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**g/s/i** is an annual peer-reviewed journal which publishes research on gendered identities and the ways they intersect with and produce Italian politics, culture, and society by way of a variety of cultural productions, discourses, and practices spanning historical, social, and geopolitical boundaries.

**Title:** Book Review: Encounters with the Real in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema  
Edited by Loredana Di Martino and Pasquale Verdicchio

**Journal Issue:** gender/sexuality/italy, 4 (2017)

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**Publication date:** September 2017

**Publication info:** gender/sexuality/italy, "Reviews"

**Permalink:** <http://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/13-encounters-with-the-real-in-contemporary-italian-literature-and-cinema>

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Di Martino, Loredana, and Pasquale Verdicchio, eds. *Encounters with the Real in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017. Pp. xli, 255. ISBN 9781443811231. £ 57.99 (hardcover).

It is perhaps one of the great paradoxes of the twenty-first century that a media landscape dominated by “reality” television programming has altered the way we interact with and comprehend what is “real.” Also paradoxical is the possible antidote to this illusory “reality”: creative works of fiction that engage the real in new and innovative ways. Loredana Di Martino and Pasquale Verdicchio’s volume *Encounters with the Real in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema* seeks to explore this question, using the Italian context to investigate the global phenomenon of an artistic return to reality as well as its implications for the future. The essays contained in this collection examine Italian cinema and literature from the 1990s to the present, situating their discourse within current theories on New Realism (*nuovo realismo*), and probe how these dialogue (or not) with those of Neorealism and postmodernism. The authors contend that this renewed interest in reality has resulted in hybrid art forms that aim to reawaken the reader or viewer to a historical memory that has been lost. While the works examined are Italian, the argument is universal and decidedly prescient in the present moment of media hyperreality, lending the volume a more global and interdisciplinary appeal.

Di Martino and Verdicchio divide the collection in two parts, with the first six essays focusing on literature and the last six dedicated to cinema. Each section concludes with an interview, the first with author Antonio Franchini, conducted by the editors, along with contributor Raffaello Palumbo Mosca, and the second with director and critic Giovanna Taviani. The editors’ introduction provides a clear overview of the contemporary theories on realism that form the foundation for the majority of the contributions contained within. In particular, Maurizio Ferraris’s *Manifesto del nuovo realismo* (2014) is one of the primary points of reference for many of the contributors, though not all of them fully adhere to his notion of “documentality,” the idea that “inscribed social acts [...] and the objects that follow [...] allow us to define social reality somewhat objectively” (ix). In fact, Di Martino and Verdicchio assert in the introduction that they prefer a middle ground between Ferraris’s theory and Eco’s “negative realism,” asserting that “contemporary realism seems to be driven by the necessity to subject reality to continuous reassessments in order to liberate it from the prison of preconceived meaning” (xiii). These “reassessments,” according to theories by the Bolognese writing collective Wu Ming and Antonio Scurati, among others, are performed through the act of storytelling and the creation of alternative narratives. This is one of the primary conclusions of the volume: the experimental nature of the works in question not only speaks to the symbiosis of reality and imagination but also to a deeper ethics of community building, which is what ultimately distinguishes this “return to the real” from postmodernist thought. The ethical element is where this new form of realism intersects with what the editors refer to as the “specter” (vii) of Neorealism. Similarities aside, however, it is Di Martino and Verdicchio’s contention that today’s storytellers aim not for the “mimetic verisimilitude” (x) favored by their predecessors but for the *evocation* of the real that pushes readers/viewers towards a collective negotiation of meaning.

The essays in Part I discuss realism in representations of labor rights and working conditions, the environment, violence, trauma, and immigration. While the idea is an underlying theme in all the contributions, Raffaello Palumbo Mosca’s essay explicitly identifies the return to reality as a return to ethics, and narrative experimentation as a tool for engagement on a moral level. He eschews the debate on New Realism altogether, focusing instead on examples of contemporary hybrid novels that inspire critical thinking, action, and empathy. In a similar vein, Di Martino looks at Antonio Scurati’s *Il sopravvissuto* (2005) as an effective response to the spectacularization of violence by the media, a different way to confront trauma, and possibly, a more effective healer. Clarissa Clò’s essay on “Collective Transmedia Storytelling from Below: *Timira* and the New Italian Epic” makes the most significant contribution of the volume to the

topic of Italian gender and sexuality studies, as she sees both novel and namesake (Timira Hassan) to exist, in postcolonial terms, beyond the confines of any genre or nation. Her argument calls attention to the limitations of *nuovo realismo* and the New Italian Epic, whose experimentation within well-established generic and philosophical parameters continues to largely exclude women writers in general and postcolonial Italian authors in particular, despite their stylistic and thematic similarities.

In Part II, Verdicchio investigates the engagement of film with social and economic crisis between *Prima della rivoluzione/Before the Revolution*, by Bernardo Bertolucci (1964), and Matteo Garrone's *Reality* (2012). Most interestingly, Verdicchio uses the example of *Reality* to show how Ferraris's theory on "documentality," rather than proving our existence through the material traces of ourselves that we leave, has the adverse effect of making us vulnerable to social surveillance. In his essay on "allegorical realism" in Emanuele Crialese's *Respiro* (2002), Fulvio Orsitto also challenges Ferraris's idea of anti-reality, applying Massimo Recalcati's Lacanian distinction between a dream-like and continuous "reality" (in this case, the narrative) that is disrupted by the intrusion of the "real" (here, the protagonist Grazia's nonconformity to the tight-knit but restrictive island community where she lives). In the following essay, Gloria Pastorino also considers a film by Crialese, *Terraferma/Terra firma* (2011), along with a documentary and a theatrical production, using their common theme of migration to show how the "real," in this case identified as the encounter with the Other, is more effective when employed through imagination and re-elaboration rather than presented as fact. This idea returns in Marco Bertozzi's essay, which addresses the relationship between documentary and film archives, arguing that including found-footage in a given work allows for the transcendence of realism because images can mean "again" and "differently" (205). Among the various examples he analyzes, there are several that engage with questions of gender and sexuality, such as *Vogliamo anche le rose/We Want the Roses Too* (2007) by Alina Marazzi, which uses material from various archives to chronicle a fifteen-year period of women's rights and sexuality.

In the closing interview of the volume, Giovanna Taviani maintains, in contrast to the "common sky" of the Neorealist films of the postwar era, that "[s]olitude is our new stylistic key" (237). Despite their aesthetic and thematic differences, however, these films (and literature) aim to invite the reader or spectator to interpret his/her world differently, to understand the true fiction of the spectacle of the media landscape, and to work towards a better future. While few essays in this collection speak explicitly on gendered identities, the ideas discussed here on the "real" as a path towards creative expression, community, and recovered historical memory point towards the deconstruction of hegemonic narratives. The concepts elaborated on in this volume are largely universal in nature and widely applicable outside the field of Italian Studies. A "return to the real," as presented here, reveals the potential to move beyond the current moment of media hyperreality, both in the Italian context and globally, which could create more space for the underrepresented voices that have long been excluded from dominant representations of "reality." *Encounters with the Real in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema* addresses a significant trend in contemporary Italian artistic production and represents a valuable contribution to a conversation that has been ongoing but remains as relevant as ever.

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