



# Calvino and the Pygmalion Paradigm (Troubador Italian Studies)

*Bridget Tompkins*

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Calvino and the Pygmalion Paradigm: Fashioning the Feminine in *I nostri antenati* and *Gli amori difficili* is the first book-length analysis of the representation of the feminine in Calvino's fiction. Using the structural umbrella of the Pygmalion paradigm and using feminist interpretative techniques, this book offers interesting alternative readings of two of Calvino's important early narrative collections. The Pygmalion paradigm concerns the creation by a male 'artist' of a feminine ideal and highlights the artificiality and narcissistic desire associated with the creation process. This book discusses Calvino's active and deliberate work of self-creation, accomplished through extensive self-commentaries and exposes both the lack of importance Calvino placed on the feminine in his narratives and the relative absence of critical attention focused on this area. Relying on the analogy between Pygmalion's pieces of ivory and Barthes' 'seme' and drawing upon the ideas underlying Kristevan intertextuality, the book demonstrates that, despite Calvino's professed lack of interest in character development, his female characters are carefully and purposefully constructed. A close reading of Calvino's narratives, engaging directly with Freud, Lacan and the feminist psychoanalytical thinking of Kofmann, Kristeva, Kaplan and others, demonstrates how Calvino uses his female characters as foils for the existential reflections of his typically maladjusted and narcissistic male characters.

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