



# **In the Shadow of the Mammoth: Italo Svevo and the Emergence of Modernism (Toronto Italian Studies)**

*Giuliana Minghelli*

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The writings of Italo Svevo (1861-1928), who was a pioneer of the modernist novel in Italy, are being revived in both Italian and English. Giuliana Minghelli's *In the Shadow of the Mammoth* uses Svevo's parodic Darwinian fable of the prehistoric encounter between the weak and 'unfinished' man and an incommensurable other to reassess his eccentric contribution to 20th century literature in works like *As a Man Grows Older* and *Confessions of Zeno*. Svevo's fiction displaces the heroic strain in Modernism, revealing the self-construction of the subject as an ongoing symbiosis with otherness.

Minghelli situates Svevo's work in its cultural context, especially in relation to the writings of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Otto Weininger, and Italian contemporaries such as Giacomo Debenedetti. Working at the intersection of post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, and gender and postcolonial theories, Minghelli performs a series of close readings of Svevo's novels and short stories, exploring the construction of self as a constant contamination with the world and the other, one that consciously subverts accepted narratives of evolutionary progress, gender binarism, or national and racial belonging.

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