments: paleographic and codicological analysis;
3. Palimpsests and rewriting: the erasure of one text to make way for another; techniques for the recovery—including digital methods—of severely damaged texts (e.g., Vatican City, Vatican Apostolic Library, Vat. lat. 5757, a palimpsest in whose *scriptio inferior* Angelo Mai rediscovered Cicero's *De re publica*);
4. Textual fragments, testimonies, and indirect tradition: *excerpts* and quotations as forms of "incompleteness" in transmission (e.g., the quotations contained in Athenaeus of Naucratis' *Deipnosophists ,* but consider also the fragments of archaic Latin tragedy); problems of philological, historical, and textual reconstruction ;
5. Analysis of fragmentary or incomplete epigraphs.

Italian Studies

The history of Italian literature, from the Middle Ages to the present day, is dotted with instances of unfinished works. Evaluating and appreciating unfinished texts—which are fragmentary and indeterminate in nature—is a highly delicate undertaking that touches upon the fundamental principles of literary creation and the author's intent.

Closely connected to the notion of "unfinished" is that of "potential," understood not only as "that which has not been realized," but also as the text's broader capacity to retain possibilities for meaning, development, and rewriting, regardless of its completed form. Fragments, authorial variants, drafts, and works transmitted in an incomplete state continue to exist as spaces of possibility, in which philological inquiry, critical interpretation, and literary reception reactivate paths that had remained suspended and continue to generate new interpretations, reconstructions, reinterpretations, and rewritings.

Furthermore, the unfinished can be viewed not only as the result of biographical or historical circumstances, but also as a deliberate aesthetic choice. While debates regarding completed works have centered on the multiplicity and degree of openness of the interpretive paths through which they can be explored (think of Eco's *The Open Work*), the dimension of potentiality also extends to unfinished works: from sketches to fragments, from open endings to deliberately unfinished forms, numerous literary works employ incompleteness as a means of constructing and representing meaning.

The incompleteness of a work has, moreover, always required the use of critical, philological, and editorial methods and tools capable of retracing its drafting process and safeguarding its structure and content; without these, the text's value would risk being overlooked, misunderstood, or even compromised. There are numerous instances in which scholarly research has enabled an unfinished text and/or one not authorized by the author to reach the press and the public in a form that, while not always consistent, is at least accessible, thereby allowing not only for a broader understanding of figures, themes, and narrative or poetic elements within the author's overall body of work, but also—and above all—to save great literary monuments from oblivion, whether due to the physical loss of manuscripts, fluctuations in the work's popularity, or deliberate attempts at censorship.

The category of the unfinished allows us to examine the history of the Italian language from a historical-linguistic perspective as well, focusing on the processes, phenomena, and possibilities that have remained unresolved, interrupted, or unfulfilled. Linguistic history can, in fact, be interpreted as the result of a series of selections, stabilizations, and abandonments: forms, constructions, words, varieties, and discursive traditions emerge, spread, and sometimes disappear before achieving normative stability or full integration into linguistic and cultural systems. Incompleteness can pertain to the dimension of linguistic structures: this is the case with incomplete lexical, morphological, and syntactic structures, which may even come to crystallize; or, from a diachronic perspective, the notion of incompleteness is a matter of particular significance in studies of linguistic change, given that there are documented cases of grammaticalization and lexicalization that have not been fully completed (Giacalone Ramat 1998).

Finally, another area for reflection on incompleteness concerns the practices of linguistic description and documentation, with particular reference to glossaries, dictionaries, grammars, treatises, and scholarly projects that are unfinished or have remained at the planning stage.

Below are some possible research directions, which are intended to be non-binding:

1. Unfinished works: works interrupted by the author's own choice (e.g., Dante's *Convivio*, Petrarch's *Africa*, the ending of Gadda's *Cognizione del dolore*) or due to circumstances beyond the author's control (e.g., Boccaccio's *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia*, the sixth American lecture *Consistency* planned by Calvino, Pasolini's *Petrolio*); literary projects that were started but never completed (e.g., Fenoglio's *Il partigiano Johnny*), or promised but never realized (e.g., Leopardi's *Disegni letterari*); drafts; works without a conclusion, etc.; unfinished grammars, dictionaries, repertoires, and descriptive linguistic projects.

2. Textual/material fragments and indirect tradition: works handed down only in fragmentary form or indirectly; authors and works known only through other works; fragmented sources (anepigraphic, adespotic, apocryphal, headless, mutilated), lost works; palimpsests (understood as possible reasons for a work's oblivion);

3. Censorship and unfinished works: censorship and ideological and social constraints as factors limiting the full completion of a work (e.g., Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*); Purged works, in which the original does not reach the public, thereby generating new philological and hermeneutic possibilities (e.g., the 16th-century editions of the *Decameron*, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, and, in the 20th century, Tondelli's *Altri libertini)*;

4. The potential of unfinished works: ongoing processes (e.g., the various drafts of Vico's *Scienza Nuova)* but also the focal point of a narrative (e.g., Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*), integral parts of a work, and defining themes;

5. Unfinished linguistic trajectories: linguistic varieties still in the process of development that have not yet achieved full establishment;

6. Unfinished processes in the history of discursive traditions: genres, textual models, and communicative practices that have remained experimental, marginal, or transitory; linguistic and textual losses and additions in the transition from oral memory to writing (or from writing to orality);

7. Ephemeral forms and languages: words, linguistic constructs, and idioms that were widespread for a specific period but did not become part of the prescriptive norm and/or fell out of use; unfinished phenomena of grammaticalization and lexicalization.

General Information

Doctoral candidates and Ph.D graduates who have earned their degree no more than three years prior to the abstract submission deadline are invited to submit a proposal for an original paper (maximum 350 words, excluding the title and essential bibliography), as well as a brief academic profile (maximum 100 words) by **January 25th, 2027** .

Please send your proposal to **r3incompiuto2027@gmail.com**, with the subject line "Doctoral Conference Proposal" and specifying the relevant section (Classical Studies or Italian Studies). The body of the email must include the following information: title of the paper, first and last name, affiliation, and email address for correspondence. Proposals, in Italian or English, must be submitted as anonymous PDF files. Selection results will be announced by **February 19th, 2027**.

Each presentation will have a maximum duration of 20 minutes. Selected presenters must deliver their papers in person. The Scientific Committee will evaluate the publication of the papers in the conference proceedings.

The conference will be held on **May 5th–6th, 2027,** at the Department of Humanities at Roma Tre University (Via Ostiense 234–236, Rome). There is no registration fee. Information regarding registration, the conference venue, accepted proposals, and the detailed program will be sent to the email address provided and posted on the dedicated page on the Department of Humanities' website.

For further information, please contact **r3incompiuto2027@gmail.com**.

Organizing Committee

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