



**SPUNTI E RICERCHE**

Naturalism  
and  
Beyond

Fragmentation and  
transformations  
of the real

edited by  
**Annamaria Pagliaro**  
and  
**Antonio Di Grado**

**Volume 19**

SPUNTI E RICERCHE

VOLUME 19 2004

# SPUNTI E RICERCHE

Volume 19 – 2004 (published in 2006)

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*Naturalism and Beyond: Fragmentation and transformations of the real*

*Spunti e Ricerche* vol. 19 2004

Edited by Annamaria Pagliaro and Antonio Di Grado

Published by members of the divisions of Italian Studies  
La Trobe University and Monash University: Melbourne, Australia

ISBN: 978-0-9803109-0-0

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Typesetting by Veronica Peek, Preston, Victoria.  
Printed by La Trobe University Press.

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The editors wish to express their gratitude to Prof Simonetta Magnani, Director of the Italian Institute of Culture in Melbourne, for the support given to *Spunti e Ricerche*.

## Foreword

The present collection of original essays, as its title suggests, aims to present a selection of writers from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century whose narrative experimentation and thematic content reveal the problematic shift from a positivist conception of a concrete reality which can be objectively reproduced in art, towards a dialectical vision of reality which questions such a stance and focuses on the issues surrounding subjectivity and the alienated, fragmented self as well as on a sensibility towards a modernist crisis of human values and a pervasive cultural relativism attuned with intellectual and philosophical *fin de siècle* crisis.

Antonio Di Grado's study on Federico De Roberto's writings on the phenomenology of love is placed as an introductory essay to the volume because it offers a reading of the author's deeply felt epistemological crisis expressed through his theories and apologues on love, where in particular the concept of the death of love is seen as embodying De Roberto's vision of a humanity given to illusion and renunciation, a theory which as if by synecdoche represents a sense of cosmic entropy. Di Grado suggests that De Roberto in these writings presents a vision which is as scornful at an intellectual level as it is indulgent at a human level, being prone as it is to gnosiological and ethical relativism. It mirrors a similar protest levelled at the world of power in *I Viceré* which after all is a denunciation of crisis of bourgeois civilization. De Roberto's writings on love as representative of a crisis are also analysed by Rosario Castelli in his essay "L'Amore e gli Amori di Federico De Roberto". However, Castelli focuses primarily on the personal and confessional aspect of this body of writings and on the nineteenth-century sources with which De Roberto relates.

Other essays in this collection focus on De Roberto's short stories and on his masterpiece, *I Viceré*. Giuseppe Traina's study looks at the experimental nature of all of De Roberto's short stories, highlighting the assiduous linguistic revisions undertaken by the author, which foreshadowed that linguistic expressionism typical of the twentieth century. From a thematic point of view, Traina finds in De Roberto's short stories aspects of a Pirandellian dialectic and a on a theoretical level a post *verista* discourse on matters of objective narrative representation. On the other hand Rosaria Sardo, in her linguistic analysis of the so called "novelle di guerra", draws attention to the modernity of De Roberto's linguistic experimentations in his search for mimetic representation and suggests that his use of dialect in some parts of direct speech, is an expression of De Roberto's constant search for a "lingua media". The "plurilinguismo" and use of dialect which characterise these short stories represent an extraordinary sensibility for a mimetic literary representation of what in effect was a

## Foreword

complex socio-linguistic reality. Annamaria Pagliaro in her analysis of *I Viceré* emphasises the experimental nature of this text in which the author contrasts the internal and external representation of reality. She argues that this novel could be seen as representative of the crisis of Naturalism in so far as De Roberto emphasises the alienating and subjective dimension of perceptions, as with scathing irony, he presents a deformed vision of the world of politics and power, where characters are locked in and isolated in their own very personal and obsessive world view. In so doing he subverts the notion of naturalist objectivity and representable reality and brings to the fore a new positioning of the self in relation to the real.

Sarha Hill's study explores the relationship of photography and realist narrative through the photographic work of Capuana, De Roberto and Verga. Walter Zidarić looks at the legacy of Verga's short story, "La lupa" in the different artistic genres: narrative, theatre and opera as well as a recent adaptation of the short story by the librettist Di Leva and the composer Marco Tutino in the homonymous 1990 opera. Paul Barnaby offers a reading of Luigi Capuana's fourth novel *La Sfinge* as a lucid and engaged reaction to a changing of literary climate and also as a response to political and cultural crisis in the 1890s Italy.

The essay by John Gatt-Rutter on Pirandello and Svevo and the one by Simona Storchi on Massimo Bontempelli take us beyond the issues in the above-mentioned studies which reflect on a period of transition between realism and modernism, and bring us to consider the critical inquiry related to the modernist crisis implicit in themes such as aesthetic sublimation, the belief in a stable ego replaced by a fragmented sense of self, the alienating effects of subjectivity and a lacerating sense of crisis in European civilisation, manifested by a problematic positioning towards mass industrialisation and mass culture.

The aim of this collection is to bring to the fore a range of questions and critical issues concerning the problematic discourse inherent in the *fin de siècle* approach to representations and renegotiations of the real. We hope that these essays will generate further productive contributions to this debate.

**Monash University**

**Annamaria Pagliaro**