

## TRADITION AND EXPERIMENTATION IN CAPUANA AND CAPUANA STUDIES

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The concept of artistic and literary experimentation is a crucial element for Capuana and consequently for Capuana studies. As we shall argue, it may in fact be considered the critically productive point of juncture between Capuana's *oeuvre* and recent scholarly work on it, as well as the ideal point of departure for framing the diverse range of excursions into Capuana's body of work by the contributors to this critical collection.

Capuana himself, like all the main Italian writers who contributed to naturalist literary production, such as Verga, Serao and De Roberto, in the 1870s and 1880s did conceive his artistic and theoretical endeavours as a pioneering attempt to radically change the Italian literary landscape, to update and render it competitive within a European – mostly French – literary scene, which had been in the previous thirty years at the forefront of literary innovation (see Capuana 1972a). For just over a decade Capuana pursued what has been critically regarded, in a rather reductive way we would like to argue, as an orthodox naturalist practice *à la* Zola, in which he wrote, along with the 1877 collection *Profili di donne*, his first naturalist novel *Giacinta* (in at least three main editions: 1879, 1886, 1889), dedicated to Zola himself, and a number of short stories about psychopathological cases (mostly female), such as *Storia fosca* (1880), *Precocità* (1884), *Tortura* (1889). Equally limiting is another critically established position, according to which in the 1880s a shift began, and Capuana's by-then fading adherence to the naturalist doctrine of *Verismo* was reflected in both his later critical work (*Per l'arte*, 1885, *Libri e teatro*, 1892, *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, 1898, and *Cronache letterarie*, 1899) and in his creative production. Capuana thereafter wrote the anti-naturalist and happy-ending *Profumo* (1890 and 1892), the idealist experiments *La Sfinge* (1895 and 1897) and *Rassegnazione* (1900 and 1907), and the eclectic *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* (1901). He also extended his production of fairy tales and experimented with children's novels as, for example, *Gambalesta* (1903), *Scurpiddu* (1898), *Cardello* (1907), *Gli americani di Rabbato* (1912). As to his short stories, in the last decade of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth centuries, Capuana organised his materials in two main themes, with the publication of the collections *Le passionate* (1893, now 1974a: 253-499) and *Le Paesane* (1894, now 1974b: 3-255). In addition, by re-connecting

to the themes of his early short stories – *Il dottor Cymbalus* (1865) and *Un caso di sonnambulismo* (1874) – and through his essays on occult phenomena, *Spiritismo?* (1884) and *Mondo occulto* (1896), Capuana expanded his short story production so as to embrace a wider variety of topics, ranging from science and science fiction (for example, in the collection *Un vampiro* 1904) to psychological investigation and self-reflexive fiction, particularly the collections *Il Decameroncino* (1901, now 1974a: 389-446), *Coscienze* (1905a), and *La volontà di creare* (1911).

The variety of critical approaches to Capuana's work, however, for a long time failed to take account of the complex diversity which characterises his *oeuvre*. This collection of essays aims to challenge some of the canonical critical positions and reread his work in the light of the different interests pursued by Capuana from the beginning of his career. In fact, he strongly protested against being defined a «strenuo campione del naturalismo in Italia» (Capuana 1899: 247), which he felt was arbitrarily imposed onto his critical and creative production. Nonetheless, the critical premise that Capuana was primarily a fine critic and the literary theorist who founded and promoted Italian *Verismo* and did little else persisted for a long time<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, both his interestingly ambivalent attitude to Naturalism and the very relevance of his post-*verista* theoretical work, as well as the technical quality of most of his creative production were put into question and often compared, negatively, with the work of the possibly still undisputed best exponent of the *Verismo* movement, Giovanni Verga.

As early as 1952, Scalia's monograph, regrettably with little impact, had begun questioning the operation of «labelling and pigeon-holing» (Scalia 121) that had been applied to Capuana by early critics starting with Croce's seminal 1905 essay *Luigi Capuana e Neera*. In fact, the largely (post)Marxism-informed Italian criticism of the 1960s and 1970s – and even, more sporadically, the 1980s – persisted in assessing Capuana and Capuana's work in a rather reductive and ultimately unproductive light. In the works of such critics as Trombatore (1949, 1970), Spinazzola (1970) and Ghidetti (1982), Capuana's work often comes across as the production of a mediocre narrative talent and a narrow-minded, right-wing

<sup>1</sup> It should be clarified that the interest for Capuana's theory, although most prominent and unchallenged in the early stages of Capuana studies, has, to date, never declined. In 1970 Ermanno Scuderi published his *Luigi Capuana primo critico dei contemporanei* (9-21). In 1978 Stefano Longo's *Capuana tra Positivismo e idealismo* came out in *Critica letteraria* with an unpublished *Prolusione*, while an analysis of Capuana's «itinerario accademico» appears in Comes (41-106). Amongst the more recent work on his theory one should mention Anna Storti Abate's *Percorsi del romanzo dalla storia al reale* (1993); the Capuana section in Maria Luisa Patruno's *Teorie e forme della letteratura verista* (1985) as well as the section titled *Critica e teoria letteraria in Capuana* (55-110) in her *Verismo e umorismo: Poetiche in antitesi* (1996), Ambra Carta, *Il romanzo italiano moderno: Dossi e Capuana* (2008), and also *Il cantiere Italia: Il romanzo. Capuana e Borgeese costruttori* (2011).

conservative bourgeois. Even the seminal monograph by Carlo Alberto Madrignani *Capuana e il naturalismo* (1970) based its narrow selection of texts on the assumption that Capuana had little to offer after *Profumo* (1890), either from the standpoint of theory, narrative complexity or ideological coherence.

A new hypothesis which helped to change the direction of Capuana studies markedly, was put forward by Judith Davies, *The Realism of Luigi Capuana* (1979). Davies' study included all five of Capuana's major novels, that is, *La Sfinge*, *Rassegnazione*, and the widely recognised masterpiece *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*. Davies' appraisal partly contested the so-called *involuzione* theory (7) of an author, who after *Profumo*, was regarded as culturally irrelevant in the rapidly changing *fin de siècle* literary landscape (Mazzamuto 1969: 986; Madrignani 1970: 248; Mauro 13; Luti 1973: vii). On the contrary, Davies takes issues with this position of a «career which may be divided chronologically» (154), arguing instead for continuity in Capuana's ideological position and at the same time for a persistent duality involving an Hegelian idealistic dimension in his positivist rationalism which surfaced in varying degrees as the cultural scene presented new challenges.

In particular, Davies' study marked what can rightly be described, in Calogero Colicchi's words, as *La riscoperta di Capuana* (1980). It managed to reignite a critical interest for the author which gradually extended to incorporate the totality of his work, including the countless short stories, the until-then semi-ignored essays on the themes of Spiritism and the Occult – *Spiritismo?* (1884) and *Mondo occulto* (1896), the fairy tales, the theatre in Italian and dialect and children's literature. For some time now, Capuana scholarship has been developing in diverse directions, through a few monographic studies (Guarnieri 2012, Michelacci 2015), conference proceedings (Picone and Rossetti 1990, and *Capuana Verista* 1984), edited collections (Scarano 1985) and some translations (Capuana 2013a; 2014; 2016a), but mostly through individual book chapters and journal articles.

Despite the fact that the *Archivio Capuana* in Mineo has long been difficult to access (Palermo 1979: 23), the concerted and mainly philologically driven work of the *Fondazione Verga* and of Italian academia in general has led to discoveries of new and interesting authorial texts and to comparative *studi delle fonti*<sup>2</sup>. In this context, works by such scholars as Bertazzoli (1983), De Cesare (1992, 1997), Durante (1984, 1998), Bocola (1999), Sardo (2008), Bellini (2011), Meli (2012) and Di Silvestro (2012) should be noted. A number of special issues were published by the *Annali della fondazione Verga* featuring work on the manuscripts of the *Archivio Capuana*, as well as contributions around specific topics such as the special volume

<sup>2</sup> *Fondazione Verga* has been the publisher, since 1984, of the *Annali della fondazione Verga*, quantitatively still the most important source of publications not only on Capuana, but on *Verismo* in general.

edited by Giuseppe Sorbello, *L'Unità d'Italia nella rappresentazione dei veristi* (2012b). Capuana has also been at the core of “institutional” interest: in 2009 the monumental series of volumes of the *Edizione nazionale delle opere di Luigi Capuana* opened with a volume on his *Cronache teatrali* edited by Gianni Oliva. In 2015 Mario Bocola updated the then only existing full bibliography on Capuana by Gino Raya (1969), with his comprehensive *Bibliografia di Luigi Capuana: 1968-2015* (2015).

Capuana's intellectual background and the philosophical influences on his poetics have been another most important feature of the renewed interest. Croce's initial argument, stressing the theoretical contradiction implicit in Capuana's choice of mentors – the positivist thinker Angelo Camillo De Meis and the idealist philosopher Francesco De Sanctis, author of the 1866 *Saggi critici* – for long had been the premise for assessing the author's poetics. This began to be reviewed by critics such as Palermo who, for instance, examined the impact of Hegel (1964: 350). However, the majority of critics after Palermo, starting with Madrignani (1970: 50), have argued that Capuana never really dared to address the monumental Hegelian system directly, but filtered it exclusively through De Sanctis' and De Meis' appropriations. Recent critics such as Silvio Balloni (2007) have instead provided evidence that Capuana may have engaged with Hegel's works in a more direct and perhaps deeper way. For Balloni «la lettura degli scritti di Hegel fu attenta e approfondita, poiché poté svolgersi nella traduzione italiana di Antonio Novelli» and «non avvenne solo tramite *La Poétique par W. F. Hegel* di Charles Bénard» (Balloni 2007: 136-37)<sup>3</sup>. This reassessment of Hegel in Capuana's *oeuvre* prompted some critics, Christina Petraglia (2010) for example, to formulate a “Hegelian reading” of the lord-servant dynamics in Capuana's *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* grounded in a close textual analysis that draws on the section of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) entitled *Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage*, in which the German philosopher expresses his well-known theory of the Master-Slave dialectic.

Ideological questions arising from Capuana's texts remain a lively topic even in more recent critical work. The reassessment of Capuana's ideological critique features in Pagliaro's essays *Aspetti tecnici e continuità tematica ne La Sfinge di Luigi Capuana* (1989) and *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina di Luigi Capuana: Crisi etica o analisi positivista* (1997) which underscore the coherence in Capuana's artistic theory and its adaptation to the evolving *fin de siècle* cultural climate. Likewise, in most of Barnaby's work from his *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina: Myth, History and Hagiography in Post-Risorgimento Sicily* (2000), his *The Haunted Monastery: Capuana's Profumo and the ghosts of the 'Nuova Italia'* (2001), *The Riddle of the Sphinx and Ariadne's Thread* (2004) to his *Superuomini e no: Dan-*

<sup>3</sup> In support of his argument, Silvio Balloni (2007) quotes directly from Capuana's private correspondence (137).

*nunzian hypotexts in Capuana's Rassegnazione* (2017), the critic investigates how Capuana's production explored the social and cultural tensions between post-Risorgimento Positivism, Roman-Catholic ideology and resurgent *fin de siècle* idealism. Franco Manai also has worked on issues relating to ideology and nation-building. The critic, in his various works on Capuana (1992, 1995, 1996, 1997), has explored the sociological dimension of Capuana's overall conservative ideology. Salvina Monaco's (2012) and Lara Michelacci's (2016a) essays have focused on the question of Capuana's conservative ideology reflected in his scientific explorations and/or his representation of Sicilian working-classes within the context of the coeval political upheavals in Sicily.

The latest development of this ideological debate has been written – within a postcolonial framework and drawing, to an extent, on earlier works by Mazzamuto (1996) and Re (2009) – in Virga's recent monograph (2017), where some of Capuana's texts are read as the product of the hybrid socio-ethno-cultural location of an intellectual torn between the hegemonic national ruling élite and the peripheral world of the rural Sicilian subaltern classes.

Following from these ideology-focused contributions, there has been a prolific line of criticism examining Capuana's fairy tales. Drawing on the earlier work by Romagnoli Robuschi (1969), Congiu Marchese (1982), Barsotti (1984), Malato (1990) and Fedi (1990 and 1997), it has been especially Gina Miele (2009a and 2009b) who has explored the rather unlikely *verista* dimension of these tales and their social and ideological undertones, while Alberto Carli has focused more broadly on the intersection of journalism and children's literature (2007, 2012, 2015) and also on its connection with Capuana's involvement in education (2011).

Another most significant area of investigation, prompted by the consolidation of gender studies, has been female representation in Capuana's texts. Such scholars as Annamaria Cavalli Pasini (1982), and more recently Valeria Pappalardo (1995), Edwige Comoy Fusaro (2007), Federica Adriano (2014) and Lara Michelacci (2015) further explored Capuana's interests in science and particularly the emergent field of psychiatry and suggested detailed linkages between the symptoms manifested by Capuana's (mostly) female characters and the findings of late nineteenth-century medical discourse. Some of these critics, such as Pappalardo (1997 and 2002), Comoy Fusaro (2001), Olive (2001) and Marchese (2009) suggested that Capuana not only assimilated and applied the most advanced physiological notions to his literary investigations of the human psyche, but also re-elaborated and expanded upon them in a way that foreshadowed Freudian and Jungian discoveries.

As many of the essays in the present collection also attest, Capuana's production and the then increasingly popular theme of *il mondo occulto*, the unknown worlds of ultramondane beings whose comprehension escaped (official) nineteenth-century scientific knowledge, was fundamental to Capuana's research and well represented in his entire *oeuvre*, but

captured critics' attention only in more recent times. This line of inquiry increased substantially following both Simona Cigliana's re-edition of Capuana's works related to Spiritualism (1995)<sup>4</sup> and Mario Tropea's extensive work (1994, 2000, 2015). This engendered a particularly productive development which linked Capuana's *Spiritismo* practices to the development of his artistic theories<sup>5</sup>.

In tune with a general trend in Italian studies towards inter-disciplinarity and intermediality, scholars have begun to look at Capuana's writing in relation to other art forms. The studies by Di Silvestro (1999), Hill (2004), Minghelli (2009) and Comoy Fusaro (2018) argued that the appreciation for the new medium of photography which Capuana shared with his fellow *veristi* writers is useful in understanding some features of *Verismo* itself and its ambitious claims to so-called objective representation. Anna Maria Damigella's *Capuana e le arti figurative* (2012) – along with contributions such as Annamaria Loria's *Luigi Capuana e Sebastiano del Piombo: Una declinazione eccentrica del tema del ritratto animato in letteratura* (2005) – extended this line of research to Capuana's overall relationship with the visual arts and added to the already established image of an eclectic Capuana, at once photographer, «disegnatore e pupazzettista» (Damigella 13) and performer of «esperimenti di incisione» (21).

What seems to have characterised the critical discourse in Capuana studies in the last decades is a concerted attempt to reconfigure the spectrum of Capuana's production on criteria other than adherence to *Verismo* principles and practice. This approach has brought to light many less known texts by Capuana and led to a reassessment of single works, previously ignored or dismissed. Critics have followed the numerous ramifications of Capuana's interests in order to highlight how the author's «production culturelle hybride» (Comoy Fusaro 2010) and his «sperimentalismo» (Storti Abate 1989: 107, Cenati 2007) have had a lasting effect on the Italian literary scene.

The profile which emerges from this latest phase of Capuana studies is, in Corrado Pestelli's words, that of a «post-*verista*» author (Pestelli 14), who certainly played a key role as a theorist and fiction writer in the heyday of *Verismo*, but did not cease to contribute significantly to the literary debate once *Verismo* started to fade. In their analyses, these critics have not only foregrounded Capuana's experimentalism but also

<sup>4</sup> Such collections as Luigi Capuana, *Novelle inverosimili* (1999), *Novelle del mondo occulto* (2007) or *Quattro viaggi straordinari* (1992) testify the renewed interest in both *occultismo* and *fantastico*. See also Andrea Cedola's *Luigi Capuana e l'altro* (2006) which addresses Capuana's occult interests using the theme of the double. On Capuana and “otherness” and “double” see also the section on Capuana in Petraglia (2012).

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Giannetti (1996), Della Coletta (1995) and Leone (1998), as well as more recently Loria (2006), Foni (2007b), Mangini (2007), Comoy Fusaro (2009) and Michelacci (2015).

“applied” their own, by deploying various and innovative critical approaches and thus acknowledging the diverse and intriguingly complex nature of Capuana’s production.

The studies presented in this volume aim to further develop this phase of inquiry into the multifarious nature of Capuana’s work in an attempt to examine how his experimentalism and eclectic interests respond to nineteenth-century intellectual trends and offer ways to interpret modernity. The volume is divided into three main sections, capturing both the major areas of interests and experimentation reflected in Luigi Capuana’s *oeuvre* and the key critical approaches discussed so far. The first section focuses on an investigation of the author’s work in light of a national cultural project aimed towards progress and renewal of literature and its aesthetics; the second section illustrates diverse critical approaches particularly, but not only, to his major novels and highlights the centrality of the female character in Capuana’s work. The essays in the last section reassess Capuana’s interests in science and supernatural phenomena and examine how these characterise his literary experimentalism as well as his ideological approach to reality. This section aptly concludes the volume with an application of Digital Humanities’ tools to map aspects of Capuana’s work.

In this first section the essays bring to the fore a fundamental ambivalence in Capuana’s positivist ideology. On the one hand, the author’s involvement as a critic, his militancy for a new aesthetic for the novel, his desire for the creation of a modern nation reflected in literature and his unstinting scientific interests make him a progressive contributor of his times. On the other, as was typical of the literary production of Italian Naturalism, supported by a rather conservative medicalisation of society and focused on the construction of an authentic immediate sense of reality, Capuana’s work is a testimony of interesting tensions between a conservative worldview and modern dynamics. Barnaby’s essay rereads the representation of Doctor Follini, the *medico-filosofo* in *Giacinta*, Capuana’s first novel, traditionally regarded by critics as the cipher of the author’s views on science. The critic’s analysis of the function of this character in the narrative opens up new perspectives for assessing both Capuana’s participation in Naturalism and the weight given to the potentiality of positivist science in relation to the formation of the new Italian nation. For Barnaby, Follini’s cold scientific objectivity is projected in a decidedly ironic light and contains a critique of positivist ideology from a Hegelian perspective. Accordingly, Capuana with this character signals that objectivity must be transcended and that understanding only comes from immersion in the stuff of life. Follini’s infatuation with his patient, and eventual abandonment of her, rather than merely softening the heroine’s moral excesses or signaling a playful self-referentiality, symbolise the impotence of positivist science when faced with the mysteries of the psyche. Likewise, the critic argues that the text shows little regard for depicting the impact of social and hereditary factors, revealing instead a growing difficulty on the part of the author in reconciling positivist and idealist views of the psyche.

Barnaby offers useful insights into the complexity of narrative strategies used by Capuana, which go beyond the over frequently stated focus on the endeavours to perfect impersonality.

The issue of Capuana's poetics is taken up by Pagliaro's essay which revisits the critical evaluation of his discourse and his militant commitment to establishing the modern novel, and pays particular attention to the importance the author places on the fundamental positivist conceptualisation of the impact of *le moment* on art and ideology and on the novel as the most congenial receptacle of the ideas and progressive movements of his contemporary society. The critic examines Capuana's ambiguous reception of Naturalism and the often-stated claims of a post-naturalist artistic involution, arguing instead for a coherent artistic development sustained by a fundamental interest as a chronicler of his times and, particularly, of ideological shifts. More than Capuana's *verista* theory and practice, it is this very aspect – that is his historical conscience and his search for innovative practices – which constitutes the author's most engaging contribution to the post-unification cultural programme and reveals his anxieties. Monaco's essay examines the relationship between the political class' awareness, in the late 1880s and early 1890s, of the substandard conditions of the peasant farmers and that of the *veristi*. The essay revisits the *veristi*'s literary contribution in making the complex and difficult plight of the subaltern class the subject of their literary investigation, and questions the extent to which such a contribution was able to penetrate the socio-political nature of this class. In the case of Capuana, it draws particular attention to the impact that remembrance of a nostalgic past and patriotic commitment had in the *verista* reconstruction of the subaltern class. This study underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of Capuana's social commitment and response to the nation-building project than hitherto provided by Marxist criticism and a reflection on Capuana's aesthetic principles and search for originality in art.

The connection between Italian unification and Capuana's ideological position is also the starting point of Virga's study. The critic contextualises it through the lens of a postcolonial reading, specifically locating Capuana's perceptions in an in-between position (Bhabha 1994), that is between the national and the Sicilian worlds, between the coloniser and the colonised. The essay reflects on Capuana's so-called conservative position and how historical time and the political consciousness of the subaltern class are conceptualised. The critic uses a selection of fairy tales and the short novel *Scurpiddu* to illustrate the literary construct of a subaltern class' authenticity whose value is to be found in a stagnant timeless past, while in the historical present such a class is altered as the voiceless Other. Nonetheless, the critic argues, within these texts there emerges a dynamic which pushes the boundaries of Capuana's conservative position, revealing also the limitations of such a position. For instance, the orphan *Scurpiddu*, minder of turkeys, is firstly depicted in positive terms as an unhistorical, primitive mythical figure, a sort of noble savage in harmony with his

country life and then, as bourgeois-to-be who has to go through a process of acculturation. The critic argues that in these two polarities what is missing is the assignation of agency to these characters. They all seem to lack a social conscience in the nationalist project. These first four essays bring to the fore the question of Capuana's ideology and his response to the hegemonic discourse of nation-building, and suggest the need to go beyond the rather dismissive claims of a conservative bourgeois *tout court*.

In the second section, experimentation, as a principal driver in Capuana's artistic investigation and production, is explored. Carta takes an intermedial approach and looks at science and photography and how these become means of aestheticising the nineteenth-century fictional character. The critic examines how science, photography and artistic observation intertwine in producing tropes of the hysterical female body and contribute to the creation of a collective scientific imagination. The essay reveals a Capuana closely connected to epistemological issues of the time ushered in by science and photography. The author's experimentation reflects a questioning of what scientific investigation can or cannot deliver in relation to understanding the complexity of the human body and psyche and likewise, the complex and ambiguous relationship of photography and reality in the reproduction of the visible and the invisible. Carta argues that Capuana's use of photography, in tune with psychiatric scientific practices, makes clear how the author manipulates the medium in order to adopt and in turn contribute to the construction of an aesthetic of disease, which is reflected in many of his female characters.

Capuana's knowledge and application of medical science to literature, particularly hysteria and traumatic repressive behaviours, are also the focus of Comoy Fusaro's psychoanalytic approach to Capuana's second novel, *Profumo*. However, Comoy Fusaro argues, in an innovative way, that the hysteria represented in Eugenia is only a symptom or a metaphor for a more complex representation of a cultural and social malaise and claims instead that Patrizio is the real protagonist, the fulcrum of an investigation comprising a wider sense of disease, which is omnipresent, and of a cultural nature. The critic firstly establishes the centrality of Patrizio and the counter current aspect of it being a male character afflicted by neurosis. Her textual analysis shows how the environment and other characters, including Eugenia, are functional in revealing a pathological society and a misogynist culture. *Profumo's* environment is repressive, not only in the obsessive sexual censorship exercised by the mother, but even more so in the traumatic censorship implicit in a culture of taboo, here defined as "il male del logos". The critic highlights the complexity of the text as residing in an ideological ambiguity in so far as the narrator both denounces and panders to the pathogenic nature of the society, while the writer has managed to bring to the fore the nuanced ambivalence of meaning.

As recent criticism has highlighted, Capuana's complex perception of reality is exemplified by his keen interest to examine invisible and inexplicable natural forces such as the phenomenon of hypnotic states, Mes-

merism and Spiritualism, which for him challenged the univocal, concrete human document and needed to be examined. Michelacci's study probes this new critical space and shows how Spiritualism and occult forces constituted from the very beginning an essential aspect of Capuana's narrative experimentation, especially as it concerns the female character. The critic examines the connection between Capuana and Lombroso and their common position that perceptions and experiences affect outward materiality, which in turn becomes an essential source of investigation. Focusing on *Profili di donne* and *Profumo*, Michelacci argues that the construction of female characters becomes Capuana's experimental laboratory as he delves beyond the concrete real to take account of illusion and hallucinations, and particularly the transformation of the body during hysteric and hypnotic states. In this, the author pushes the margins of what constitutes reality, and a sort of syncretism of science and art becomes a model for interpreting an ever-more complex real.

The last essay in this section is dedicated to *La Sfinge*, Capuana's third novel, which received comparatively little attention in the critical discourse and yet constitutes an interesting work particularly for its metafictional references. Zuccala's study focuses precisely on this aspect of the novel, showing how the metanarrative discourse goes beyond Giorgio Montani's metaliterary comments directed to his interlocutor, Fulvia Fiorelli Crispi, and how it closely intertwines with the allegorical and symbolic level of the text. Exploring further the importance of Hegel as a source of inspiration for Capuana's poetics, Zuccala argues that the author's dynamic symbolism of the Sphinx and his theory of evolution of genres are Hegelian. He recognises in the dichotomy of the protagonist's experience as the failed playwright, and in Capuana the author's successful completion of the novel, the exemplification of the evolution of genres. The critic explains how the text illustrates the very experience of fiction-making through Giorgio Montani and in connection with this, delves further into Fulvia's symbolism, showing how this character allegorically lends herself as an instrument of fiction-making. For Zuccala her conflicting and contradictory nature is not just a figment of Giorgio's jealousy, but rather her enigmatic character makes her embody the symbol of the Sphinx itself. Ultimately, the innovative aspect resides in the fact that the reader in this novel is guided to experience the mystery of artistic hallucination, while at the same time reflecting on fiction-making.

The four essays in this section have shown how Capuana's diverse interests underline not just the experimental nature of his work, but also are a source for reading in new ways the *fin de siècle* epistemological revision and its anxieties. This becomes even more evident when one looks at the evolution of Capuana's scientific discourse which forms the focus of the last section in this volume, where Capuana's excursions into the natural, the superhuman and the fantastic are explored.

The first essay by Alberto Carli examines Capuana's extensive involvement in children's literature. The critic emphasises the significance that

the author places on it in terms of literary form and pedagogical import, but also the different ideological approaches used in the fairy tales as opposed to the production dedicated to older children such as *Gambalesta*, *Scurpiddu*, *Cardello* and others. Here, rather than the *verista* representation of social immobility, Capuana presents a national hegemonic message of social emancipation. The fairy tale, on the other hand, is a source of complex and interesting experimentation on the traditional pre-literary form, beyond its concerns for mimetic representation. Carli draws attention to the connection expressed by Capuana between artistic hallucination and the creation of fairy tales, showing how, in addition to the author's response to late Romantic trends which sought to recover in folklore a lost local identity, there is an eclectic intertwining of childhood reminiscences, ethnological and particularly scientific studies of occult forces and Spiritualism. The critic suggests that for Capuana, children's literature meant injecting new life, the enduring life of literature, into the pre-literary oral tradition. Carli illustrates this through a subtle examination of *Il Raccontafiabe*, where he sees a veiled polemic towards the ethnologist Giuseppe Pitré.

Petraglia's essay brings to light the remarkable and innovative narrative experimentation into the new Gothic, science fiction and the post-human in some of Capuana's short stories. Through a psychoanalytical reading, the critic explores two intriguing science fiction novellas of 1901. In the first, *Creazione*, taken from the collection *Il Decameroncino*, the scientist engages in a parthenogenetic experiment in order to create, through particles and living atoms in the air, his ideal woman – a sexualised and grotesque object which ultimately reveals the scientist's own materiality and has resonance of the narcissistic self-love implicit in the Freudian *Doppelgänger*. The other tale, *L'incredibile esperimento*, is taken from the collection *Il benefattore* and presents another provoking and horrifying atypical human reproduction. Here the author explores artificial insemination as the scientist, through electricity, impregnates his own virgin daughter. This immaculate (scientific) conception ironically conjures up a scenario of futuristic post-humans who will have moved beyond woman and the physical and sentimental nature she represents, while raising ethical issues regarding self-fashioned human reproduction. In the diegesis this sexless and loveless reproduction also gives rise to a gender debate as to the function of pre-human creatures (females) and human creatures (males) in the evolutionary discourse. Petraglia's essay highlights the prescient aspects of both situations developed in these short stories and the profound ideological and ethical issues they raise in regards to the unbridled use of science, but even more so, issues which bring the reader to reflect on identity, the materiality and breakdown of the subject, and on psychosexuality, rape and incestuous desire.

Capuana's connection to science, the evolution of his involvement in paranormal inquiry and how this affected his scientific discourse, are traced, through a selection of short stories, in the essay by Gabriele Scalessa.

The critic examines the representation of supernatural phenomena such as Mesmerism, Spiritualism, magical thinking in nineteenth-century Italian literature, specifically as they relate to writers such as Igino Tarchetti and Antonio Fogazzaro and compares it to Capuana's output with a specific focus on the paradigmatic shift in his scientific discourse. Scalessa argues that in the course of Capuana's career it is possible to observe an enlargement of the scientific paradigm from that implied in his early work such as *Il dottor Cymbalus* and *Spiritismo?*. Particularly his later work such as the collections *Delitto ideale* and *Un vampiro* are shown to be the product of both the author's readings of Northern European cultural and social evolutionism and of his studies of the Southern Italy folkloric substrate. Scalessa's examination illustrates how Capuana's commitment to knowledge and representation of reality encompassed a much wider spectrum than that of official positivist science and included a re-evaluation of popular culture and phenomena defined as superstition whose study, he believed, would contribute to a more comprehensive knowledge of reality.

Along the same lines as Scalessa, Tropea demonstrates the profound importance that the unconscious and its occult phenomena had in Capuana's research and production. It is precisely this aspect, even more so than his so-called naturalist period, which according to the critic, renders Capuana an intellectual receptive of his times and exemplifies how his significant contribution is in tune with European scientific interests in the *world beyond* which influenced medical, psychiatric and more progressive branches of science. This essay offers an excursus into Capuana's writing on the Occult, from his *Diario spiritico* (1870), to *Spiritismo?* and to his later essays such as *Medianità* (1901) and *Il "Di là"* (1902), and then briefly surveys his short stories and novels, showing how Spiritualism and the Occult provide an epistemological key for understanding Capuana's work. The critic emphasises the naturalist matrix which supports Capuana's tireless examinations of visible and invisible reality. His method of investigation remained that of openness towards official and paranormal science, treating inexplicable phenomena as material whose meaning perhaps would be unraveled at a later date, while his fiction always underscored that what was being created should be regarded as documentary evidence for understanding reality beyond its materiality.

This final section (and the volume) ends with a further, exemplary illustration of the exegetically productive link between Capuana's own experimentalism and new critical tools. In this conclusive essay by Musgrave and Zuccala, two techniques derived from Digital Humanities are used to map the conceptual universe within which Capuana's literary endeavours unfold, by highlighting key lexical areas and by comparing them to Verga's. Musgrave's and Zuccala's exploration begins with an attempt to map Capuana's intellectual formation by charting the geographical sources of the *Fondo Capuana's* materials. It then proceeds to a more abstract kind of mapping, using text analysis methods to isolate the core conceptual areas that define Capuana's reflection as well as his work and to visualise a

«projection of concept space» that illustrates the interrelations between those concepts.

The aim of this volume has been to bring to the fore a range of questions and critical issues concerning the complex nature of Capuana's work and to further elucidate the experimental nature of the author's inquiry into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The present collection can only offer a partial insight into the author's diverse achievements and their ramifications both in the context of the *fin de siècle* cultural expressions and in the potential for new critical approaches. However, it is our hope that the recognition that all contributors share for the need to inquire beyond Capuana's adherence to positivist ideology and naturalist practices, will lead to further critical engagement and research into the dialectical vision of reality implicit in the author's *oeuvre* and the tensions it reveals in relation to new sensibilities ushered in by the modernist crisis of human values and pervasive cultural relativism.