

# 1 **Capuana *naturalista* malgré lui: 'Classics' and 'New Turns' in Capuana Studies**

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**Summary** 1.1 'Genre Studies' in Early Criticism and 'Classic' Monographs. – 1.2 History and Philology. – 1.3 Ideology. – 1.4 Gender and Intermedial 'Turns'. – 1.5 Occultism. – 1.6 Structure of This Study.

Before delving into a close reading of a selection of Capuana's texts, it is appropriate to show why such a far-reaching self-reflexive approach is more than just exegetically useful. By reflecting on those recent 'turns' in Capuana's criticism that have aimed to break away from a long-standing *Verismo*/Naturalism-centred line of enquiry, it must be shown how such an approach is critically needed at this stage of *capuanistica*. In other words, it is important to focus on why and how the issue of (self-)reflexivity increasingly appears to position itself at the point of intersection of many still-open and cogent questions in Capuana studies and to offer itself as a potential answer to a significant proportion of those questions.

## **1.1 'Genre Studies' in Early Criticism and 'Classic' Monographs**

With the exception of individual magazine reviews of specific works and an insightful 1896 overview by Luigi Pirandello, Capuana criticism begins with the well-known, widely investigated and enormously influential essay by Benedetto Croce, "Luigi Capuana - Neera" (1905).

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Croce's essay addresses Capuana's theoretical activity and creative writing separately, and argues that Capuana's primary literary merit was that of theorising *Verismo* and promoting the *verista* work of fellow writer, Giovanni Verga, rather than being a result of his own creative writing.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even in the formulation of Capuana's artistic theories there are, for Croce, some rather significant contradictions. These discrepancies are best exemplified by the two epigraphs on the front page of the critical collection *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea: Prima serie*, by Francesco De Sanctis and Camillo De Meis respectively, which Capuana himself defined as a summary of his artistic theory.<sup>2</sup> For Croce, the concept of the autonomy of art that Capuana derived from De Sanctis somewhat contradicts De Meis' Hegelian affirmation of the necessary and historical 'evolution' of artistic forms, and, for Croce, such a contradiction betrays, in turn, the theoretical inaccuracy and inadequacy of Capuana's own aesthetical thinking and poetics. However hasty such an allegation of theoretical unsoundness might seem to a contemporary reader, it accompanied the author's (scholarly) reputation throughout the twentieth century and even fed through to recent critical appraisals and textbook editions and anthologies.

As for Capuana's narrative, Croce argues that it is fully shaped by "[la] dottrina dell'impersonalità" and progresses rather uneventfully as a sequence of "studii di casi [patologici]". Indeed, this "atteggiamento da naturalista" is, for Croce, the reason for Capuana's work being "generalmente, un po' fredd[o]", and its "scarsa vena di sentimento" turns into "un difetto artistico". The case of *Giacinta* is, for the critic, paradigmatic: the novel's primary objective is descriptive – "rifare oggettivamente il processo di una situazione psicologica" – rather than being driven by any authentic "ispirazione poetica". Accordingly, Croce sees Capuana's style as "artificioso", and prefers "quelle parti [...] nelle quali il proposito dell'impersonalità è stato dimenticato o non è messo pienamente in atto" (1905, 342-72).<sup>3</sup> Among later critics, Croce's view prevailed over – for instance – the perceptive, yet antithetical, views earlier formulated by Luigi Pirandello. The Sicilian critic, as early as 1896, acknowledged how negatively Capuana had been affected by the *verista* label imposed onto his work a few years earlier, which he himself had vehemently questioned, along with all other labelling classifications (Pirandello 1896, 366-75). Among the

1 "Le teorie artistiche del Capuana e la sua propaganda del Verismo e del naturalismo valsero a spingere il Verga più oltre sulla via nella quale era entrato" (Croce 1905, 341).

2 "Il mio credo critico è tutto in queste parole di così grandi maestri" (Capuana 1880, VI).

3 Croce's essay was later collected in the third volume of *La letteratura della nuova Italia* ([1915] 1922).

various and substantial issues touched on in the essay, the one that has possibly exerted the greatest effect upon later criticism is Croce's neat separation of Capuana's theorising activity from his creative endeavours, and the priority he gives to Capuana's theoretical contribution to the *verista* cause, however fundamental, to the detriment of the role and the actual quality of his narrative. To put it in Giovanni Carzaniga's terms: "[There is] the widespread myth that in Italian *Verismo* [...] Luigi Capuana was the theoretical mind and Verga his disciple" (2003, 70). Or, as Domenico Calcaterra writes: "È opinione che ha trovato largo consenso, la preminenza da accordare al Capuana critico rispetto al più che prolifico narratore" (2015, 85). Even though Capuana strongly disputed the definition of his being the "campione" (Capuana 1899, 247; 1888b, XI) of Italian Naturalism, the critical premise persisted that Capuana was little else but a fine critic and the literary theorist who promoted Italian *Verismo*.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, critics depreciated what was in fact an interestingly ambivalent approach to Naturalism, questioned the very relevance of his 'post-*verista*' theoretical work and undervalued the technical quality of most of his vast creative production, often comparing it negatively to the work of the writer who is still seen as the greatest exponent of the *Verismo* movement, Giovanni Verga.<sup>5</sup> Croce's critical strategy of carefully distinguishing between the on-the-whole insightful, albeit fallible, critic and the me-

<sup>4</sup> Scalia's early monograph had begun questioning the "pigeon-holing" (Scalia 1952, 121) of Capuana by early critics. However, it had little impact. Interest in Capuana's 'narratology', although most prominent and unchallenged in the early stages of Capuana studies, has, to date, not disappeared. See also Scuderi 1970, 9-21. Longo (1978) curated one unpublished "Prolusione" for *Critica letteraria*, while an analysis of Capuana's "itinerario accademico" appears in Comes 1976, 41-106. Amongst the more recent work on his theory, see Storti Abate 1993; the Capuana section in Patruno 1985 as well as the section titled "Critica e teoria letteraria in Capuana" (1996, 55-110), as well as Carta 2008 and 2011.

<sup>5</sup> See also Re, for whom "Capuana stesso però non ha avuto la fortuna critica di Verga, né la sua posizione nel canone è paragonabile a quella del suo conterraneo e amico, rispetto a cui viene sempre visto come secondario. Spesso definito in senso negativo 'naturalista' invece che autentico verista" (2009, 94). Indeed, Carzaniga writes: "It is doubtful whether anyone would now read his fiction had he not taken such a vigorous and controversial role in the literary debates of his time" (2003, 70-1). The discrepancy between Verga's and Capuana's popularity is proven also by the discrepancy in number and relevance of the attempts to translate their work. Translators such as Santi Buscemi (Capuana 2013a), have recently been trying to fill the gap. Interestingly, some of Capuana's collections of fairy tales, such as *C'era una volta* (1882), and a few short stories, such as the Gothic story "Un vampiro" ([1904] 1974c, 203-21), have been slightly more appealing to translators from shortly after their publication, as shown by the existence of the anonymous collection of translations *Once Upon a Time: Fairy Tales Translated from the Italian of Luigi Capuana* (1892b) and an early translation of *Nimble-Legs. A Story for Boys (Scurpiddu, 1898)*. The point about the overall scarcity of Capuana studies in the Anglosphere is made clearly by Hiller (2009, 168). This argument can be supported by looking at the comparatively limited space dedicated to Capuana in comprehensive overviews of Italian literature such as the *Cambridge History* ("The Literature of United Italy, 1870-1910") in which no more than half a page

diocre novelist forms the basis of early neo-Crocean biographical profiles such as Luigi Russo's ([1923] 1951), histories of literature such as Attilio Momigliano's ([1935] 1962), and critical analyses in genre studies such as Paul Arrighi's *Le vérisme dans la prose narrative italienne* (1937). The same imbalance is to be found in many of the later seminal and, to varying degrees, Marxist-informed genre studies on *Verismo* as a literary movement, such as those by Mario Pomilio (1963), Roberto Bigazzi (1969) and Marina Musitelli Paladini (1974) as well as the two volumes of proceedings *Naturalismo e Verismo* (1988). A Marxist approach, increasingly popular in the post Second World War Italian intellectual *milieu*,<sup>6</sup> had revived interest in socio-economic reality in general and therefore 'realistic' literature in particular, which was regarded, however naively, as the cultural artefact that best allows one to reflect on that reality. Those essays thus appear to be intrinsically more preoccupied with investigating the literary category of realism and its (mostly) class-related implications than exploring Capuana's fiction-making endeavours themselves. These contributions focus mainly on his critical work and discuss the part played by Capuana's seven major collections of essays in "la nascita d[ella] [...] poetica veris[ta]" (Musitelli Paladini 1974, 9), while making very clear that "tra la teoria e la pratica" (90), of Capuana the narrator "il passo è [...] lunghissimo" (90). But even the largely (Post) Marxist-informed Italian criticism of the Sixties and Seventies, and more sporadically, the Eighties, which focused more extensively and 'monographically' on Capuana, persisted in assessing him and his *oeuvre* in a rather reductive and ultimately unproductive light: in the works of such critics as Gaetano Trombatore (1949), Vittorio Spinazzola (1970) and Enrico Ghidetti (1982), Capuana's narrative work, once again, comes across as the output of a mediocre narrative talent and, what will prove to be even worse for his future reception, the output of a rather narrow-minded, right-wing conservative, land-owning bourgeois.

Such a (comparative) marginalisation of the figure of Capuana as a narrator and a creative writer in those years and in that Marx-

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(Dombroski 1997, 463-4) is dedicated to Capuana, as opposed to the five pages dedicated to Verga (1997, 464-9).

**6** The increased popularity of this critical approach was partly due to the translation of György Lukács' *Saggi sul realismo* (1950) and *Il marxismo e la critica letteraria* (1953). Whilst the early debate on *Verismo* was particularly lively at mid-century - with comprehensive works such as Marzot 1941 - the categories of *Verismo* and Naturalism have continued to be studied in monographic contributions in more recent years: it will suffice to mention Carnazzi 1996; Pagano 1999; Petronio 2003; Luperini 2007; and Pellini 2010, among others. In all these works, too, Capuana is taken into consideration primarily for his theoretical production and, amongst these, Pellini's view of Capuana is a rather exemplary one: a "narratore modesto e teorico tutt'altro che originale" (2010, 11), characterised by a "disimpegno [...] ammantato di scrupoli formalistici" (76). See also Merola 2006, particularly the chapter "Modernità del romanzo naturalista" (21-53) and, on Capuana and Pirandello in relation to the *Verismo* movement, Salsano 2005, 2006.

ist cultural terrain is, in fact, not only of a 'technical' nature, as is made apparent for instance by Gaetano Trombatore's classic *Riflessi letterari del Risorgimento in Sicilia* (1970), which expresses perplexities of an ideological kind about Capuana's contribution to the *verista* cause. *Riflessi letterari* praises the civic engagement of "il verismo economico del Verga" (30),<sup>7</sup> while, at the same time, criticising Capuana for his social and ethical detachment: "[il] non [avere visto] mai nel verismo nulla più che un fatto strettamente letterario" (76). The basis of Trombatore's appraisal is a synthesis of the theory of *Verismo* in three elements: "documento umano, procedimento scientifico e linguaggio" (81). *Verismo's* potential was enormous, because "un saggio uso della [sua] formula" could have led to a deep understanding of the whole human condition as being dependent on "una particolare struttura economico sociale" (84). However, Capuana circumscribes the *verista* formula exclusively, "nell'ambito [...] della sua accezione scientifica" (82), and represents "fatti di ordine [...] eccezionale e patologico [...] con accento [...] obbiettivo e scientifico" (83) but without an adequate socio-economic perspective, or, even worse, he deliberately avoids any socio-economic implications.<sup>8</sup> Such a contention also informs the major monograph by Carlo Alberto Madrignani (1970). Madrignani's work remains invaluable for its contextualisation of Capuana's *naturalismo* and the analysis of pivotal naturalist works such as *Giacinta* and it can be regarded as a testament to the pervasiveness of some 'ideologically biased' views in relation to Capuana's works. What is symptomatic of Madrignani's biases is the actual period covered by his book, which is directly determined by the ideological stance informing his work. *Capuana e il naturalismo* (1970) based its rather narrow selection of narrative texts, which revolves around the novels *Giacinta* and *Profumo* and the short stories written in-between, on the assumption that Capuana had little to offer after *Profumo* (1890; 1892c), either from the standpoint of theoretical insightfulness, narrative complexity or ideological coherence (Madrignani 1970, 248).

A paradigm-changing hypothesis that helped reorient the direction of Capuana studies was put forward by Judith Davies (1979). Davies' monograph, the third and last one in English after the far less influential works by Traversa (1968) and Scalia (1952), encompassed all five of Capuana's major novels, including *La Sfinge* (1895 in episodes and 1897 in volume), *Rassegnazione* ([1907] 2000), and his widely recognised masterpiece, *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* ([1901] 1999b). Davies' appraisal partly contested the so-called *involuzione*

<sup>7</sup> And Trombatore 1970, 84. A similar argument is to be found in the almost coeval Tanteri 1971, 4, 49 and in Pomilio 1963, 124.

<sup>8</sup> These words echo Patruno's (1985, 53).

(7) of an author who had been regarded, after *Profumo*, as culturally irrelevant in the rapidly changing *fin-de-siècle* literary landscape (Mazzamuto 1969, 986; Mauro 1971, 13; Luti 1954 and 1973, VII). Davies' major thesis is twofold: on the one hand, she takes issue with this assessment of a "career which may be divided chronologically" (153). She maintains, rather, that there is continuity in Capuana's ideological positioning and, at the same time, that there is a persistent duality involving his positivist rationalism inflected by Hegelianism, which surfaced, in varying degrees, as the Italian and European cultural scenes shifted and presented new challenges. On the other hand, Davies claims that for just over a decade Capuana pursued what has been critically regarded, in what is in itself a rather reductive way, as an 'orthodox' naturalist practice *à la* Zola. In this period 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" (1879), "Precocità" (1884), "Tortura" (1888), to be grouped together in two collections: the early *Storia fosca* ([1883] 1974a, 171-231) and, later, *Le appassionate* (1893). Davies highlights "how brief was in fact [the 'naturalist period'] the period when scientific materialism seemed to offer Capuana a total approach to reality", and yet how: "Capuana was involved not so much in an ideological *volte-face*, as, right from the beginning, in [...] the compromise of his *hegelmismo scientifico* which remained constant throughout his career, though the changing climate of the times served to emphasise its different components in succession" (1979, 7). In so doing, her work bestows upon the 'rest' of Capuana's body of work a literary 'dignity' and status it had, on the whole, never before enjoyed.

Davies' study marked what may be described as "La riscoperta di Capuana" (Colicchi 1980). It managed to reignite a critical interest in the author that (very) gradually extended to incorporate the totality of his work, including the until then semi-ignored essays on the themes of Spiritualism and the Occult (Capuana [1884] 1995 and [1896] 1995), the several collections of fairy tales, the theatre in Italian and dialect, the idealist experiments *La Sfinge* (1897) and *Rassegnazione* ([1907] 2000), the eclectic *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* ([1901] 1999a), and his children's novels, *Gambalesta* ([1903] 2010), *Scurpiddu* ([1898] 2013b), *Cardello* ([1907] 2009a), *Gli americani di Ràbbato* (1912). Critics also gradually came to acknowledge the existence of a corpus of short stories that ranges well beyond the two traditional themes of physiopathology – epitomised by *Le appassionate* ([1893] 1974a, 253-499) – and rural Sicilian peasant life – epitomised by *Le paesane* ([1894] 1974b, 3-255) – and covers a wide variety of topics, from science and science fiction (for example, in the collection *Un vampiro* [1904] 1974c, 199-236) to psychological investigation

and (overtly) self-reflexive fiction (particularly the collections *Il decameroncino*, 1901, *Coscienze*, 1905, and *La volontà di creare*, 1911).

All of these eclectic materials were gradually brought to light again in a critical scene that was not only increasingly curious and oriented towards (perceived) 'minor writers' but also increasingly ambitious from a theoretical standpoint. As a peculiar consequence of re-discovering new 'primary sources' at a time of overall shifts in Italian studies (and in literary studies and the humanities by and large), for a number of years now, Capuana scholarship has also been developing in diverse methodological directions, through a few monographic studies (the little-known Guarnieri 2012,<sup>9</sup> and the aforementioned and by-now widely disseminated Michelacci 2015), conference proceedings (*Capuana Verista* 1984; Picone, Rossetti 1990; Marchese 2015), edited collections (Scarano 1985) and some translations (Capuana 2013a, 2014, 2016), but mostly through individual essays. Each of these works, in its own way, has emphasised the presence and 'weight' of Capuana in *fin-de-siècle* Italian culture and literature. They have also clarified his contributions in pioneering the modern and contemporary style of "giornalismo letterario" (Oliva 1979, 187) with his work for *La Nazione*, and, with his *Semiritmi* (1888a), the form of the "verso libero",<sup>10</sup> as well as the fairy tale genre, the Italian *giallo* and the genre of *letteratura fantascientifica*, which developed in Italy when the traction gained by Positivism declined.

Whilst I have attempted elsewhere, and in different settings, to give an overview of the new landscape of *capuanistica* as it presents itself to scholars today, my aim here is simultaneously 'narrower' – in that I omit a detailed discussion of some individual titles – and yet more ambitious theoretically, in that I attempt an illustration, however necessarily cursory, of how the individual methodologies and the individual themes that have been the building blocks of the subfield of Capuana studies have progressively come closer to one another and mutually hybridised in a way that renders *capuanistica* more relevant within Italian studies and this study's chosen angle of self-reflexivity more compelling within *capuanistica* itself. In fact, proving this very hybridisation consolidates the 'status' of Capuana studies itself within the landscape of Italian studies, by showing how studying Capuana is far from an archaeo-philological indulgence towards a *minore*. It is an exegetic tool to cut through the entire breadth of intellectual production in Liberal Italy, both chronologically (1865-1915) and from the point of view of literature and culture. It also pro-

<sup>9</sup> Alberico Guarnieri's *Sulla narrativa siciliana di Luigi Capuana* (2012) is worth mentioning with regard to Capuana's explicitly Sicilian works. Yet, in my view, it is far less useful critically, owing to its almost complete lack of theoretical framework and somewhat impressionistic approach to the texts. The same applies to Montanari 2006.

<sup>10</sup> On *Semiritmi* (1888a) see, for instance, Morace 1999 and Miliucci 2014.

vides a way to traverse and expand upon the many methodological facets of contemporary Italian studies.

## 1.2 History and Philology

Despite the fact that the Archivio of the Biblioteca Capuana in Mineo has long been difficult to access (Palermo 1979, 23), the work of the Fondazione Verga and the Italian academy in general, following a mainly, but not exclusively, historical-philological orientation, has led to discoveries of new authorial materials even in very recent years, as well as to accurate and comparative *studi delle fonti*. Over the years, a number of special issues have been published by the *Annali della Fondazione Verga*, featuring work on manuscripts from the Archivio, as well as contributions on specific topics such as the remarkable volume on the *Risorgimento*, edited by Giuseppe Sorbello, *L’Unità d’Italia nella rappresentazione dei veristi* (2012b).<sup>11</sup> Capuana has also recently been at the core of a welcome, however belated, ‘institutional’ interest – the same interest that has already involved major figures of *Verismo* such as Verga: in 2009 the monumental series of volumes of the *Edizione nazionale delle opere di Luigi Capuana* opened with a collection of his *Cronache teatrali*, edited by renowned ‘Capuanist’ Gianni Oliva.<sup>12</sup> From the angle of bibliographical investigation, in 2016 Mario Bocola updated the first full bibliography on Capuana by Gino Raya (1969), with his extremely comprehensive *Bibliografia di Luigi Capuana: 1968-2015* (2016), which had the additional merit of going beyond national boundaries. Yet, history and philology have become increasingly intertwined with other, less philological approaches: an essentially philological *ratio* is, for example, at the basis of some otherwise pervasively thematic contributions revolving around (female) characterisation such as that by Paul Barnaby (1991), who reinterprets some aspects of the novel *Giacinta* by following the ‘authorial variations’ throughout its three major editorial versions (1879, 1886, 1889). A similar approach also informs Enrica Rossetti’s “Il romanzo teatrale nei saggi critici di Capuana”

<sup>11</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. In this context, works by such scholars as Bertazzoli (1983); De Cesare (1992, 1997); Durante (1998); Bocola (1999); Sardo (2008); Bellini (2011); Meli (2012); Di Silvestro (2012); Marchese (2015); and Cassola (2015) should be noted. The Fondazione has also worked ‘monographically’ on Capuana’s theatre, on which see the contributions by Muscariello (77-90), Nay (91-134) and Pasquini (135-52) in *Il teatro verista* (vol. 1, 2007), and individual essays such as the lengthy Sanfilippo 2008, as well as Morace 2015 and Nicastro 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Under the direction of philologist Gianvito Resta. Among Oliva’s important contributions on Capuana’s theatre, see also Oliva 1999 and Capuana 1999c.



(1990) and, more recently Ambra Carta's *Il romanzo italiano moderno: Dossi e Capuana* (2008), both of which, drawing on Davies, investigate the idea of Capuana's prose as shifting progressively towards an intermediate form of 'theatrical novel', through mapping the varying proportions between direct and indirect discourse in the main editions of *Giacinta*.

Likewise, along lines that can also be regarded as partly historical-philological and partly 'cultural', Capuana's intellectual background and the philosophical influences on his poetics have been another crucial feature of the renewed interest in the author and his *oeuvre*. Croce's initial argument, stressing the alleged theoretical contradictions 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* – had long been the foundation for assessing the author's poetics. Drawing on Croce's early argument, Trombatore (1949), Palermo (1964) and Navarra (1968) endeavoured to further examine the nuances of that hybrid mentorship. Palermo suggested that a way of understanding how Capuana could integrate such different philosophical traditions into a relatively coherent system is that of looking at the common matrix of his two inspirations. Palermo's essay is the first to highlight that "nonostante una precisa testimonianza diretta, quella del Capuana stesso [...], quasi nessuno degli studiosi che si sono occupati di lui ha dato il necessario peso all'incontro Capuana-Hegel" (350), which played a central role in instilling in Capuana's poetics "il concetto delle forme artistiche e del loro svolgimento nella storia" (350). Palermo claims that Capuana's undoubtedly articulate but sometimes contradictory attempts to accommodate materialism and idealism holistically into the same theory of artistic forms began after encountering Hegel first-hand, and benefitted greatly from the encounter with De Meis' philosophical novel *Dopo la laurea* (1868 and 2005 in English, see Traversa 2005). In fact, De Meis' idea of equating the (Hegelian) evolution of the forms of art in history with the biological development of a living organism (which Capuana assimilates) can be regarded as the most striking evidence of this attempt to merge two fundamentally different philosophical inspirations. Despite Palermo's contention, most later critics – starting with Madrignani<sup>13</sup> – have argued that Capuana never really dared to address the monumental Hegelian system directly, filtering it exclusively through De Sanctis' and De Meis' appropriations. In order to dismiss the hypothesis of a direct influence of Hegel's texts on Capuana's, it has been customary to refer to Capuana's essay *Spiritismo?* (1884), in which Capuana claims to be a *dilettante* when it comes

**13** See Madrignani: "Rimane il fatto che una vera svolta hegeliana non si avverte durante gli anni delle recensioni teatrali [...] il che non esclude che a Firenze sia avvenuta una qualche lettura hegeliana, magari saltuaria" (1970, 50).

to philosophical speculations.<sup>14</sup> These arguments, however, seem to deliberately overrate the quasi-Horatian *protestationes modestiae* on Capuana’s part, while overlooking those instances in which his intellectual indebtedness to Hegel’s texts is most clearly declared.<sup>15</sup>

In line with Palermo’s argument, recent critics, such as Silvio Balloni, have provided philological 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” (2007, 136-7).<sup>16</sup> Christina Petraglia’s “*Il marchese-contadino*” (2010; emphasis in original), once again combining historical-philological close reading and a philosophical take enriched by cultural studies, has suggested an insightful ‘Hegelian’ reading of the master-servant dynamics in Capuana’s *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*. Petraglia’s close textual analysis draws on a specific section of Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), the famous “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage”, in which the German philosopher expresses his well-known theory of the master-slave dialectic. This reassessment of Hegel’s *oeuvre* as directly and heavily woven into Capuana’s fictional and non-fictional work alike is of particular consequence for this study. Its importance cannot be overstated, as it lays the philosophical foundation on which the core interpretative proposition presented in these pages is built.

### 1.3 Ideology

In line with the steady rise of cultural studies and of what can be generally termed ‘ideological criticism’ in recent decades, the cultural features of gender, class and race – and intersectional combinations thereof – have also been gaining prominence within the field of Capuana studies. In particular, just as a certain degree of ideological ‘bias’ was a very important factor in shaping the field of Capuana studies in its early stages, ideology has remained topical at the (present) moment of attempting to disentangle the field from those very biases.

<sup>14</sup> “In filosofia ero la medesima cosa che in storia naturale, [...] cioè un curioso e nient’altro, un dilettaante e nient’altro” (Capuana 1884, 131). “Mi ero buttato alla filosofia [...] [a] *La fenomenologia dello Spirito* del gran pensatore di Stutgarda, benché mal masticata e mal digerita [...]. Non afferravo (ci voleva ben altro che i miei denti!) tutta quella meravigliosa astrazione” (130).

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Sportelli 1950, 39.

<sup>16</sup> To support his argument, Balloni quotes directly from Capuana’s private correspondence (2007, 137).

The reassessment of Capuana's ideological critique is a major element of Annamaria 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 positivistica" (1997), as well as in most of Paul Barnaby's 'Italianist' work (1997, 2000, 2001, 2004). Barnaby endeavours to expand on both Trombatore's and Pagliaro's post-*Risorgimento*, nation-building angle (1997), through emphasising the allegorical levels and religious backdrop of some of the novels, such as *La Sfinge* ([1897b] 2012), *Profumo* (1890, 1892c) and *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* ([1901] 1999a). The same nation-building approach has also been followed by Franco Manai,<sup>17</sup> who extensively and primarily explored Capuana's conceptualisation of class. Similarly, Salvina Monaco (2012b) and Lara Michelacci (2017) have also focused on the question of Capuana's purportedly conservative ideology as it is reflected in his quasi-scientific explorations and/or his representation of the Sicilian working-classes within the context of the coeval political upheavals in Sicily. Monaco (2012a, 2019) in particular delivers a detailed historical analysis of Capuana's political leanings and his increasingly inflexible and belligerent "crispismo" at the turn of the twentieth century, that is, his Francesco Crispi-inspired right-wing conservative ideology.

Similarly, 'ideological' work has been done on Capuana as a writer of fairy tales. This scholarly line draws on early works by Gabriella Congiu Marchese (1982), Giuseppina Romagnoli Robuschi (1969), Anna Barsotti (1984); Enrico Malato (1990) and Roberto Fedi (1990, 1997). More recently Gina Miele, with her essays "Through the Looking Glass: A Consideration of Luigi Capuana's *fiabe*" (2009b), and "Luigi Capuana: Unlikely Spinner of Fairy Tales?" (2009a), has highlighted the *verista* aspects of Capuana's *fiabe*, and also their thinly veiled social commentary. These works, on the whole, explore Capuana's techniques in relation to the values promoted more or less explicitly by his texts.<sup>18</sup> The educational features in some of Capuana's *romanzi per ragazzi* have been compellingly analysed by Rosaria Sardo (2010), while Alberto Carli has focused more broadly on the intersection of journalism and children's literature (2007, 2012, 2015) and also on their connection with Capuana's involvement in education (2011).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Manai 1992, 1995, 1997; and, to a lesser extent, also 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Along the same lines, one should also mention Nicolò Mineo (2015), who focuses specifically on Capuana's last published collection of fairy tales.

<sup>19</sup> On his collaboration with the educational publisher Rocco Carabba, see Luciana Pasquini's "Introduzione" to Capuana's *Racconti per ragazzi, 1901-1913* (2010); Oster (2015), who analyses Capuana's representation of Sicily within a discussion of North vs South Italian and European public narratives; and the contributions on Capuana and the *Risorgimento* movement by Durante (2012) and Longo (2012).

The latest development in this ideological debate has been provided – within a postcolonial framework and drawing, to some extent, on earlier works by Lucia Re (2009) and Pietro Mazzamuto (1996) – by Virga's recent monograph (2017b, see also 2017a and 2019) as well as individual essays such as those by Zuccala (2018b) and Poggioli-Kaftan (2018). Here some of Capuana's texts are reread, poststructurally, not as the obtusely conservative reactions of a threatened exponent of the conservative elite but as the product of the hybrid socio-ethno-cultural position of an intellectual torn between the ideological framework of the hegemonic national ruling elite and the peripheral world of the rural Sicilian subaltern classes. This postcolonial approach is indeed only one of the cultural turns<sup>20</sup> that have invested Capuana studies after affecting Italian studies as a whole.

#### 1.4 Gender and Intermedial 'Turns'

Another very significant area of investigation, prompted by the consolidation of gender studies within Italian studies over the last few decades, is the analysis of female representation and, more broadly, gender dynamics in Capuana's texts. As seen, in early criticism and 'classic' monographs, the attention to these themes was, on the whole, in the form of scattered references, thematic clusters and individual, 'canonised' characters such as Giacinta. Likewise, it is within the conceptual and chronological boundaries of the naturalistic 'phase' of Capuana's fictional production – as canonised by Madrignani, Traversa and Davies (in the 1880s) – that gender-focused contributions have proliferated in recent years.

Scholars such as Annamaria Cavalli Pasini (1982, 2015), Federica Adriano (2010, 2014), Edwige Comoy Fusaro (2007, 2019), Valeria Pappalardo (1995), Dora Marchese (2009), Lara Michelacci (2015)<sup>21</sup> and Ambra Carta (2019) have explored what earlier critics had classified generically as a 'scientific' interest or 'psychological' approach. Cavalli Pasini and Adriano suggest detailed linkages between the symptoms mostly manifested by Capuana's female characters and the findings of medical science in the late nineteenth century, which – as Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978) illustrates – had deeply permeated European cultural and literary discourse. Along the same

<sup>20</sup> I draw on Ponzanesi 2012. For a more comprehensive take on cultural turns, see Bachmann-Medick 2016. Amongst other recent contributions using 'turn' in relation to Italian studies see Bond 2014.

<sup>21</sup> See Pappalardo 1995; and Michelacci 2015, especially the chapters on *Giacinta* (45-77) and *Profumo* (79-115).

lines, such works as Pappalardo (1997),<sup>22</sup> Comoy Fusaro (2001), and Olive (2001) suggest that Capuana not only assimilated and applied the then most advanced physiological notions to his literary investigations of the human psyche, but also reelaborated and expanded upon these notions in a way that foreshadowed Freudian and Jungian intuitions. These critics argue, for instance, that there is an Oedipus complex at the basis of *Profumo's* mother-son bond, and that the Freudian notion of "la reminiscenza del trauma" (Comoy Fusaro 2001, 125) can be seen in Giacinta's behaviour after being abused, while "l'esistenza della sessualità infantile" (126) can be found in the flashback to Patrizio's childhood in *Profumo* as well as in the short story "Precocità" ([1884] 1974a, 333-42).<sup>23</sup>

In tune, once again, with a general shift in Italian studies – and in the study of modern languages, for that matter – towards interdisciplinarity in general and intermediality in particular, scholars have begun to look at Capuana's writing in relation to other art forms. The studies by Antonio Di Silvestro (1999), Sarah Hill (2004), Giuseppe Sorbello (2008, 2012a, 2014), Giuliana Minghelli (2009), and very recently Comoy Fusaro (2018) as well as, more tangentially, Gussago and Zuccala (2019) argue that the appreciation for the new *medium* of photography that Capuana shared with his fellow *veristi* is most useful in understanding some features of *Verismo* itself and its ambition to 'capture' reality objectively and without bias but not merely as an exact 'photography-like' reproduction. Anna Maria Damigella's monograph, *Capuana e le arti figurative* (2012) – along with essays such as Annamaria Loria's "Luigi Capuana e Sebastiano Del Piombo" (2005) – extends this line of research to Capuana's overall relationship with the visual arts and adds to the already established image of an eclectic Capuana, at once photographer, "disegnatore e pupazzettista" (Damigella 2012, 13) and performer of "esperimenti di incisione" (21). Among the aspects that these studies have brought to the fore is the predominance of women as privileged artistic subjects for all of his activities, from photography to drawing and printmaking.<sup>24</sup> In so doing, this line of enquiry, too, cor-

<sup>22</sup> See also 2003.

<sup>23</sup> The same psychoanalytical approach is also at the basis of Mazzoni 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, recent critics such as Laura Marullo have acknowledged the importance of the female characters in Capuana's theatrical production. Marullo firstly observes that "il teatro costituisce una presenza costante dell'affollata, operosa officina di Luigi Capuana" and that "scorrendo la produzione teatrale del mineolo è possibile tracciare l'evoluzione di una poetica, delineare un percorso" which is "specchio fedele del periodo di crisi e di lento mutamento di gusto" (Marullo 2011, 1) in *fin-de-siècle* Italian literature. Secondly, she outlines a close connection between theatrical practice and female representation, affirming that "vi si accampa, protagonista assoluto, l'universo femminile con le sue convulsioni psicologiche, con le sue accese passioni, col suo ipertrofico sentire" (1). This 'double correspondence', which closely links female figures and theatrical production and the latter, in turn, with Capuana's overall artistic devel-

roborates the earlier but undeveloped contentions and intuitions (see for instance Mazzamuto 1996; Madrignani 2007) that “la miriade di personaggi femminili” (Ghidetti 1982, 71) might, in fact, be the catalyst of Capuana’s poetics<sup>25</sup> beyond the Crocean canonised paradigm of the female *caso psicopatologico* epitomised by *Giacinta*.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.5 Occultism

An additional and, for the purpose of this relatively concise overview, concluding example of how ‘traditional’ and ‘philological’ Capuana studies have been evolving both by revising the primary sources taken into account and by hybridising and merging with different methodologies, often ‘imported’ (from the Anglosphere), is constituted by the study of Capuana’s interest in *occultismo*. The then popular theme of *il mondo occulto*, the unknown world of supernatural beings, the comprehension of which escaped (official) nineteenth-century scientific knowledge, was fundamental to Capuana’s intellectual quest and well-represented in his entire *oeuvre*, but it has captured critics’ attention only in recent times and only in a rather compartmentalised fashion. Nearly non-existent until the mid-Nineties, this line of enquiry in-

opment, works in itself as a supporting element for claiming, as this study aims to do, the centrality of female characterisation in the evolution of, and the changes within, Capuana’s literary theory (and practice).

**25** Pietro Mazzamuto, for instance (1996, 107-12), sharply frames his study of the short story “Parola di donna” ([1902] 1974c, 5-44) within a broader discussion of the ideological relevance of Capuana’s female characters: “Il personaggio femminile è forse quello che rinvia, meglio del personaggio maschile, a tutta la poetica narrativa e teatrale del Capuana, perché è, tra l’altro, il personaggio che scandisce via via il suo itinerario ideologico e documenta appieno la mobile immagine psicologica e culturale dello scrittore mineolo” (1996, 107). In this observation, an explicit correspondence – though cautious and undeveloped – is drawn between female characterisation and different stages of Capuana’s fictional production, poetological ideas and ideological leanings. Others have since pointed out this very correspondence. For example, Madrignani, in his later *Effetto Sicilia* (2007), comments: “Fra i meriti di Capuana c’è di aver intuito con il suo fiuto di *conteur à la page* che il tema-donna si offriva come una zona di frontiera e di sperimentazione e di aver cercato, con temeraria facilità, di penetrare nei fantasmi dell’‘altro’ – per identificarli, ed esorcizzarli” (85). Lara Michelacci (2015) also speaks of “la donna che è misura di un’identità conflittuale” (16). So does Monica Farnetti’s “‘Pathologia amoris’”: “Capuana sembra non esente dalla tentazione di assumere a sua volta la donna quale possibile figura di interpretazione di un’epoca: a giudicare almeno dalla frequenza con cui i personaggi femminili si presentano alla ribalta della sua narrativa” (1992, 254). Madrignani’s, Michelacci’s and Farnetti’s remarks on women’s centrality in Capuana’s shifting artistic and social conceptualisation, like Mazzamuto’s, point to the scholarly need, here addressed in part, of investigating further such link.

**26** Enrico Ghidetti’s *L’ipotesi del realismo: Capuana, Verga, Valera* (1982) still represents a good example of a critical tradition that has constantly explained female characterisation in a rather cursory and univocal way. It has highlighted Capuana’s “accentuata predilezione per la psicologia femminile” (69), and acknowledged that, among his many female characters, “un posto eminente occupa [...] *Giacinta*” (71).

creased substantially following both Simona Cigliana's critical edition of Capuana's works related to Spiritualism (1995) and Mario Tropea's extensive exegetic work spanning two decades (1994, 2000, 2015). This interest engendered a particularly productive, progressive examination of Capuana's *spiritismo*-related practices in conjunction with the development of his artistic theories and, later, his fiction.<sup>27</sup> Capuana's short stories on the topic are countless and range - in Mario Tropea's words - "dalle teorie della reincarnazione [...] al vampirismo [...] al sonnambulismo [...] alle magnetizzazioni [...] alle presenze misteriose nelle case infestate [...] alle apparizioni [...] alle animazioni di statue e osmosi di vite nelle opere d'arte [...] alle premonizioni [...] alle sopravvivenze fluidiche dei corpi" (1994, 20). These short stories and their *occulto*-related themes have been investigated either individually or collectively by critics such as Della Coletta (1995), Leone (1998), and Tropea himself. Within the same investigative stream, other critics, such as Giannetti-Karsienti (1996), Loria (2006), Foni (2007) and Comoy Fusaro (2009, 79-160)<sup>28</sup> have progressively endeavoured to highlight the link between the *occulto* and the theory of art, by connecting Capuana's reflections on the mystery of the supernatural world with those on the impenetrability of the creative act. This line of criticism has very recently hinted at the link between the theme of the Occult and female characterisation, most explicitly in Michelacci's latest essay (2019), where the critic draws a parallel between Capuana's experiments with evocation, by means of a female *medium*, and his literary, naturalistic representations of female *documenti umani*. This threefold tangle of *occulto*, theory of fiction and female characterisation - however still undeveloped, especially regarding the limited spectrum of primary sources considered - will prove very useful as a foundation for the following portion of this study. It will function as a springboard for my analysis of Capuana's narrativisation of his theories as it emerges - with various degrees of clarity and sophistication - from his early work until his latest collections, completed and published well into the twentieth century.

In sum, what seems to have characterised the critical discourse in Capuana studies in the last few decades is a concerted attempt to re-configure both the spectrum of Capuana's production and the variety of scholarly approaches to it, following criteria other than adherence to the principles and practices of *Verismo*. This approach has brought to light many lesser known texts by Capuana and led to a critical reas-

<sup>27</sup> The republication of the essay was followed by editions of some of his collections of short stories, such as *Novelle inverosimili* (1999b), *Novelle del mondo occulto* (2007) and *Quattro viaggi straordinari* (1992). These testify to the renewed interest in both *occultismo* and *fantastico*. On Capuana and the themes of 'otherness' and 'double', see also Pappalardo and Brunetti 1981.

<sup>28</sup> See also Corradi 2019, 210, which offers a broader contextualisation.

assessment of single works or even clusters of works, previously ignored or dismissed. Critics have also followed the numerous ramifications of Capuana's interests in order to highlight how the author's "production culturale hybride" (Comoy Fusaro 2010) and his "sperimentalismo" (Storti Abate 1989, 107; Cenati 2007) have had a lasting effect on the Italian literary and cultural scene. The profile that emerges from this latest phase of Capuana studies is, in Corrado Pestelli's words, that of a "post-*verista*" author (Pestelli 1991, 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, most of these critics have not only foregrounded Capuana's experimentalism but also 'applied' their own, by deploying various and innovative critical approaches - ranging from enhanced philology to postcolonial theory and translation studies - and thus acknowledging the diverse and intriguingly complex nature of Capuana's production. In so doing, *capuanistica* has been further hybridised geographically, insofar as it has incorporated methodologies developed (as well as scholars working) outside the Italian academy for the most part. Moreover, the importance of both the theory-practice intersection and female characterisation as a "catalizzatore" (Cedola 2006, 160) have been progressively emphasised as being necessarily at the centre of any further investigation into *capuanistica*.

On these bases, this study sets out to further develop this phase of enquiry into the multifarious nature of Capuana's work. It does so from an angle - that of self-reflexivity - that is as apparently counter-intuitive to the notion of *Verismo* (see above) as it is methodologically 'foreign' to the Italian tradition, but which is also self-evidently right at the core of the theory-practice-female characterisation tangle. The study therefore attempts to (re)examine in an ever more nuanced way how Capuana's experimentalism and eclectic interests respond to one another as well as to late nineteenth-century intellectual trends.

## 1.6 Structure of This Study

Following the way *capuanistica* itself has progressed in recent years, this study is organised along two main exegetic trajectories: one developing the questions of "gender and narrative"<sup>29</sup> - or, rather, the three-fold knot of gender, narrative and theory - in Capuana, and the other looking diachronically at the link and, as will become pro-

<sup>29</sup> This formula, taken from LHN, can be retailed specifically for Capuana: "The (historically contingent) ways in which sex, gender, and/or sexuality might shape both [Capuana's] narrative texts themselves and [...] [his] theories through which readers and scholars approach them" (Lanser 2013).



gressively apparent, the tension between theorisation and practice in Capuana's production.

As to the former hermeneutic link, Capuana studies as a whole have clearly and convincingly moved beyond an exclusive *naturalista* framework and towards a more articulate set of approaches, concerned with the nuances not only of Capuana's theory but also of his narrative techniques and his social conceptualisation. Yet the same cannot convincingly be said of the studies of his female characterisation. These remain, with a few, albeit notable, very recent exceptions, restricted to the works of the naturalist period: mainly *Giacinta*, *Profumo* and the *racconti* in-between.<sup>30</sup> Acknowledging recent intuitions on the theme of gender, in fact, is not to say that gender is now to be considered exhaustively covered by *capuanistica*. On the contrary, the overarching scholarly answer to the question of what part female characterisation plays in Capuana's narrative seems, after all, to have remained by and large quite univocal. Women are – the critical corpus seems to assert – either the primary focus (*Giacinta*, naturalist *racconti*, most of his theatrical pieces), or the collateral objects (*Profumo*, *Il Marchese*, *La Sfinge*) of Capuana's scientific *études de femme*.<sup>31</sup> It seems, in fact, that much work remains to be done with regard to periods and narrative works that are beyond the (perceived) boundaries of *naturalismo* and it is precisely this 'counter-canonical' route that the first part of this work will take, through the lens of 'metanarrative tension'.

On the other hand, as far as the theory-practice dichotomy goes, the sheer number of Capuana's creative and non-creative efforts has meant that there are still comparatively 'minor' works – or those perceived as such, for example the collection of short stories *Fausto Bragia e altre novelle* (1897), as well as the isolated autobiographical piece *Ricordi di infanzia e di giovinezza* ([1893] 2005) – to which insufficient critical attention has hitherto been paid. The second portion of the body of my analysis is devoted to this particular line of enquiry, once again through the lens of narrative self-consciousness.

Finally, in the context of the aforementioned 'grand' methodological shifts that have been taking place in *capuanistica*, one line of criticism does not seem to have been explored as thoroughly as it could be. One could argue that such an impressive corpus could potentially be approached along the lines of the increasingly pervasive methods that are commonly referred to as "distant reading" (Moret-

<sup>30</sup> Most critics seem to have retained the naturalist criterion even in addressing, for example, such characters as those of Agrippina Solmo in *Marchese* or Fulvia in *La Sfinge*, who would not belong to the naturalist phase from a rigidly chronological standpoint. Such characters, therefore, end up among the environmental causes – the Zolian *milieu* – or the symptoms of a pathology that triggers the (often) male characters' self-destruction.

<sup>31</sup> See also Michelacci 2016.

ti 2013). While the discursive nature and internal economy of this specific study do not lend themselves, in my estimation, to the direct application of Information and Communication Technology and Digital Humanities per se,<sup>32</sup> in the concluding part of the study I nonetheless attempt to retain the insights gained from the idea of distant reading, which are indeed those of distance and 'distancing oneself' (Moretti 2017) from the individual close reading of the individual text. I do so with the aim - once again, through the prism of self-reflexivity - of foregrounding overarching patterns and 'mapping' or 'charting' trends in a literary corpus - Capuana's - spanning over half a century and several hundred pieces of writing.

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**32** I have in fact recently attempted to do exactly that elsewhere: see Musgrave, Zuccala 2019.