“Il vocabolario e la strada.”
Self-Translation between Standard Italian and Regional Dialects in the Works of Salvatore Di Giacomo, Luigi Capuana, and Luigi Pirandello.

by

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Abstract
The present dissertation explores the work of three playwrights active both in regional dialects and standard Italian in the post-Unification period, who consistently translated their own work from one code into another: Salvatore Di Giacomo, Luigi Capuana, and Luigi Pirandello. Their “bilingual writing” is best understood in light of the process of linguistic unification of Italy, described as a shift from prevailing non-bilingual diglossia to prevailing diglossic bilingualism. Considering self-translation as an extreme case of author-translator relationship, I compare the Italian and dialectal version of each play, highlighting the central features of the rewriting process. The analysis especially focuses on phenomena of linguistic interference, self-censorship and semantic attenuation, paying also attention to the systematic loss of “internal linguistic networks and argots” (Berman, La traduction 63-64). At the same time, translation acts a relatively free space for linguistic experimentation, allowing the three authors examined to challenge the idea of a fatal link between language and nation. Self-translation between standard Italian and regional dialects thus marks a very important transition in the Italian modernity, helping to close the rift between spoken and written language and eventually paving the road to the national renovation of Italian dramatic literature fully accomplished in the 1920s and 1930s.
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Introduction
The Language Question in Post-Unification Italy

1. An Endless Debate

In 1895, the cultural journalist Ugo Ojetti (1871-1946) collected a group of interviews with the most prominent Italian writers of the time in a volume titled *Alla scoperta dei letterati*. Among the interviewees were canonical authors such as Gabriele d’Annunzio, Giovanni Pascoli, Giosuè Carducci, and leading figures of the cultural establishment, such as Edoardo Scarfoglio and Ferdinando Martini; there were dialectal poets, such as Cesare Pascarella, and the champions of the Italian regionalist novel, namely Luigi Capuana, Giovanni Verga, Matilde Serao, and Federico de Roberto. Their answers cast light on a number of controversies and tensions shaping the literary debate of the time, such as the antagonistic relationship between Realist and Decadent models, the role played by intellectuals in molding the national character, and the advent of the new Spiritualist currents. Significantly, a recurrent topic of discussion in the book is the linguistic problem of Italy, traditionally known as the “questione della lingua.” The considerable space devoted to the language question in the book effectively shows its centrality in the cultural landscape of the time. Given the high representativeness of the interviewees, this episode perfectly exemplifies the persistence of this topic in the intellectual debate of the late Nineteenth century.

The answers collected by Ojetti reveal a systematic opposition between those authors who defended the adequacy of the current literary language and those who denounced its expressive insufficiency, advocating instead for forms of hybridized language. Ferdinando Martini, for instance, clearly belongs to the former category: “Manca il linguaggio? Oh, in grazia, e noi che lingua parliamo? Che io mi sappia, ella ora mi parla in lingua italiana e io le rispondo in lingua italiana” (*Alla scoperta dei letterati* 175). Matilde Serao instead defends her “linguaggio incerto” or “stile rotto,” as she proudly defines it (271). Whether they saw stylistic hybridism between Italian and dialects as a positive change or as a dangerous ‘corruption,’ all the interviewed authors seemingly shared a common assumption: the inadequacy of standard Italian, and most notably of spoken Italian. Even Martini, the most strenuous advocate of literary purism,
admits that “[q]uel che manca è un buon vocabolario della lingua parlata. Tutti quelli che ci sono accolgono parole disusate e viete. Io sto tentandone uno. La lingua nostra corrente, spontanea, vera è ricca quanto e più d’ogni altra lingua” (175-76). He then invites his colleagues to a rigorous study of the Italian lexicon and of its current usage.¹

The views on language documented in Alla scoperta dei letterati are far from being isolated in the contemporary debate; on the contrary, they are fully representative of the linguistic debate at the turn of the century: three decades after the political and territorial unification of the Italian kingdom, linguistic unification was far from being attained. In fact, the decades immediately following the unification of Italy (1861) were dominated by the a harsh polemic concerning the role played by the Florentine model in shaping the linguistic identity of the nation.

In January 1868 Alessandro Manzoni, who had personally grappled with the language question in the three subsequent versions of his masterpiece I promessi sposi (respectively published in 1821, 1827, and 1840), was charged with the difficult task of pedagogical and theoretical elaboration. The Ministry of Education Emilio Broglio nominated him to sit on a special committee on the “questione della lingua.” This nomination was the logical consequence of the prestige attained by I promessi sposi, whose prose had become an essential model in the eyes of his contemporaries.² Manzoni was no stranger to theoretical reflection: his interest in the language question dated back to the early letters to Claude Faurel in 1806, in which he had first started reflecting on the expressive limitations Italian novelists had to face.³

¹ Despite this claim, Martini never completed his intended dictionary of spoken Italian. A similar project, the Vocabolario italiano della lingua parlata, was instead realized by Giuseppe Rigutini and Pietro Fanfani in 1875.
² Countless critics have highlighted the rift between theory and practice in Manzoni’s work: Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi and Giacomo Devoto, for instance, have noted how “alla lenta maturazione della dottrina si contrappone in questi testi la improvvisa maturità per quanto riguarda la sintassi, e i suoi periodi complessi, armoniosi, classici” (La lingua italiana 74). Likewise, Vitale notes: “Il suo problema pratico di scrittore, il Manzoni aveva risolto rinnovando dal punto di vista dello stile, della sintassi e della lingua con tanta efficacia e maestria d’artista le strutture complesse e tradizionali dell’italiano; ma il problema teorico e generale risolveva in considerazioni di altri interessi e ideali politici e civili – l’unità della lingua nell’Unità d’Italia – con una soluzione programmatica radicale e naturalistica […] che, pur circoscrivendo la lingua al solo ambito lessicale, trasformava la questione linguistica da questione letteraria a questione sociale. (La questione della lingua 442).” Finally, Guido Bezzola has suggested that in the late works of Manzoni, the “love for the language” had finally replaced his initial “love for the novel” (p. 87)
³ See the judgment of Vitale, who stated that “nella storia della lingua italiana, l’importanza dell’opera di teorico della lingua e di scrittore di Alessandro Manzoni è comparabile solo a quella di Dante” (La questione della lingua 205).
Manzoni devoted himself to the new task with enthusiasm: the ensuing report (“Della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla”), compiled in 1869, was mainly the reflection of his own beliefs and opinion, with little input from the other two members of the Commission, Giulio Carcano and Ruggiero Bonghi. Manzoni’s views did not coincide with the traditional opinions of Purism, the strict preoccupation with adherence to the literary canon that had oriented the linguistic debate Antonio Cesari’s unofficial fifth edition of the Vocabolario della Crusca (1806-1809), anachronistically advocating for the imitation of the literary language used by the fourteenth-century Florentine authors. Building on a set of paradigms inherited from the linguistic utilitarianism of the Enlightenment, Manzoni viewed the lack of a common vocabulary as an obstacle to a full community of intents and thought: “una nazione dove siano in vigore vari idiomi, e la quale aspiri ad avere una lingua in comune, trova naturalmente in questa varietà un primo e potente ostacolo al suo intento” (Dell’Unità della lingua 53). The language spoken by the educated classes of Florence was, in his view, an ideal ground to achieve this effect, combining the need for a viable standard with the need for liveliness and concreteness in the everyday expression. Manzoni recognizes the potential value of regional variation; however, he sees a historical anomaly in the setting of Italy, in which dialects are dominant and prevent the formation of a common standard:

Ci possono essere bensì, e ci sono, de’ dialetti, nel senso di parlari che si trovino in opposizione e in concorrenza con una lingua. E ciò accade presso quelle nazioni, dove una lingua positiva, riconosciuta unanimemente, e diventata continua a una parte considerabile, e particolarmente alla parte più colta delle diverse province, sia riuscita a restringere in un’altra di essa più rozza, e che va scemando ogni giorno, l’uso di quelli che, prima dell’introduzione d’una tal lingua, erano gli unici idiomi delle diverse province. Ma tra di noi, invece, i vecchi e vari idiomi sono in pieno vigore, e servono abitualmente a ogni classe di persone, per non esserci in effettiva concorrenza con essa una lingua atta a combatterli col mezzo unicamente efficace, che è quello di prestare il servizio che essi prestano (Dell’unità della lingua 65-66).

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4 Giulio Carcano instead wrote almost single-handedly the second part of the “Relazione,” devoted to practical proposals aiming at promoting the knowledge of standard Italian. Some of these proposals soon became the target of sarcasm for their unrealistic nature: see, for instance, the famous idea of sending Tuscan schoolteachers in the different provinces of Italy, acting as linguistic missionaries.
Manzoni recognizes that dialects are the only expressive instruments available to the vast majority of speakers, and namely the only tools that can absolve basic communication functions. Dialects offer a common ground for comprehension and allow speakers to name material referents in an unequivocal way, something that cannot yet be accomplished in Italian. The author’s view of language is normative and pragmatic at once, since it aims at transforming the present condition of language rather than at describing it. This orientation is already evident in the stated aims of the Ministerial Commission: “proporre tutti i provvedimenti e i modi coi quali si possa aiutare e rendere più universale in tutti gli ordini del popolo la notizia della buona lingua e della buona pronuncia” (53).

Manzoni’s well-known argument, in a nutshell, is that the language spoken among the lettered people of Florence can provide a viable standard for the nation. Florentine—Manzoni argues—is not a dialect by virtue of its “special quality,” allegedly recognized by everyone, including its opponents. To support his argument, Manzoni compares the Italian situation with two notable hegemonic languages: French and Latin. He is thus able to reject the accusations of provincial narrow-mindedness brought forward by his opponents, claiming that “senza il municipalismo di Roma e Parigi non ci sarebbe stata, né lingua latina, né lingua francese” (58). Hegemonic languages such as French, Latin or (at least in the author’s hopes) Florentine have been legitimized not merely by political and cultural circumstances, but by their continued use in “common conversation”: true national unification shall be attained “in una società vivente e riunita, dove una totalità e continuità di relazioni tra gli uomini produce necessariamente un uso uniforme di lingua” (58).

The frequent references to “conversation” clearly bear a trace of Manzoni’s early closeness to the philosophy of the Enlightenment: and indeed, the term “conversazione” is loaded with important philosophical overtones. This aspect did not go unnoticed by subsequent critics and polemists: for instance, Croce criticizes Manzoni’s pragmatism as an anachronistic eighteenth-century legacy (“un concetto del linguaggio che apparteneva piuttosto al secolo decimottavo che al decimonono: del linguaggio come di un complesso di segni sui quali si possa convenire, e che importa scegliere tra i più semplici, costanti e univoci” La letteratura della

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nuova Italia I 152). At the same time, though, Croce recognized the value of such a project, precisely for its pragmatic intents, its anti-rhetoric quality and its emancipatory direction: all aspects that are deeply entrenched in the Illuminist background of Manzoni as a young man.

In turn, the centrality of conversation is one of the main elements that distinguish the Manzonian project from the Purist tradition, imperatively relying on the literary canon of the Trecento and conveniently dismissing five centuries of linguistic change. Putting aside his own experiences as a narrator and poet, Manzoni was advocating for a model of spoken Italian, a language that could not be entirely based on written forms of literary derivation. This is particularly evident in Manzoni’s claim that written language [“la lingua scritta”] is nothing else but the “lingua degli scrittori.” The code of a very narrow group of people cannot, consequently, express the life of a newly found national community: “come mai una lingua (che è quanto dire una lingua intera) si potrà ritrovare in quel tanto o quanto che ad alcuni e molti e moltissimi, se si vuole, ma pur sempre alcuni a fronte d’una intera società, sia venuto accidentalmente in taglio di mettere in carta?” (64-65).

Such conception of linguistic unity rests on two fundamental premises. The first is a conception of a language as an ensemble of words, which can be the foundational pact holding together a community of intent. On the contrary, the lack of a common lexicon leads to a paralyzing and disorienting confusion [“guazzabuglio”], the very condition that prevents Italian speakers (and writers) from attaining a solid and universal communication. This impression is confirmed by the importance of lexicography in the Manzonian project: the author repeatedly suggests that the creation of a dictionary of contemporary Italian would be the most effective way to promote the linguistic unification of the country. However, a common vocabulary is an indispensable, but not sufficient condition. The author adamantly states that a language is not merely an aggregate of common lexical items: a collection of all the words idiosyncratically used by Italian authors or, for that matter, a collection of all the lexical items shared by the different Italian vernaculars would not, alone, grant the necessary unity of language. This helps explain why Manzoni is skeptical over the previous lexicographical ventures—including the fundamental authority over the matter, the Vocabolario dell’Accademia della Crusca. Being no more than a
collection of words, listed regardless of their current use, the Vocabolario della Crusca lacks the homogeneity that can only be granted by common conversation. 6

Such view leads us directly to consider the second central element defining the Manzonian ideal of linguistic unity: the notion of “common usage,” which Manzoni defines as “il vero Uso, quello che vive in una società riunita, dove il bisogno continuo, incessante, d'intendersi sopra qualunque materia conserva necessariamente una maggiore identità” (Lettera intorno al Vocabolario 145). Manzoni sees usage—and not historicity, or literary value—as the most important criterion or, as he writes, “la sola autorità” (Appendice 203).

There is an inescapable circularity of thought in Manzoni’s argument: he argues that Florentine should be considered as the national standard for its common usage, yet he places the fundament of such ‘common usage’ in a dictionary which has yet to be compiled. Furthermore, Manzoni subtly undermines the very principle he is so adamantly asserting, that is, the priority of “conversation” (even if it is a particular conversation, narrowed down to the learned and the wealthy). While the common usage should be based on a network of continuative cultural exchanges, its ultimate guarantee is to be found in the pages of a dictionary, the written text by definition.

These views were overtly criticized by Graziadio Isaia Ascoli in the 1873 “Proemio” [Preface] to the first issue of Archivio Glottologico Italiano, a journal of dialectology founded by Ascoli himself. In this well-known essay, Ascoli promoted the study of the Italo-Romance dialects on a scientific basis, following the principles of historical and comparative linguistics first promoted by the German school of Indo-European studies: hence the need for an apology of the study of dialect. Indeed, his contrastive approach to the problem is fully reflective of his background in the scientific study of dialects, clearly modeled on the comparative and historical

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6 See, for instance, the following passage: “Che ci sia una quantità indefinita di locuzioni comuni a tutta l’Italia, o perché si trovino primitivamente ne’ suoi vari idiomi, o per essere venute comunque e donde che sia, è un fatto che a nessuno potrebbe neppure venir in mente di negare. Ma nessuno vorrà nemmeno affermare che una quantità qualunque di locuzioni basti a costituire una lingua. Se questo fosse, non avrebbe alcun senso ragionevole il titolo di lingua morta, che si dà, per esempio, alla latina. Ma un tal senso lo ha, e importa, per l’appunto, una quantità bensì di locuzioni, ma una quantità non adeguata a una intera comunicazione di pensieri tra una società umana che è ciò che l’universale degli uomini intende per lingua, per quanti possano essere, nel gran numero di esse, i nomi con cui s’esprime questo concetto.” (Dell’unità 186)
methodology then prevalent in Germany; for the same reasons, Ascoli praised the role of bilingualism from a pedagogical point of view.

While accepting the diagnosis of Manzoni and his followers about the weakness of standard Italian, Ascoli rejected their proposed therapy, which he summarizes in the following statement: “che una lingua nazionale altro non può e non deve essere, se non l’idioma vivo di un dato municipio; deve cioè per ogni parte coincidere con l’idioma spontaneamente parlato dagli abitatori contemporanei di quel dato municipio, che per questo capo viene a farsi principe, o quasi strumento livellatore, dell’intiera nazione.” (“Proemio” 10). Ascoli also rejects the proposed parallel between the historical hegemony of the French spoken in Paris and the Florentine dialects (13-17). Instead, he counters Manzoni’s claim with an equally relevant model: the linguistic situation of Germany, which is also marked by linguistic fragmentation and by a historical delay in the process of national unification. Nevertheless, Ascoli argues, German writers can count on a strong common language, without facing the same problems as the Italian writers and intellectuals: a result achieved not by imposing the language of a capital onto the rest of the nation, but through intellectual dialogue conveyed by the written creations of poets, novelists and intellectuals. While Manzoni saw a seed of linguistic unification in the “viva conversazione” of the educated bourgeoisie of Florence, for Ascoli such conversation should take place in a metaphorical way, through the written texts of the learned: it is, in short, a conversation of souls and minds, rather than one of voices.

Ascoli also undermines Manzoni’s position by rejecting his central claim that Florentine is not a dialect. By virtue of his glottological background, he clearly demonstrates how much the vernacular of Florence has distanced itself from the phonological and syntactic structures it exhibited in the thirteenth century, when it provided a normative basis to what was to become literary Italian: “se voi oggi insegnate agli Italiani, che il modo: io e te quando ci si lamenta merita e deve soppiantare quest’altro: quando io e tu ci lamentiamo, voi date pien diritto ai vostri avversarj di rispondervi, che da pedante a pedante, meglio è la grammatica che lo sgrammaticare.” (25) On these grounds, he argues that the oral language spoken in Florence is no less a vernacular than the languages spoken in Palermo and Milan.

Two other important elements emerge from the “Proemio all’Archivio Glottologico Italiano:” the complexity of linguistic variation, and the need to distinguish between oral and
written expression. In particular, Ascoli distinguishes between social and geographical variation, arguing that in no case familiar and popular forms should enter the space of a courtroom, of the Parliament, or the written page of a novel: however, forms such as “fare un bucolino” (a vernacular expression meaning “to pierce a small hole”) are spurned for their lack of formality and not because of their alleged regionalism (22-23). As Maurizio Vitale noted in his seminal *La questione della lingua*, the latter position is directly related to Ascoli’s suspicion towards the notion of common usage, too loose to be taken as a criterion of the standard:

Non si tratta più per l’Ascoli di accostare o di integrare le due differenti sfere di esperienza culturale e linguistica, la dotta e la popolare, né tanto meno di rendere popolare la superiore cultura della nazione con l’implicito avvicinamento della lingua scritta a quella parlata; ma piuttosto di far condividere a tutti gli italiani, cittadini di uno stato prevalentemente dialettofono e di rarefatto lavoro del sapere, l’alacre esercizio della cultura nazionale con l’ovvio superamento (…) della parlata idiomatica per il pieno possesso ed impiego della lingua italiana della tradizione scritta e comune. (*La questione della lingua* 462)

In this respect, one could claim that the pedagogical dimension of Ascoli’s thought is as important as it had been in Manzoni’s theory: however, their views of linguistic education are fairly different. The national language, polished and refined by the work of Italian poets, thinkers and scientists through the centuries, appears to be an instrument of civilization, whose educational force is comparable to that of Manzoni’s long-awaited “dizionario dell’uso vivo.” Pedagogical overtones can clearly be perceived in Ascoli’s claim that unity of language should be achieved through the industrious activity of intellectuals, who are charged with the noble task of promoting the life of the nation.

Finally, the opposite positions of Manzoni and Ascoli, with their opposite focus on spoken Florentine or on a common national language of literary derivation, entail two fairly distant views of the relationship between written and oral speech. While the “viva conversazione” played a central role in Manzoni’s linguistic theory, Ascoli explicitly rejects the idea that written language should become more similar to oral conversation (“l’idea che l’incremento della cultura stia in ragion diretta della prossimità o della maggior vicinanza fra parola parlata e parola scritta,” “Proemio” 31). The municipal dialect spoken by housemaids,
butchers and grocers should never the basis of scientific expression, as it cannot provide the needed clarity to philosophical and scientific reasoning.

The rift between these two opposite views was not reconciled until the 1880s, thanks to the mediating role played by Francesco D’Ovidio. Despite having initially started as a fervent supporter of Manzoni’s theses, D’Ovidio came to criticize the extremism of his own side, advocating a more equidistant position. These new moderate views were first exposed in *Critica al libro del Morandi, ed esame sommario della questione della lingua*; D'Ovidio later expanded on them in his influential 1882 volume *Le correzioni ai Promessi Sposi e la questione della lingua*, unanimously considered the final word on the question.

Both Vitale and Serianni credit D’Ovidio with having identified the numerous elements of compatibility between the two linguistic theories, often lost in the heat of the polemic (*Il secondo Ottocento* 55; *La questione della lingua* 468-471). A final epitaph on the ‘questione della lingua’ can be read in D’Ovidio’s preface to the 1914 edition of Ascoli’s *Proemio*: “Il fiorentino odierno si dovrà perciò tener presente come un vivo specchio d’italianità sincera e fresca, e solo non prenderlo a norma quante volte diverge dall’uso letterario, ove questo è saldamente stabilito; e prenderlo come un consigliero spesso prezioso, non come un’autorità assoluta, dovunque l’uso letterario ondeggi o manchi del tutto” [qtd. in *La questione della lingua* 471]. In sum, D’Ovidio promoted a tempered Manzonism, condemning the excesses of Manzoni’s followers and clearly detaching the monumental accomplishments of *I promessi sposi* from the overly rigid and not always rigorous theorization of the author. Despite the fierce polemics of the 1870s and 1880s, the Manzonian model kept its prominence in shaping the

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7 See in particular the following passage: “Posto pure che dal Manzoni avessimo avuto l’unico tipo di prosa oggi possibile, non però basterebbe egli solo a formare il buono stile negli altri. La sua elegante semplicità fu il risultato ultimo d’infiniti studii e letture, né è dato appropriarsela durevolmente a forza di rilegger lui solo, senza rifarne in qualche modo il cammino e prendere la rincorsa da Dante in giù. Il sussidio dei’altrui esperienza e gli effetti già conseguiti dai nostri antecessori non ci dispensano dal formarci un’esperienza propria, ma solo ce ne rendono l’acquisto più spedito e piano. Chi non conosce che un unico libro, in realtà non può nemmen di quello avere conoscenza intera, e nel mettersi ad imitarlo ne fa, senz’acccorgersene, la caricatura.” (*Le correzioni ai Promessi Sposi e la questione della lingua* 10-11).

8 Cf. the following passage: “Ma egli, se nella vita pubblica e nella privata fu un purissimo eroe, e anche letterariamente degno d'ammirazione per la elegante semplicità dello stile, per un instintivo senso d'arte, per la modesta coltura acquistata con magnanimo sforzo tra difficoltà indicibili d'ogni maniera, difettava quasi interamente della dottrina e delle virtù intellettuali necessarie al critico e al pensatore: è bene che ai giovani ciò sia detto senz'ambagi, onde sappiano con la più fervida devozione alla sua memoria conciliare la diffidenza verso l'ingenua avventatezza dei suoi giudizi.” (*Le correzioni ai Promessi Sposi e la questione della lingua* 117-18)
linguistic pedagogy both in the school curriculum and in the vast production aimed at promoting literacy amongst adults;\(^9\) however, it lost its hegemonic value for Italian novelists and prose writers.

Nevertheless, the literary quality of standard Italian continued to be a highly divisive topic, as the interviews collected by Ojetti in his *Alla scoperta dei letterati* prove. While the centrality of Florentine vernacular gradually lost its urgency as a matter of debate, a deep awareness of the limitations of standard Italian remained an inescapable point of departure in any discussion on the topic, often being used as a a critical cliché and a blanket explanation for any weakness or delay of the national culture. Long after its supposed resolution, the Italian language question continued to inspire and guide the research of many authors, who were still striving to reach that “qualità comune e popolare e soprattutto una natura unitaria” that both by Manzoni and Ascoli sought, albeit with different means (*La questione della lingua* 352).

2. Dialects in Post-Unification Era

Alongside the theoretical debate on the suitability of Tuscan (and Florentine in particular) to serve as the national standard, the nineteenth century also saw the emergence of two conflicting trends with respect to dialect. On the one hand, authors and scholars showed a growing interest in regional idioms, which resulted in a surge of dictionaries, repertoires, and lexicographical ventures of various kinds. Marazzini defines the nineteenth-century (before and after the unification of Italy) as “il secolo d’oro della lessicografia:” this wealth of sources is exemplified, among others, by dialectal dictionaries such as the *Gran dizionario Piemontese-Italiano* (1859), directed by Vittorio di Sant’Albino; the *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano* (1829), compiled by Giuseppe Boerio; the *Vocabolario milanese-italiano* (1814), compiled by Francesco Cherubini and first published in 1814; the *Vocabolario Napoletano-Italiano* (1823) compiled by Raffaele Andreoli, and Traina’s *Vocabolario Siciliano-Italiano Illustrato* (1863), to name but a few examples; finally, the champion of Purism Basilio Puoti compiled a *Vocabolario domestico*

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italiano napoletano e toscano (1841), which aimed at promoting a better understanding of the difference between Italian and dialect through a contrastive approach.¹⁰

On the other hand, the intellectual classes aspired to bring the most elementary functions into the Italian language—and especially those communicative functions normally carried out in dialect (cf. La questione della lingua 365-66). In practical terms, this dualism led to a contradictory attitude towards the use of dialect: the scholarly interest for the different regional dialects spoken in the peninsula coexisted with a strong bias against their use in everyday life. Trifone effectively describes this condition, suggesting that: “alla diffusione dell’italofonia, da tutti auspicata, corrispondono atteggiamenti contradditori nei confronti del dialetto, che suscita ostilità in alcuni intellettuali, in diversi funzionari ministeriali, e soprattutto nella grande massa degli insegnanti elementari.” (Storia linguistica dell’Italia disunita 89). Two linguistic pedagogies were then clashing: on one side, the ideal of linguistic unification, one based on a pragmatic and instrumental view of language, derived from the linguistic theories of the Enlightenment and finally reshaped by Manzoni in Dell’unità della lingua; on the opposite side, a contextual re-evaluation of dialect, which Vitale has considered as a late legacy of the Romantic movement.

In this respect, one might argue that Manzoni’s rationalistic drive towards linguistic conventionalism was defeated because it collided with the linguistic reality of the peninsula. As Vitale suggests, by virtue of its diffusion, dialect was effectively acting as “mediatore di contenuti reali più genuini e validi, […] veicolo di cultura nelle classi più umili della società e come tramite diretto di approssimazione linguistica all’italiano.” (La questione della lingua 370).

These two ideals led to two potential outcomes. On the one hand, written language could evolve in the direction of the substandard, incorporating elements from the ‘regional,’ the ‘popular,’¹¹ and the ‘spoken.’ On the other hand, authors and educators felt it was their duty to

¹⁰ In his L’ordine delle parole, Marazzini defines the nineteenth century as the “golden age” of dialectal lexicography: while dialectal dictionaries had been compiled since the eighteenth century, the majority of the dialectal dictionaries published in the nineteenth century are still in use. explains this phenomenon with the Romantic re-evaluation of folklore and the interest in historical linguistics and philology. (311-313)

¹¹ I am here referring to the notion of “italiano popolare,” first defined by Tullio De Mauro in 1970 as “il modo d’esprimersi di un incolto che, sotto la spinta di comunicare e senza addestramento, maneggia quella che ottimisticamente si chiama la lingua nazionale” and later by Manlio Cortelazzo in 1972 as “il tipo di italiano
raise the overall level of linguistic education, reducing the differences between spoken and written speech: this model would implicitly recognize the superiority of literary and written tradition, acting as a beacon and leading the process of Italian linguistic unification. The written corpus of the Italian culture is thus seen as the basis to common expression, meeting the need for a clear and unambiguous lexicon and fostering the scientific, political and moral renovation of Italy.

The literary production, and particularly that in prose, of the post-Unification decades was clearly affected by this linguistic duality. The most extreme views of Purism, well exemplified by the educational program of Basilio Puoti and by the lexicographic ventures of Pietro Fanfani and Costantino Arlia, were gradually overcome by those Italian novelists who ventured into the territories of linguistic regionalism to reproduce 'realistically' the life of the working classes. This result was achieved through a cautious but relentless opening towards dialect, carried on by authors of different currents and literary schools. For instance, Giovanni Faldella, a Piedmontese author close to the literary current of Scapigliatura, greatly contributed to creating a regional standard for Piedmontese novelists. Claudio Marazzini has extensively studied Faldella’s “Zibaldone,” a list of lexical items translated from Piedmontese into standard Italian, which provides a “triangolazione importante per definire il rapporto con la lingua degli scrittori piemontesi e periferici in generale: il francese (la lingua internazionale del Settecento, ma anche una delle lingue più diffuse in Piemonte tra i ceti elevati [...] ), il dialetto nativo e naturale, l’italiano libresco e letterario raggiunto attraverso la consultazione di lessici” (Spogliare la Crusca 16). The research for lexical items was not oriented by a concern for Tuscan-based purism: on the contrary, the “Zibaldone” is dominated by a quest for “ambivalent” lexical forms,

imperfettamente acquisito da chi ha per madrelingua il dialetto.” For a full discussion of this notion, see Lepschy’s chapter “Popular Italian: Fact or Fiction”, in Mother Tongues (49-69).

12 Born in Naples in 1782, Puoti was the most notable representative of the Purist wave in Naples. He actively promoted the principles of grammatical purisms in his school (started in 1825), from whose ranks graduated, among others, the patriot Luigi Settembrini and the eminent critic Francesco De Sanctis.

13 Il lessico dell’infima e corrotta Italiàtì, by Pietro Fanfani and Costantino Arlia, was first published in 1877. It combined the strict Florentinism of its author (also evident in previous works such as the Vocabolario dell’uso toscano, published in 1863) and a strong personal verve, expressed in venomous tirades against “gli sdolcinati che non sanno dire proprio quattro parole, senza che tre siano straniere e una ibrida” (27).
which can be equally found in Italian and in dialect.\textsuperscript{14} In other words, Faldella (like many other “peripheral writers”) sought to create an impression of local colour by looking for a productive intersection between his native dialect and the national language. This concern does not only help explain Faldella’s own stylistic choices, but anticipates a common trend in the work of future Piedmontese writers, up to Cesare Pavese: as Marazzini suggests, “si direbbe che lo scrittore piemontese periferico si muova su diretrici costanti: [...] si indirizzi verso una medesima area lessicale toscana alla ricerca di lessico adatto a uno stile vivace e pittoresco” (24). The lexical innovation brought forward by the Piedmontese Scapigliatura is thus symptomatic of a wider trend, seeking to create the illusion of local colour and “common usage” while staying within the boundaries of national language.

In the Sicilian area, an important contribution to the modernization of prose was made by Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, the author of Rubé. In her recent work Il cantiere Italia, Ambra Carta has identified in Borgese and Capuana the true heirs of De Sanctis’ invitation to “rifare il sangue dell’Italia.” At the same time, one should not forget the role played by the champions of realist literature, in particular Giovanni Verga and Federico De Roberto, whose experimentalism led to important examples of Sicilian-Italian hybridism. An explicit statement of poetic can be found in the early critical writings of De Roberto, who affirms in his Documenti umani (1888) that:

I popolani di Sicilia parlano un loro particolare dialetto; quando io li introduco in un'opera d'arte ho due partiti dinanzi a me: il primo, che è l'estremo della realtà, consiste nel riprodurre tal'è quale il dialetto--come hanno tentato per le loro regioni il D’Annunzio, lo Scarfoglio, il Lemonnier—il secondo, che è l'estremo della convenzione, consistente nel farli parlare in lingua, con accento toscano e con sapore classico. Ora, se nel primo caso io rischio soltanto di non farmi comprendere dai lettori che ignorano il dialetto, nel secondo rischio addirittura di farli ridere tutti. Fra i due partiti estremi, io

\textsuperscript{14} See a note by Faldella, in his “Zibaldone:” “Dialetti. Molte voci domestiche, le quali si credono de’ soli dialetti, son ben e bello del parlare toscano e fiorentino, come per esempio il preo Veneto, e il prêt milanese, per scaldaletto, anche a Firenze si dice prete: il mari milanese per veggio anche a Pistoia è il marito: il bottegher per pizzigagnolo, che dicesi a Brescia, è il bottegaio di Firenze; ... e così fino a badar a ire, salvo il divario di pronunzia, accidente che non muta la sostanza” (qtd. in Spogliare la Crusca 19)
tento, con l'esempio del Verga, una conciliazione; sul canovaccio della lingua conduco il
ricamo dialettale, arrischio qua e là dei solecismi, capovolgo dei periodi, traduco qualche
volta alla lettera, piglio di peso dei modi di dire, cito dei proverbii, pur di conseguire
questo benedetto coloure locale non solo nel dialogo, ma nella descrizione e nella

Even in distancing himself from the most extreme choice of having the peasants of Sicily
speaking with a perfect Tuscan accent, De Roberto seems to advocate for a use of a generic
Italian, only occasionally enriched by lexical, stylistic or even syntactical particularities of
dialect (such as “capovolgere dei periodi”); a choice that makes Italian closer to dialect, while
retaining the syntactical and morphological traits of standard Italian.

In his 1999 work Prosa e narrativa dell’ottocento, the linguist and language historian
Francesco Bruni has analyzed the contribution made by the short season of Verismo to the
development of a standard language for the novelistic prose. His commentary of the language of
Verga—a language which, he notes, has been always superficially described as a “pastiche
linguistico a metà strada tra lingua e dialetto”—is particularly interesting. Partially breaking
with a longstanding critical tradition Bruni proposes a more complex reading of Verga’s
linguistic architecture, identifying the crucial role of ta “registro semicolto e superregionale,”
alongside the presence of regional influences (which Bruni summarizes as a handful of lexical
Sicilianisms and in larger number of syntactical and morphological traits modeled on dialectal
patterns). The latter register, roughly corresponding to what both Bruni and Paolo d’Achille
define “italiano dei semicolti,” represents the real innovation that Verga brought in the Italian
prose: “il Verga, inconsapevole di queste implicazioni linguistiche, ma illuminato dalla sua
capacità di ricreare le cadenze espressive e il pensiero dei suoi personaggi, è andato molto al di là
del semplice adattamento all’italiano di alcune caratteristiche del dialetto siciliano” (Bruni 161).

15 Bruni borrows this definition from Vito Maisiello, who used it in his essay “La lingua del Verga tra mimesi
dialettale e realismo critico” (Cf. Prosa e narrativa dell’Ottocento 161)
For the Neapolitan area, the hybrid prose of Matilde Serao (often criticized for its apparent lack of rigor) constituted another remarkable example of hybridism. Bruni analyzes the prose of *Il paese di cuccagna*, which Serao considered her masterpiece. In particular, he highlights the “esasperata tensione nomenclatoria” directly deriving from Zola’s shaping influence (*Prosa e narrativa dell’Ottocento* 143): as a result, the prose of this novel is laced with Neapolitan words. The overall result is what Bruni calls a “lingua oscillante” [wavering language]. Bruni describes the stylistic project of Serao as an attempt to mediate between conflicting polarities of language:

La lingua media o borghese cui la Serao si riferisce equivale a quel registro intermedio fra gli opposti del dialetto e della lingua che è ancor oggi caratteristico dell’italiano parlato e, in misura minore o comunque in modi differenti, scritto, e che negli studi di storia linguistica si definisce comunemente italiano regionale, o varietà regionale d’italiano. (*Prosa e narrativa dell’Ottocento* 138)

In this respect, Serao’s “lingua media” can be seen as one of the earliest realization of the regional register of the Italian fiction; the alleged weakness of her style is the price to pay for her linguistic experimentalism. 17

Despite their differences, all these experiences contributed to reduce the hiatus between dialect and language by bringing regional life into the national novel: a task shared by those authors who, like De Amicis, 18 elaborated a standard of “prosa borghese,” and who, according

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17 Several authors have highlighted the stylistic weakness of her language. Antonio Palermo notes, for instance, how: “Insomma, piaccia o no ammetterlo, per questo aspetto la Serao, con tutta l’organicità culturale ed espressiva che differenzia la sua pagina da quella di Mastriani, non riesce ad andare molto al di là delle ingenu e trasposizioni gergali dell’appendicista, confermando così una volta di più la portata del miracolo dei *Malavoglia*.” (*Da Mastriani a Viviani* 51).

18 D’Amicis, in turn, promoted a Tuscan-centric view of language in his *L’Idioma gentile* (1905), in which he recommends the study of grammar and pronunciation. However, he condemned the excessive affectation and the adoption of Florentine vernacularisms (“non c’è bisogno di toscaneizzare per pronunziar bene, che consiste nel dare a ogni lettera il suo vero suono e a ogni parola il suo giusto accento, come sono indicate nelle grammatiche, nei vocabolari e in trattatelli speciali” 76). De Amicis was particularly wary of regional habits and forms, which he mocks in the essay “A ciascuno il suo: A una schiera di ragazzi di diverse regioni d’Italia.” In this essay, he ironically points to common habits and mistakes of different regions—including the vernacularism of Florence. “Per
to Bruno Migliorini, acted as mediators between opposite linguistic tendencies. (*Storia della lingua italiana* 610). More importantly, the vast majority of Italian writers did not follow Verga in his extreme syntactical experimentalism, but chose to limit themselves to more cautious forms of hybridism, based on a standard Italian of literary derivation with the addition of isolated dialectal loanwords. What is more, they often chose such loanwords among those vast subsets of words that were documented both in a regional variety and in the corpus of the literary tradition. Through this technique, authors were able to keep a local flavor without abandoning the normativity of standard Italian: a method that is probably close to the author’s practice of self-translation, and which documents a co-existence of the two codes in the consciousness of many writers of the late Nineteenth century.

### 3. The Space of Translation

In addition to the achievements of the Italian regional novel, the novelistic imagination affected the linguistic unification of Italy also through the bulk of translations from French and other European languages, often carried out by novelists-turned-translators. These works contributed to modify the standard for the Italian writers of prose, pushing for the adoption of standard and substandard elements, in order to describe new material referents from the literary capitals of European modernity, Paris and London.

The importance of translation was often remarked by intellectuals of the time, who saw it as a pernicious influence on the formation of a true national character. An example of this chauvinism can be seen in the vitriolic comments by Pietro Fanfani, who spurned the influence of French linguistic models in his *Lingua e nazione: Avvertimenti a chi vuole scrivere italiano*. In the Preface, Fanfani mocks “que’ cotali che, letti così a spilluzzico sei o sette libricciuoli francesi, ovvero alla francese, entra loro addosso la smania d’essere autori e di andare in

insegnar la lingua ai tuoi fratelli d’Italia, che ti riconoscono maestro dalla nascita, devi guardarti anche tu dai dialettismi, non con altrettanta, ma con maggior cura degli altri,” he writes, addressing to a young reader from Florence.
istampa.” (2); and quite meaningfully translation (“libricciuoli *francesi*) is akin to imitation (“ovvero *alla francese*”). In the views of Fanfani and his fellow Puristi, translation is thus understood in pejorative terms, as a passive and servile imitation of a foreign vogue: the high number of translation is thus seen more as the evidence of Italy's intrinsic cultural weakness than as a productive venue for cross-cultural contact.

Bruno Migliorini was the first to highlight the specific role of translation, intuiting the vital link between linguistic standardization, the creation of a national identity and the outpouring of French titles onto the Italian publishing market. In his monumental *Storia della lingua italiana*, he compares two translations of the same work to exemplify the variety of stylistic options that was available to the writers of prose in post-Unification Italy (607-608). His chosen text, Zola’s *L’assommoir*, is particularly compelling, given Zola’s influence on the renewal of the Italian narrative prose. Migliorini points to the striking differences between the 1879 translation by the Neapolitan writer Emmanuele Rocco (who was very close to the positions voiced by Puoti) and the translation published a year later by Policarpo Petrocchi, a Tuscan writer of strict Manzonian observance. These two versions provide evidence to the linguistic and stylistic uncertainties faced by the Italian prose writers of the time: while Rocco chose a traditional and conservative form of language, ostensibly inspired to Puoti’s Purist tendencies, Petrocchi laced his version with Tuscanisms, closely following the solutions adopted by Manzoni in his 1840 edition of *I promessi sposi*. Migliorini notes how quickly the difference between these two opposite orientations ceased to be, completely disappearing at the beginning of the Twentieth century: “prescindiamo per un momento dalla personalità dei due traduttori, e consideriamoli come i rappresentanti di due tendenze che, con innumerevoli sfumature tennero il campo ancora per alcuni decenni dopo l’unità. Nel 1910, due traduzioni così profundamente diverse sarebbero impensabili.” (609). Alongside the modeling value of the so-called “prosa borghese,” translations from other European languages can be partially credited for this unifying process.

Similar comments are formulated by Patricia Bianchi, who analyzes the conspicuous translational activity in Naples especially focusing on series “Nuova raccolta di romanzi” printed by the publisher Firbeno. The translators publishing in the series (Sesto Giannini, C. Torelli, Raffaele Colucci among others) mostly follow the authority of traditional dictionaries such as the Vocabolario dell’Accademia Crusca or Tramater (‘*I te vurria parla*’ 193); very much like the
Purist option chosen by Rocco, their work is strongly oriented by a long-lasting “memoria linguistica,” which explains the persistence of lofty, literary forms long after their elimination from the *Promessi Sposi*’s 1840 edition. As Bianchi notes, “la lingua di queste traduzioni appare complessivamente orientata su un modello della tradizione aulica.” Indeed, this linguistic option is obliterated in the subsequent linguistic evolution, As the more realist vein of the Neapolitan novel gradually abandons the models proposed by Puoti, Rocco and the other “purist” translators to adopt a more hybrid language. In turn Matilde Serao epitomizes such expressive trajectory, as her adoption of a modern language corresponds with her severing ties with the “translationese” of the cheap import novels (“la Serao si differenzia per temi e per lingua proprio da quelle traduzioni di romanzi stranieri che erano stati alla base della sua formazione” (*I te vurria parla*’ 192)”

In more recent years a growing number of scholars have received Migliorini’s suggestion and began focusing more systematically on the role of translation in the process of nation-building. Important cultural centres such as Milan, Naples or Florence have therefore been analyzed in their function of editorial microcosms or “civilizations of translators;” so have the peripheries of readership, such as the separate communities constituted by female readerships or by provincial and narrower audiences.

Nunzio Ruggiero, for instance, has devoted his 2010 monograph *La civiltà dei traduttori* to the literary landscape of Naples, heavily influenced by the models of London and Paris – two different facets of the rising urban modernity. In particular, Ruggiero compares the translational work of Di Giacomo, Vittorio Pica, and Federigo Verdinois, together with the aforementioned translations of *L’Assommoir* carried out by Rocco and Petrocchi. The author also focuses on the expressive registers available to Southern Italian translators of the time – a set of options that ranged from the rigid expressive purism of Rocco to the pictorial realism of Di Giacomo. Regardless of their choices and stylistic preference, all translators faced a similar challenge: “le difficoltà inerenti alla sfera del parlato letterario, traendo spunto, all’indomani della riforma manzoniana, dalle pratiche sperimentate nella stagione del realismo ottocentesco” (126). The Manzonian model, which had officially attempted to narrow the gap between spoken and written language, influenced the practices and the expressive choices of translators, increasingly concerned with linguistic verisimilitude and realism. As Ruggiero maintains, “l’adeguamento, all’insegna delle poetiche del realismo urbano ottocentesco, alla cosiddetta ‘lingua parlata’
implicava la ricerca di una colloquialità espressiva che non escludeva il ricorso al serbatoio dei dialetti” (126). In this respect, translation acted as a safe haven, allowing translators and writers-turned-translators to experiment freely with expressive solutions later implemented in their own narrative.

Similarly, Sergia Adamo has reflected on the value of the translation of popular novels from French into Italian, noting how the translation of a given sub-genre shaped its own community of (mostly female) readers. In a recent paper titled “Microhistory of Translation,” Adamo recalls her previous research on the “the role of translation in the context of the rise and the inferior status of the modern novel as a genre in the eighteenth century, in relation to the formation of new audiences as well as new reading practices” (88). Through her work, Adamo had demonstrated how translation generated its own segment of audience, defining a specific female readership. At the same time, she relates this specific research to a methodological problem, claiming that the object of her studies (practices entailing, more than the translator’s proverbial “invisibility,” a status of “hardly noticeable visibility”) were not adequately served by the traditional paradigms of the discipline:

nothing corresponded to the actual translation practices I was observing in the translated novels of my corpus. The widespread practice of translation or retranslation of novels (a new, not canonized, but increasingly more significant genre) from French into Italian had no previous grounds to refer to. It was a practice deeply rooted in the needs of the publishing market and in the demands of the active and creative cultural consumption of the readers. What I wanted to recover was the variety and the complexity of the translation practices far beyond established theories and norms. (89)

19 Adamo’s argument, in her own words, was that “translations were addressed to a lower-middle standard of enlarged public (to the extent that we can label the eighteenth-century reading public as “low” or “wide”) constituted mostly by women; they were an important factor for the definition of a female reading public which had not been considered as a separate entity before” (“Microhistory of Translation” 88).
If the work of Ruggiero focused on a “centre” (the former capital Naples, which lost its cultural preeminence but remained an important centre in the printing industry)\textsuperscript{20}, Adamo’s work is more useful in its engagement with the notion of periphery. Regardless, both call for a combination of paradigms ranging from cultural and social history to linguistic analysis. These two works therefore establish an important methodological precedent for the study of translation in the Southern Italian culture, often torn between a glorious tradition and a present of marginalization. In translating the masterpieces of the French, English and German novel, Southern authors found a way to reassert their own place in the national canon as well—a place that was often subject to tense negotiations, and which was far from being \textit{a fait accompli}.

4. The Translator on Stage

If the prose of the novel was slowly but inexorably achieving its own standardization, also thanks to the vital role played by translation, the same cannot be said of the post-Unification theatre. While the language question acted as a powerful catalyst on the Italian novel, prompting authors to adopt new expressive solutions, the lack of a standardized model of spoken Italian acted mostly as an obstacle for playwrights, preventing the development of a strong and successful modern theatre. See for instance Migliorini: “Ancor più che i narratori, stentano a trovare un tono garbato e naturale gli autori teatrali, soprattutto perché l’uso parlato è poco sciolto e poco uniforme.” (\textit{Storia della lingua italiana} 611). A similar view is shared by Serianni, who states: “L’insufficienza del teatro contemporaneo nell’opinione degli scrittori ha la sua radice fondamentale nella scarsa credibilità linguistica, nella povertà e nell’impaccio dei dialoghi.” (\textit{Il secondo Ottocento} 156). In fact, lamenting the “lack of a national theatre” is as commonplace as deploring the ‘weakness of the Italian prose’ in the literary debate of the post-Unification decades.

In her 2006 volume \textit{Va in scena l’italiano}, Stefania Stefanelli has noted how the problematic relation between dialect and Italian—an omnipresent feature of the Italian dramatic literature since its inception—becomes particularly relevant to the elaboration of a Nineteenth-

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. below, Chapter II, section 2.4 (“Foreignizing and Domestication translation”).
century theatrical aesthetics. Furthermore, she describes the contemporary history of Italian theatre along the fault lines of the “accoglimento [...] di quelle che Nencioni chiama le ‘ragioni del dialetto’ a fianco delle ‘ragioni dell’italiano’:” a movement that she sees epitomized in the work of Pirandello (Vu in scena l’italiano 15).

Similarly, in a paper titled “Le due vie del parlato teatrale: tra realismo e deformazione,” Trifone identifies two opposite ways in which Italian playwrights traditionally sought to overcome the lack of a standard spoken Italian, respectively called “expressive realism” and parodic deformation of languages and codes.” While the former is marked by the “invenzione letteraria dell’italiano parlato,” whereas the other is marked by the “impiego esasperato del plurilinguismo.” While Goldoni, Eduardo De Filippo and Pirandello are notable representatives of the former tendency, the latter is embodied by the Romanesque comedies of Ettore Petrolini and by the centuries-old tradition of Commedia dell’Arte, from its first theorist Andrea Perrucci to its most illustrious contemporary heir Dario Fo.

This dualism is clearly indebted to many dichotomies used to describe the historical lines of Italian literature, beginning with Contini’s seminal distinction between monolinguismo and plurilinguismo; in fact, Trifone’s reference to the so-called “linea Folengo-Gadda” is an explicit acknowledgment of this tradition. What is interesting in this particular reconstruction is the fact that Trifone does not trace a rigid, mutually exclusive opposition between these terms; on the contrary these two tendencies are in a direct opposition to the “scelta alternativa del dialetto,” seen as a way to avoid the stylistic quandaries posed by Italian altogether. However, dialect is omnipresent in both these approaches. In the ‘realist’ vein, dialect takes the form of realistic insertions of code-switching, loanwords or regional influences. At the same time, dialects are important elements also in the “expressive” tendencies: for an example, one might just think of the linguistic fantasies of Fo’s grammelot, loosely based on the multilingual model of Commedia dell’Arte.

In his Il secondo Ottocento, Luca Serianni describes the theatrical production of the 1880s and 1890s as eclectic and hybrid (“caratterizzata da un sostanziale eclettismo linguistico,” 156-157); however, the hybridism of theatre does not appear to be the outcome of a conscious project, as it was the case of the narrative prose, but the result of individual and extemporaneous attempts.
Dialect plays a pivotal role in such experiments; in particular, self-translation between Italian and dialect emerges as a recurrent practice among those playwrights who sought to overcome the expressive differences between dialect and Italian and between written and spoken speech. As Serianni notes, “sovente lo stesso autore rielaboura in italiano un suo testo dialettale […] ovvero passa dall’italiano al dialetto.” (156): the name of the authors who alternated dialect and Italian in their work include Vittorio Bersezio in Piedmont, Giacinto Gallina in Veneto, Luigi Capuana in Sicily, Salvatore Di Giacomo and Achille Torelli in Naples. All these authors translated their plays from one language into another (often in both directions), turning to regional varieties in their frantic quest for a credible and authentic Italian “stage dialect.”

In light of these punctual observations, it is surprising to note how little study has been devoted to the practice of self-translation between dialects and standard Italian for theatrical purposes, and to its role in helping Italian playwrights overcoming their expressive hesitations. Despite its importance and diffusion in the dramatic literature of the post-Unification era, this practice lacks an extensive and comprehensive study. The present dissertation attempts to overcome this theoretical gap, showing how the practice of self-translation between dialects and Italian for the stage has contributed to re-articulating the relationship between the different regional codes present on the Italian peninsula, while at the same time recombining the relation between their respective literary corpora. In this respect, the practice of self-translation between dialect and Italian appears to be a third way that is not in direct opposition with Trifone’s identified dichotomy of expressionism and realism, but foreshadows both.

5. The Corpus: a Brief Description

Over the past few sections, I presented the development of the linguistic debate in the decades immediately following the national unification of Italy (1861), gradually leading to the official end of the “language question.” This debate represents an important frame to understand the linguistic practices adopted by playwrights and novelists in the 1870-1915 period, and an indispensable prelude to the analytical work of this dissertation.
In the next chapters I will analyze the bilingual production of three Southern playwrights who consistently translated their works from dialect into Italian (and vice versa), thus falling in Serianni’s category of the theatrical self-translators: Salvatore Di Giacomo (1860-1934), Luigi Capuana (1839-1915), and Luigi Pirandello (1871-1936), whose bilingual activity spans over periods of different length and resulted in over 25 bilingual plays.  

This choice is consistent with Riccardo Tesi’s assessment of southern writers such in post-Unification culture, whom he describes as “i più sensibili al problema di una lingua media adeguata alle nuove esigenze del romanzo o del teatro moderno” (Storia dell’italiano 163); in particular, Tesi identifies a few common traits in their literary careers, such as formative sojourns outside of their native region, frequent collaborations with the main literary journals or reviews of their times, and an intense activity as theatre reviewers in their early years (164). However, Tesi fails to mention their common involvement in translations and self-translations from, and into dialects, for the stage: the impact of this practice in post-Unification culture, and its role in shaping a common linguistic identity will be the subject of the present dissertation.

In particular, the rest of my dissertation is articulated as follows: Chapter 1 (“Reading the Bilingual Text”) provides a methodological discussion on the notion of “bilingual text,” “bilingual writing,” and “self-translation,” the conceptual tools I employ to read my textual corpus. Chapter 2, 3, and 4 provide an in-depth analysis of the self-translational practices adopted by each author, analyzed according to similar parameters. Each analytical chapter follows a similar structure, presenting the author’s linguistic beliefs before engaging with textual analysis, and tracing a constant parallel between the authors’ practice of self-translation between Italian and dialects and their translation from French (or German) into Italian. The analysis will follow recurrent patterns and categories, such as the use of represented orality and artificial

Di Giacomo kept an even pace during the considered period, with no ostensible peaks or falls. His practice was more or less constant, as he alternated the involvement with dialectal theatre with other activities – poetry, short stories and non-fiction. His literary production is a poly-generic system, with poems written in Neapolitan, fictional and nonfictional prose in Italian – and theatre as the only bilingual field. Capuana and Pirandello, instead, focused their theatrical activity in certain periods. As we will see, these peaks of activity corresponded to external factors: mostly financial need, or the collaboration with some particular acting companies, as I will discuss later in chapters IV and V.

Tesi compares Verga, Capuana and Pirandello; Di Giacomo, instead, is never mentioned in his entire book.
recreation of writing of semi-literates, the representation of gender variation in the use of language, the use and function of code-switching between dialect and Italian and the problems arising from its translation in monolingual Italian texts, and the most recurrent lexical tendencies adopted by the authors. Finally, Chapter 5 (“Titolo”) will provide the working conclusions of my research, charting differences and similarities between the studied authors and suggesting possible future developments.

In order to have three corpora of comparable size, I identified a corpus of selected works, chosen for their circulation and critical importance:

- Salvatore Di Giacomo: Assunta Spina, Il voto. Scene di vita popolare/’O voto; Il mese Mariano/’O mese mariano; Quand l’amour meurt; L’abbé Peru
- Luigi Capuana: Malia; U Cavaleri Pidagna/Il Cavaliere Pedagna; Bona genti/Il mulo di Rosa; Riricchia; Il paraninfo/’U paraninfu

This corpus of bilingual (i.e., self-translated) works is better understood in comparison with the bulk of monolingual vernacular plays also written by the same authors: monolingual plays in dialect accompany the production of bilingual plays (that is, plays with a double script in dialect and in standard Italian), creating a common aesthetics. Also relevant to my research are their translation of works written by others, including regional dialects as well as other European languages. These authors often translated Italian plays into their working dialect, often working under commission by others: an example of this practice is Capuana’s translation of I Rantzau in Sicilian, Di Giacomo’ adaptation of Basso porto, and Pirandello’s Sicilian translations of Ercole Morselli’s Glauco). At the same time, the authors were active translating major works from French (Capuana and Di Giacomo) or German (Pirandello) into Italian: their working practice as translators for the editorial market is an interesting ground for comparison, allowing to assess their different ethics as “translators” and self-translators.” As I contend, all these different practices (that is, self-translation, monolingual writing in a vernacular, cooperation with other playwrights in adapting their works in dialect, and translation from other national languages into Italian) articulate themselves in a continuum:
### Table 1 “Practices of multilingual writing”

As we will see in greater detail over the next chapters, their practice of self-translation or bilingual writing falls within a wider constellation of practices, involving the use of dialect at

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Di Giacomo</th>
<th>Capuana</th>
<th>Pirandello</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>SELF-TRANSLATION</em></td>
<td>Mala vita → ‘O voto’</td>
<td>Malia</td>
<td>Lumie di Sicilia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ITALIAN → DIALECT)</td>
<td>Assunta Spina; ‘O mese mariano; A san Franscisco;</td>
<td>Riricchia; Bona Genti; Lu Cavalieri Pidagna; Lu paraninfu</td>
<td>Liolà; Pinsaci, Giacominu! ‘A giarra; A birritta cu’ I ciancianeddi; A patenti’; Tutto per bene → Cu i ‘nguanti gialli.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>COLLABOURATION TO</em></td>
<td>Mala vita; I mariti</td>
<td>Ammattula; Di cosa nasci cosa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>SELF-TRANSLATIONS</em></td>
<td>Basso porto</td>
<td>I Rantzau → I Ficicchia.</td>
<td>Glaucu; ‘U ciclopu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>TRANSLATIONS</em></td>
<td>Edmond de Goncourt, Suor Filomena (1892)</td>
<td>Henrik Ibsen, Casa di bambola (1891)</td>
<td>Wolfgang Goethe, Elegie Romane (1896)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(FRENCH/GERMAN → <em>ITALIAN</em></td>
<td>Quand l’amour meurt</td>
<td>U Comparaticu; Don Ramunnu; Ppi lu currivu; ‘Ntirrogatoriu; Quacquaracquà.</td>
<td>‘A Vilanza; Cappiddazzu Paga tuttu;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>MONOLINGUAL PLAYS</em></td>
<td>La fiera (favola in musica); Abbe peru.</td>
<td>Giacinta; Castigo; Ribelli.</td>
<td>Così è se vi pare, Sei personaggi, etc…</td>
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<td>(DIALECT)</td>
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<td><em>MONOLINGUAL PLAYS</em></td>
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23 I have indicated the both titles only when there is a significant changes, as in _Mala Vita_ → ‘_O voto_ and _Tutto per bene_ → ‘_Ccu i ‘nguanti gialli_’. In all other instances, only the dialectal title is mentioned.

24 Despite having a strong background in the study of classics, and therefore having linguistic access to the original Greek, there is textual evidence that Pirandello translated mainly from Ettore Romagnoli’s Italian translation of _The Cyclops_. For a detailed discussion on the topic, see below, Chapter IV, section 4.4 (“Sicily as the Afterlife”).

25 The year refers to the translation, not to the year of original publication of the work.
various levels. Consistently with these practices, the notion of authorship is often blurred, despite the authors’ strong personalities and their strong feelings over the playwright’s priority. Capuana consistently collaborated with his wife, Adelaide Bernardini, adapting her Italian plays into Sicilian scripts; several of Pirandello’s works were the result of his standing collaboration with Nino Martoglio, the founding father of contemporary Sicilian dramaturgy; and Di Giacomo often lent his linguistic expertise to fellow Neapolitan writers like Achille Torelli, helping them as they moved their first steps in the arena of vernacular theatre.

As seen earlier, Di Giacomo, Capuana and Pirandello were not the only authors who self-translated their works from dialect into Italian and vice versa. However, there are reasons suggesting that a comparison between their works would provide extremely productive.

Firstly, their use of dialect and Italian is not episodic; on the contrary, it gave way to a consistent production, albeit in different chronological patterns. The extent of their bilingual writing is exceptional in many respects—both quantitatively and qualitatively. Secondly, their activity as bilingual writers overlaps with a wider ideological involvement with the values of vernacularism and regionalism, leaving a deep mark in their production and literary reputation. Thirdly, their use of self-translation was deeply attuned to a wider process of artistic and literary renewal: to different extents, they all strove to renovate the expressive codes of their time, and they did so while operating through the porous border of the language/dialect interaction. It is worth mentioning that all the three authors examined were Southerners, and their geographical location plays a fundamental role in their inspiration. Their specific location contributed to fuel their interest in regional topics and characters, as it was the case of the “verista sentimentale” Di Giacomo and of the naturalist writer Capuana. At times, their genius loci took the form of a mythical land: just think of the mythical depiction of Sicily land in Pirandello and, to a lesser extent, to the most idealized depictions of Naples in Di Giacomo’s poetry. Self-translation thus appears to be functional to the author’s self-searching journey, a way to carve a space of agency for southern and regional identity in the context of the new national community.

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26 Nino Martoglio (1870-1921) was active as a reporter, poet, and playwright; he is mostly remembered for his intense theatrical activity (which began in 1903, after the sweeping success of Grasso’s company in Rome) and for his involvement in cinema – culminating in the successful Sperduti nel buio (1913), a screen adaptation from Roberto Bracco’s novel of the same title.
In addition to sharing similar practices and values, the chosen authors also occupy a similar place in the system of cultural production. They are all part of the literary canon, a status signified by their many awards and honours as well as by their parallel careers in the cultural industry and in the academic establishment. While the use of dialect has often been associated with minor writers of lesser artistic value, these authors are clearly the evidence that the contrary is true: their self-translational practices thus help re-negotiate the space of the standard and of the dialectal in the literary canon. For this reason, their regionalism should not be misunderstood as a sign of provincialism. While being active in their regional dialects, these authors were exposed to the most advanced tendencies from French and German literatures. Avid readers of classical and modern literatures they were translating into Italian important authors, such as Edmond de Goncourt, Henrik Ibsen and Wolfgang Goethe. The fact that these three giants of the Post-Unification culture were involved with this practice shows its importance in shaping the linguistic and cultural identity of Italy as a nation. More importantly, this variety of practices proves the importance of translation within the conceptual arsenal at their disposal. Translating essays, short stories or novels from important French authors was a normal task among emerging intellectuals in the late Nineteenth century, both for its immediate financial outcome and for its formative value; these endeavours show the authors’ familiarity with the practical problems of translation.

Ultimately, this thesis attempts to demonstrate how translation, self-translation and inner cultural diversity merge in a coherent system of discursive practices in the work of the three authors examined, who are representative of the linguistic tensions shaping their times. Their experience in translating authors from major European national languages, with its obvious impact on the standardization of Italian prose, clearly overlaps with their use of translation in respect to the inner linguistic diversity of Italy, along the fault lines of the standard and the substandard, language and dialect, written and spoken speech.

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27 Di Giacomo was nominated to the Real Accademia d'Italia in 1929—as a partial compensation for his unsuccessful run as a Senator, and in acknowledgment of his support of Mussolini’s regime. Pirandello, himself a member of the Accademia, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934.
Chapter 1

Reading the Bilingual Text

Earlier in the *Introduction*, I provided a detailed summary of the debate on the language question in the post-Unification period (1870-1915). In particular, I showed how the opposition between the Florentine-centric model championed by Manzoni and the contrastive approach proposed by Ascoli was gradually left behind in an intense process of linguistic unification. Along similar lines, I showed how the experimentations of regionalist fiction and the development of the so-called “prosa borghese” contributed to orient and reshape the linguistic options available to writers of prose in late-Nineteenth century Italy. Finally, I reflected on the role played by translation in shaping the linguistic landscape of the time: while the work of translators (or, as it often happened, novelists-turned-translators) from French and other national languages provided a ground to experiment stylistic solutions later implemented in the Italian narrative prose, theatre saw the emergence of a different dynamics. In the theatre of the time—and especially in the theatre of prose—self-translation between standard Italian and dialects emerged as a space for the expressive quest of those authors who were seeking to elaborate a standard spoken Italian viable for the stage. In both cases, translation acts as one of the vectors for the linguistic unification of Italy at the height of its process of nation-building. This is especially true for those authors operating from Southern locations, whether peripheries (Sicily) or in former cultural capitals (Naples), who had to negotiate their linguistic identities within the new national frame through an intense use of translation at all levels. At the same times, translating in the context of a ‘nation-building’ process raises important questions, which will be examined in detail in the present chapter.

In the following sections, I will engage with the notions of bilingualism, diglossia, self-translation and represented orality, which offer the conceptual foundations for my analysis in this dissertation. In particular, I will guide the readers through the main force fields shaping the linguistic landscape of the 1870-1915 period: the polarities of standard/dialect, oral/written, bilingualism/diglossia will not be presented as rigid dichotomies but rather as the extremes of a continuum. First, I will attempt to define the notion that is central to my entire research, that is to say, the very practice of “self-translation,” which is often assimilated to the concepts of bilingual
writing or bilingual text. Thereafter, I will discuss the notion of bilingualism both in relation to the societal norms and to the individual conscience of a writer—that is, both from the perspective of the *sociolect* and the *idiolect*. From a collective point of view, I will examine the competing paradigms of “bilingualism” and “diglossia,” which entail different balances of forces between languages despite being at times used interchangeably by scholars of self-translation. From the point of view of the idiolect, regarding the individual conscience of each writer, I will question the notions of native speaker and “mother tongue,” which are embedded in the very idea of “bilingual writing.” As I will argue, the notion of “mother tongue” is far from being objective, being in fact instrumental to what Nynioles and other scholars of Francophonie have described as the “diglossic ideologies” of the nation-state.

Finally, I will leave aside the problems of definition (“what is the bilingual text”) to tackle the deeper methodological question of how to read the bilingual text, a two-fold text that is always at the core of a complex network of cultural and literary systems and which cannot be merely read in light of the quest for equivalence between source and target language.

1. The Universal Metaphor of Translation

Since the foundation of Translation Studies as a discipline in the 1950s and 1960, the practice of translation has met with growing interest, eventually becoming a metaphor for communication as a whole. While translation acts as a powerful metaphor in philosophical works such as *Le monolinguisme de l’autre* or *Des tours de Babel*, scholars of literature have increasingly looked at the role played by linguistic diversity in reshaping the surface of their literary canons, articulating their national languages in a plurality of Engishes, Frences, Spaines, and so forth. The conceptual paradigms of translation thus play a pivotal role in our understanding of culture, working as an aggregator of transnational and intercultural linguistic communities.

As Western literatures faced a Babelic scattering in the theoretical diaspora of deconstruction and post-colonial studies, the field of Translation Studies gradually left aside the

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28 James Holmes, who named the discipline in his famous 1972 paper “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies,” argues that the Second World War was pivotal in marking an increased interest towards translation. (“The Name and the Nature” 68).
quest for equivalence between source and target language in order to focus on more complex problems such the translation of multilingual works, the status of minority languages, and the power unbalance implicit in any act of cultural negotiation. This sudden interest in the relations between translation and bilingual or polyglot writing is at the core of recent works such as Jan Hokenson and Marcela Munson’s monograph *The Bilingual Text* (2007), and more recently, by the essays collected in *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, edited in 2013 by Anton Cordingley. By analyzing the specific problem posed by the translation of multilingual texts, traditionally haunted by the risk of what Antoine Berman calls the “destruction of inner linguistic networks” (*La traduction de la lettre* 63-64), these innovative approaches effectively question the subtle assumption that monolinguism is the norm and bilingualism the exception.

This conceptual shift is mirrored by the very metaphors used to address the subject. The metaphor of language as a universal currency, traditionally used to define the indissolubility of language and thought in the Medieval grammatica29, has gradually given way to more dynamic paradigms, starting with Pierre Bordieu’s metaphor of the “linguistic marketplace” or the “talk market” in the 1970s. With this metaphor, Bordieu traces an analogy between the structures of social domination and the interrelations between different sociolects (or languages tout court), whose relation reflects the delicate balance of power between their groups of speakers (“Language and symbolic power” 501). These relations are always dynamic and conflicting, but their hierarchical nature becomes especially relevant when the two codes are in a “stylistic collision,” which is to say, “when the speaker is confronted with a socially heterogeneous audience or simply with two interlocutors socially and culturally so far apart that the sociologically exclusive modes of expression called for, which are normally produced through more or less conscious adjustment in separate social spaces, cannot be produced simultaneously” (507). Particularly noteworthy in Bordieu’s original formulation is the analogy between the linguistic value and the fluctuations of price (504). Like its economic equivalent, the language market is shaped in a hierarchical way: “the laws of the market are more favorable to the

29 See in particular Richard A. Shoaf’s claim that “Money and poetry are both fictions, as we who live with paper money know only too well, and they are both strangely alike--so much so that the problem of the meaning of money is analogous to the problem of the meaning of language, especially poetic language.” (*Dante, Chaucer and the Currency of the World* 14).
products offered by the holders of the greatest linguistic competence” (505). In turn, this model calls for a deeper understanding of bilingualism in conflicting contexts, including post-colonial cultures and literatures. More recently, new paradigms of “brokerage” and “negotiation” have started to replace the very notion of “value,” with its heavy structuralist legacy: the fluid economies of today’s global languages market are better represented by the constant fluctuations of the stock market than to the semiotic metaphor of the two sides of a coin.

The growing interest in multilingual writing is also consistent with the advent of more “humanizing” perspective in the field, leaving aside the quest for equivalence and fluency that was so central to the earliest theorizations in the field. No longer perceived as a science or a normative code of conduct, the study of translation opens to historical and anthropological consideration. As an example, one might think of Anthony Pym’s repeated appeals to historicize and humanize the study of translation, converging in what he defines as a “translator ethics.” This ethical pursuit rests on two fundamental ideas: that a translator is responsible of his/her words, and that such responsibility does not simply apply to the target language or culture, but unfolds in the space between the two involved cultures (what Pym defines as the “space of cooperation”). The scholar thus aims at overcoming the traditional dualisms of translation, split between the tendencies to foreignize and domesticate, inherited from German Romanticism. Rejecting the technical-oriented view of translation, which compelled the translator to choose between target- and a source-oriented approach in order to focus on the final outcome, the

30 The notion of “linguistic market” was applied to the field of sociolinguistics by David Sankoff and Suzanne Laberge in a paper titled “The Linguistic Market and the Statistical Explanation of Variability” (1978), in which the researchers analyze the distribution of morphological and syntactical variations (avoir/être; ce que/qu’est-ce que; on/ils) according to the economic condition of the informants. However, in this reading, the linguistic market works more as a statistical index than as a metaphor of identity and prestige. A more relevant use of the notion is the one made by Monica Heller, who relates the notion of “talk market” to that of prestige, closely following Bourdieu’s original input: she thus analyzes the role played by “linguistic capital” in negotiating the speakers’ identities in a bilingual context (specifically, the use of French-English bilingualism in Montreal after the adoption of Bill 101).

31 The quest for equivalence is central to the early translation studies: see, for instance, Eugène Nida’s notion of dynamic equivalence (first formulated in his 1964 work Toward a Science of Translating) and Gideon Toury’s notion of “Descriptive Translation Studies,” in which ‘equivalence’ is a criteria for assessing the appropriateness and adequacy of translation (appropriateness to the receiving context; adequacy to the source text). A full discussion of the notion can also be found in Pym’s paper “Natural and Directional Theories of Equivalence” (2007). The notion of “fluency” is central to Venuti’s investigation in The Translator’s Invisibility (1995).

32 I am here referring to the 2012 revised edition of On a Translator Ethics, which takes into consideration the debate originating from its first edition, including Meschonnic’s rebuttals (On Ethical and Political Aspects of Translation 39-41).
“humanizing” translator inhabits the space between languages, where an ethics of responsibility can thrive.

Within the wider subject of “translating multilingual (or bilingual) works”, a particular set of challenges is presented by those contexts that are marked by internal linguistic diversity. This is decidedly the case of Italian culture, marked by a centuries-old divide between standard and regional dialects. Translating in such a context calls into question the identity value of each linguistic code, constantly recombining in a fluid and complex “talk market,” and problematizes conflicting notions such as hegemony, canon, and standardization. At the same time, the practices of translation, self-translation or multilingual writing contribute to changing this already complex picture, allowing speakers (and writers) to subvert the traditional rift between minority and “major” language. In this context, self-translation achieves a double subversion: when used as a theoretical lens, it challenges the traditional hierarchy between the “vernacular” and the “standard;” and it does so equally in the making of a literary system, allowing authors to erode the boundaries between the canonical and the non-canonical, between the hegemonic and the marginal.

Indeed, the very terms of “dialect,” “vernacular” and “standard” are far from being unequivocal in the context of post-Unification Italy. Being all cognates in their common relation to Latin, and characterized by distinct phonological, morphological, and syntactical reason, the varieties of the Italo-Romance continuum are hardly assessed on a rigid language/dialect dichotomy, and their socio-linguistic status is deeply contentious. More importantly, these ‘minor’ and ‘marginal’ codes are documented by a rich literary corpus, which is as ancient as the production in Tuscan vernacular. Indeed, the most ancient document of the Italian language, the Placito Capuano, is a witness statement written in a proto-dialect of Campania. Italy is thus historically marked by an inescapable contrast between conflicting poles: the “oral” and the “written,” the ‘highbrow’ and the “popular”, the “canonical” and the “substandard.” These

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33 Here and in the rest of my dissertation I use the term “standard Italian” in opposition to regional varieties or dialects (whether they are koiné or sub-regional clusters). By using the term “standard” I do not, in fact, assume that the Italian peninsula has known the same degree of phono-morphological standardization as the German Hochsprache or the Oxford English. In this respect, my use of the term is fairly different from its use in the sociolinguistic debate of Italy—from Berruto 1987 onwards.
34 See on the topic Storia della lingua italiana 90-93 and Castellani 103-109.
dichotomies will provide the backbone to this chapter, in which I present the main methodological questions raised by my corpus, thus leading to formulating the four main hypotheses guiding my research.

2. Self-Translation and Bilingual Writing

The notion of self-translation is akin to the practice of bilingual writing, of which it is often seen as a special subset. This special liaison is made evident in nearly all the available scholarly definitions of such practice. For instance, in defining “auto-translation” for the Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies, Rainer Grutman presents it as “the act of translating one’s own writing or the result of such an undertaking” and explains the relative lack of study of the phenomenon with its being “more akin to bilingualism than to translation proper” (“Auto-translation” 18). Self-translation is thus seen as a “pivotal point in a trajectory shared by most bilingual writers,” often serving a self-asserting function for marginalized cultures at historical crossroads (and to make his point, Grutman provides the example of the Flemish production of the 1920s-1960s in Belgium, in which self-translation became prominent among the first generation of speakers who were university-educated in Dutch, for which French translation provided means to access a wider and more refined audience).

Self-translation and bilingualism also converge in Hokenson-Munson’s definition, presenting the bilingual text as “a self-translation, authored by a writer who can compose in different languages and who translates his or her texts from one language into another” (1); later in the Introduction they refer to it as “a single text in two languages, smoothly spanning different audiences” (1), a definition that emphasize the twofold nature of the self-translation. Considering that Munson and Hokenson consider the ‘bilingual text’ and the ‘self-translated text’ to be equivalent, it is not surprising that they attempt to ground their analysis in a theory of bilingualism. They define “bilingualism” as “the alternate use of two languages,” or, for the specific purpose of literary analysis, as “having authored in two languages” (4). This broad and flexible definition is meant to overcome the ongoing debate about native or acquired bilingualism: in fact, their notion of “bilingual text” includes a wider spectrum of practices, potentially including the conscious decision of writing, authoring and publishing in a language of culture acquired during adulthood. Clearly, when they define a “bilingual author” as “anyone
who, in addition to speaking and writing one language idiomatically, has acquired a high degree of control over spoken and written forms of a second language and [...] has authored work in both languages” (12), they are thinking of acquired bilingualism, including notable examples such as Samuel Beckett’s French or Joseph Conrad’s English.

Later in their introduction, the authors attempt to chart the different ranges of competence found amongst bilingual writers. Building on previous work by James Noel Adams, Daniel Baggioni and Suzanne Richards, Hokenson and Munson propose a taxonomy that includes the following typologies: the ambient translingual, who adopts different languages in different settings; the diglossic writer, which they consider a subset of the previous category and has a “chiefly oral use of two languages”; the colingual writer, who produces polyglot texts, often recurring to code-switching; the competent bilingual, who is equally competent in both languages and aware of their social variation; the idiomatic bilingual, who is has native or near-native fluency in both codes; and, finally the multilingual writer, who is competent or idiomatic in more than two languages. (11-12)

The work of Hokenson and Munson has many merits, beginning with that of having first formulated an organic theory of bilingual writing that stretches from the late Mediaeval continuum of vernaculars and Latin up until the Modernist experiments of authors such as Giuseppe Ungaretti and Stefan George. Furthermore, in their monograph they promote a historical understanding of the notion, re-conceptualizing the Romantic identification of language and Volk as a culturally and historically specific moment. Nevertheless, their identification of “bilingualism” and “translation” is problematic, being marked by a constant preoccupation with the balance between “dominant” and “subordinate” language and by a rather explicit focus on “idiomatic” and “competent” bilinguals. In fact, the latter typologies are often identified with the “literary” self-translator tout court.35

This focus leads the two scholars to a contradictory line of thought: after having traced a quite comprehensive and pragmatic definition of the bilingual writer, they narrow it by stating that “self-translators are idiomatic bilingual writers who have two literary languages and

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35 Cf. the following passage: “Accordingly, self-translators are idiomatic bilingual writers who have two literary languages: they compose texts in both languages, and they translate their texts between those languages” (14)
compose texts in both languages, and they translate their texts between those languages.” (14) With this conceptual shift, Hokenson and Munson narrow the label of ‘authentic’ self-translation to those authors who have native or near-native fluency, apparently excluding the many practices of those authors who chose to rewrite or translate their works into languages they ostensibly do not master.

Their taxonomy of bilingual writing is equally problematic, especially in regard to the condition of minority languages or regional dialects. For instance, the claim that diglossia is a subset of ambient translingualism does not adequately describe the reality of many diglossic cultures: while a different pattern of use is one of the distinctive traits of diglossia, there are other factors to be considered, such as prestige, acquisition, and standardization. Indeed, their contradictory stance toward diglossia and ambient translingualism is coherent with their asserted focus on literary genius: and it is not by chance that they ignore the case of literature in Italian dialects and other minority languages as a “non-literary” issue, readable mostly from a sociological and political perspective (185). More importantly, the two authors implicitly exclude diglossic writing from the domain of literary writing when they state that a diglossic subject is chiefly oral, writing being an “unnecessary condition.” Their use of “diglossic” in such a context is deeply problematic, as it excludes bilingual literature also produced in diglossic context; furthermore, their reconstruction implicitly dismisses the many literary traditions that are not based on a written tradition but only on a corpus of work, orally passed from a generation to the next. Finally, it is not clear whether these typologies are to be mutually exclusive or if there are possible overlaps between them. For instance, can a diglossic subject be “competent” or “idiomatic” in either or both languages? Can a (multilingual) author be idiomatic in two codes and competent in one?

Clearly, both the definitions provided by Grutman and Hokenson-Munson, while laying down a set of fundamental criteria for defining the “bilingual text,” leave open a number of questions. Where exactly does one set the threshold for defining an author, or his/her oeuvre, as “bilingual”? Do co-authorship and collaborations count as practices of “bilingual writing”? And

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36 A detailed definition of diglossia is provided later in this chapter, section 3.
more importantly, how does the practice relate to the linguistic hierarchy of an author’s national community?

Scholars have provided conflicting answers to these answers. In a 2003 essay titled “Le Bilinguisme littéraire comme relation intersystemique,” Grutman defined the bilingual writer as an author who adopts at least two languages in his or her oeuvre: “un écrivain est [...] un bilingue littéraire si et seulement si sa production totale comporte au moins deux langues, quelle que soit leur importance quantitative ou qualitative.” (204). The reference to “quantitative and qualitative importance” is clearly aiming at applying this definition to an array of different cases – ranging from the case of minority languages to that of the colonizer/colonized divide or, yet again, to the case of dialectal literatures. Given its looseness, Grutman’s definition appears to be useful in orienting our understanding of authors who were operational bilinguals in a context shaped by a constant opposition of standard/vernacular form.

The three authors under examination would certainly satisfy such a broad definition. Di Giacomo was an accomplished writer both in Neapolitan and in standard Italian; furthermore, his multilingual activity is distributed along the coherent lines of a multi-generic oeuvre, as he adopted only Neapolitan for his poems, Italian for his narrative and non-fictional prose, and a complex alternation of both for his theatre. Capuana, mostly known for his realist novels and for his militant support of Naturalism, had begun to collect Sicilian folktales and songs as early as the 1850s under the guidance of local historian Lionardo Vigo; many of these folkloric texts were, however, crafty forgeries written by Capuana himself and not secondary texts derived by an (inexistent) original. Finally, Pirandello devoted his doctoral thesis at the University of Bonn to the study of his own “dolce parlata natia,” as he would later define the dialect spoken in Agrigento in his well-known preface to the 1917 edition of Liolà (Liolà 1917 836): in addition to a native knowledge of Sicilian, later reflected in his many Sicilian plays, he had a scientific understanding of its sub-regional clusters and of its grammatical structures. Unlike the many authors who were fluently bilingual in their everyday lives, but who used only standard Italian for their literary endeavours, the three examined writers exploited their native bilingualism with expressive finalities.

The term “bilingual,” however, often generates confusion between self-translators and writers in a second language, a vast category that includes post-colonial authors, exiled writers
and migrant writers who chose to write in a language other than their mother tongue, but who did not necessarily translate their own work from a language into another. For this reason, Hokenson has recently cautioned against the simplistic use of the “bilingual” term, partially retracting the very broad definition he had provided, together with Munson, in *The Bilingual Text*. In a more recent paper titled “History and the Self-Translator,” Hokenson distinguishes self-translation from the work of those authors who “immigrate into a second language and adopt it as their literary medium” (51). According to this new classification, not every author who happens to be a bilingual should automatically be considered a “bilingual writer” or a “self-translator.” Similarly, Grutman distinguishes “bilingual writing” from those practices of “translingual writing” that entail the adoption of a non-native language for expressive purposes without any form of multilingualism, dissipating doubts and anticipating potential objections.

Di Giacomo, Capuana and Pirandello clearly also fit this second, more restrictive, definition. Not only were they active both in Italian and in their native dialects, but they directly translated their own work from one code into another. Not only did they produce a bilingual corpus of works (that is, a corpus in which both standard Italian and a local dialect are used in different texts); they also produced bilingual texts (that is, texts constitutively marked by the co-presence of dialect and the standard). In their production, bilingual writing thus comes to indicate a particular form of literacy, and not only a mental state—the linguistic conscience of an individual author who also happens to be a bilingual. Their bilingual nature reverberates at all levels of the language, affecting both the world of the idiolect and the world of the sociolect: indeed, both these levels will be taken into consideration in the next sections of this chapter.

### 3. Bilingual Texts, Diglossic Writing

If the term “bilingualism” can be effectively used to describe the condition of authors who are equally proficient in two or more codes (regardless of their status, function or prestige), its use to describe the socio-linguistic setting of the Italian peninsula is problematic at best. In this respect, a more common label is that of diglossia, first formulated by Charles A. Ferguson in order to
account for the stratifications of standard language and spoken regional dialect in a variety of settings that include modern Greek, Arabic, Haitian Creole, and Swiss German.\(^{37}\)

According to its proponent, a condition of \textit{diglossia} occurs when, within a same defining language, a low-prestige variety (L) is functionally and grammatically distinguished from the high-prestige variety (H), the only one suitable for use in formal contexts and in written speech. As Ferguson states, H is seldom used in oral conversation unless in prescriptive, highly codified situations. Examples of such exceptional situation are the ritual alternation of languages in religious celebrations, or the reading aloud of a text written in H, immediately switching to the L-code to comment its content. Ferguson analyzes the distribution of H and L with respect to their functional use, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition pattern, standardization; he then examines intrinsic features of language, such as their different phonological and lexical structures. Finally, he analyzes the societal perception of “diglossia”, noting that it is not regarded as a problem but rather accepted in the community of speakers (245), and he advances a hypothesis regarding the historical factors leading to diglossia – that is, a very limited diffusion of literacy, the existence a considerable body of literature written in H dating back to when H was a natural language, and an interval of several centuries between these two facts.

If applied to the Italian peninsula in the immediate post-Unification era, Ferguson’s model effectively accounts for several aspects of the Italian/dialect opposition. For instance, the different patterns of acquisition of Italian and regional dialect reflect Ferguson’s statement than the L-code is “naturally” acquired during childhood while the H-code is acquired through formal education: indeed, for decades, native speakers of a regional dialect struggled with the phonology and the orthography of a standard language they first learned in the classroom. Similarly, the centuries-old length of the separation between standard Italian and dialect is consistent with Ferguson’s statement that “diglossia persists for at least several centuries” (324). Finally, Ferguson’s claim that “for each of the defining languages there is a sizable body of written literature in H which is held in high esteem by the speech community, and contemporary literary production in H by members of the community is always felt to be part of this otherwise

\(^{37}\) The author does, in fact, reference the Italo-Romance continuum, when stating that Italian and Persian regional dialects are perhaps “the most familiar example” of diglossia. (325)
existing literature” (325) adequately describes the prevailing literary nature of the Italian canonical works before 1861.

Ferguson’s model can also explain some different characters of Italian and regional dialects: particularly relevant to the Italo-Romance case is his claim that, despite their sharing a considerable lexicon, H contains learned and scientific expressions absent from L, whereas L contains everyday referents, popular expression and names of domestic objects that do not have a direct equivalent in H. As the translational analysis will confirm, this distribution roughly corresponds to the lexical distribution of Italian and regional dialects: any author who seeks to overcome these linguistic boundaries needs to work around these expressive limitations.

Several authors have looked at the diglossic paradigm, including De Mauro, who describes the gradual evolution of Italy as a shift from non-bilingual diglossia to non-diglossic bilingualism in his Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita (240). According to De Mauro, the sociolinguistic setting of Italy gradually abandoned a rigid prestige distinction (still prevalent in the immediate post-Unification era) in favor of softer boundaries, allowing the alternate use of L and H in both written and oral speech, and in both formal and informal contexts.

However, important scholars have criticized the adoption of this pattern for the Italian peninsula, whose codes appear to be distributed in a less rigid way. In particular, Ferguson’s

38 Half a century since its first formulation, the notion of “diglossia” remains very controversial, not only among scholars of Italian linguistics but among sociolinguists at large. Ferguson himself has revised some of the main aspects of his original theory, for instance paying more attention to the intermediate varieties between L and H (“Diglossia revised” 222), or to the confusion between language variation and stylistic variation; Anne Pauwels, for instance, takes issue with the loose application of such concept to a variety of situations, and suggests an additional taxonomy based on additional criteria such as size of the analyzed region, number of native speakers of L and H, linguistic and sociolinguistic relation between the varieties (respectively describing interlingual or intralingual diglossia), and functional distribution (identifying fluid or rigid diglossia) (Pauwels 16). Similarly, Fishman identifies a wider range of situation exceeding Ferguson’s rigid 1959 definition, distinguishing the societal condition of “diglossia” from the individual condition of “bilingualism”; he thus proposes a taxonomy of four quadrants (Both Diglossia and Bilingualism; Bilingualism without Diglossia; Diglossia without Bilingualism; Neither bilingualism nor diglossia), which are largely used among Italian sociolinguists (cf Fishman 4-5). More recently, Don Snow has suggested that Ferguson’ original cases are, in fact, representative of three different kinds of diglossia, each one marked by specific patterns: traditional diglossia (marked by the use of a sacred language, such as Latin, Arabic or Sanskrit), revived diglossia (as in the case of Greek and Tamil), and modern diglossia (such as the case of German-speaking Switzerland) (Snow 62). While traditional diglossia is typical of societies that have yet to undergo modernization processes, revived and modern diglossia are a product of secularization and modernization, including mass education and the rise of print culture (Snow 65;70). For a full account of the criticism brought upon Ferguson’s original definition of diglossia, see Hudson, “Outline of a Theory of Diglossia.”
condition of a rigid separation between the two codes, enforced by societal pressure among the speakers, would not accurately describe the post-Unification decades. John Trumper, for instance, has distinguished two particular modes in the Italo-Romance continuum: macrodiglossia and microdiglossia (also known as “real diglossia” and “pseudo-diglossia”, cf. Trumper 1993).

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>macrodiglossia</th>
<th>microdiglossia</th>
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<tr>
<td>wide functional distribution of both codes</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regional koiné</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>clear-cut functional demarcations</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>code-mixing</td>
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<td>inner sociolinguistic stratification of dialect</td>
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**Table 2. Macrodiglossia and microdiglossia** (Trumper 298-99)

According to this view, the Italian case would be an almost perfect example of macrodiglossia, since dialects naturally tend to converge in a regional koiné, and they are no strangers to inner social stratification (Alfonzetti 1992; 2013). Building on this premise, Alberto Mioni has considered Sicilian as the perfect example of microdiglossia, together with a handful of other regions (Piedmont, Veneto, and Campania) (189). Similarly, Berruto has rejected the notion of “diglossia,” at least in Ferguson’s narrow definition, for the Italo-Romance case. Berruto instead suggested adopting the paradigm of ‘dilalia,’ which would account for the blurred distinction between functions in the use and for the increasing use of Italian in spoken, everyday interaction. However, Berruto recognizes the many traits the Italo-Romance shares with classic “diglossia:” these traits would, in turn, explain why the diglossic paradigm has been applied to the Italo-Romance continuum with success (557).

In addition to proposing the notion of ‘dilalia,’ Berruto has identified a set of criteria distinguishing “bilingualism” from the more rigidly hierarchical situations such as diglossia and dilalia:

(1) All the involved codes are “community languages”, both as
Abstandsprachen (language by distance) and Ausbausprachen; (language by construction)\(^{39}\)

1. H and L are divergent varieties;
2. H and L are both used in everyday conversation;
3. H and L are clearly differentiated from a functional point of view;
4. There are overlapping domains of use between H and L
5. L has some relative degree of standardization;
6. L has some inner social stratification;
7. There is a continuum of sub-varieties between L and H;
8. H has high prestige, not only in relation to L, but to other codes as well.

(adapted from 1989, 558)

Particularly interesting for the Italo-Romance context are criteria (6) and (7), which are directly called into question by the literary use of dialect – whether in a monolingual fashion or as a part of multilingual compositions.

In particular, rule (6) seems to account for the relative degree of standardization of dialect, the feature that makes it possible to write in dialect in the first place. Indeed, the existence of a rich literary tradition written in dialect is an important factor contributing to the relative standardization of dialect, as Berruto suggests: “in more than one instance the low

\(^{39}\) This distinction was first formulated by Heinz Kloss in his 1976 article “‘Abstand languages and Ausbau languages,’ aiming at laying clear criteria for the distinction of languages and dialects. According to Kloss, a language can be identified by their formal distance from other languages (“Abstandsprachen”), regardless of their prestige or literary production; as Kloss points out, the distance is “intrinsic” and not “geographic” (158). At the same time, a language can be identified as a language for its prestige – that is to say, for political, cultural or historical reasons (Ausbausprache). As Klopp explains, “Languages belonging in this category are recognized as such because of having been shaped or reshaped, molded or remolded—as the case may be—in order to become a standardized tool of literary expression. We might say that an Ausbausprache is called a language by virtue of its having been reshaped, i.e., by virtue of its “reshapedness,” if there were such a word.” (158). As Kloss maintains, the notion of Abstandsprache is eminently linguistic while the notion of Ausbausprache is clearly “sociological” (159). Peter Trudgill has observed that this definition has important consequences in asserting the autonomy of languages: “Ausbau languages,” he argues, “are cultural and political entities,” and for the same reason, they also are “potentially temporary entities:” “They may become dialects, through loss of autonomy, as in the case of Scots, which was formerly a distinct language but is not widely though not universally regarded as a dialect of English. And dialects can become language, by gaining autonomy, such as when Norwegian lost its heteronomy with respect to Bulgarian and Serbian.” (Language and Dialect: Linguistic Varieties, 647). In this respect, we can consider the Florentine vernacular as a language by construction (Ausbausprache), where the other mutually unintelligible dialects of the peninsula are languages “by distance” only.
variety, the dialect, experiences a certain degree of explicit standardization and codification (sharply increasing with the revival of local cultures and languages), even if it’s far from reaching a degree comparable to that of the standard.” (“Main topics in Italian sociolinguistics” 184).

Rule (7) accurately reflects the inner stratification of such literature, to some extent reproducing the social variation of regional dialect and reproducing it for expressive purposes. Indeed, the three authors examined were clearly aware of these inner stratifications, and they often used this variety for expressive purposes. Di Giacomo, for instance, reproduced the sociolinguistic stratification of Neapolitan in his own works. He wrote his lyrical poems in a lofty version of Neapolitan language that had been codified by centuries of literary expression. However, he also attempted a more “faithful” recreation of the everyday street language in ‘O Funneco Verde (1886), a collection of poems describing the striking misery of the traditional neighbourhoods near the harbour, later reshaped by the policy of urban modernization known as the Risanamento. Similarly, Capuana was well aware of the inner varieties of Sicilian, each coming with a different social connotation. For instance, he clearly distinguishes the urban variety of Eastern Sicilian adopted by Nino Martoglio for his poems (“un dialetto nel dialetto”) from the loftier koiné dialect used by Meli, which appears to be a “mental translation from Italian” (Capuana e Verga 215). Finally, Pirandello went as far as to adopt different geographical subsets of Sicilian in different plays, diversifying both within inter-textually within his corpus and intra-textually (that is, within the same text). Inter-textual variation is exemplified by his decision to use a bourgeois and urban dialect for Pinsaci, Giacominu and ‘A birritta, while adopting a rural variety of Sicilian for the scripts of Liolà and ‘A giarra. Infra-textual variation is best epitomized by Pirandello’s translation of Euripides’ Cyclops, in which each character speak a slightly different variety of Sicilian consistently with their different levels of nobility and humanity. All these examples show the complexity of the Italian continuum, as well as the multiplicity of its dialectal literature, challenging too rigid boundaries and norms.

40 A useful excursus on the linguistic debate on the standardization of Neapolitan can be found in De Blasi-Imperatore, Il napoletano parlato e scritto, 120-125.
41 For a detailed discussion of the sociolinguistic differentiation in Di Giacomo’s poetical production, see further below, in Chapter III.
42 See below, Chapter IV.
The definition of “diglossia” for the Italian setting has also found a stern opponent in Claudio Salvatore Sgroi, who expressed his reservations in his 1994 controversial monograph *Diglossia, prestigio e varietà della lingua italiana*. In this work, Sgroi suggests that the Italian setting is not governed by “true diglossia,” as there is no official demarcation between an official language and the unrecognized languages spoken by minorities. Unlike German and the other enclave languages spoken in the Italian peninsula, dialects are not officially recognized as minority languages. More importantly, the consistent use of code-switching, broadly documented both in private and public conversation,⁴³ should be regarded as a conclusive evidence of the unsuitability of diglossia as a descriptive paradigm for the Italian case (238), since code-switching is generally considered the most suitable code for bilinguals (Poplack 588). Proficient bilinguals tend to switch within the boundaries of a same sentence in a way that defies any attempt at a rigid functional classification, such as the one entailed by diglossia. Building on these premises, Sgroi argues that the Italian socio-linguistic setting should not be considered as an example of diglossia, but rather as a case of “prevailing diglossic bilingualism,” in which the distributional tendencies of diglossia are prevalent but not rigidly enforced.

Sgroi’s preoccupation with bilingualism is far from being trivial: indeed, the notion of *code-switching* (defined by its first proponent Shana Poplack as the alternation between two languages or dialects in the same speech, conversational turn, or sentence, 584) plays a central role in the examined corpus. As it will be seen in great detail over the next chapters, the examined authors represent a plurality of languages and codes, depicting their urban worlds with striking modernity. The analyzed plays often present a plain juxtaposition of Italian and dialect in the same scene or in the same line; and the lines of more educated, socially privileged character are laced with many examples of code-switching between dialect and Italian. Finally, the very act of self-translating, in its double Italian and dialectal utterance, could be metaphorically read as a form of written code-switching.

⁴³ There is a vast literature on the use of Code-Switching in Italian. A fundamental contribution can be found in the pioneering work by Giovanna Alfonzetti, *Il discorso bilingue. Italiano e dialetto a Catania* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1992) a sociolinguistic analysis of the code-switching between Italian and Catanean in an oral corpus collected by the scholar. Also fundamental is the work by Sobrero (1992). A grammatical approach on the subject can be found in Giacalone Ramat (1995).
Far from being a terminological *minutia*, the question of whether “diglossia” should be applied to the Italian case has important theoretical consequences. When we speak of “diglossia,” we place the emphasis on the dichotomy between oral and written speech: a rift that becomes blurred when analyzing samples of theatrical texts, whose oral performance is “scripted” or “programmed” in advance and therefore subject to a strong representational filter. Second, adopting a more restrictive paradigm affects our ability to use the labels of “bilingual” or “diglossic” writer as two completely interchangeable conditions. To claim that Pirandello was a “bilingual” writer is not the same as to claim that he wrote in a condition of “diglossia:” speaking of bilingualism entails, if not parity, at least functional ambivalence between the codes – a condition that is radically opposed to that of diglossia, and that in the sociolinguistic setting of post-Unification Italy is more of a political than a descriptive statement.

A practical indication on how to use these two labels comes from Grutman, who devoted several essays to the topic. For instance, in the article “Bilinguisme et diglossie,” he suggests a practical distinction between “diglossic” and “bilingual” writing. Both modes, he assumes, are marked by the co-presence of conflicting linguistic codes, carrying different social values and

44 Haller notes that “[f]or the linguist and the language historian, dialect plays provide a precious window to language use through time and social space. More so than the poetic output, dialect plays tend to be mimetic, especially in modern times, representing the speech forms of local people, or the affected interlanguages of the noble class”(41). However, theatre is not only an oral medium: it is increasingly a written one, as during the Nineteenth century, the emerging figure of the *metteur-en-scène* modelled itself on the role of the “reader of novels” (Zuber-Skerrit 276): this appears to be especially the case of the bourgeois theatre, whose models crossed the path of our three authors in different ways. The hyper-literary and overly written quality of nineteenth-century theatre is potentially at odds with the sociolinguistic value of dialect, and with its perceived linguistic “realism.” In this respect, dramatic literature is not only an artificial imitation of everyday language, but engenders a wide spectrum of relations with linguistic reality, including direct influence, a value as a model or a standard for accepted linguistic forms, and linguistic experimentalism. In a multilingual context, this filter naturally entails a problem of selection: as Ricard has noted in a pioneering study of diglossia and multilingual, “La sélectivité est le choix des éléments du code oral transportables dans le scriptural.” (Ricard, Alain. “Ecriture du verbal et multilinguisme” 104) More recently, the Spanish linguist Laura Callahan has warned her fellow scholars against using dramatic texts as documents of oral language or a “realistic” form of speech. However, the scholar does recognize the mimetic value of theatre, among others, in representing the inner linguistic diversity of a culture, and its role in reproducing instances of Code-Switching. If dramatic texts do not fully account for their contemporary linguistic setting, mechanically reproducing oral speeches and interactions, still they offer a stylized model of double competence to their audience, carving a space for the agency of both the standard and the substandard in the same context. More importantly, dramatic literature should not only be considered as a written mimicry of spoken phenomena, but as a form of bilingualism on its own, to be “placed” in the oral-written (*scritto-parlato*) mode within the ideal continuum of “diamesic” variation, ne of the several axis of the well-known graph of the Italian language, proposed by Gaetano Berruto (1987, 21). Theatre, with its specific regime of discourse (a speech written to be performed), is a particularly fertile ground to assess the shift from diglossia to bilingualism. In fact, writing in dialect – even if it is for a performance – challenges the fundamental assumption of diglossia—that is, that one simply *does not* write in dialect.
marking a conflict of identities; however, the two labels entail two different perspectives. “Bilingualism” is rooted in the authors’ self-representation and perception as a bilingual, equally proficient in both codes (“le ‘bilinguisme’ a le défaut de faire partie du discours que ces derniers tiennent à eux-mêmes”, “Bilinguisme et diglossie” 6). The notion of “diglossia” rests instead on external and circumstantial factors and on a close consideration of the social hierarchies between the different codes. As the author claims, ‘par ‘diglossie’ on entend tantôt la répartition fonctionnelle de deux variétés linguistiques dans une société donnée, tantôt leur superposition conflictuelle” (6). Therefore, when we qualify an author as “diglossic,” we emphasize the relation of the writer to his or her context: by choosing one code over the other, writers make an implicit statement, while also selecting their privileged audiences. On the contrary, when we adopt the label of “bilingualism,” we put the accent on the author’s relation to her/his own text—the author’s creative process, their stylistic arsenal, and so forth.

At the same time, the choice between diglossia or its “less rigid” conceptual alternative (“bilingualism”) is in itself a statement, influencing the hierarchy and the value of the available codes and reorienting the possible interaction between the standard and the vernacular.

These views are further developed in the essay “L’autotraduzione verticale” (2004) where Grutman distinguishes between a vertical and a horizontal notion of auto-translation. **Horizontal** self-translation requires a substantial parity between the two languages (for an example, one may just think of Beckett’s self-translation between English and French, two imperial languages of comparable status). On the contrary, **vertical** self-translation occurs between two languages with uneven prestige; it often represents the inaugural moment in the career of an author, and is a way of siding on one side or the other of a given linguistic border. While horizontal self-translation clearly corresponds to an individual condition of bilingualism (be it innate or acquired), vertical self-translation is implicitly related to a societal condition of “diglossia” and is an intrinsically political act. According to Grutman, vertical self-translation can be further articulated in two opposite subsets: “infra-auto-traduzione” (descending self-translation, from the standard to the substandard) and “supra-auto-traduzione” (ascending self-translation, from the substandard to the standard). Descending self-translation allows an author to regain touch with his/her native community after having achieved authority and respectability by publishing in the language with the highest cultural capital. On the contrary, the **ascending** self-translator becomes a ‘broker’ of his own fame, making his regional or marginal identity
accessible to a wider audience, and consequently negotiating his own particular culture in a national or global context ("L’autotraduzione verticale") 41). As will be seen later in greater detail, both practices are relevant to the analyzed authors, who all moved from descending to ascending self-translation; indeed, the succession of these two modes might be in itself a pattern, casting light on the linguistic policy of a recently unified nation.

4. The Ideology of the Mother Tongue

In the previous sections, we have seen how the difference between bilingualism and diglossia is related to the sociolectal distinction between the status of each language, to some extent proving Max Weinreich’s well-known assertion that “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy.” However, at the level of the idiolect, the practice of multilingual writing is linked to other important questions related to an author’s native proficiency in Italian and/or in dialect: a thorny matter, in which the expressive quest for one’s own authorial voice overlaps with the mythical conception of a “mother tongue.” In this respect, the ideology of the “mother tongue” is to the individual writer what the quest for a “national language” is to the national community of writers.

Why did nineteenth-century authors especially feel the need to return to their native dialects, either in beginning or in revamping their theatrical careers? And what does their frequent use of self-translation reveal about their mastery of Italian? Is it true, as Verga claimed in a vitriolic 1911 letter to Capuana, that “voi, io, e tutti quanti scriviamo non facciamo che tradurre mentalmente il pensiero in siciliano, se vogliamo scrivere in dialetto; perché il pensiero nasce in italiano nella nostra mente malata di letteratura […] e nessuno di noi […] riesce a tradurre in schietto dialetto la frase nata schietta in altra forma” (Lettere a Luigi Capuana 215)? Or on the contrary, should their reliance on dialect be taken as the sign of their secondary acquisition of Italian?

There is no possible doubt on the fact that Capuana, Di Giacomo, and Pirandello were native speakers of their local dialects, which they acquired naturally and without any formal
instruction, and to which they were likely to switch in everyday, ordinary, and informal conversations.\footnote{See also Trifone and Migliorini for an assessment of how learned speakers, while being perfectly capable of having a conversation in Italian, would switch to dialect in everyday conversation.} In this respect, Verga’s question is trivial and his insinuations are clearly biased. However, at a deeper level the questions raised by Verga can be read as an attempt at establishing a hierarchy between Italian and dialects, replacing the chronological primacy of dialect with an ideological one. In fact, the question posed by Verga is not one of chronological order (i.e., which language was acquired first), but rather one of “essence” (i.e., which language is closer to embodying the author’s inner world of concepts and phantasies). In claiming that writers cannot truly conceive their art in dialect, Verga confuses, perhaps intentionally, thought and language, “forma mentis” and linguistic form. More than a second nature, Italian is the \textit{forma mentis} of the literate, which has irremediably replaced the authenticity of dialect and spoken, familiar language: from there, there is no turning back to the instinctual ways of the illiterate, dialect-speaking populace. This attitude is indeed rooted in an essentialistic view of the “mother tongue,” replacing the actual native fluency with the acquired fluency or the ‘second nature’ of language. Furthermore, Verga is artificially seeking a primacy where there is innate parity: in his yearn for the “true form of expression” he is, essentially, negating the very possibility of bilingualism.

This debate is illuminating, since it reveals the two contradictory meanings of the expression “mother tongue,” and the problems deriving from its use for the purpose of definition. In its most literal and obvious sense, a “mother tongue” indicates the mastery of a language naturally learned during early childhood.\footnote{The connection between Italian and the “mother tongue” is not, however, a recent invention: its most eminent formulation can be found in Dante’s\textit{De Vulgari Eloquentia}, and particularly in I, 3 well-known passage: “I call vernacular language that which infants acquire from those around them when they first begin to distinguish sound; or, to put it more succinctly, I declare that vernacular language is that which we learn without any formal instruction, by imitating our nurses” (\textit{De Vulgari Eloquentia} I, 3; pp. 2-3) [The Latin reads: “[...] vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes assuefiunt a b assistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accepimus.”]. Equally famous is Dante’s praise of the vernacular, or his assertion that “of these two kinds of languages, the more noble is the vernacular: first, because it was the language originally used by the human race; second, because the whole world employs it, though with different pronunciation and using different words; and third, because it is natural to us, while the other is, in contrast, artificial.” ([: “harum quoque duarum nobilior est vulgaris: tum quia prima fuit humano generi usitata; tum quia totus orbis ipsa perfruitur, licet in diversas prolationes et vocabula sit divisa; tum quia naturalis est nobis, com illa potius artificialis existat"] DVE I, 4; pp. 2-3). For a discussion of these passages, see at least Tavoni, Mirko.} The “mother tongue” is the language learned without
the mediation of a school teacher or a textbook, naturally absorbed from the family and the environment. This first, literal meaning of ‘mother tongue’ justifies our assessment of Di Giacomo, Capuana or Pirandello as native speakers of both codes, and therefore “full bilingual authors.” However, the notion of “mother tongue” can be used in an ideological way, to convey the idea of an essentialist link between a language, a people and a nation. This second, super-structural meaning justifies Verga’s paradoxical—and factually incorrect-- assessment that Italian, and not dialect, is the native language of an intellectual. In this respect, the affirmation that Italian is the “mother tongue” is a declaration of intent rather than a descriptive statement. Italian is the “mother tongue” insomuch as it expresses an ideal “Italianness” – the quality of a people that is still in the making; it is the native language that ought to be, as in Manzoni’s famous line “una d'arme, di lingua, d'altare,/ di memorie, di sangue, di cor.” (Marzo 1821, vv. 31-32).

The identification between Italian (or, for that matter, any national language) and the “mother tongue” is the polemic target of Giulio Lepschy, who criticized the notion in his 2002 volume Mother Tongues and Other Reflections on the Italian Language. Lepschy notes that “there are some questions concerning the mother tongue that seem to be even more disturbing for Italian than for other languages:” (17) Italy’s diglossic condition is precisely at the origin of such uneasiness. Historically, the dichotomy between standard and dialect overlaps to that of Latin and vernacular, resulting in the triadic linguistic consciousness that, Lepschy argues, was customary among the Italian intellectuals up until the Nineteenth century. The three codes are presented as follows:

first, one of the dialects, that is, their mother tongue, which might or might not have a written tradition as well, such as Venetian, Milanese, Neapolitan, and so on; second, the standard language, that is, the literary language, or the national language, based on the literary form of fourteenth-century Tuscan, as codified in the sixteenth century (and also

Introduzione. … . A very interesting take on the question is provided by Gary Cestaro in his Lady Grammar; See also Grutman, “La langue paternelle en littérature.”
available in other varieties influenced by regional features and by Latin); and third, Latin itself. (*Mother tongues* 17-18).

The “ideology” identifying the national language with the mother tongue cannot but be at odds with a society in which, traditionally, “only the dialect (originally more appropriately designated as a ‘Vernacular’), could be considered a mother tongue” (18), while Tuscan and Latin were “literary languages, acquired through literacy, when one learnt to read and write.” (19) Along the same lines is his definition of Italian as “a well-known language, the vehicle of a famous literature extending over eight centuries, with writers of world stature, such as Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Tasso, Leopardi, Manzoni,” but which “until fairly recently had no native speakers and was no one's mother tongue.” (25) While his caustic assessment of Italian as a mostly written code points to the centuries-old disconnect between the graphocentric mindset of the lettered and the phonocentric mindset of the dialectophones, Lepschy’s truly revolutionary assessment is the one according to which, historically and at least up until the Second World War, the mother tongue of Italians is not Italian, but their dialect.

5. The Bilingual Text and the Sacred Unity of Language

While the opposition between diglossia and bilingualism is based on sociolinguistic criteria (dialect vs. language) and on the linguistic conscience of each individual writer (mother tongue vs. acquired language), there is also a third dimension to be considered. I am here referring to the political dimension of language, successfully defined as “idéologies diglossiques:” (Ninoyoles 157) that is, the ideological pretension to identify the language with the destiny of a nation.

Such “ideology” is well documented in late nineteenth-century Italian culture. A clear example of it can be seen in the linguistic thought of Pietro Fanfani, one of the last Italian purists, who affirmed: “lingua e nazione sono una cosa medesima nel divino concetto della Bibbia e dell’Alighieri: che spenta o alterata questa, si spinge pur la nazione; della qual cosa ne diedero e danno dolorosa prova i dominatori stranieri, il cui primo studio è stato sempre quello di imporre ai popoli conquistati più volentieri la lingua che le leggi loro.” (*Lingua e Nazione* 6-7)

By associating the works of Dante Alighieri with the sacred text by definition, Fanfani implicitly
promotes a sacral narrative of the Italian language, reasserting the mystical unity of language and nation; at the same time, he makes an explicit connection between linguistic policy and imperialism, presenting the imposition of foreign languages as an instrumentum regni.

Such an imperialistic vision of language, with its entangled knot of national sovereignty, unity and the “mother tongue,” can perhaps be understood in light of the notion of hegemony formulated by Gramsci during his decade-long imprisonment. Indeed, a growing number of Gramscian scholars, both in Italy and internationally, have pointed out to the important linguistic aspects underlying the notion of “hegemony,” which can be defined as the cultural discourse through which the dominant classes present their own ideology as the shared perception of reality or “common sense.” To name but a few, Franco Lo Piparo has pointed to the similarities between the notion of ‘hegemony’ and the linguistic concept of prestige, via the theories of François Meillet, Gilléron and other neo-linguists (“The Linguistic Roots of Gramsci’s Non-Marxism” 25); De Mauro has highlighted the role played by the “radical sociality of language” in the Gramscian discussion of culture and ‘common sense.’ (“Some Notes on Gramsci the Linguist” 257); finally, Derek Boothman has highlighted the importance of ‘translability’ in Gramsci’s linguistic thought, comparing his views to Volosinov’s theories of signification (Traducibilità e processi traduttivi 137-45). There are, in particular, two points in Gramsci’s linguistic theory that are directly related to the linguistic unification of Italy, which I will discuss in this section: Gramsci’s view of the standard, and his views of the linguistic divide between the lettered and the illiterate.

From his formative years at the University of Turin to his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci devoted a considerable amount of thinking to the “questione della lingua,” which he considered always instrumental to other concerns and, to some extent, symptomatic of a shifting hegemony. To cite his direct words, “ogni volta che affiora, in un modo o nell’altro, la quistione [sic] della lingua, significa che si sta imponendo una serie di altri problemi: la formazione e l’allargamento della classe dirigente, la necessità di stabilire rapporti più intimi e sicuri tra i gruppi dirigenti e la massa popolare-nazionale, cioè di riorganizzare l’egemonia culturale” (Quaderni del carcere, Quaderno 29, § 3). The dynamic nature of hegemony and its connection with the social value of language are already evident in this oft-cited note. Having left aside his initial scholarly interest for glottology, Gramsci considers the linguistic problem to be especially relevant in connection with the wider cultural history of the nation: “It seems to me that if language is understood as an
element of culture, and hence as an element of general history, and hence a manifestation of the “nationality” and “popularity” of the intellectuals, then this study would not be idle or merely erudite. (The Prison Notebooks II 174-75). If language is a repository of ideological perceptions, beliefs and idées recues, no criticisms to the dominant class can be carried out without a critical understanding of the language that is instrumental to such hegemony.

The elites, Gramsci argues, are directly responsible for this harmful separation between the people and the intellectuals: at the same time, this mutual unintelligibility is responsible for the absence of an authentic popular culture and for the self-imposed segregation of the Italian intellectuals in a truly circular logic. The Italian intellectuals are members of a closed caste; their literary tradition, Gramsci claims, “è libresca e astratta, e l'intellettuale tipico moderno si sente più legato ad Annibal Caro o a Ippolito Pindemonte che a un contadino pugliese o siciliano,” (127) even when the intellectual is the direct descendant of a peasant family. For the same reason, there is no authentic popular culture. Folklore, which Gramsci considered an extremely important subject of study, never produced a true national-popular culture in Italy: of the two nuances of Volkisch, meaning both “popular” and “national”, neither is truly translatable in Italian (127). It should also be noted that Gramsci was far from uncritical in his consideration of dialects, which he considered a residual, backward entity, resulting from a historical delay, but nevertheless worth of attention and respect.

In the debate on the ‘questione della lingua’, Gramsci prominently sided with Ascoli against the Tuscan-centric views of Manzoni. In criticizing the 1918 project of adopting

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47 This consideration is closely related to Gramsci’s criticism of the self-segregation of the intellectuals, who in his views lacked an authentic connection with the productive system: “Gli intelletuali concepiscono la letteratura come una "professione" a sé, che dovrebbe rendere anche quando non si produce nulla immediatamente e che dovrebbe dar diritto a una pensione. Ma chi stabilisce che Tizio è veramente un letterato e che la società può mantenerlo in attesa del "capolavoro"? Il letterato rivendica il diritto di stare in "ozio" ("otium et non negotium"), di viaggiare, di fantasticare, senza preoccupazioni di carattere economico. Questo modo di pensare è legato al mecenatismo delle corti, male interpretato del resto, perché i grandi letterati del Rinascimento, oltre a scrivere, lavoravano in qualche modo (anche l’Ariosto, letterato per eccellenza, aveva incombenze amministrative e politiche): un’immagine del letterato del Rinascimento falsa e sbagliata. Oggi il letterato [è] professore e giornalista o semplice letterato (nel senso che tende a diventarlo, se è funzionario, etc). Si può dire che la letteratura è una funzione sociale, ma che i letterati presi singolarmente, non sono necessari alla funzione, sebbene ciò sembri paradossale. Ma è vero nel senso, che mentre le altre professioni sono collettive, e la funzione sociale sì scompone nei singoli, ciò non avviene nella letteratura. La quistione è dell’“apprendissaggio”: ma come si può parlare di “apprendissaggio” artistico-letterario? La funzione intellettuale non può essere staccata dal lavoro produttivo generale neanche per gli artisti: se non quando essi hanno dimostrato di essere effettivamente produttivi “artisticamente”. Né ciò nuocerà all’arte, forse anzi le gioverà: gioverà solo alla "bohème" artistica e non sarà un male, tutt’altro. (Letteratura e vita nazionale 78)"
Esperanto as the international language of Socialism, he traced a well-known parallel between the artificiality of Esperanto and Manzoni’ hoped Tuscanization of the peninsula:

Manzoni asked himself: now that Italy is formed, how can the Italian language be created? He answered: all Italians will have to speak Tuscan and the Italian state will have to recruit its elementary teachers in Tuscany. Tuscan will be substituted for the numerous dialects spoken in the various regions and, with Italy formed, the Italian language will be formed, too. Manzoni managed to find government support and start the publication of a *Novo Dizionario* which was supposed to contain the true Italian language. But the *Novo Dizionario* remained half-finished and teachers were recruited among educated people in all regions of Italy. It had transpired that a scholar of the history of the language, Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, had set some thirty pages against the hundreds of pages written by Manzoni in order to demonstrate that not even a national language can be created artificially, by order of the state; that the Italian language was being formed by itself and would be formed only in so far as the shared life of the nation gave rise to numerous and stable contacts between the various parts of the nation; that the spread of a particular language is due to the productive activity of the writings, trade and commerce of the people who speak that particular language. (*Selections from Cultural Writings* 28)

In this passage, Gramsci criticizes the arbitrariness, the conventionalism, and the artificiality of the Manzonian ideal: what the Milanese writer saw as a living and spoken language was in fact an artificial code, forcibly bestowed from above onto the rest of the nation. This early criticism can perhaps help understand why, in Gramsci’s view, the notion of standard appears as an ideological project, anachronistically and colonially imposed onto a passive nation. This view is made evident in a 1929 rebuttal to Ermini’s article “Il Mediolatino,” in which he clearly expresses a criticism of standard Italian: 48

48 The article had originally been published in *Nuova antologia*, May 16, 1928.)
I believe that there are many questions about which the national rhetoric of the past century and the prejudices it embodied failed to stimulate even the most preliminary research. For instance: across what area, exactly, was Tuscan spoken? I think that in Venice, for example, the Italian that was introduced had already been developed by the scholars along the same lines as Latin, and so Venice never experienced the penetration of original Florentine – in the sense that Florentine merchants did not make spoken Florentine heard in Venice as they did in Rome and Naples – and the language of government remained Venetian. The same applies to other centres (Genoa, I believe). There is still no history of the Italian language along these lines; historical grammar is anything but historical. (*The Prison Notebooks* II 74)

With this observation, Gramsci unmasks the ideological and anachronistic nature of commonplace identification of the national language (and in particular Tuscan-turned-Italian) with the sovereign language of the nation. It is also safe to assume that “historical” in this context should be read as ‘dialectical’: grammarians and philologists dwell in the minutiae of historical evolution, but their ‘histories’ lack authentic depth, as they ignore the collective and societal forces shaping culture and driving linguistic evolution.

More importantly, the creation of an artificial unitary Italian, based on the anachronistic identification of Tuscan and Italian, is instrumental to a negative, coercive project of hegemony. So is the very idea that Italian is the linguistic destiny of the nation, based on the “anti-historical preconception that Italy has always been a nation.” (*Prison Notebook* II 81, Note §82):

There could not have been national unity in the history of the nineteenth century since the permanent element, the people-nation, was missing. The dynastic tendency had to prevail, given the support its received from the state apparatus, whereas the most strongly opposed political tendencies could not agree on a minimum of objectivity. History was propaganda; it sought to create national unity – that is, the nation – from the outside, going against tradition and basing itself on literature; it was a “wanting to be” rather than something that must be because the *de facto* conditions already exist. (81).
In conclusion, the critique of the standard is deeply engrained in the author’s view of the 
*questione della lingua*: the nationalistic fiction of a “standard Italian” is the toxic legacy left by a 
centuries-old separation between the intellectuals and the people.

The development of “diglossic ideologies” is best understood in connection with what 
Benedict Anderson, in his 1983 work *Imagined Communities*, has defined as the 
“vernacularizing thrust of Capitalism,” a movement intrinsically related to the advent of print. 
Anderson traces the origins of the nationalistic ideologies backwards through a constellation of 
historical moments that include the birth of national kingdoms in early modern Europe, the 
evolution of Creole identities in the Americas in the 1820s, up until the contemporary creation of 
national histories through a shared politics of memory. It is the first moment, the rise of 
vernacular identities in early modern Europe, which appears to be especially relevant to the 
understanding of the relation between dialects and the standard in the Italian culture. Anderson 
describes the shift from the hegemony of Latin (which he defines as “a language of bilinguals”) 
to the advent of the national languages, the aforementioned “vernacularizing thrust of capitalism.”

Anderson’s argument in a nutshell is that print technologies had a crucial role in creating 
“the interplay between fatality, technology, and capitalism” (45). Print, he argues, contributed to 
vernacularization in three ways: first, by creating a unified field among the speakers of different 
*Englishes* and *Frenches*, which would later provide the “embryo of a nationally imagined 
community.” Second, print gave a new fixity to language, a process that exponentially 
emphasizes the arbitrariness of language. Third, and more importantly, fixity resulted in a 
hierarchization of the different vernaculars, with a first differentiation of the standard and the 
substandard—which is to say, the first germ of what we could define “diglossic ideology. To cite 
directly Anderson:

print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older 
administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects ‘inevitably’ were closer to each print-
language and dominated their final forms. Their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable 
to the print-language, lost caste, above all because they were unsuccessful (or only relatively successful) in insisting in their own print-form. (*Imagined Communities* 43).
This assessment is consistent with the theories of many sociolinguists who have highlighted the link between the formation of “diglossic” regimes, the rise of nationalistic ideologies and processes of modernization, including urbanization, the spread of mass education and the advent of print. For instance, in his *Linguistic Communities* Gumperz argues that modern linguistic communities are based on a different loyalty than traditional ones—a loyalty for the standard, which is founded on the ideology of nation and on the widespread possess of literacy. Similarly, Hudson suggests that, while writing does not alone determine a diglossic setting, it certainly provides a “particularly hospitable environment” for it (24), and he later connects the advent of modern diglossia with the rise of middle class, the decline of clerical orders, and the replacement of traditional elites (30). Finally, in his 2013 article “Revisiting Ferguson’s Defining Case of Diglossia,” Don Snow identifies a specific typology of diglossia (modern diglossia, as opposed to traditional and revived ones) that takes place in conjunction with modernization, mass literacy, and nation building.\(^49\)

In synthesis, the vernacularizing thrust of capitalism and the advent of print languages created a tight knot between language, sovereignty and “destiny” and, in parallel, to a hierarchical and normative view of language and dialects. In this respect, the practices of self-translation and staged “orality” can assume a subversive value, restoring to some extent a degree of parity between codes that preceded the advent of vernacularization, the birth of print-languages, and the formation of diglossic ideologies.

Both the Gramscian theory of hegemony and its reappraisal by Anderson can help illuminate the relation between the hierarchy of the standard/substandard (or, in Gramscian terms, the lofty and rhetoric language of the intellectual caste vs. the nude and unlearned language of the working class) and the distinction of written/oral. In fact, the advent of print is

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\(^{49}\) See in particular the following passage: “Modern diglossia differs from traditional and revived diglossia in its historical and social setting it is found in societies that have already undergone the changes associated with modernisation, such as secularisation, the rise of commercial print culture, and especially promotion of mass literacy and education. It also appears in a rather distinct and unusual type of society, one that has a strong degree of cultural and linguistic affinity with a neighbouring nation in which the H variety is promoted as the national standard. However, the society has enough political autonomy that it can control the degree to which it promotes this standard language, and it is also linguistically and culturally distinct in ways that it wishes to preserve.” (Snow 70)
closely related to the establishment of a hierarchy, which is enforced through aesthetic values and linguistic policies.

Within this context, the advent of self-translation mirrors the transition from a strictly diglossic and therefore hierarchical pattern of interaction between codes to a horizontal model, marked by bilingualism and, more specifically, by the extensive use of code-switching and by a substantial parity between codes. In fact, the development of in-print languages resulted in a standardization and hierarchization of vernaculars: one dialect, acting as the base for the normative version of the print-language, became the new Standard and was placed above the others, marginalized as “dialects.” I argue that this process is at least partially reversed by the practice of self-translation: the bilingual text restores a degree of parity between the interested codes by virtue of its nature as a twofold utterance. Even if they start as practice of “vertical self-translation” (whether ascending or descending), the analyzed practices end by restoring a more horizontal model that is closer to the multilingual setting of early modern Europe, carving spaces for the co-presence of different languages and dialects in the same work or play.

This reversal is further magnified by the advent of what Walter J. Ong has defined as “secondary orality,” which is to say, the orality of “present-day high-technology culture,” which is “sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print,” as opposed to the “primary orality” of cultures “totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print.” (Orality and Literacy 11) As the spread of literacy brought many Italians from “primary” to “secondary” orality, this paved the way for a new way of represented orality on the stage, opening the page to the mediated reproduction of the many languages, dialects and vernaculars spoken in the street.

6. The Bilingual Text and the Oral Text

Whether one adheres to the narrow definition of diglossia proposed by Ferguson or chooses more flexible paradigms such as the ones of “macrodiglossia” and “dilalia,” the distinction between the standard and the substandard is deeply intertwined with another dichotomy: the one between oral and written speech.

The exclusively oral nature of the low-prestige code is in fact a fundamental criterion that enables the scholar to adopt a strictly diglossic frame. On the contrary, writing in dialect—that is,
treated dialect as an “ausbausprache”— disproves the most fundamental law of diglossia: that one, simply put, does not write in dialect: hence the need for more flexible paradigms such as those of macrodiglossia and dilalia proposed by Berruto, Trumper and Sgroi among others for the Italo-Romance continuum. However, even under more flexible paradigms the higher prestige code is often associated – and at times identified – with written language. This appears to be especially the case of Italian: as Trumper states, “there is little truly unitary at the communicative level in a national sense, […] which implies that it is not easy to define a spoken standard even in syntactic or pragmatic terms.” (310). A similar take is given by Lepschy, who defines Italy as a nation where “tradizionalmente si parla una lingua che non si scrive (il dialetto), e si scrive una lingua che non si parla (l’italiano).” (In che lingua? 21): once again, this definition emphasizes the functional difference between written and spoken language, so distant that they act and work, in fact, as two different languages.

The constant overlap between the oral/written and the dialect/standard polarities can help explain why the preoccupation for the lack of “spoken” language is so obsessively recurrent in the linguistic debate of post-Unification years. Authors did not lament the lack of a written language, which was documented in the literary canon, despite the unavoidable orthographic and lexical uncertainties; they lamented the lack of a national conversation, a term that the Enlightenment tradition had charged with important philosophical nuances. This is evident in several lexicographical ventures, such as the Vocabolario italiano della lingua parlata (1875) compiled by Giuseppe Rigutini and Pietro Fanfani, quite contradictorily aiming at presenting a common standard for the oral speech through a written repertoire of words.

Italian linguists and language historians generally agree in listing the limited access to literacy among the factors that delayed the formation of a standard spoken Italian. As Tullio de Mauro has noted in his Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita, by the time of its unification Italy was largely a nation of illiterates, people who had no access whatsoever to the written language, and therefore to Italian. The first Italian Census, in 1861, revealed a staggering 78% of illiterates: as De Mauro comments, “al momento dell’unificazione, […] la popolazione italiana era quasi per l’80%, priva della possibilità di venire a contatto con l’uso scritto dell’italiano.” It should also be

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noted that the 22% of literates was a very inclusive category, including functional illiterates and semi-literates, without any distinction in regard to the speakers’ actual level of education. Building on these figures, De Mauro has estimated the number of “potential” Italophones in 1861 at 16 million, a number he obtains by adding the 13 million of literate people nationwide to the 3 millions of inhabitants of large city, who were virtually exposed to spoken Italian despite their inability to read it. However, this number is largely hypothetic and potential; as De Mauro argues, “probabilmente gli italofoni effettivi non superavano i cinque milioni di individui,” a number he calculates by retroactively analyzing the data on the diffusion of Italian available since the 1951 census, and based on the percentage of literates in the country (Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita 1 128). Italian thus appears as a predominantly written code, whose use is limited to a very narrow pocket of speakers and to determined functions: a lofty language that appears unsuitable to represent the struggles and the reality of a highly fragmented population. More recently, Trifone has described the sociolinguistic setting of the post-Unification decades as marked by a complete and irredeemable dichotomy between oral and written language (“una duplicità radicale, quasi schizofrenica, tra i poli dello scritto e del parlato.” Storia linguistica dell’Italia disunita 84). Quite literally, 80% of Italians were speakers of another language—that is, their own native dialect:

Sul piano verticale, il supersistema in questione si avvaleva di un raro e sofisticato organismo retorico-grammaticale, una lingua di eccellenza specificamente destinata agli impieghi della sfera formale e pubblica, che veniva quindi preclusa, anche per tale via, alla partecipazione attiva delle classi inferiori; mentre sul piano orizzontale era la fresca e spontanea parlata locale a rispondere alle normali esigenze della comunicazione quotidiana e insieme a marcare l’appartenenza dell’individuo al territorio, con le prerogative e i diritti che ne conseguivano rispetto ai forestieri. (Storia linguistica dell’Italia disunita 90)

As mentioned in the previous section, the artificial superposition of the “language” over the plurality of vernaculars-turned-dialects is best understood in light of the advent of print,

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51 The level of education was finally included as a criterion only in the 1951 census.
generalizing a condition of literacy that was previously available to a very selected minority. The invention of print is not the only factor leading to the standardization of vernaculars and their making into national languages, but certainly acts as a catalyst, accelerating the process. Print, in particular, is what allows the written, standardized, grammatical forms to prevail over spoken and substandard ones, opening a rift between the multiplicity of spoken argots, patois, dialects, vernaculars, now relegated to the periphery of linguistic consciousness, and the monism of the new sovereign languages. At the same time, the fact that spoken language is perceived and categorized as “a different language” is a powerful marker for the otherness of the subaltern classes. In turn, it is not surprising to see that the rift between oral and written language is a capstone of the diglossic ideologies. Gramsci, for instance, conceptualizes the irreconcilable dichotomy of written and spoken language as an ideological duality. The lofty language of the lettered and the intellectuals is literally perceived as a different language by the populace, who is confined to the world of “primary orality:” and indeed, these two languages correspond to conflicting views of the world. As Gramsci suggests, this linguistic segregation produces its own rhetoric. The rhetoric traits of the literary tradition (for instance its magniloquence and its abstraction) are thus identified with a quintessential traits of standard Italian, to the point that even the illiterates end up by imitating these stylistic features in their attempt to speak what they perceive to be “proper Italian”:

Questa "malattia" è talmente diffusa che si è attaccata al popolo, per il quale infatti "scrivere" significa "montare sui trampoli", mettersi a festa, "fingere" uno stile ridondante, ecc., in ogni modo esprimersi in modo diverso dal comune; e siccome il popolo non è letterato, e di letteratura conosce solo il libretto dell'opera ottocentesca, avviene che gli uomini del popolo "melodrammatizzano". (Letteratura e vita nazionale 72)

Quite significantly, Gramsci seeks a mediating paradigm in the language of theatrical forms and especially opera, which provided vast uneducated audience with the access to the rhetorical tropes of literary Italian. In short, he seeks a performative text—conveniently located between the periphery of the oral and the mainstream of the poetic/literary language.
The very idea of “imitation” carves a new space of potential agency, close to what Homi Bhabha, in his study of the post-colonial subjectivity, has defined as “mimicry”. In his seminal *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha contrasts two different modes of representations that inform post-colonial subjectivities: *mimesis* and *mimicry* (85-86). While the *mimesis* of the colonizer corresponds to the self-effacing gesture of nationalism, flattening all differences in the “unisonal” narrative of the nation-state, mimicry is the space where differences are negotiated, bearing in itself the sign of constitutive otherness. While mimesis hides differences under the all-encompassing and self-referential blanket of the ‘effet de réalité,’ mimicry, with its radical, subversive and parodic quality, marks the posture of interstitiability: it embodies the position of those who, faced with the hegemonic narrative of nationalism, speak the language of migration and exile. It should be noted that *mimicry* is not conceived as an overtly antagonistic gesture: Bhabha rather describes it as marked by “recalcitrance” and inner resistance, stating that “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.” (86)

Like Gramsci’s imitation, colonial mimicry is a performance, a show put on display for the other’s gaze: hence its prevailing tonalities and devices, which are to be found in the “trompe-l’oeil, irony, mimicry and repetition.” (85) The disguised peasant, wearing the cothurns and the linguistic robe of tragedy, is clearly a figure of hegemony: one that, however, already anticipates its potential demise.

Given the performative nature of mimicry (Bhabha) and imitation (Gramsci), it should not come as a surprise that performative genres carry a special value in altering the pre-established balances of nation and minority. The language of performance—be it carnivalesque or ritual, theatrical, operatic, folkloristic or spontaneous—acts as a special space for the masking and unmasking of the self.

The performative nature of such agency, alongside the implicit connection between mimicry/imitation and the act of masking, can therefore help us answer another important question: why theatre, of all genres? As it was noted in the *Introduction*, the three authors examined adopted the practice of self-translation only in their theatre, leaving poetry or fiction to the monolingual use of dialect (Di Giacomo) or Italian (Pirandello, Capuana); and their case is far from isolated. It is possible to argue that theatre acted as a relatively free space because of its
performative and oral nature, legitimized by a centuries-old tradition of multilingualism (just think of the *Commedia dell’Arte*, an example that all three authors explicitly referenced in their essays and reviews).

Theatre is not the only performative genre, but it certainly embodies the ambiguity between orality and literacy with striking clarity. This aspect was first understood with clarity by Giovanni Nencioni, who coined the notion of “parlato-recitato” to describe this aspect of language. Nencioni’s research questions the rigid dichotomy between written and oral language, which is particularly problematic given the delay in the formation of a standard spoken Italian (127), and which makes it problematic to study written theatrical scripts [“composizioni teatrali scritte” 128] as documents of oral speech. In particular, Nencioni criticizes the current position of semioticians such as Luis Prieto and Georges Mounin, according to whom theatre would not be an authentic communicative act (134-137). This position, Nencioni maintains, originates from an overly narrow understanding of Saussure’s sign, and from a too rigid acceptance of the Structuralist communicative model. However, the theory of enunciative framing can help overcome these theoretical obstacles, understanding the different “mediations” that are at play in the theatrical text.

Nencioni then subdivides the vast field of orality in two macro-categories, parlato-parlato and parlato-scritto: while the former indicates conversational speech (“il parlato del quotidiano” 132), the latter indicates the conventional representations of orality in a written text. The “parlato-scritto” is further articulated in “parlato-citato” (reported speech) and “parlato-recitato” (the represented orality of a theatrical script). In describing the speech of actors, Nencioni observes how it is more stylized than literary speech, because of its conative function and of its quicker pace. At the same time, he observes, the theatrical speech is not spontaneous: it is “un parlato programmato, al quale possiamo applicare senza scrupolo l’attributo di ‘recitato’, purché s’intenda nel senso della esecuzione di un parlato programmato” (175). At the same time, the

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52 The relation between otherness and orality can perhaps help explain the growing interest towards the topic shown in the Italian literary debate during the Twentieth and early Twenty-First centuries. This fascination with hybrid textualities is evident in several studies, ranging from Spitzer’s 1921 *Lingua italiana del dialogo* to Spunta and Caesar’s *Orality and Literacy in the Italian Culture*, which includes among others an illuminating essay by Spunta, reconstructing over fifty years of debate on the topic. A fundamental methodological premise is also provided by Italo Testa, *Lo stile Semplice* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), an analysis of the direct discourse in the Italian novel from Manzoni to the ‘Cannibali.’
actor’s speech is a stub for oral performance: therefore, it mimics the modulations of spontaneous conversation, with phenomena such as interjections, auto-corrections, prosodic and melodic accents, etc. Playwrights can in their own turn be part of this phenomenon, anticipating the oral executions of their performance: in this respect, Pirandello can be considered as the inventor of Italian as a stage language [inventore del parlato teatrale] since his writing clearly anticipates the realistic execution of a “parlato-recitato” (177).

With this polemic gesture, Nencioni inscribes theatre within the wider category of “parlato-scritto,” ranging from the narrative representation of oral discourses (and Direct Discourse in particular) to the televised script. With his bold theoretical move, he finally solves the methodological quandaries of using theatre (which is not a true document of orality) as a source in studying the history of oral speech, and provides a frame to understand the reality effect sought by the “mimetic” line of the contemporary Italian theatre.

Theatre is thus governed by a duplicity between the page and the stage. It is an act of reading, quintessentially embodied by the nineteenth-century ideal of the “stage director” as the archi-Reader and by what André Helbo has famously dubbed as the “terrorisme du texte;” and it is an act of carnivalesque performance, embodied by the creative tradition of the actor-performer, and by the rebellious performer à la Musco. By opening the language to its duality, authors make the difference between the voice and the sign evident, thus calling for new creative spaces of bilingual performance. The language of theatre thus becomes the ground for a viable synthesis, allowing for forms of linguistic experimentalism which take into account the language of the other: a language that carries the sign of its own duplicity.

7. The Bilingual Text as a Polysystem.

While the act of representing the coexistence of codes on the stage might appear innovative, the act of writing in dialect is not, per se, particularly challenging. Herman Haller has effectively described the relationship between literature in the standard Italian and in dialect, stating that dialectal literature lacks “autonomy,” but “it lives with literature in Standard in a mutually
enriching relationship. We find in it similar themes, such as love, death religion and pessimism.”

(The Hidden Italy 44)

What self-translation between standard Italian and dialects accomplishes is not, however, a mere continuation of a pre-existing tradition. It is a new act of negotiation, carving new spaces of linguistic agency and rearticulating the identity values of each in a new dynamic architecture. More importantly, the bilingual theatre of post-Unification Italy does not happen in a void, but alters a pre-existing balance of languages and different literary traditions.

Understanding such balance is not, of course, an innovative endeavour: for generations, literary critics, reviewers and linguists have struggled with the very same question. Among them was Benedetto Croce, the main voice of nineteenth-century idealist culture. His theory deserves a closer look, because of the impact he had in shaping the cultural formation of the southern intellectuals of Italy.

Having been personally involved in the collection of folkloristic documents and texts, in his maturity Croce was responsible for forging the definition of “letteratura dialettale riflessa,” which would later become a commonplace for the study of Italian dialectal literature. In 1928, a quarter of a century after having officially declared the “questione della lingua” dead, Croce took a strong stance on the subject in an article titled “La letteratura dialettale riflessa. La sua origine nel Seicento ed il suo ufficio storico.” With this label, the Neapolitan philosopher sought to define the self-conscious use of vernacular for literary purposes.

In this essay, Croce opposed the undifferentiated view of all “dialectal literature” as an act of cultural resistance against the hegemony of Italian, voiced by Giuseppe Ferrari in an 1839 article titled “Saggio sulla poesia popolare in Italia.” Croce’s argument, in a nutshell, is that there cannot be a self-aware and polemic use of dialect before the process of linguistic standardization: in fact, he claims, there is no understanding of ‘dialect’ without the codification of the ‘standard.’ As a consequence, the term “dialettale” (vernacular/dialectal) cannot be used without a contrasting understanding of the different available codes and of their hierarchical

53 Ferrari first published his “Saggio sulla poesia popolare in Italia” in the June 1, 1839 issue of the Parisian Revue des Mondes. An Italian version later appeared in Lares (). The essay had a strong penchant for Risorgimento, and primarily intended to promote a creative reconsideration of the 19th century vernacular production in the analyzed regions and cities (including Milan, Naples, Rome, Sicily, and Emilia).
organization (‘in tal caso non si può neppure chiamarla dialettale mancando il termine di riferimento per qualificarla con questo nome’) (354). Positing a ‘conflicting’ drive for a literature that pre-exists the fifteenth-century standardization of Italian is, therefore, anachronistic and anti-historical.

Building on these premises, Croce distinguishes two opposite modes of literature in dialect, marked by conflicting functions and aims. On the one hand, there is the literature naturally conceived in dialect, which Croce defines as “letteratura dialettale spontanea o popolare.” On the other hand, there is the self-reflective use of dialect, which he calls “letteratura dialettale riflessa.” These two modes, Croce maintains, could not be more different: the former is spontaneous and oral, whereas the latter is written and self-aware.

If the production of “letteratura dialettale popolare o spontanea” preexists the standardization of national languages, this does not mean that it must cease immediately afterwards. On the contrary, he claims, “letteratura dialettale spontanea” continues long after the standardization of Italian, encompassing all forms of oral literature (i.e. folktales, songs, oral poetry and the like), and only so long as they express “il costume del volgo o un costume proprio del volgo.” (“La letteratura dialettale riflessa 358) On the contrary, he claims, “la letteratura dialettale riflessa suppone come antecedente e punto di partenza la letteratura in lingua nazionale.” It cannot exist before the invention of the standard, which is its very birth certificate. However, this does not entail a conflictual stance, either: the literature in dialect presupposes not only chronologically, but also philosophically the existence of a wider literary system in the standard, in which it positions itself.

The conceptual rift between these two distinct forms of “dialectal literature” also explains their different historical fortunes. As Croce claims, nineteenth-century culture did not really have an interest in “dialectal literature,” but rather in “popular literature,” consistently with the Romantic fascination for the folklore and the origins of any people. Similarly, the patriots of the Italian Risorgimento largely ignored dialectal literature, focusing their interest in other genres and modes of writing. On the contrary, the interest in self-aware vernacular was greater in those areas fascinated by the spectacle of the foreign and the strange. This is, for instance, the case of the Baroque age:
Lo svolgimento della letteratura dialettale nel Seicento non fu un processo antiunitario ma, per l’opposto, un processo di unificazione, perché non mirò a combattere o a sostituire la letteratura nazionale, da tutti riverita, accettata e coltivata, ma la prese a modello per entrare nella cerchia della vita nazionale voci finora inascoltate o piuttosto inarticolate. (359)

In turn, this “unifying tendency” helps explain the sudden interest of post-1861 narrators, playwrights and poets in the life in the regions of Italy. This new interest manifests itself in a variety of forms, ranging from the depiction of regional topics and characters to linguistic experiments with the hybrid forms of “dialettismo e dialetto.” (363). Through these many ventures (which included the compilation of several regional and dialectal dictionaries), “le varie regioni d’Italia facevano, anche a quel modo e con quella letteratura, la reciproca presentazione e stringevano reciproca conoscenza,” (359) in a process that should not be read under the sign of division, but, rather, as a cultural amalgamation.

The notion of letteratura dialettale riflessa outlived the critical fortunes of its inventor, becoming almost commonplace in the Italian scholarly community: for instance, to name just a few important voices, both Maurizio Vitale and Cesare Segre have appropriated this label in more recent years.54 Furthermore, Croce’s indirect influence can be perceived in Haller’s statement that “Italy’s dialect literature originates in the Renaissance, at a time of political

54 Vitale clearly elaborates on the concept of “letteratura dialettale riflessa” in his groundbreaking article “Il dialetto ingredients intenzionale della poesia non toscana del secondo Quattrocento.” Building on previous work by Carlo Dionisiotti, Vitale suggests that bilingualism could act as a paradigm for the linguistic consciousness of the early Renaissance culture. According to him, the bilingualism of the fifteenth century would include Latin (still used as an official language both in cultural production and for legal uses), the emerging hegemonic code of the Tuscan-Florentine vernacular, and the other regional vernaculars. Within this context, the latter would embody the core values of the “maternal,” allowing for a freer expression of subjectivity and emotions. The presence of dialect in Fifteenth-century poetry is widespread and universally acknowledged, going well beyond the authoritativeness of few selected writers or even the prestige of a handful dialects used for bureaucratic expression in some of the Renaissance courts of Italy. In this respect, dialect thus becomes a source of local colour, within the Petrarchean ideal of variatio. Local voices appear in the poetry of Matteo Maria Boiardo, Niccolò da Correggio, Giovanni Battista Refrigerio, Serafino Cimmelli, Antonio Tebaldeo, Gasparo Visconti. Having been legitimated by such production, dialects resonate through all the levels of language, for instance affecting the use of verbal tenses and certain word-choices. Even if these phenomena do not replace the monolingual order of Tuscan Petrarchism, they still modified it, establishing regional elements as an accepted component of a possible poetic koinē. Once again, the presence of dialect is not seen as irrelevant or antagonistic to the mainstream, but as a voice that positions itself in a wider context, somehow contributing to a complex balance of forces.
disunity and fragmentation, when Tuscan had won its preeminence as the Italian literary language over all other dialects

The theorizations by Croce are important mostly because of their self-reflective nature, being close in time to the decades where Di Giacomo, Capuana and Pirandello operated. Croce’s thought had a direct influence on their formation. He was an important mentor for Di Giacomo in the long years of their troubled friendship. His influence is also perceived in the early theories and writings by Pirandello, and particularly in his aesthetic theorizations.⁵⁵

With its obvious limitations, the definition of “letteratura dialettale riflessa” can also be read as an early acknowledgment of the role played both by dialects and standard Italian in shaping a national identity, and of the systematic nature of their relation – a central feature of many modern theorizations, marking our understanding of the relation between the dominant and the subaltern within a same literary tradition.

Indeed, a systematic notion of literature has been one of the main principles guiding the recent reorganization of the field of Translation Studies, with its post-structuralist push towards a new understanding of the entangled knot of languages, nation and identity. André Lefevere, for instance, builds on the definition of literature as a system, first advanced by Russian Formalism, in order to propose his notion of “manipulation of the literary fame” (1992). In such conception, “rewriting” becomes a blanket term that includes a wide variety of practices, ranging from the production of anthologies to interpretive reading, criticism, and, of course, translation: “whether they produce translations, literary histories or their more compact spin-offs, reference works, anthologies, criticism or editions, rewriters adapt, manipulate the originals they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological and poetological currents of their time.” (Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame 8). Such practices have the power to reshape and change literary poetics – a notion that entails not only an arsenal of stylistic convention, but also a given ideology of what literature is (and of what it is not)⁵⁶. Lefevere’s ambitious claim is that re-writers, as opposed

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⁵⁵ I am referring to the production of the years 1907 and 1908, clearly aimed at qualifying for tenure.

⁵⁶ “A poetics can be said to consist of two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs and symbols: the other a concept of that the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole.” (Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation 26).
to writers, are the ones who promote changes in the long term: “the struggle between a rival poetics is often initiated by writers, but fought and won or lost by rewriters,” as the author deftly notes (38). If all translators are rewriters, this is especially the case of self-translators, who literally carry their own work across linguistic frontiers; by choosing their code, bilingual authors “manipulate” a set of assumption and values traditionally associated with the language and/or the vernacular. If according to Lefevere all “rewriting” has a creative function, this is especially true in the case of translations: “Rewritings, mainly translations, deeply affect the interpenetration of literary systems, not just by projecting the image of one writer at work in another literature or by failing to do so (...) but also by introducing new devices into the inventory components of a poetics and paving the way to changes in its functional component.” (26) In turn, translations from and into dialects carve new spaces of agency for once marginalized components of the literary system.

Another relevant paradigm is the one suggested by Itamar Even-Zohar, who first proposed the notion of “literary polysystem” in 1973. Even-Zohar and Lefevere attain similar results building on similar premises. Building on the conceptual precedent of Russian Formalism, Even-Zohar reformulates the notion of “literary system” as a “poly-system,” of which each individual national literature would be a sub-set. In this way, the theorist hopes to account for the interactions between different national traditions (as designed by translational fluxes and cultural influences) and, most importantly, between canonical and non-canonical systems.

The latter paradigm can be fruitfully applied to the case of Italian vernacular production continuum for three main reasons. Firstly, Even-Zohar’s theory accounts for the division between “canonized forms” (which the author defines as “major literature: those kinds of literary works accepted by the literary milieu and usually preserved by the community as part of its cultural heritage” Papers in Historical Poetics 15) and “non-canonical literature,” including works that are marginalized by the literary establishment and which are often identified with “sub-literature, penny literature, entertainment, vulgar” (11). Even-Zohar describes its model also in the terms of a centre/periphery division, a dichotomy self-evidently relevant for the relationship of the standard and the vernacular. In turn, this position clearly accounts for what Haller has described as the "hidden canon" of dialect literature, acting as a counter-code shaping its national identity from within. In his “Introduction” to The Hidden Italy, the scholar insists on
the twofold aspect of Italian cultural poly-centrism, stating that “[t]he dual literary canon is replicated in the linguistic structures of Italian and dialect in their forms, social uses, literary potentials, changes and evolving perceptions” (7).

However, Even-Zohar’s definition explicitly points to the assumption of minor value and “cheapness,” something that might appear to be at odd with the current glorification of ‘minor’ literatures inaugurated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their well-known Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature. The derogatory connotation of the ‘non-canonical’ and the ‘substandard,’ however, should not be overlooked: in fact, it is as important as its marginal and peripheral status. All the analyzed self-translators had to face the stigma associated with vernacular theatre, and they sometimes validated it. Both Di Giacomo and Pirandello expressed covert suspicion and overt contempt towards the stereotypical manners of traditional vernacular companies, whose commercial nature appeared to them incompatible with the uninterested pursuit of ‘authentic’ art. Such derogatory attitude is evident in critical writings such as Di Giacomo’s “Storia del Teatro San Carlino” (1886) and Pirandello’s 1908 article “Teatro Siciliano?” Capuana’s hatred for the environment of Sicilian actors reached an all-time high in a 1915 letters, in which he went as far as to deprecate the commercial success of his own play Don Ramunnu: “C’era un gran pubblico, ma di negozianti, di bottegai, di studenti, di sedicenti autori dialettali. E veder ridere – per colpa di Musco – tutta questa gente che avrebbe dovuto forse piangere mi ha dato pena più che se mi avessero fischiato.” (Capuana e le carte messaggere 680). For the three examined self-translator, adopting dialect as an expressive code meant, to some degree, having to deal with a ‘minor’ literature: this choice entailed complex consequences and risks, such as cultural marginalization, the silence or the open hostility of reviewers, and the risk of critical oblivion in the long term.

Secondly, and most importantly, the theory of literary poly-systems accounts for the plurality of linguistic and cultural levels within the translational process. In other words, Even-Zohar proposes a dynamic view of translation, capable of recreating or at least accommodating the hierarchy of values, functions and identities associated with each sub-system into a new “original:” something which is especially relevant when translation is faced with the near-impossible task of rendering what Berman terms “network of inner linguistic codes,” (Berman 63-64) a case most evident in the case of the translation of code-switching – a stylistic resource
that all authors use profusely and which cannot be maintained in the monolingual Italian translations of their work.

Thirdly, this theory accounts for the identity-shaping role of translation within a literary canon, and particularly so when Even-Zohar suggests that “to say that translated literature maintains a primary position is to say it participates actively in modeling the centre of the polysystem” (Papers in Historical Poetics 23). While the author suggests that translation can, in fact, assume either a central or a peripheral status depending on the specific case, the latter position (that is primary, or canonic, or “central”) best accounts for the identity-shaping process undergone by the post-Unification Italian culture, both in the form of translation from dialects, and in the number of translations from French (including translations of Dostoevsky, Ibsen, and Tolstoy, also mediated through French translations) which flooded the Italian editorial market of the 1880s and 1890s.

The influence of Even-Zohar’s theory is easily perceived in the current theories of bilingual or diglossic writing, in which the relation between the two codes is precisely understood as a dialectic within a system. For instance, Grutman clearly acknowledges his debt towards Even-Zohar in the aforementioned essay “Le Bilingualism littéraire comme relation intersystémique.” In this work, he defines literary bilingualism as “la communication en deux ou plusieurs langues au moyen d’œuvres littéraires qui fonctionnent de manière analogue ou divergent à l’intérieur de systèmes littéraires unilingue” (203). Grutman’s argument is based on the assumption that bilingualism (and bilingual writing in particular) can be considered a case of poly-systemic interaction between sub-systems, since it is always the outcome of a complex balance of forces (200). Similarly, in defining the practice of bilingual writing from an operational point of view, Grutman suggests that by choosing a given code, authors find a way of positioning themselves in the literary system.57

Both paradigms proposed by Lefevere and Even-Zohar can guide our analysis of bilingual writing in the Italian context since they help us understand the complexity of manifold systems that are structured around an inner division between canonical and non-canonical

57 “A writing language is the expressive tool chosen by the author (or imposed to him by the circumstances) to write his creative works and position himself or herself in a literary tradition.” Rainer Grutman, “Bilinguisme et diglossie: comment penser la différence linguistique dans les littératures francophones.” 2003, 3.
literatures. More importantly, both models potentially account for the dynamic role of translation in contexts marked by inner multilingualism: while Lefevere’s notion of “rewriting” helps us in dealing with the ideological manipulation and the agency shift promoted by self-translation, the theory of literary polysystem can guide our understanding of the relation between major and minor languages within a unitary literary system.

8. The Bilingual Text Beyond Equivalence

Tzvetan Todorov, who was himself a bilingual author, traced a compelling equivalence between dialogism, bilingualism and clinical schizophrenia in a 1985 paper titled “Bilinguisme, dialogisme et polyphonie”. “La polyphonie démesurée condurait donc à la schizophrénie, si l’on veut garder à ce terme sa signification commune de scission de personnalité, d’incohérence mentale, et son appreciation de forme de détresse” (18), he writes, before engaging in a personal discussion of the topic: “Chacun de mes langues était un tout, et c’est précisément ce qui les rendait incombinables, ce qui les empêchait de former une totalité nouvelle” (25). Bakthinian dialogism and Orwellian double think are therefore used to assert the incompatibility of the two languages, each of which embodies a totality of memories, experiences and perceptions: “Mes deux langues, mes deux discours se ressemblaient trop, d’un certain point de vue: chacun pouvait souffrir à la totalité de mon experience et aucun n’était clairement soumis à l’autre. L’un régnait ici, l’autre là; mais chacun régnait inconditionablement.” (24) The author concludes by asserting the reassuring function of hierarchies, giving structure and definition to the two conflicting languages: “L’égalité des voix me fait sentir le souffle de la folie. Leur asymétrie, leur hiérarchie est au contraire rassurante. Et je sens très bien que, tout comme mon bilinguisme, tout mon dialogisme est constitutif de ma personnalité présente, l’est aussi une certaine hiérarchie (pas n’importe quelle)” (25-26).

If there is no perfect bilingualism, there is no perfect translation either. In this respect, the case of self-translation contradicts and challenges several assumptions and methodological commonplace of Translation Studies. The critique of traditional binarism is immanent to the current theorizations, from Pym’s aforementioned “ethics” to Henri Meschonnic’s “battle of the continuum against the discontinuum” (Ethics and Politics of Translating 66). Even Gideon Toury, one of the founding fathers of equivalence, has recently proposed a revised definition of
equivalence, conceived more as a functional-relational concept than as a rigid source-target correspondence (Toury defines equivalence as “that set of relationships which are found to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate modes of translation for the culture in question,” *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* 122)

If the critique of equivalence-based approaches has become accepted and wide-spread in the field of Translation Studies, the problematic aspects of this notion are particularly evident in the study of bilingual texts and their translations. For instance, Susan Bassnett has recently questioned the use of traditional polarities such as the dichotomy between target- and source-text in studying the problems of self-translation. As she argues, the term ‘self-translation’ is problematic in itself, for its underlying assumption that there is an “original” text, from which a ‘secondary’ text is derived; on the contrary, Bassnett suggests that “many writers consider themselves as bilinguals and shift between languages, hence the binary notion of original-translation appears simplistic and unhelpful.” (“The Self-Translator as a Rewriter” 15) After examining the practice of illustrious self-translators such as Nancy Houston, Rabindranath Tagore and Vladimir Nabokov, she opts for a less rigid descriptive paradigm, accounting for the variety of options and approaches among bilingual writers – including those who, she claims, have “rewritten their work,” and those who adopted a “dialogic way with something that might be termed an original.” (24).

Cognizant of these warnings, I consider the analyzed pairs of scripts as twofold textual systems resulting from the interaction of the vernacular and the standard, linked together as the two sides of a coin. To this effect, I adopt the term “bilingual play” to describe the self-translated plays of my corpus, as opposed to the bulk of the plays in dialects, which are the monolingual outcome of authors who happen to be bilinguals. While tracing semantic losses and compensations is a necessary step, a merely descriptive approach fails to understand the complexity of these works, which are full-fledged bilingual speech acts or twofold textual systems. After all, the goal is not to state what language came first—as in Verga’s mental form—but breaking with the monism of the ‘original’ language to acknowledge the ‘bilingual’ or ‘self-translated’ text as a space where the two codes can coexist, mingle and re-define each other.
9. Conclusion

This chapter offered an overview of the paradigms that guide and inform my analysis, engaging with complex notions such as bilingualism, diglossia, self-translation, and represented orality. First, I discussed the paradigms of bilingualism and diglossia in relation to the question of how bilingual authors operate, pointing to similarities and differences between self-translation and bilingual writing. I then examined these two partially overlapping modes in light of societal constraints and norms. Notions such as ‘mother tongue,’ clearly instrumental to the self-identification as a bilingual author, were thus deconstructed as part of the “diglossic” ideologies shaping national identities in the nineteenth century. Finally, I examined two important contributions coming from the field of translation studies, the current reassessment of the notion of equivalence, and the theory of literary polysystems, which effectively acts as a frame for the role of dialectal production within the Italian literary canon.

These considerations will provide the background of my research hypothesis, to be tested by rigorous textual analysis, listed below:

**Hypothesis #1**: Self-translated texts are to be considered bilingual works.

**Hypothesis #2**: The self-translated text should not be primarily analyzed following a Source→Target model, or pursuing equivalence.

**Hypothesis #3**: Self-translational practices, with their bilingual nature, restore parity between the two codes of Italian and dialect, subverting the hierarchical frame of the “diglossic ideologies.”

**Hypothesis #4**: Theatre, with its constitutive ambiguity between written and spoken speech, is an experimental place par excellence.

The first hypothesis (“self-translated texts are to be considered bilingual works”) defines the object of my study under the perspective of the idiolect (individual production) and of the sociolect (societal norms): while the described authors act as bilingual in their individual writing practice, they operate in a condition of diglossia. Despite relying on an individual condition of bilingualism (i.e., the native or near-native fluency in two distinct codes), the self-translating playwrights of the late nineteenth century were writing in a condition of ‘diglossia’ marked by
constitutive inequality between the different dialects spoken in the peninsula and literary Italian. However, the notion of diglossia should not be adopted uncritically, considering the many exceptions that are peculiar to the Italian case – first and foremost, the presence of a centuries-old tradition of literature in dialect, providing an alternative canon to the literature in standard language and contravening to the very foundation of diglossia (the idea that one does not write in the low-prestige code). With these warnings in mind, I will therefore adopt the label of bilingual writing for the self-translated texts, focusing more on the individual components of the process.

The second hypothesis (“the self-translated text should not be primarily analyzed following a source → target model”) accounts for the complex relationship between Italian and dialect in the self-translated text, and derives directly from the discussion of equivalence proposed in Section 8. During my analysis, I maintain that the self-translated text is better understood as the product of a constitutive duplicity: therefore it should be analyzed as a twofold text, rather than as a set of direct correspondences between a Source and a Target. While its direction (i.e. downwards or upwards) can account for a specific pattern in the wider frame of diglossia, nevertheless a bilingual text is globally understood as the combined blending of the two text, as inseparable as the two sides of a coin.

The third hypothesis (“self-translational practices, with their bilingual nature, restore parity between the two codes of Italian and dialect”) frames the analyzed practice historically. As it was seen, the emergence of bilingual writing marks a contradictory movement in the linguistic debate of post-Unification era, when the standard consolidates around the hegemonic narratives of the nation-state. In such a context, the “bilingual” text restores parity between the new hegemonic language and the dialect, which is contextually being retroceded from a language of culture to a marginalized, oral-only code. The advent of self-translation mirrors the transition from a strictly diglossic and rigidly hierarchical pattern of interaction between codes to a horizontal model, marked by bilingualism and, more specifically, by the extensive use of code-switching and by a substantial parity between codes. This motion, however, is not an antagonizing one, but it is rather akin to the discursive modes of mimicry (Bhabha) and imitation (Gramsci).

The fourth hypothesis provides an important rationale for the analyzed criteria, questioning the choice of focusing on a specific genre. The linguistic subversions of the
bilingual text are enabled by the liminal quality of the theatrical text, which participates both of the oral and of the written language. A text ‘written-to-be-performed’ (“scritto-parlato”), the theatrical text allows in its own grain the space for performativity, thus re-enacting the constitutive difference that haunts the formation of a modern nation.

These four hypotheses will be at work in the second part of my dissertation, offering a detailed analysis of three bodies of self-translated plays.
Chapter 2

The Bilingual Writings of Salvatore Di Giacomo

Born in 1860 and active on the Neapolitan literary scene since the late 1870s, Salvatore Di Giacomo is an exemplary figure to understand the relation between Italian and dialects in the first decades after the national unification of Italy. Nicola De Blasi, in his seminal essay “Le letterature dialettali: Salvatore Di Giacomo,” credits him with the ability of “condurre il dialetto dagli orizzonti municipali alla Nazione” (“Le letterature dialettali” 837). According to this view, Di Giacomo was able to create a set of popular metaphors and tropes through the use of a highly lyricized poetic dialect; more importantly, he successfully combined two apparently antithetic notions, such as those of nation and dialect (837). His ability to mediate between languages and poetic traditions establishes him as an outstanding figure in the post-Unification culture of Italy, and makes his case particularly relevant for the process of shaping a linguistic identity. His career spanned over six decades, encompassing a vast production in different genres: fiction and non-fiction, theatre and melodrama, poetry and critical essays. In this vast production, he combined a historical and erudite gaze on the past of his city (and especially on the culture of the eighteenth century), with a deep fascination for the miseries of the present, documented in his activity as a reporter.\(^{58}\)

Di Giacomo’s monolingual production in dialect has been the subject of countless critical studies, ranging from Luigi Russo’s 1916 critical profile to Franco Schnitzler’s posthumous study of Di Giacomo’s poetical lexicon (first published in 1966), up to the more recent work of

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\(^{58}\) Di Giacomo worked as a reporter at the Corriere di Napoli from 1888 to 1896. The periodic followed the editorial line already traced by Il Corriere del Mattino, from which it had evolved; Di Giacomo was the living symbol of this continuity, embodying “l’autorevole eredità della scuola di Cafiero e Zerbi” in artistic terms (Villani 503). The newspaper had an important role in familiarizing the Neapolitan readership with the most up-to-date trends of French literature, through translations of novels (often in installments) and bio-bibliographical profiles. Di Giacomo served both as a literary critic (under the nom de plum “Snob”, later turned into “Job”) and as a court reporter (under the nom de plum “Paglietta”). In the latter capacity, he was responsible for various columns, significantly titled “In tribunale”, “Corriere Giudiziario,” “In corte d’Assise,” and “Settimana Giudiziaria” (Villani 516). His deep knowledge of the courtroom is reflected in several works of fiction, including the dramatic version of “Assunta Spina”, whose first act is entirely set in the courtroom.
Nicola De Blasi and Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo. However, little attention has been given to the significance of the author’s multilingualism, which takes the form of self-translation (from Italian into dialect and vice versa) and represented bilingualism (i.e., the citational use of code-switching between Italian and Neapolitan in several of his plays). In this chapter, I will explore the relation between the representation of multilingualism and the choice of the theatrical medium—a genre that Di Giacomo embraced relatively late in his life, after several decades of activity as a poet, a narrator and a reviewer. Is there a specific relation between the theatrical medium and the representation of multilingualism? And, more importantly, is there a specific liaison between theatre and translation, allowing a different range of writing practices?

In order to answer these questions, I will first examine the “theatricality” of Di Giacomo’s oeuvre, seen as a global aesthetics that anticipates the author’s recurrent use of intersemiotic adaptation. Thereafter, I will analyze the dialogic nature of his poetry, whose lively use of direct discourse anticipates themes and stylistic features of the author’s theatre, opening the page to the universe of voices and styles commonly heard in the streets of Naples. In particular, the sociolinguistic and stylistic variation of the poetry creates an important precedent for the use of dialect in Di Giacomo’s theatrical works. Building on this linguistic exploration, I will then analyze Di Giacomo’s imitation of the so-called “italiano dei semicolti” in his narrative: the latter is particularly relevant to the representation of female characters, whose social marginality is often metaphorically mirrored by their lack of access to standard Italian. All these different strategies represent different ways of voicing the other, thus preparing the ground for the author’s dramatic production. More importantly, these different forms of “parlato-scritto” contribute to unfold the duplicitous linguistic conscience of the “bilingual writer,” thematizing the ideological division between oral and written language. In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on Di Giacomo’s view of languages and translation: in particular, I will analyze his relationship with other important national languages (French and German), providing a fertile ground on which to experiment with modes of “foreignizing” translation and “pseudo-translation”; finally, I will examine in detail the recurring features of his bilingual plays, starting

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59 I borrow this term from Roman Jakobson’s famous 1959 article “On Translation,” in which the Russian linguist distinguishes three modes of translation: interlinguistic (that is, translation properly meant), intralinguistic (that is, paraphrase or reformulation), and intersemiotic translation (that is, between different media)
with the ones he coauthored with other playwrights (‘O buono marito fa’ ‘a bona mogliera and Mala vita) and then considering his most successful works, ‘O mese mariano and Assunta Spina.

1. The “Fondaco” As an Anatomic Theatre

In his essay on the language of Salvatore Di Giacomo, the Italian linguist Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo effectively captures Di Giacomo’s use of different codes for different genres, inviting his fellow scholars to a deeper understanding of the author’s polygeneric activity: “Neppure sarebbe male studiare i rapporti interni fra i vari ‘generi’ della creatività digiacomiana, poesia dialettale, racconti, teatro: le loro peculiari ragioni d’essere e le loro distinzioni certamente (Di Giacomo è, ricordiamolo sempre, un grande lirico che non si accontenta della lirica), ma anche le loro interrelazioni.” (Mengaldo 4).

Indeed, this suggestion provides an important indication in order to understand not only Di Giacomo’s use of different genres, but also the systematic adoption of different codes for each genre. In fact, while Di Giacomo chose Neapolitan dialect for his poetic and songwriting activity, he wrote prose exclusively in standard Italian. An exception to this rigorous and mutually exclusive distribution is provided by theatre, which represents an authentic space of bilingual expression. Not only are many of his plays are bilingual texts, having a double Italian and Neapolitan version, bilingualism also appears in works such as Assunta Spina, Quand l’amour meurt and ‘O mese mariano, characterized by a noticeable presence of code-switching between standard Italian and dialect.

The co-presence of Italian and dialect has often been neglected by the scholars of Di Giacomo, who have tended to read these plays as ‘monolingual’ works in dialect. See, for instance, the judgment of Aurelio Benevento:

l’uso del dialetto è il primo elemento che caratterizza [...] i drammi digiacomiani e li distingue nettamente dalle novelle. Mentre in queste, infatti, il Di Giacomo utilizza la lingua letteraria, se pur avvicinata alla lingua parlata, che gli sembra lo strumento naturale per raccontare le storie dei suoi personaggi, nei drammi, come nelle poesie e nelle canzoni, ritiene necessario usare il dialetto, che è il linguaggio del teatro popolare
napoletano, al quale egli si rifà, anche se avverte il bisogno di conferirgli una nuova dignità di arte. (Benevento 71)

Toni Iermano, perhaps the leading scholar of Di Giacomo in present times, makes a similar assessment when he suggests that “la lingua usata – il dialetto – aveva nel teatro una funzione del tutto simile a quella della canzone e della poesia.” (Il melanconico 193). According to this view, Neapolitan would be by definition the linguistic mask of Otherness, thus allowing a realistic representation of popular identities. However, these judgments do not account for the systematic co-presence of Italian and Neapolitan in the plays, let alone for the translational aspect that is so important in Di Giacomo’s theatre.

Di Giacomo’s theatrical aesthetic can be understood in light of its “translational nature.” Indeed, several of the analyzed plays are translations in two different ways: not only are they self-translated, bilingual texts, but they also are stage adaptations of works originally created for other media. For instance, *Assunta Spina*, *O mese mariano*, and *Mala vita* are respectively adapted from the short stories “Assunta Spina,” “Senza Vederlo,” and “Il voto.” Di Giacomo thus follows the customary practice of realist page-to-stage adaptation, marked by a strong emphasis on regionalist aspect and a marked preference for the dynamic of crowds over the exploration of individual psychologies. Alongside the common practice of page-to-stage adaptation, less frequent options are also found: consider for instance the ambitious project of *A San Francisco*, an illustrated collection of sonnets unified by an overarching narrative which was later adapted into a bilingual prose play and an opera. The theatricalization of *A San Francisco* is consistent with two important tendencies of Di Giacomo’s *oeuvre*: the dialogic tension underlying his poetry (which will be analyzed in greater detail in the next section) and the complementary role played by text and image in his work. The latter tendency has been remarked, among others, by Laura Donadio, who has recently analyzed the text/image relationship in the recently found “piccolo albo” devoted to “Ellis” (one of the many

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60 *Il piccolo albo dedicato a Elisa* was a private booklet collecting lyrics, sonnets and illustrations. It was never meant for publication, but it just intended for private communication with its dedicatee, Elisa Avigliano—the author’s fiancée of nearly fifteen years and later his wife.
nicknames given to Elisa Avigliano) and the poet’s general propensity for illustration: “Alla passione per la pittura il poeta affianca quella per il libro illustrato e ornato, capace di sedurre il lettore per l’efficacia del messaggio scritto e per la forza visiva. Per Di Giacomo il libro è sì una serie di fogli stampati da leggere, ma allo stesso tempo un oggetto interessante da stampare, piacevole da guardare.” (206)

Donadio’s remarks are valid not only for the individual case of the Piccolo Albo, but they also serve the illustrations accompanying the short stories of Minuetto Settecento or the sonnets of ‘O Munasterio. In their complex intertwining of text and image, these precious volumes are “optical theatres”, already anticipating the spectacularity of tragic plays such as O Mese Mariano and Assunta Spina. In this respect, the poet’s concern for the para-text of his works (including illustrations, reproduction of manuscripts and visual documents, and freshly produced illustrations) lays the foundations of a spectacular experience:

Erede della spiritualità lirico-pittorica partenopea, Di Giacomo mostra interesse per la poesia, il teatro, le arti visive, la musica e le arti minori. Convinto sostenitore dell’enunciato barocco delle “arti sorelle,” ne testimonia con la sua opera la veridicità: parola e immagine avendo per lui la stessa dignità e necessità come nell’emblematica rinascimentale. Ingegno poetico e fantastico, ma pur sempre verista sentimentale, per formazione e deformazione il suo occhio è abituato a vedere non soltanto la realtà che lo circonda, ma anche ciò che sta attorno alla parola scritta. (Donadio 205-206)

The reference to Baroque aesthetics is particularly significant in this context: the roots of Neapolitan popular shows lay down in the Baroque, with its complex spectacularity combining visual, musical and verbal performance. It should also be noted that the “translational” push – underpinning the dynamic of Di Giacomo’s page-to-stage adaptation—did not exhaust itself with theatre: in the 1910s, following their success as plays, both A “San Francisco” and Assunta Spina provided the subject to highly popular cinematic scripts. In Di Giacomo’s oeuvre, self-translation goes hand in hand with adaptation and rewriting, three different modes that are not always easy to distinguish.
The tension towards theatricality, translation and intermediality spans the entire oeuvre of Di Giacomo: in fact, his entire narrative and poetic production has often been read under the sign of performance and spectacle. The critical reception of Di Giacomo in the twentieth century was seminally shaped by Luigi Russo’s idea that the proprium of Di Giacomo’s dramatic imagination lays in the blending of music and painting: “Dalla canzone piedigrottese che è corale, come abbiamo detto, si svolge il dramma, che è dramma, appunto, non di intimità passionale e riflessa, ma di coloure e di suono.” (109). While the main motive of dramatic invention is provided by the principle of choral scenes or by that of pictorial ensemble, melody provides the playwright with the necessary sensitivity to unify and merge a series of otherwise disconnected scenes and images. According to Russo, melody emerges as a unifying principle alternative to narration, providing the fundamental principle of ‘dramatization.’ The most important plays by Di Giacomo, including ‘O mese Mariano and Assunta Spina, are thus seen as an effective synthesis of music and painting and as the natural outcome of a decades-long expressive quest (Salvatore Di Giacomo 110). The group scenes, typical of melodrama, meet the technique of group paintings: hence their typical choral quality, often acknowledged as a specific feature of Di Giacomo’s narrative style and as the overarching trend guiding many of his page-to-stage adaptations. Indeed, both elements are rooted in the author’s self-representation. On the one hand, the idea of a “musical” and “melodic” principle clearly resonates with Di Giacomo’s fascination for the pre-romantic, eighteenth-century melodrama, also evident in fictional works such as the collection of short stories Menuetto Settecento and the play L’Abbe Peru.\footnote{Di Giacomo shared Croce’s positive judgment over the tradition of musical theatre, flourishing in Naples in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See for instance his positive comment on Metastasio’s play Didone abbandonata, first represented in Naples in 1724 (during the Neapolitan sojourn of Metastasio), which is a “dramma rapido, chiaro, senza gonfiezze, senza intruse buffonerie” (I teatri di Napoli 176).} On the other hand, Di Giacomo affirmed several times the importance of visual inspiration for his work. This aspect is documented, among other places, in an important letter to Benedetto Croce, dating to the 29\textsuperscript{th} of May, 1914: “Quanto a quello che volevo dirvi a proposito delle novelle è che bisogna far notare che quando le scrivevo ero molto giovane – che non me la sono fatta mai con i letterati, ma coi pittori (e da questo la sovrabbondanza delle tinte, e gli effetti di luce, etc. etc….). che Napoli era, allora, quel che descrivevo. Che bisogna perdonarmi la lingua. Che non credevo d’imitare alcuno.” (Infusino 32)
This letter has a strategic importance: Croce was then in the process of writing a preface to the 1914 edition of Di Giacomo’s collected short stories (with the new title of *Novelle Napolitane*): the letter thus serves as a reminder of what the author considered to be the most important aspects of his narrative production. By rejecting the affiliation to professional writers and by choosing the company of painters, Di Giacomo refashions his own early production in a coherent way, setting the ground for the future scholarship on his works. Indeed, the “pictorial” quality of Di Giacomo’s inspiration has become commonplace in the author’s critical reception, from Russo to more recent critics such as Iermano.62

While not all the views voiced by Russo are still considered valid in our days, his intuition of the link between painting, musical chorus and theatricality is a shared point of departure in the scholarship of Di Giacomo, and influences the common understanding of his “theatricality.” Iermano, for instance, highlights the link between visual and theatrical imagination: theatrical adaptation works as an expansion of the visual sketches, the sudden epiphanies conveyed by the narrative sketches. Naples thus comes to embody a theatre of human vices, misery and sorrow, masterfully seen through the visual conventions of local artists such as Vincenzo Gemito, and Luca Postiglione.63

In his visual inspiration, Di Giacomo was not merely a passive receptor of his friends’ pictorial inspiration; he also influenced them, both through his short stories and through his own photography. As he strolled down the alleys of Naples, with a Kodak constantly at hand in a true Zolian fashion, Di Giacomo often captured glimpses of the Neapolitan humanity—sick women

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62 As Luigi Russo notes in his 1916 critical profile, “l’opera del Di Giacomo la si intende bene se avvicinata non alla letteratura dialettale ma alla pittura sua contemporanea” (180): his best friends and collaborators should therefore be found among painters such as Morelli, Gemito, and Dalbono (“sono stati i suoi migliori compagni e talvolta consentanei collaboratori”) (180). The act of literary creation is thus conceived as the product of a visual, rather than verbal, imagination, consistent to Di Giacomo’s self-assessment. According to this view, the narrative of Di Giacomo is predominantly based on the conflict between external reality and an inner theatre of shadow, revived in the imagination of the narrator. While commenting on “Gabriele,” one of the most praised *Novelle Napolitane*, Russo declares: “Questa è la catastrofe della visione. Tragedia? Non direi: siamo, abbiamo detto, nel regno della visione” (47. Author’s emphasis).

63 See in particular the following passage: “Edoardo Dalbono, Vincenzo Caprile, Vincenzo Irolli, Enrico Rossi, Vincenzo Migliaro, Luca Postiglione, Lionello Balestrieri, Pietro Scoppetta ed altri pittori napoletani si ispirarono a tanti soggetti fotografici di Di Giacomo per dipingere i propri quadri. La splendida Carmela dipinta da Dalbono trae ispirazione sia dalla poesia che dalla fotografia digiacomiane (vedi l'acquerello del Dalbono riprodotto nella *Tribuna illustrata*, a. I., n. 3, Roma, 19 gennaio 1890). (*Lettere a Elena* 16)
and children. One of such examples is the portrait of a prostitute breastfeeding a child, taken in 1885 in the local Sifilicomio, the infectious disease unit: said image provided inspiration for a painting by Postiglione, alongside the short story “L’Ignoto” (1893). The author recalls this episode in a letter to the French critic and translator Georges Hérelle: 64

Non giudichi me da questo libro di pura immaginazione: io sono piuttosto un verista. Un verista sentimentale è vero. Ella se ne avvedrà dalla novella 'L'ignoto' che è nella Tribuna Illustrata che le spedirò tra due o tre giorni... 'L'Ignoto' è la prima delle sei novelle di un volume umano che pubblicherò quanto prima. Lo stesso personaggio seguito nel moto suo materiale e spirituale, s'incontra in ognuna di quelle. Ho qui davanti a me una fotografia presa al Sifilicomio di Napoli, nel 1885. Le prostitute sono a pranzo in un vasto carnerone scuro e una di esse allatta una bambina. E al Sifilicomio che la protagonista muore. Giudichi da quello se sono verista. Ci tengo. Osservazione della verità con alito di poesia personale. Questa l'arte per me. (Infusino 96)

In short, the literary poetic of realism could establish itself in Naples only through the irreplaceable mediation of the local schools of painting, including the so-called Scuola di Posillipo 65 and the exponents of the so-called “rivoluzione morelliana (Il malinconico 64).

64 The letter is dated on February 1st, 1894 and accompanied the volume of short stories “Pipa e boccale,” marked by a fantastic tone and by an unrealistic German setting: hence the author’s warning that they are not representative of his global poetics.

65 The “Scuola di Posillipo” indicates a group of Neapolitan landscape painters active in the 1830s, mostly inspired by the teaching of Anton Sminck van Pitloo, a Dutch painter who had opened shop in Naples in 1816. Famous representatives of this group include Achille Vianelli, Gabriele Smargiassi, Teodoro Duclère among others. Their way of painting was heavily influenced by the manner of other Romantic painters residing in Naples, such as Camille Corot and William Turner, and it is responsible for the main stylistic features of the most typical Neapolitan illustrations, including the “vedute” of the Naples Gulf that are still commonly associated with the city. Domenico Morelli (1826-1901), a painter of the following generation, brought a revolution in the local artistic currents, breaking with the most stereotypical and encrusted traits of the Scuola di Posillipo. Thanks to his early formative sojourns in Florence and Rome, furthered by his 1853 tour in Munich, Berlin, Rome, Bruxelles, London and Paris, he became insufferent with the traditional manners of Italian art. In particular e developed a Romantic sensitivity and a taste for historical subject, also thanks to his friendship with Giuseppe Verdi and his personal ties with the historian Pasquale Villari (his brother-in-law): these values clearly inspired his dramatic taste for historical and religious subject. The dramatic tension of his painting had, in turn, a very strong influence on the literary works of Di Giacomo.
However, the realist and the melancholic often conflict in Di Giacomo’s imagination: his keen and acute observations are often paralized by the fantastic deviations of his mind. His realism, which he famously qualified as “sentimental,” is therefore at odds with the strict realist observance of other authors such as Matilde Serao.

The theatrical quality of Di Giacomo’s inspiration is best understood in connection with a specific episode: the Neapolitan Risanamento, an urbanistic transformation which might be comparable, in its extent and social significance, to the haussmannization of Paris. Alongside its most evident dimension of urban renovation, the “Risanamento” is also a “literary phenomenon: the often merely superficial renovation of the poorest neighbourhoods of Naples (such as the boroughs of Vico, Pendino and Porto) marks the partial disappearance of the “bowels of Naples,” immortalized by popular authors such as Serao and Mastriani, and thoroughly denounced by historians and reporters such as Pasquale Villari, Jessie White Mario, Renato Fucini.

Di Giacomo documented the Risanamento with contradictory feelings, describing with particular emphasis the disappearance of the “fondaco”, the most typical form of housing of those neighbourhoods and a landmark of the city. While he did acknowledge the historical importance of some of the demolished neighbourhoods, Di Giacomo famously dubbed the fondaci a ‘scarrafunnera’ (a cockroach pit) in the poem “O Funneco Verde”. In “Gli Ultimi Fondaci,” a reportage published in two installments in Il Corriere di Roma in 1893, he described

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66 See the aforementioned letter to Georges Hérelle, mailed on November 1, 1894. Infusino 98.

67 See Serao’s harsh judgment “Di Giacomo è un giovanotto che sa veder bene e non vede troppo, che osserva molto, e rende con grande efficacia d’arte: un tempo studiava esclusivamente il popolo napoletano e ci riusciva. Ma lo paralizzano un soverchio senso di scontento, le delusioni necessarie di ogni principio di carriera e quei vagabondaggi della fantasia cui vanno soggetti tutti gli artisti napoletani.”

68 The Risanamento was launched in 1885 by Mayor Nicola Amore as a direct response to the cholera epidemics that had ravaged the city a year before. In the turn of a few years, a system of modern boulevards replaced the fondaci, the poverty-ridden and overcrowded housing near the harbour that had especially been vulnerable to the spread of the infection. However, as noted among others by Giancarlo Alisio, the Risanamento was far from being an exhaustive solution and was a superficial answer to a problem that continued undisturbed in less visible areas of the city.

69 See in particular lines 12-14: “E sta gente nzevata e strellazzera/ cresce sempre, e mo’ so mille e treciento. / Nun è nu vico. È na scarrafunera.” (Poesie 52). [And these filthy and noisy people/ keep growing. They are one thousand and three hundreds now./ This is not an alley. It’s a cockroach pit.” My translation].
the standards of living of these neighbourhoods, home to alcoholic prostitutes and disfigured women similar to the ones depicted in the *Novelle Napolitane*. Di Giacomo defines their poor and insanitary houses as “tane” (dens) and “corti dei miracoli.” (*Gli sfregi* 188-89); later in the article, he expresses the hope that the public authority is able to “svuotare del loro infetto contenuto quelle caverne asfittiche.” In describing the fondaco in Vico Venafro, he claims that “vi si fanno tutti i mestieri, e un de’ primi fondaci che forse è il più sozzo, accoglie donne di mal’affare che le prime ore della sera sparpagliano per tutto il vicolo o cariatidano al suo ignobile ingresso, tra i rigagnoli del vicolo e della fontanina, tra la spazzatura sparsa o ammucchiata:” quite literally, the prostitutes are juxtaposed to infected material and urban waste.

What is particularly relevant to the notion of theatricality is the fact that for Di Giacomo the fondaco acts as a true scenic space, either of aural or visual nature. For instance, in the poetical series ‘*O funneco verde* the author recreates the many voices audible in the ‘fondaco.’ Similarly, in short stories such as “Quarto Piano, Interno 4” (first published in *L’ignoto*, 1903) the abyss of the courtyard also provides a space for the chorus to comment and reconstruct the sad episode; at the same time, the hollow space of the *fondaco* turns into an anatomic theatre, wide open on the social miseries of Naples. It should be noted, as Sergio Minichini does, that *fondaci* were not a picturesque invention of the author, as some non-Neapolitan reviewers naïvely suggested, but an embedded feature of the Neapolitan urban landscape (Minichini 234); nevertheless, Di Giacomo should be credited for recognizing the potential of a tragic scene in their abysmal shape. Proceeding from the pictorial notion of sketch, theatre emerges as an all-encompassing mode of representation that informs all genres and media. Instead of depicting the pain of his fellow citizens through short and dense narrative scenes, the author opens his page to the many voices of Naples, recreating the chorus of its many voices for the enjoyment of the audience.

Riccardo Scrivano among others has remarked the importance of theatricality in Di Giacomo’s work, suggesting that theatre is for Di Giacomo both a *hybrid* form of artistic creation and a more *advanced* one, capable of overcoming the shortcomings of his previous narrative

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70 For instance, in “Gli ultimi fondaci” he documents how quickly a fondaco marked for demolition had been repopulated merely hours from its first eviction, and had actually doubled in population. The new desperate tenants had been fooled into paying rent to a female impostor, who had falsely posed as the “owner.”
manner (448). According to this view, dramatic writing acts as an enhanced gaze, revealing the
duplicity of the Neapolitan human types, and their subtle inclination to a “theatre of life:”

Attraverso queste figure dalla doppia esistenza, quella di semplici persone, di napoletani
immerse nella gran folla della grande metropoli, e quella di attori, che continuano a
essere altro da quello che sono, un poco confondendo di continuo le due esistenze che in
fondo hanno confine inidentificabili, Di Giacomo vive tutto l’universo napoletano nelle
sue ascese e decadenze, l’estrema delle quali è quella del Teatro San Ferdinando […]
(Scrivano 444)

Such attitude is perfectly exemplified in the chronicle titled “Il fatto di Vico Zuroli,” a non-
fictional sketch about an episode of hysterical possession, later included in the collected essays
_Napoli figure e paesi_. In recounting this gruesome episode, Di Giacomo suggests that Naples’
everyday life is naturally infused with a theatrical quality. The medical description of the
‘pathologies’ of the Neapolitan populace (evident in the use of terms such as “hysteria”,
“catalepsy,” and “neuropathy,” and consistent with the author’s early years spent studying
medicine) is thus framed by an exquisitely theatrical gaze.

The conclusion of the essay is particularly telling: “Date a questo sensazionale
movimento impressionante di uno scenario partenopeo, dategli le voci e le parole fantasiose del
nostro popolo, e gli atti e l’accesso comento [sic] e la visione della vincita al lotto, balenante a
ognuna di quelle irrequiete miserie, e vi troverete al cospetto di una grande commedia tragica,
degna dell’amata e comica filosofia di Shakespeare.” (Il teatro e le cronache 556). Theatricality
allows the author to reconcile his typical stance—that is, a Naturalism already oriented towards
the morbid description of extreme physiologies—with a more vivid depiction of the Neapolitan
alleys, oriented towards literary realism and social denunciations. The Neapolitan theatre is an

71 Di Giacomo’s early disgust for the body is famously recounted in his 1886 “Pagina Autobiografica,” describing
the gory spectacle of the dissections carried out at the Anatomic Theatre. Franca Angelini insists on the importance
of medicine in the author’s work, especially to understand his depiction of female characters: “Il primo capitolo di
un’analisi della produzione di Di Giacomo potrebbe intitolarsi: la scienza medica e l’arte. Comprenderebbe gran
parte dei suoi racconti, specialmente intorno ai personaggi femminili delle isteriche, delle nervose, delle sensuali,
egli ospedali, manicomi, prigioni, oppure nei paesaggi fantastic dei racconti alla tedesca” (Rasol 40).
extreme act of vision, in which the traditional labels of comedy and tragedy lose their significance. In Di Giacomo’s private pantheon, Shakespeare’s genius stands next to the prose of his beloved Balzac as the foundation myth for a “human comedy” of miseries and sorrows: a total “comedy,” which encompasses at once the most farcical and the most tragic aspects of life.

Once again, dramatic writing is at the convergence of two different modes of expression, closer to a bridging form than to an aesthetic genre of its own. The novel (the most typical ground of application of realist convention, and the only form of art that Di Giacomo never experimented with) is here replaced by an organic theatre of memories, voices and images, to be rehearsed in the abysmal amphitheatre of a “fondaco” of a “vico” or of a hospital.

Indeed, theatricality appears as a common paradigm in understanding the social representations of Naples. Iain Chambers, for instance, has noted how “the street as a spectable, as simultaneously the space of a performance and a mass public, is what no doubt links the figure of Pulcinella (who apparently first appears in 1609 at the Stanza della Commedia in via Medina) to the great twentieth-century Neapolitan comic Totò” (Mediterranean Crossings 74-75). While Di Giacomo was not a comic actor, certainly his tragedies fall under the general “theatrical” paradigm described by Chambers, whether they were set in the panopticon of the Real Albergo dei Poveri, in the “anatomic theatre” of a fondaco, or in the “natural stage” provided by the Neapolitan alleys.

Di Giacomo placed himself in a long tradition, consistently with his tendency to reappropriate genres and traditions, both from the past (i.e., the Eighteenth-century melodrama) and from the present (i.e. the pictorial convention of the so-called “Scuola di Posillipo”). To some extent, the multilingualism of his plays is also the reinvention of a previous tradition, as it establishes a dialectical relationship with the traditional multilingualism of the Neapolitan Commedia dell’Arte, whose stage-dialects were used to reproduce stereotypical attributes, often originally linked to socio-political hierarchies (such as the Spanish-based dialect used to portray mercenaries, or the Bergamasco used to satirize porters, often immigrants to the much wealthier city of Venice). However, the relationship to the Neapolitan tradition of Commedia is not one

72 Rimandare alla tradizione critica (più o meno recente: da Perrucci, Apollonio e D’Amico fino a Jaffe-Berge e, ovviamente, Bakhtin).
marked by admiration and imitation, but rather one based on conflict and criticism. In fact, Di Giacomo was extremely critical of the popular theatre of his times, which he personally sought to reform. His attitude towards his competitors is twofold: he was fond of the popular audiences, which he often portrayed in an indulgent, if paternalistic, way; at the same time, he sought for himself a role as a reformer, cleansing the production of authors such as Ferdinando Russo and the work of popular performers such as Eduardo Scarpetta of their more coarse and vulgar aspects.

Given this reforming drive, it is not surprising that Di Giacomo often provides glimpses of popular entertainment in his narrative. In “Riconciliazione,” for instance, the emotions unleashed by a puppet-show play an important role in allowing two old friends, Tore and Vito, to reconcile after a row between their children (a young man and a girl, engaged one to another) has sparked a fight between their respective families. The narrator describes the small puppet theatre where the show is about to begin, while the ritual behaviour of the audience displays a whole microcosm of social relationships:

Il teatrino si riempiva a poco a poco. L’uditorio abituale della seconda rappresentazione entrava, lentamente, scegliendo i posti migliori nelle prime file di sedie. Le conoscenze si salutavano, gravemente e aspettando che si desse principio si mettevano a discorrere dell’epoca triste, delle regole al lotto, del pane che rincariva. Si vedevano col desiderio di trovarsi assieme dopo il lavoro d’una giornata. Le assenze si notavano una dopo l’altra. (Le poesie e le novelle 758)

Quite meaningfully, Di Giacomo does not choose to immortalize the comic shows of the San Ferdinando, nor does he represent the easy and vulgar “comicality” of Sciosciammocca (the mask invented by Eduardo Scarpetta) that he was later to criticize in his own “Storia del San Ferdinando.” Instead, he turns to the popular puppets shows, reviving the stories of the ancient paladins set in a distant and dreamy atmosphere, which is clearly more congenial to his sensitivity as a “verista sentimentale.” Di Giacomo vividly represents the attitude of his popular audience, escaping from their harsh daily lives and devoid of any cultural sophistication. For this popular audience of cobbler, house-keepers and fishermen, the music played in the Intermezzi is
nothing more than catchy entertainment, fiercely competing against the local gossiping of the older spectators: “A volte delle chiamate insistenti dalla piccionaia disturbavano delle confidenze; il trombone, vecchio del mestiere, le intratteneva, soffiando nello strumento che metteva una nota rauca, come una promessa: dopo, per un momento, il silenzio si ristabiliva, e, nell’angolo, I piccoli gesti, le asserzioni, le curiosità del racconto ricominciavano”. (759) Jeers and thrown vegetables help to shape fully the image of a rowdy, uneducated and noisy audience.

Alongside their unruly behaviour, Di Giacomo represents their reception horizon, marked by a critical inability to grasp the difference between fiction and historical reality. In “Riconciliazione,” the adventures and the quests of the French paladins give birth to animated discussions, whereas more senior spectators use their longer watching history as an authority argument:

- Eppoi, se volete sentire la verità, questi guerrieri di Buovo non li ho mai visti far niente. Tore ebbe un sorriso di compassione. Ora la discussion s’animava, quelli della fila avanti s’erano voltati a sentire, e Vito, che i Reali di Francia li sapeva a mente, spalancava tanto d’occhi
- Volete parlare soltanto voi – disse Tore.
Il giovanotto s’inchinò.
- Alle altre opere ci siete stato?- chiese Tore.
L’altro parve offeso della domanda. - Come? Ogni sera, e le tengo stampate in corpo! (Le poesie e le novelle 762)

There is no fourth wall in such a theatre: spectators are emotionally challenged and engage in the spectacle, acting more like a mob of fans than as a modern audience:

L’ultimo atto durò pochissimo; il tradimento della regina si compiva, Buono era trucidato da Adalberto, la città cadeva nelle mani dei Maganzesi. L’innamorata regina accoglieva nelle sue braccia il guerriero amato. Le calde proteste della sua passion eccitata irritavano il pubblico; insulti da trivia le cadevano addosso mentre lei sclamava, le braccia per aria, il corpo le si contorceva. I sospiri si perdevano negli urli d’insofferenza, nelle apostrofi rauche e minacciose della piccionaia aizzata, sorta in piedi. (765).
We know that such events were not infrequent in the reality of Neapolitan stages: Croce recounts similar episodes in his *Teatri di Napoli*, for instance. Curses and insults follow the villains even after the curtain is dropped: “La tela scese in una ostile manifestazione di fischi e d’improperii, che assordò l’uditorio con un lungo schiamazzo” (765).

However graphic these descriptions might appear, popular theatre is not only meant to excite the most violent passions of the crowd: it also serves the important function of an escapist art, distracting the poorest inhabitants of Naples from their daily sorrows; and to the melancholic dreamer Di Giacomo, escapist imagination was as important as pathetic involvement. This is what happens in “Per Rinaldo,” where a naïve spectator cannot rest until he learns that his beloved hero, who has fallen prey to a Moorish ambush, will be rescued in the next episode of the saga. In this short story Di Giacomo is depicting the world of serial storytelling, which is akin to that of theatrical performance: in fact, the seriality, the style and the subject of the public reading coincide with those of puppet-shows, while the storyteller acts as a true performer. Unlike the aforementioned “Riconciliazione,” in “Per Rinaldo,” Di Giacomo gives a clue to the source of his represented performance, citing a few lines from Niccolò Carteramo’s *Ricciardetto*, a minor epic from the fifteenth century. The French cycle gives way to the Arthurian one, but the narrative style is still one based on seriality and suspense, similar to the one depicted in “Per Rinaldo.” The storyteller Tore has his own audience, mainly composed of habitués: “Di patiti nell’uditorio ce n’erano meglio di una diecina e sapevano la storia di Rinaldo come il paternoster. Ogni giorno, alle due, alle due letture che faceva Tore, con una mezz’ora d’intervallo, si venivano a pigliare le loro emozioni” (727).

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73 Croce documents the historical decadence of the Commedia dell’Arte by the mid-Eighteenth century, defining the budding “teatro istrionico” as marked by “grossolana scurrilità” and religious superstition (214). These practices, no longer viable as a form of court entertainment, went back to the open space of streets and other informal venues (“tornava ora al popolo, ossia alle fere, alle baracche, agli spettacoli a cielo aperto” (213). He later follows the story of the Teatro San Carlino after its first closing and subsequent refoundation in 1769, documenting also the practice of popular spectacles in shacks and tents on the Lungo Castello (277-278).

74 Niccolò Carteramo was the *nom de plum* of Cardinal Niccolò Forteguerra, a fifteenth-century Cardinal and Papal Legate who is best known as the dedicatee of Andrea del Verrocchio’s unfinished tombal monument.
Di Giacomo lingers on the description of the public reading, thus offering a glimpse on the reality of the popular entertainment of the time. The performer appeals to his own rituality, a small theatre of stereotypical gestures and recurrent tics that are integral part of his show and, as one may be tempted to say, of his own ‘brand’: “Tore mise fuori il fazzoletto scuro, lo avvolse alla mano sinistra, aprì il libro ad un segno di carta, tossì, sputò con un getto rapido, sprizzando la saliva fra le commessure dei denti, facendo un passo innanzi, alzò lentamente la bacchetta e, con una cantilena immutabile, cominciò...” (728).

The audience stands silent, captivated by the repetition of an ancient tale: “Attorno non si sentiva più un ette. L’uditorio attento e interessato pigliava l’aria di una scuola di bimbi: degli uomini, bianchi di capelli, non muovevano ciglio, colle braccia conserte, gli occhi fissi su Tore che si scalmanava” (729). The audience is so raptur ed that they regress to an infantile condition, as children caught in a tale: “Rinaldo si trovava allora in male acque. Una banda di saraceni gli teneva agguato nel bosco. La situazione, pericolosa davvero, metteva nell’uditorio una straordinaria ansietà; si spaventavano, cogli occhi sbarrati, la bocca aperta.” (730).

Throughout the story, Di Giacomo toys with a variety of popular genres, for instance when a touring puppet show interferes with Tore’s reading: “A intervalli, da lontano, lo strido acuto del Pulcinella d’un burattinaio arrivava sino alla folla, tra un mormorio vago di risate. Dal cielo azzurro il sole si spandeva sulla gran via larga con un chiarore abbagliante; il selciato, arso, scottava” (729). The reference to Pulcinella and the other masks of the Neapolitan Commedia dell’arte acts as a signal to the readers, drawing their attention to the wider universe of popular art forms, all competing for the interest of the very same audience. Indeed, the puppet-show reviving the deeds of the French Paladins, the Arthurian saga read aloud by the story-teller, and the lazzi of a wandering Pulcinella all share a common feature: their ability to establish a community of spectators, among the lowest classes of Naples.

Consistently with his aesthetic principles, Di Giacomo refers quite polemically to the hegemonic and – in his views – despicable models of entertainment in his well-known article “Il Teatro San Ferdinando”. Here, in commenting on the activity of popular comedian Federigo Stella and on that of Eduardo Scarpetta, Di Giacomo expresses his strong dislike for “il nostro sciagurato e bifronte teatro vernacolo” (Il teatro e le cronache 443). Di Giacomo especially attacks both Federigo Stella (the “brillante” performing in Standard Language) and Eduardo
Scarpetta (the creator of vernacular plays closer to *vaudeville* than to an authentic popular voice). Vernacular and Italian theatre are the two faces of a same coin—a tradition that is incapable of true renovation but keeps repeating the same coarse tricks, limiting the pursuit of high moral values to the artificiality of Italian scripts—which is embodied, in the present case, by Stella’s linguistic conventionalism.\(^75\) At the same time, Di Giacomo refuses to acknowledge the dialectal tradition reinvented by Scarpetta as an “authentic” primitive expression: to him, the vulgar tricks of Sciosciammocca are as inauthentic as the false diction of the Italian actors:

> Il teatro dello Scarpetta, come la canzonetta partenopea che s’è snaturata e avvilita, non ha di napoletano che il nome. Quello e questa son ricalcati sulla produzione francese: la *pochade* si traveste e scorazza per un repertorio entro il quale è difficile ritrovar la ragione, la verità, il nesso logico; il *Gil Blas illustré* riaccende al fuoco pornografico de’ suoi disegni gli spiriti plagiarii de’ nostro verseggiatori e alimenta, con una inesauribile generosità, la lor vena poetica, sprizzante il suo copioso sangue inquinato sulle tavole afrodisiache de’ caffè-concerto. (*Il teatro e le cronache* 440)

With this double attack Di Giacomo disproves the identification between the comicality of the Teatro San Ferdinando with authentic Neapolitan culture, suggesting instead that the coarse comicality of the “macchietta” should not be identified with Neapolitan culture *tout court*. In so doing, however, he offers a tame and “cleansed” image of the Commedia dell’Arte—one that is seemingly much closer to Perrucci’s systematic theories than to the reality of the popular shows performed by the itinerant companies gathering early in the 19th century along Lungo Castello. For instance, in his historical writings about Neapolitan theatre, Di Giacomo explicitly gestures at the tradition of Commedia dell’arte, of which he provides a watered down and reassuring depiction: “Che diavol venivan a fare tutti costoro sulla faccia del mondo? Dio mio, quel che vi facevano gli altri, quel che vi s’è fatto sempre, quel che vi facevano gli altri, quel che vi s’è fatto sempre, quel che vi faremo ancora in appresso: un po’ d’amore, ossia un po’ di commedia.” (*Il teatro e le cronache* 440-441).

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\(^75\) See the following description of Stella, provided by Di Giacomo: “Recita in lingua e con l’enfasi di quel Bene che la moral tradizione teatrale popolana ha destinato, da secoli parecchi, a ridurre il Male alle strette e a distrarne gloriosamente le forze. E poi che il Bene è una figura atteggiata, quasi simbolica, certamente nobile, si suppone che il linguaggio vernacolo non le si adatti.” (*Il teatro e le cronache* 440-441).
In so doing, Di Giacomo denies credibility and authenticity to a long lineage of popular theatre, purging the Commedia dell’Arte of its most popular, subversive and coarse nature. The popular masks of Coviello, Pulcinella, and Zeza are cleansed of their stratified obscenities and brought back to a pure, musical and naïve ideal of comicality. Through this censoring gesture, he restablishes Commedia dell’Arte as a mythical origin and a pristine source of inspiration; however, Commedia appears to him in the light of romance and imagination, far from the raunchy and cynical slapstick comedy that was popular among the lower classes. In turn, this critical reinvention of dialectal comedy offers an alternative to the situation of present-day theatre, in which the habit has become encrusted in a stereotypical notion of the ‘popular.’ With this critical gesture, Di Giacomo goes as far as to manipulate cultural history, promoting a lyrical wave of popular production that is consistent with his songwriting.

Di Giacomo’s ideological rewriting of Commedia dell’Arte is telling of the author’s intellectual orientation, revealing both his aristocratic and paternalistic attitude towards the urban populace and his heclectism. Di Giacomo’s imagination is fuelled by the re-appropriation of cultural tradition, rather than by original invention. Whether by rewriting the history of Commedia dell’Arte in a convenient, self-legitimizing fashion, by appropriating the principles of the so-called “Scuola di Posillipo” or paying homage to the Neapolitan years of Metastasio, the author places himself into a long tradition – whose contours he is, however, bending and rewriting at his own pleasure. His appropriation of previous traditions is instrumental to promoting a wide notion of “theatricality,” globally informing his poetics and anticipating his actual involvement with theatre.

2. Dialect, dialogism and language variation in Di Giacomo’s poems

As the previous section showed, there is a deep connection between the choice of writing in dialect and the “theatricality” of Di Giacomo’s oeuvre. This correspondence is easily detected in the spectacular forms of his narrative and in his explicit intention of reforming the dramatic
culture of Naples. However, Di Giacomo’s use of dialect is best understood and evaluated in relation to his poetry, often considered as his main aesthetic contribution. \(^{76}\) At the same time, given the importance of theatricality in the global aesthetics of Di Giacomo, it is not surprising that for decades, critics and reviewer have applied terms from the vocabulary of performance arts to his narrative and poetry. The label of “lyric tragedy,” for instance, is often applied to the tormented humanity of Di Giacomo’s female characters, while Mengaldo highlights the dialogic tendency in the realistic side of his poetry (notably A “San Francisco” and ‘O Funneco Verde) as well as in its “lyrical” side.\(^{77}\) Precisely because of its dialogic nature, Di Giacomo’s poetical dialect is an important piece of comparison to assess the innovativeness of the dialect used on the stage, as well as to evaluate the degree of “abstraction” and “artificiality” of his language.

An inescapable starting point in such assessment is provided by the work of Benedetto Croce, whose criticism touches on the two fundamental aspects of Di Giacomo’s poetic dialectality: its problematic linguistic “essentialism” and its alleged artificiality.

In his influential profile on Di Giacomo, published in the series La letteratura della nuova Italia, Croce dismisses the 'dialectal' identity of the poet as irrelevant and uninteresting. The polemic nature of such gesture should not go unnoticed: Croce is here taking aim at the attention that both erudite criticism and general audiences bestowed upon his production in dialect, precisely because of its vernacular nature: “Ma, se io dessi termine in questo punto al mio scritto, sento che lascerei nell'animo di molti una delusione. – Come? (si direbbe): avete parlato del Di Giacomo, e non lo avete considerato in relazione e in gruppo con gli altri poeti

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\(^{76}\) His poetry collections include Sonetti (1884), ‘O Funneco Verde (1886), ‘O Munasterio (1887), Zi’ Munacella (1888), Canzoni Napulitane (1891), A San Francisco (1895), Ariette e sunette (1898), Fantasia (1898), and Napoli illustratata (1900). Di Giacomo was constantly re-structuring the overall significance of his poetical works, by rearranging the order of his own poems and often merging old collections with freshly printed works. His poetic collections seem to voice an urge for construction, as well as a deep awareness of editorial processes. Di Giacomo published two editions of his Collected poems during his lifetime, both by the prestigious press Ricciardi: the first (1911) contained a Preface by Benedetto Croce, which was later removed from the second edition in 1927, as a result of their rapidly deteriorating relationship.

\(^{77}\) To quote the direct words of Mengaldo: “È di tutta evidenza che uno degli ‘atouts’ quasi imbattibili del ‘realismo’ di Di Giacomo è la tecnica del dialogo (anche del discorso interiore dei personaggi), che può giungere a saturare un testo intero o già di lì (basti, fra tante possibilità, rileggere VL 25, FV 47, 52, ss., M 78, SF 192, ecc.).” (11). Later in his analysis, Mengaldo notes that “Frammenti di dialogo (anche cospicui) penetrano in testi ad alto tasso lirico” (11) and presents dialogue as a natural, albeit extreme, outcome of Di Giacomo’s thrust for descriptive realism (12).
dialettali di Napoli e delle altre regioni d'Italia?” (La letteratura della nuova Italia III, 97-98).

Croce refuses to give credit to the category of dialectal poetry and rejects its typical questions as “oziose, poste male, provocanti false risposte” (98): such a critical orientation appears to be consistent with his general attitude towards the “questione della lingua,” and other linguistic or philological concerns: indeed, in this writing Croce reiterates his position on the topic, rejecting the “questione della lingua” as well as its foundational myths, that of “la lingua realmente parlata,” and that of Florentine’s hegemony (157). Finally, his stance on Di Giacomo anticipates his assessment of “letteratura dialettale riflessa” as a non-antagonistic component of the literary canon, discussed earlier in Chapter I.

The philosopher identifies "dialect" with spoken language, thus mirroring both the sociolinguistic reality of a strictly diglossic context and the ideological values commonly bestowed on dialect. To Croce, dialect is a genuine and authentic expression of the soul, in which 'thing' and 'word', or rather image and sound, adhere to each other as the two sides of a coin: “Molta parte dell’anima nostra è dialetto, come tant’altra è fatta di greco, latino, tedesco; francese, o di antico linguaggio italiano. Il dialetto non è una veste, perché la lingua non è veste: suono e immagine si compenetrano perfettamente”. (98). It is easy to recognize Croce’s distinctive linguistic anti-conventionalism: as discussed in the Introduction, similar considerations were behind his critical view of Manzoni’s “uso comune,” which he saw as a straight legacy of the linguistic theories of the Enlightenment. To this artificial and grammatical notion of spoken language, Croce opposes his own idea of a spontaneous “parlare,” which in turn substantiates his evaluative take on “authentic” art: “Il parlare come si parla quando si pensa alle cose e non alle parole, non è forse quello in cui si trovano le parole giuste?” (157). The same anti-conventionalism that led Croce to refuse the traditional terms of the “questione della lingua” can help explain his rejection of the "questione del dialetto" in Di Giacomo.

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78 See Chapter I, section “The Bilingual Text as a Polysystem”.

79 Cf. this passage, : “Dominava nella mente del Manzoni un concetto del linguaggio, che apparteneva piuttosto al secolo decimottavo che al decimonono: del linguaggio come di un complesso di segni sui quali si possa convenire, e che importa scegliere tra i più semplici, costanti e univoci” (Letteratura della nuova Italia I 152), discussed earlier in the Introduction, section I.
In light of its etymological meaning as διαλεκτόο, that is to say “spoken language,” dialect is for Croce a primal expression of creativity, closer to the primitive expression of the poetical soul theorized by Vico in his Scienza Nuova than to the rowdy voices of the Neapolitan populace. According to this nominalistic view, dialect is naturally poetic, since it is governed by an instinctual correspondence of “notion” and “word.” Grammar superimposes its categories on the instinctive truth of dialect only later: “Sopra viene il grammatico pei suoi fini, e in modo del tutto arbitrario e convenzionale, stacca le categorie di queste e quelle lingue, e di lingue e dialetti” (98). In conclusion, the poetry of Di Giacomo is artistically valuable because of its instinctive correspondence between thought and things, between his “voci” and their poetic referents: the fact that this instinctive correspondence is felt more clearly when writing in dialect is a mere corollary.

Croce's position clearly set the terms for any further discussion of Di Giacomo’s “dialectal identity” and vernacularism, orienting the critical debate for many decades to come. With his essentialistic view of poetic language, Croce promptly dismissed the three capital arguments of those who reduce Di Giacomo’s poetry to its linguistic code, the Neapolitan dialect. Firstly, he refuses to confine poetry in dialect to a specific set of topics, themes or motives. Secondly, he refuses to group authors or schools simply on the basis of their linguistic choice, or to explain their stylistic preferences merely as a consequence of their use of a given vernacular. Finally, he rejects the identification of poetry in dialect with a more ‘realist’ inclination, according to which dialectal poetry should abstain from the lofty reality of the soul and stick to social denunciation instead (99). With these conceptual moves, Croce eliminated a few prejudices that are especially detrimental to the evaluation of Di Giacomo’s linguistic and expressive choices; he did, however, give in to a nominalistic identification of “words” and “things” as the criterion for assessing artistic worth.

In his critical profile, Croce also mentions the allegedly ‘artificial’ nature of Di Giacomo’s language, defending his linguistic “hybridism” against the polemic views made by many proponents of realistic poetry. Croce traces a prima facie startling comparison between Di Giacomo’s artificial reworking of dialect and the hybridism of those authors, who, like Teofilo Folengo, blended together dialect and standard to better serve expressive purposes:

It should be noted that Croce’s appropriation of the word “naturale” is extremely far from a theory of natural language, being rather attuned to the author’s idealist sensitivity. Consistently with his recurrent reversal of abstraction and concreteness, Croce uses “natural” as a synonymous of everything that is spontaneous and heartfelt: his idea of a “natural expression” is therefore an evaluative statement, akin to what he elsewhere defines as an “authentic” artistic expression. Consistently with this evaluative tone, Croce states that the linguistic hybridism of Di Giacomo should therefore be seen as the result of an artist’s inspired choice, and should only be assessed on the basis of its poetical effectiveness: artistic value, and not a sociological preoccupation with the author’s documentary accuracy, should be the only concern of a reviewer:

> Nelle canzoni amorose di Salvatore Di Giacomo, parla lui, l’autore, con la sua cultura e le sue squisitezze di innamorato, o parla un giovinotto napoletano di plebe, un operaio, un cocchiere, un camorrista? Rispondono esse alla levatura morale di costoro? Non so, e non m’importa saperlo: sono voci umane, comunque si siano formate nell’animo dell’artista. Se mescolano al cosiddetto dialetto la cosiddetta lingua, se a scatti selvaggi raffinatezze di sentimento, il solo problema è di vedere dove quel miscuglio è fusione e dove rimane artificioso.” (100)

In this passage, Croce is clearly alluding to a polemic debate that had divided the Neapolitan literary society of the 1880s and 1890s, when the abstract and lofty nature of Di Giacomo’s verses was often contrasted with the realistic manner championed by the aforementioned
Ferdinando Russo (1866-1927). Being active both as a playwright and as a poet, Russo popularized the Neapolitan underworld in novels, essays and plays; at the same time, he voiced the lowest instincts of the populace in the cheap theatrical manner of the “macchietta.” In prefacing the complete edition of Russo’s poems (Tutte le poesie), the realist novelist Carlo Bernari sketches a comparison between the rivalling aesthetics of Di Giacomo and Russo, linking their different styles to a traditional dualism of Neapolitan culture: “quel dualismo che, fin dalle origini, oppose quasi naturalmente due linee poetiche; quella che risaliva al Basile, e quella che, dal binomio Cortese-Sgruttendio, riceveva i maggiori impulsi dal mondo popolare” (Bernari 10). Pasolini makes a similar remark in his Preface to the anthology Poesia dialettale del novecento, where he contrasts the opposite manners of Russo and Di Giacomo: while the former can directly compared to the works of Porta and Belli, the latter is credited with full originality of poetic invention (“Di Giacomo cominciava a operare in una piccola nazione, con dei canoni poetici senza equivalenti nella lingua: degli stessi Belli e Porta si potrà parlare a proposito di Russo, non di Di Giacomo,” Poesia dialettale del Novecento XXIII). Pasolini also notes how Di Giacomo lacks an objective perception of reality: even his most realistic poems, such as the dialogic sonnets of ‘A san Francisco, are dominated by an expressive tension (“le notazioni realistiche sono allucinanti, sfumano, sfuggendo ogni possibile intenzione dell’autore, in una specie di involontaria surrealtà” XXIII); Pasolini thus contrast Russo’s documentary realism with Di Giacomo’s fantastic realism, which is qualifies as a “realismo musicale,” “realismo inebriato di fantasia,” or again “realismo di coloure” (XXIV); and later on in his text he opposes the “epic” ad “choral” quality of Russo’s realism to the “medical” inspiration of Di Giacomo’s superficial verism (LXXXIX).

De Blasi offers a similar reading in “I poeti dialettali”, where he states that:

80 Like Di Giacomo, Russo alternated a vast poetical and fictional production to a fervent activity as a reporter: the latter culminated in his 1907 work La camorra, a depiction of habits and rituals of the Neapolitan underworld and perhaps his most successful non-fictional work. Organized crime is prominently featured in novels such as Memorie di un ladro and poetic collections such as Gente e mala vita. Alongside other successful authors (Mastriani above all) and prominent criminologists such as Abele de Blasio, Ferdinando Russo contributed to make the rising “camorra” a popular object of curiosity.
I due grandi poeti muovono in effetti da atteggiamenti che comportano diverse soluzioni di stile e di lingua: Di Giacomo, si è visto, assume in sé la realtà, cercando corrispondenze tra il mondo interiore e quello esterno con una elaborazione lirica fortemente individuale, che, anche nei suoi versi realisti, lo porta a concentrarsi sulla vita delle cose, sulle strade, più che sulle persone; Russo, invece, nella realtà si immerge, spinto dalla curiosità di conoscere e descrivere strati e aspetti della società mai prima entrati nel raggio di osservazione di un autore napoletano. (“I poeti dialettali” 868)

De Blasi credits each author with different merits: if Di Giacomo distilled the poetic force of post-Romanticism into a new, refined version of dialect, Russo should be seen as the poetical equivalent of the French school of realism: “Ciò vuol dire che, se Di Giacomo è il primo grande poeta che sceglie di promuovere il dialetto al rango di lingua letteraria, Ferdinando Russo è un altro grande poeta che dà vita a un verismo di ambientazione urbana, entrando in sintonia con la plebe dell’unica città italiana che sul finire dell’ottocento avesse – in comune con la Parigi dei naturalisti – carattere di metropoli, con tutto quanto ciò comporta in termini di problematiche sociali” (869). The two authors were often contrasted for stylistic reasons: Russo’s allegedly “authentic” dialect was compared to Di Giacomo’s rhetoric, artificial and “Italianized” dialect. Frank Albi, for instance, compares their style in his 1962 article:

Because of the selective and rejuvenating quality of Di Giacomo’s dialect, his poetry, after having mastered a few forms, can be read with little effort, while Ferdinando Russo’s, for instance, presents many difficulties. The latter’s lexicon is ultrarich, for he loved to mingle with the crowds of the bassi. Russo rejoiced in gathering dialectal differences and molded them into his poetry in order to acquire a clear mark of originality. Unlike Ferdinando Russo, Di Giacomo did not mingle with the crowds of the bassi, nor did he fear being labeled as non-original, because he had no models to imitate. (394-395)

According to the reviewer, Russo’s poems are difficult to read, as they offer a specimen of the lowest social strata of Naples: the vernacular chosen by Di Giacomo, on the contrary, is a literary version of dialect, syntactically responding to the poetical structures and clauses of Italian sonnet
tradition and expurged of its most remarkable colloquialisms. Quite interestingly, this debate echoes a recurrent attitude towards dialect: the inner sociolinguistic variation of urban dialects—which, as it was seen earlier in the Introduction, is a common feature of macrodiglossic settings—is often mistaken for a lack of authenticity.\textsuperscript{81} It should also be noted that Russo played an active role in the polemic, criticising his opponent for the alleged lack of authenticity of his dialect:

\begin{quote}
Certe espressioni, certe locuzioni, certi sfoghi, certe immagini, certi scritti, è bene lasciarli vergini, ed anche brutali. Essi danno al dialetto – per chi lo scrive e lo scrisse e lo scriverà sempre senza alterarne la forma, il senso ed il concetto—quella importanza del vero e proprio \textit{documento umano} che oltre passa in efficacia rappresentativa ogni lingua ed ogni stile. (cit. in \textit{Il melancolico} 158).\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

However, these accusations are also the product of a literary aesthetics, consistently with Russo’s partial appropriation of the French realist tradition, explicitly referenced the use of the expression “documento umano.” Contrarily to his claim, Russo himself was responsible for a certain degree of abstraction, as his work typified human specimens of “camorra” in memorable poetic sketches. In other words, Russo’s claim of \textit{documentary} accuracy is in itself a narrative device, consistent with the conventions of self-effacing realism.

The main topic of Di Giacomo’s poetry is the celebration of love and beauty, often depicted through the use of subtly reworked popular metaphors. The same imagery is also recurrent in his production as a songwriter, which earned him fame at a national level, but which severely harmed his critical reputation.\textsuperscript{83} Consistently with this thematic orientation, Di Giacomo

\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, the argument used by Albi echoes the objections moved by Verga to Capuana half a century earlier in his aforementioned 1911 letter, as well as Capuana’s own criticism of the rarefied dialect used by Nicola Meli in his own Eighteenth century poetry. See above, “Introduction”, and below, section 3.2.

\textsuperscript{82} Ferdinando Russo here refers to the poetics of the ‘documenti umani,’ a pillar of the realist aesthetics which was first brought to the Italian literary scene by Federico De Roberto and Giovanni Verga. More detailed explanations are provided later in this chapter, at the sections 1.4 and 1.5.

\textsuperscript{83} For instance, Di Giacomo’s nomination to the Senate of the Italian Kingdom was crushed with the dismissive comment that “Piedrigrotta non può entrare in Senato.”
rarely adopted the dialect spoken by the lower classes for his poetry, opting instead for a refined literary Neapolitan. De Blasi, in particular, credits him with the invention of a literary version of Neapolitan, affirming that “il distacco dal mimetismo comporta in Di Giacomo l’adozione di uno stile poetico,” and claiming the continuity of such a linguistic operation with the utopian views expressed by Francesco Galiani in his 1783 work *Del Dialetto napoetano* [1738] (“I poeti dialettali” 851). De Blasi therefore challenges two persistent prejudices that have shaped the reception of Di Giacomo for over a century: his “Italianization” of dialect, and, more importantly, the dichotomy between a ‘false’ and an ‘authentic’ dialect (851), often taken as a legitimate criterion in evaluating the work of Di Giacomo and other poets.

As De Blasi notes, the use of Italianisms and other realistic features is extremely rare in the poetry of Di Giacomo: “A esclusione di pochi casi particolari, Di Giacomo evita sia la ricerca degli italianismi (che sarebbero ingrediente realistico), sia il ricorso compiaciuto al lessico basso e comico” (851). Similarly, in his *Studi su Salvatore Di Giacomo* Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo provides a detailed analysis of his poetical language, insisting on his taste for the chromatic adjectives, and on his limited display of modernizing forms such as Italianism and foreign words (43-44). Di Giacomo did, however, experiment with various manners and registers in order to appease his own thirst for realism, to some extent anticipating features of his theatrical dialect. This involvement with realism is especially evident in the sonnets included in ‘*O Funneco Verde*’ (1886) a collection inspired by the the Neapolitan *Risanamento*. In this work, a faithful attempt at linguistic realism is instrumental to the sheer realism of its descriptions and the vehemence of the author’s social denunciation. This poetics is perfectly exemplified by the following sonnet:

**NNAMURATE NFUCATE**

*Stanno assettate azzicco zzzo ncopp’ a nu divano ‘e telapella, tutto spellacchiato. Fa nu mmalora ‘e caudo! De rimpetto ‘o miérolo d’o scarparo canta:* Don Nicò! Don Nicò!

- Tengo n’attaccamento ‘e nervatura!
- Tiene? – Nun saccio che te vurria fa’!...
- Overo? Me faie mettere paura….
- Meh! Nun fa’ o vummecuso, cionca ccà!

Tu… mme vuo’ bene? E giurammello! Giura!...
The sonnet portrays a quarrel between two jealous lovers, immediately followed by their reconciliation. The poem presents the lovers’ voice without any apparent mediation or contextualization: the readers are to infer the situation based on the direct discourse, whose fast pace and frequent interjections mimic a theatrical exchange. From a linguistic point of view, the sonnet is entirely constituted by dialogues, which Mengaldo considers a prominent trait of popular language; other popular and colloquial forms can be found in the lexicon (for instance ‘cancaro’, ‘vummecuso’ or the imperative ‘cionca cca,’ and the adverb “azzicco zzicco”). These colloquial forms are placed next to words that are more consistent with Di Giacomo’s ordinary register (including the diminutive ‘vasillo’ and the Italianism ‘traditore’). Theatricality plays a pivotal role in this sonnet, which is not only marked by a pervasive use of dialogue, but is also introduced by sort of “stage direction.” In fact, the introductory sentence does not provide a comment or a contextualization to the ensuing dialogue, but rather a scenario, describing the

84 [Title: Heated lovers]. They are sitting, very closely, on a worn out leather sofa. The weather is dammingly hot. From the opposite door, the cobbler's merle sings “Don Nicò! Don Nicò!” – I’m having a mental breakdown! “Are you having one?” “I don’t know what I would do to you!”/ “Really? You’re scaring me..”?/“Don’t be picky, come here... // Do you love me? Please swear it! Swear!”/ “I swear upon my father’s soul! May I die in a dark house!/ Now I’ll strangle you!”/ “Really? Kid me not!.../ Be honest, don’t you want a little kiss?”/ “No!” “Come on!” “No!” “Listen to me, it will cure you!/ So, don’t you want a kiss?” “No.” “Give me a kiss!”/ “Forget it!” “What were you saying? Why would I ever leave you?”/ “You traitor... and what if I didn’t kiss you?”/ “What the hell are you saying? I almost died!” (Opere I Poesie e novelle 114)
setting where the two ‘innamorati infuocati’ quarrel and the surrounding soundscape, with the picturesque detail of a caged bird repeating a popular song. Indeed, this setting replicates almost verbatim the opening scene of ‘Mala vita and other plays, thus proving the pervasive nature of theatrical imagination in the work of Di Giacomo.

The same aspect is also pivotal in *A “San Francisco”* (1895), perhaps Di Giacomo’s most ambitious work from a formal standpoint. Once again, the quest for realism is expressed through an intense use of dialogism; furthermore, the series of sonnets is unified by a common narrative structure. Set in the local penitentiary, *A “San Francisco”* poetically recounts the story of blood and jealousy among a group of convicted affiliated with the then-rising organized crime—a phenomenon that Di Giacomo documented in his guise of “verista sentimentale,” and which provided the raw material both to important paintings of the time and to important texts in the rising field of criminal anthropology.  

In short, poetic collections such as ‘*O funneco verde* and *A San Francisco* stand out in Di Giacomo’s poetic production because of their recurrent use of dialogue: in them, the author mimics the speech of the lower classes, evocating human tragedies through the use of a fast-paced, highly condensed and dramatic dialogue. The quest for realism here meets the quest for a *performable* and *speakable* language, which will later culminate in his dramatic production. At the same time, these works are important because they document Di Giacomo’s lucid awareness

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85 Criminal anthropologist Abele de Blasio (1858-1945) devoted numerous writings to the anthropological understanding of such practice, which he classified according to its symbology and motivation in his *Usi e costume dei camorristi* (Greco 30n; De Blasio 131-40). In addition to showing important consonances with Di Giacomo’s literary representations of the underworld, his work reflects the adoption of Lombroso’s theory on the hereditary and physiological determination of crime and prostitution (its female form).

86 Nicola Merola, in his essay “La poesia di Di Giacomo e il verismo” (Candela-Pupino 353-370), highlights the theatricality of these experiments in realistic poetry: “Circa il mimetismo, e tenendo ancora da parte il lirico puro che sopratutto lui è stato, va da sé che i risultati più significativi Di Giacomo li consegua in certi scambi di battute che già sono teatrali e virtuosisticamente capaci, l’abbiamo appena visto, di suscitare con la loro pura animazione verbale persone e cose (un teatro fuori dal teatro, al contrario di Pirandello e allo stesso modo di situazioni tipiche della narrativa verista).” (358) A similar view is expressed by Mengaldo: “Ottimo scrittore di teatro, Di Giacomo dunque sceneggia le sue poesie ‘realistiche’ con una ricchezza e perspicuità che certo s’inseriscono bene nella tradizione poetica napoletana (…), ma altrettanto certamente si stacca da quella contemporanea in lingua, con la quale in fondo egli si misurava” (28). In describing the theatrical mechanism of such poems, the linguist also notes how “le battute di discorso diretto sono incastrate dentro una narrazione, ad animarla, teatralizzarla.” (23).
of the inner stratification of Neapolitan dialect, which he at times mimicked for expressive purpose.

3. “Human Documents:” the Alphabet Bias

The continuum between Italian and Neapolitan forms—be it within a dialectal koine or within subvarieties of “popular” and “regional” Italian—is not the only available linguistic option within Di Giacomo’s production. Another important factor is represented by the variation between written and oral speech, which—as it was seen already in the introduction of this thesis—is particularly relevant to the sociolinguistic setting of post-Unification Italy, and is in direct connection with the functioning of theatrical speech. Di Giacomo toys with the variation of oral/written speech in several moments of his production, fully transposing the complexity of the Neapolitan socio-linguistic setting in his narrative and theatre. These experiments, preparing the ground for the recurrent “scritto-parlato” of the theatrical medium, will be analyzed in detail in the present section.

Di Giacomo’s taste for linguistic mimicry proceeds in both directions, from oral to written language and vice versa. He brings the oral quality of dialect into the rhythm of his written page, to some extent “disciplining” the vocal flow of the Neapolitan alleys; at the same time, he struggles to infuse his written language with the oral quality of “speakability.” In addition to reproducing important features of oral speech in the direct discourse of his narrative prose and in his most realistic works of poetry, he also pays attention to the use of different registers in the written expression. Not only does he lean toward a more “material” and realistic use of direct discourse, but he reproduces, albeit in a stylized way, the writing of popular classes. In this respect, a remarkable feature of his style is his frequent imitation of the populace’s tentative writing, often echoing what Paolo d’Achille has famously defined as “italiano di semicolti” [Italian of semi-literates] in a seminal study in 1990.

The ‘Italian of semi-literates’ is a prominent feature of the years following national Unification, where it marks the slow acquisition of a common expression for the popular classes—although D’Achille stresses that examples of it can be found in Italian culture since its origins, and particularly among the trial records of the post-Tridentine era (L’italiano dei semicolti 51).
Furthermore, the writing of semi-literates has several affinities with other varieties analyzed and distinguished by Italian scholarship, and notably with what Tullio De Mauro has labeled as ‘Italiano popolare’ [popular Italian] and with what Zingarelli, and later Bruni and Beccaria have defined “lingua selvaggia” (46).\(^87\)

The literary use of “Italiano di semicolti” serves ideological and cultural purposes. As Giuseppe Petrolini has noted, its function and status is close to that of the comical use of dialect in the 16\(^{th}\) century theatre, as opposed to a rapidly establishing set of norms (64). Di Giacomo clearly exploits these social overtones, using traditional examples of “umorismo grammaticale,” that is using the difference between written and oral speech in order to produce a comical effect.

Both in the stories and in the plays, the most socially disadvantaged characters ostensibly struggle with literacy. Di Giacomo acknowledges the rift in the characters’ access to written speech, even though he never attained the same degree of realism of Capuana’s *Gli Americani di Rabbato*.\(^88\) These mimetic samples serve various purposes, such as emphasizing the social difference between characters or depicting the miserable conditions experienced by the marginalized classes of Naples; at the same time, they provide a symbolical representation of the “alphabetic bias,” the ideological rift between those who have access to the Italian language and those who are confined to the “underworld” of dialect.\(^89\) The social divide created by literacy often overlaps with gender and generation variables—partially mirroring the statistic reality of the time.\(^90\)

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\(^87\) While these three notions share some important elements, they are not interchangeable. The language of semi-literates tend to achieve a higher level of National standardization than popular Italian, which is explained by the modeling value of literacy itself: since there is no accepted standard for writing in dialect, writers strive to attain some mastery of Italian, as d’Achille notes. At the same time, the “italiano dei semicolti” presents a lesser extent of grammatical standardization as the *lingua selvaggia*, but it has specific traits in spelling, morphology and syntax. Simplification and economy are recurrent tendencies at the syntactical level, while the interference of dialect and/or regionalisms is mostly perceived in the lexical and phonetic/graphic structures (66).

\(^88\) See in particular Capuana’s representation of the language of semi-literates, analyzed in Chapter III, Section4.

\(^89\) I liberally borrow this concept from Roy Harris’ *The Origin of Writing*.

\(^90\) Statistic evidence show that the correlation between illiteracy and prostitution (or loose status) is strikingly high in Southern Italy. By 1875, 62% of women were illiterate in Naples: among those recored as prostitutes, the percentage rose to a staggering 95% (Gibson 112).
A clear example of this attitude can be seen in the play *Assunta Spina*, where Donna Emilia, a secondary character, cites a letter she has received from her daughter Tina, who has ran away from home with a fellow actor: “L’atriere mm’ha scritto ‘a Livorno: ‘Mia cara mamma, perdonatemi!... io sono più infelice di quello che credete!’... [Piangendo] E allora peccché te ne si’ fuiuta!... E allora peccché mm’è lassata! E peccché nun te ne tuorne!’...” (Act II, Scene 3; 307-308). This line can be read as an example of citational code-switching (Auer 24), as Donna Emilia briefly switches to Italian in order to reproduce the words used by Tina, who has a solid grasp of written Italian having attended school. The shift from Neapolitan dialect to Italian further emphasizes the cultural divide between the two women, which is also perceived as a divide in their access to literacy. In particular, Emilia is deeply resentful against her daughter and sees her dishonourable conduct as a direct consequence of her education: “Eggià!.... Ll’ha vuluto da’ n’educazione? Ll’ha mparata a leggere e scriverë? Ll’ha vuluta fa’ sciantsosa? .. E tecchete chesto!” (II, 3.*Il teatro e le cronache* 307).

The same attitude is voiced by the character of Concetta in the one act-play “Quand l’amour meurt” (1910), which represents a different, higher social setting than the one already depicted in other plays by Di Giacomo. In *Quand l’amour meurt* Di Giacomo abandons his typical lower-class settings in order to represent presents a broken family coming from the ranks of a rapidly declining low-middle class. The main characters of this play all have some formal education, and none are employed in practical trades. Rafele, the father, is a scrivener on the verge of alcoholism, whereas his daughter Silvia, a piano teacher, is a graduate of the Scuola Normale Femminile – the school that Matilde Serao famously attended and immortalized in a novel of the same title. However, culture does not save characters from their tragic destiny: Silvia is seduced and abandoned, much to the distress of her alcoholic father. To their tragic and self-deceiving ‘education’, Concetta, the mother, opposes her sound and firm practicality. While Silvia is too ashamed even to ask for the money due to her in exchange for her teaching services, Concetta brusquely scolds her: “E peccché faie a grandiose? Pecché liegge ‘e rumanze e ‘e giurnale!... Eggià!... Pecché si istruita!... Ah! E quanto era meglio si te mparave mpagliasegge!...” (*Il teatro e le cronache* 342). Tina, Silvia and the other female characters that have a solid grasp of literacy thus fall into the category of the ‘loose woman’, women of no status who can attain neither respectability nor wealth through their access to culture.
As D’Achille has noticed, semi-literacy is often a token of marginality, and this is especially true of female semi-literate: “non di rado l’accostamento del semicolto alla scrittura ha, o piuttosto ha avuto, un carattere in qualche modo ‘eversivo,’ forse particolarmente evidente nelle scritture ‘femminili’, dato che le donne di larghe fasce sociali furono tradizionalmente escluse, se non dalla lettura, di certo dall’alfabetismo attivo, sia in epoca medievale sia, soprattutto, in quella post-tridentina.” (L’italiano dei semicolti 45). The ideological value of such representation is particularly evident in those texts that represent the writing of women who are semi-literate and who are either on the verge of prostitution or full-blown prostitutes.

Assunta Spina, the eponymous character of the play, is a woman of ambiguous condition, literate enough to write and read, but not enough skilled to avoid being deceived by a courtroom clerk. Her lack of linguistic competence is crucial to the whole development of the plot. In fact, her lack of linguistic competence acts as a metaphor for the lack of empowerment of the character. Being pathologically incapable of dominating her passions, Assunta is also a victim of circumstances and events: she has no control over the language of the legal jurisdiction, nor can she assess the validity of the claims she is presented with, or the ‘authoritativeness’ of their source. This allows the vain and superficial Federigo Funelli to take advantage of her ignorance – as he promises to keep her close to her violent lover Michele only if she accepts to become his own mistress. The lines in which the adultery is settled and agreed are dramatic and evocative at once: silence, rather than wordiness, is where the ‘tragedy’ takes place:

ASSUNTA (pare indecisa, tormentata. Si volta a destra e a sinistra come per accertarsi che non l’hanno udita. Sgueglia e Torelli seguitano a scrivere, ma la sorvegliano e ammiccano).
FEDERIGO: Dunque?
ASSUNTA (decisa): Iammo. (Il teatro e le cronache 288)

The smirking faces and the saucy looks of the scriveners underline the helplessness of the woman face to male power, which masks its desire with the authority of law.

A similarly troubled relation between women and writing can be detected in “Sant’Anna”, another short story focusing on an adulterine affair. In “Sant’Anna,” Di Giacomo depicts the uneven relationship between two secret lovers, the cold-hearted, successful, and
established merchant Carlo, and his needy lover Bianchina. The story unfolds in a succession of heated and passionate love letters, whose frantic rhythm recalls the personal correspondence Di Giacomo entertained with Elisa Avigliano from their first meeting in 1905 to their marriage (which took place on February 20, 1916).

Bianchina, the daughter of an estate agent, is far from being a miserable “loose woman;” however, the narrator emphasizes her uncertain writing in the opening lines of the story: “Ella avea scritto con la sua calligrafia timida, con l’ingenuità delle sgrammaticature e delle sconordanze, sopra un piccolo foglietto roseo, con l’inchiostro annacquato del quale si serviva suo padre per firmare le ricevute agli’inquilini” (769). The description of her irregular writing is the first detail to be revealed about the character, even before her name. Her small, insecure and nervous handwriting reflects her psychology, marked by an irredeemable conflict between religious devotion and a very worldly passion. Her lack of control over writing seems to imply a similar lack of control over her passions and thoughts. This impression is reinforced by the conclusion of the story, clearly alluding to an episode of hysteria and ritual possession (“‘Oh! Sant’Anna mia!...’ susurrò Bianchina. E cadde lunga distesa sul pavimento, co’ denti che le battevano, con la febbre che la bruciava sino all’ossa.” 778). Later in the story, the physical appearance of her handwriting is described in greater detail: “Più in là erano confidenze intime, tra le quali, lo si vedeva dalla forma impacciata e sconnessa, correva un rossore di fanciulla pudica a cui, nello scrivere, la penna avea dovuto tremare di mano. Una parola era addirittura cancellata da una lagrima, un’altra non finiva, spezzata forse da un singhiozzo improvviso che la dimenticava lì, in fondo alla letterina.” (789)

If the possessive personality of Bianchina is mirrored in her uncontrolled writing, the cold and self-assured personality of Carlo is also mirrored by his elegant, self-complacent, and flourished handwriting: “Poi sopra un foglio azzurro di carta commerciale scrisse una lettera cifrata, dalla calligrafia bizzarramente convenzionale, piena di ghirigori. La firma pigliava da sola un terzo del foglio. Chiuse la lettera in una busta gialla bislunga, cercò un francobollo nel tiretto e lo incollò all’angolo della busta” (Le poesie e le novelle 772)

Although the narrator refers to the many “grammatical mistakes and missing agreements” of Bianchina’s prose, her text does not show any: “Io prego ogni sera prima di mettermi a letto, prego tutti i santi del Paradiso perché si muovano una buona volta a pietà di me sventurata. Non
so a chi confidarmi. Se mia madre, buon’anima, fosse viva, me le sarei gettata al collo, le avrei detto tutto. Ah! Carlo mio! Vi sono certi momenti in cui maledico quell giorno che ti conobbi!... Carlo mio, tu solo mi sei rimasto!” (769)

As these lines show, the spelling of this piece is still conventional and correct; while the overall tone is familiar and colloquial, it certainly does not belong to the “italiano di semicolti”. The “agrammatical” writing of Bianchina is apparently subject to the careful filter of the author’s “translation,” distilling the character’s presumed “lingua selvaggia” into a literary, purified and clearly artificial rendition of it. The passionate temper of Bianchina is more conveyed by the emphatic style of her exclamations, by the peremptory tone of her allocutions and by the fragmentary pace of her frequently interrupted syntax, than by mistakes and flaws actually displayed in her writing. In other words, by qualifying Bianchina’s writing as “laced with mistakes and missing agreements,” the narrator conveys a moral judgment rather than an actual linguistic assessment: the alleged “wildness” and uncorrectedness of grammar acts as a metaphor for the psychology of a deeply troubled female character.

While men have full mastery of writing, the female subject is here confined to the urgency of voice. Orality is to Bianchina the only secure ground on which she can hope to win her confrontation: “Vediamoci [...] , io ti voglio vedere. A voce debo dirirti tante cose che non posso affidare alla carta” (769), she begs her lover. Later on, when the two meet in person, she refers again to the divide between written and oral speech: “Che volevo dirti? – esclamò. – Non lo sai? Non te l’ho scritto? Non hai capito? Ora te lo ripeto a voce. Non ne posso più. Ti pare che a questo modo si possa andare innanzi? Per chi m’hai pigliata? Di’, per chi m’hai pigliata?” (773, my emphasis). Alongside the emotional disappointment and the unexpressed fears of turning into a ‘loose’ woman, her angry words also seem to carry the inner belief that “written words” are false and easily distorted, while the urgency of voice cannot be manipulated or ignored.

Both in Assunta Spina and in “Sant’Anna,” emotional and unstable writing of women thus becomes a symptom of their impulsive and contradictory personalities, which Di Giacomo often understood as a mixture of emotional and pathological energies. Di Giacomo’s early medical background is certainly behind this description, which aequates the mental energy of these women to a phenomenon of hysterical possession.
The unrestrained and agrammatical quality of female writing is not necessarily related to income or social level: for instance, Bianchina is relatively wealthy; so is Assuna Spina, who owns a laundry shop and has several employees at her dependencies. However, their lack of control over their verbal production is symptomatic of their social marginality. More importantly, in both stories, the lack of control over writing resonates with the characters’ inability to master their passions: their love for unavailable men takes the form of an incontrollable drive, a supernatural bind that recalls hysteria and religious possession at once.

While the female writing is filtered by the narrator’s consciousness in “Sant’Anna” and in Assunta Spina, the same cannot be said of the long letter reproduced in “Documenti Umani” [Human Documents], a short story originally published in Rosa Bellavita. “Documenti Umani” offers the most realistic depiction of “scrittura dei semicolti” in the entire production of Di Giacomo: for this reason it provides a fertile ground of comparison with the same efforts in Capuana’s fiction. “Documenti Umani” tells the story of 18-year old orphan Antonietta Canserano, who commits suicide after having been raped by a quartermaster: as she loses her reputation, Antonietta has to dismiss her dreams of a future marriage with a young dockworker; she consequently surrenders to humiliation and despair. The only document Antonietta leaves behind is a pathetic letter addressed to her rapist, the only person in the position to restore her “honour” according to the societal norms of the time. In summarizing the chain of events leading to Antonietta’s suicide, the narrator stresses the ordinary nature of this episode, noting that “La storia di questa fanciulla è breve ed è la solita storia” (854): the sad story of all abused women with no status. The narrator adopts an impersonal and objective point of view, consistently with the methods of Verismo which are ostensibly referenced by the title. The document is said to be reproduced without alteration, consistently with the poetics of “human documents” first enunciated by the Goncourt Brothers in their Preface to Les Frères Zemganno and popularized by De Roberto in Italy. The whole narration could be read as a framing for this “document”, already containing the seed of its philosophical truth: the first page of the story could thus be seen as a narrative antecedent: consistently with its title, the focus of the story is to be found in the authentic ‘human document’ of Antonietta’s last words.

Her writing is indeed chaotic, unruly, ‘wild:’ from a textual point of view, it displays a clear absence of syntactical planning, which is a typical feature of oral speech; furthermore, it is laced with grammatical mistakes and linguistic interferences with Neapolitan dialect. This piece
of writing exhibits many of the features listed by D’Achille. Graphic anomalies are “stupita” (meaning ‘stupida’), “ucidere”, “riche” (for ‘righe’): these spellings reproduce a hypercorrection of dialectal phonology. The first person singular pronoun is consistently spelled as “ia,” graphically reproducing the [ɔ] sound typical of spoken Neapolitan. As in most writings of semi-literates, words are not clearly separated: ‘Iddio’ mistakenly spelled as two separate words “i Dio,” while “innascosta” merges two separate words. Syntactical agreements are often missing (as the result of the indistinguished pronunciation of many different word endings in [ɔ]): hence forms such as “mie parenti,” “sono orfane,” and so forth. Redundant forms such as “mi sei levato l’onor mio” and “fatelo una lettera” are also typical of the semiliterate writing, according to D’Achille (“L’italiano dei semicolti” 71); similarly typical are forms such as “mi ho azzardato di scriverti” (wrong preposition, as opposed to ‘a’), and the confusion between the auxiliary forms ‘essere’ and ‘avere’, “in sintonia con i dialetti meridionali”, and especially the use of ‘avere’ with reflexive forms (D’Achille 72): some instances are “mi ho azzardato”, “ti sono scritta”, “così come tu mi sei lasciato”, “mi ho dato a cattive strade” (as opposed to the correct forms which would respectively be “mi sono azzardata”, “ti ho scritto”, “così come mi hai lasciata”, “mi sono data a cattive strade”). (Di Giacomo, Le poesie e le novelle 856). Di Giacomo also reproduces stylistic and macro-textual features of the”italiano di semicoloti,” such as the formulaic opening, for instance “ti fo conosciere [sic] che io sto bene di salute e così spero di sentire di te,” typical of popular letter-writing.

However, Di Giacomo remains faithful to his roots as a “verista sentimentale,” and reinterprets the principles of Naturalism in his own way, subtly manipulating the very poetic to which it so loudly proclaims to belong. The short story “Documenti Umani” is particularly striking for its complex balance of universalism and detail: beyond the individual tragedy of Antonietta Canserano, the author is striving to define and comprehend ‘humanity,’ a larger set of values. Far from being a mere “exercise of style,” the “cited” letter is crucial to the narrative construction precisely because of this ambiguity. This “human document” clearly participates of the realistic quality sought by the author in his writing, thus obeying to the prescriptions of Zolian realism. However, the author offers his own take on the significance of “human”, thus breaking the boundaries of Verist aesthetics into an ethical statement. As Di Giacomo stresses in his conclusion, there is nothing more human and more big-hearted than this poor piece of writing: “Niente di più umano, di più anima, di più cuore di questa lettera d’una quasi
analfabeta” (857). The adjective “human” employed in the title is therefore endowed with a second and ironic meaning, somehow reminiscent of the complex values associated with the notion of “humanity:” a moralizing tone that is deeply conflicting with its apparent aesthetic statement. Di Giacomo is standing up for the humanity displayed by this “naïve writing” against the refined sophistication of the scholars and, more in general, of all those who misuse their literacy skills. At the same time, these lines suggest a possible identification between victimization and lack of linguistic agency. Rape and silence (or, as in this case, the lack of access to the eloquent words of the print-language) are inextricably related.

The difference between written and oral speech is also crucial to the plot of “Senza vederlo” and to its theatrical adaptation “’O mese mariano”, the one-act play set in the foucauldian space of the Real Albergo Dei Poveri. The main character is Carmela, a young unwed mother who is forced to choose between her motherhood and her status: when Vincenzo, a cobbler, agrees to marry her and save her from disgrace, she is forced to give her first born for adoption. Carmela’s marginality is powerfully symbolized by her lack of access to standard language. Easily confused by the impersonal, bureaucratic language of the Real Albergo, she is forced to entrust her son (and herself, to some extent) to the clerics of the Financial Office: her lack of knowledge is a lack of empowerment. Both in the short story and in the play, Carmela is intimidated by the rules of the school: she is even reluctant to buy some candy apples, fearing that food would be not authorized in the building, and in entering the Albergo she is faced with an intricate maze of doors, corridors and staircases: “Sul largo pianerottolo non sapeva più dove andare, le porte erano molte, la scala continuava” (828).

The officers are qualified by their status: writing is a visible mark of their social and professional identity. For instance, the first person Carmela encounters is holding papers: “Spuntò subitamente un giovanotto, con le mani in saccocca e uno scartafaccio sotto l’ascella.” (829). Later on, when Carmela enters the office, she sees again the tools of writing: “Il segretario era un uomo assai maturo, molto per bene, con occhiali d’oro, con un bell’anello al dito indice. Sedeva presso la sua scrivania, firmando certe carte che un impiegato gli metteva innanzi una

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91 The plot of “Senza vederlo” is slightly different: in it, Carmela is a widow who gives away her son due to her inability to provide for him, hoping that he will be able to receive an education and learn a trade in the hospice
dopo l’altra, asciugando le firme sopra un gran foglio di carta rosa.” (829). The secretary barely raises his eyes from his papers to cast an unsympathetic gaze on Carmela and her daughter: “Chi siete? Che volete – fece il vecchio levando gli occhi dalle sue carte ed esaminando la vedova e la bambinella. La vedova non sapeva che dire.” Carmela, however, attempts to reach the formality demanded from her: for instance, she translates the name of her son from her native dialect to the language of official documents. Instead of asking of her beloved “Peppino,” she now has to refer to “Giuseppe Selletta,” as he would probably be listed in the registers of the school. Such a linguistic turn should not go unnoticed, as the first part of the story is punctuated by the stubborn repetition of “Andiamo da Peppino” (“We are going to visit Peppino”), the immutable answer the woman gives to anybody who questions her along the way. It should therefore be noted that, when Peppino becomes Giuseppe Selletta, he is already a step closer to death.

The conflicting relationship between silence and words is crucial, as the plot of “Senza Vederlo” deploys itself as a reaction to a “missed” act of writing. Carmela becomes obsessed with seeing her child after one of her neighbors (tragically anticipating the sad outcome of the story) instills in her the fear that, should her son die of an illness, nobody from the school would ever warn her: “‘Ah! È vero!’ soggiungeva con le lacrime agli occhi. ‘Io non avevo pensato a questo, ma già, avranno medici e medicine, e se accade che lui s’ammali, lontano sia, me l’hanno da far sapere’. ‘Vi dico che non lo fanno sapere,’ sentenziava la Fusco [...] .” (826).

Indeed, a deceitful silence is what awaits Carmela once she reaches the Albergo; the mystifications of writing are both a way of protecting the widow from an unbearable truth and a psychological shield for the officers, who are unwilling to go through the experience of announcing the tragic loss. “‘Glielo dirà il direttore, lunedì,’ mormorò, ‘io no, di certo. Non voglio ricominciare la giornata a questo modo.’ Asciugati gli occhiali se li piantò sul naso, tossì, soffiò nelle mani e riprese la penna,” is indeed the disheartening conclusion of the scene.

The short story focuses on a dense semantic nucleus and on sharp thematic oppositions such as the one between “word and silence.” The same topics are also pivotal in the play. Here, the difference between “written” and “oral” speech is exploited for comical purposes in the first scene of the play, when the scrivener Mazzia is confused and mechanically transcribes the silly jokes and the dietary concerns of his coworkers in an official file alongside the instruction of his superior Don Gaetano:
DON GAETANO: “Mi è venuto pregando con rilevante sollecitudine, e in confidenza mi ha detto…”
MAZZIA: Piano!
[dopo un po’]
“Con rilevante sollecitudine…”
RAFELE [Viene dal fondo, con un cartoccio fra le mani]: Ccà stanno ’e ppizze!
[FERRENTINO, che lascia il registro, e VARRIALE, che smette di scrivere, gli si accostano].
FERRENTINO [a don Gaetano]: Cavaliè, onorateci.
MAZZIA [dopo aver dato un altro sguardo alla sua carta]: “E in confidenza mi ha detto…”
DON GAETANO [a Ferrentino e Varriale]: Vi faccia salute!
[Mazzia scrive]
VARRIALE: [dividendo le ‘pizze’ con Ferrentino] Cavaliè, doie pezzelle aglio e uoglio….
DON GAETANO: Ottima idea.
[Mazzia scrive, dando sempre un’occhiata alla sua carta]
Dunque?
[A Mazzia]
Avite fatto?
[Gli si avvicina]
MAZZIA [Nasconde la sua carta in saccoccia]

The dictation scene is indeed a long-lived topos of comedy, spanning over many centuries, from Da Ponte and Mozart’s Don Giovanni until the overly popular dictation scene in Totò, Peppino e la Malafemmina. In this case, the comical effect is not based on a linguistic satire of the poor speaker trying to ‘imitate’ the language of the educated people (or, as Gramsci would have it, “melodrammatizzare,” Letteratura e vita nazionale 72); however, the exchange is concluded to a
sudden code-switching to Neapolitan dialect (“E ched è?”), remarking the distance between the world of dialectal orality and that of written, standardized Italian.

The connection between illiteracy and lack of empowerment leads to a specular question regarding all those characters who – like Di Giacomo himself - are well versed both in the vernacular of the illiterates and in the written language of bureaucracy. Such characters should act as mediators, interpreters and scriveners for those who are left outside of literacy; on the contrary, their behavior is far from honest, as they invariably mislead those who have no choice but trust them. Characters such as Federico in the play “Assunta Spina,” Potito in “Documenti Umani,” and Suor Cristina in *’O mese mariano* are equally ambiguous: their attitude as mediators between the written and non-written world gives them the power to manipulate the perception of reality.

Di Giacomo often wonders about the ethical uses of the written words: for instance, in “Documenti Umani” he compares the flaws of Antonietta’s writing with the cynical despondency of those who use their better knowledge for unethical purposes: “Ma certo il signor Potito, se l’avesse ricevuta, ne avrebbe riso coi compagni, per gli errori di grammatica. Un furiere è *istruito.*” Indeed, *rape* is a matter of knowledge: women such as Carmela Battimelli in *’O mese mariano* or Antonietta in “Documenti umani” are victims of men who prey on their lack of awareness and malice. So is Potito, who takes advantage of Antonietta’s lack of experience through his conversation.

The link between rape and knowledge (or lack thereof) is also pivotal to “Rosa Bellavita”, the story that gives the title to the 1894 collection. In the story, a young student of medicine, Pasquale Offretelli, rapes a poor woman, who is in distress over her husband’s infidelities:

No… No … singhiozzava la Bellavita. ‘Questo no… Questo mai’.

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92 This is stated very clearly in “Documenti Umani:” “Si mise a chiacchierare con lei, la tentò, e seppe abusare della poverina. Questo succede assai spesso. Una rovina in un attimo. *Dopo,* il furiere, come tutti gli uomini senz’anima e senza rimorsi, abbandonò Antonietta” (855).
Tentò di risollevarsi, fra la foga irrefrenata del piano. Si afferrò con le braccia al collo dello studente, e fu peggio.

“Questo no…” balbettava ancora. Ma così pianamente che le parole si persero in un soffio. Si rifece il silenzio[...] . Daccapo risuonò il tintinnio dell’incudine, ma questa volta senza la voce compagna. Il mistero del momento, nella penombra, fu breve e concitato; il singhiozzo continuava, in un susurro di parole mozze. (Le poesie e le novelle 871)

Rosa’s inability to articulate words is echoed by the surrounding silence: even the sounds from outside are now unaccompanied by human voices, somehow emphasizing the isolation of the victimized woman. Pasquale is euphoric, having just passed his first exam at the faculty of Medicine: his education is an essential component to his character. In fact, the narrator insists on the attributes that qualify him as a “learned” and “educated” person: his clean demeanor, his refined and soft hands and the notebooks he carries distinguish him from an unskilled worker:

Invece era costui Pasqualino Offretelli, lo studente di medicina del quinto piano, un piccolo bruno, molto pulito. Saliva con fra mani un rotoletto di quaderni, fumando la sigaretta, lietissimo. Aveva compiuto il suo primo esame felicemente, e pensava compiaciuto alla nessuna difficoltà de’ quesiti, alla bonarietà di un de’ professori, che gli aveva battuto familiarmente con la mano sulla spalla, tra una dimanda e l’altra, felicitandolo. (868)

Through this partially autobiographical detail—Di Giacomo, as mentioned earlier, had initially begun to study Medicine upon his father’s wishes—the author is perhaps questioning his own double perspective in accessing both sides of Naples, and the ethical risks of his ambivalent “proficiency”.

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93 Instead it was Pasqualino Offretelli, the medical student living at the fifth floor, a short dark tiny boy, very tidy and clean. Up he went, holding a roll of papers in his hands, smoking a cigarette, happy. He had just brilliantly passed his first exam, and he kept thinking of the easiness of the questions and the joviality of one of his professor, who had felicitated him, patting him on a shoulder, between a question and another.
After the act of violence, Offretelli goes back to his life with indifference: eloquently, the “sign” of his return to normality is provided by the concern for his notebooks, which he has lost in the confusion of the rape:

E i quaderni?” Li aveva dimenticati laggiù, sul divanuccio, forse. Lasciarglieli? Mah! Riscendeva lentamente, indeciso. Di fronte all’uscio della Bellavita s’indugiò, tentando con le dita irresolute la corda del campanello.


“Ci ho persi i quaderni,” mormorava per la scala silenziosa. “Già, sempre qualcosa ci si rimette. È destino, è destino! E io ci ho rimesso i quaderni…” (872)

The final line is particularly striking, as it points to the indifference and selfishness of the young student, comparing the loss of his “notebooks” to the violence experienced by Rosa Bellavita. Once again, a writing tool becomes the token of the arbitrary violence of the sign—often an instrument of oppression at the hands of those who hold authority. Whether it is employed for “humanitarian” and uninterested purposes (as in the well-meaning, but ultimately tragic deceit that takes place in “Senza vederlo”) or for self-serving and unethical reasons (as in “Documenti Umani,” “Assunta Spina,” and “Rosa Bellavita”), the power of the alphabet seems to be a double-edged sword: Di Giacomo is well aware of its corrupting side.

Illiterates or semi-literates, on the contrary, belong to an inescapable and fearful condition of minority, like children who will never emancipate. Their lack of empowerment is directly mirrored by their inability to read and by their tragic, often self-harming, ingenuity. In their lack of speech they thus resemble the many melodramatic ill children populating the pages of Di Giacomo (as in “Vulite ‘o Vasillo” or “Notte della Befana”), a powerful image that will persist in the Neapolitan literature up until the tragic death of Pippetto, a climatic scene in Carlo Bernari’s Tre Operai (1934). They are the the “voiceless” ones, who remain speechless in front of the alphabet’s spell like Carmela in the Economato office or like Rosa Bellavita under the violence of her neat and educated rapist.
A step above women like Carmela and Antonietta are more ambiguous and apparently self-determined figures of semi-literate women, who might be proficient enough to write letters, but whose writing is still presented as “wild,” “agrammatical,” “unrestrained.” Their lack of “control” has a prevailingly moral and social nature: women such as Assunta Spina and Bianchina cannot make their own position in society, nor cannot they control their own passionate “nature,” which flows as wild and unrestrained as their words. Were they to be compared to children, such women would thus be closer to the disenchanted little girls of “Bambini”, those who, when caught begging, brusquely ask: “Ebbene? Dobbiamo metterci a far qualche altra cosa? È meglio questo” (798), having lost their innocence long before it was time: “Era una bimba a dieci anni, non più. Pronunziava quelle parole gravemente, senz’arrossire, con l’incoscienza infantile della colpa vera, ma con l’aria maligna delle figlie del popolo, delle bimbe sperdute e libere che già sanno qualche cosa” (789).

Be it as precociously sexualized little girls, or as small children who will never make it past the preverbal and “inanimate” state, the wretched of Naples are there to be abused and raped, and their inability to speak up is denounced by their stuttering or unrestrained expression. The violence of the alphabet has a high price, in Nineteenth-century Naples.

4. Foreignizing and Domesticating Translation

As it was seen in the previous section, Di Giacomo’s production involves an immersion in the linguistic reality of the time, something that is deeply grounded in the author’s half-hearted adherence to the realist cause, highly popular in the Neapolitan editorial market of the 1880s and 1890s and influential at least since De Sanctis’s famous address “Zola e l’Assommoir” (1879); however, other influences are easily perceived in his cultural inclinations, including the Decadent trends popularized in Naples by Vittorio Pica and, for the short duration of his Neapolitan sojourn, by Gabriele d’Annunzio. These cultural trends and literary fashions were being negotiated through the declining but still lively activity of a strong publishing industry and

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94 French and (to a lesser extent) German authors were increasingly circulating in the Neapolitan publishing industry in the 1880s and 1890s, as Marco Santoro has pointed out in a contribution on “Presenze europee nell’editoria napoletana:” “sul versante della letteratura straniera Napoli soffre l’agguerrita concorrenza delle aziende del Centro-
through the intense activity of literary gazettes and magazines. Di Giacomo was no stranger to this ferment: among other venues, he wrote for *Il Novelliere* and *Gazzetta Letteraria* (which was based in Turin and directed by Vittorio Bersezio), often hosting such aesthetic debates. More importantly, he was among the animators of *Il fantastio* (1881-1883), whose editorial board included Rocco De Zerbi and Rocco Pagliara, some of the main local interpreters of French Decadentism. Such aesthetic influences are not central to the object of this investigation; however, Di Giacomo’s take on other major European literatures is interesting also in light of his translational practices, providing a useful ground of comparison with his self-translation between Neapolitan dialect and standard Italian. In the present section I will examine the opposite strategies and attitudes shown by Di Giacomo face to German and French literature, a case that perfectly embodies the contrast between “foreignizing’ and “domesticating” translation.

It has often been noticed that, compared to other cultural voices of his times, Di Giacomo appears to be a rather insular artist, whose interest towards the other European literatures was genuine but limited. Far from being a cosmopolitan, he never travelled outside Italy; even when he left his native Naples to stage his works or to sign his contracts, he did so with extreme reluctance. Giorgio Barberi Squarotti highlights the peripheral and backward nature of his inspiration, comparing him to the more dynamic and modern orientation of his contemporaries:

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Nord, in particolare di quelle milanesi e torinesi, nei confronti delle quali è vistosamente penalizzata da componenti non soltanto economiche ma anche logistiche e organizzative. Ciononostante gli operatori tipografici-editoriali non abdicano al proprio ruolo di promozione culturale e, sia pure nelle difficoltà talvolta insormontabili, tentano di eludere il tentacolare provincialismo o di conquistare posizioni all’interno del mercato non soltanto locale” (141). Santoro backs these statements with statistical evidence, proving the French hegemony over the local publishing market: among the few foreign authors who were massively printed and circulating in those years, Zola has the lion’s share (of the 102 editions of Zola’s works printed in Italy between 1880 and 1900, 20 came out of the Neapolitan press). Similarly, Mascilli Migliorini gives an outlook on the general condition of the printing industry in Naples in his paper “Editoria, pubblicistica, giornalismo.” (*Salvatore Di Giacomo settant’anni dopo* 39-49). In particular, he emphasizes the coincidence, in the local structures, between booksellers and publishers, and the overall distance between the authors and their publishers (as opposed to other organic industries where the myth of an author would be carefully built by his press). In other words, the whole publishing industry of Naples was already struggling to adjust to modernity, even before the competition of other cultural centres in the newly established Regno d’Italia. These remarks are crucial for a correct understanding of the circulation of literary news in the 1880s and 1890s Naples.

Di Giacomo’s dislike of travel is documented in countless letters sent to his fiancée Elisa Avigliano. For instance, in July 31 1906, on his way to Milan for a meeting with Ricordi, he writes: “La mia sensibilità è tale che a Roma, dove sono sceso dal treno per aspettare l’altro un’ora, io non sono neppure uscito sul piazzale della stazione.
È il periodo in cui a Napoli operano prima Imbriani e poi d’Annunzio e Verdinois e i futuristi, in alterna contemporaneità, eppure pare che Di Giacomo neppure se ne curi, intangibile e del tutto distaccato da tutte le sperimentazioni rispetto all’ormai invecchiato romanticismo (*Pipa e Boccale*), sia pure rinfrescato a Napoli e dintorni dalla citazione di Hoffmann, non dimenticando però che le novelle e romanzi fantastici scrive anche Capuana, capace tuttavia di tentare altri modi narrativi, come la magia, la visionarietà, la psicologia del profondo, le confusioni e gli sconvolgimenti mentali, le reincarnazioni. (Barberi Squarotti 17)

While Barberi Squarotti appears to be excessively negative in his judgment, particularly when he denies any originality to the work of Di Giacomo, he is certainly right to suggest that the poet’s interpretation of foreign currents and literary trends was backwards and insular. In fact, his appropriation of German and French literature was always mediated by the strong filter of his own Neapolitan inspiration, as opposed to authors such as Imbriani and Verdinois, who on the contrary read their own urban reality through the expressive filter of other national poetics.

Iermano reconstructs the network of cultural influences shaping the formation of Di Giacomo. He cites the names of Zola, the Goncourt brothers and Balzac, in a heterogeneous blend of Romanticism, Decadentism and realism (*Il melanconico* 44). This eclectic landscape seems to prove a pervasive but superficial influence of French culture, marked by exterior echoes and repetitions—such the perceived similarities between the corrupted young girls depicted in “Bambini” and the character of Gavroche, or the equally superficial similarity between Di Giacomo’s aimless wandering through the darkest alleys of Naples and the *flanères* of Baudelaire:

Nulla volevo vedere di Roma, nulla vedrò di Roma mai più: non andrò al Ministero, non mi fermerò a Roma tornando: la odio, adesso.” (*Lettere a Elisa* 10).
Acuto osservatore dei cambiamenti che attraversavano la Napoli fin de siècle, nonostante le sue distrazioni e i suoi viaggi immaginari, l’artista comprende, anche da lettore de *Les Misérables* ed estimatore di Victor Hugo, così come di Balzac, Dumas, De Goncourt, Zola e l’amato Maupassant, che «le grandi città nelle grandi miserie si rassomigliano»: costante nei suoi articoli o cronache giornalistiche fu il confronto che stabilì tra i *gamins* di Parigi e gli *scugnizzi* dei fondaci e questo rappresentò uno dei motivi che lo portò ad ammirare l’arte di Vincenzo Gemito, cui dedicò una vasta monografia. (78)

However, Di Giacomo’s appropriation of such motives and ideals happens under the sign of “domestication:” in the customary parallel between Paris and Naples, it is clearly the latter that prevails. In fact, Di Giacomo frequently polemicized against Pica’s French-leaning sympathies; for instance, in 1882 he criticizes a draft article proposed by Pica for an upcoming issue of *Il Fantasio* on the grounds of its excessive length and excessive leniency towards French culture:

A me pare che l’articolo pecchi di questo, prima, di lunghezza, come al solito, secondo di troppa ammirazione. Poi non mi va per niente che in un giornale italiano si parli in ogni numero di cose francesi mentendo sugli autori. L’altro numero è pieno di de Goncourt e di un altro del quale non ricordo il nome, ecco, Duranty. Ora daccapo con il de Goncourt e la solita chiusa: speriamo che l’autore voglia darci [meno]. (La seduzione dell’arte 108-108).96

Pica was certainly familiar with the work of Di Giacomo, whom he had briefly introduced to Edmond de Goncourt in quite positive terms in a letter dated November 14, 1889:

96 The letter bears no date, but as Paola Villani suggests, it cannot have been sent before February 10 (1882), when Pica’s mentioned article was published in Il Fantasio despite Di Giacomo’s negative review.

Even more relevant is the circumstance that Di Giacomo translated Edmond de Goncourt’s Soeur Philomèle from French in Italian in 1892—a translation extensively analyzed by Nunzio Ruggiero and Stefania Segatori. In particular, Ruggiero sees Suor Filomena as the channel for Di Giacomo’s absorption and re-fashioning of Goncourtian realism. The translation combine a close attention for the most morbid aspects disease with the use of a visual aesthetic clearly derived from the local school of painting, thus acting as a relatively free space where Di Giacomo could experiment with the descriptive strategies he was later to implement in his own prose (Mon Cher Ami 36)

A more original and less studied aspect is the role played by Di Giacomo in shaping and orienting the reception of his own works in France and in the rest of Europe. The author closely monitored the work of his translators into other languages. He was translated, among other languages, into Spanish, French, German, and Romanian; the latter version was translated and edited by Elena Bacaloglu, a close friend and admirer of the poet. Di Giacomo used to work in close connection with his foreign translators; for instance, he personally supervised the German rendering of his plays, working side by side with Hardt. On June 6, 1909, he writes to Elisa: “Ho lavorato iersera in camera mia: ho aiutato Hardt nella traduzione di A San Francisco. Eccellente compagno, e pieno di cortesie e di delicatezze per me – ma terribile, perché vorrebbe che lavorassi con lui solo.” (152). A few hours later, in the post-scriptum, he adds the following remark: “Ho molto lavorato, e per suo conto, m’ha fatto lavorare Hardt, che in due giorni, con
me accanto, m’ha compiuto una magnifica trad. ne tedesca d’A *San Francisco*” (153). As the correspondence makes clear, Di Giacomo did not read German directly: following a customary practice of the time, the two communicated by using French as an interlanguage—what we might call a “translation of second degree.”

French was the only language that Di Giacomo knew well enough to attempt translating his own work in it. In 1897, *La Revue des Mondes* published the translation of two short stories by Di Giacomo, “L’Aube” and “Nuit de la Befane;” according to the editorial note, the author had prepared the French version himself. The reality appears to be more complex: a previous version of the French texts had already been published in 1895 in a translation by Jean De Casamassimi, a marginal figure in the history of the French-Italian cultural relations. Casamassimi’s version was reprinted without changes in the 1896 collection of his stories *Rosa Bellavita*. A close comparison between the two translations clearly demonstrates that they are genetically related. The chronological order of their publication would suggest that Di Giacomo, instead of preparing a new version from scratch, adapted and adjusted Casamassimi’s French version, sacrificing clarity in the target-language in order to recuperate the local flavor of his native dialect. However, absent manuscripts or other documentary evidence, it is not possible to rule out entirely the opposite possibility; that is, that Casamassimi adapted and corrected a previous draft prepared by the author, and that Di Giacomo remained fond of his own sketch and decided to have it printed instead.

The comparison between the two versions is interesting because it reveals the ideological framework of Di Giacomo’s translation, aimed at *foreignizing* the text in order to maintain the “ethnical” character of the original language. On the contrary, Casamassimi’s translation is target-oriented, as the translator states very clearly in his Preface to the 1896 Calmann-Levy edition:

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Les Français ont une prédilection toute particulière pour la sobriété, la simplicité – ne sont-elles pas d’ailleurs les deux plus gracieuses expressions de l’art ? – c’est pourquoi nous avons cru leur être agréable, en leur traduisant les œuvres de ce jeune maître, dont le génie pourrait bien s’acclimater plus facilement en France que tel autre. S’il n’était ainsi, le rêve de l’auteur serait réalisé et le but du traducteur atteint. (XIII)

Casamassimi’s project is clearly based on an ethnic view of languages: after defining Di Giacomo as a “napoletain napolétanisant,” he clearly associates the use of French language with its stereotypical virtues of clarity and simplicity. However, the translator seeks to adapt the text to the presumed qualities of the target culture, replacing the alleged values of Neapolitan with the genius of French language: in other words, translating from one “ethnicity” to another.

The two versions systematically differ for their treatment of diminutives, a typical feature of Nineteenth-century Italian regionalism which serve a particular function in the context of this text. “Notte della Befana” tells the tragic story of Chiarinella, a six-year old girl who dies of consumption amidst the indifference of her own mother and sister. In such a context, the recurrent use of diminutives clearly resonates with the topic of childhood, providing an overarching theme to the entire story: diminutive forms such as “piccola calza bucherellata”, “lettuccio”, “anellino”, “pupattola”, and “piccina” clearly resonate with the “infantile minutezza” of the main character, paving the way to the tear-jerking conclusion of the story. Casamassimi systematically removes the diminutives, recuperating the *semanteme* of “pettiness” through the use of the adjective “petit” or other nouns (“enfant”). Di Giacomo, on the contrary, recurs to equivalent morphological structures, as in the following example:

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En hiver, quand le soleil était doux, la pauvrette s’endormait dans un flot de lumière qui réchauffait ses petites mains pâles, sur la couverture. (Di Giacomo 315).
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En hiver, quand le soleil donnait, la pauvre enfant s’endormait dans un flot de lumière qui réchauffait , sur la couverture, ses petites mains anémiées (Casamassimi 213).
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Another example of these opposite strategies can be found in the translation of the sentence “Un grande silenzio s’era fatto nella viuzza solitaria, un grande silenzio si fece nella stanzuccia quando Bettina e Malia chiusero al sonno gli occhi stanchi!” (Le poesie e le novelle 837), sporting two diminutives in a single line:

Un grand silence s’était fait dans la ruelle solitaire ainsi que dans la chambrette, après que Bettina et Malia eurent clos leurs yeux fatigués. (Di Giacomo 316)

Un grand silence régnait dans l’étreite rue solitaire, un grand silence se fit dans la chambre quand Bettina et Malia cédant au sommeil fermèrent leurs yeux lasses. (Casamassimi 222)

Once again, the self-translator opts for the most literal choice, while Casamassimi chooses a strategy of functional equivalence: he paraphrases “viuzza” in “étreite rue,” and eliminates the notion of “pettiness” in “chambre.” It should be noted that both “ruelle” and “chambrette” are documented in the French of the time and appear in the Littré dictionary; yet, these word choices are probably motivated by their verbatim similarity with the original wording. Di Giacomo adopts the same strategy in order to translate complex syntactical structures, to some extent “Neapolitanizing” the syntax and the morphology of his French. See for instance the translation of the following sentence, displaying a typical feature of spoken Neapolitan: “Si chiama Angelica – disse Cristinella. – è figlia a me.” (Opere I, Le poesie e le novelle 845):

Elle s’appelle Angelica, dit Christinella. C’est ma fille à moi. (Di Giacomo 316)

Elle s’appelle Angelica, dit Christinella. C’est ma fille. (Casamassimi 220)

The two versions clearly follow opposite strategies: while Di Giacomo emphasizes and amplifies the ‘agrammatical’ feature of Neapolitan, Casamassimi downright eliminates it.
Similarly, Casamassimi often disposes of false friends and seemingly favours a poetics of *variatio*, such as in the following example: “udiva per un pezzo ancora il respiro forte e uguale della sorella che alla baracca aveva ripetuta una piroetta e s’era affaticata”. (Le poesie e le novelle 843):

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elle entendait longtemps encore la respiration forte et égale de sa sœur, qui avait dû répéter une piroette à sa baraque, et s’était fatiguée. (Di Giacomo 316)
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“Pirouette” seems to be a legitimate entry in this context, according to the French dictionary *Le Littré*, which lists the following definition: “Terme de danse. Un ou plusieurs tours qu'un danseur fait sur la pointe des pieds sans changer de place. Les Troyens sur la jambe droite Firent d'une manière adroite Une pirouette à deux tours. [Scarron, Virgile travesti].” However, not all Di Giacomo’s lexical choices could be similarly acceptable. See, for instance, the following case, where the sentence “La Malia, ch’era ballerina a una baracca,” is rendered in two different ways:

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Là-haut, dans la petite chambrette du quatrième étage, dormaient aussi Malia, danseuse danse une baraque, donna Bettina et son mari. (Di Giacomo 315-316)
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En cette même chambre, si pauvre et sous les combes, logeaient la Malia, qui était danseuse dans un théâtre du faubourg, dame Bettina, et son mari. (Casamassimi 214)
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The polysemy of the Neapolitan word ‘baracca’ cannot be simply transferred in the target language—at least, not by adopting a word-by-word translation. While Casamassimi opts for a cultural adaptation, pointing to a referent (the “théâtre du faubourg”) clearly attuned to the mental encyclopedia of his readership, Di Giacomo forces the target language with the insertion of a clearly foreign term.

Far from being representative of Di Giacomo’s translational practices between Italian and dialect, this occasional exercise in French translation tells us something of how the author sought
to present his work to a foreign audience. As Venuti has stated in his seminal *Translator’s Invisibility*, a translation is always a choice between the many potential interpretations of a text; an author’s semantic choices appear to be especially significant, revealing what aspects the author prioritized in his own work.99

In this respect, a very interesting example is the translation of the Italian adjective ‘esangue,’ meaning both ‘bloodless’ and ‘pale.’ The author uses this terms twice, first in describing the complexion of the young protagonist (“Nel verno, quando il sole era dolce, la poverina s’addormentava in un’onda luminosa, che le scaldava le manine esangui sulla coverta” 842), and later in the conclusion of the story (“La piccola calza bucherellata era caduta sulla coverta del lettuccio, e da presso due piccole mani vi si abbandonavano, esangui. Tra tanta infantile minuzetta le cose più grandi eran due lacrime, che scendevano per le gote di Chiarinella.” 847). Di Giacomo is here toying with the conventional representation of consumption, a disease that, as Susan Sontag has argued, “is understood as a disease of extreme contrasts: white pallor and red flush, hyperactivity alternating with languidness” (*Illness as a metaphor* 12). The disease is visually recreated through the striking contrast of darkness and light, consistently with Di Giacomo’s known predilection for expressive solutions borrowed from the visual arts: in this respect, the palette of disease encounters one of the guiding principles of the “Scuola di Posillipo.” However, in actualizing the many potential nuances of a poetic wording, both translators are forced to choose, having to privilege either the medical or the pictorial nuance of the term:

En hiver, quand le soleil était doux,  
la pauvrette s’endormait dans un flot de lumière qui réchauffait ses petites mains pâles, sur la couverture. (Di Giacomo 315. My emphasis)

En hiver, quand le soleil donnait, la pauvre enfant s’endormait dans un flot de lumière qui réchauffait, sur la couverture, ses petites mains anémiées. (Casamassimi 212. My emphasis)

99 “As a result, a foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations, in different historical periods. Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence, and therefore a translation cannot be judged according to mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one-to-one correspondence.” (Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility* 18)
In both passages, Casamassimi opts for a ‘medical’ translation, using the word ‘anémies.’ Such choice emphases the popularly perceived link between consumption and anemia, and potentially resonates with other works of the author, and especially with his famous 1895 sketch “Le bevitrici di sangue;” at the same time, it is a choice consistent with the target culture, meeting the aesthetics of degeneration laid out by Zola and the Goncourt Brothers. On the contrary, Di Giacomo emphasizes the pictorial aspect of the scene, choosing the chromatic echoes of “pâles” and “décolourées;” as usual, the perspective of the painter prevails over that of the physician, consistently with the author’s self-definition as a “verista sentimentale.”

Self-translators are generally known to operate with a great degree of expressive freedom with regard to the original text, taking liberties than ordinary translators do not take, and oftentimes bordering on rewriting. On the contrary, Di Giacomo pursues a policy of strict literalism. His “foreignizing” ethics of translation is overwhelmingly motivated by his attempt to maintain the “Neapolitan” flavor of his original word choice. Such an attitude thus seems to unfold under the sign of “ethnicity” or “genius of language”—that is, the essentialistic identification between a language and the ethos of a nation that, as seen in the introduction, plays an essential role in shaping the “diglossic ideologies” of Nineteenth-century nationalism.

100 This short, powerful text depicts a crowd of young anemic women gathering on the outside of a local slaughterhouse to drink the blood of the freshly slaughtered cows, pursuant popular belief that doing so could cure anemia.

101 Reference and examples. For instance, … in analyzing Joyce’s self-translation of Livia Ann Plurabell, … notices that. Susan Bassnett.
The same essentialism is even more evident in Di Giacomo’s attitude towards German literature, for which he often professed a deep love despite his lack of linguistic access to it. If French authors were an important part of the Neapolitan culture of the time, the same can be said for the German authors overtly cited by Di Giacomo at the beginnings of his literary career. The works by E. T. A. Hofmann – to whom he extensively refers in the preface of his *Pipa e Boccale*, had been circulating in Naples since 1833, when a translation of the *Racconti Fantastici* had been made available by Nicola Concia (*Il melanconico* 43). His “foreignizing” attitude is here reversed: rather than bringing the “ethnic” qualities of his Neapolitan inspiration into another language—as he did in translating “Notte della Befana”—he artificially recreates the traits stereotypically associated with German identity. The linguistic representation of Otherness here converges with the notion of “pseudo-translation,” a form of literary manipulation or deceit. The connection between pseudo-translation and “ethnicity” of language has been expressed with striking clarity by Christine Lombez, who proposed a taxonomy of self-translation in Nineteenth-century French culture in her article “La ‘traduction supposée’ ou: de la place des pseudotraductions poétiques en France.” Lombez lists, among others, a distancing function, an ideological function, and a function of literary renovation (i.e., “introduire de nouveaux sujets et modèles d’écriture dans un système littéraire récalcitrant à l’innovation”, 110). The latter case is clearly the most relevant to our case, especially considering how pseudo-translation and imitation of linguistic otherness overlaps with the process of forging new expressive code for a newly unified nation. A similar interpretation is provided by Lefevere, who lists pseudo-translations among the possible instances of “literary refractions,” and “[a] quite legitimate strateg[y] aimed at circumventing mainly poetological and, to a certain extent, also ideological constraints” (*Translated Literature: Towards an Integrated Theory* 76). In particular, pseudo-translation would subvert the system of literary genres by virtue of its ironic and parodic subtexts:

One does not confront the Age of Reason or the Age of Chivalry head on, so to speak, not in its ideology and not in its dominant generic forms. One attacks under the cover of refraction, since one is aware (or afraid) that the original would not be acceptable to other

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102 See in this respect the work of François Jeandillou cited in the Bibliography.
refractors, the proclaimed or even appointed guardians of current orthodoxy: the critics.

At the same time, pseudo-translation also belong the more complex domain of “reproduced otherness,” or fictive representations of a foreign language or code. In fact, there is a certain degree of heteroglossia implied in the practice of pseudo-translation, closely recalling other form of speech representation. Monica Fludernik, for instance, includes phonological and orthographic conventions (“spellings indicative of dialectal, sociolectal, or other linguistic […] deviations”) among the markers of reported speech (*The fictions of language* 228). Similarly, Grutman e Dirk Delabatista place pseudo-translation amongst the practices of representation of linguistic otherness, distinguishing “intra-diegetic” practices (that is, different forms of reported speech) and extradiegetic practices (relying mostly on meta-narrative choices and other para-textual devices). Pseudo-translation would belong to the second category, thus being completely distinguished from more traditional forms of discoursive representation of otherness (*Fictional representations of multilingualism and translation* 15).

In the work of Di Giacomo, foreignizing translation and pseudo-translation appear to be the two most radical consequences of an essentialist view of languages, entirely subservient to the romantic and idealist dogma identifying a national tongue (or a dialect) with certain rhetoric traits. In turn, the same essentialism is behind the exclusive code-genre correspondence governing the author’s production, seen at the very beginning of the present chapter.

A typical example of this “foreignizing” and “essentialistic” attitude can be found in a 1903 commemorative article titled “Goethe a Napoli,” first published in the journal *Musica e Musicisti.* (issue 6, 1903), in which the Neapolitan author offers a fictitious reconstruction of Goethe’s sojourn in Naples, in 1787. The text is accompanied by a selection of photographs taken by Di Giacomo himself, which document the laying down of commemorative stones in the places visited by Goethe.

In this short text, Di Giacomo attempts to recreate the poet’s phantasies, in a striking mixture of melancholia and authenticity. In his attempt to recreate the gaze of a Northern author, Di Giacomo ends by transforming his own city into an exotic object of vision:
Through the stereotypical references to Sherazade and to the garments of an unidentified Gypsy woman Di Giacomo crafts his own Naples into a female object of desire, offering itself to the gaze of the male visitor. The perceived Otherness of an enigmatic, seductive and gendered Naples foreshadows the real otherness at stake in the episode: the different language, culture, and tradition of the German poet, whose voice Di Giacomo pretends to imitate, but which he actually effaces in his “fiction of the foreign.”

Given the exotic thrust that underlies Di Giacomo’s cultural representation of a German author, it is not surprising that his literary beginnings, laced with explicit citations of German authors, were mistakenly seen as a plagiarizing translation from an uncredited German source. The publication of his first German short stories on Il Corriere del Mattino” was marked by the slanderous suspicion of plagiarism and mistakenly read as the translation from unpublished German (or Flemish) works. As the Neapolitan journalist Olga Ossani noted in her review of Pipa e Boccale, una legione di giovani letterati si era rovesciata nelle biblioteche pubbliche e private per invenire l’originale tedesco dal quale – secondo loro – il Di Giacomo doveva aver tradotto quelle novelle meravigliose per coloure locale e verità d’ambiente” (cited in Il)

103 I borrow this definition from David Bellos, who uses it in his Is that a fish in your ear? (2011)

104 A minor figure of the local literary landscape, Ossani was a personal friend of Di Giacomo, who dedicated her one of his most famous songs, “Napulitanata,” and the 1884 edition of his collected Sonetti. Their friendship is documented by the private correspondences, collected by Ferdinando Cordova in the volume Caro Olgogigi. Lettere ad Olga e Luigi Lodi. Dalla Roma bizantina all’Italia fascista. (68-70).
malinconico 41). Not only readers and reviewers gave credit to the rumor, but even Martin Cafiero (the director of Il Corriere del mattino) and Federigo Verdinois (also the author of fantastic tales) momentarily shared their concerns. To refute these allegations, the newspaper finally had to publish a note on June 17 1879, in which Di Giacomo’s full and sole paternity of his work was soundly reaffirmed. The note is particularly interesting insomuch as it rewrites these unfounded charges of plagiarism as a stylistic evaluation of Di Giacomo’s prose. His own relation to German culture – which has induced even an informed critic such as Cecchi to believe that he had spent part of his youth studying philosophy in Germany – is now read as a sign of a poetic intention. The anonymous author of the “Note” (probably Verdinois himself) declares: “A questi sospetti davano apparenza di verità i pregi singolari dello scritto, cioè il colourito tutto tedesco, la sobrietà del racconto, la semplicità dello stile, e quel non so che di sicuro che rivela la mano ferma e sperimentata dell’autore” (cited in Il Melancolico 41). Consistently with this essentialistic view of language, the “Note” on the Corriere del Mattino is concluded by the following promise: “Facciamo ai lettori la bella promessa di pubblicare altri scritti che il Di Giacomo ci promette di tradurre… dal proprio cervello” (42). The similarity between the creation of a form and the translation of a work of art is nonetheless rooted in late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth-century culture: and, as Antonio Prete brilliantly affirms in his recent book Stare tra le lingue, “Quando diciamo che il traduttore sta dinanzi al testo originale come il poeta sta dinanzi alla natura, già nell’analogia mettiamo in atto una traslazione dell’idea di traduzione”(56).

Indeed, Di Giacomo’s fantastic prose could be easily served by the paradigm of “pseudo-translation”, since the author mimics his model so well that he creates the illusion of a non-existent “source.” The problematic reception of his early works is precisely motivated by the author’s fictitious representation of ‘Germanness.’ Similarly, the reviewers mistook the alleged clarity and simplicity of Di Giacomo’s early works for specific virtues of a tongue: while aiming at specific stylistic virtues, the young artist is thus seen as “recreating” the genius of a foreign language—a paradigm extensivbely discussed by Paola Gambarota in her comparative analysis of the linguistic theories of Bouhours and Vico. In her extensive research on the pre-Romantic and Romantic philosophy of national language, Gambarota considers the connections between the naturalist approach to peoples’ ethos and the stereotypical characterization of national languages, dating back to the well-known polemic between Bouhours and Vico. As she claims in
her initial pages, the Italian case is particularly interesting as the perception of one’s own autonomous ethos overlaps, without necessarily conflicting, with the perception of Italian’s fragmentary and variegated linguistic reality. As Gambarota writes, “for a long time in Italy the local identities and the supra-regional (later national) identity were not necessarily perceived as incompatible.” (*Irresistible signs* 12).

Di Giacomo soon abandoned the “tedescheria” of his early ways in order to adopt a more realist allure, following the advice of influent figures such as Serao and Pica. Yet, his early pseudo-translation fundamentally illuminates his views of language, translation and cultural negotiation. In his work, pseudo-translation does not appear in the guise of the many invented languages of the fantastic or comic tradition, nor as the linguistic experimentalism of authors such as Vittorio Imbriani: it rather offers the ground for an essentialistic view of language, consistent with the Romantic and Idealistic discourse that identifies language, nation, and the identity of a People. The “resistance” to translation—seen, for instance, in Di Giacomo’s clunky and unidiomatic French—is thus consistent with this ideal, culminating in the adoption of what Schleiermacher sees as the as “foreignizing” translation, the act of rendering one’s own mother tongue foreign, by endowing it with qualities and traits deemed peculiar of another language.\(^\text{105}\) As it will be seen in greater detail in the next section, the same “ethnicity” of languages informs the author’s view of the Italian/Neapolitan dualism.

5. Translating Family Values: from *I mariti* to ‘O Buono Marito fa ‘a buona mogliera

If the translation of his own works into other languages is marked by a strong “foreignizing” tension, an opposite attitude informs his self-translations between Italian and Neapolitan, as we will see in detail in the next sections. Di Giacomo’s foreignizing attitude—well exemplified by the exotic nuances of his “pseudo-German” prose or by the “Neapolitanizing” allure of his French—is here replaces by a “domesticating” strategy, meeting the cultural horizons and the

\(^{105}\) For a full account of Schleiermacher’s foreignizing ideal of translation, see Venuti’s chapter “Nation,” in his seminal *Translator’s Invisibility* (102-118).
shared values of the target culture. This is equally verified in the cases of “ascending” self-translation (that is, from dialect into Italian) and in those of “descending” self-translation (that is, from Italian into dialect); furthermore, this attitude is also found in those self-translation that Di Giacomo realized jointly with another author.

A perfect example of this attitude can be found in ‘O buono marito fa ‘a buona mugliera (1886), the first vernacular play that saw the direct involvement of Di Giacomo. The play was a Neapolitan translation of I mariti, the six-act play that had earned Achille Torelli his reputation as a rising star of Italian theatre in 1867. I mariti was set in the aristocratic society of Naples immediately before the national unification (the play is set in 1860); its plot focuses exclusively on the labours of love of a group of young aristocratic couples. I mariti thus transcends its historical and geographical setting to provide an abstract and conventional version of the sentimental comedy: Silvio d’Amico describes it as an old-school play, “in fondo ancora basata, ottocentescamente, su questioni d’etichetta, di scandali, di duelli” (35).

In I mariti, the old Duke of Herrera and his wife Matilde, a happily married couple, are to pick a husband for their youngest daughter Emma. Their oldest children’s marriages, all procured amongst the local aristocracy following the conventions of the ancient regime, had disastrous outcomes: their son Alfredo is too immature and constantly disrespects his wife Giulia, whom he married at a very young age; at the same time, their daughter Sofia suffers at the hands of the idle, overly jealous and violent Teodoro, whom she married for love and against the warnings of her parents. Having learned from their previous mistakes, the Herreras pick a non-blue-blooded husband for their youngest daughter: the notary Fabio Regoli, who has a solid reputation as a hard-working, wealthy and established professional. Emma is unruly at first, both because of Fabio’s non-aristocratic birth and because of her previous infatuation with Ernesto di Rogheredi, a noble but impoverished military cadet. However, she gradually realizes that, in spite of his non-aristocratic descent, Fabio has a truly noble soul. At the end of the play, their marriage stands out as the only happy one and is blessed with the announcement of their first pregnancy.

106 The play first staged in Florence on November 21, 1867. It was enthusiastically reviewed, among others, by Luigi Capuana, who saw it as the incipient germ of the rising “teatro nazionale”.
The success of *I mariti* was never again matched by any of the subsequent comedies written by Torelli: therefore, it is not surprising that, in moving his first steps in the environment of vernacular theatre, he chose to translate his most praised and successful script. First staged at the Teatro Fenice on December 7, 1886, *O buono marito fa 'a buona mugliera* was warmly welcomed by the audience. Its critical reception was so good that the journal *Don Chisciotte* immediately requested the script for publication (Borrelli 96). The letters exchanged between the two authors clearly indicate their division of tasks, with Di Giacomo firmly in charge of the linguistic revisions and Torelli in charge of the dramaturgical choices. According to Rosaria Borrelli, the linguistic revisions of Di Giacomo were determinant for the good outcome of this version: “Autore di ben undici commedie dialettali, il maggior successo [Torelli] lo ottenne proprio con questo lavoro: ‘*O buono marito fa 'a buona mugliera*. E non fu certo un caso: egli si era avvalso dell’aiuto di Salvatore Di Giacomo che aveva rivisto il testo soprattutto in relazione all’uso del dialetto” (95).

In a letter sent on December 9, 1886, Torelli asks Di Giacomo to proofread their Neapolitan, fearing that his own lack of linguistic competence might damage the play: “Gentile Di Giacomo,/ ditemi se correggerete voi le bozze per la parte dialettale, altrimenti potrei correggere a modo mio e guastare il ben fatto da voi.” (Lett. Autogr., BNN L. P. Racc. Di Giac. Ba III. A (359). These fears appear to be grounded in Torelli’s unidiomatic knowledge of Neapolitan. However, due to their later disagreement, the author decided to assume full responsibility for the any future proofreading (Benevento 75). Their different view of the orthographic conventions (with Torelli strenuously defending traditional spelling over Di Giacomo’s phonological innovations) seems to justify the many differences between the first installments of the play, printed in *Don Chisciotte*, and the final version, as it appears in Rispoli’s 1972 edition of Torelli’s collected *Teatro Dialettale*. In the latter, the orthographic conventions are not as accurate, with several hybridisms between Italian and dialect, which were absent from the version revised by Di Giacomo.

‘*O buono marito* should be regarded as an adaptation rather than a translation. The numerous changes include the suppression of several scenes, the rewriting of many lines, many changes to the cast, and the reduction of the original five acts to four: overall, the new play is considerably shorter. More importantly, Torelli and Di Giacomo highlight the local aspect of the plot, while reducing the emphasis on the aristocratic connotations that had been so important in
the original play. According to d’Amico, for instance, *I mariiti* had been dominated by a conflict between the ethics of the ancient regime and the new set of bourgeois values, showing that “fra tanti nobiluomini alle cui ‘forme’ non corrisponde più alcun contenuto, il ‘borghese’ Fabio è il solo gentiluomo vero: egli si conquista il cuore della nobile sposa on tanto ‘agendo’ quando facendo ‘bei gesti’.” (35). This underlying class dialectics is absent from the Neapolitan version, which focuses mainly on a moralistic praise of the Christian marriage and on a general examination of human vices and virtues.

This thematic shift is clearly mirrored by the changes in the system of the *dramatis personae*. The aristocratic-sounding names of *I mariiti* are replaced by typically Neapolitan names: Baronessa Rita d’Isola becomes Giesummina, Marchese Teodoro becomes Mariano, Fabio Regoli is transformed into Iennariello, and so forth. Social characterizations are also adapted to the reality of Neapolitan lower classes: for instance, the aristocrat Enrico di Rivabella, a Marine officer, is transformed in the figure of Taniello, a poor “berzaglìere” (104) who learned to write and read at the school of his Regiment: “Mi songo imparato a scrivere a ‘a scola dello reggimento perché io vi … vi pozzo scrivere a voi”, reads the unrealistic broken Italian of his letter to his former lover Catarina. Similarly, the officer Ernesto di Rogheredi is transformed in a nameless valet (“chillo milordino d’o cammariero d’o Conte”, 88): it is worth noting that both careers (that is, house service and military service) are marked by the presence of a uniform, which naïve and unexperienced women such as Emma and Nannina see as a token of prestige and social reputation.

While the conflict of bourgeoisie and aristocracy had a pivotal role in *I mariiti*, class differences are not so prominent in *O bono marito*: while Emma is a noblewoman who struggles to accept her new status as a “Signora Regoli e bassta,” Nannina is simply an immature girl who would superficially marry a good-looking crook, were it not for the better judgment of her mother. Similarly, while Fabio embodies the nobility of the soul as opposed to the vacuity of aristocratic titles, Iennariello is just a honest and hard-working fellow who stands out in a crowd of crooks and liars.

Consistently with this overall transformation, many moralistic tirades of Fabio disappear in *O buono marito*: Iennariello is not a fine *raisonneur*, but a practical man with a golden heart:
FABIO: Se io mi fossi accorto che il signor Ernesto di Rogheredi fosse stato un giovane serio, e non già un ragazzo leggero e vanitoso, per non dir peggio, avrei rispettato il vostro cosiddetto amore. - Ma che speranze aveva e poteva avere su di voi il signor De Rogheredi? Rispondetemi, via! EMMA: Che so... l'avvenire... il caso... FABIO: Ah, il caso! - Fidare nel caso! Bell'appoggio il caso! L'appoggio di tutti i poltroni e gli imbecilli! - La fortuna l'aspettano dal caso: un terno al lotto o una cartella di tombola! - E senza neanche aver l'idea di mettersi a lavorare, circuiscono una povera ragazza, la innamorano, le giurano amore eterno... Ma non l'amano, no! - Perché se l'amassero davvero, darebbero la vita per farsi quel patrimonio che s'aspettano dal caso. - In noi, cara Emma, non vive soltanto l'anima: «Una capanna e il suo cuore» è una bella frase, ma l'hanno inventata i poeti, e i poeti, su per giù, sono un mucchio di poltroni! - Invece un uomo veramente innamorato e veramente onesto, dice: «Un regno e il suo cuore»; e il regno non mica per me, ma per lei; e l'agiatezza non per me, ma per la salute di chi sarà la madre de' miei figliuoli; la ricchezza non per me e non per lei, ma per l'educazione, la felicità, la vita della nostra prole!... Ecco come la pensa un uomo veramente innamorato e veramente onesto. (358)
The comparison between the two passages is particularly revealing: while Fabio engages in a long digression on the value of work and responsibility, Jennariello keeps it short and limits himself to a brief ironic comment. On the contrary, there is no irony in the grave lines of Fabio, except for the meta-literary reference to the poets as being “un mucchio di poltroni” – a judgment that perhaps, by extension, could apply to the author of the play himself.

Despite these changes, the moralizing allure of the original is not completely lost: instead of celebrating the typical bourgeois virtues, the new script insists on the Christian virtues of a good wife. The following lines offer a clear example of this tendency:

GIULIA: Oh, il divorzio!
LA DUCHESSA (alzandosi con ira): Marchesa! Bestemmiate! Volete che v’ordini di ritirarvi nelle vostre stanze?

TERESA: Mannaggia ‘o matrimonio e chi l’ha fatto!
MATALENA: E accossì, Tere? Tu vuò parlà buono, o no? L’ha fatto Dio, l’ha fatto!
TERESA: Io vorria sapere pecché l’uommene nzorate ponno fa l’ammore co cie’t’aute femmene, e nuje femmene no?
MATALENA. (aizandose) Teré, mo te dongo no paccaro e te faccio parlà io comme se commene!
TERESA: Ma io voglio sapè pecché nce stanno duje pise e duje mesure!
MATALENA: Pecchè… pecchè si uno arroba non è ragione ca n’auto ha d’arrobbà pure isso! He capito! A Napole, pe grazia ‘e Dio, so’ chiù ‘e femmene annorate che ‘e sbrevgnate; e ‘a femmena ha da chiagnere, s’ha da disperà, ha da morì, e ha da rommanè annorata! Ca pò ‘o Signore s’a vedarrà isso c’o marito che l’ha fatta schiattà! (TD 95)

In *O buono marito*, Matalena expresses a religious view of marriage that was completely absent from *I mariti*. The latter is immersed in a mundane and secular atmosphere: social respectability is the main reason for behaving correctly, even for those characters who do not limit themselves to a hypocritical affirmation of virtue, but who strive to live by their own ideals. Even Fabio,
arguably the character who sets the moral standards for everyone else in the plays, belongs to this secular and worldly horizon: when he enumerates the virtues of a good husband, he mainly focuses on his social and economic responsibilities as a good provider.

The latter passage also demonstrates how the Neapolitan version is also characterized by a greater freedom of language: transgression is directly mentioned, without paraphrases or allusions. For instance, in I mariti Giulia merely alludes to the possibility of legal separation—somehow foreshadowing the conclusion of her own subplot; in the corresponding passages of ‘O buono marito, however, the lines of Teresa and Matalene contain very explicit expressions such as “fa[re] l’ammore” (which did not, anyways, indicate carnal relationships in the language of the nineteenth-century) and “femmine sbrevognate” (loose women). While in I mariti Giulia constantly hints at adultery, in ‘O buono marito Teresa goes as far as to demand “equal rights” for men and women—which, in this specific instance, mean equal license to sin.

The loosened self-censorship of the Neapolitan version results in much greater comic strength. While Fabio is self-righteous and pensive, Jennariello is closer to a converted Razzullo, ready to embrace his course of virtue but also winking to the audience, of whom he knows, and at times shares, the human weaknesses. Even when he sticks to an irreprehensible conduct, Jennariello is not entirely blind to temptation, as the last line of the following sequence shows:

RITA: Lasciate là questa parola, Fabio; dite soltanto amico, se volete; ma l’altra di fratello non posso soffrirla. Esclude tutto. È troppo ed è troppo poco. Non posso sentirmela dire… particolarmente da voi. (Si abbandona leggermente verso di lui e gli pone la mano sulla mano).
FABIO: Allora ne dirò un’altra: vostra figlia.
RITA (Richiamata alla sua dignità, dopo una pausa) Grazie. Era di fatti la parola che ci voleva.

IENNARIELLO. E… ca tenite na figlia, ca tenite na figlia, non ve l’arricordate?
GESOMMINA (come se avesse avuto no cato d’acqua fredda ncuollo se mette ‘e mane nnanze a l’uocchie pe ‘o scuorno) Avite ragione… me l’era scordato.
IENNARIELLO (da pe isso) Meglio accossì, pecché n’auto poco me scordava pur’io ‘e moglierama!
(Teatro dialettale 107)
Consistently with the increased emphasis on comicality, the references to transgression become more open and more vulgar in the Neapolitan version. For instance, in *I mariti*, Baronessa Rita d’Isola suggests a formal separation from her unfaithful husband after the latter publicly talked to the discredited noblewoman Amelia Gioiosi and exposed his own daughter to such a ‘perilious’ influence. The same scene appears in *O buono marito*, but here Fernando engages in an outrageous and completely unrealistic behavior, such a bringing along his young daughter in one of his frequent visits to the local brothel:

FERDINANDO: [...] *(acalannose, e parlanno zitto zitto dins’a la recchia ‘e Nennella)*: Nennè, non di’ niente a mamma addò simmo state... NENNELLA: Ncoppa a chella bella casa co tutte chelle figliole? FERDINANDO: Non di’’ niente sa’, si no papa non te porta chiù! *(Teatro Napoletano 105)*

In turn, the lines of Giesummina are also much more explicit and violent, as opposed to the cold temper kept by Rita d’Isola at all times:

RITA: Avete svergognato voi stesso e il GIESUMMINA (ammollanno e guardanno vostro sangue. Intendo che per l’avvenire Ferdinando). Addò aje portata a non abbiate da darvi più alcun pensiero per figliema?... Risponne, piezzo ‘e galiota...
mia figlia!

IL BARONE Mi fareste il piacere di dir
nostra?

RITA: È un diritto che voi uomini acqustate
molto facilmente… ma lasciamo andare
queste volgarità. (Congedandolo)

Barone…

IL BARONE: Obbedisco… Posso avere dei
torti, ma pure… ho conservato sempre le
forme dei miei pari.

RITA: Infatti: è la sola cosa che abbiaie voi
ed i vostri pari: la forma! (I mariti 59)

addò l’aje portata? L’aje portata ncoppa ‘a
na casa ‘e chelle addò nce vaje tu? …
Nennella comme è trasuta accessi me ha
ditto. Siente, sbrevognatone nfame, nfino a
quanno tu affienne a me, poco me ne
preme, e te ponno portà ngalera ca i’
portarraggio ‘e cannele a Santa Brigeta:
ma quando affienne a figliema…. Pe
l’arma e patemo, fetentone nfame vede che
perdo ‘e sense e succeede che vaco io ‘n
galera, ma a te, a te te faccio ji’ a ‘o
camposanto! (Teatro dialettale 105)

Changes do not only affect the psychology of character or the social dynamics shaping the play: they also influence the social value of language and its artistic representation. This is especially evident in the case of metalinguistic lines, which are recurrent in both versions. In the following example, for instance, the alternation between the indicative “voglio” (‘I want’) and the more formal, politer, form at the conditional (‘vorrei’ – I would like) conveys a clear meaning.

EMMA: Lo voglio! Anzi, lo vorrei!
FABIO: Grazie di quel condizionale.
[...] (50)

NANNINA. E io me ne voglio turnà a Napule! Io
voglio... (Sbatte ’e piede)
IENNARIELLO. Voglio sta fora ‘a porta, Nanni!
NANNINA. Embè, vurria turnà a Napule!...
Iennariè, me vuò fa stu piacere?
IENNINA: Ah, bè! Mo va bene [...] (97)

In both sequences, the self-correction marks a turning point in the wives’ attitude: both Emma and Nannina start their transition from hostility to love. However, in I mariti, the auto-correction is unexpected and unsolicited, as Emma is spontaneously changing her mind. In ‘O buono marito Jennaro acts instead as authoritarian husband taming his wife: in particular his lines “voglio sta
for a ‘a porta” and “ah, bè! Mo va bene” imply that he would not satisfy a request made by his wife in an imperative tone, clearly showing that he is in command.

Grammatical markers also convey the changing attitudes of characters in the following sequences:

| Emma: Salvo che tu non debba.... | Nannina: Siente, Jennà!...
| Fabio (con gioia): Emma? | Jennaro: Di’...
| Emma: Che c’è? | Nannina: Farrisse ‘no favore a Mariannina toia?
| Fabio: Mi date del tu... la prima volta!... | Jennaro. (quase non ce credesse): Mariannì?!
| *(I mariti 50)* | Nannina: Ched’è?
| | Jennaro: è la primma vota ca te siento di’:
| | Mariannina.
| | *(Teatro napoletano 97)*

In the Italian text, Emma’s increased familiarity with her husband is marked by her sudden shift from the formal “voi” to “tu”, the most familiar and informal second-person pronoun. It is worth mentioning that the same grammatical opposition is available in Neapolitan dialect, with similar nuances; however, in this particular instance, Torelli and Di Giacomo use two different devices of familiarity, a diminutive (“Mariannina”), further reinforced by a possessive (“a Mariannina toia”). In both scenes, the characters’ language mirrors their changing mindset: however, the stylistic devices adopted in Neapolitan are less formal, more familiar and pathetic than the pronoun alternance used in the Italian script.

As it is known, the cooperation between Torelli and Di Giacomo remained an isolated episode, soon spoiled by their increasing competition and disagreements: several biographers and scholars of Di Giacomo have suggested that the disappointment for their falling out was instrumental, in prompting the author to begin his own activity as a playwright. As Di Giacomo wrote to Verdinois on December 18, 1886, “se non altro tutti questi equivoci avranno fatto nascere in me il desiderio di provarmi da solo.” (Benevento 67).

More importantly, this first experiment already encompasses some of the tendencies characterizing his entire bilingual production. ‘*O buono marito* presents a strong interest in
lower-class settings and human types, a geographically rooted sense of humour and a remarkable tendency to “domestication,” the very same traits that also characterize Di Giacomo’s later self-translations. Moreover, the increased pathetism and the preference for a lower class setting of ‘O buono marito seems to anticipate the successive modes of Di Giacomo’s solo production. However, there are also important differences to be noticed: its explicit and sometimes coarse comicality is far removed from the bitter tone prevalent in tragic works such as O mese mariano, Assunta Spina and ‘O voto. Indeed, this early collaboration is nothing more than a starting point, marking the beginning of a long theatrical career; yet, Di Giacomo will continue to mature as a playwright, progressively abandoning the stiffness and the stereotypes of ‘O buono marito in order to develop his own dramatic style—one based on a tragicomic mode, a greater psychological depth and grandiose ensemble scenes.

6. From Mala Vita to ‘O voto: Adaptation and Transcodification.

If the translation of I mariti was instrumental in advancing Di Giacomo’s interest towards the theatrical medium, it was not until the staging of ‘O voto in 1888 that the author began elaborating his own dramaturgical aesthetic. Adapted from the short story “Il voto,” the play was first staged in Italian with the title of Mala vita (1888);107 it was later translated in Neapolitan by the author himself, who decided to recuperate the original title (‘O voto).

Like its narrative source, Mala vita/O voto revolves around the topics of prostitution, disease and religious superstition, three topics commonly associated in the literature of the time.108 At the beginning of the play we see Vito Amante, a tubercular launderer, struggling with

107 Mala vita was first represented at the Teatro Gerbino, in Turin, in December 1888, by the company of Francesco Pasta. According to the Introduction of its first published version, (Bideri 1889) its first cast was comprised of Pasta himself (playing the role of Vito Amante), Adelaide Tessero (cast as Donna Amalia), Maria Rosa Guidantoni (Donna Rosa), Teresina Mariani (Cristina), Carolina Stocchi (Nunzia), Luigi Russo (Annetiello). The play was warmly received, obtaining the praise of Giovanni Verga among others. It was later represented in Genoa, Milan, Florence, Naples, and Rome. Over the span of two years, it was staged 19 times by three different companies: the companies Maggi performed in Florence and Naples, while the Pantalena Company brought it onstage in Naples and Rome. Two different Neapolitan theatres, the Fiorentini, and the Teatro Nuovo, featured the Italian version.

108 As social historian Alain Corbin wrote in his work Les filles de noce : « Le portrait de la prostituée demeure, et pour longtemps, à peu près tel qu’il avait été élaboré durant la première moitié du siècle. Avec une étonnante constance, les auteurs soulignent l’instabilité, la loquacité de la fille publique, son gout pour l’alcool et en particulier
his physical illnesses. After a particularly violent episode of blood coughing, Vito takes a religious vow, publicly promising to redeem and marry a prostitute in exchange for his restored health. Everyone in the alley witnesses the vow, including Amalia, a married woman who is Vito’s secret mistress and who is generally loathed but also feared by her neighbors. The promise is also overheard by Cristina, a prostitute enslaved in a nearby brothel but resolved to change life. Vito appears to be determined to break his old affair with Amalia in order to marry Cristina, despite the fierce opposition of his own mother, Donna Rosa. Eventually, mistress and mother join forces, as Donna Rosa begins to see her son’s adulterine affair as a “lesser evil” in comparison to the open scandal of his marrying a former prostitute. Vito eventually gives in to the general pressure and breaks his vows, falling again for his old mistress. As the two reunited lovers leave for a day-trip at the nearby beaches of Piedigrotta, a heartbroken Cristina accepts her fate and returns to her brothel.

Di Giacomo cooperated with another playwright to achieve a better understanding of dramaturgical structures. In fact, the Italian script of *Mala vita* was co-authored by Di Giacomo and Goffredo Cognetti (1855-1939), an emerging voice of the local theatre. A former military and police officer, Cognetti belongs to that local demi-monde of detectives, local journalists and self-appointed experts who popularized the secrets of the Neapolitan underworld for a more refined bourgeois audience. After the initial success of *Mala vita*, he continued to provide a sensationalistic depiction of the Neapolitan populace in prose plays and melodramatic librettos such as *Basso Porto* (1888), ‘*A Santa Lucia* and *Alta Camorra*. After their joint debut, Di Giacomo and Cognetti continued a productive collaboration for several years later. However, Di Giacomo was more interested in authoring his own plays than in partaking in further joint efforts: he willing renounced any rights on the translations of *Basso Porto* and *Santa Lucia*, and

pour l’absinthe, sa gourmandise, sa passion du jeu, sa propension à la paresse, au mensonge et à la colère. On se plaît toujours à souligner ses quelques qualités morales: le sens de la solidarité, l’attachement aux enfants, la pudeur à l’égard du corps médical et surtout la religiosité. » (Corbin 39).
he used this as a leverage to try and control the performing history of *Mala vita/ ‘O voto*, preventing its representation by companies of lower quality.\(^{109}\)

It is a shared view that Cognetti provided the dramaturgical structure of the play, while Di Giacomo was mainly responsible for the linguistic adaptation and stylistic revision. As Iermano notes, “il Cognetti ebbe un ruolo determinante nella stesura del drama, del quale il poeta curò le didascalie ma non la sceneggiatura. Cognetti era abile nella tecnica di scena ma il suo gusto del particolare del caratteristico tende ad essere rappresentato come fenomeno di costume e non secondo il gusto pittorico digiacomiano.” (*Il melanconico in dormiveglia* 189)

In the wake of the play’s initial success, Di Giacomo started immediately to work on a vernacular translation, which was first performed by the company of Elio Pantalena at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples, on the 27\(^{th}\) of April, 1889 (*Il melancolico* 191). As Iermano writers, “riveste certamente interesse il fatto che Di Giacomo autore si misuri immediatamente con il dialetto. Dopo avere esordito con Cognetti in lingua, decide di indirizzarsi, senza ulteriori indugi, verso una scelta linguistica già operata per le poesie e le canzoni.” (192) Despite the creative role played by Cognetti, the play is completely representative of Di Giacomo’s later production, marked by strong conflicts, tormented and complex characters, and a highly pathetic use of language. In this respect, *Mala vita/’O voto* is very distant from the moralizing and superficial comicality of ‘*O buono marito fa ’a buona mogliera*, with its confusing multitude of characters and its conventional plot twists.

As it had been the case with ‘*O buono marito*, the Neapolitan translation of *Mala vita* is also marked by an attempt to “localize” and “domesticate” the text; however, these these

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\(^{109}\) See in particular the following letter, sent on November 15, 1908: “Bisogna mettere a posto le cose del *Voto*: nel De Riccardi che è tuo amico e in cui ho fiducia come te io ho riposto tutta la fiducia fin qua. Ma come non ha badato alle recite che si facevano dal 1906 in qua, e allo scempio che ha fatto del *Voto* il Nunziata? Lascia, dunque, che quest’opera comune sia garentita da altri: io desidero che il tuo e il mio nome non vadano così, come è successo, in berlina.” Later in the passage, Di Giacomo reiterates his decision to waive his copyrights on the Neapolitan translations of *Basso porto* and *Santa Lucia*, and uses this as a leverage: “Mandami assieme ad essa il copione di *Mala femmina*: <se ti pare>. Se ti pare ch’io possa tradurlo. Per *Basso porto* ho pregato Pantalena di affidare due parti a due artiste che le faranno meglio di quelle a cui lui le aveva affidato. Per S. Lucia ricordati – se ti chiedono il permesso - di dare la parte di Rosella, alla Sig.na Blanche. La Domina, che forse ti proporranno, è insufficiente. Ma non fare il mio nome: di’ piuttosto che sei venuto in teatro e hai udito la Blanche. A Roma io non pretendò nulla per le riprese di *A S. Lucia e Basso porto* in dialetto; tu hai accettato la mia rinunzia e io non te la ricordo se non per pregarti di fare del *Voto* quello che ti chiedo. Qui a Napoli avrai sempre in me un amico.” (Infusino 191)
attempts at “localizing” the text are carried out through opposite textual strategies: instead of bringing comedic relief to text and lowering the social setting of the play, Di Giacomo emphasizes the realistic and pathetic elements of the source-text.

Once again, self-translation comes with a certain degree of freedom, which sometimes can lead to the rewriting of entire scenes. The comparison between the Italian and the Neapolitan scripts (which I read, respectively, in the 1899 Bidéri edition of *Mala vita* and in the revised 1920 Carabba edition of his *Collected Theatre*) shows clear evidence of structural changes, such as the reversed order of lines or sequences, the attribution of lines to different characters, and the merging of lines originally pronounced by different characters. These tendencies seemingly confirm and expand the tendencies showed by Di Giacomo’s early revision of the Neapolitan text, documented by the author’s correction in the autograph manuscript Ms. B a l b (3), held at the Library Lucchesi Palli in Naples.

A systematic comparison between *Mala vita* and *O’ Voto* reveals a few recurrent tendencies, such as the increase of local colour, a more detailed use of descriptions, and a greater emphasis on pathos. The Neapolitan version is enriched by locally connoted details that could easily resonate with a local audience, such as names of place in the stage directions: for instance, “Una piccola piazzetta, a Porto” (*Mala vita* 6) is rendered with “Una piccola piazzetta al ‘Pendino’ (*O Voto* 7), the name of a neighbourhood that only those familiar with the topography of Naples could easily recognize. The following example shows the increased realism and more vivid detail of the stage decor, as in the following example:

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*Il vicolo a sinistra termina con una grande scala, che appena s’indovina nella penombra. L’altro continua fra palazzi puntellati, e si va, man mano, rinserrando. È un tramonto di agosto.*

(*Mala vita* 6)

*A destra dello spettatore, pur sul davanti, la bottega di barbiere di Don Marco. Sull’insegna c’è scritto Salone. Sedie e una scranna fuori la bottega. Più in là il banchetto del calzolaio. Poco discosto dalla tintoria un Banco del lotto.*

(*O voto* 7)
The game of lotto (whose addictive power had become known to the Italian readership thanks to Matilde Serao’s *Il paese di Cucagna*) is present in both versions: both in ‘*O voto* and *Mala vita*, Papele/Rafele, Annetiello and Marco draw numbers for a bet from the riot that concludes Act I. However, the importance of this popular phenomenon is further emphasized by the presence of a lotto stand as part of the stage decor.

The dialectal version is also more allusive and less explicit. In the script of *Mala Vita*, many sequences hint at the hidden tensions among the characters, and namely, at the open contempt that many neighbors feel towards the unfaithful Amalia and her cuckold husband, Annetiello. The same feelings and tensions are, of course, present in *O Voto*, but they are mostly rendered by means of allusion, rather than through the character’s explicit statements. See, for instance, the interaction between the two female characters in Act II, Scene 1. Amalia, who has been abandoned by Vito, is currently experiencing a fall of popularity in the alley. In order to regain control over her former lover, she bribes Nunziata/Nunzia, an old woman who works as an in-home hairdresser and therefore has access to everyone in the neighbourhood. The initial encounter between the two characters runs as follows:

NUNZIA (*Di fuori*). Donn'Amà, buonasera. Mi buttate le bucce addosso?

DONN'AM[ALIA]. Non vi abbadavo, Nunzia... E venite qua, non ve ne passate scantonando, che non v'abbiamo fatto nulla di male! (23)

NUNZIATA (*di fuori, davanti alla porta*). 'Onn'Amà, 'i ve saluto.

AMALIA: E ched'è, ve ne passate? Cè nun v'avimmo fatto niente... (77)

The Neapolitan version clearly attenuates the feeling of aggression, conveyed quite directly by the Italian line “*mi buttate le bucce addosso?*” The conflict becomes less explicit in the Neapolitan version, thus making Nunziata’s subsequent change of heart more credible.

Di Giacomo does not only eliminate and shorten lines in the translation: in other instances, he adds greater detail, making the dialogue between secondary characters more vivid and realistic. See, for instance, the following lines:
**NUNZIA**: O figlio mio!  
**SOFIA** (sottovoce ad Assunta) (Sentite a me, chello è affetto 'e neveratura).  
**ASSUNTA** (c.s.) (A fratemo ‘o surdato lle faceva tale e quale). (20)

While in the Italian version Nunzia and Sofia comment the nervous breakdown of Vito with conventional expressions of pity, in the Neapolitan version the characters engage in their most typical gossip, relating the events to their own experience and showing a general lack of sympathy for the disgraces of others. Together with the increased livelihood of language comes its increased coarseness and vulgarity: as it is often the case in “descending” self-translation, the language becomes more explicit and coarse. See the following lines, for instance, where Vito’s mother yells in exasperation at the spying neighbors:

**ROSA** (urlando) Badassero ai lor panni sudici, che ne hanno a casa abbastanza! (Le sbatacchiano in faccia le imposte). (39)  
**DONNA ROSA** (rivolta alle finestre) Nun hanno che penza’! Penzassero ‘e corna loro, ca ne teneno assaie pure loro! (le finestre si rinserrano) (38)

Furthermore, the Neapolitan version has a greater choral force. Di Giacomo achieves this important effect by restructuring many scenes, cutting or inserting lines, and making the interpersonal relations more specific and lively. The group scenes become grandiose and majestic in the Neapolitan translation, following the same visual principles that had been so instrumental in founding the author’s narrative and poetic aesthetic.

The most striking example of transformation is seen in the final scene of Act I, showing a riot in the neighbourhood: in the translation, the scene undergoes significant changes, both for its dramaturgical structure and for its ideological significance. In the scene, Vito is talking to Cristina, who has overheard his promise and sees it as a possible way out of her current situation. Two Italian-speaking Carabinieri arrive for a routine inspection, hoping to find evidence of
clandestine gambling; they surprise Cristina talking to Vito and try to arrest her for evidence of soliciting. The girl justifies herself by saying that she only left the house to collect fresh water at the public fountain; when Vito defends her, all the neighbors back him up; the verbal conflict soon escalates in a street riot, similar to the ones Di Giacomo documented in his 1898 report “I tumulti di Napoli.” The translation affects both the dramatic structure and the social significance of the scene:

BRIGADIERE (alla folla) ma la legge la sapete o no?

SOFIA. Che legge e legge!

NUNZIA. Sull’acqua fresca non c’è legge!

TUTTI (Gridando): Non c’è legge! Non c’è legge!

VITO: è un abuso!

BRIGADIERE: Indietro, o arresto anche a voi!

BRIGADIERE (gridando, a Vito): Ma vuie ’a legge ’a sapite, o no?

SUFIA: Qua legge e legge! Int’e ccase noste nun c’è legge!

TUTTE LE DONNE (con un urlo) Nun c’è legge!

GUARDIA BIANCHETTI: Indietro!

SUFIA: Avasciate e’ mmane!

IL BRIGADIERE (a Vito) Levateve ’a lloc, sì no arresto pure a vuie!

The content of the lines is significantly altered: in the Italian version, the women claim that “sull’acqua fresca non c’è legge,” (“there is no law forbidding to take water”), thus minimizing the extent of Cristina’s transgression. The Neapolitan line “Int’e ccase noste nun c’è legge!” (“There is no law in our houses”) sounds much more explicit and threatening, clearly echoing the harsh reactions to the evictions that were frequent in the old fondaci during their force evacuation, and alluding at the separation between the Southern underworld and the new laws of the unified Italian Kingdom.

Similarly, in the Italian version Papele, the oldest of Vito’s employees, protests as the violent intervention of the guards is regarding a woman: before throwing himself into the fight, he exclaims: “Le mani addosso a una donna! Corpo di...”; however, this comment disappears in

110 Indeed, in this respect Benevento suggests that Cognetti, involved in enforcement operations during his service years, might here have drawn inspiration from his own experiences and memories, 231
the Napoletan version. Both the women’s claims that “fresh water is a right” water and the
chivalrous indignation of Papele serve the same purpose, that is, making more acceptable the
resistance to public authority for the national audience of Turin, Florence and Rome; clearly,
such justifications are not needed when addressing the vernacular-speaking audience of Naples,
for which a street riot is a very recent memory, and a ‘natural’ reaction to any display of public
authority.

Furthermore, the whole scene is longer and more detailed in the Napoletan version. In
Italian, the execution of the scene is left to a brief, generic, stage direction, open to the
improvisation of the actors. On the contrary, the actions and lines of each character are fully
detailed in the Napoletan translation, which is enriched by many colourful details:

PAPELE: Le mani addosso a una donna! Corpo di... (fa per linciarsi.
La folla prende pel vicolo a sinistra dello spettatore, urlando, protestando, urtandosi).

DONNA ROSA: Ma c'ha fatto? Vuie pecché mm'vo vulite arrestà?

IL BRIGADIERE: (gridando) Facesse 'o tintore, invece 'è protettore 'e femmene malamente!
DONNA ROSA (gridando): Avite raggione! Avite raggione! Addò sta, sta bona femmena?...
CRISTINA: Madonna mia... (si copre la faccia)
VITO: Iammo ncoppa! Ce voglio veni!
DONNA ROSA (Facendosi largo) Addo' sta? 'A voglio vedè!

IL BRIGADIERE: Indietro! (afferra Vito pel braccio)
VITO Nun avite appaura cca io nun me ne fuio...
Lassateme piglià 'a coppola...

ASSUNTA: Datele 'a coppola... (Gliela portano)

[...]
SUFIA (afferrando una bambinella che grida)
'E chi è sta piccerella? A chi è figlia, sta guaglionia?
UNA VOCE DALLA FOLLA: Nannì, viene a mamma!
DONNA ROSA: Aggia venì pur io!
AMALIA: Iammo, vengo pur io!!...
ANNETIELLO (afferrandola): Tu statte 'o posto tuio...
Far from being unnecessary additions, some of these lines amplify the underlying tensions between the characters. For instance, Donna Rosa supports the police against her own son, immediately blaming the prostitute Cristina for the ensuing riot. Similarly, the scene openly portrays the conflict between Amalia, who immediately launches herself in the turmoil in order to be close to Vito, and her husband Annetiello, who un成功fully tries to control and tame her. At the same time, some details seem to be void of dramaturgical significance and merely functional to a display of pathos and dynamism – which, as we have already seen, are two central elements in Di Giacomo’s choral method of composition. For instance, the presence of a crying child, lost amid the confusion of the riot, is a mere touch of colour, unrelated to the events.

In turn, these tendencies – that is, the greater detail in the interpersonal relations, the greater emphasis on location-specific details and a stronger view of social conflict—are consistent with the corrections of Di Giacomo on the text, documented in Ms. Ba 1b. Once again, the authorial variations affect both the linguistic surface and the dramaturgical structure of the text. Consistently with his role in modernizing and standardizing the orthographic convention for written Neapolitan, Di Giacomo systematically alters the spelling of the manuscripts, eliminating the use of accents to indicate the elision of final syllables and replacing them with more philologically accurate apostrophes. Di Giacomo also eliminates Italian forms that had accidentally been maintained in the first draft, as in the following changes:

chello che vulite > chello ca vulite (Folio 28, verso)
na mala femmena > na femmena malamente (Folio 10, verso)

More importantly, the linguistic corrections show a tendency to the “domestication” of the text. For instance, the author replaces lexical items that are common to Italian and Neapolitan with words that do not have an equivalent in Italian, thus increasing the local flavor of the script. See for instance the following changes, in Act I:

[a] Ass[unta]. Ogne momento nu’ >fatto< <sparpetulo> e’ chiste... (Folio 6, recto)
In addition to being more expressive than “fatto”, “sparpetulo” has not a clear equivalent in standard Italian; the substantive “malauria” and the verb “contà” (with the meaning of ‘telling’) have a direct equivalent (‘malauguri’ and ‘contare’), but they still represent less obvious lexical choices as opposed to ‘cose’ and to ‘parlare,’ two words of broader use. Finally, ‘ncuollo’ (literally meaning ‘on one’s own neck’) is a form widely spread across Southern dialects, which lacks a direct equivalent in Florentine-based literary Italian. As result of these changes, the lexical surface of the script becomes more regionally connoted and variegated. It is worth mentioning that this process is directly opposed to the practice of regionalist writers of prose in Italian, which often selected voices attested both in the Vocabolario della Crusca and in dialectal dictionaries in order to combine the overall “Italianness” of their work with its local flavor: rather than choosing those words and expression that are easily found in both codes, Di Giacomo is here attempting to differentiate his codes.

The author also disseminates subtle references to the material culture of Naples throughout the text. The analyzed manuscript, for instance, documents the genesis of a very effective sequence, which reads as follows in the final version:

RAFELE: Mo nce vo’ o chinino!
DON MARCO: Vatténne, va tigne ‘o cuttone! Isso sape ‘o chinino!
ANNETIELLO (a Don Marco): Nun te ne ncarricà! Addò te vene fatto tu nzagne e miette sanguette.
DON MARCO: ‘O chinino! È asciuto n’ato Cardarelle!
(II Teatro e le Cronahce 20)

In this sequence Don Marco and Rafele, two minor characters, argue about the most effective way of treating Vito’s tuberculosis. While the backward and superstitious barber suggests resorting to leeches, Rafele successfully advocates the cause of modern medicine; however, he inappropriately mentions quinine, which is a common treatment of malaria (and not, clearly, of
tuberculosis). Don Marco, offended and humiliated by the rejection of his old methods, mocks the self-asserted medical competence of Rafele, sarcastically comparing him to Antonio Cardarelli (1831-1927), a prominent figure of the post-unitary Neapolitan society who combined his social and civic engagement with his scientific role as the Chair of Pathology at the University of Naples. As the manuscript documents, the reference to Cardarelli is a later addition to the text:

Marco. 'O chinino! È asciuto n'ato >medico< <Cardarelli>! (folio 6, recto)

The generic reference to a “doctor” turns into a location specific reference: the name of Cardarelli is immediately significant for anyone familiar with Naples and its public sphere. This reference adds a surefire comical effect, while at the same time gesturing at the local tradition of social and humanitarian engagement embodied by the historical figure of Cardarelli.

The stage directions also undergo significant revisions in the manuscript version: Di Giacomo often enriches the stage directions lexical items that emphasize the local colour, consistently with the general tendency already observed in the comparison between the 1889 Bideri edition of Mala vita and the 1920 Carabba edition of ‘O voto.

Finally, several lines become more explicit thanks to the insertion of personal pronouns. These indexical devices help distributing the dramatic action in the space, while also adding an affective element to many lines. See, for instance the following changes:

[a] Si no <mm'> 'o tengo p'offesa.
[b] >Io< <Vuie sapite ca io> v'o dongo co tutto 'o core....
[c] Comme 'e facite --> Comme v'è facite?

The spatial and emotional relations between the characters become more explicit and intense, both for the audience and for the readership of the future printed version: once again, this tendency is consistent with the greater detail of interpersonal relations achieved in the Neapolitan text.
Not all the authorial variants affect the linguistic surface of the texts: some of the changes documented in Ms. B a 1b\(^3\) have a stronger impact on the dramaturgical structure of the play. For instance, long lines are broken and distributed among different characters, thus preventing the choral scenes from becoming slow and static:

Giovan[na] 'E medicine nun so' niente! <Assunta> Ce vo’ ‘a fede. (Folio 9, Recto)

Several scenes are further enriched with the addition of side-sequences, often marked by a pencil annotation reading “riquadri da comporre.” The play becomes a truly choral event: the whole street acts like a close-knit community, not only commenting on the facts but also influencing their final outcome. Once again, these revisions are consistent with the overall translational tendency, privileging group scenes and vivid ensembles.

It is no wonder that, in a play whose central action is the breaking of a sacred vow, one of the main semantic areas is that of religion. Several variants affect this semantic sphere: in particular, many direct invocations to Christ are either eliminated or replaced by the indexical reference to the statue overlooking the scene. Here is a complete list of such changes:

Giesù, Giesù --> On Vi... (Folio 7, recto)
uh Giesù, Giesù... --> uh, mamma mia! (Folio 7, verso)
SUFIA: C’ha fatto s’ha vevuto! >Giesù Giesù!< Vuie vedite ste criature...? (Folio 7, verso)
scanzà, >Cristo ’n croce<, tu n'aie 'e libberà (Folio 8, verso)
Giesù, Giesù... --> mamma mia (Recto carta 11)
ROSA: [...] Ah, >Giesù, Giesù< <(al Cristo) ’O siente? (Folio 14, recto)

The same self-censorship regards to the name of Mary in Act II, where Amalia’s direct invocation is replaced by a periphrasis, possibly to avoid a redundancy or in order to reinforce the emotional strength of her desperate appeal:

Madonna mia > Mamma Addelurata mia, (Folio 27, recto)
Here, in what appears to be a blasphemous reversal of the initial vow made by Vito, Amalia repeatedly turns to a small statue of the Virgin that she keeps on her dresser for comfort and solace: her lustful pleas to her private altar are directly mirroring the public display of devotion made by Vito of the initial scene, and his final corruption takes place under the direct gaze of the Virgin’s statue.

Consistently with this general significance, the entire sequence unfolds under the sign of reversal: the power dynamics between characters are gradually overturned and rewritten throughout Act II. Cristina, who appears bold and victorious in her first showdown with Amalia at the beginning of Act II, appears powerless in the last scene, as she is forced to assist to the reconciliation of the two lovers from outside, under a pouring rain, through the filter of a window. Similarly Vito, who appears to be strong and assertive in his first confrontation with Amalia, is shown as weak and fragile when he finally succumbs to the overwhelming temperament of his lover: his final powerlessness is symbolized by his physical posture, as he is shown literally crawling on the floor. In this context, the elimination or attenuation of religious evocations acquires a very strong significance.

The censorship does not only involve religious exclamations and invocations, but also lexical references to religion, as in the following example:

a chella bona crestiana --> a chella femmena (Folio 14, verso)

In this line, Vito contemptuously refers to Donna Amalia by using the antiphrastic epithet “good Christian,” (a label quite unfit for an adulterine woman). The initial sarcasm of his remark is therefore attenuated in “chella femmena” (that woman).

Whether these eliminations and replacements are motivated by a concern for stylistic variatio or by a censoring drive, this rewriting does not lessen the importance of religious values in the text. In fact, religion is constantly alluded to, mostly through gestures, allusions or as a symbolic force—including the apotheosis of act I and its blasphemous, tragic reversal in Act II. Most importantly, religion lives in the text through the the most “sacred” of all theatrical devices, that is to say, real presence. The lexicalized mention of religion is not eliminated tout court, but
replaced by an indexical device--for instance, Vito pointing to the statue of Christ, which is a central element of the stage décor. See, for instance, the following revision:

ROSA: [...] Ah, Giesù, Giesù <(al Cristo) 'O siente? (Folio 14, recto)

The explicit and somewhat stereotypical invocation “Giesù, Giesù” is replaced by a the character’s direct address to the statue, which does not simply symbolize Christ in an intellectual fashion, but embodies Christ through its live presence—as it is often the case with religious acts. Similarly, when Vito addresses the statue with his vow, his act is one of real transcendence; his promise is a performative speech act, interpreted as such by all the bystanders. The statue thus is character at all effects, casting his silent gaze on the events throughout the play; and in the final scene, he stands up like a frozen stone guest, reminding Vito of the impending final judgment. By eliminating the pathetic colour of the many religious invocations, the revised version therefore emphasizes a profoundly theatrical quality.

7. O’ mese mariano

If Mala Vita/O voto was dominated by the interplay of religion, social denunciation and illness, O’ mese mariano, expands on the same combination of topics. The one-act play, originally adapted from the short story “Senza Vederlo,” tells the tear-jerking story of Carmela Battimelli, an unwed mother who is forced to choose between her love for her first-born, her natural son Peppino, and the chance of restoring her status through a later marriage. The play shows a confused and intimidated Carmela, lost in the “Foucauldian” space of the Real Albergo dei Poveri, where she is hoping to visit her son. Being illiterate and generally wary of authority, Carmela does not realize that her very presence in the Hospice, outside of the times and spaces prescribed for visitation, is a violation of the rules. Carmela wanders off and accidentally enters the administrative office, where she runs into Gennaro, an old acquaintance of hers, who is living at the Hospice and keeps himself busy by running small errands for the employees. The two begin to chat only to be interrupted by the senior officer Don Gaetano, clearly annoyed by the distraction. However, once Gaetano hears Carmela’s story he is moved by her struggle: he thus decides to allow her impromptu visit, against the Hospice’s regulations. As the young boy is
called, a tragic fact is suddenly revealed: Peppino had died the night before due to a sudden outbreak of meningitis. Gaetano cannot bring himself to break the tragic news to the woman, who is now excited for the imminent arrival of her son. A charity nun, Suor Cristina, takes the task upon her: however, instead of telling Carmela the truth, Suor Cristina just convinces her to leave with a feeble excuse. As the two women exit, a visibly shaken Don Gaetano tries to go back to work, struggling to hold back his tears.

The script of 'O mese mariano' was first published in 1890 in the journal Flegrea, rivista di lettere, scienze ed arte. The play was first staged in dialect at the theatre San Ferdinando in Naples ten years later, on January 24, 1900. The debut was shortly followed by additional representations at the Teatro Sannazzaro (also in Naples) and at the Filodrammatico in Milan. In 1910, 'O mese mariano' was adapted into an opera, for which Umberto Giordano composed the music and set the Neapolitan painter Luca Postiglione provided the stage decor. This one-act play was highly praised both by audiences and critics for its lyricism and its emotional intensity. In his profile “Salvatore Di Giacomo,” Croce mentions it as a true masterpiece, alongside 'O voto' (it should be noted that Assunta Spina, the most famous and successful play written by Di Giacomo, had not been yet composed at the time).

The Library Lucchesi Palli in Naples holds two different manuscripts of the play: Manuscript MSS B a I B (10) and Manuscript B a I B (12). The first one, manuscript MSS B a I B (10), is ostensibly the stage manuscript, as the indication “Napoli Gennaio 1900 Teatro San Ferdinando” seems to prove. It does not, however, appear to be autograph and it does not present significant variants. Manuscript B a I B (2), bearing autograph corrections, seems to provide the basis for its first publication: its title page bears the indication “O’ mese mariano, 1900 / Proprietà letteraria dell’Autore/ Depositato alla Prefettura di Napoli. / Prefettura Melfi e Jole. Palazzo Maddaloni. Napoli”).

In addition, the printed version appears in two different published editions, the one printed by the press Melfi & Jole in 1900 and the final version included in Di Giacomo’s collected plays published by Lanciano in 1920. Before providing a detailed comparison with the Italian translation (first published by the Neapolitan press Guida in 1931), I will provide an analytical description of the texts variations—both in the manuscript and in the printed
traditions: in fact, the different authorial changes clearly document the genesis of the text, showing the emergence of an increasing pathetism and its progressive “Neapolitanization.”

Manuscript B² I B, with a total of 34 folios, is an autograph manuscript, presenting several layers of corrections, all handwritten and in ink of different colours (black, green, blue and red). The binding is not entirely consequential, as several folios are re-numbered. This document helps us understanding the direction of the author’s work and his gradual reworking of the text, from the first draft to its final form: in particular, it presents three early drafts of passages in Scene 4 and in the final scene (originally merged in a single scene), alongside their successive rewriting. While these variations do not provide any insight on the self-translational process, they are still interesting as they document the complex genesis of the work.

The variations shown by this manuscript affect the text at all levels—from its linguistic surface to its dramaturgical structure. The linguistic corrections mostly aim at normalizing the orthographic conventions of the script, consistently with Di Giacomo’s normalization of dialect.

Another, much larger, group of variations affects mainly the stage directions: the description of the setting becomes more precise, with the addition of many spatial and iconographic details. In the opening stage direction, for instance (Folio 1, recto, lines 7-9), a long description is added:

due grandi oleografie. Accanto alla scrivania dell'economato il cestino per le carte inutili e una sputacchiera. Una porta a sinistra dello spettatore, tra le scrivanie di Mazzia e di Ferrentino. Una finestra dietro la scrivania dell’economato.

Further additions can be observed in the following variants:

111 The three variants are integrally reproduced in the Appendix to this dissertation.

112 This particular set of variants, however, seems to be quantitatively inferior to those of previously analyzed works, such as ‘O Voto, where Di Giacomo had to homogenize the inconsistent, sometimes erratic, spelling of Goffredo Cognetti.
Other changes affect the motions of the characters on the stage, breaking down their actions and gestures:

<Rientra> Rafele <e> porta l’acqua (Folio 23, numbered 17, line 21)
<e si netta le mani alla tovaglia che cava da un fodero> (Folio 22, numbered 16, verso, line 17)
<(la bambina si avvicina a lei)> (Folio 22, numbered 16, verso, line 20)

Finally, an important set of linguistic variants affects the sociolinguistic dimension of the play, altering the power dynamics among the different characters. In these instances, the author adds revelatory features of the language, mimicking the dialect spoken by the lower classes and differentiating the way in which different characters speak, according to their social condition. A correction (in the same black ink as the body) modifies the line pronounced by Rafele (a poor old man who also lives in the Real Albergo), and his mispronunciation of the brand of matches he is supposed to buy for the officers at the Economato. The correction reads:

'a Baschiera → 'a Vaschiera  (On Folio 3, recto (line 20)

By inserting the lenition (b > v), Di Giacomo renders the line more realistic, imitating the process of phonological adaptation of Italian by a dialectophone speaker. Another stylistic correction occurs in folio 12 (recto; line 4), when in Matalena’s line the dialectal form ‘e sciure’ is corrected in ‘o buché’. (‘Teneva ‘e sciure mmano > Teneva o buché mmano). The word
‘buché’ is a French loanword and—as noted by Mengaldo in his analysis of ‘O funneco verde—an example of realism and “popular language”.

If the previously cited variants affect the linguistic aspect of the text, other changes directly affect the dramaturgical structure of the play, while also changing its overall significance. Several lines are also further articulated with the insertion of vocatives, exclamations, and other incidental phrases, which all lead to a more discursive, less hastened pace. Pauses are also frequently inserted, as a result of these changes, affecting the intonation and the recitative quality.

La suora (dolce) <Ebbene...> Mi lasci fare... (Folio 7, numbered 24, verso line 1)
Comme< <Si sapesse come> (Folio 8, numbered 25, recto, line 20)
lei ha più <maniera... più...> abitudine (Folio 7, numbered 24, verso line 4)
ricurderrebbe <oscellenza> (Folio 23, numbered 17, recto, line 2)
<tu mme capisce...> (Folio 23, numbered 17, recto, line 2)

Thanks to these additions, the dialogue is less schematic and more realistic, reproducing the uncertainties and the self-corrections typical of spoken language. A different correction occurs in Scene 4, when a change in the set of pronouns helps focusing more clearly the power dynamics at work in the scene:

ubberite > ubberisce (Folio 13, line 9)

In this line Don Gennaro, an old acquaintance of Carmela, is trying to convince her to leave the room—thus sheltering her from a painful and shocking discovery. The correction renders the form much more appropriate, since the familiar pronoun “tu” (implied by the second person ‘ubberisce’) seems to portray more accurately the relationship between the two speakers.

113 See, for instance, the following verse from Carmela, a series of three sonnets appearing in Sunette Antiche, where a parvenu is mocked through the reproduction of her language: “Carmela s’ha spusato a nu signore,/ porta cappiello e veste commifò,/ cumanna a cammarera e a servitore,/ e s’è mparata a di’ pure: Oibò!” (“Carmela”, Sonnet I, lines 1-4, Opere I, Poesie e novelle 68). See also earlier, section 3.
Trivial expressions are, at times, replaced by semantically richer idioms, whose metaphorical value enriches the whole linguistic texture of the play. In the following line, for instance, an ordinary expression is replaced by a much more elaborated one:

>facitele pe chi vulite bene<  <puzzate aunnà quanto ô ppane e ô vino> (Folio 19, numbered 9, recto: lines 14-15).

As was the case with ‘O voto, attenuation and censorship are shown in respect to religious references. In the following line, for instance, the mention of blasphemy is replaced by a more vague periphrasis:

>låstemme sempre<  <Tiene sempe chella vocca scostumata>

(Folio 20, numbered 31, recto; lines 1-2)

Finally, as a result of many changes sanctioned by the author, the play becomes more pathetic and emotionally intense. A climatic moment is reached in Scene III, when Carmela recalls the episode in which she was forced to give away her firstborn, against her own will. As her story makes evident, Carmela has been abused twice: the first time by a sexual predator, and the second time by her jealous and judgmental husband. The backstory is essential to understand the plot of ‘O mese mariano and the overly passive, defeatist attitude of Carmela. In particular, the lines in which Carmela recounts the disheartening dialogue between herself and her husband Vicienzo are heavily modified:

1. 2 >(Scuotendo la testa e il busto, atr. napolet.)
1. 17 >Tengo< <Tu saie> 'a >na< cummara
1. 18 Nunziata >. 'O< <? Embé, chella 'o>
1. 20-21 >Se piglia 'o guaglione e<  <E' 'na femmena revulata e affezziunata; 'o guaglione 'o damm'a essa. Essa s’ ‘o tene, e t'o cresce.> (Folio 24, numbered 19, recto)

The following comment by Carmela is also a later addition:
In these lines, Carmela reveals the full extent of her own inner conflict, showing the extent of her passivity and resignation: to her, shame and loss are a normal and almost unavoidable part of life.

Several corrections expand the stage direction, making the characters’ action and attitude more explicit and evident. For instance, the author adds a stage direction \(<(\text{Sorpreso e dispiaciuto})>\), Folio 24, numbered 19, recto) to describe the attitude of Don Gaetano, thus highlighting the emotional participation and the sympathy now surrounding Carmela. Similarly, other additions detail the gestures of Carmela and of the other characters:

1. 13 \>(Cava il fazzoletto)< \<(Pausa)>
1. 24 \<(s'asciuga gli occhi al grembiale)>
\<(sospira) Ah! Signò!>
1. 25 Don Gaet \<(sospirando profondamente)>\) (Folio 24, numbered 20, recto)

Similarly, the lines of the characters become more emotional and pathetic. This is particularly evident in those lines where Carmela is addressing her children—either Peppino (the infant son she was forced to abandon) or Matalena (the legitimate daughter, born later inside the marriage).\(^{114}\) Carmela’s personality thus becomes more nuanced and complex: her humanity as a loving mother is outlined more clearly thanks to these increased displays of affection. Through his subsequent interventions on the text, Di Giacomo gradually elaborates a major tragic character.

\(^{114}\) See for instance the insertion of a diminutive in “Peppinie\(<\text{Ilo mio...}>\)” (Folio 24, numbered 20, recto, line 22). Similarly, Di Giacomo expands the line in which Carmela asks her youngest daughter to go play elsewhere, so that she does not hear the scabrous truth about her oldest brother: “\(>\text{ccà!}\)< \(\text{ccà... Pazzea c'à pupata... N'ata vota nun te porto cchiù!}<>\)” (Folio 8, verso, numbered 26, line 6).
The version of the play documented in manuscript B\textsuperscript{a} I B\textsuperscript{12} considerably differs from the version printed in the 1920 edition of *Tutto il teatro*, sanctioned by Di Giacomo as the last and final version of his collected plays. In particular, three passages appear in a significantly different form.\textsuperscript{115} The first two variations appear on separate folios (respectively folio 9, recto and verso, and folio 9 verso – folio 10 recto), and are rewritten in the current form later in the manuscript (folios 11-15, without any correction). The last variant is not corrected anywhere in the manuscript: it seemingly represents an earlier version of the text, which the author modified at a subsequent time.

The early draft differs from the final version for several reasons: several lines appear in different order, or they are less elaborate and pathetic. For instance, the desperate plea of Carmela (“Essì, doppo nove mise ca nun ‘o veco, vengo ‘ccà ‘a vascio a ‘ll Arco e Cangiane, ‘o signore mme fa fa’ nu core tanto… e ched’è, tuto nzieme: ‘Non lo potete verere. Si appone il revulamento!’ Ah, suora ma’, cheste so’ barbarie!”, *Teatro* 215)\textsuperscript{116} is missing from the first draft.

Also, Carmela sounds more diffident in the first draft: despite her passive frame of mind, she appears at least suspicious of the white lies she is being fed from Suor Cristina and the other bystanders. For instance, initially she does not believe that the children cannot be distracted from their religious functions on a weekday:

\begin{quote}
  **CARMELA:** <Iusto mo!> E perché, neh, suora ma? Ogge è martedì.... (indecisa)

  **LA SUORA:** è il mese mariano, figliuola [...] . (Folio 9, verso).
\end{quote}

This line has seemingly been eliminated, since it does not appear in any of the subsequent versions (whether manuscript or printed). In addition, in manuscript B\textsuperscript{a} I B\textsuperscript{12} stage directions are slightly longer than in the following editions: for instance, the line “La suora si scuote, pare che abbia trovato la ragione per negare ancora”, corresponds to the much shorter, and more enigmatic line “La suora si scuote: il suo volto triste si rischiara,” in all later versions. On the

\textsuperscript{115} The full text of the scenes is reproduced in Appendix I.

\textsuperscript{116} “I haven’t seen him for nine months, and once I come until here, at the Arch of the Cangianos, and the officer here made me believe it… and then, all of a sudden, you can’t just say: ‘You can’t see him. It’s against the rules’. Sister, this is just barbaric!” (My translation)
contrary, other lines appear to be no more than stubs, on which the author has elaborated at a later time. The line “a pregarla per... tutti...”. documented in Manuscript B^a I B (2, is further expanded in “a pregarla… per me… per voi… per tutti…”: Suor Cristina becomes less inflexible and more welcoming, as she implies that everyone is a sinner and in need of greater compassion, including herself.

While these minor changes do not significantly impact the overall meaning of the scene, a bigger semantic change can be observed in the second variation of this early manuscript version, in respect to Suor Cristina’s deception. In the final version of the play, Suor Cristina successfully convinces Carmela that her son is well and alive in the Albergo. In fact, when the mother claims that she did not see him amongst the group of altar boys marching in the courtyard, Matalena, her daughter, claims she has; This, however, did not occur in the first version of the scene, as documented in B^a I B (2):

\begin{verbatim}
CARMELA: M'ha vista? Mi ha vista?
LA SUORA: Si... si... v'avrà vista......
CARMELA: Matalè, l’è visto?
MATALENA: Ni, ma'!.... (scende dalla seggiola).
CARMELA (spiaciuta, emozionata, balbettante): Nun l’aggio visto!... Matalè, tu ll’è visto?.
MADDALENA (scendendo dalla seggiola): Si… mm’è paruto… Teneva nu buché mmano….
DON GENNARO: Isso era!...
(\textit{Il teatro e le cronache} 218).
\end{verbatim}

In the earlier version of the scene, neither Matalena nor Carmela recognize the young boy. This exchange therefore leaves open the possibility that Carmela has, in fact, not been deceived by the nun’s lies, but has simply given up for fear of her authority. Clearly, this different interpretation would modify the overall meaning of the story, whose tragedy lies in the lack of “knowledge” displayed by Carmela in every aspect of her life. The definitive solution chosen by Di Giacomo, with its layer of ambiguity, is therefore more effective and consistent with the overarching narrative of the play.
The order of the lines is also different in B² I B (²) in particular, the important exchange in which Carmela leaves a pastry for her son occurs at an earlier point of the dialogue:

CARMELA: Aspettate... (Caccia la mano in saccoccia; ne cava un pacchetto) Almeno, faciteme 'a carità... quannn'esce... lle date sta sfugliatella... S’è fatta pure fredda!.... (La dà alla suora)  
LA SUORA: Sarà fatto... (La mette sulla scrivania dell’econ)

In the final version, the false promise of Suor Cristina becomes more personal and intense: in fact, the nun promises that she will personally give the gift to the child (“Gliela darò io... non dubiti”, Il teatro e le cronache 221). Furthermore, in the final version this exchange is moved further, almost at the end of the sequence, thus providing a further melodramatic note to the conclusion.

The third major variation affects the formal subdivision of scenes in the final part of the play. In the published version, Scena Ultima – which is an independent scene—begins right after Carmela and Cristina leave the stage; in the earlier draft, documented by B² I B (²), the scene flows without any fracture. This is not a merely typographical difference. In fact, in the first draft the final scene is just a stub, which Di Giacomo later expands and reworks, until the point of turning it into a brief but independent scene:

DON GAET: Mazzì, vuie vulite... continuà...?  
DON GAETANO: Voi... volete continuare quest’esposto?  
MAZZIA: Sissignore... MAZZIA: Come volete voi...  
(Folio 10, verso) (Il teatro e le cronache 222)

In the first draft, Carmela’s exit is the last climatic moment of the scenes. After that scene, there are no more pathetic peaks; the brief stub of dialogue between Don Gaetano and his subordinate marks the character’s anticlimactic return to normality. In the final version, instead, the final inserts another element of pathetism, embodied by Don Gaetano’s shaken and heartbroken attitude. The apathetic and indifferent answer of Mazzia thus creates a stark contrast with the evident distress of Gaetano, powerfully amplifying this last, pathetic note. A linguistic device
further emphasizes Gaetano’s emotions: in the final version of the play, he switches back to Italian in an unsuccessful attempt to return to his ordinary business and to distance himself from the “human document” he has just witnessed. This linguistic nuance is clearly absent in the first draft, where Don Gaetano continues to speak in dialect—as he has done for most of the time since Carmela’s irruption onstage.

Almost none of the manuscript variations significantly affect the meaning of the play or its thematic balance; they rather shows the consistency in the author’s subsequent rounds of creative elaboration. In polishing the first draft of his work, Di Giacomo emphasizes the most pathetic and tear-jerking aspects of his story, using small details to give an accurate insight of the tormented humanity of his characters. The expansion of multiple stage directions, the use of a more varied and realistic vocabulary and the consistent adoption of emotional features such as diminutives all belong to this global strategy, serving the common goal of pathos and emotion.

In addition to the early variations documented by the manuscripts, the author brought minor correction to the text well after its first staging and its first printed edition. This is clearly demonstrated by a rigorous collation of the two printed version—the 1900 version printed by Melfi and Jole and the 1920 edition of ‘O mese mariano in the collected edition of his complete plays printed by Lanciano. The two texts diverge in just 19 loci; all the corrections affect the linguistic and stylistic surface of the text, without significantly affecting the thematic structure of the play. The recorded changes include orthographic variation, such as the changes in the vocalism in “rumoroso” (Ed. Melfi & Jole 11) \( \rightarrow \) “romoroso” (Lanciano 220) and in “n’atu mese” (M&J 11) \( \rightarrow \) “n’atu mese” (Lanciano 221), and the different consonant in “sordo” (Ed. Melfi & Jole 10) \( \rightarrow \) “soldo” (Lanciano 219), a change that is repeated several times throughout the text. Other changes affect the phonological conventions in reproducing the oral pronunciation of Neapolitan, which Di Giacomo normalizes, consistently with his orthographic reform (see, for instance, the adoption of a double consonant in “mm’o vuò proiere”, Lanciano 219). A lexical variant can be seen in Ed. Melfi & Jole 12 (Lanciano 222), where “pappa” replaces “magna;” the following line, instead, shows morphological variation:

**LA SUORA:** Oh no! Ma lei è tanto buonina!

**CARMELA** *(RIDENDO)*: Buonina! ... Lei site buonina! (fa per baciarle la mano: la Suora, invece, l'abbraccia). *(Il teatro e le cronache 259)*
In this line, the author exploits the geographical variation between ‘lei’ and ‘voi,’ the two regionally marked prestige forms of the pronominal system. While “voi” is the customary form in Neapolitan, the Spanish-influenced form ‘Lei’ prevails in Tuscan and in the Northern dialects since the Fifteenth century, as Gerald Rohlfs points out in his Grammatica Storica della lingua italiana e dei suoi dialetti (Morfologia 183). However, the form “lei siete buonina,” with its syntactical inconsistency between subject and verb, mirrors above all the lack of competence of popular speakers in using the courtesy forms of the second-person pronoun. The use of ‘lei’, displayed by the affected speech of Suor Cristina, is confusing for Carmela, who tries unsuccessfully to accommodate her interlocutor but fails to master the new form. The Melfi-Jole version normalized this line in “vuie site buonina” (30), correcting the grammatical inconsistency; on the contrary, the Lanciano version reads “Buonina!... Lei site buonina!” (259), consistently with the early draft documented in manuscript B\(^A\) I B\(^2\). An excessive normalization is therefore reversed in the final editing of the text, perhaps preserving the markedness of a “symptomatic” mistake from the excessive zeal of a corrector. Once again, this detail reveals Di Giacomo’s ongoing attention to the internal variation of his own written dialect, while also confirming his sensitivity to the language spoken by the lowest classes.

Such linguistic realism is clearly lost in the Italian translation Il mese mariano, first published in 1931 by the Neapolitan publisher Guida. In fact, the Italian translation is dominated by the concern for equivalence in the target-language, and therefore confirms the tendency to “domestication” encountered so far in the author’s self-translations.

The main translational tendencies at stakes can be summarized as follows: *attenuation* (which encompasses both the censorship of particularly scabrous expressions and the attenuation of moral and interpersonal conflicts shaping the play); *equivalence* and *compensation* (especially for location-specific referents, and sometimes combined together); and, finally, the loss of many markers of socio-linguistic variation, with a consequent loss of social and linguistic realism.

In the Italian translation, the tensions between the different officers are often attenuated: for instance, the insolence of Raffaele and Ferrentino/Varriale loses its edge; so does the hypocrisy of Gennaro, who constantly reports petty office gossip to Don Gaetano just to be entertained by his consequent outbursts of rage. This attenuation derives from the suppression (or
shortening) of many lines. As in the previously examined cases of ‘O buono marito and ‘O voto, we are also faced with a recurrent tendency to semantic attenuation, clearly displayed in the following examples:

**DON GAETANO**: Ha detto così il signor economo: Quanto site porpetta! (221)

**DON GAETANO**: Dice il signor economo: Quanto siete buffo!... Buffo, sì!... (15-16)

**DON GAETANO**: Mo’, don Euge’! ’O bbedite ca sto facenno ’o spezziale!... (222)

**DON GAETANO**: Un momento, don Eugenio! Sto Parlando!... Un momento!... (16)

**GENNARO**: Che fa? Tene sempe chella vocca scustumata comm'a primma? (227)

**DON GENNARO**: Che fa? Le dice sempre così grosse? Ah, che belle male parole che diceva! (23)

Consistently with semantic attenuation, several lines present an artificial stylistic ennoblement, especially due to the lexical choices of the (self-)translator. See, for instance, the change in the verbs and nouns in the following example:

**MAZZIA**: Cavalie’, vogliamo *fini* sta *lettera*? (222)

**MAZZIA** (a Don Gaetano, con la penna levata): Cavaliere?... Vogliamo *terminare* l’esposto?... (16. My emphasis)

Although it would have been technically possible to translate the sentence by using the common words ‘finire’ and ‘lettera’, the author switches to a more formal and specific register, perhaps echoing the bureaucratic nature of the portrayed environment.

The strategies of equivalence and compensation are especially adopted in respect to geographically specific references, to places, referents or habits. An example of this is showed by the two following passages, linked by a common strategy of semantic recuperation and compensation:
DON GENNARO: Teh! Viene vide che se vede 'a ccà ncoppa! (244)

DON GENNARO: Qua Ponterusse?
Chillo è 'o Maciello! E iene mente 'a ccà... a mmano deritta.... “A vide chella cupola? (seguitano a parlare alla finestra) (244)

DON GENNARO: Ma che Ponterosso! Quello è il macello, ove s'ammazzano gli animali! E guarda più in là... la vedi quella cupola? È la chiesa del Carmine...

CARMELA: Sì... sì! Guarda, Maddalena! Il Carmine! (46)

In the second exchange, Gennaro shows Maddalena the panoramic view of Naples, accessible from the top floors of the Real Albergo dei Poveri. In his line, he points to several locations in Naples, such as the Macello (mistakenly identified for another really existing location, Ponterosso, by his interlocutor). These specific references are clearly lost in the translation, and emphasized through explanatory clauses such as “dove si ammazzano gli animali” or “è la chiesa del carmine.” However, the generic mention of a slaughterhouse and a church clearly fail to evoke any specific image of Naples to an audience unfamiliar with its topography. In order to recuperate the local flavor of the scene, the author inserts a trivial reference to the Vesuvius in an earlier line by Gennaro, citing a landmark that virtually anyone in the country could associate to Naples.

Similarly, the culturally specific reference to the game of lotto is emphasized and made more explicit in the Italian translation:

DON GAETANO (mentre Varriale e Ferrentino mangiano e ridono)
Mo' dicite pure e ched'è?! Volete sapere che cosa è? Adesso ve lo dico io. È ca quanno vene 'o sabbato, figlio mio, vuie 'a capa nun 'a tenite cchiù ncapo!

DON GAETANO (bonario ma seccato, mentre Ferrentino e Varriale mangiano e ridono): Dite anche “Come”?
MAZZIA (imbrogliato) Ma... non so come è successo...

DON GAETANO: Lo volete sapere? Be’... ve lo spiego io. Che giorno è oggi? Sabato, non è vero.
MAZZIA (mortificato e seccato)  
Abbiate pazienza... Che ce vulite fa? Me so nu poco stunato...  
DON GAETANO: E nu' ve stunate!  
Sia fatto il volere di Dio! (OMM 214)  
N/A.

MAZZIA (mortificato)  
Cavaliere... ma è da un pezzo che non metto più al lotto...

DON GAETANO (sorridente)  
Questo non mi riguarda. E ora? Come s'aggiusta?

MAZZIA (premuroso)  
Subito, s'aggiusta...

DON GAETANO: Oh, benedetto Dio!

(IMM 5-6)

In the Neapolitan version the dialogue is shorter and more allusive: anyone familiar with the city and its habits would instantly grasp the connection between Saturdays and the game of lotto, a connection that is not immediately evident to a different audience. The author thus makes this connection more explicit by adding a new exchange of lines (b), which explicitly mentions the game and also serves the secondary purpose of showing Gaetano’s paternalistic attitude.

Equivalence strategies are often used when treating material referents from everyday life: for instance, the “aulive ‘e Gaeta” is rendered with “olive siciliane,” and so forth. A particularly significant case is the translation of “pizza,” perhaps the most successful loanword ever transferred from Neapolitan into Italian—and one of the most known Italianisms internationally:

Ccà stanno ’e ppizze! (213)  
Le focacce son qua! (3)

Cavaliè, doie pezzelle aglio e uoglio...  
Son calde, cavaliere! (4)
When he does not eliminate the word altogether, Di Giacomo chooses to translate both “ppizze” and “pezzelle” with their generic, non-culturally specific hyperonym “focaccia.” The current fortune of the term ‘pizza’ should not trick the twenty-first-century reader into an anachronistic reading of these passage: in fact, the translational choice is widely documented in the lexicography of the time. In their monograph ‘*I te vurria parlà: Storia linguistica della Campania*, De Blasi, Bianchi and Librandi note that Francesco de Domenico, in his *Vocabolario Napolitano Italiano ad uso delle scuole e del comune e della provincia di Napoli*, also translates or comments common expressions such as “‘o taralluc ce’ (la ciambellina), “‘o taralluce c’o zucchere (‘la ciambella’)” and “a pizze (‘la pizza, la focaccia, la schiacciata’)” (Bianchi-De Blasi- Imperatore 161). Long before its adoption in the lexicon of unified Italian, the word “pizza” did sound exotic to a national audience, and had to be paraphrased, translated, or at the very least explained.

If equivalence and compensation mark the translation of culturally specific referents, a different course of action is followed for the sociolinguistic variations of the text, which play an important role in the characters’ depiction. Both in the Neapolitan and the Italian version, different characters show different levels in linguistic competence: this serves as a token of their different social status, while providing the source for several puns and comical scenes. The translator strives to maintain the comical aspect through the use of equivalence strategies; however, the realistic characterization of their language use is often lost.

For instance, the mispronunciation of the Latin expression *requiescat in pacem* as ‘requia schiatta’ is left unaltered: “Carmela: è morto, poverino! Requia schiatta in pace.” (23). Similarly,
Raffaele’s mispronunciation of the popular brand ‘La Baschiera’ is emphasized and turned into a forced pun:

VARRIALE: ‘Na scatuletta ’e cerine La Baschiera... Te ricuorde?  

VARRIALE: Una scatola di cerini La Baschiera...  
RAFFAELE: La Pasquiera. Va bene. (7)

The pun (based on the vague assonance between Baschiera and “Pasqua”, Easter) is repeated a few lines later, as to ensure that the audience will correctly grasp it:

VARRIALE: Duie mieze tuscan... chille ca so’ asciute mò... (215)  
VARRIALE: (A Raffaele) Due mezzi toscani...  
RAFFAELE: È una scatola La Pasquiera. Va bene.  
VARRIALE: La Ba-schie-ra!  
RAFFAELE: La Pa-squie-ra! (7)

Similarly, when later in the text Don Gennaro equivocates the word ‘degenerato’ [degenerated] for ‘generale’ [general], the pun is repeated verbatim in the Italian version:

DON GAETANO: Eh!... Un vero degenerato ubriacone...  
DON GENNARO: ‘O vero generale d’e mbriacune, mo dicite buono! (238)

On the contrary, another important textual feature is lost in the process: the frequent use of code-switching between Italian and Neapolitan, in both direction. This change is particularly relevant, since the use of code-switching has a much greater role in ‘O mese mariano than in other plays of Di Giacomo.

Code-switching appears in the text to highlight the social tensions and the power unbalances that underlie in the dramatic structure. Socially inferior characters such as Gennaro and Carmela are confined to the limited horizons of dialect: their Italian is clumsy, forced and often incorrect (as highlighted by the many grammatical puns), closer to an interlanguage than to the actual forms of italiano regionale. Suor Cristina, who was educated in a convent and—
presumably—far from worldliness, is equally limited in her proficiency, since she has a merely passive understanding of Neapolitan. On the contrary, bureaucrats like Don Gaetano are proficient both in Neapolitan and in Italian. They can easily move across registers and style, selecting the most appropriate code for each situation: they speak in Neapolitan when buying a slice of pizza from a close-by street vendor, but they can manage their official communications in Italian.

Dialect is also used in highly emotional contexts: for instance, Don Gaetano switches to Neapolitan when he hears unflattering remarks about his productivity, allegedly coming from the mouth of a superior; he also switches to dialect in accommodating his interlocutor Carmela, in what Auer has defined *participant-based* code-switching. Don Gaetano constantly switches code throughout the play: he acts like a highly skilled mediator between the world of the street—embodied by Carmela—and the world of the institution, of which he is a direct member and a cultural ambassador. Gaetano’s lines show both instances of *interphrasal* and *intraphasal* (that is, code-switching between different sentences or within the same sentence), and is both participant-related and content-related. The following quotations provide an inventory of these different types of code-switching:

[a] DON GAETANO: E nu’ ve stunate! Sia fatto il volere di Dio! (215)

[b] DON GAETANO: E stu fatto comme se spieca? Vostro marito si chiama Battimelli e vostro figlio si chiama Esposito? (230)

[c] Ha detto così il signor economo: Quanto site porpetta! (221)

[d] DON GAETANO (mangiando) Dunque... ditemi na cosa... Voi vorreste vedere vostro figlio? (a Raffaele) Rafè, st'aulive nun banno niente!  
RAFELE: Comme, cavalie! Aulive 'e Gaeta (233-234).

Examples [a] and [b] are clear examples of content-related, intraphrasal CS: the speaker signals a change in attitude and tone by switching to Italian, respectively in the context of a religious exclamation (“Sia fatto il volere di Dio”) and of a matter-of-fact statement (“Vostro marito si
chiama Battimelli e Vostro figlio si chiama Esposito”). Example [c] is a classic example of citational code-switching, accompanying an instance of simulated direct discourse. Finally, example [d] shows a very clear use of participant-related code-switching: the author uses different codes to select different speakers (Italian in addressing Carmela, and dialect in commenting the poor quality of his meal).

Towards the end of the play, his use of code-switching is especially charged with emotional values: Don Gaetano, who had progressively showed sympathy and comprehension towards Carmela, suddenly switches back to Italian, in a desperate attempt to distance himself from the incumbent tragedy:

**DON GAETANO** *imbarazzato* Ma... figlia mia... Io poi chi sono? … C'è il soprintendente... (254)

Code-switching from Neapolitan into Italian is mostly found in Carmela’s lines, although occasionally. It mostly appears as *citational code-switching* or as part of an accommodation strategy (that is, when the woman attempts to imitate the pronunciation of her interlocutor, identified with a higher level of social prestige). Of course, this results in grammatical puns, *qui-pro-quos* of various nature and downright mistakes, all reflective of Carmela’s limited proficiency:

[a] **CARMELA**: No! No!... (*quasi disperandosi*) Essì, doppo nove mise ca nun ’o veco, vengo ccà ’a vascio a ll'arco d'è Cangiane, ’o signore mme fa fa nu core tanto... e ched'è... tutto nzieme: “Non lo potere verere... Si appone il revulamento!” Ah, suora ma' cheste so' barbarie! … (*quasi piangendo*) (254)

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117 Indeed, her limited proficiency in Italian could suggest that her lines are better served by the concurrent label of Code-Mixing, defined by Poplack as the blend of two linguistic codes where the two languages are not easily distinguishable, but rather mixed together inconsistently.
[b] CARMELA: Chi, io? So benuta a truvà Peppeniello... V'o ricurdate? Chillo piccerillo ca ve cunzignaie m mano a bb uie, int'a l'Asile infantino... (250)

The former example displays a partial phonological adaptation (‘si appone’ and ‘revulamento’), whereas the latter displays a morphological interference (with the creation of a non-existent word, ‘infantino,’ based on analogy).

Language variation is especially pivotal in Scene IV, when Carmela is facing the oppositions of the clerks, preventing her both physically and metaphorically from seeing her son (quite literally: the characters line up in front of the window, prevent her from properly seeing the children’s cortege and realizing her son is not, in fact, part of the procession). If Carmela and Don Gaetano are “cooperative” speakers, who frequently switch code to replicate or accommodate their interlocutor’s selection, Carmela and Suor Cristina instead face each other from opposite shores of language, each sticking to her code like a virtuoso to his/her own instrument. In particular, while Carmela struggles to overcome her linguistic and social limitations through some failed attempts at speaking Italian, Suor Cristina speaks Italian as a native speaker. Her Italian is therefore artificial and normative, heavily relying on literary models: she speaks “by the book”, come un libro stampato: quite literally, her language is perceived as foreign:

CARMELA: Dicite... A me quanto mme piace 'e ve sentì parlà! Si sapisse ve comme ve dice bello stu trascurzo francese catenite!... Dicite... (TT 249)

CARMELA: Dite, dite!... Quanto mi piace di sentirvi parlare! E come vi sta bene, questa pronunzia francese che avete!... Dite, dite.... (IMM 48)

The linguistic contrast seemingly echoes the social and moral distance between the two characters and their opposite life choices: the “pure” language of Suor Cristina, with its “trascurzo francese,” seemingly alludes to her chastity, while linguistic and social lack of status merge and often overlap in Carmela. Code-switching, appearing both as both participant-related and content-related, is an important linguistic feature of the play, allowing the author to express the tensions between the characters and their power unbalances. More importantly, code here
exists both in its sociolinguistic aspect (i.e. as an indicator of prestige) and in its metaphorical value (especially in the contrast between the two female characters of Carmela and Cristina in Scene 4). In particular, while Dialect is the language of familiarity (including the jokes and the tensions among the office workers) and of empathy, Italian comes to Carmela as the language of cold bureaucracy and power abuse, no matter how hard Suor Cristina tries to imbue it with the accents of religious devotion and piety.

8. The Multiple Lives of Assunta Spina

*Assunta Spina*, commonly considered Di Giacomo’s theatrical masterpiece, was first staged on March 27, 1909 at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples. The representations continued without interruptions for over two months until May 29, and the play was so successful that the author started immediately working to its operatic adaptation.¹¹⁸

The two-act play revolves around a central trope, a crime of passion. The first act opens in the courtroom, as the hearing for a trial begins. The victim, Assunta, had her face gashed by her violent-tempered lover, Michele Boccadifucoco, who is now standing on trial. Due to his criminal record, he is convicted even after Assunta agrees to drop charges; more importantly, he is to be imprisoned not in Naples but in the nearby town of Benevento. As Assunta cries inconsolably in the hall, Federigo Fumelli, an officer of the courtroom, intervenes and promises to avoid the transfer in return for Assunta’s favors. After a moment of hesitation, Assunta follows him out of the court, and it is hinted that the two begin a sexual relationship. The second act takes place almost two years after the imprisonment of Michele. Federigo has kept his promise, not only preventing Michele’s transfer to another facility, but also easing his life in prison. Assunta, however, is now in love with Federigo and fears the release of her former lover. As Michele’s term approaches its end, Federigo resolves to terminate the affair. Feeling

¹¹⁸ The original cast of the performing company (Compagnia Molinari) included Adelina Magnetti (as Assunta Spina), Enrico Allevi (Don Michele), and Maria del Giudice (Donna Emilia). Francesca Berti, who was later to achieve fame as the star of the 1915 cinematic adaptation, played a minor role in the original cast, starring as one of the employees at Assunta’s laundry. Influential personalities of the culture of the time attended the première at the Teatro Nuovo: Marco Praga, Domenico Oliva, Benedetto Croce, Carlo Vossler, Riccardo Ricciardi were among in the audience (Iermano, *Il malinconico* 199).
desperate and abandoned, Assunta tries to lure him back on Christmas’ Eve, but her plans are disrupted by the sudden arrival of Michele, who has been released two days early. As Assunta unwillingly welcomes him, an oblivious Michele keeps praising Federigo for his loyalty and help; eventually, he mentions in conversation the existence of Federigo’s wife, effectively revealing that the corrupted officer is leading a double life. Blinded by rage and despair, Assunta finally confesses the truth to Michele, manipulating him into stabbing her new lover to death. After the murder, Michele runs away to avoid capture. In the final scene, two carabinieri arrive on the premises and Assunta takes the blame for the murder.

The play derives its theme and main character from the short story of the same title, first published in 1888 and later collected in Mattinate Napolitane. There are, however, significant differences between the two plots. In the short story, Assunta is married to Ferdinando, an honest, hardworking bricklayer, who has always patiently tolerated her escapades and infidelities. While in the play Michele Boccadifuoco is the perfect embodiment of a violent and choleric ‘guappo,’ the murder committed by Ferdinando appears as the sudden outburst of a long repressed rage. Indeed, both the quick-tempered Michele and the silently fuming Ferdinando represent two recurring character typologies in the Southern regionalist drama and fiction: on the one hand the geloso (the silent and honest fellow whose passion uncontrollably explodes); on the other hand the guappo (or mafioso), who displays a violent temper to intimidate others, and who arrogantly claims his rights on all women regardless of their availability.

For instance, these contrasting temperaments are sketched in Cavalleria Rusticana, the masterpiece of Verist theatre which provided a thematic and stylistic model for many dialectal and bilingual plays in the 1890s and 1900s. Similarly, the contrasting personalities of Nino and Cola in Capuana’s Malìa reflect these two opposite character typologies. Rather than completely rewriting the character of Vincenzo, Di Giacomo is thus transitioning from one typology to another, consistently with the overall themes of his drama.

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119 At the beginning of the story Assunta melodrammatically affirms: “Io lo so che meriterei d’esser bruciata viva, là in quel larghetto, in una botte di pece, per quello che ho fatto a Ferdinando mio, che m’ha perdonato cinque volte, come le dita della mano...” (Le poesie e le novelle 900).
The play expands the material of the short story in order to depict the Neapolitan underworld: Act I, in particular, is entirely set in the courtroom and is dominated by a crowd of different characters, including members of organized crime, courtroom officers, peddlers, other convicts and their families. The adaptation process thus follows two contradictory tendencies, a focus on the individual and a focus on the crowd. On the one hand, the play maintains the focus on the magnetic and domineering personality of its eponym heroine, Assunta Spina, whose desires and motives are often unspoken and contradictory. In this respect, Di Giacomo’s original narrative sketch is heavily indebted to the tradition of the character study, represented for instance by d’Annunzio’s novel *Giovanni Episcopo*, whose morbid introspection perfectly resonates with the blinding passions of Assunta and Michele. On the other hand, Di Giacomo follows the visual principle of chorality, favouring group scenes over monologues and revealing moments of intimacy, and often pausing the central narrative to indulge in portraying minor and secondary characters.

The first act, largely drawing upon Di Giacomo’s personal experience as a courtroom reporter in the 1880s, is a perfect embodiment of the latter tendency: the human tragedy of Assunta and Michele unfolds against a very noisy background, amongst annoyed and bored officers, fellow convicts and even a few sprinkles of what Flora dismisses as stereotypical humour. In addition to providing picturesque elements and occasional comedic relief, the banter of the secondary characters Sgueglia and Martino and the sudden arrival of Donna Emilia (Assunta’s neighbor and confidante) also serve the essential purpose of illuminating a demi-monde laced with moral and economic corruption: in such a universe, interested and temporary liaisons normally take the place of familiar and affective relationships, thus providing a convincing background for the individual tragedy of Assunta.

Similarly, Act II begins in the laundry shop owned by Assunta: here, an intense choral scene features a group of female workers and two Carabinieri. The dialogue alternates moments of vivid realism (mostly in the launderers’ lively conversation) and lofty peaks of lyricism (such as the soliloque of Flaminio, one of the young Carabinieri entering the shop, who fondly

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120 “Nei drammi è qualche concessione al pubblico teatrale, qualche battuta di facile umorismo ottenuta sugli spropositi di pronuncia e sugli equivoci degli’ignoranti, qualche tirata a effetto [...] , qualche accento caricaturale da parte di Donna Emilia a vammana, e così via” (*Nuova lettura delle poesie e delle opere* 40).
describes the peaceful atmosphere of Christmas’ eve in his hometown Sulmona). Several registers thus interplay in the adapted play Assunta Spina: psychological realism coexists with the realistic depiction of the local underworld, punctuated by isolated moments of comedic relief and by rare lyrical peaks. This lack of unity did not escape the attention of critics such as Aurelio Benevento, who noted that “Il dramma nel suo insieme difetta di organicità, [...] oscillante tra i grandi personaggi di Verga e Dostoevskij e la figura di una piccola ‘Carmen da stiratoria’.” (Napoli in dialetto e lingua 75).¹²¹

Not only did Di Giacomo adapt creatively the powerful character of Assunta Spina for the stage; he also recombined a handful of themes and tropes recurrent in his entire production, and especially in ‘O voto/Il voto. For instance, Assunta’s failed attempt at winning Federigo back overturns Amalia’s successful seduction scene in ‘O voto; similarly, Michele’s innocent and unaware revelation closely recalls the spiteful and contemptuous lines in which Annetiello willfully informs her wife of Vito’s imminent marriage. More importantly, the powerful character of Assunta resonates with the manipulative and contradictory psychology of Donna Amalia, consistently with the author’s view of love as a binding obsession.

Another recurrent motive that spans across Di Giacomo’s entire oeuvre is the “sfregio,” a violent practice previously represented in countless narrative and poetic works, from the short story “Sfregio” (Opere I, Poesie e Novelle 719-726), to the poem of the same title (“Sfregio”), originally included in Sunette Antiche: “Ha tagliata la faccia a Peppenella / Gennareniello de la Sanità; / che rasulata! Mo la puvarella,/ mo proprio è stata a farese medicà” (Opere I, Poesie e Novelle 67). A possible ‘non-fictional’ origin for these representations can be found in “Amore allo spedale,” a short chronicle collected in Scritti inediti e rari. In this piece, the author does not focus on the judiciary ordeal of the perpetrator, but rather on the victim who is convalescent at the local Spedale. The piece seems to offer a starting point for all the future narrative developments of this theme. In fact, Teresa Petringolo, the non-fictional launderess of the Vomero who had her face slashed by a jealous lover, shares the same behaviours as Peppenella or Assunta, including her stubborn refusal to denounce her aggressor: “Questa donne napoletane,

è conosciuto, non rivelano mai il nome del loro sfregiatore,” comments Di Giacomo (*Scritti inediti e rari* 83). The succession of this chronicle and of three fictional works, developing a common set of motives across different genres, seems to reveal the author’s underlying inclination for adaptation and rewriting through different media and conventions.

The same aesthetic pursuit orients the 1915 filmic adaptation of *Assunta Spina*—an international success that became an exemplary text of cinematic Verism and launched one of the first divas of Italian silent film, Francesca Berti. The cinematic adaptation continues the aesthetic tendencies of the page-to-stage adaptation: Di Giacomo further expands on the background story of the characters, exploring their possible motivations. To this effect, in the cinematic script he introduces us to the figure of Rafele, a previous lover of Assunta Spina who keeps lingering in the background, suggesting an actual reason for Michele’s jealousy. Similarly, the cinematic script insists and magnifies the choral scenes so prominently featured in the play: in addition to the chorus of female workers in Assunta shop, the cinematic version also represents a group of fishermen and net makers spotted by the characters on a day-trip to Piedigrotta and a group of female by-standers commenting Michele’s aggression. The continuity between the page-to-stage and the stage-to-screen adaptation should not appear surprising in the context of the silent Italian film, which, as Francesca Gatta notes in her *Il teatro al cinema*, chose its themes, models and linguistic repertoires from the theatre of the late nineteenth-century: “accanto a Pirandello, figurano i testi della ‘cosiddetta piccolo drammaturgia italiana,’ cioè di Torelli, di Giacometti, di Praga e di Giacosa, […] una scelta […] coerente con la tendenza diffusa della cinematografia italiana ad avere come riferimento la società borghese ottocentesca’.

When compared with this rich gallery of rewritings and trans-medial adaptations, the Italian translation of *Assunta Spina* stands out for its fidelity and strict literalism. The Italian version of the play was first represented in 1928, many years after its première in dialect (1909) and over a decade after its cinematic adaptation (1915). As the reviews of the time highlight, both the staging and the translation were oriented towards the recreation of “regionalism”—albeit

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cleansed from any linguistic abnormality, and rigorously composed in standard Italian. Therefore, ‘domestication’ goes hand in hand with normalization, in the attempt to create an illusion of regionalism without dialect.

This is especially evident in the review by Renato Simoni, a trendsetting critic of the time: “La spontaneità propria delle commedie dialettali fu raggiunta, e si poterono, oltre ad essa, ammirare la finezza della precisione, la varietà nell'unisono, una bellezza rara di movimenti, di atteggiamenti, di gruppi, di intrecci di voci, di pittoresca verità regionale, nelle trucature, nelle intonazioni e nell'espressione dei caratteri e delle innumerevoli macchiette”. (12) In particular, Simoni identifies regional identity and the representation of the crowd, as opposed to the depth of individual psychological exploration:

Ma a dir “rappresentazione italiana” s'affermà cosa inesatta. Assunta Spina è rimasta mirabilmente napoletana, non solo nello spirito, ma anche nel linguaggio: e sarebbe un errore allontanare le parole dalla bocca del popolo per il quale furono scritte; ché Assunta Spina, più che il dramma di una donna, è una commedia e una tragedia di folla. Dalla folla si isola a poco a poco la protagonista; ma di questa folla assume l'appassionata fierezza e il vendicativo sentimento di giustizia. Ella è la nota più acuta di un complesso vocio di popolo; è il grido di spasimo che rompe su dal corale magnifico della vita partenopea. (Simoni 11)

The textual analysis confirms this overall impression of “domestication” and, to some extent, ‘normalization,’ evident in the recurrent tendencies to literalism, semantic attenuation, and paraphrase or reformulation.

The translation is dominated by literalism: unlike previously analyzed examples, it does not show any dramaturgical interventions (such as elimination or merging of scenes, of lines, of roles). Examples of loanwords and strict literalism can be seen in the following lines:

AVVOCATO 2 (stretta di mano): Oh! AVVOCATO 2 (stretta di mano): Oh!
Carissimo! Dunque? C'è motivo? Carissimo! Dunque? C'è motivo?
AVVOCATO 1. Altro! Ce ne stanno dduie. Siamo a cavallo! (172)

TORELLI: Guagliò! Si afflittivo, sai!... (172)

NANNINA: Io nun pozzo passà! (172)

FEDERIGO: (atto di sprezzo) Nucchiù? (173)

Similarly, in the following lines, colourful idioms are translated literally in Italian, without any attempt at equivalence:

SGUEGLIA (…) (Mannaggia chi nun te spara a te e figlieto!) (191)

TITTARIELLO: Chi? Chella pare 'a Vergene d'e sette spate! (235)

Attenuation is mostly employed, as usual, for referents pertaining to the religious world, or expression that might offend the audience sensibility, as in the following example, where the ironic comment “Essì! S’è aperta ‘a cappella!” (“They have opened the chapel”) is eliminated from the translation:

CONCETTA: Uh mamma della Libera! Lo metto nelle tue mani miracolose!

Avummaria e grazia plena! E dominus teche! (Borbotta) E nunche et in ore...

FILOMENA E FORTUNELLA (commosse) – E mortissi nostri!...

Torelli (levandosi seccatissimo) E ammenne! Essì! S’è aperta ‘a cappella! Ma scusate, questa nun è a maniera! Cè
Albeit to a lesser extent than ‘O mese mariano, Assunta Spina is also characterized by use of mimicry and linguistic parody, oftentimes for comic purposes. For instance, in Act II, Di Giacomo introduces two elements of multilingualism, with the insertion of two parts in other Italo-Romance dialects, Sicilian and Abruzzese (respectively spoken by the two carabinieri, the lyrical and pensive Flaminio and the loud and brash Marcuso). Far from being a mere linguistic extravagance, the use of dialects other than Neapolitan can be explained with intertextuality. In particular, the choice of Abruzzese dialect is a nod to Gabriele d’Annunzio, whose work La figlia di Iorio (1904) had created a strong identification between the literary representation of Abruzzese settings and lyricism. Di Giacomo put extra care in these lines, soliciting the advice of Giuseppe Mezzanotte to check their linguistic accuracy.  

The Italian translation mimicks the linguistic difference in various ways, perfectly synthetized by the following passage:

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\begin{align*}
\text{MARCUSO (alzandosi, a Marcello)} &\quad \text{MARCUSO (alzandosi, a Marcello)} \\
\text{Amunini, và (salutando Rachele) Ossia} &\quad \text{Andiamo, su. (salutando Rachele) Vossia,} \\
\text{benedica! (Poi alle altre) Picciotte, buono} &\quad \text{benedica. (alle ragazze) Ragazze, picciotte,} \\
\text{Natale! (a Marcello) 'I cuddari 'i} &\quad \text{buon Natale! (A Marcello) I colletti li hai} \\
\text{pigghiasti? (252)} &\quad \text{presi? (26)}
\end{align*}
\]

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123 See the letter sent to Giuseppe Mezzanotte on February 14, 1909: “Caro Peppino, mandami a volta di corriere la traduzione in abruzzese della frase che accludo. In una bottega di stiratoria una guardia di P.S. di Pescara parla, - ingenuo un po' primitivo e poetico - , alle stiratrici le quali, mentre alla vigilia di Natale si odono fuori le zampogne (a Napoli) gli domandano del Natale del suo paese, per irridere. Se ti pare aggiungi: io voglio dare un personaggio abruzzese quasi poetico in un momento drammatico. In un dialetto intelligibile con gli accenti sulle gravi e le acute (...). In fretta ti ringrazio. Sto per finire il dramma 'Assunta Spina' fra i dolori di casa e tante mie preoccupazioni. Augurami forza.” (L.P. Mss. Di Giacomo. B.a. III. A126)
The translation of this line combines different strategies, ranging from literal translation (“Andiamo, su”), loanwords with phonological adaptation (‘Ossia > Vossia”), and the use of a widely known Sicilianism (‘picciotte’); finally, while the morphological anomaly of “Buono Natale” is lost in the translation, the Italian text reproduces the marked syntactical order of the final sentence, typical of Sicilian dialect.

Contradictory tendencies are used for translating the lines of Donn’Emilia, a morally shady and socially ambitious character whose hybrid language provides the most consistent source of grammatical humour. The following lines reflect these contradictory translation strategies:

DONN’EMILIA (a Pesce) Aspettate! Ma lei avete cantato all'Eden? (208)

DONN’EMILIA (a Pesce) – Aspettate! Ma voi avete cantato all'Eden? (19)

DONN’EMILIA (…) Vulite nu poco ’e ciucculata Sciusciarre? (209)

DONN’EMILIA: (…) Volete un poco di cioccolata «Sciusciarre»? (19)

The missed agreement “lei avete cantato” – which, as it was seen in the previous section, is a sociolinguistic marker—124—is lost in the Italian version; however, the author strives to maintain the comical effect deriving from the incorrect pronunciation of “Suchard,” phonologically adapted in Sciusciarre.125

Also frequent are cases of explanatory paraphrases, allowing the author to maintain a specific lexical element while allowing a non-local audience to understand a less-known, regionally marked term. Appositive clauses are used in the following examples:

124 Section II.8, “O mese mariano”
125 Again, this choice is consistent with the translation of a similar pun in ‘O mese mariano (the phonological adaptation of “vaschiera” in “Pasquiera.”
(A) FILOMENA: Ma che bulimmo fa' l'opera?
(B) MICHELINA (sciacquando i colletti) Vo' dicere accussì ca nun facite 'o farenello! (250)
(C) SQUEGLIA: Lasciatemi stare, 'on Peppì. Tengo 'a signora mia ch'è uscita di conti da tre giorni! (181)
(D) FILOMENA. Sta ccà. Chella è gravante e nu' po' correre. (186)

FILOMENA: Ma che vogliamo fare l'opera di teatro? (17)
MICHELINA (sciacquando i colletti) – Sarebbe a dire che non dovete fare il pomicione, il "farenello". (25).
SQUEGLIA: Lasciatemi stare, don Peppino. Tengo la signora mia ch'è incinta e ch'è uscita di conti da tre giorni! (15)
FILOMENA. Sta qui. Quella è pesante, è "gravante" e non può correre (17).

In all these cases, the author translates with a loanword (l'opera, farenello, ‘uscita di conti’ and ‘gravante’), but accompanies it with an appositive clause (‘il pomicione,’), a more common synonym (‘pesante’) or a further specification (‘l’opera di teatro’, ‘che è incinta’).

Also noteworthy is the translation of referents from the everyday, material life, and especially names of foods. In this respect, the self-translator adopts contradictory strategies:

UN VENDITORE (gridando e accostandosi ai tavoli): Tarallucce frische! Na buona marenna! (172)
MICHELE (scoprendo i piatti e senza badarle) Genovese rifredda!
Mozzarella!... E bravo!... (...)

UN VENDITORE (gridando e accostandosi ai tavoli): Biscottini, ciambelline fresche! Una buona merenda!
MICHELE (scoprendo i piatti e senza badarle) Genovese rifredda! Mozzarella! E bravo! (...)

While in the first passage Di Giacomo translates “tarallucce” with the pan-Italian equivalent “ciambelline”, other names of regional foods such as “genovese” and “mozzarella” are maintained in the Italian version. As these different examples show, Di Giacomo’s most recent self-translation is dominated by a tendency to linguistic normalization: the foreignness of dialect
is domesticated thanks to the use of direct, word-by-word translation or explanatory clauses, with a prevailing orientation towards literalism. Dialect and regionalism are still an important component of the artistic message; however, they are mostly seen in a thematic light, as stylistic nuances or elements of folklore—an attitude that is especially evident in Simoni’s comments: “La pagina e la scena di Salvatore Di Giacomo, il romanzo di Matilde Serao, oggi la prosa di Giuseppe Marotta hanno dentro il linguaggio napoletano come un’armatura di ferro beton” (Simoni 8). As opposed to previous self-translations (such as ‘O mese mariano or ‘O voto), in the 1928 version of Assunta Spina translation appears to be an instrumental pursuit rather than a creative endeavour in itself, whose primary aim is promoting the circulation of a very successful text across the entire nation. Clearly, by 1928, intersemiotic translation towards different media (cinema in particular) had taken the place of interlinguistic translation in the author’s creative effort, effectively marking the conclusion of the creative parable of self-translation between Italian and Neapolitan.

9. Conclusion

The present chapter provided a detailed analysis of the strategies for bilingual writing adopted by Salvatore Di Giacomo, an artist whose entire oeuvre was marked by a constant drive towards multilingualism and intersemiotic adaptation (involving media as different as music, visual art, opera and cinema). Translation serves a wide array of purposes in his work: for instance, it accompanies his personal appropriation and creative reworking of expressive codes absorbed from the French culture; and it orients the mimicry of marginal linguistic realities (including the dialect spoken by the Neapolitan populace and the artificial reproduction of speech written by semi-literates). Finally, translation defines his creative relation with German and French literatures, and is instrumental in elabourating an image of language that is marked by the Idealistic identification of language and national, regional or municipal ethos. These different practices coexist and merge, providing Di Giacomo with a relatively space to elabourate a new linguistic ideal that is equally distant from the Florentine-centric, literary-based and puristic attitude dominant in the pre-Unification Naples (an attitude perfectly embodied by Puoti’ puristic
teaching in the 1820s), and from the willfull experimentation with “scriver male” promoted by verist author (masterfully embodied by Serao’ novels in the Neapolitan area). More than ever, Di Giacomo appears to be the inventor of his own expressive codes, a statement that equally describes his narrative prose in Italian and the lofty, refined, stylized dialect of his poetry. In this rigid distribution of codes, theatre emerges as the space of multilingual and vernacular expression, allowing the coexistent of dialect and Italian not only within the same genre (plays in dialect and plays in Italian), but also within the same art-work (the twofold bilingual text) and in the same script (in the guise of code-switching). Finally, self-translation practices span over the entire arch of his production, accompanying the shift from a foreignizing, essentialistic and ethnic ideal of translation (that is, one oriented by the quest for the exotic and by expressive opaqueness) to a linguistic ideal of transparency. The latter results in a complete correspondence between Italian and Neapolitan, a model perfectly encompassed by Ernesto Grassi’s observation that “la pagina e la scena di Salvatore Di Giacomo, il romanzo di Matilde Serao, oggi la prosa di Giuseppe Marotta hanno dentro il linguaggio napoletano come un’armatura di ferrobeton (8):” indeed, this linguistic model— that is, a regional Italian that carries the echo and the linguistic structures of Neapolitan—is behind the theatrical successes of the second afterwar, marking the successful transition of classic Neapolitan theatre for the cinematic and televised screen in the Republican era.

126 See above Introduction, section “The Space of Translation”
Chapter 3

From Regionalism To Dialect: Linguistic Realism In The Works Of Luigi Capuana

Assessing the importance of the vernacular production in the oeuvre of Luigi Capuana is not, at first, a simple task. Vernacular theatre makes a very late appearance in Capuana's oeuvre, which spans over half a century (from his earliest production in the mid-1860s to 1915, the year of the author's death). The naturalist overtones of Giacinta and Profumo and the psychological depths of Il marchese di Roccaverdina are what Capuana is mostly known and appreciated for, alongside his vast production as a writer of fairy tales and short stories for the edification of the youth in a recently unified country. Therefore it would be easy to dismiss his Sicilian theatre as a marginal component, more of an erudite curiosity than a legitimate object of study: the decision to adopt dialect could be seen as the most radical attempt to document the life of the lowest classes, or the most extreme experiment in his activity as a realist author, in line with the principle of literary Naturalism.

These views seem to be confirmed by the bulk of critical work on Capuana, consistently failing to address his vernacular production in depth. Scholars of Italian nineteenth century literature have instead chose to focus on Capuana’s views of Italian unification, on his interest for Sicilian characters or topics, and on his militant support of the ideals of Naturalist literature; yet, the study of his Sicilian works remains confined to the work of linguists, philologists or historians of the theatre (see in particular the work of Pietro Mazzamuto, Sarah Zappulla Muscarà, and Gianni Oliva), and is largely disconnected from the overall artistic trajectory of the author. However, it appears problematic to dismiss a creative parable that lasted for slightly over

127 Not a word is spent on the topic in the otherwise insightful Spinazzola’s Verismo and positivismo; similarly, Judith Davies limits her exploration of Capuana's realism to his novels and short stories. Bigazzi and Ghidetti fail to examine the vernacular plays in detail, limiting themselves to a cursory mention; so does Silvio d’Amico, according to the sincere (but not completely unbiased) reproaches of Camillo Antona-Traversi. Donatella La Monaca, who equally divides her chapter “La narrazione in scena: il teatro di Luigi Capuana” in two parts, one for the Italian works and one for the Sicilian plays, mostly focuses on Malìa, whose main topics (the lost honour of a woman and adultery) is consistent with the entire thematic overarching of Capuana's production. Even Vincenzo Traversa, who devotes an entire chapter of his volume Luigi Capuana to “Capuana and literature in dialect,” focuses almost exclusively on Capuana’s early ethnographic works, limiting his discussion of the vernacular plays to a few brief and superficial remarks on two sole titles, Malìa and Il cavaliere Pedagna (71).
a decade (from 1902 to 1915) and resulted in nine original works. Whether they were composed in Sicilian (as it is the case of *Don Ramunnu* and *U Comparaticu*) or they were the result of practices of bilingual writing, all these works prove the author’s concern for linguistic difference, thus enriching his view of the “questione della lingua” of a new dimension.

Capuana’s contradictory involvement with vernacular theatre could be easily explained with the author’s financial hardships: “‘*u maladittu bisognu,*” as Verga defined it in a private letter to the author (*Verga-Capuana* 189). Indeed, Capuana correspondence clearly documents his financial distress, with frequent requests of smaller and larger sums from friends, acquaintances and collaborators. What is more, Capuana often refers to his plays as a potential source of income, expecting immediate success from his theatrical ventures. For instance, on October 13, 1908, he reassured his friend Ferdinando Martini (who had lent him considerable amounts of money between 1901 and 1902) about the future earnings coming from his new Sicilian plays: “Se il lavoro [*Ribelli*] andrà male, conto su altro scritto in dialetto siciliano per la Compagnia Aguglia che dovrà rappresentarlo all’estero…” (*Capuana in archivio* 286). While financial distress surely played a role in the beginning of Capuana's Sicilian production, such an explanation would also be simplistic, especially in light of the disastrous financial outcome of many theatrical ventures. Not even Capuana’s ruinous contract with Giovanni Grasso (in which the author gave away the rights on his first five vernacular works, including *Malìa*) prevented him from joining other ventures, leading to a fruitful but tense

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128 A compelling example can be seen in the letter sent on August 29, 1882 to Ferdinando Martini, who had recently become the Ministry to Education, and who was a friend of Capuana since the years of his literary apprenticeship in Florence. Capuana asks his powerful friend to support in his nomination to a University teaching post, describing his currently bleak financial situation: “A cinquantatitre anni, e dopo aver lavorato molto ed esser riuscito a far qualcosa di non comune per questi lumi di luna letterarii, io mi trovo davanti a questo bel risultato: Ho consumato il mio patrimonio per servire all’arte italiana (i teologi dicono: servire al dono mio) imponendomi sacrifici d’ogni sorta: e da oggi in poi dovrò vivere in uno stato di precarietà che mi atterraisce, e al quale non veggo altro rimedio (…). L’illusione che in Italia le lettere potessero fare il miracolo di non lasciar morire di fame è svanita. I compensi degli editori sono diventati così irrisori, che neppure sfaccinando giorno e notte e mettendo fuori sbadatamente tutto quel che casca dalla penna si può ricavare tanto da vivere come un meschino studentello. (…) A cinquantatitre anni non è possibile mutar mestiere. Son rimasto artista libero perché ho potuto, conintero sacrificio del mio; oggi, se non voglio rinunziare a vivere, debo chiedere a un lavoro affine affine all’artistico, all’insegnamento governativo, i mezzi di non morire assolutamente di fame. Ti giuro che non esagero, e tu intenderai facilmente quanto mi costi il doverlo dire.” (*Capuana in archivio* 268)

129 Also in a letter to Martini (April 13, 1912: “Sol tanto il Verga sa quante e quali anguiste ho sofferto per la mia incredibile inesperienza negli affari. L’ultima balordaggine l’ho commessa vendendo, quasi per niente, a Giovanni Grasso, l’assoluta proprietà di otto mii lavori dialettali, che gli han permesso di comprare due palazzi!” (*Capuana in archivio* 289)
cooperation with Angelo Musco; nor did the frequent pleas of his wife Adelaide Bernardini, whom the author calls a fierce enemy of Sicilian theatre, convince him to abandon the production in vernacular. While there certainly are financial reasons behind his “conversion” to Sicilian theatre, these alone cannot explain twelve years of original plays, stage adaptations, and translations of plays from and into Sicilian dialect.

Bilingual theatre serves a number of artistic purposes in the economy of Capuana’s oeuvre. Some of these purposes are intrinsically related to his aesthetic quest as a playwright and a writer, while other reasons are rooted in the old debate on the questione della lingua. In the years between 1903 and 1915, Sicilian theatre embodied a possible pathway to the renovation of Italian theatre—an aim that Capuana shared with the other analyzed authors, Di Giacomo and Pirandello. At the same time, the use of dialect seemingly offered a viable answer to the linguistic problems posed by realist fiction, still heavily affected by the limitations of literary language. Vernacular and self-translated theatre provided a relatively free space to the author; it allowed him to experiment with a plurality of codes in a (linguistically) safe haven, far from the sanctioning eyes of scholars and reviewers. It provided the author with a much needed source for energy and renovation, through the contact with a naïve and enthusiastic audience and, more importantly, with a performing culture marked by spontaneity and excess. Finally, Sicilian dialect allowed Capuana to bring on stage the life of different classes: it offered a viable code not only for the words and the deeds of landless peasants, unskilled labourers and *mafiosi* who had been the traditional subject of Verist narrative, but also members of the local gentry, small landowners and shopkeepers: in short, what Pietro Mazzamuto, in his 1972 preface to *Teatro Dialettale Siciliano* has defined as the ‘code’ of wealthy peasants (33). With this code, Capuana attempted at establishing a new standard for written dialect, closer to Italian and to a regional *koine* from a phonetic and lexical point of view. His “bourgeois Sicilian” was equally distant from the code of landless peasant subtly evoked in Verga’s prose, from the dialect of the urban populace adopted by Nino Martoglio in his plays and poems, and from the lofty vernacular of the poetic tradition (embodied, among others, by the poems of the 18th century writer Nicola Meli). Italian, on the contrary, remained the language of choice for the lofty world of the high aristocracy and educated classes, portrayed in plays like *Ribelli*, *Serena*, or ambitious experiments à la D’Annunzio such as the one-act play *Gastigo*. In this respect, Capuana’s linguistic choices reflect

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130 As he writes on March 8, 1912 to Martoglio: “Tra l’altro c’è Ada che odia a morte il teatro siciliano, per tutte le lacrime che le costa.” (*Carte Messaggere II* 627)
his ambitious goal, that of representing the multilayered and rapidly evolving reality of Sicily and producing a dialectal equivalent to 'bourgeois theatre;' and his linguistic differentiation, with its systematic correspondence between different genres, social class and linguistic codes, resonates. In this chapter, I will attempt at exploring the role of his bilingual texts (and namely, his self-translation from Italian into Sicilian) within this complex blend of languages and styles; and I will try to place this sudden conversion to dialect (a brusque change that many, beginning with Verga, saw as a betrayal) within the wider artistic evolution of the author.

In the next sections, I will examine how the theoretical views of Capuana gradually shifted from tempered regionalism to the adoption of dialect; I will then reconstruct key moment in his quest for a literary ‘mother tongue’ and I will question his experience as a reader and translator from other European languages, as a potential source of methods and practices later used in his self-translations between standard Italian and vernacular. Such questions are directly related, and in fact pave the way, to a critical assessment of Capuana’s bilingual writing. In particular, I will engage in a detailed analysis of Capuana’s poetics of regionalism (3.1) and of his linguistic beliefs, tracking his gradual shift from a moderate Florentine-based purism to the use of vernacular as a literary code (3.2). I will also analyze his occasional activity as a translator from other European languages, focusing on his 1889 translation of Ibsen’s masterpiece A Doll’s House, which sets the standard for his future translational practice and helps us define Capuana’s ideal of “bourgeois theatre.”

The second half of the chapter (sections 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6 respectively) will be devoted to the translational and linguistic analysis of Capuana’s bilingual plays. In particular, I chose to focus on three crucial moments in the linguistic evolution of the author. I will begin with an analysis of Malìa, the text that marked his “conversion to the vernacular stage” in 1903; I will then focus on Capuana’s attempt to represent the Sicilian small gentry and bourgeoisie in works such as ‘U cavaleri Pidagna and Bona genti, whose composition years also coincide with the mounting tensions between Capuana and Grasso. Finally, I will examine ’U paraninflu, the bilingual text resulting from his collaboration with Angelo Musco, after his disastrous falling out with Grasso, examining the linguistic implications of the shift from serious, tragic genres to comedy.
1. Regionalism, or the Italian Way to Realist Prose

Together with De Roberto and Verga, Capuana joins an outstanding triad of authors who used their regional culture as a lens through which appropriate the lesson of French Realism. To different extents, all three contributed to define the conventions of a “regional” literature, combining their depiction of Sicily with the literary influences coming from France. In this section, I will explore the specific contribution made by Capuana to the mounting wave of Italian Verism: namely, his ideal of regionalist fiction, which played a pivotal role in reshaping the author’s linguistic idea. Scholarship is unanimous in suggesting a strong continuity between the ideal of regional fiction launched by Capuana and his late theatre: both provide a close-up on of Sicilian society, with many theatrical plots directly taken or adapted with minimal changes from the regionalist fiction of the 1880s and 1890s, in what Stefano Bosetti has defined as an ongoing state of transmodalization.\(^{131}\)

Earlier, in discussing Di Giacomo's endeavours as a translator from and into French, I defined him as a provincial with a European culture: a similar blend of local inspiration and European aspirations can be observed in the artistic trajectory of Capuana, who famously dedicated his first novel *Giacinta* (1879) to Emile Zola, and who was often accused of slavish imitation of French models. Capuana's entire literary career was marked by the dialectical relation between the margin and the centre. On one extreme, there is the periphery of literature embodied by his native Mineo; on the opposite extreme, the literary capitals where the author lived and sojourned: Milan, Rome, and most importantly, Florence, where he completed his literary apprenticeship from 1864 to 1869. In addition to forging friendships and contacts that were to accompany him for the rest of his life, in Florence Capuana had a chance of formulating his own idea of poetry in his ongoing activity as a theatre reviewer for *La Nazione*. Capuana's feared reviews clearly reflect his impatience with contemporary dramatic culture, which lacked realism and spontaneity; at the same time, he foresaw the possibility of a new Italian theatre in

\(^{131}\) In his article “The Intertextual Short Play: An Example Using Verga's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Capuana's *Il piccolo archivio*, Boselli applies Genette’s notion of transmodalization to the one-act Verist play, arguing with d’Amico that Verist theatre was characterized by a close relationship between mimesis and diegesis: in turn, the one act play became an ideal ground to test this connection, due to the genre’s potential for self-effacement, intertextuality, and dialogism.
the work of Achille Torelli, whose play *I mariti* he favorably reviewed in 1866 as an example of 'character-building' art.

Rome had an equally important impact on his formation: Gianni Oliva affirms that the Capital allowed Capuana to experience “il contatto con una vasta esperienza europea che, avvalendo quella già acquisita negli anni addietro, la corroborò con le nuove linfe vitali sgorganti dal seno di un clima culturale eterogeneo, ove tra l’altro prendevano piede i fermenti dell’incipiente Decadentismo” (*Capuana in archivio* 106). Finally, Milan exposed him to the friendship of professors and scholars such as Pio Rajna, and was a safe haven for his occasional escapes from the Sicilian routine throughout the 1870s. Meanwhile, the literary promises and seductions of Paris kept lingering in the background, despite Verga’s warnings that “viste da vicino, le condizioni letterarie di Francia non sono più splendide che da noi, almeno materialmente, salvo poche eccezioni che confermano la regola. Ed è un vero miracolo che qualche nome italiano sia arrivato fin qui.” (*Capuana-Verga* 194).

In this respect, the literary geography of Capuana is seemingly dominated by a triadic relation between his native land (Sicily, the place of his inspiration and his truest safe haven), Florence and the Northern Italian cities that, as Picone suggests, became the ultimate formative environment, and Paris (the place of his aspirations and models). In his aforementioned *Verismo e positivismo*, Spinazzola describes the literary geography of post-Unification Sicilian writers in the following terms:

Nel Sud la nuova letteratura, in faticosa crescita dopo un ritardo pluridecennale, non trovava interlocutori. Gli scrittori siciliani si recarono prima a Firenze poi a Milano per cercarli. Ma li videro assai diversi rispetto alle attese: perduti nel sentimentalismo tardoromantico, col gusto infranciosato, appassionati soltanto di cronache e polemiche giornalistiche, ma assenti dalle grandi battaglie ideali. (11)

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132 “il locus dell’educazione artistica e sentimentale” (“La Sicilia come mito in Capuana” 71)
This disappointment is surely behind Capuana's evolving poetic: when the ideal of a “national theatre” sought in Florence fell through, Sicilian subjects and sketches offered a new path to pursue his literary creed. More importantly, his literary return to Sicilian landscapes and characters provided him with a viable alternative to the passive imitation of the French models that were omnipresent in the literary debates, and which were shaping the expressive codes of Italian realism and naturalism.

Capuana's relation with French models and influences was marked by the somewhat stereotypical idea that authors should accept the influence of other writers, but should stay away from the servile imitation of doctrines and aesthetic tendencies. Despite his positive relations with Emile Zola, he refused the label of “zolismo” that was often bestowed upon him (most notably, by Ugo Ojetti). He constantly shrugged off suspicions and claims of Francophilia: for instance, he firmly reacted against Onorato Fava’s review of his work “Ribrezzo,” an episode documented in 1886 (May 3) letter:

Siccome ritengo il soggetto di Ribrezzo assolutamente originale (badi, dico il soggetto) così fui sorpreso nel vedergli scrivere che esso somigliava a parecchi altri soggetti di novelle e di romanzi. Le confesso che la sua risposta non mi persuadeva: ancora non ho saputo trovare quali somiglianze, anche lontane, possano passare tra esso e la Dame aux camélias a cui Ella accenna. (Capuana in archivio 348-49).

At the same time, Capuana was adamant in protecting the reputation of his literary cohort from negative comparisons with other national traditions. This polemic aim is evident in his 1884 review to I Malavoglia, in which he affirmed that: “Scritti in francese, a quest'ora i Malavoglia avrebbero reso celebre il nome dell'autore anche in Europa, e toccherebbero, per lo meno, la ventesima edizione. In Italia, intanto, pare che pochi se n'accorgano o vogliano mostrare

133 On April 2, 1877, after Capuana reviewed favorably L'Assommoir (“L'assommoir di Zola.” Il Corriere della Sera, Milano, 10-11 Marzo 1877), the French novelist wrote him a thankful letter, which Capuana proudly cited to his Florentine friend Giovanni Gianformaggi: “J’ai à vous remercier bien vivement du bel article que vous avez eu l’obligeance de consacrer à l’Assommoir dans: Corriere della Sera. Mon père était Vénitien, et toute la sympathie qui me vient d’Italie, m’arrive comme d’une première patrie que je ne connais pas, mais qui est bien chère à mon cœur. Ce ne sont pas de vos éloges que je vous remercie, mais de la chaleur d’enthousiasme que j’ai sentie dans votre étude. » (Carte messaggere I 58)
Not only did Capuana reject the accusations of slavish imitation; he went as far as to criticize Ojetti for his French-centric prejudices: “I signori della Revue e i francesi che la leggono devono essere stati lietissimi di vedere un italiano chieder loro ospitalità per ragionare della letteratura della sua patria quasi con lo stesso tono d’un francese della più bell’acqua.” (Gli “ismi” contemporanei). Similarly, in an essay devoted to the writings of French critic and novelist Edouard Rod (“Intuitivismo”), he criticized the anxiety of influence showed by his peers, who combed Italian literature searching for French parallels and echoes, often based on very superficial similarities (for instance, Capuana criticizes those who compare the character of Eugenie Grandet to Neera’s character of Teresa, whose only common aspect is, he argues, “il fatto d'esser zitelle” Cronache letterarie).

French models act as a constant reminder of the low quality of Italian narrative production; yet, Capuana suggests that Italian authors should find their own way to realism, instead of passively imitating the forms, the language and the range of topics chosen by their French counterparts. Capuana deprecates an editorial market that is seemingly flooded by translations and cheap imitations. As he writes in Gli “ismi” contemporanei, “La letteratura francese ha il beneficio dell’esportazione, che noi non abbiamo” (4), immediately pointing out that the problem goes well beyond the abundance of translations (“le traduzioni non sono esportazione o sono una piccola parte di essa”). As these lines suggest, imitation, and not translation, is the main responsible for the French cultural hegemony: those authors who imitate the French cosmopolitanism are the main responsible for the poverty of the national literary landscape.

Capuana does not address the possible reasons for this unbalance, but identifies the weakness of the Italian novels with the lack of a market and of a qualified audience, a common scapegoat in nineteenth-century culture: “Manca da noi il pubblico intermedio tra la classe aristocratica dell’inteligenza e del gusto e i volgari lettori che chiedono al libro d’arte narrativa sensazioni consimili a quelle chieste giornalmente ai circoli dell’Assise, ai resoconti delle cause...
penali, alla narrazione dei fatti diversi della cronaca spicciola. Manca un pubblico borghese.” (Libri e teatro xxi). As the author seems to suggest, there is no “national Italian novel” because the Italian society lacks a common readership. With this analysis, Capuana joins the ranks of those who, over the centuries, have connected the supposed absence of a strong national novel to the historical delays in the formation of a national bourgeoisie. However, his explanation fails to address the fortune of the French cultural products and social imaginary, seemingly unaffected by the lack of their primary target.

The Italian way to a national novel, Capuana argues, cannot be found through the exterior imitation of French models, be it the roman larmoyant of the early 19th century, the Parisian-based ideal of realism of the many literary “mysteries” published both in French and Italian, or the more recent vogue of Cosmopolitan and Decadent literature. Rejecting all these ways, Capuana favors the exploration of Italy’s original sources, ultimately championing the idea of “regionalist fiction.” His notion of realism thus identifies with: “il tentativo di ridurre a materia d’arte la vita italiana, ritraendola direttamente dal vero, e non co’ soliti cieli di carta turchina o colle solite campagne di verde inglese brizzolato di rosso e di giallo per simulare i crisantemi e i rosolacci, e non colle contadinelle di terra cotta e le signore vestite di cencio, dalla testina di cartone verniciato.” (Per l’arte XXIV)

The polemic verve of the latter passage should not go unnoticed: in these lines, Capuana is bitterly criticizing the Romantic vogue of the picturesque; furthermore, his criticism of “i soliti cieli di carta turchina” anticipate his criticisms of those companies and stage directors who significantly fail to produce realistic and accurate stagings of his works, as it will be the case with the Italian staging of Malìa.

Capuana's apologetic declarations were not simply instrumental to the author’s literary polemics: his notion of realism did differ from the artistic manner of his French counterpart on a number of significant issues. For instance, in Per l’arte Capuana distanced himself from the French exclusive preoccupation with the life of the lowest classes and in especially with a specific human type, “quel brulicame di bruti che si agita nei bassi fondi della società parigina, sospinto dalle cieche forze delle passioni e degli interessi materiali, attanagliato dalle influenze del mestiere, dalle condizioni di famiglia, oppresso dai grandiosi organismi dei mercati, delle miniere, dei magazzini di mode!” (124). Capuana did not only seek to represent the brutish and
material life of the lower classes, but he attempted to represent the life of the middle and upper classes: as we will see later, this is a genuine and long-lasting concern of the author and is fully reflected in bilingual plays such as *Bona Genti*, *Riricchia* and *Lu Cavaleri Pidagna*, offering a multilayered view of Sicilian society that ranged from the landless peasants to the petit-bourgeoisie.

If the cause of naturalism had in Capuana a strenuous champion and an indefatigable polemist, it found its clearest embodiment and model in Verga’s regionalist fiction. Capuana acknowledges this primacy in his theoretical writings and reviews, beginning with his well-known article “La vita dei campi” (1880). According to Capuana, the mounting tide of Italian realism first emerged in the strong features of Nedda, who might have been an odd fit among the other female characters of the author, but was artistically more accomplished than Eva and the other figures of corrupted women and coerced nuns that had populated the early fiction of Verga. At the same time, this favorable judgment is especially telling of the special interest that Realist fiction devoted to female characters, whose otherness was often seen as an open door on the abysses of irrationalism and of social degradation. Verga’s attention for female characters, Di Giacomo’s aforementioned sketches of women and Capuana’s own collection *Profili di donna* are all examples of this common tendency.

Capuana energetically praises the striking realism of “Nedda:”

Rare volte s'era inteso in Italia un accento così schietto di vera tristezza, un'impressione così viva e così immediata della realtà, che rivelano una potenza d'artista affatto fuori dell'ordinario. Quel bozzetto acquistava sotto gli occhi le grandi proporzioni di un quadro. Le tinte sobrie ma calde davano la vigorosa sensazione del cielo infocato della Sicilia. In quel paesaggio arsiccio, selvatico, sotto l'ombra del bosco di castagne sui fianchi dell'Etna, la figura della *varannisa* si modellava con una meravigliosa nitidezza di contorni, con un rilievo potente: e l'emozione destata nell'animo del lettore dall'opera d'arte differiva poco o nulla da un'emozione di prima mano. L'autore aveva avuto la felice malizia di nascondersi dietro la stupenda solidità delle sue figure e il lettore non vedeva che queste: l'illusione era completa. (*Verga e d’Annunzio* 23)
In this passage, Capuana displays his intimate knowledge of Sicily, the region to which both he and Verga belong: for instance, in his review he uses linguistic patches of colour such as the expression “varannisa.” Also noteworthy is his vivid recollection of the landscape, under the sign of his usual pictorial sensitivity. More importantly, the wording chosen by Capuana highlights the emotional aspect of the artistic work: as an example, one might just note expressions such as “accento schietto di vera tristezza,” “vigorosa sensazione,” and “impressione [...] viva e immediate della realtà.” The work of art is supposed to inspire sensations rather than knowledge; ideally, the sensations experienced by the audience should correspond to the ones experienced by the creator.

The mark of reality is closer to a passion than to a scientific process – quite distant from the method of a surgeon, to cite a commonplace metaphor of realism that Capuana adopts in his seminal preface to *Per l’arte*: “Il romanziere ruba il mestiere al [sic] psicologo, al fisiologo, al professore di scienze sociali. Non già che predichi, che dimostri, che voglia far la lezione; ma egli scortica vivi vivi i suoi personaggi; ma egli pianta il bisturì in quelle carni palpitanti con la stessa spietata indifferenza di un anatomico.” (XLIII).

At the same time, this review of *Vita dei Campi* perfectly documents the sentimental, irrational, and anti-scientific turn taken by Capuana’s verism, something that did not, in fact, escape the attention of scholars and reviewers such as Ghidetti and Spinazzola. In this respect, Capuana appears to be another “verista sentimentale,” who combines his preoccupation for a keen depiction of the life of the working classes with a deep fascination for the spiritual, the immaterial, and the supernatural. Finally, Capuana violently reacted against the profile that

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134 The latter aspects are well documented through his career, and powerfully converge in his interest for Spiritualism. For instance, already in 1877, he acknowledges the success of mystical literature, praising the purity of its religious inspiration in a private letter to De Roberto: “Ah, caro Federico, perché non ci facciamo frati addirittura? Almeno il misticismo religioso, anche quando fosse una piena illusione, sarebbe qualcosa di elevato!” (*Capuana e De Roberto* 243). Equally telling is the list of recent works he orders from the friend on September 21, 1877, including titles such as *La logique de l’absolu*, *Le Royaume de Dieu*, *Histoire naturelle de la croyance*, *Introduction à l’histoire des religions* (251). Capuana’s recurrent experiments with séances were documented in *Spiritismo* (1884), a reportage imbued with Spiritualist beliefs. Irrationalism and spiritualism also influenced his interest for photography – a common pursuit among the proponent of Realism, Naturalism and Verism, which Capuana shared with Zola and, most notably, with the French writer’s wife, Alexandrine Zola. Of all ‘realist’ photographers Capuana was most preoccupied with aesthetic and extra-documentary questions: according to Andrea Nemiz, his experimentations with the medium always bore a “subtle poetic effect” [*sottile effetto poetico*] (Nemiz 105) and a close emphasis on the exterior effects (67). More interestingly, he repeatedly tried to use photography and other forms of ‘light-painting’ in order to capture the images of both dead and living souls – an attempt that
appeared in Ojetti's volume *Alla scoperta dei letterati* (1895), harshly rejecting the derogatory definition of “zolismo travestito da siciliano” and his own identification as the “capo dei naturalisti italiani.” In a polemic response to the essay, he proudly reminded his interlocutor of his many cultural influences, including names commonly associated with the Spiritualist and Decadent currents:

> Le scrivo da quell’alta scrivania che lei sa, con attorno quei bei scaffali che le è piaciuto ricordare, a la smagliante luce di questo bel giorno di maggio che invade il mio studio dalle sue quattro finestre. E negli scaffali posso scorgere da qui, in volumi dalle coperte pergamenate, Platone, Hegel, e Guyau, e Fouillée, e Tolstoi, e Dostoiewski, e Maeterlinck, e Ibsen, e Björnson, e il mio Zola, come lei dice con sottile ironia, e i miei Verga e De Roberto – questo lo dico io e ne sono orgoglioso – e il suo D’Annunzio che, se me lo permette, è un tantino mio, e lei lo sa. (Gli ho letti e studiati e li rileggo e li ristudio anch’io; non li ho comprati soltanto per ornarne gli scaffali” (Gli “ismi” contemporanei 33)

As for his own production, Capuana cites his long activity as a writer of children’s literature, his works on psychic manifestations, and his first volume *Profili di donne* (33-34), proving the vast scope of his production. His naturalist creed thus appears to be tempered by different influences, such as an ongoing interest for spiritual and supernatural phenomena as well as the deepest psychological refractions of the soul. To borrow his own words from another important apologetic essay titled “Domando la parola!”: “Io sono naturalista, verista, quanto sono idealista perfectly resonates with Barthes’ well-known considerations about the intimate connection between death and photography (*Camera Lucida*). For Capuana, photography was a way to access the afterlife: for instance, in 1864 he took a photographic portrait of a young girl who had recently died: similarly, a print from July 17 1882 documents “strane rielaborazioni di camera oscura con le quali Capuana tentò forse di catturare l’immagine di uno spirito” (Nemiz 21).
If Di Giacomo was a Romantic at heart, who sought to represent the living conditions of the poorest but translated them into the terms of a pictorial and spectacular aesthetic, Capuana went in the opposite direction: his interest for the life of the spirit was at the core of his ideal of “reality,” deeply influenced by the Idealist culture of the time. The balance between idealism and realism is thus reversed; yet, in both cases we are confronted with the limits of literary labels and definitions. Both authors, indeed, refused simplistic identifications and labels, reclaiming the complexity of their inspiration. More importantly, these spiritualist nuances deeply influenced the manner of Southern realism as it was formed in the post-Unification years, somehow validating the irrational and primitive view of Southern otherness conveyed through fiction and theatre.

The sentimental nature of Capuana’s realism is a fundamental aspect of his poetics of regionalism, and it resurfaces at several times in his review of “Vita dei Campi.” For instance, the author voices a personal feeling of nostalgia for the Sicilian landscape depicted in *Novelle rusticane*:

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135 All these documents seemingly prove Oliva’s statement about Capuana’s indecision in regard to the religiosity, which is well reflected in the secondary plotline of “il cugino Pergola” in *Il marchese di Roccaverdina* (painfully oscillating between atheism and religion); as it is known, such uncertainties culminated in the author's own conversion on his deathbed (*Capuana in archivio* 197-198). More importantly, the supernatural phenomena treated in *Spiritismo*, the experiments in photography and spectrography, and the words praise devoted to the new current of literary spiritualism in Ojetti's *Alla scoperta dei letterati* are all uncommon for a self-proclaimed positivist and a rationalist.

136 This feeling is certainly consistent with the general theme of the return mythical Sicily, which – as Michelangelo Picone has argued, had been a constant part in Capuana's artistic toil (as well as a part in that of Verga, Pirandello, Vittorini, and Quasimodo). Picone argues that experiencing a distance from Sicily was a crucial ingredient in his realist desire of uncovering the ‘authentic face’ of Sicily, a desire that permeated his many endeavours (from his involvement in folkloristic enquiries to his production of short stories and novels), Picone 65-66.
The review of *Vita dei campi* thus emerges as a crucial text, laying down the main elements shaping Capuana’s poetics of regionalism: the use of memory as a source, the poetics of impersonal narration, the organic nature of artistic creation, and the importance of *genius loci*.

First of all, memory appears as a more irrational and subjective source than the human documents sought by his French counterparts. We can therefore understand why Capuana belittles the role played by the *fait divers* and the *human document* (of which he still is a proponent, as his enthusiastic letters to De Roberto prove)\(^{137}\) in Verga’s creative process, emphasizing the author’s life experience as a medium to access intimate knowledge of a given society or region. This is especially evident in his discussion of “La lupa,” which he considers by far Verga’s best short story. Capuana claims that “La lupa,” like all other *Novelle rusticane*, is in fact based on a true memory, depicting real people existing in the region of Easter Sicily between Catania, Mineo, and Santa Margherita. He even claims having seen a woman who perfectly corresponded to the human type of Gnà Lola:

i personaggi di questi racconti, la piú parte, hanno esistito realmente, e l'autore non ha fatto che degli studi dal vero. Quella Lupa io l'ho conosciuta. Tre mesi fa, tra le colline di

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\(^{137}\) On August 29, 1887, he writes to De Roberto: “Ho finito or ora di leggere i tuoi *Documenti Umani*. Mi piacciono. Le stesse cose dicevo ieri sera ad un amico, il solito dottore, il solo con cui io qui possa ragionare d’arte, di reale e d’ideale. Ma c’è poi una vera differenza tra il reale e l’ideale? Il reale non è altro che un ideale attuato. L’ideale un reale che dovrà attuarsi e che forse non si attuerà mai. L’arte ha diritto a questo ideale? Ecco la questione. L’arte è forma, è realtà viva, dunque il suo vero ideale non può essere che l’ideale attuato: ecco la formula filosofica del vero realismo. E siccome l’ideale attuato è sempre qualcosa di monco, di difettoso, così la semplice rappresentazione artistica di esso basta per solleticare, per ridestare l’idea dell’ideale da attuarsi. Ma vogliono la predica, voglio[no] il ragionamento, la dimostrazione. Forse la Natura ne fa? Non siamo noi che ragioniamo, che deduciamo, che ci facciamo la morale?” (*De Roberto-Capuana*, 242-243).
S. Margherita, su quel di Mineo, passavo pel luogo dov'era una volta il pagliaio di lei, fra gli ulivi, presso una fila di pioppi che si rizzano gracili e stentati sul terreno umidiccio. Ella abitava lí per dei mesi interi, specie nel settembre e nell'ottobre, quando i fichi d'India eran maturi. Si vedeva ritta, innanzi il pagliaio, all'ombra dei rami d'un ulivo, in maniche di camicia, col fazzoletto rosso sulla testa, spiando le viottole, “pallida come se avesse sempre addosso la malaria,” in attesa di qualcuno che doveva arrivare dall'Arcura o dai Saracini o dalla Casa di mezzo, o da Sopra la Rocca. Spesso la s'incontrava alla zena, china sulla lastra di pietra accanto al ruscello, apparentemente per lavare i panni, in realtà per fermare tutti quelli che passavano e attaccar discorso. Più spesso si vedeva andare di qua e di là per la campagna “sola come una cagnaccia, con quell'andare randagio e sospetto della lupa” tale quale il Verga l'ha superbamente dipinta. (Verga e d'Annunzio 30)

Regardless of the accuracy of such claims, this passage is important because it documents Capuana's dissatisfaction with the limitations of photographic realism. Capuana is suggesting that Verga did not merely recount a fait divers or reproduce a photograph, but achieved something original in refashioning real-life materials for the written page, recreating life itself for the enjoyment of his readers. Similarly, art cannot be fully accomplished through the illusion of self-effacing realism or through mechanical reproduction, but requires a surplus of life. Verga should therefore be credited with the invention of form, a notion that Capuana explains in plastic terms (“forma scultoria”): “L’autore non ha inventato nulla; ha trovato, ha indovinato la forma, che è quanto dire: ha fatto tutto.” (Verga e d'Annunzio 31). More importantly, the original germ of this aesthetic re-creation is to be found in memory, thus inserting a subjective and emotional filter in the seemingly impersonal and objective method of the realist writer.

This conception is directly related to the second element that I intend to highlight in Capuana's notion of regionalism, that is, his struggle for impersonality. Capuana defines 'impersonal narration' in visual terms, as the exteriority of the author’s gaze on his literary creatures: “Quei personaggi il Verga non li ha visti, come crede il critico, né li ha fotografati; li ha pensati e ripensati, li ha lungamente rimuginati per intendere il segreto dei loro caratteri e delle loro passioni; e se non ha palesato la sua opinione intorno ad essi, questo è avvenuto perché il farlo gli è parso superfluo.” (Cronache Letterarie 114). The vocabulary for describing this
narrative technique is also derived from the field of visual and plastic arts, as opposed to the non-mediated technology of photographic reproduction: once again, the author translates a key feature of French Naturalism in his own cultural terms, twisting the medical fascination for reality into a more subjective concern for life.

The use of memory and the impersonal gaze converge in the third element shaping Capuana’s poetics of regionalism: the idea that artistic creation is akin to an organic process. This is clearly connected to Capuana’s ideal of “aesthetic form,” a form that encompasses all of its parts in an indistinguishable ensemble. Organic creation is what differentiates Verga's authentic creations from D’Annunzio's perfectly crafted but irremediably artificial works. If the emphasis on memory and on pictorial sensitivity represents a powerful cultural re-appropriation of French naturalism, the notion of an organic artistic creation is even more unconventional in such a context: this notion of artistic creation clearly bears the mark of the Italian idealist culture, a rather uncommon presence for an author of strict Naturalist observance.

Memory, pictorial impersonality and organic artistic creation all contribute to shape what we could term as a *genius loci*, the very element defining regionalist fiction. Indeed, none of the previous proclamations of aesthetic principles could be achieved without a rigorous quest for the spirit of the location. On the contrary, by closely following their location Italian realist writers can abstain from superficial imitation, achieving their own realism instead of artificially following aesthetic doctrines imported from abroad.

This is evident in Capuana's own reviewing style: for instance, when he claims to feel nostalgia for his native lands in reading Verga’s *Novelle Rusticane*, he bestows a personal and subjective feeling on a specific landscape, identified in great detail and beyond any possible ambiguity. Similarly, when he praises Verga’s ability of conveying the essence of a specific region, he is covertly advocating for his own right to write about his province without being accused of provincialism or narrow-mindedness:

*Questi suoi contadini non sono soltanto siciliani, ma piú particolarmente di quella piccola regione che sta, come dissi, fra Monte Lauro e Mineo. Tolti di lí, anche nella stessa Sicilia, si troverebbero fuori posto. I loro sentimenti, le loro idee sono il necessario prodotto del clima, della conformazione del suolo, degli aspetti della natura, degli usi,*
delle tradizioni che costituiscono col loro insieme il carattere particolare di quell'antica regione greco-sicula. (Verga e d'Annunzio 26-27)

As contradictory as this might sound, this conception of ‘regional literature’ is also influenced by trans-national cultural codes and models: just consider the similarities between Capuana’s emphasis on “clima, […] conformazione del suolo, […] aspetti della natura” with Hippolyte Taine’s notion of race, milieu and temps; or consider the possible echoes of the ideal of a new Latin Renaissance on his identification of a “regione greco-sicula.” However, the reference to Monte Lauro and Mineo also identifies a precise location – which is, in turn, also a linguistic area, given the high local diversification of Sicilian dialects. However, while the label of classical culture can be indiscriminately applied to Sicilian identity, Capuana has in mind a specific area: the countryside near Monte Lauro and Mineo, an area that is smaller than the eastern Sicilian region itself and extends on a few miles.

These views are consistently re-affirmed in the critical writings of the 1880s and 1890s, and will provide the backbone for Capuana's later conversion to the Sicilian theatre, taking place in 1903. For instance, in the aforementioned “Intuitivismo” we read a clear explanation of this attitude: “vive ancora presso molti critici il pregiudizio della morale astratta, universale; e non è possibile persuaderli che ci siano fatti e sentimenti da sembrare naturalmente enormi a Torino e non meno naturalmente indifferenti a Catania” (Libri e teatro 150). On the contrary, authors can access true realism (which, as we saw earlier, is paramount to true art) by carefully observing the language, of the climate, of the uses and costumes of a specific place - in short, by resorting to a politics of the location.

While the 1880 review of Vita dei Campi presents all the key features of regionalist art with striking clarity, it was a different text that officially launched this conception. I am here referring to the preface to Per l’arte (1885), almost universally considered the rallying cry of Verist literature. In this crucial text Capuana lays down the basic principles of realist narrative and reaffirms the strategic role played by regionalist fiction. Among other controversial topics, Capuana discusses the prevalent choice of characters and situations from the life of the lowest classes – a tendency that, as we saw, he did not favor in his own playwriting. Capuana does not
commend the exclusive attention for lower classes typical of early realist fiction, but he suggests that regional characters are especially evident in depicting the life of lowest social strata:

Un torinese, un milanese, un fiorentino, un napolitano, un palermitano dell’alta classe e della borghesia differiva, esteriormente e interiormente, così poco da un parigino delle stesse classi che il coglierne la vera caratteristica presentava una difficoltà quasi insuperabile, almeno a prima vista. Allora, per ripiego, rivolgiammo la nostra attenzione agli strati più umili della società dove il livellamento non è ancor arrivato a rendere visibili i suoi effetti; e vi demmo il romanzo, la novella provinciale (più questa che quello) per farci la mano, per addestrarci a dipinger dal vero, per provarci a rendere il sapore delle cose, le sensazioni precise, i sentimenti particolari, la vita d’una cittaduzza, d’un paesetto, d’una famiglia… (Per l’arte IX-X)

Scientific terms taken from the realm of medicine and naturalism here overlap with a spiritualist and anti-rationalist conception of human life: however, not only is the life of lower classes simpler to depict, it is also the least affected by the growing internationalization of culture. While the lowest classes provide the narrator with the fittest material for their exploration of local character, nevertheless realism can – and should - be practiced with respect to any social condition.

However, in the long run the artistic outcomes of the realist seem to prove true the critics of realism, and Capuana’s own justification: just think of Verga’s gradual disillusion, and his decision to abandon the original project of his “Ciclo dei Vinti,” and the uneven results of Capuana’s own theatre, which will constitute the subject of the next sections. Both examples seem to prove how difficult it was, for the self-effacing naturalist writer, to turn the camera inward and produce a self-reflective picture of his own bourgeois world.

Of course, Sicily did not have the exclusive on regionalism in Capuana's theorization. Over the course of his critical production, the author indicates other regions and cities as potential sites for realist literature. For instance, in the aforementioned review of “Vita dei Campi,” Capuana foresees a series of Milanese sketches that might be comparable to Verga’s Novelle rusticane (something that is partially realized by In portineria, the play set in a popular
building in Milan, which Di Giacomo sought in vain to adapt for the Neapolitan stage). To borrow Capuana's own words: "Il suo occhio di osservatore ha già tolto di mira la vita bassa della città, e un giorno o l’altro lo vedremo comparire con un volume di Novelle Milanesi che faranno un bel riscontro a questi maravigliosi quadretti della vita siciliana: il processo artistico dell’impersonalità conterà senza dubbio un trionfo di più." (Per l’arte 174)

On the same grounds, the author praises the perseverance of Grazia Deledda, who steers clear of the new fashionable path of spiritualism and sticks to the reality she knows best. In reviewing La via del male, Capuana writes: "è già molto il veder persistere nella novella e nel romanzo regionale lei giovane e donna, e per ciò più facile ad esser suggestionata da certe correnti mistiche, simbolistiche e idealistiche che si vogliano dire, dalle quali si lasciano affascinare ingegni virili." (Gli ‘ismi’ contemporanei 97). Her novels, Capuana argues, are based on the direct observation of reality instead than on abstract speculation: hence their historical and geographical concreteness. “La signorina Deledda fa benissimo di non uscire dalla sua Sardegna e di continuare a lavorare in questa preziosa miniera, dove ha già trovato un forte elemento di originalità. I suoi personaggi non possono esser confusi con personaggi di altre regioni; i suoi paesaggi non sono vuote generalità decorative,“ (97) is his final praise.

Not only is the regional fiction more authentic and meaningful than its spiritualist counterpart; for Capuana, it is also more balanced in aesthetic terms. Indeed, the author argues that accurate characters and realistic situations can make for minor weaknesses at the formal level. This is especially evident in the review of Amilcare Lauria's novel Povero Don Camillo. Capuana criticizes the language and the style of the novel, laced with lexical localisms that create an obstacle to the comprehension: yet he commends the overall vitality and realism of the characters, whose sapid portraits make the novel worth reading. “L’importante,” he writes, “era che le sue creature fossero vive, napoletane, tali da non poter esser scambiate con altre creature di altre regioni italiane; e questo scopo supremo è maestrevolmente raggiunto.” (110). Once again, Capuana concludes his review with an optimistic statement on the Italian regional novel: “Lauria mi ha confermato in una mia antica opinione, cioè: che l’originalità noi dobbiamo, per ora, cercarla appunto nel romanzo regionale, specialmente là dove la sincerità delle indoli e dei caratteri non è stata ancora sofisticata dalle ipocrisie della civiltà generale.” (Per l’arte 111). The review of Povero Don Camillo clearly suggest that Capuana values more the overall realism of a
representation over the quality of language and style: as we have seen earlier, the overall result should exceed its individual parts, and the ensemble prevails on the details.

At the same time, Capuana seems to suggest that authors should render the local colour accessible to readers across the nation, giving up minor linguistic details for the sake of general readability. Regionalism should certainly not be embodied by an antiquarian-like preoccupation for individual linguistic curiosity, but rather by a synthetic, almost pictorial depiction of souls and characters: regionalist authors should not be concerned with the exactness of language, but should rather strive to depict the ethos and the true characters of the different regions of Italy. To borrow the old adage about translation, we could safely claim that, in his ideal of regional literatures, Capuana still favors *belles infidèles*: and the exact balance between freedom and faithfulness will be examined in detail in the next section.

2. From purism to the use of dialect: Capuana and the language question

In promoting his ideal of regionalist fiction, Capuana became a strenuous defender of that hybrid manner of writing already embraced with success by many realist authors in Italy. In this respect, the preface of *Per l'arte* is best understood with the fading debate on the “questione della lingua” and with the many discussions on the quality of Italian prose (theatrical prose in particular), referenced earlier in the *Introduction*. This important text, summarizing over a decade of Realist investigations, clearly documents the transition between Capuana’s early quest for a ‘national literature’ (that is, a standard prose broadly based on a literary model of Tuscan) and his final acceptance of linguistic particularism, opening the page to linguistic particularism. I will therefore offer a close reading of the linguistic themes surfacing in the critical reasoning of *Per l'arte*, before discussing how his linguistic evolved from the Florentine-centric ideals of his youth up until allowing the direct use of dialect.

Overturning his early support of linguistic purism, in the preface to *Per l'arte* Capuana takes side against the proponent of a Florentine based standard language; he deplores the lack of a standard prose for the novel and harshly criticizes the anachronistic pretensions of scholars and philologists:
Pel nostro lavoro avevamo bisogno di una prosa viva, efficace, adatta a rendere tutte le quasi impercettibili sfumature del pensiero moderno, e i nostri maestri non sapevano consigliarci aiuto: studiate i trecentisti! Avevamo bisogno d’un dialogo spigliato, vigoroso, drammatico, e i nostri maestri ci rispondevano: studiate i comici del cinquecento!

Parlavano sul serio.

Noi li guardammo nel bianco degli occhi e facemmo una spallucciata. Fu forza decidersi a cercare qualcosa da noi, a tentare, a ritentare: quella prosa moderna, quel dialogo moderno, bisognava insomma inventarlo di sana pianta. I toscani, che avrebbero potuto darci il gran soccorso della loro lingua viva, non facevano nulla: covavano il loro Dino Compagni e la Crusca e sudavano a goccioloni. Dovevano rimanere colle mani in mano, aspettando la prosa nuova di là da venire? (Per l’arte VI-VII).

While the author recognizes, in principle, the potential value of Tuscan as a “living language” [“il gran soccorso della loro lingua viva”], he sternly rejects the preoccupation with literary models from the past, whether they are seen in the Bembian option of the “Three Crowns” of the Italian language, or in the preference for the Florentine chronicle writers of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century authors, then dominating the selections of the Crusca.

Still faithful to an ideal of Form that transcends the small details of form, Capuana is careful to detach the menial aspects of grammar from artistic and narrative quality. After citing a lengthy passage from I Malavoglia, Capuana challenges his purist opponents to find an equally compelling passage in any work written by any Purist author. He thus rejects the pretensions of grammar, claiming that the effectiveness of style is completely different from its refinement and formal correctness:

Come se lo scrivere un romanzo e una novella fosse soltanto un affare di stile e di grammatica! Ne conosciamo parecchi che maneggiano la lingua e lo stile con invidiabile bravura e, se scrivono un articolo di giornale o un discorso, incantano e fanno venire l’acquolina in bocca ai poveri diavoli che non sono da tanto. Ma i poveri diavoli si consolano qualche poco scorgendo che quello strumento non par più lo stesso (e neppure
Capuana claims that stylistic perfection, when detached from its content, is useless or even counterproductive. Using a series of metaphors from the field of music, he argues that in representing the reality of lower classes, a shrieking acute might be more effective than the virtuoso flourishing of a Stradivarius. Similarly, a few linguistic irregularities are a small price to pay to the rise of a truly representative artistic current. Capuana therefore criticizes those reviewers who are exclusively concerned with the perfection of grammar, accusing them of losing sight of the greater purpose of art: “se dietro l’esempio, mal compreso del Verga, una turba di scolaretti si è messa allegramente a proclamare la Comune della sintassi, non c’è da farne gran cosa.” (XXI-XXII).

Faithful to his polemic verve, Capuana conceals his strongest blows behind a falsely apologetic tone. He seemingly acknowledges the insufficient preparation and background of his fellow naturalists with expressions such as “mezzi insufficientissimi,” “poco,” “pressappoco” (p. XVI); in reality, however, his seemingly derogatory expression are a praise in disguise, as he points his finger against the inadequacy of the traditional literary prose and the shortsightedness of philologists. Naturalist writers should be credited for having established a standard prose for the Italian novel out of nowhere; starting from a striking poverty of means, they went on to obtain considerable results (“qualcosa di discreto”).

The same falsely apologetic tone can be found in Capuana’s description of the new prose, with its stylistically hybrid features: “E ne abbiamo imbastita una pur che sia, mezza francese, mezza regionale, mezza confusionale, come tutte le cose messe su in fretta. I futuri vocabolaristi non la citeranno (…) ma gli scrittori che verranno dietro a noi ci accenderanno qualche cero, se non per altro, per l’esempio di aver parlato scrivendo” (VII). The definition of “parlato scrivendo” (writing while speaking) is strikingly similar to the condition of 'scripted orality' which is typical of theatre; consequently, the implications of such a model on the author's later playwriting activity cannot be overlooked.

At the same time, the prose is heavily marked by dialect, which is the prevailing spoken code in the diglossic landscape of late nineteenth-century Italy: the natural outcome of this
choice is a high level of linguistic interference. Once again, Capuana uses visual and pictorial metaphors in order to describe this linguistic model:

L'artista gli ha presi nella loro piena concrezzzezza, nella loro piú minuta determinatezza, facendosi picino con loro, sentendo e pensando a modo loro, usando il loro linguaggio semplice, schietto, e nello stesso tempo immaginoso ed efficace, fondendo apposta per essi, con felice arditezza, il bronzo della lingua letteraria entro la forma sempre fresca del loro dialetto, affrontando bravamente anche un imbroglìo di sintassi, se questo riusciva a dare una piú sincera espressione ai loro concetti, o all'intonazione della scena, o al colourito del paesaggio (Verga e d'Annunzio 26-27)

This passage, referring to the linguistic hybrid of *I malavoglia*, reflects an essentialistic and impressionistic view of language, in which language and thought constantly overlap. In particular, Capuana's wording suggests that dialect is to provide a syntactical skeleton and a shape to narrative prose; a lexicon of literary derivation is superimposed on the structures of dialect.

In sum, the new realist prose is defined by its hybridism, by its strong regional markedness, and by a close relationship with orality. Far from being a mosaic of poorly assembled words from foreign languages and dialects, this language has its own structure, clearly based on that of oral syntax. This model of hybrid language provides thus an interesting term of comparison to assess Capuana's own practice, both when writing in Italian and, much later, in eastern Sicilian dialect.

These radical conceptions represent a complete turnaround from Capuana’ initial view of the language question, marked by his early enthusiasm for Martini's ideal of a “national theatre.” Indeed, embracing the aesthetic ideal of regionalism was a turning point in Capuana’s journey as a writer, a journey that Pietro Mazzamuto eloquently reconstructs in his preface to the 1972 edition of *Teatro Dialettale*: “Il Capuana fu lungamente e tenacemente ostile al teatro dialettale, se attese il 1895 per scrivere *Malia* in siciliano, se trascorsero cioè più di trent’anni dalla sua attività critica e poetica prima che si maturassero le ragioni ideologiche e operative necessarie alla crisi definitiva del grosso pregiudizio.” As Mazzamuto also recognizes, the reasons for this
prejudice laid in the social stratification of the time (including the disappointment for the failed hopes of the national unifications, also reflected in Capuana’s narrative) and in his desire to contribute to a national cultural program. Finally, Mazzamuto identifies the early sojourn in Florence as a crucial factor in bending his linguistic creed towards an ideal of Florentine-based purism, given that “l’infatuazione manzoniana di una lingua comune aveva a Firenze il suo terreno più fertile, data la fortunata coincidenza tra l nuova configurazione politica della città e la condizione genetico-geografica della presunta e vagheggiata lingua nazionale.” (8)

The Florentine-centrism of his early years is intimately related to Capuana’s quest for an original authorial voice: a rather uneasy task for someone who had begun his career in the peripheral environment of Bronte (where he attended the Real Collegio from 1851 to 1853) and for whom Latin grammar was more familiar than spoken Italian.

Writing in Italian was a real challenge for the young Capuana, as we may infer from the epistolary production of 1859. The budding writer shares his doubts about his first endeavours, the historical tragedies such as Sordello and Ghisola. In a letter to Giovanni Macherione, he complains: “Finito l’atto primo, ero a più di metà del secondo, quando una mattina, rileggendo il già scritto, mi dispiacque in tal guisa il mio stile che giurai di non prender la penna se non dopo quattro anni e sudare intanto per formarmi uno spirito veramente drammatico ed italiano” (July 20 1859; Capuana in archivio 23). These words are almost literally echoed in another letter to Giovanni Squillaci: “Nel maggio ritentai il dramma: ma che stile, fratello mio! Sono così restato all’atto secondo, scena terza; l’andare innanzi mi parea tempo sprecato: ho giurato di non toccar la penna che con altri due paia d’anni, e nel frattempo sudare a formarmi uno stile veramente drammatico, e quale n’ho in mente il modello” (July 30, 1859; Capuana in archivio 23).

These documents can help us evaluate the importance of the “questione della lingua” in his early production. As someone who had to “craft” his own language and learn how to write

138 See for instance the following passage in Il Marchese di Roccaverdina: “L’Italia una, sì, gli sarebbe parsa forse una bella cosa, se non avesse portato con sé tante tasse che non lasciavano rifiutare; ma a lui, che di politica non si era mai occupato, poco importava che il re si chiamasse Franceschiello o Vittorio Emanuele. La libertà egli la capiva fino a un certo punto. Chi gli aveva dato noie nel passato? Aveva sempre fatto qual che gli era parso e piaciuto in casa sua; non cercava altro.” (p. 202, Online edition).
139 Capuana was never satisfied with any redaction of these texts, which he carefully hid from public view, and which were published only posthumously (Capuana in archivio 20-25)
properly in his adulthood, Capuana was very familiar with the challenge of “parlare scrivendo:” he was used to question the balance between Sicilianisms and Florentinisms, and between literary and spoken language, since the very beginning of his writing career.

In Florence, then effectively acting as a “primo labouratorio della lingua comune postunitaria” (Tesi 154), the young writer was finally able to overcome the uncertain and rhetoric way of his earliest writing, often displaying what Oliva defines “un folto campionario di scorrettezze ortografiche, non sempre rientranti nell’ambito delle sviste a stento ammissibili neppure in documenti privati” (23). In this respect, Capuana and Verga appear very similar, as they both strove to find a balance between dialect and Italian: “Egli vive gli stessi travagli che contemporaneamente affannavano il giovane Verga attorno ad Amore e patria [1857]. Per l’uno e l’altro, siciliani, era forte il divario tra lingua e dialetto, di cui sarà difficile anche in appresso far smarrire le tracce.” (19) These expressive weaknesses and uncertainties are not the mere consequence of the authors' native condition as bilinguals, but are also rooted in Sicily’s political and cultural insularity, clearly described by these words of de Roberto:

In Sicilia, a quei tempi, non c’erano altri maestri tranne i preti: la cultura dei quali non andava oltre le lingue morte: quanto al gusto, essi lo avevano formato sulle tradizioni dei Santi Padri, sui quaresimali, i panegirici e le orazioni funebri. I vizii nei quali Ruggero Bonghi doveva trovare di lì a poco la spiegazione del Perché la letteratura italiana non è popolare in Italia, la gonfiezza e la pompa facenti le veci della vera nobiltà, gli artifici retorici e le contorsioni generate dalla mania di imitare i modelli latini erano comuni a tutta la penisola: ma nell’isola vi s’aggiungeva una notazione alquanto ambigua della grammatica e della sintassi. Quel nemeriti Padri-lettori ai quali non sfuggiva il minimo soleicismo quando i loro scolari adoperavano la lingua di Cicerone, lasciavano poi violentare le regole più elementari delle composizioni italiane. I giovani che uscivano dalle loro scuole erano troppo spesso costretti a cavarsela dando cadenza toscana alle forme dialettali; e mentre per questa ragione incappavano in grossolani errori, infarcivano contemporaneamente le loro scritture di voci e costrutti disusati e rancidi che i loro maestri stimavano preziosi e squisiti. Quasi tutta la poesia e quasi tutta la prosa erano quindi agghindate e zoppicanti, imbellettate e grinzose, pieve di solennità classica e di sciatteria paesana. (Capuana in archivio 21)
This critical assessment is echoed by Capuana’s own words, in “Come io divenni novelliere. Confessione a Neera” (originally printed as a preface to his collection of short stories Homo!). In this essay, Capuana describes his education (or lack thereof) in the following terms:

Figuratevi che io ero fino a vent anni, ed anche oltre, un terreno quasi vergine. Mi avevano insegnato poco o nulla, e pochissimo o nulla avevo appreso da me. A quei tempi (1850-1857) punti ginnasii in Sicilia, punti licei, punti esami, e quindi oh felicità, punte bocciature! Si studiacchiava qua e là se n’avea un po di voglia ma si diventava medici avvocati ingegneri e farmacisti egualmente I professori universitari eran di manica larga. La pensavano pare come quel frate domenicano che dicono facesse sgozzare alla lesta cattolici e albigesi colla scusa che Domineddio avrebbe poi riconosciuti i suoi nell’altro mondo. Il pubblico avrebbe anch’esso distinto alla prova i buoni dai cattivi medici i buoni dai cattivi avvocati quelli che avrebbero ripreso dopo la laurea a studiare davvero da quelli che sarebbero rimasti dei somari com erano stati laureati. (“Com’io divenni novelliere” VI).

In light of this insufficient preparation, one can fully understand the heroic rhetoric adopted by a young Capuana, who set for himself the goal of creating a new “national theatre,” as he enthusiastically announces to his friend Squillacì in April 1864: “O darò all’Italia un vero teatro nazionale, o passerò come non vissuto. Ho avuto fin da giovanetto la pazzia di quasi credermi nato a ciò: le immense difficoltà che mi si parano dinanzi (e forse non le vedo tutte) non mi sconfortano, anzi, mi incoraggiano più a tentare l’ardua prova.” (Capuana in archivio 23-24)

The quest for linguistic purity is still very evident in Giacinta, the first novel written by the author and published in 1879, immediately considered a manifesto of the new realism amidst fierce polemics for its scandalistic content. Capuana revised the linguistic structure of the page in the two subsequent editions, as Matteo Durante has clearly shown in his accurate study of the first two versions of the novel.\textsuperscript{140} In his chapter “Lingua e problema della lingua in Capuana,” Alfredo Stussi has spelled out this contradiction, describing the author’s virtuosisms which

\textsuperscript{140} Durante, Matteo, “Tra la prima e la seconda Giacinta di Capuana,” Annali della Fondazione Verga. 1983
culminated in his preoccupation for the formal perfection of his work and his constant revisions of published work, making him an “idealista della forma.” (“Lingua e problema della lingua in Capuana” 15).

Capuana’s linguistic concerns are also documented in the correspondence between the author and Giovannino Gianformaggi, a friend met in his Florentine years. The two kept writing long after Capuana left Florence, and Gianformaggi often acted as a linguistic informant for Capuana: their letters document the author’s attempts at meeting a Florentine-based standard Italian in his writing, thus correcting his native influx.\(^{141}\) For instance, in a letter dating March 27 1881, Capuana closely examines his friend’s suggested revisions to the first edition of *Giacinta*. The novelist clearly admits his own shortcomings and the importance of the revision process: “Son convinto anch’io che nell’arte dello scrivere anche le virgole hanno importanza. Ho rifatto da cima a fondo la *Giacinta* in ossequio di questa mia convinzione, e, se tornasse conto, la rifarrei [sic] un’altra volta.” (*Carte messaggere I* 114). In the letter, he accepts the vast majority of the many suggestions made by Gianformaggi, only expressing timid doubts when his original choices are indeed part of the common usage or are documented in dictionaries:

In quanto agli apostrofi vedi che ho già cominciato a far qualcosa nel *Bacio*. Quei *stracci che gli cadevan per via* sono un’iperbole, e la lascio perché mi pare efficace. Ho messo *scalino*; ma gradino non è la stessa cosa e non è anche dell’uso? Abbeveratoio il Fanfani lo reca anche come bevarino; ma forse è antiquato. Sentore è odore. E il soave sentor che il largo spande

*Alamanni*

Ma forse antiquato anch’esso e l’ho tolto. Tutto questo per farti vedere in che conto tengo le tue osservazioni.

(…) (*Carte messaggere I* 114)

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\(^{141}\) See for instance the following request: “Fammi il piacere di informarti come si dicono in toscano li reschi della spiga e il fiore giallo che noi chiamiamo ciuri di maju. Sono due vocaboli che non ho potuto affatto rammontarmi.” (March 21, 1877; *Carte messaggere I* 46).
The many accepted corrections can be classified according to a few recurrent typologies, showing a few recurrent trends in Capuana's attempt at re-styling and normalizing his own text. Many changes aim at shortening the text, getting rid of verbose locutions. Pan-Italian or regionalized spelling is often changed for greater consistency with Florentine orthographic norms (see for instance 43. Incontratolo per via → per istrada o per la strada, with the prosthetic “I,” a typical feature of Florentine dialect). Such changes are listed below:

innanzi → dinanzi oppure davanti  
rimpetto → dirimpetto  
a dirittura → addirittura  
poggiando → appoggiando;  
entro -> dentro;  
ai ricolti → alla raccolta  
comperare → comprare  
addietro → indietro;  
giorni addietro → avanti;  
appresso → dopo;  
al di là del → di là dal  
impaccio → impicció;  
grembiiale (46.49.52) → grembiule;  
servigi → servizi  
obbedire → ubbidire  
orecchie → orecchi (*Carte Messaggere I*, 214-217)

Diminutives and other derivative suffixes are also undergoing an orthographic normalization, as in the following examples:

Lettuccio → lettino  
Tenerume → tenerezza  
Chiavina → chiavicina  
(Carte Messaggere I 214-217)
The latter set is particularly important since, as we will see in greater detail in sections 4-6, the use of diminutives is a recurrent feature also in Capuana’s own dialectal writing, and is widespread in his Sicilian scripts.

Significant changes also affect the pronominal and verbal morphology. Postverbal clitics are eliminated and replaced by tonic forms (diessi a correre → si dette), with a modernizing effect. The literary series of third person personal pronoun (egli, ella) is systematically replaced by the object pronoun series ‘lui’, ‘lei’. An evident case of tuscanization is the systematic replacement of quello or, more rarely, questo, with “codesto” (e.g. “93. Lì, su quella poltron a → Così, sopra codesta”). Once again, the series ‘questo/codesto/quello’ is important as a piece of comparison for Capuana's bilingual scripts, since the author attempts at creating a systematic equivalence between demonstratives adjectives in Italian and eastern Sicilian.

Lexicon is also affected, with both occasional and systematic changes (the latter include ‘viso/volto’ → ‘faccia’; ‘scordare’ → ‘dimenticare’; ‘chiedere’ → ‘domandare’; ‘sovente’ → ‘spesso’; ‘togliere’ → ‘levare’).

Syntax is often simplified, for instance by replacing the present participle used in a rare predicative function with a more common relative clause (precedente → che precedeva). The following revisions also make the text smoother and more idiomatic:

da mille miglia di lontananza → mille miglia lontano

passò l’andidito [sic] → attraversò

Finally, Gianformaggi suggests replacing a local word with another term from a different location (115. Sior Andrea → sor Andrea): the central-Italian spelling “sor” appears generally more tuned to a Southern novel than the Venetian “sior.”

The revision of Giacinta might have later guided Capuana in helping other authors who were facing the same problems. For instance, in 1886, he helps fellow writer De Roberto to revise the draft of his collected tales. De Roberto expressed his gratitude in the following letter, dating to August 1886:
Significantly, Capuana's contribution leads to a reduction of those Sicilianisms that came naturally to De Roberto's mind: in this respect, the author is faithful to his belief, advocating for a realistic depiction of “regional character” but condemning the excessive use of lexical regionalisms – which could hinder the comprehension across the nation.

Both the linguistic trajectory of the revisions of *Giacinta* and his role in advising De Roberto prove the direction of Capuana’s linguistic and aesthetic research of these years. By the 1880s, well into his Naturalist phase, the author was oriented towards the ideal of a Florentine-based spoken Italian, eminently concerned with the preoccupation of linguistic use and national readability.

Capuana’s dislike of dialectal theatre at the time is best understood in light of this purist orientation. As late as the mid-1880s, vernacularism appeared to him as an unsuitable and limiting option, since the barrier of the language obstacles the circulation at a nation-wide level and confines the authors’ imagination to represent feelings and scenes from the lower classes.

Capuana’s Florentine background left a deep influence in his work, practically orienting his linguistic choice long after his change of heart. Of his proposed “hybrid” model, Capuana's prose maintains the plurality of composing elements and codes; yet, the hierarchy between the different levels shifts is not always consistent with his theory. Both in the novels and in the short stories, the author adopts a substantially monolingual prose, in which the use Sicilianisms is limited to appellations (such as the omnipresent “Voscenza”) and onomastics, including the popular “’ngiurie”, nicknames commonly used in the rural villages of Southern Italy. We find, therefore, Sicilian nicknames such as Don Mimmo *Li ‘Nguanti* or *Scurpiddu* (to cite only a few examples), but these appear as isolated lexical particularities: when it comes to syntax, even the direct discourses are heavily based on literary language. Instances of code-switching are kept to a
minimum; similarly there are very few instances of Free Indirect Speech (which was instead the most evident stylistic mark of authors such as Verga and De Roberto). Finally, Capuana is careful to avoid those non-marked orders that are so frequent in mimetic renditions of the oral speech, and which Italian highbrow literature displays since its very origin (D’Achille 1990). In analyzing the revisions of Il marchese di Roccaverdina, Stussi for instance has highlighted the presence of syntactical phenomena that are a direct reaction to the marked syntactical orders typical of Sicilian dialect, such as the systematic posticipation of clitics depending from infinitive verbs (“Lingua e problema della lingua in Capuana” 29-30). In other words, the author is pouring Sicilian and Florentine lexical elements on a structure that is prevailingly florentine, and standardized: exactly the contrary of the model he had described for in Per l’arte and Cronache Letterarie, in which the lexical treasures of literary Italian were cast, like liquid lead, in the empty forms of dialectal syntax.

A particularly striking example of Capuana’s contradictory linguistic choices is offered by the novella Gli americani di Rabbato (first published in 1912, but originally composed in 1909), one of the first literary texts to address the burning issue of emigration towards the Americas. Originally written for a young readership, the novella follows the peregrinations of Stefano, Santi and Menu, three young Sicilians who leave their native town of Rabbato to seek better fortune in New York. While Santi and Menu quickly find their place in their new home, maintaining strong ties with their community but also taking advantage of the new perspectives opened by emigration, Stefano struggles to adapt and enters the ranks of organized crime. He finally repents, but not before having been nearly killed in a brawl, for which he is also sentenced to a one-year conviction. Shocked by this chain of events and by the news of their grandfather's impending death, Menu and Santi come back home, pay back their family's mortgaged home with their hard-earned savings and decide not to leave again; it is hinted that Stefano will work for some time and come back as well, once he will have served his term in prison.

Despite its recurrent bouts of paternalism (especially evident in the conclusion, with its consolatory refrain stating that “la patria è sempre la patria”) Gli “Americani” di Rabbato stands out for the urgency of its theme and for its matter-of-fact realism: the Rabbato where Santi, Menu and Stefano live is very different from the Rabbato already depicted in Il marchese di Roccaverdina, populated by idle and degenerated aristocrats, passiona...
from the afterlife. However, the author adopts an overall literary and lofty language, in striking contrast with the crude worlds he is representing. For an example, just consider the following instance of direct discourse, in which a poor Sicilian peasant uses Tuscan words and expressions that are completely remote from the linguistic reality of his social class:

‘Si guastano la testa, signor dottore. Lo vedo dai due maggiori che sanno anch’essi qualche punto di lettura. Ai miei tempi...’
‘Non li rimpiangete. I tempi mutano. Oggi si sta un po’ meglio di prima.’
‘Sarà!’
‘Quella ricetta...’
‘Perdoni, voscenza; ma è ancora nel cassetto. I danari dati allo speziale mi sembrano sciupati.’

The two interlocutors clearly belong to two different social classes; yet, their language is not really differentiated. If there is a contrast, that is between the literary tone used by old Santi and the backward mindset they supposedly express. Most importantly, regional voices such as 'speziale' coexist with typical features of the Florentine register, such as the spelling of 'danari' (as opposed to 'denari').

In his linguistic analysis of the novel, Sgroi has identified a variety of registers, including regional Italian, code-switching, Tuscan Italian and literary language. Indeed, the linguistic texture of the novel is prevailingly based on Italian structures, with Sicilianisms being especially abundant at the lexical level.

However, Capuana adopts a generic and literary vocabulary when representing the material reality of countryside. See for instance the following dialogue, coming from chapter VII
and fully echoing the conventionalism of many representations of the countryside, famously mocked by Giovanni Pascoli in his well-known essay “Il Fanciullino.”

‘Nonno, che albero è quello?
‘Un noce.’
‘E quell’altro?’
‘Un albicocco.’
‘E quello lì accanto?’
‘Anche questi ulivi hai tu innestati?’
‘No, essi contano centinaia e centinaia di anni, me lo diceva mio padre a cui l'aveva detto suo nonno... Sono del tempo dei Saraceni. Non c'è nel tuo libro di scuola?’
‘Ci sarà forse, ma ancora non l'abbiamo letto; voglio domandarlo al maestro.’ (Online edition)

Ironically, the content of this exchange alludes to the cultural rift between the world of experience (the practical knowledge of the older generations) and the book (the theoretical knowledge of the young generations, who have been formally schooled and have thus been exposed to the temptations of modernity). Consistently with the paternalistic attitude expressed throughout the novel, Capuana seems to side with Zi’ Santi, the illiterate peasant who keeps his culture alive through his personal encyclopedia of legends, songs and folkloric texts.

The ideological rift between these two cultural universes is confirmed when, later in the novel, Capuana introduces the character of Miss Mary, “la padroncina entusiasta delle canzoni siciliane e delle fiabe” (47), who asks Santi to repeat folktales and songs for her own pleasure:

142 Pasolini was the first to identify the importance of Pascoli's poetry and stylistic choices for the Italian poetry in vernacular, claiming that Pascoli and Di Giacomo represent, together, the main points of reference for the twentieth-century poetry in dialect: he defines them as “la solita ascissa e la solita ordinata su cui individuare il poeta medio del Novecento dialettale” ([Poesia dialettale del novecento LV](https://example.com)). It is my take that his model is relevant not only for the production of vernacular poets of the early 20th century, but for the vernacular production in general. Capuana's insistent use of diminutives, as well as his linguistic depiction of the countryside and his imitation of the language of Italian-American immigrants are consistent with this hypothesis.
those same traditions that are being dismissed by the Italian people can still raise the interest of educated people abroad. Later in the novel, however, the woman asks for more folktales and songs from the youngest brother, who has indeed attended school and represents the model of a new class of literate Italian; she is disappointed to hear that Menu has no knowledge of the Sicilian folklore:

“Studio per modo di dire”, spiegò ridendo. “Ho appreso una parola ieri, una oggi, conversando. Sapete anche voi canzoni, fiabe?”

“Canzoni, no, fiabe... quelle lette in scuola.”

“Le fiabe scritte non mi piacciono. Non ve n'ha raccontate vostra madre?”

“Sì. Ma non saprei ripeterle come le diceva la mamma; io ero bambino allora. Anche mio nonno ne sa tante!... Poi sono andato a scuola, e le fiabe le leggeva il maestro. Io le rileggevo a casa; le so quasi tutte a memoria.”

“No, no, le fiabe scritte non mi piacciono.” (Online edition)

Menu, who has replaced the oral folktales of his grandfather's generation with the printed fairy tales of the school reader, is the epitome of the new Italian. Ironically, his education, made of moralizing stories expressly composed for the edification of the youth, is an example of the very “national character” that Capuana had set to create and educate almost four decades earlier. At least in this passage, Capuana’s own style fails to recreate the same culture he seeks to keep alive and protect. From a linguistic point of view, particularly noteworthy is the syntax order of “hai tu innestati,” which fails to reproduce the marked orders typical of oral language, and Sicilian in particular, that were a viable solution for novelists at that age.

Also striking is the following description, laced with both linguistic and descriptive clichés: its artificial conventionalism certainly cannot be compensated by the realist patch of colour of the appellative “gnà”:

Le rondini erano venute ad appendervi alle travi due nidi perché il finestrino restava sempre aperto nella buona stagione; ed era parso lieto augurio agli sposi novelli. Ogni anno, in primavera la gnà Rosa Lamanna attendeva con dolce ansietà il ritorno delle
ospiti, ed era felice la sera in cui poteva annunziare al marito che tornava dalla campagna:
“Sono arrivate! Sono arrivate!.” (Online edition)

Yet, the language slowly changes throughout the course of the novel, allowing for some attempts at reproducing oral language. Sicilian features are especially prominent in the second part of the novel, when the author represents the life and the struggles of his Sicilian characters in the dreamy land of “Nuova Yorca.” See for instance the following narrative passage, imitating the pronunciation of a Sicilian characters in forms such as “Talia” and “Siggilia”: “Quando non aveva da fare, si sedeva sull'uscio dalla parte interna, e leggeva il giornale allo zi' Carta, che ora lo comprava ogni giorno, e voleva le notizie della Talia, della Siggilia, maravigliandosi che quei bestia dei giornalisti non dessero neppure notizia di Ràbbato, come se non esistesse.” (141).

At the same time, the linguistic incompetence of the characters is mostly represented from an external perspective – to quote a fundamental Jamesian distinction, Capuana “tells” the linguistic difference instead of “showing” it, to some extent betraying his own poetics of 'impersonal narration.' See, for instance, the following passage, where the linguistic attempts of zi’ Carta are summed up and paraphrased in a brief instance of indirect speech:

Coi gesti, più che con le parole, giacché egli non sapeva un motto d'inglese (le due o tre frasi apprese a memoria le riduceva incomprensibili per la cattiva pronunzia), soprattutto mostrando la lettera che indicava chiaro, per via dell'impronta, la sua provenienza, lo zi' Carta fece capire all'ispettore di che cosa si trattava. Fu fatto venire un interprete che traduceva in italiano le domande. (Online edition)

The same distance is shown when the narrator comments on the sample of written popular Italian. Capuana reproduces the features of texts written by semiliterate speakers in two letters sent by Stefano and Santi to their family in Sicily: the narrator describes these letters as written in “misto linguaggio” and “ortografia ribelle,” or in an “italiano-siciliano di equivoca ortografia” - three labels that, as Sgroi argues, reflect the author's purist beliefs (Scrivere per gli Italiani 90). These documents are marked by a curious mixture of realism and manipulation: as the scholar notices, “Il documento capuaniano risponde bene ai canoni della poetica veristica, ma la sua
oggettiva impersonalità non è esente [...] da una precisa 'manipolazione' del testo, ovvero dall'impronta del suo interprete.” (90) Instead of documenting the linguistic reality of his land, the author sees himself as its 'translator,' commenting his 'documents' and framing them within a meta-linguistic perspective. Finally, the author sporadically attempts to provide a small sample of the linguistic interference between Sicilian and English in the speech of first-generation immigrants:

‘Oh! Ben venuto, boy! Non mi fermo; vado di corsa. Vi saluto; ci rivedremo, boy.’
E scappò.
‘Perché mi dice boia?’ domandò Menu sdegnato. ‘Sarà boia lui!’
‘Qui significa ragazzo!’ spiegò Stefano ridendo. (Online edition)

Yet, in this particular example the linguistic realism is limited to the space of a single word (boy, equivocated by Menu as “boia,” meaning “hangman”), failing to reproduce the complex phenomena of interference: the episode is not very far from the tradition of linguistic humor used by many generations of writers and playwright to mock the linguistic reality of the working masses. Dialect appears in the direct discourse to mark the emotional peak of the novel: for instance, when the two older brothers are finally reunited in the hospital room, Santi comforts his gravely ill brother with Sicilian words: “Fratuzzu miu, fatti curaggiu!” This small patch of linguistic colour, however, does not substantially alter the linguistic nature of the novel, which is a linguistic hybrid mostly based on an Italian of literary derivation.

Still in the 1890s, despite his growing disaffection for the contemporary Italian theatre, Capuana was questioning the artistic validity of vernacular theatre, considering dialect as a limiting tool. For instance, in Libri e teatro (1892), Capuana refused to see vernacular theatre as a valid alternative to the fallimentary outcome of national theatre, even though he acknowledged the expressive crisis of current dramaturgy (“il nostro neo-teatro è un’ironia, [...] la riproduzione,

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143 To this purpose, see also the linguistic humor displayed by Di Giacomo in ‘O mese mariano and Assunta Spina, analyzed in detail earlier in Chapter II.
la copia, il pastiche, il musaico di tutte le forme indifferentemente tentate, indifferentemente accolte ed applaudite” he claims in *Libri e teatro* 276).

His anti-vernacular bias is particularly evident in the way he considers Commedia dell’Arte in his theorization. Capuana praises the genre as the last true embodiment of national theatre, claiming that “il vero, l’unico teatro italiano è stato la Commedia” and that “tutti gli elementi del teatro moderno ‘[sono] già tutti nella Commedia dell’Arte in istato di fermento e di creazione” (250). Yet, even in his positive assessment, Capuana is oblivious to the linguistic nature of the medium, and he fails to mention a basic feature of the genre: its linguistic diversity, and its mainly dialectal nature. On the contrary, Commedia dell’Arte serves a nationalistic purpose, that of reaffirming the potential primacy of Italian theatre over the continent. This mystification is coherent with Capuana’s polemic goal, that is, to spurn the fashion of vernacular theatre: “Un altro sintomo della malattia che uccide da noi la drammatica io la trovo in questo risveglio (un po’ fittizio, logico del resto) dei teatri in dialetto.” (277). Capuana uses his usual set of arguments against the use of dialect: its inherent association with the brutish life of the working classes, its minor degree of sophistication, and its provincial circulation:

(…) Il Teatro dialettale vuol dire primieramente: vita inferiore, e per tante ragioni; inferiore pei mezzi che adopra, inferiore nel suo contenuto che non riesce e non può affatto uscire da una certa classe sociale, inferiore per le intenzioni artistiche che son messe al secondo, al terzo, all’ultimo posto nella mente dello scrittore. Vuol dire, inoltre, vita locale, provinciale, frazionamento, analisi, proprio quel ridestare, come dice il Tommasi parlando della malattia ordinaria, quello svegliare tutte le energie occulte della materia viva, le quali per il servizio della vita erano rimaste latenti come tante forse in istato di tensione. Da cotesto basso fondo, ove si è ridotta fra noi la sola e reale poverissima scintilla dell’arte, uscitone un capolavoro come *Monsù Travet*, n’è uscito tutto; non gli si può chiedere di più. L’arte superiore non ha relativamente saputo darci niente di simile. (277)

In the light of these strong and consolidated positions, the decision of adopting dialect as an expressive code appears to be shocking at least. The radicalism of this change of views did not
escape the attention of scholars and reviewers, who have suggested material and aesthetic reasons for this switch. Gianni Oliva, for instance, has suggested that “la ragione principale della conversione al dialetto (…) fu una lunga e progressive familiarizzazione con le forme vernacolari dovuta all’ampia esperienza del Capuana come critico del verismo e del Verga in particolare” (Capuana in archivio 220). In other words, the new code would emerge as a natural consequence of Capuana’s gradual familiarization with the hybrid paradigms promoted by narrators such as Verga, Serao, and De Roberto. Ironically, according to this interpretation Verga would be the main responsible for Capuana’s long ‘domestication’ of dialect, despite his own opposition to the burgeoning activity of dialectal authors and companies.

At the same time, this shift in taste would be symptomatic of a broader general tendency taking place in the fin-de-siècle Italian culture, with a newly found interest for vernacular and its artistic uses (222). Finally, Oliva claims that Capuana’s aversion to vernacular was never one of principle, since he recognized the artistic value of works produced in different regional dialects, such as Milanese or Piedmontese (221); however, the harsh words used in Libri e teatro seem to contradict such statement, casting a dubious light also on a “recognized” masterpiece as Bersezio’s Monzù Travet (written in Piedmontese), whose artistic reach, Capuana claims, was indeed limited by the use of dialect.

A more complex discussion of the topic can be found in Gramsci’s notes: Del Capuana occorrerà ricordare il teatro dialettale e le opinioni sulla lingua nel teatro, a proposito della questione della lingua nella letteratura italiana. Alcune commedie del Capuana (come Giacinta, Malia, Il cavalier Pedagna) furono scritte originariamente in Italiano e poi voltate in dialetto: solo in dialetto ebbero successo. Il Tonelli, che non capisce nulla, scrive che il Capuana fu indotto alla forma dialettale nel teatro "non soltanto dalla convinzione che 'bisogna passare pei teatri dialettali, se si vuole davvero arrivare al teatro nazionale italiano' […], ma anche e soprattutto dal carattere particolare delle sue creazioni drammatiche: le quali sono squisitamente (!) dialettali, e nel dialetto trovano la loro più naturale e schietta espressione". Ma cosa poi significa "creazioni squisitamente dialettali"? Il fatto è spiegato col fatto stesso, cioè non è spiegato (è da ricordare ancora che il Capuana scriveva in dialetto la sua corrispondenza con una sua "mantenuta", donna del popolo, comprendeva cioè che l'italiano non gli avrebbe permesso di essere capito con esattezza e "simpaticamente" dagli elementi del popolo, la
cui cultura non era nazionale, ma regionale, o nazionale-siciliana; come, in tali condizioni, si potesse passare dal teatro dialettale a quello nazionale è una affermazione per enigmi e dimostra solo scarsa comprensione dei problemi culturali nazionali).

(Letteratura e vita nazionale 168)

Even though he did not acknowledge the extent of his linguistic conversion, Capuana attempted to motivate his conversion to vernacular literature in the 1912 preface to his collected Vernacular Plays [Teatro dialettale]. In this crucial text, the author offers a retrospective gaze on his decade-long activity as a vernacular playwright, facing the possible objections to his new venture.

Positioning himself within the tradition of the philosophical dialogue – a rhetorical device largely used in the “questione della lingua” at least since the works of Bembo and Castiglione –, Capuana recreates a possible conversation between himself and an unnamed friend who is fiercely opposed to the very idea of dialectal theatre. This friend, whose views are largely consistent with Capuana’s initial wariness of dialect, could easily be identified with Verga. With a complete reversal of roles, Capuana now presents his new faith in vernacular theatre as the natural continuation of his quest for “a national theatre,” claiming that “i personaggi veneziani, fiorentini, napoletani, siciliani [sono] personaggi più italiani di quelli del teatro non dialettale, perché più sinceri, al pari degli attori che li rappresentano” (Teatro dialettale 72). He thus makes his case by saying that “io credo che bisogna passare per teatri dialettali se si vuol davvero arrivare al teatro nazionale italiano. (72) This position clearly recalls his mid-1880s belief that ‘regional literature’ could pave the way to the Italian novel and theatre; yet, the ideal of ‘regionalism’ is now replaced by the downright use of dialect, and nowhere in the essay does Capuana acknowledge the implications of this shift.

Building on these premises, Capuana goes so far as to affirm the superiority of vernacular theatre, which would excel both for its realistic inspiration and for the sincerity of its interpreters. In making his case, the author merges two levels that are normally kept separate, that of performing conventions and that of the script as a piece of literature. Textual aspects of playwriting (such as new plot devices and character typologies, and the adoption of new linguistic code) are thus used to innovate the dominant conventions of his times, without considering the specific problems of performance, such as recitations style, gesturality and
Posture, costume and design, and the open problem of the balance of power between actor, director and playwright.

Partially motivated by his personal failures as a playwright, Capuana joins the ranks of those who advocate for a change in the theatrical culture of Italy: a change that, he argues, should be driven by a new class of playwrights and not by the same old interpreters. This overall renovation drive can help explain the bitter criticisms of the traditional performing culture of Italy, which are evident in the following passage:

Noi recitiamo di maniera; non sappiamo essere sinceri, veri. Non intendiamo queste passioni, questi caratteri semplici e complicati al tempo stesso. Vi metteremmo il “primo attore,” il “caratterista,” il “brillante,” la “prima donna,” “l’amorosa,” insomma l’artifizio, l’arte anche, ma non quel che ci vuole per questo genere, non quella che vi mettono, quasi inconsapevolmente, I vostri attori dialettali…” (Teatro dialettale siciliano 73)

All the traditional terms of the great-actorial culture are displayed in this passage, beginning with the typical roles of traditional theatre, such as “brillante,” “prima donna,” and “amorosa.” As the author argues, these artificial typologies sharply contrast with the supposed spontaneity of regionalist actors, who bring the life of their own “simple characters” on the stage.

This criticism deeply resonates with Diderot’s _Paradoxe sur le comedien_, one of Capuana’s formative readings. In his _Paradoxe_, Diderot explicitly criticizes the excesses of the actors and their lack of moral and cultural education laying out the premises for the late 19th and early 20th century pedagogy of the actor. Certainly, Capuana's criticisms of the actors he came to know in his life sometimes echoes Diderot's harsh depiction of the actor's self-interested and mercenary nature:

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144 _Giacinta, Serena, and Ribelli_ all had a very tepid reception.
145 As the author recalls in his preface to _Homo!: “Maledica Telemaco Signorini, l’ingleseggiante pittore di Piazza Santa Croce che mi rivelava da lì a poco (che fretta aveva egli?) le novelle e i romanzi del Diderot!” (“Com’io divenni novelliere” XX).
Dans le monde, lorsqu'ils ne sont pas bouffons, je les trouve polis, caustiques, fastueux, dissipés, dissipateurs, intéressés, plus frappés de nos ridicules que touchés de nos maux; d'un esprit assez rassis au spectacle d'un événement fâcheux, ou au récit d'une aventure pathétique; isolés, vagabonds, à l'ordre des grands; peu de moeurs, point d'amis, presque aucune de ces liaisons saintes et douces qui nous associent aux peines et aux plaisirs d'un autre qui partage les nôtres. (Paradoxe 48-49).

The two authors' conceptions of acting, however, are not merely united by their criticism of the actor's moral character, but by the deeper idea that an actor is nothing but an instrument of the playwright's creation, an idea that Diderot expresses with a musical metaphor: “un grand comédien n'est ni un piano-forte, ni une harpe, ni un clavecin, ni un violon, ni un violoncelle; il n'a point d'accord qui lui soit propre; mais il prend l'accord et le ton qui conviennent à sa partie, et il sait se prêter à toutes.” (47) More importantly, the French philosopher praises a cool, detached attitude and a lack of sensitivity in an actor, since oversensitive actors bring their own emotional turmoil in the characters they are supposed to represent, while, in Diderot's own words, “les grands poètes, les grands acteurs, et peut-être en général tous les grands imitateurs de la nature, quels qu'il soient, doués d'une belle imagéinarion, d'un grand jugement, d'un tact fin, d'un goût très sur, sont les êtres les moins sensibles” (14). Where the two conceptions clearly diverge, however, is in their view of nature: while Capuana sees art as a recreation of nature, and expresses an organicist view of the artistic process that is consistent with this important Idealist notion, Diderot explicitly declares that art is a matter of artifice, and not of nature: as he iconically phrases it, “on est soi de nature; on est un autre d'imitation” (56). Consistently with this view, in the final part of his Paradoxe the French philosopher considers the 'natural man' [homme de nature] as an inferior creature in respect to the poetic man [homme de poésie] and the acting man [homme d'acteur]. However, their criticism of 'imitation' also converges, since Diderot claims that bad actors (and in general, bad artists) limit themselves to imitating the external and superficial features or reality: hence the self-aggrandizing presumption of many actors. Diderot's final plea that “il n'est pas même permis d'imiter la nature, même la belle nautre, la vérité trop de près,” and that “il faut quelquefois que l'acteur se sacrifie au poète” in

146 “On accouple à une âme petite ou grande, de la mesure précise que Nature l'a donnée, les signes extérieures d'une âme exagérée et gigantesque qu'on a pas; et de là naît le ridicule.” (Paradoxe 56)
order to respect convenient and reasonable conventions is not too far from Capuana's own vision that excessive and overly passionate recitation obscures, and eventually harms, the playwright's artistic affirmation.

In his preface to the collected edition of his Sicilian plays, Capuana then moves to compare Duse’s interpretation of Santuzza with the performance of an unnamed actress, una poverta attrice di provincia, accompagnata da quattro o cinque guitti” (Teatro dialettale siciliano 73), perhaps identifiable with Marinella Bragaglia, a notable Sicilian interpreter of Santuzza. Despite her undeniable talent, Duse almost disappears in comparison to the unnamed Sicilian actress. Her artificial and emphatic recitation, Capuana claims, betrays the spirit of Verga’s original character, also due to the use of very inaccurate stage costumes. On the contrary, the author praises the outstanding performance of the anonymous Sicilian actress, capable of reliving the life of her character: “la poverta attrice regionale, con gli abiti tolti in prestito dalle contadine del paesetto dove si trovava, dalle scarpe agli orecchini, dalla gonna alla mantellina di panno blù, diventava una ‘Santuzza’ viva e reale, come forse ce n’era qualcuna fra i suoi spettatori.” (74) Once again, Capuana identifies ‘life’ and ‘form,’ suggesting that while Italian actors “represent” their character through an act of imitation, Sicilian performers relive them through a veritable act of identification. As one might argue, the popular actor who embodies his/her human type represents the ultimate stage embodiment of the “human document” already attempted in the fiction by Capuana and his fellow Southern realist writers: a document that is displayed, alive and breathing, on the stage for the pleasure of the audience.

As Zappulla Muscarà among others has noted, this criticism is probably infused with petty and personal motives, since the author had not gotten over Duse’s refusal to play the main role in Giacinta (Capuana e De Roberto 23). At the same time, the comparison reveals a deep contradiction: while comparing the performance of an anonymous Sicilian actress to that of Duse, Capuana is in fact opposing two models that are equally actor-centred and performance-oriented, and equally disrespectful of the script's integrity. This contradiction is the main reason

147 However biased, this position also reflects a common attitude in the critical landscape of the times. A few years later (on March 2, 1919), Silvio D’Amico, will review a vernacular performance of Verga’s La Lupa in strikingly similar terms: “Al solito, abbiamo avuto bisogno d’una compagnia dialettale per risentire questo lavoro. E la compagnia dimostrò le ormai ben note sue qualità, positive e anche negative: le dette un tumulto di vita; ma, nel tumulto, ci parve affogasse un poco la linea del dramma.” (“Lola Balistrieri e La lupa all’Argentina.” In Cronache teatrali I 234-236; 235)
undermining Capuana’s utopian faith in the redeeming power of vernacular: the actors of the Teatro Machiavelli are not more inclined to be the passive instrument of his inspiration than it was the case with Zacconi or Duse. This tension will in turn lead to the failure of Capuana’s partnership with Grasso; the same contrast is behind the failure and the brusque end of other important ventures performing and writing Sicilian theatre, including the intense but short-lived cooperation between Pirandello, Martoglio and Angelo Musco, which will provide the main subject of the third section of this dissertation. The contradiction between stage and text, between authorship and performative autonomy will only be solved by Pirandello’s drastic stage autocracy, unifying the figures of playwright and stage director: unsurprisingly, however, this solution will only applicable to plays written in standard Italian.

Regardless of its many contradictions and of its startling silences, the preface to the 1912 edition of *Teatro Dialettale* is a fundamental document of Capuana’s newly found faith in dialectal theatre, and it is fully indicative of his new artistic priorities. The wording chosen by the author deeply recalls the intimate and instinctual emotional correspondence between the audience and the author, which was already emerging in the author’s review of *Vita dei campi* as a fundamental trait in Capuana’s ideal of “regionalism”. Ironically, in the same text Capuana argues against translation – the very practice he is engaging with: and the highly fictionalized reconstruction of the exchange between the “unnamed talented young writer” and Amedeo Chiantoni (the fictional spokesperson of Capuana’s own beliefs), ends on the plea “No, no, per carità, non traduca,” (74) a plea that is in patent contradiction with the author’s own practice of self-translation – from and into Italian.

3. The inner stratification of dialect

If the question on “what Italian” Capuana used in his fiction is crucial, the same can be legitimately asked of his Sicilian dialect as well. His identity as a bilingual writer cannot be detached from the problem of determining his “native language,” and the mental representations of dialect that were shaping his linguistic conscience. Was Capuana a native speaker of dialect, as all evidence seems to suggest? If so, was he a diglossic speaker (that is, a speaker who would use dialect exclusively in familiar and oral contexts, relying on Italian or other languages of
culture in formal/written contexts)? Was he exposed to different social strata of dialect? Was he a speaker of regional koiné or of local dialect? These questions are far from trivial; on the contrary, they are crucial in determining the level of artistic sophistication used by the author in his vernacular production.

Capuana's frequent requests for linguistic help and his hard times in developing a standard prose suggest that he was a native speaker of dialect; yet, influential voices have questioned his degree of fluency, suggesting that he might, in fact, belong to the first generation of native speakers of Italian and be a derivative user of dialect. Among these voices is that of Verga, who criticizes Capuana’s vernacular writings in two important 1911 letters.

Verga's perspective on the subject was certainly biased by his own hatred for the environment of vernacular companies. The Sicilian author prejudicially viewed dialect as an intrinsically minor code – a position that, until 1902, was fully shared by Capuana. Despite the huge success of the Sicilian versions of his most popular plays (from *Cavalleria Rusticana* to *La Lupa*), Verga refused to engage directly in the translation of his own words, or to write in dialect. Finally, as it was seen earlier in Chapter II, his hostility towards the genre brought him to deny Di Giacomo his permission to translate *In portineria* in Neapolitan.

That said, his motives for criticizing Capuana's use of Sicilian dialect are extremely complex, and cast light on the mental horizon of a diglossic writer at the turn of the century. In the first letter, Verga makes a very important statement on the artificiality of written dialect, claiming that all writers in dialect are mentally translating their sentences from Italian:

Voi, io, e tutti quanti scriviamo non facciamo che tradurre mentalmente il pensiero in siciliano, se vogliamo scrivere in dialetto; perché il pensiero nasce in italiano nella nostra mente *malata di letteratura*, secondo quello che dice vossia, e nessuno di noi, né voi, né noi, né io, né il Patriarca San Giuseppe riesce a tradurre in schietto dialetto la frase nata schietta in altra forma – meno qualche poeta nostro popolare – e anche quelli, a cominciare dal Meli, che sa non solo di letterario ma di umanista.” (*Capuana e Verga* 215)

In this passage, Verga is implying that there is no such a thing as “written dialect,” because the literate and the intellectual are forced to think in “italian” by their own mental paradigms, which
are fatally “malati di letteratura.” This assumption calls into the picture the dichotomy of oral and written speech: the syntax and the rhetorical structure of each sentence is embedded in written language and cannot render the tone of oral speech. Therefore, all instances of “written dialect” are nothing but ‘translations:’ and poor translations indeed, since their making does violence to the nature of the ‘source-code.’ In a single sweep, Verga is thus asserting the omnipresence of translation (all vernacular sentence being a poor translation of an Italian thought) and the dogma of untranslatability (which, as we saw earlier in chapter 2, is often cited the truest mark of artistic creation in the customary rhetoric of the time).

Of course, this conception is based on the overlap between two different ways of thinking language: in this view, modes of communications (i.e. “literature” and “reality”) are fully identified with linguistic codes, consistently with the “ethnical” conception of languages that was so typical of the Nineteenth-century culture.

At the same time, Verga does capture the real nature of the code adopted by Capuana, making full use of his own great linguistic sensitivity. For instance, he supports his claims with examples of expressions that he considers poorly adapted borrowings from Italian: “Ma se tu stesso mi dai per siciliano schietto trasalisci – friscu prolungato – panni per robi!” (216). What these terms seem to suggest is a veritable state of koiné – a regional version Sicilian expanding towards the social strata of the upper classes, and absorbing new Italian words in order to name referents from the modernity. Verga, however, argues that his fellow Sicilian writer should strive to write his plays in a highly hybridized Italian (“in italiano colourato anche di mineolo” 216), in order to achieve both cultural respectability, and artistic truth.

Verga also challenges Capuana on aesthetic grounds, suggesting that the use of dialect is narrowing the reach and the scope of artistic production. As he rhetorically asks, “E poi, con qual costruito? Per rimpicciolirci e dividerci da noi stessi? Per diminuirci in conclusione? Vedi se il Porta, ch’è il Porta, vale il Parini fuori di Milano.” (216) As the example of Carlo Porta demonstrates, dialectal authors face marginalization, both during their life and after their deaths; Verga thus concludes his letter with a plea to keep striving for greater audiences, while working on the local colour and ‘flavor’ (Il colore e il sapore locale sì, in certi casi, come hai fatto tu da maestru, ed anch’io da sculareddu; ma pel resto i polmoni larghi.” 216)
This letter, however, failed to achieve the hoped result, prompting Verga to a change of strategy. In a subsequent letter, the novelist resorts to a different approach: he cruelly mocks Capuana, mimicking his inconsistent written dialect. I am reproducing the document in its entirety, for its content summarizes a decade of critical debates and rivalries:

Catania, 31 May 1911


Don Giuvanni Viria.

(Capuana e Verga 217-218)

This letter documents the full extent of Verga’s hatred of vernacular theatre, which is especially evident in his derogatory use of the word “pupara” – indeed, the performing company of Grasso, and the whole environment of Sicilian theatre began with this popular form of spectacle, then giving way to the “pupi di carne,” that is, human actors. To him, the only admissible reason that could justify the involvement with Sicilian theatre is financial need; even in that case, authors should not translate their own work, but they should charge someone else with the “dirty work”
of translation. Verga clearly fails to understand the aesthetic challenge sought by his colleague: that one might want to create a literary tradition in vernacular seems simply to exceed his comprehension.

Verga's argument against the use of vernacular is twofold. First of all, he questions the linguistic accuracy of Capuana’s literary dialect, reminding him of the many problems deriving from its lack of linguistic standardization (hence the exaggerated doubts on the spelling of “vossia”/“vassia” and “nni”/“ntra”). In the same spirit, he deprecates Capuana's unfortunate attempts at bringing Italian expressions into the linguistic texture of dialect (expressions such as “saluttu elegenamenti mobigliatu” and “a li pareti picculi quatri” could be considered word-by-word calques of Italian phrases or examples of a regional koiné, depending on the point of view).

Secondly, and most importantly, Verga criticizes the accuracy of Capuana’s sociolinguistic views, thus challenging his very reason for choosing dialect. Verga is explicitly rejecting the idea that members of the upper class speak in dialect on a regular basis. His definition of ‘upper class’ is very loose in this context, and could equally include the members of the old aristocracy, the non-blue-blooded members of the professional élite and the impoverished gentry. Two opposite worlds collide here: on the side, the “street,” where dialect is a viable code of expression: on the other side the “parlor” [salotto], where, as Verga claims, refined people have to speak Italian unless they want to be considered oafish and unmannered.

By changing the language of Machiavelli’s plays for the dialect of the Machiavelli theatre, Capuana has undermined his own reputation as a writer, thus harming the very cause of realism that would be better served by recreating “colour and local sentiment” [lu culuri e lu sintimentu lucali”] in regional Italian.

Verga is here voicing very clear view of regionalism, which goes from the particular towards the general, and brings the flavor and the colour of dialect into Italian. Capuana, once a proponent of this very same model, has crossed a line while engaging with vernacular theatre, and unsuccessfully attempting to transport the referents of bourgeoisie (including the “furnished parlors” of the bourgeoisie) into his own “native” dialect.

148 Founded in 1868, the Machiavelli theatre was a popular venue for vernacular farces in Catania, and the most stable venue for the work of Grasso’s company. Cf. Giovanni Grasso, 24-25.
From a linguistic point of view, however, there are many reasons to question the accuracy of Verga’s claims. Not only was Capuana a native speaker of dialect, as we have extensively shown in the previous sections; more importantly, he was well aware of the risks entailed by his code of choice, and he had a clear idea of the social and stylistic differentiation of dialect. This is especially evident in those reviews that Capuana devoted to works written in Sicilian dialect, both in his years and in the previous centuries. An avid collector and reader of popular vernacular poetry (and a talented forger of it, as we will see in the next chapter), Capuana devoted few but important reviews to the writing of his fellow Sicilians. For instance, he prefaced a collection of poetry by Nino Martoglio – the mastermind of Sicilian theatre, and the author who contributed most to the popularity of Sicilian theatre across the nation. The essay, first appeared in *Capitan Fracassa*, on May 24, 1901 with the title “I poeti della gara,” lucidly describes the linguistic choices made by Martoglio:

> Nino Martoglio ha avuto la giusta intuizione di quel che dev’essere la forma della poesia dialettale; e per ciò, trattando soggetti popolari, si è servito della parlata delle infime classi catanesi, con tutti gli scorci, con tutte le aferesi, le metatesi, i troncamenti, le elisioni, gli scambi di consonanti che rendono quella parlata quasi un dialetto nel dialetto. La riproduzione è riuscita perfetta. I personaggi vivono anche per virtù della forma così assolutamente adattata ai sentimenti ch’essi esprimono, e sono un mirabile documento per i folkloristi e per gli studiosi di fonetica. (*Capuana inedito* 186)

In these lines, Capuana is clearly showing his awareness of the inner social straficiation of dialect, while also detaching the code used. Instead of arguing that dialect *tout court* is the most suitable code for representing the working class, he isolate a specific social stratum of dialect – the particular code that he suggestively dubs “a dialect within a dialect.” This sub-code of Sicilian is very different from the traditional vernacular used by lyrical poets, a refined code used to voice the lofty feeling of lyrical courtly poetry (of which we could find a perfect parallel in Di Giacomo’s sonnets)\(^\text{149}\). A historical precedent for the latter code is provided by the works of Eighteenth-century poet Meli, cited by Verga as a negative example, and to whom Capuana also

\(^\text{149}\) See above, Chapter 2. “Dialect, dialogism and language variation in Di Giacomo’s poems.”
refers: “Colouro che conoscono il dialetto siciliano soltanto dalle poesie dell’abate Meli si troveranno un po’ smarriti davanti a questo adoprat o dal poeta catanese. Io non credo però che esso possa costituire un ostacolo insormontabile del pubblico della capitale da impedirgli di gustare le finezze dei quadretti di genere tratteggiati dal Martoglio con mano maestra.” (187)

To the poetry of Meli, Capuana had already devoted a piece in 1898: the review of a recent biography of the poet authored by Pipitone-Federico and published by Sandron in Palermo. In discussing the poet's style and language, Capuana provocatively claims that “bisognerebbe tradurre il Meli in siciliano.” (Cronache letterarie 94); then he proceeds to analyze the contrast between the form and content [“il dissidio che c’è tra la forma dialettale e il concetto in quasi tutte le sue poesie” (105)], arguing that vernacular calls for a different set of themes and topics than the ones chosen by Meli:

La poesia dialettale implica naturalmente l’idea della forma popolare. Il Porta e il Belli, due grandissimi poeti, lo hanno istintivamente capito e messo in atto. Il Meli, no. E quando dico forma, non intendo solamente la parola del dialetto, ma il modo di sentire e di concepire il soggetto. Il Porta e il Belli non hanno mai dato impronta letteraria alle cose loro; e questo costituisce il massimo loro pregio. Il Meli, invece, è raramente popolare, anche dove più la sua natura di poeta e l’argomento lo spingevano ad esser tale. Da ciò la meraviglia di colouro che accostandosi, timidamente, per la prima volta, alla lettura delle sue poesie, le trovano di più facile comprensione che non si erano immaginati. (94-95)

Building on this premise, Capuana engages in a detailed description of Meli’s style, listing the alleged “Italian” features of his style. His poems are relatively easy to understand for the non-native speaker of Sicilian, because their author conceived them in Italian and mentally translated in dialect, Capuana claims. Ironically, the reviewer is here engaging in the same argument that will be used against him by Verga, in the 1911 letters.
This alleged 'Italianness' of these poems can also explain the greater extension of their vocabulary face to Porta and Belli, respectively Meli's Milanese and Roman counterparts: as the reviewer argues, many of the words used by Meli are not real Sicilian words, but phonological adaptations from Italian. The final and incontrovertible evidence, however, lays in the test of translation. After translating one of Meli’s sonnets into Italian (the “Idilliu Iº”, whose opening line reads “Tàcinu l’occiduzzi tra i rami”), Capuana argues that “questa traduzione sembra l'originale. Il poeta ha sforzato il dialetto, e che, scrivendo, aveva nell'orecchio un movimento ritmico disadatto alla natura di esso.” (96).

Indeed, a translational analysis of the two works – that is, Meli’s original vernacular poem, and Capuana’s Italian translation – provides some interesting insights:

Tacinu l'ocidduzzi 'ntra li rami;
Sula la cucuccinta, ch'era stata
La prima a lu sbigghiarsi, ultima
[ancora
Va circannu risettu pri li chiani:
Ed ora l'ali soi parpaghiannu,
Si suspenn 'ntra l'aria; ora s'abbassa,
Ripitennu la solita canzuna.
(Cronache letterarie 97)

Tacciono gli augelletti in mezzo ai rami;
Sola l'allodoletta, ch'era stata
A svegliarsi la prima, ultima ancora
[ancora
Va cercando ricetto per le piane;
Ed or con l'ali, a guisa di farfalla,
Si sospende nell'aria, ora si abbassa
Ripetendo la solita canzone.
(Cronache letterarie 97)

First of all, Capuana systematically adopts a loftier and more formal vocabulary in his translation. The slightly anachronistic effect of his version is also consistent with his polemical goal – that is, finding the 'mental archetype' for the analyzed piece, and demonstrating that this 'mental archetype' was conceived in Italian. His translation thus reads like a literary forgery, an imitation of the Eighteenth century lyrical poetry, thanks to aulicisms such as “augelletti” and

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151 A practice in which Capuana often engaged, mostly with ludic and polemical aims; see the discussion on “Un poeta danese” in the next section.
“ricetto.” Particularly interesting is the rendition of “parpaghiandu” (a slightly onomatopoietic verb) with the locution “a guise di farfalla.” Capuana also inserts a rhetoric effects in the translation of lines 3-4: he changes the word order, inserting an anastrophe (“a svegliarsi la prima” as opposed to “la prima a svegliarsi”) and a chiasm at the same time. A poetizing effect can also be seen in the diminutive “allodoletta,” supposedly translating the unaltered word “cuccucinta.” Lines 1 and 6-7, on the contrary, are translated word by word.

Even considering these poetic licenses, Capuana has a point in highlighting the prevalence of Italian structures in the language used by Meli. This is particularly evident at the lexical level, with words that are completely Italian (“la solita,” “s’abbassa,” “ultima ancora”), and words that are merely phonological adaptations from Italian (“si suspenni,” “risettu”). The syntax shows a more typical case of overlapping, with an ambivalent construction like “va circannu” (the verb andare + gerundive is in fact both used in Old Italian and in Sicilian dialect).

Capuana reviewed both Martoglio's collected poems and Pipitone's biography of Meli well before starting his own venture as a writer of theatre and before Verga's violent attack as well. These two reviews prove his solid awareness of the inner sociolinguistic diversity governing the literary tradition of Sicily – a tradition that Capuana knew very well, also from his collaboration with folklore enthusiast Lionardo Vigo and from his friendship with the more philologist authoritative Giuseppe Pitrè. Most importantly, Martoglio and Meli, respectively experimenting at the lowest and the highest social extreme of the linguistic continuum, came to embody two opposite poles for Capuana’s inspiration, somehow replicating the stylistic dichotomy represented by Verga and D’Annunzio in Italian literature.

Capuana did not adopt Martoglio’s “dialetto nel dialetto” as his expressive code, since this code would have allowed him only to represent the maze of alleys inhabited by the populace of Catania At the same time, he was well aware of the limits of traditional dialect, and rejected the lofty vernacular used by lyrical poets in the previous centuries, which to him read as a verbatim translation from Italian.

In their polemic, both Capuana and Verga chose translation as the ground to assess the quality of vernacular literature, by using their own translation in Sicilian to mock an interlocutor (as it happened in Verga's 1911 letters to Capuana) or an Italian translation to prove the derivative, and secondary nature of Sicilian lyrical poetry (as it was the case with Capuana's
review of Meli). As these episodes seemingly prove, translation never leaves the mental landscape of Sicilian authors: more than an editorial practice, it is a process of thought, involving a dialectic relation between two linguistic worlds.


In the previous Chapter, I devoted an entire section to explore how Di Giacomo’s linguistic beliefs were partially shaped by his experiences as reader, and occasionally as a translator, of other European tradition: a relationship that was mostly oriented by the values of exotism, pseudo-translation, and foreignizing translation. Equally revealing are Capuana's experiences with other European languages of culture, and especially French and German – two main vectors of literary and cultural trends at the time. In this section, I will analyze the role played by translational paradigms in shaping Capuana's European culture, charting those practices and paradigms that can provide a term of comparison for the author's late endeavours as a bilingual writer.

For Capuana, translation becomes a test of literary value not only when it is applied to the Italian/dialect continuum (as it was the case in the aforementioned review of Meli’s poetry), but also in reference to other cultures and languages. This belief can be seen at work in the 1898 essay *Gli “ismi” contemporanei*, in which the author uses a translation-based argument to reject Ojetti’s dismissive judgment on Verga. In *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, Ojetti had argued that the greater international success of d’Annunzio was an evidence of his greater value as an artist. With a subtle rhetorical turn, Capuana subverts this argument:

E a proposito dello stile di questi due autori, un’altra prova concludentissima. Prima assai dell’avvento del D’Annunzio in Francia, il Verga aveva visto tradotti i suoi *Malavoglia* per opera del Rod e pubblicati dall’editore Savine. Il Rod ha compiuto un miracolo di lucidazione del testo italiano, sorprendente per fedeltà ed esattezza; ma il lavoro del Verga non ha avuto però successo presso i lettori francesi, e non poteva averne soggiungo io. La personalità del suo stile, il carattere speciale di esso nella traduzione era sparito; il traduttore era riuscito a diventare traditore per la evidentissima buona intenzione di non
tradire l’originale. Invece quello era il caso, se mai di rifare con colourito francese, con forme dialettali di qualche provincia francese, un libro dove le forme dialettali si fondono assolutamente nella lingua comune e vestono e rivestono l’idea in modo così organico che la forma non può scindersi dal concetto. Che ne è avvenuto? L’opera del Verga nella veste straniera è apparsa scialba, stinta.

I lavori del D’Annunzio nella traduzione del d’Herelle si sono trovati come a casa loro; il traduttore non ha dovuto penare molto; gli è bastato togliere in prestito a questo o a quello scrittore francese decadente certe forme in voga tra i seguaci della letteratura cosmopolita (or ora mi scappava dalla penna: della massoneria letteraria cosmopolita) e il colpo è riuscito” (Gli “ismi” contemporanei 12-13)

In this passage, Capuana is blaming the disappointing reception of Verga on the shortcomings of an individual translator; however, his argument has very profound and complex consequences. In fact, the author is literally that some texts are easier to translate than others: and that resistance to translation should be considered as the sign of greater, not smaller, artistic quality.

Verga’s idiotisms and regionalisms are a riddle that no translator can hope to solve completely; his work cannot resist the pressure of translation; its opacity does not easily dissolve through the filter of different language. D’Annunzio’s work, on the contrary, fails to present the same resistance. While the hard grain of Verga's dialectal prose does not allow any porosity, the prose of d’Annunzio is shallow and derivative, clearly based on a superficial imitation of French fashions and fads: therefore d’Herelle was charged with a much easier task. This lack of resistance is precisely what makes d’Annunzio a superficial and rhetorical author, incapable of expressing the true ethos of his people; on the contrary, Verga's original and untranslatable texture has the true stature of art.

This use of translation as a conceptual paradigm is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, Capuana is implying that Verga's reception was already confined to an essentialistic and stereotypical view for its Sicilianness (“al più poteva avere un successo di curiosità come rarità esotica come siciliano,” Gli “ismi” contemporanei 12). The exotic expectations on Southern Italy prevented readers from an open and unprejudiced impact with the text: as we will see, Capuana himself will struggle with this risk when his Sicilian plays will cross the borders of Italy, during the international tours of the Grasso company.
Secondly, and most importantly, Capuana sees the text's resistance to translation as a sign of originality and artistic value. The more accurately a work depicts a regional character (to some extent recreating life for the readers' enjoyment), the more it becomes 'untranslatable.' Real quality is therefore confined to the national borders, since it is difficult to render the specific tone of a 'ethnic' work of art in other languages. Once again, we are faced with the somewhat contradictory idea that untranslability is the ultimate evidence of artistic worth: a recurrent assumption in the history of modern Italian theatre, and a key paradigm informing the two-century long debate on the genius of language.

Capuana presents his readers with two opposite models of translation: on the one hand, there is the possibility of assimilation, close to the pole of “domesticating” translation—which perfectly describes the rank of all those French translators who have strived to adapt their texts to the “ethnic” virtue of clarity. On the other hand, Rod’s attempt at maintaining Verga’s idiomatism would be perfectly described by the label of ‘foreignizing’ translation, preserving the most idiomatic and cultural-specific aspect of the source. As we saw earlier in Chapter II, this approach was very common in translating Southern Italian works: a perfect embodiment of this method can be seen in the “Néapoletanisant French” used by Salvatore Di Giacomo in the revisions of his own short story “Nuit de la Befane,” analyzed earlier in Chapter II.

Capuana is seemingly equidistant from both these models: his ideal of translation appears to be an equivalence-based model, overtly relying on the analogies between the linguistic fragmentation of Italy and the countless dialects and patois of France. Incidentally, Capuana suggests a possible model of what we could define, in today's term, an ethical translation: to borrow the author's own words, “rifare con colourito francese, con forme dialettali di qualche provincia francese, un libro dove le forme dialettali si fondono assolutamente nella lingua comune e vestono e rivestono l’idea in modo così organico che la forma non può scindersi dal concetto.” (Per l'arte 11-12). Clearly, this option serves especially well the translation of regional fiction, marked by the use of a hybrid and multilayered language.

However, the author was not blind to material consideration. Although he seems to blames Rod's excessive use of Italianisms for Verga’s disappointing reception, he chose him as a translator for his play Giacinta. The reasons for this preference are spelled out in a letter to De Roberto, dating to April 17, 1885:
Un professore del Liceo di Vanves presso Parigi, che sta traducendo Giacinta e le fiabe mi aveva fatto la proposta di tradurre il dramma e presentarlo al Théâtre Libre. Un altro invito della stessa natura mi era stato fatto da Robecca per parte d’un suo amico che è molto addentro nelle cose teatrali di Parigi; ma preferisco di scrivere al Rod se vorrà prendersi lui l’incarico della traduzione, quantunque l’esempio dei Malavoglia e delle traduzioni delle mie novelle, che peccano di troppa fedeltà d’italianismi, mi facciano esitare. Le traduzioni non le fa lui ma sua moglie ed essa non sa darle, a quel che pare, lo stile veramente francese. Forse nella traduzione della Giacinta il difetto si vedrà meno; ma l’idea che col Rod la rappresentazione troverà delle facilità che non potrò avere con altri mi risolve a questo tentativo. (Capuana e De Roberto 297-298).

As this letter demonstrates, Capuana was not fond of source-oriented and foreignizing approaches; yet, he was ready to compromise the quality of his own translation in exchange for the advantages deriving from a consolidated editorial network, and in this respect Edouard Rod was an obvious choice and a top contender for any Italian author seeking notoriety in France. Rod was a true cultural mediator between the two literatures and played a key role in the history of Franco-Italian relations: among other things, he introduced the French audience to the work of Verga (translating “Nedda,” “La lupa,” “Rosso Malpelo,” “Cavalleria Rusticana” and I malavoglia), Giacosa (Come le foglie) and Fogazzaro (Piccolo mondo antico) (Capuana e De Roberto 119). In turn, it was Verga who acquainted Rod with the works of Capuana in 1882 (Lettere a Capuana 113).  

French translators struggled with Capuana’s literary prose at least as much as they did with Verga’s heavily regionally marked syntax. In 1885, Rod writes to Capuana: “Ensuite, je compte toujours donner prochainement quelque chose de vous à la revue, que je prendrai dans vos volume. Je pense à “Fasma” dans Profili di donne, pour cette raison, que les conversations

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152 In a letter from Paris (May 18, 1882) Verga introduces Capuana to Rod, whom he describes as a “giovane scrittore di molti meriti che mi ha parlato di te, e desidererebbe conoscerti almeno per mezzo delle cose tue.” Verga also asks for some copies of Giacinta and Profumo, claiming that “il Rod ha intrapreso una serie di studi sugli scrittori contemporanei italiani con amore e intelligenza, cosa rara in Francia; egli ti conosceva diggià, mi ha chiesto di te, e io gliene ho parlato come tu puoi immaginare.” (Verga e Capuana 193-194)
sont à peu près intraduisibles. Vous n’imaginez pas la difficulté à les rendre.” (Lettre a Capuana 117). Another French translator, Tristan Klingor, documents similar problems, in a letter from August 6, 1900. Klingor meticulously consults with the author, suggesting possible equivalences for the most idiomatic aspects in the text he was translating, a short story titled “Bestia:” “J’ai marque d’un point d’interrogation au crayon les passages don’t l’interprétation m’a paru douteuse. Ne pouvant traduire Bestia par Bête, ou même par Bêta, j’ai choisi l’équivalent Idiot, et changé Don Bastiano en “Don Idomeneus” de façon à conserver le calembour Bestiano transformé in Idioménée. (Lettre a Capuana 122). Klingor’s creativity comes in handy when replacing puns and comical lines with equivalent expressions; however, he struggles with regional connotations and referents from the everyday life, for which he suggests resorts to the proverbial translator’s note: “Comment faut-il traduire cassata, soffione, Napoletane a coppe?… Comment rendre monaca di casa don’t je ne vois pas d’équivalent en France? Que sont les jeux de “bussolotti” et du “zecchinetto”? Je l’expliquerais en note en quelques mots au lecteur français.” (Ibid. 122)

If Rod and Klingor attempted to respect the author’s intentions as much as possible, the same was not necessarily true of the German translators who also had to deal with regionalist Italian fiction.  

Capuana manifested his concerns on the work of his German translators in an epistolary exchange from November 1885. Not being a fluent reader of German, he needed the linguistic and editorial assistance of De Roberto; yet, even with his limited linguistic proficiency, Capuana made sure to be correctly rendered, carefully looking for deviations from his original wording. On November 26 1885, he writes:

Io, col poco pochino che mastico di tedesco e coll’aiuto molto problematico di un vocabolario insufficiente, ho già confrontato la traduzione col testo della fiaba di

153 Apparently, this was not an uncommon problem. On March 14, 1879, Verga complains “Ho ricevuto la traduzione tedesca della Nedda. Figurati che si permettono di fare dei tagli a piacere – beninteso senza aver chiesto nemmeno il permesso di tradurre. Si può far questo con le leggi nostre e i trattati internazionali sulla proprietà letteraria?” (Verga e Capuana 115). Two days later, Verga scornfully comments the translation: “Figurati dove quei buoni operai tedeschi si son permessi di far dei tagli cesarei. Io ho la febbre del fare non perché me ne senta la forza, ma perché credo d’esser solo con te e qualcun altro a capire come si faccia a fare lo stufato. Gli altri sono imbrattacarte, lavapiatti…” (117)
*Ranocchino* e il principio di quella *Senza-Orecchio*. La traduzione della prima è più fedele. Può darsi che il tedesco non abbia il nostro *povero diavolo*, ma io temo che il traduttore, da vero protestante, abbia avuto scrupolo di nominare il diavolo in un libro destinato ai fanciulli. Dico questo perché quella efficace espressione è stata sempre tradotta con *der arme Vater*. In un punto io avevo scritto semplicemente:
- Vendo questo bambino, chi lo vuol comprare.
Il traduttore ha messo:
- Ich verkaufe diesen kleinen! Wer will ihn? Wer will ihn? *Rief der Mannn zum Fenster hinaus.*
Come se senza l’aggiunta sottosegnata il senso non fosse chiaro e l’azione evidente benché non espressa. Per il resto la traduzione mi pare molto fedelmente calcata sull’originale. (*Capuana e De Roberto* 178)

Although he carefully controlled the foreign translations of his work, Capuana was not particularly fond of the vogue of translation from German and Northern European languages, shaping the literary taste of the post-Romantic and Idealist generations. In this respect, his attitude towards translation widely differs from that of Di Giacomo, analyzed earlier in section 2.4. If Di Giacomo came to elaborate his own fantastic poetics through an involuntary act of pseudo-translation from German, Capuana used the practice of pseudo-translation in a consciously satiric fashion in the 1882 hoax titled “Un Poeta Danese.” This piece was first published in the October 1882 issue of *Il Fanfulla della Domenica* under the initials G.P., when the author was part of the editorial board of the journal. It was later included in *Cronache letterarie*, accompanied by an author's note that revealed the satirical nature of the piece. While documenting the author's taste for more or less ludic forgeries (as well as his talent for this kind of enterprises) the piece also outlines the author's main motives of polemic against that

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154 His short stories later collected in *Pipa e Boccale*, and his fantastic reconstruction of Goethe's travels to Naples. See below, Chapter 2, section 4 (“Foreignizing and Domesticating Translation”).

155 This ability was recognized by no less than Giuseppe Pitré and Alessandro d'Ancona. After Maura’s collection *Poesie in dialetto siciliano* was published in Milan (1879), Pitré wrote him a message stating “Ho letto, dalla prima all’ultima pagina, le Poesie del Maura […] È un volume prezioso come antologia poetica di Mineo, e terribile per chi cerca documenti contro il Vigo. Queste tue poesie, bellissime da vero, inserite nella Raccolta amplissima, mostrano due cose: primo, che tu sai stupendamente imitare e ritrarre la poesia popolare; secondo, che quel raccoglitore lasciava una massa di materiali che non capiva.” D'Ancona acknowledged his ability: “Mi pare di poter indurre dalle parole stampate a pagina XIV ch’ella è l’autore di questi canti e io non posso che rallegrarmi con
translation frenzy that characterized the nineteenth-century editorial market. Giuseppe Cimbali, an old friend who participated in the hoax, recounted the episode in a private letter to the author:

Ricorda quella domenica, in cui io e Lei eravamo tutti intenti a preparare pel Fanfulla l’articolo-burla sul gran poeta danese Gejer [sic]? Ella correggeva le sue cartelle e con particolarità quelle che contenevano i pretesi saggi di traduzione; poi mi dettava tutto a voce alta e cadenzata da vero traduttore che vive la stessa vita del proprio autore, ed io scrivevo, solo di due cose agitato: di vedere agitare Lei nelle grandi fatiche della contraffazione e di sforzarmi con tutte le forze possibili a contraffare la mia scrittura perché non fosse riconosciuta per niente. Ricorda ancora, che in sul meglio, sentimmo picchiare alla porta? Fu un momento di confusione straordinaria quello: quasi quasi ci turbammo sul serio, come fossimo stati lì a falsificare moneta. (April 7 1885; Carte messaggere II 407)

This account emphasizes the playful aspects of this “forgery” (a term explicitly recalled by the comparison between Capuana's act and the criminal act of counterfeiting money); however the episode served a deeper purpose. In discussing another famous hoax by Capuana (his falsification of a group of Sicilian folk songs included by Vigo in his Amplissima raccolta)—Stefano Rapisarda has convincingly suggested that these practices serve a polemic purpose in the author's literary battles, effectively sabotaging the “invention of a tradition” that took place in the Romantic and post-Romantic age (344).

If the fake folkloristic texts discredited the general enthusiasm towards oral poetry and folktales, the forgery of “Un poeta danese” has a different polemic target: the piece is a conscious satire of the mystique on the impossible task of translation, and of many commonplaces that derived from it, orienting a view of languages and literatures that is essentialistic and based on the “ethnicity” of language. In “Un poeta danese,” Capuana satirizes the raging fashion of Northern European literature by pretending to translate and comment the unpublished lyrics of an unknown Danish author, Wil’helm Getzier (who was, in reality, a fictional persona). As Capuana later declared in his note, the article was meant to be a satire “dei vostra signoria per la felice imitazione della forma popolare. Per la maggior parte di essi, lo spirito delle forme plebee è così ben colto e riprodotto, che l’illusione è perfetta, e solo avendo il reum confitentem si può accorgersi dell’errore” (qtd. Rapisarda 341-342).
tanti pretesi cultori di letteratura straniera che in Italia traducono, o fingono di tradurre, tutte le lingue europee” (“Un poeta danese” 167). Most importantly, none of these supposed translators and polyglots realized of the falsification: the forgery would have been uncovered, had it not been for Capuana’s overt admission:

È inutile aggiungere che, come non è mai esistito un poeta danese chiamato Getzìer, così sono un’invenzione i canti che si dicono tradotti e I giudizi dei critici citati. Al Fanfulla della Domenica giunsero parecchie cartoline che incoraggiavano il presunto traduttore; nessuna che avvertisse il giornale di essere stato messo in mezzo da un burlone. Se qualcuno dei tanti nostri traduttori di poeti stranieri ha già, per caso, versificata la mia prosa, ora è pietosamente avvertito.” (167).

In writing the fictional biography of Getzìer, Capuana resorts to all available stereotypes, calling into question the national and religious aspects of identity. For instance, Capuana resorts to all the standard qualities of a Protestant writer, including a stern father, a sense of guilt, and a negative prejudice against poetry, judged as “un’occupazione quasi indegna di un vero uomo, d’un Cristiano, sebbene il Re David avesse composto i Salmi; però non si sapeva se questi fossero stati proprio scritti in versi” (156). In this respect, Capuana is especially targeting the post-Romantic fascination for northern European and Scandinavian literature, promoted among other things by the growing popularity of Ibsen's oeuvre.

In addition to calling out the linguistic incompetence of the “traduttori di traduttori di poeti stranieri” (who merely adapt versions made by others, and have no real knowledge of the original), the author challenges and discredits the mystique of translation. Commonplace beliefs on the impossibility of a true translation are ridiculed in meta-literary statements such as: “Questo che segue è un cammeo antico, scolpito con plasticità tutta pagana. Tento di tradurlo alla meglio, benché una versione letterale, anzi interlineare come le precedenti, mi paia incapace di renderne la squisita purezza della forma.” (“Un poeta danese” 163). On the same lines reads the following statement, an eloquent platitude on untranslability of poetry: “Peccato che questi pregi non sia possibile riprodurla una traduzione di prosa! Però il lettore può esser sicuro di
trovarvi l’accento, l’intonazione dell’originale: è qualche cosa” (165) With these claims, Capuana mockingly imitates the translator's rhetoric of fidelity: as his satire implies, the seemingly humble self-effacement of the translator is often a louder way to affirm his omnipresence.

Together with its primary target (that is, the mystique of translation), Capuana also parodies another commonplace of literary debate, from which he is not completely immune himself: the ‘ethnic’ conception of poetry, or the belief that the truest spirit of a nation is inseparable from its language and – consequently – from its literary tradition. Such an illusion rests on the belief that language and expression are tied together as the two sides of one coin – hence the impossibility of perfect translation. The ethnicity of language is, therefore, the fundamental assumption that supports and validates the ‘mystics of translation.’

Capuana does not directly targets the “ethnicization” of poetry, of which he was a proponent himself, but he parodies the orientalism and the love for the exotic that was such a large part of it. He does so by rapidly jumping from a culture to another: Getziier’s pieces seem to be Mediterranean, Nordic, or even Arab depending on their tone and subject. Now he states that Getziier “ama il mezzogiorno, l’oriente, forse per contrasto” (163), and forges “una serenata del mezzogiorno, che non parrebbe possibile trovare in Danimarca” (162); but immediately after, he offers the reader “una di quelle piccole liriche dove il Getziier è proprio lui, un vero poeta del nord” (164). Several lines later, the author claims Mediterranean influences for another lyric that, he claims, seems to be translated from Arabic [“si direbbe tradotta dall’arabo” (164)]; and it is worth noting that not even this kaleidoscopic variety of country rang a bell to his unsuspecting readers. With the latter statement ("si direbbe tradotta dall’arabo"), Capuana overtly ridicules the stereotypical identification of language, ethos and ethnicity. The poetic samples featured in “Un poeta danese” are the quintessential embodiment of parody, being laced not only with stereotypical references to landscape and mythology, but also with not-so-subtle cues to their real humoristic nature. In this respect, Capuana's experiment clearly exemplifies the role of irony in self-translation, which David Martens has described in the following terms:
En un tel contexte, l’intérêt se porte non seulement sur la traduction de l’ironie portant sur le principe de la traduction, mais aussi sur la façon dont les pseudo-traducteurs et les véritables traducteurs de ces textes mettent en scène leur geste. En raison de l’ironie qu’elles font porter sur leur opération scripturaire, les pseudo-traductions contraignent en effet de façon particulière, au point d’ébranler parfois le mode d’autorité spécifique qui définit la tâche des traducteurs. (196)

By displaying an ironic re-enactment of his pseudo-source, Capuana undermines the textual and linguistic marks of authority of the translator, effectively emptying the “translator’s talk” of any possible significance and relevance. This is especially evident in the fictions of poetry fictitiously attributed to Getz’ier. See for instance the fragment titled “Nella foresta,” which reads: ‘Gittati sui muschi e sulle erbe, – ch’essi strappano con le mani, – convulse dallo sdegno, – *imprecano* contro gli ingrati – che dei loro benefici – non si sovvengono più” (165. Emphasis mine). It is hard to believe that a verb like “imprecare” could really figure in a lyric poem, and it is harder to imagine a clearer hint of its parodic nature. Similarly, it is hard to recognize “la raffinatezza concettosa di una *cacidas* dell’El-Mofadaliat” in the following lines:

> “Perché dunque, o zampillo, continuamente – stai a lamentarti sommesso – cascando nella rosea conchiglia – tra i profumi delle piante fiorite?”
> “Avresti dovuto lasciarmi lontano – nella rozza grotta ove la fonte – mia madre, si distende fra il caper venere – e una folla di amiche pianticine.
> Avrei continuato nella natia ombra fresca – il mio sonno di liquido argento; – qui tratto per forza, che può importarmi – dei tuoi ricchi doni? E mi lamento, mi lamento!” (164)

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156 With all evidence, a non-phonological spelling for Mufaddaliyat, the important anthology of Arabic poetry compiled in the VIII sec. a.D. In order to make his hoax more credible, Capuana summons a series of real literary references: in addition to the Mufaddaliyat, he also cites the Danish Romantic poet Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger (1779-1850). The solidity of these references, alongside a favourable horizon of reception, might help explain why the author’s forgery went undetected.
Despite his satire against “i traduttori di traduttori”, Capuana engaged in the same activity a decade later, when in 1891 he translated Henrik Ibsen’s *A House of Dolls* not from the Norwegian original text but through the mediation of Maurice de Prozor’s French translation.  

Contrarily to popular belief, Capuana was not the first to translate Ibsen’s masterpiece into Italian: in 1889 the company run by Emilia Aliprandi and her husband Vittorio Pieri staged an earlier version adapted from German by Pietro Galletti (Alonge 77). The play debuted (in Galletti’s version) on March 15 1889, but the work was poorly reviewed and soon obliterated. A cabled message from Ibsen himself resolved the legal dispute between Galletti and Capuana about the translation rights (“Stimo che galletti abbia perduto il dirotto di rappresentazione perché non ne approfittò e non pagò nulla. Autorizzo lei a far rappresentare *Nora,*” reads the original note). (78). Capuana immediately contacted Cesare Rossi for a possible staging, in a letter from September 19, 1890:

> ho ottenuto dal celebre commediografo norvegiano Enrico Ibsen e dal suo traduttore francese conte M. Prozor, segretario dell’ambasciata russa a Dresda, il privilegio di tradurre e far rappresentare in Italia la bellissima commedia *Bambola* (*Maison de Poupée*). È una delle più rigorose e interessanti produzioni del teatro moderno, ed io ne sono entusiasta.
> La commedia è stata applauditissima anche in Germania; son sicuro che sarebbe egualmente applauditissima in Italia. Quattro principali attori, due uomini e due donne possono trovarvi modo di sfoggiarvi le loro più belle qualità artistiche. Nel difetto di novità di non dubbio successo, questa *Bambola* mi par destinata a far parte del repertorio d’ogni primaria compagnia.
> Vuoi veder il manoscritto della mia traduzione?
> Tu sei il primo a cui mi rivolgo. (*Carte Messaggere II* 528)

Capuana’s version of *Casa di Bambola* was first staged in Turin in February 1891. The translation was first published on the journal *Il carro di tespi* in two installments (respectively in

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157 The first printed version appeared in 1889 in the following volume: Ibsen, Henrik. *Theatre: Les revenants; Maison de poupée*. Transl par Maurice de Prozor (Paris: Savine, 1889)
the January 1891 and in the March 1891 issues), with the title “Bambola” already mentioned in this letter. The first edition in volume was published in 1894 by Kantorowicz, a press based in Milan; the original title was instated thanks to the pressures made by Eleonora Duse, who starred in it as a memorable Nora.

A systematic comparison between the French version and Capuana’s translation reveals a few recurrent tendencies. Capuana systematically inserts diminutives (and, to a lesser extent, other morphologically altered nouns) in order to translate a variety of expressions that range from the affectively charged adjectives ‘pétit’ and ‘joli’ to transformative verbs. Prozor does employ diminutives in few selected cases (for instance in the word ‘alouette,’ one of the pet names by which Helmer calls Nora); building on this trend, Capuana multiplies these instances, resulting in overall stylistic inflation. See, for instance, the following turns:

(i) HELMER. — Ne me dérange pas. (Peu après il ouvre la porte et, la plume à la main, jette un coup d’oeil dans la chambre.) Acheté, tu dis? Tout cela? Le petit étourneau a-t-il de nouveau trouvé moyen de dépenser un tas d’argent?

NORA. — Mais oui, Torvald, cette année nous pouvons bien faire un peu plus de dépenses. C’est le premier Noël où nous ne soyons pas forcés d’économiser.

(…) HELMER. — (c.s.) Non mi disturbe. (Poco dopo apre l’uscio e si affaccia, con la penna in mano, per dare un’occhiata nella stanza). Hai comprato tutti questi oggetti? Lo stornellino ha di nuovo trovato modo di spendere un monte di quattrini.

NORA. — Si, Torvaldo, quest’anno possiamo permetterci qualche spesina di più. È il primo Natale in cui non siamo costretti all’economia. (…) NORA. — Si , Torvaldo, un pochino, un pocolino, un pocolino. Ora che tu avrai un grosso stipendio e che guadagnerai tanto e tanto denaro… (13)

“Stornellino” translates quite literally “petit étourneau”, whereas the joint effect of the repetition and of the double suffix in “pochino, pocolino, pocolino” exaggerates the semantic nuance
already present in the original. “Spesina,” instead, is an original insertion by Capuana. While Prozor had employed three different constructions to convey the idea of smallness, Capuana merges all expressions in the same stylistic device, somehow generating an effect of counter-concordance.

A similar effect can be observed in the following lines:

(ii) NORA. — Je n'y manquerai pas, tu peux y compter. Mais viens ici. Je vais te montrer tout ce que j'ai acheté, et si bon marché! Tiens, voici de nouveaux habits pour Yvar et un sabre. Voici un cheval avec une trompette pour Bob et une poupée avec un lit pour Emmy. Tout ce qu'il y a de plus ordinaire; elle les abîme si vite. Et voici des tabliers et des étoffes pour les bonnes. La vieille Anne-Marie devrait avoir bien plus que cela.

HELMER. — Et ce paquet-là, que contient-il? (154-155)

NORA. — Puoi contarci, vedrai! Ora, vieni qua: guarda tutto quel che ho comprato, si può dire, per nulla. Ecco: un abito nuovo per Ivar e una sciabola. Un cavalluccio e una trombetta, per Bob, una bambola e un lettino per Emma. Cosettine ordinarie: le guastano così presto! Grembiuli e stoffe per le donne. La vecchia Anna-Maria meriterebbe assai più.

HELMER. — E questo pacchettino che contiene? (14)

Of the six diminutives used by Capuana, only one has a direct equivalent in the original (‘trompette’ → ‘trombetta’); ‘cavalluccio’ and ‘lettino’ are seemingly motivated by disambiguation (for instance, given the syntactical change in the sentence, readers could assume Nora bought a new bed for her daughter, rather than a miniature bed for her doll); two of them, “cosettine” and “pacchettino,” are completely unmotivated.

There are, of course, recurring elements and stylistic constants: diminutives are Capuana’s preferred option in rendering the adjective “petit”, and other adjectives expressing affection, as in the following examples:
(iii) HELMER. — Non, je le sais bien. Ne m'as-tu pas donné ta parole?... (Use rapproche de Nora.) Allons, garde tes petits mystères de Noël pour toi, ma Nora chérie, ils seront démasqués ce soir quand on aura allumé l'arbre. (158)

(iv) HELMER. — Maintenant je ne m'ennuyerai plus tout seul, et toi, tu n'auras plus besoin de tourmenter tes chers yeux et tes jolies menottes. (159)

(v) NORA. — Oui. De petites choses, des ouvrages à la main, du crochet, de la broderie, etc. [changeant de ton] et autre chose encore. (163)

(vi) MADAME LINDE. — J'ai dû me tirer d'affaire à l'aide d'un petit négoce, d'une petite école que j'ai dirigée, que sais-je? (166)

(vii) … Pourtant tu as un peu pâli, Christine... et un peu maigri aussi. (161)

HELMER. — Lo so benissimo. Non mi hai data la tua parola? (si avvicina a Nora) E ti lascio tutti i tuoi misteriucci di Natale: Non saranno più misteri questa sera, appena accesi i ceri dell’albero. (17)

HELMER. — Ora non ti annoierai chiusa in camera sola sola; e non c’è più bisogno di tormentare i tuoi cari occhietti e le tue belle manine.

NORA. — Sì, delle cosettine, dei lavorini all’uncinetto, dei ricami, ecc. (20)

SIGNORA LINDE. — Ho dovuto industriarmi alla meglio con un negozietto, una scoletta che dirigevo...

Diminutives are also used to replace a transformative verb, as in the following example:

(vii) … Pourtant tu as un peu pâli, Christine... et un peu maigri aussi. (161)

Però, sei diventata palliduccia, ed anche un po’ magrolina. (20)

While they are used mostly to reproduce a display of affection, diminutives are not exclusively used in the lines of Nora and Linde: they are also present in the speech of Helmer and other male characters, as the following examples clearly show:
The same phenomenon is also found in Krogstad’s lines: the French line “ce poste à la Banque était pour moi le premier échelon” (188) is rendered with “Questo posticino alla Banca era un primo scalino” (42), with an internal rhyme clustering the sentence. In addition to diminutives, other derivative suffixes are also used in the text. For instance, “elle a un succès fou” (249) is translated with “ha un successone” (93), thus eliminating the semantic trait of “folly” that meaningfully resonated with the hysterical possession of the tarantella. The sentence “Tu vas voir comme je ferai de l’effet.” (209) is rendered with “Vedrai che effettone farò!” (60) and so forth. As for the pejoratives, “cosaccio” is used to attenuate the more explicit “Son père, vois-tu, était un dégoûtant personnage,” and “villaines” (211) is rendered with “gentaccia” (109).

Diminutives and other derivative suffixes are a common feature of regionalist fiction and of Capuana’s works in particular; in this case, they belong to a wider translational strategy, perhaps aiming at compensating the semantic losses and the overall stylistic impoverishment of
the text. More importantly, this tendency appears to be a constant of Capuana’s translational style: whether he is translating from French into Italian, or from Italian into vernacular, the author generously disseminate the texts with such forms, to emphasize the pathetic and affective dimension of the text. Sicilian diminutive suffixes such as ‘uzzu’ serve the same purpose in the subsequent self-translations of plays from Italian into vernacular, as we will see in greater detail in sections 2.5 and 2.6.

The translation of A Doll’s House is interesting not only as a way to assess Capuana’s practice of multilingual work, but also as a standpoint of evaluating his ideal of a modern theatrical prose. This is especially evident in the glimpse of linguistic modernity adopted by the translator. While he normally opts for the most faithful literalism, the author introduces a few idioms in the Italian version:

(xiii) NORA. — Et avec cela des flots de porto et de champagne... (218) NORA. Annegate nel porto e nello sciampagna. (67)

More in general, Capuana strives to give its conversation a realistic pace, closer to a regime of “scripted orality” than to a conventional written register. Pauses frequently interrupt the sentence, somehow imitating the fragmentary nature of oral speech; so do the many elliptical sentences (add examples).

Similarly, Capuana introduces a few elements of non-standard syntax, including marked word orders such as the ones presented below:

(xiv) HELMER. — Non, non, pas cette nuit... Je veux rester avec toi, ma chère, chère petite femme. (260) HELMER. No, no, questa notte voglio passarla con te, moglina mia cara! (101)

(xv) HELMER. — Aveugle que lu es, pauvre être sans expérience ! HELMER. — Cieca! Povera creatura senza esperienza!
NORA. — Je chercherai à me créer de l’expérience, Torvald. (272) NORA. — L’acquisterò l’esperienza, Torvaldo. (111).
Overall, Capuana tries to respect the word-order of the source-language, translating as faithfully as possible; his version sometimes echoes the prosody and the syntax used by Prozor. Examples of such literalism can be seen in the following cases:

(xvi) NORA. — Huit années ont passé... et même plus, en comptant depuis notre première rencontre, et nous n'avons jamais échangé une parole sérieuse sur un sujet grave.
Nora. Son già otto anni, anche più, contando dal giorno del nostro primo incontro, e non abbiamo mai scambiato una parola seria sopra un grave soggetto (108).

(xvii) NORA, frottant une allumette.
— Laissez-moi vous offrir du feu.
NORA. Permetta che io le offra il fuoco (99)

(xviii) HELMER. — Pas du tout: je me sens au contraire très éveillé. Mais toi? En effet, tu as l'air d'être fatiguée et d'avoir sommeil.
HELMER: Anzi, sono svegliatissimo. E tu? Tu sì, mi sembri stanca e piena di sonno. (95).

HELMER. — Nora, Nora, tu es une vraie femme Sérieusement, Nora, tu connais mes idées à ce sujet. Pas de dettes; jamais d'emprunt. Il s'introduit une sorte d'esclavage, quelque chose de laid dans toute maison fondée sur des dettes et des emprunts. Nous avons tous les deux tenu bon jusqu'à présent et nous continuerons à le faire durant le peu de temps d'épreuves qui nous reste. (154)

These examples display the whole range of Capuana’s effects of literalism at all linguistic level. Both (xvi) and (xvii) are cases of word-by-word translation, a choice made easier by the many French loanwords available in the language of the time. In example (xviii) we can observe a
correspondence in grammatical structures, or a ‘morphological literalism:’ the translator
maintains the same verbal form used in the source texts, a past participle used as an adjective,
merely replacing the analytical comparative of French grammar (<très + adj>) with the synthetic
form that is a viable option in Italian. Finally, the expression “punti debiti, punti imprestiti” in
example (XIX) is an example of prosodic and syntactical literalism. The expression in the source-
language is reproduced verbatim, which prompts the use of an elliptical syntactical structure that
is by far less common in the target-language.

In the same line one may also observe a lexical calque: the adjective ‘laido’ (attested in
Old Italian) used to render the French ‘laid’ (the two words are, indeed, etymologically
connected). However, this choice is not a constant, as the following example shows:

(xx) NORA. — Fi, comme c'est laid de parler ainsi.
RANK. — C'est que la chose elle-même est disablement laide. Le pire, c'est pourtant toutes les hor reurs qui doivent précéder[…] . (216-217)

NORA. — Che brutto discorso mi fa!
RANK.—La cosa è brutta da sé. Il peggio sono gli orrori che devono precedere la catastrophe[…] . (…) (66-67)

Rather than a full-fledged case of literalism, the use of ‘laido’ for ‘laid’ seems to be a partially
motivated choice between an available group of synonyms (laido/brutto): Capuana here achieves
an effects of anti-concordance, translating the same word with two different words that are
equally available in the target language.

Roberto Alonge has devoted several pages of his 1995 monograph Ibsen: l'opera e la
fortuna scenica to Capuana's translation of Maison de poupée. His argument in a nutshell is that
Capuana eliminates the underlying sexual tension in the scene with censoring and attenuating
translations. Most importantly, Alonge argues that the effacement of sexuality corresponds to a
purified and intellectualized reading of Ibsen – thus freed of all of his most complex and
contradictory aspects, also to comply with the sensitivity of the main interpreter Eleonora Duse:
Rank’s hint that Nora might be pregnant, in act II, is suppressed; so is the famous dance scene of
the Finale of the Second Act, where the Neapolitan tarantella is replaced by a more “intellectual”
costume as Harlequin. As Alonge claims, “sopprimere la tarantella significa intellettualizzare
Ibsen, spiritualizzarlo, togliere alla sua scrittura carne e saporti, ambiguità vitalistiche e sensuali” (81), while at the same time eliminating the sexual connotations of Nora as a 'geisha-spouse,' entertaining her husband through continuous performances and masquerades:

Certo dire Arlecchino/Arlecchina significa alludere a un ruolo di dipendenza servile da cui Nora alla fine si libera; ma la proletaria napoletana che balla la tarantella per il suo uomo padrone è qualcosa di più di un puro ruolo subalterno. C’è appunto una allusività pregnante di pulsioni sado-masochistiche che la scelta tutta intellettualistica di Arlecchino/Arlecchina rimuove e cancella (81)

This attenuating and censoring drive became mostly evident in the author's attempt at changing the finale, making it easier to accept for a moralistic audience, so clearly oriented by a cult of motherhood. In turn, Capuana's fears prompted the intervention of Ibsen himself (Caretti 200-201), making his famous statement that “tutto il dramma è stato scritto per la scena finale,” soon adding that “io credo che il signor Capuana si sbaglia quando teme che il pubblico italiano non sia in grado di capire o di accettare il mio lavoro se viene rappresentato nella sua forma originale” and that “in ogni caso questo va tentato.” (qtd. in Caretti 200).

Alonge has a point in suggesting that semantic attenuation and effacement of sexual motives are two constant tendencies of Capuana's translation. The following examples of semantic attenuation bear further evidence to this:

(xxi) HELMER, (souriant)— Mais le résultat a été assez piteux, Nora. (159)

(xxii) NORA. — Non, hier c'était plus évident que de coutume. Il est atteint d'une terrible maladie, le malheureux. Il souffre de la moelle épinière. Son père, vois-tu, était un dégoûtant personnage. Il entretenait des maîtresses et... il y a bien encore autre

HELMER. — (sorridente) Il risultato non fu gran cosa… (17)

NORA. Ieri più del solito. È colpito, poverino, da una terribile malattia al midollo spinale. Il padre era un cosaccio, donnaiolo e peggio. Per questo suo figlio è stato malaticcio sino dall’infanzia, intendi? (57)
In all three examples, Capuana attenuates the tone of the sentence by choosing a lighter and less explicit wording. In (xxi), he replaces an explicitly devaluing statement (“le résultat a été assez piteux”) with a litotes (“non fu gran cosa”); in (xxii), he shortens the sentence, transforming Nora’s detailed expressions of disgust in two vague references (“cosaccio” and “donnaiolo,” also accompanied by another lithote, “e peggio”). Finally, in (xxiii) he eliminates Rank’s gory reference to the materiality of his death, replacing the disturbing image of his rotting body (“pourrirai,” “will rot”) with the weaker ‘sarò’ (“I will be”).

While these changes alter the overall tone of the play, some of the translational changes drastically alter the meaning of a given scene and the balance between the different characters. This is the case of the lines in which Nora describes the Christmas gifts she bought for the children. Capuana’s version reads “Cosettine ordinarie: le guastano così presto!”, while the French reads “Tout ce qu’il y a de plus ordinaire; elle les abîme si vite.” In the Prozor’s version, the concern is limited to the only girl of the family: it is specifically Emmy, not all children, who breaks all toys regardless of their value. The original wording has many implication: perhaps the choice of a less valuable toy reflects the gender hierarchies in the household, or the girls is already displaying the same tendency to wastefulness as her mother; either way, this subtle misogynistic hint is lost in Capuana’s translation.
Another translational mistake can be observed in the following example:

(xxiv) MADAME LINDE, souriant, — SIGNORA LINDE (sorridendo) Sei tu
Nora, Nora, n'es-tu pas encore diventata una donna ragionevole? A scuola
raisonnable à l'heure qu'il est ? A eri una grande sciupona. (20)
l'école tu étais une grande gaspilleuse.
(163)

Nora’s claim that downright wealth is to be preferred to economic stability is not, in fact, an expression of wisdom, but a rather childish view of life – hence Linde’s judgmental reaction. By changing this line, Capuana subtly alters the mindset of the main character on stage. Meaning is also affected in the following exchange:

(xxv) HELMER. — Maintenant je ne HELMER. — Ora non ti annoierai chiusa in
m'ennuyerai plus tout seul, et toi, tu camera sola sola; e non c’è più bisogno di
n'auras plus besoin de tourmenter tes tormentare i tuoi cari occhietti e le tue belle
chers yeux et tes jolies menottes. (159) manine. (19)

This downright mistake was perhaps motivated by Nora’s later lines, in which she recounts to her friend Linde the many nights spent working in secret to pay off her debt. Yet, this translational license deeply changes the meaning of the scene, in a way that is almost incompatible with the overall balance of characters in the play. In Helmer’s unshakable vision of the world, solitude and boredom can only belong to the world of male responsibility, while women do not have to ruin their good-looking hands and eyes.

The translation of A Doll's House is relevant for three main reasons. First of all, it provides us with a better understanding of Capuana’s translational practice, in connection with the warmly felt problem of creating a modern standard for a national dramaturgy. As we can see, Capuana struggled with the most innovative aspect of Ibsen’s text, often failing to render controversial and scandalous nuances; at the same time, he should be credited with the attempt at creating a modern translation, capable or reproducing the oscillations, the changing rhythm and the ambiguities of spoken dialogue.
Secondly, and most importantly, Ibsen is prominently featured in Capuana’s personal pantheon of authors, also substantiating his view of the artistic process and of the actor-playwright relation; his work on Ibsen’s masterpiece shaped and influenced his idea of theatrical realism.

The modeling role played by Ibsen is well documented in an important piece titled “Di un’opinione di E. Zacconi” (later included in Cronache letterarie, 193-202), in which Capuana first expresses his idea that the script should prevail on the performer's creativity. The piece is a rebuttal to an interview of the famous performer Ermete Zacconi, whose free interpretation of Les Révenants on stage had much criticism. Capuana concentrates on Zacconi’s claim that “nella interpretazione dei capolavori dei sommi non bisogna arrestarsi sempre davanti alla semplice opera d’arte. C’è il pensiero che va più in là dell’arte. Così nell’Ibsen bisogna distinguere prima il filosofo, poi il simbolista, e soltanto in ultimo l’artista. Egli è grande per la gran forza del pensiero, e non per la forza artistica” (Cronache letterarie 196).

Capuana spurns the dichotomy between concept and form proposed by Zacconi, questioning the self-proclaimed liberty of the great actor. As he polemically wonders, “Dov’è qui il pensiero che va più in là dell’arte? Il concetto dell’eredità è divenuto personaggio vivente. Osvaldo non discute una teorica scientifica, la mostra. Così, più o meno, tutti gli altri personaggi dei lavori drammatici dell’Ibsen.” In making his argument Capuana explicitly refers to A Doll’s House (the Ibsenian script he was most familiar with), claiming that “La stessa Nora, delle ultime scene di Casa di bambola, è, se vogliamo, una persona che ragiona male, unilateralmente, ma forse per questo schiettamente donna più di quel che non si creda” (197). In other words, the characters truly reveal themselves through their actions and words, without any need for the actors to add gestures or original interpretations. Ibsen is thus considered the symbol of a modern ideal of theatre, whose work accomplish a nearly perfect fusion between the work of art and the scientific or behavioral theories that substantiate it. In such a theatre, the performer only task is, to be as faithful as possible to the script, maieutically extracting from the play its underlying significance without adding his own words, interpretation or actions.

While Capuana’s respect for Ibsen borders on veneration, he is extremely critical of Ibsen’s imitators, whose work he dismissively dubs as “Norwegianizing” or “Russifying” national literature. In this respect, his relation to the Norwegian playwright strikingly echoes his twofold
relation to Zola: marked by respect but also by a deep sense of competition with the other intellectuals and writers of Italy who were also looking at his plays as a possible source of inspiration. Capuana voiced this feeling in his well known *Gli “ismi” contemporanei*, a fiercely polemic collection of critical and literary writings:

Ed ecco i drammaturghi norvegiani, ecco i romanzieri russi. Ibsen irrompe sul palcoscenico spingendosi innanzi una folla di creature della sua Norvegia, strane, malate d’ideali, con la coscienza sconvolta dei problemi religiosi e sociali che cola lavorano sordamente i cuori e le teste; nature complicate, nevrotiche, che soffrono e fanno soffrire” (23).

The polemic target of this essay is the triumphant wave of Cosmpolitan literature, a European trend that aims at reconnecting the different national traditions around a core of common human values, and that was considered as the new dominant school supplanting the declining movements of Naturalism and Verism. Capuana, a fervent proponent of a politics of location, could not accept the international culture animating such a trend: to him, this ideal appears as a pretentious name given to the superficial imitation of foreign trends and fashions – most notably, the Russian novel, with its strong psychological and religious inclination, and Ibsen’s plays, with their tormented and well-rounded characters.

Capuana claims that the proponent of Cosmopolitanism and the imitators of foreign masterpieces are dangerously confusing the form of art with its content (“confusione tra forma e concetto”). This harmful confusion would directly result in a great number of works deriving from aesthetic theories, whose main point is not to achieve an artistic effect, but to prove grand philosophical statements about the functioning of human societies: “Il cosmopolitismo non sa che farsene di queste figure vive e consistenti. Simboli! Astrettezze! Ecco quel che egli vuole, cioè cose che sono l'opposto, anzi l'assoluta negazione dell'arte,” he claims in “Domando la parola.”

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158 The unusual spelling is adopted by Capuana without any irony. He uses it also in the letter to Cesare Rossi (September 19, 1890) cited below.
The author further explains his hatred for imitation with his repulsion for artistic compromises, which he dubs “hybrids” [“ibridismi”]. The notion of hybrid is here used in its negative acceptation, to indicate those literary chimeras that aim at advancing a philosophical discourse through fiction:

Io odio le cose a mezzo, gli ibridismi. Il puro concetto, se mi occorre, vado a cercarlo nei libri dei filosofi o in quelli degli scienziati. Lì trovo la verità astratta o nuda, cioè quella che provvisoriamente sembra verità; e coi filosofi e con gli scienziati mi insuperbisco della divina potenza dell'intelletto umano, e insieme con loro mi umilio e mi scoraggio davanti all'infinità dell'Ignoto che riduce a ben misera cosa la nostra più profonda filosofia, la nostra più ardita e più meravigliosa scienza. Quando poi mi rivolgo all'opera d'arte, ricerco invece sensazioni, impressioni, caratteri, rappresentazioni nelle quali quel tal concetto filosofico o scientifico, prima ricercato altrove, può benissimo tornarmi dinanzi ma incarnato nella forma, divenuto uomo, donna, paesaggio, passione, azione; e incarnato in modo così perfetto, che io dovrò avere l'illusione di trovarmi faccia a faccia con questa nuova e più eccelsa Natura, e rifare intorno ad essa l'identico lavoro fatto dal poeta, dal romanziere, dal drammaturgo allorché ricavavano dalla vita sociale il soggetto che li aveva prima commossi e poi spinti a riflettere. (283)

Once again, Capuana presents his readers with a dichotomous view of the artistic creation: on the one hand, the irrational force of art, embodied by subjective terms such as “sensations, impressions, characters, representations;” on the other hand, the abstractness of philosophical thought. True artists such as Ibsen are able to transform their theories and ideas into “real men and women,” giving way to the supremely credible illusion of art; their imitators, on the contrary, are caught in a web of theories and words, whose verbosity still transpires through their imperfect creations.

However, Capuana was not foreign to the sin of cultural appropriation and imitation; while he abstain from the superficial and exterior imitation of Ibsen's characters and settings, the experience of translating *A Doll’s House* did orient his subsequent quest for a new inner realism. As Mazzamuto has suggested in his preface to *Teatro Dialettale Siciliano*, there is a specific
liaison between Ibsen's use of memory and the new intimate source of inspiration sought by the Sicilian playwright:

[tra il 1895 e il 1905, dopo Malìa in dialetto, proprio sulla traccia di Ibsen e possiamo aggiungere, di qualche ibseniano italiano, come Bracco, il Capuana cominci a intravedere e a sperimentare, prima in sede narrativa e poi in sede teatrale in lingua, la forma rivissuta dall’avvenimento, la fenomenologia della coscienza-fatto e del fatto-memoria, del “processo verbale” oltre che del puro processo vivente dei fatti, se in molte novella di quel periodo (…) il “fatto” è soltanto ricostruito e in un certo senso interiorizzato dal protagonista o dal personaggio-narratore in termini di turbata sofferta memoria. (Mazzamuto 36)

This new quest for realism will go beyond the morbid and somewhat fascination with the life of the lowest classes, advancing towards the comprehension of middle classes and educated characters; more important, it will explore the depth of psychological realism as much as the realism of social ambiances. Nevertheless, the most suitable terrain for this exploration of the human character will be provided by the project of Verist theatre first, and from its natural consequence immediately after: that is, the project of a bourgeois comedy written in Sicilian dialect, which I will explore in detail in the next sections.

5. Malìa, or the conversion to vernacular theatre

“Quando sento dire d’un giovane: – è serio, assennato, non ha chimere per il capo – subito mi domando – Ma è proprio giovane costui? – Mi sembra impossibile; non so figurarmi la giovinezza senza chimere pel capo.” (Libri e teatro 155) This catchy opening for the review essay “Chimera” (a review of Enrico Corradini’s novel La verginità, published in 1898) could perfectly describe the personality of Nino, the leading male role in Malìa, the Sicilian play that allowed Capuana to combine his interests for folklore, his regionalist creed, and his contradictory belief in Spiritism. Most importantly, this claim could perfectly describe the human type so aptly impersonated by Giovanni Grasso, one of the most famous mattatori of the vernacular stage: as
Mazzamuto dubs it, “il modello maschile […] verghiano, furiosamente geloso, che uccide o vuole uccidere” (*Teatro Dialettale Siciliano* 39).

Originally composed in Italian in 1891 and translated in Sicilian in 1903, *Malià* fully belongs to Capuana’s realist season, bringing the author’s adamant faith in regionalism on stage. It can rightly be considered as transitional work, since it marks the passage from an ideal of “dramma verista” (written in Italian, but centred on the realistic depiction of a local environment) to full-fledged dialectal theatre.

The plot of *Malià* revolves around the topics of passion, unrequited love and superstition, which strikingly resonate with Verga’s most famous play, *Cavalleria Rusticana*. As Oliva suggests, the audience’s familiarity with this topic was also a likely factor of success (“Capuana, Musco e il ruolo dell’attore” 139). At the same time, the work is highly emblematic of Capuana’s inspiration, since it combines the aim at depicting the rural classes of Sicily with the author’s interest for the supernatural and the folkloristic. The main motive of the play is indeed a fact of local superstition, based on the anthropology of the time: episodes of ritual possessions were, for instance, documented by Giuseppe Pitrè in his *Bibliografia delle tradizioni popolari d’Italia* [1870].

The play tells the story of two young sisters, Jana and Nedda, who live a quiet life as the fiancées of two young men from their village, Nino and Cola. The two men’s personalities could not differ more: while Nino is levelheaded and hardworking, the younger Cola is vain and superficial. Contrarily to the tradition, it is the youngest couple (Cola and Nedda) the first to

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159 Capuana’s early interest in folklore and popular culture is well documented in his friendship with Lionardo Vigo, the scholar based in Acireale who collected a massive collection of folk songs titled *Raccolta dei canti popolari siciliani* (1857). later enlarged and revised in his *Raccolta amplissima dei canti popolari siciliani* (1870-74). Capuana himself contributed to the project with a few early examples of his propensity to literary forgery: among the many falsifications, was his famous ottava “Bedda, ch’aviti picciulu lu perj/D’oru e d’argentu la scarpa v’ he farj/Si vi scuprisci Gran Conti Ruggeri/Ca dj lu peri s’ havi a’ nnamurari:/Pigghiatimi lu ’ncensu e lu ’ncinseri./Mintjtimi la bedda ’nta ’n’artari./Nenti fazzu prj tia mè duci beni./Comu ’na santa tj vogghiu adurari.”. Capuana later confessed his forgery in a 1879, when these verse were included in a later reprint of another collection of sicilian poetry, edited by Paolo Maura. In 1898, Capuana admits the falsification of hundreds of poems contributed to Vigo’s collection, including a patent plagiarism from Dante: Ricordo che in uno di essi m’ero appropriato un noto verso dantesco, voltandolo indietro: «Donni ca aviti ’ntillettu d’amuri». Seppi, parecchi anni appresso, quando svelai dopo la morte del Vigo la mia marachella giovanile, che il professor d’Ancona, dalla sua cattedra di Pisa, aveva a lungo discusso intorno alla questione se Dante avesse tolto in prestito quel verso da l’ignoto poeta popolare siciliano, o se il poeta siciliano l’avesse rubato all’Alighieri.” This episode is masterfully reconstructed by Stefano Rapisarda in his 2006 paper “Dante nelle campagne di Mineo,” cited in the *Bibliography.*
celebrate their wedding, as Nino needs to solve some heritage disputes before establishing his own family. Initially, the family takes little notice when Jana appears detached and shaken on the wedding day: everyone attributes her distress to the disappointment for having her own wedding postponed. In reality, Jana secretly yearns for her soon-to-be brother-in-law Cola, a passion that is hinted to be the result of a spell, the “malìa” that gives the title to the entire play. This ominous feeling is further emphasized by the sudden arrival of an unwelcome guest, Caristia, an old woman whom everyone considers a witch. After hinting that Cola has seduced and abandoned her own daughter, the old woman throws a curse on the new family. The wedding banquet continues as if nothing had happened, despite the latent tensions between the two newly wed couple and Jana’s growing uneasiness around her brother-in-law.

In Act II, Jana is literally consumed by the spell, too weak to work or even leave the house. She stubbornly refuses to marry her fiancé Nino (who is still fond of her and strives to keep his vows) and spends her days alternating between prayer and crying spells. Finally, she reveals her secret to Cola. The latter, being dissatisfied with his own marriage, promptly takes advantage of the situation; after a futile resistance, Jana cedes to his sexual advances, unbeknownst to everyone else. The family, meanwhile, resorts to all possible means to save the young woman from the presumed witchcraft. They call Don Saverio, a healer who claims to be able to free anyone from malign spells with the help of a blessed gold medal. Despite the hysterical resistance of Jana, Don Saverio is able to perform a part of the liberating charm. In Act III, Jana has seemingly recovered from the most visible aspects of her illness, but she still refuses to marry Nino, who finally confronts her in an intense love scene. When Jana confesses the true nature of her “curse,” Nino is blinded by rage; yet, he believes to the supernatural explanation and accepts to marry Jana regardless of her lost virginity. Cola hears this and resolves to stand in the way, determined not to lose Jana. At first he tries to force her refuse the marriage; when his attempt fails he overtly defies the cool-headed and mild-mannered Nino. Blinded by rage, the latter surprises everyone by slashing his rival’s throat in an epic finale à la Verga.

As this plot makes it evident, Malìa stands out in Capuana’s production, constituting a crucial step in his realist project. In fact, the play combines regionalism, folklore and superstition with the usual ingredients of love, passion and death – a sure key to the favour of the audiences.
Furthermore, *Malìa* takes some characters and motives from narrative sources: in particular, the figure of Don Saverio is based on characters depicted in “Il mago” and “Don Salvatore.”

Even in this respect, Malia is a typical Verist play, as its inspiration rests on that artistic continuity between narrative and theatre that characterized the practices of the Naturalist and Verist communities. For these reasons, the play was met with enthusiasm by De Roberto, who replied to Capuana on December 23, 1891:

> Mio caro Luigi, vorrei poterti abbracciare, sarebbe l’unico modo col quale esprimerti il piacere immenso provato nel leggere la tua *Malìa*, l’ammirazione per quest’opera forte e bella che è tra le tue migliori e, se che la p… fortuna dirà di sì, ti darà finalmente quel successo del quale sei meritevole. Tu hai messo le mani sopra un argomento interessantissimo, pieno di carattere, di coloure locale, di teatralità, ma tu l’hai anche svolto da maestro, ne hai cavati degli effetti straordinariamente belli. Non esagero la mia impressione; elgendo, avrei voluto battere le mani, saltarti al collo, stringerti la pancia. Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! (*Capuana e De Roberto* 338).

Equally positive was the reaction of Verga, who also complimented the author. At the same time, Verga did not fail to notice the striking similarities between *Malìa* and his own short story “La lupa,” which he soon adapted in another successful Verist play; eventually, the Italian script of *La lupa* was translated in Sicilian dialect by Martoglio and became part of the Grasso company’s repertoire. Verga complained of this in a personal letter to De Roberto: “A proposito della Lupa ho scritto a Capuana che è un infame, un porco, un baloss… che mi ha fottuto due o tre scene della Lupa con la sua Malìa, che pure è una bella cosa, la più bella cosa forse ch’egli abbia scritto, e fui felice di dirglielo…” (January 13, 1892) (*Carte Messaggere I* 241)

> The many similarities between “La lupa” and *Malìa* include the overpowering force of love and the final transformation of a mild-mannered character into a murderer. Indeed, the unbreakable bond between Cola and Jana closely resembling Nanni’s irresistible attraction to Gnà Lola, and both Jana and Nanni feel almost possessed by their lover; similarly, Nino’s final

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160 In particular, the lines of /// are taken from the main characters of “Il mago,” including his iconic cry “Uuh! Uuh! Passa il lupo!” (“Il mago” 254)
burst of violence clearly echoes the final scene of “La Lupa,” where Nanni slowly walks towards Gnà Lola threateningly carrying his hatchet.

Despite these enthusiastic reactions, the Italian version of Malìa was not well received at its debut in 1892. Giovan Alfredo Cesareo noted in Tavola Rotonda (May 15, 1892) that “tutti […] fecero la loro parte, per parlare sotto metafora, caninamente”. Boutet also reviewed the play negatively on the journal La O di Giotto, prompting Capuana’s caustic response: “La vostra discussione e i vostri consigli (che avevo invocato prima della rappresentazione e che non potei ottenere) non sarebbero rimasti inutili come voi aspettate.” Capuana then proceeds to defend the artistic value of his own work, blaming the actors for the poor reception of the play: “Almeno voi riconoscete che in Malìa le situazioni, i caratteri, il dramma vi sono! Quanto al dialogo, permettetemi di dirvi che forse vi ingannate. Vi basterebbe dare un’occhiata al manoscritto per persuadervi che la recitazione ne ha falsato il tono. I miei personaggi non dicono una sola parola che non sia da contadino siciliano.” (Carte Messaggere I 432) At any rate, Boutet’s criticism clearly hit its target, since the reviewer had pointed his finger at the lack of realism of Capuana’s theatrical dialogue. Once again, the Sicilian writer is painfully reminded of the difficulty of his mission: creating a viable national standard for the artificial reproduction of oral speech in the near-absence of reliable models.

Capuana’s disappointment with the actors is also recorded in a later document, a 1903 letter sent to Stanis Manca, the influential theatre reviewer of La tribuna. On this occasion, Capuana remembers the shortcomings of its first staging in Italian, blaming the performers of the Rossi Company for their poor interpretation:

Le rappresentazioni di Malìa fatte da compagnie non dialettali avevano falsato i caratteri. Ricordo che alla prima rappresentazione in Roma l’attrice che sosteneva la parte di Jana ebbe fin la disperata idea di vestirsi in decolleté nella scena delle nozze; e a un mio amico che gliene fece osservare la sconvenienza prima che fosse alzato il sipario rispose queste testuali parole:— Eh, via! Il pubblico è sempre contento quando vede un po’ di ciccia! – Non vi dico altro. Su per giù, Malìa, prima della mirabile interpretazione della Compagnia Dialettale Siciliana era stata eseguita con questi criteri! (Teatro italiano 109)
The translation of *Malìa* comes at a very critical time in the history of vernacular theatre, immediately after the episode that made Grasso a celebrated actor known both nationally and internationally. In this respect, it played a crucial role in granting the performer success and credibility nation-wide, giving him the seal of approval of one of the most prominent Italian writers.

By 1901, the local arena of Catania was starting to feel too narrow for the ambitions of Grasso: this led his company (at the time named “Compagnia città di Catania”) to embark on its first tour outside of the island, hitting Southern cities such as Naples, Salerno and Avellino. The tour was critically well received but resulted in financial losses, prompting the company to return to the safest waters of Catania’s municipal theatres. It was not until the following year that the creativity and spontaneity of vernacular actors became known to the general Italian audience and, most importantly, to the trendsetters of the capital.

In November 1902, the company (promptly renamed Compagnia Siciliana after one of its many dissolutions) received an invitation to give a few charity representations at the Teatro Olimpia in Rome, as part of a fundraising operation to support a local theatre damaged by a storm and a flood. On the first night, the company performed *Zolfara* for a near-empty theatre, but on the second day a staging of *Cavalleria Rusticana* revealed the exceptional talent of the Sicilian actors to an unsuspecting audience. Stanis Manca, one of the most influential reviewers of the time, was completely taken aback by the performance, and lauded the unmatched talent of Grasso and his company in *La tribuna*. Capuana himself describes this positive shock in a commemoration article of many years later, titled “La dinastia dei Grasso:”

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161 Contrarily to the false claims made by Ludovico Capuana and Adelaide Bernardini in their July 21, 1953 letter to the Director of the Società italiana autori, the Sicilian version was not the original script of the play (AUT-ARST-002-A38-01: Biblioteca Teatrale SIAE). More importantly, the Sicilian version was not of Capuana’s making: held back by his insecurities, the playwright put his work in the hands of Giuseppe Giusti Sinopoli, a minor author gravitating around Martoglio and Grasso Sinopoli was mostly known for his play *La Zolfara*, which was part of Grasso’s repertoire at the Teatro Machiavelli in Catania, alongside *I mafiusi di la Vicaria di Palermo* (by Gaspare Mosca and Giuseppe Rizzotto) and Martoglio’s Sicilian translation of *Cavalleria Rusticana*. *La zolfara* is an eminent example of socially oriented realism on stage: the play attempts at documenting the dire life conditions of Sicilian sulfur miners, and it meets the demand for realism excited already in 1876 by the Sonnino and Franchetti’s well-known enquiry on the social conditions of Sicily.
L’apparizione di lui e dei suoi compagni all’Olimpia di Roma fu per me, siciliano, quasi catanese, una sorpresa non meno grande di quella del pubblico romano. Pochi sapevano che Catania avesse un attore così eccezionale, e parecchi di qui non arrivano ancora a persuadersi che dal bugigattolo del teatro Machiavelli sia potuto uscire l’artista che ha fatto ammirare nel continente italiano, e tra poco farà ammirare in Spagna e in America, la rude potenza delle sue interpretazioni dialettali. (*Capuana inedito* 182).

Capuana immediately saw the potential benefits of a cooperation with the successful artist, according to the synthesis of Zappulla Muscarà and Zappuppa: “Capuana […] offre subito all’attore il testo dialettale di *Malìa*, caduta nella versione in lingua, con la speranza di affermarsi, in un genere che era stato avaro di consensi, per il tramite di Grasso, consacrato dall’apprezzamento di Manca.” (42-43). Already on December 7, 1902, Capuana sent a note to the Sicilian actor:

Innanzi tutto, come siciliano, mi rallegro con lei e con la sua compagnia del trionfo da loro ottenuto all’Argentina. Avrei voluto esprimerlo questo sentimento di orgoglio provinciale a voce, e per ciò ero venuto a cercarla al Metastasio. Ero venuto anche per presentarle una copia della mia commedia *Malìa* di soggetto siciliano e volevo esprimere il desiderio di vederla rappresentata da loro con la magistrale interpretazione di cui sono capaci. Io tornerò al Metastasio verso le due. Se volesse lasciarmi una parola di appuntamento, le sarei gratissimo. Avendo la mia signora gravemente ammalata, non posso prometterle di venire ad assistere alla rappresentazione di questa sera. Le ho scritto questa lettera da un caffè con la lusinga che il mio nome non le sia sconosciuto. Io tra pochi giorni partirò per Catania dove sono professore alla Università. Accetti e faccia accettare ai suoi bravi compagni i miei sinceri rallegramenti e augurii che il trionfo di Roma sia fausto pel suo avvenire. (*Giovanni Grasso* 44)

These words are the inaugural act of a working relation destined to span over several years, often assisted by the informal mediation of Martoglio. The latter was acting as a mediator, consistently with his self-assigned mission of promoting Sicilian theatre outside of Sicily. As the letters of this time show, the relationships between the different parties were not always simple: Martoglio
and Grasso, for instance, already show signs of those tensions that are later destined to explode in disastrous falling outs. Already on December 12 1902, Martoglio warns Grasso not to be lured into a hasty venture by his sudden success, because his Company is still fragile and lacks the necessary structures to ensure the good execution of a vast repertoire:

Teatro e compagnia si mostrerebbero unilaterali, monocordi, e questo sarebbe un gran male e comprometterebbe un avvenire luminoso per me e per te, per la nostra compagnia e per il nostro teatro siciliano che comincia con te come ho scritto al Manca. Torna dunque e accudiamo qui senza fretta e senza impazienze, tutti e due uniti da un sol patto di amore e di fede, alla formazione completa del nostro teatro dialettale e della nostra compagnia. (qtd in Giovanni Grasso 45).

Together with the promise of a “bright future for both of us” [“un avvenire luminoso per me e per te”], Martoglio is intent in carving a role for himself as the patron of Sicilian theatre, whose history was about to begin. At the same time, this letter also calls for a more stable and solid vernacular company, launching Martoglio’s project of an organic regional theatre, based on the cooperation between actors, playwrights, and reviewers. This is especially evident in the final paragraph of the letter: “Appena tornerai lanceremo il nostro appello e vedrai che specialmente dopo questa splendida tua prova, troveremo aperte molte porte che parevano assolutamente sbarrate. Fa’ leggere se vuoi questa lettera al Manca, al Boutet, al Capuana, anzi te ne prego di metterli a parte dei nostri progetti e scrivimi subito se sono del mio avviso.” (45)

This project did indeed give birth to the “Compagnia Drammatica Siciliana,” also known as “Compagnia Martoglio-Grasso,”162 which included Giovanni Grasso, Angelo Musco, Marinella Bragaglia, Salvatore Lo Turco, Totò Majorana, Pietro Sapuppo, Sara Milordno, Nino e Rosina Viscuso, Giulia ed Angelo Campagna, Giovanna e Totò Libassi, Carmelina Lambertini, Giuseppe Murabito, Vittoria, Giangaleazzo e Giovannina Bragaglia, Micio Grasso, and several actresses from the Balistreri family – in sum, the most prominent names of the municipal

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162 The presence of Martoglio’s name in the official designation of the Company is the subject of endless controversies, punctually documented by Zappulla and Zappulla Muscarà in their Sicilia: Dialetto e teatro and in the aforementioned Giovanni Grasso: Il più grande attore tragico del mondo.
vernacular scene. The repertoire of the company was publicly advertised in *La tribuna* on February 3, 1903. It included works of established authors both at the national and regional level, alongside works my less-known authors. Verga has the lion share with the vernacular translations of *La Lupa, Cavalleria Rusticana, and Caccia al lupo* (all of which translated by Martoglio); Martoglio is prominently featured with his own original works *Nica* and *San Giovanni Addicullatu*; Capuana is also present with *Malìa*, freshly translated by Sinopoli; other represented works are *Zolfara, Mastru Liberu l’Armeri* by Filippo Marchese and *La festa d’Adernò*, composed by Giovanni Grasso himself. (Giovanni Grasso 52).

*Malìa* will remain a favourite in Grasso’s repertoire throughout the uneven fortunes of the company, despite the tensions between author and performer. Indeed, the role of Ninu fully corresponded to Grasso’s temperament, allowing him to display an emphatic and catchy style of recitation. *Malìa* was always performed during the foreign tours of the company, often in the debut night or soon afterwards. It was chosen as the opening piece for the successful tour at the Shaftesbury theatre in London (from February 3 to March 124, 1908): the many photographic portraits of the Grasso-Aguglia duo starring as Ninu and Jana flooding the front pages of gazettes and tabloids bear a clear evidence of the play’s success. Most notably, the play was also included in the 1921 North American tour of Grasso, who starred as Nino in New York on September 4, 1921. The expressive mimics and the natural acting talent of Grasso overcame linguistic and cultural barriers and boundaries; at the same time, his explosive and incontrollable temperament was the source of a growing rift between performer and author.

In a 1907 letter to Antona-Traversi, Capuana wonders about “l’impressione che l’arte, spontanea e quasi primitiva dei nostri attori dialettali, produrrà su le parigine e i parigini” (Antona-Traversi 187). Indeed, a positive review of *Malìa* (after its Parisian debut in 1907, at the Théâtre Marigny) seems to confirm the playwright’s hopes:

La troupe sicilienne qui interprète la *Malìa* est d’une homogeneité rare. Tous ces gens ne semblent pas exercer un métier : ils sont tellement de feu, d’ardeur, qu’ils donnent l’impression de jouer pour leur plaisir, absolument comme les paysans d’Obergammau font un acte de foi en représentant la vie de Jésus. La qualité dominante du jeu des acteurs, c’est un réalisme qui copie, qui photographie la vie. Leur réalisme diffère de celui des artistes japonais, en ce sens qu’il n’est pas individuel […] le plus petit figurant
concourt à donner l’illusion absolue de la vie. La mise en scène est sommaire, comme l’affabulation du drame : elle se compose d’une toile de fond représentant un panorama de campagne sicilienne, avec, à l’horizon, un Etna inoffensif exhalant un petit panache de fumée immeuble, toile devant laquelle on place successivement les murs d’une cour, ceux d’une maison de paysans, et quelques vagues portants sans signification précise. Cela n’empêche pas le drame d’avoir toute sa portée tragique et de produire un gros effet.

(Cited in Giovanni Grasso 89)

The anonymous review cited above provides a clear example of the stereotypes and expectations of early 20th century theatrical criticism: just think of the comparison of vernacular actors with the interpreters of religious theatre, which appears to be a particularly unfit parallel given the secular and obscene nature of Grasso’s repertoire, but was indeed a commonplace in the performing culture of the time. At the same time, the review also shows some of key features shaping the reception of the Sicilian troupes and gives us a sample of the expectations of French audiences, which were not necessarily oriented towards an ideal of ‘documentary’ realism. This is particularly evident in the claim that “la qualité dominante du jeu des acteurs, c’est un réalisme qui copie, qui photographie la vie,” suggesting that the actors’ performance is based on no skill, but just on a spontaneous and almost miraculous re-enactment. While the emphasis on spontaneity (especially convey by words such as “feu”, “ardeur,” and “plaisir”) could superficially resonate with the aesthetic horizon already traced by Capuana himself in his theories of the regional novel, there are substantial differences between the two approaches. Indeed, there is not much difference between the “toile de fond représentant un panorama de campagne sicilienne, avec, à l’horizon, un Etna inoffensif exhalant un petit panache de fumée immeuble, toile devant laquelle on place successivement les murs d’une cour, ceux d’une maison de paysans, et quelques vagues portants sans signification précise” described by the Parisian reviewers and “i soliti cieli di carta turchina o colle solite campagne di verde inglese brizzolato di rosso e di giallo per simulare i crisantemi e i rosolacci,” or “le contadinelle di terra cotta e le signore vestite di cencio, dalla testina di cartone verniciato” spurned by Capuana in his Per l’arte (XXIV).

Despite their successes, the international tours contributed to widen the rift between Capuana and Grasso. By 1905, Capuana was already resenting Grasso’s performative
independence, which often prompted him to alter and re-write his scripts. For instance, after the successful representation in Paris, he writes to Antona Traversi: “Sono lieto del successo di *Malìa*, quantunque capisca che i critici ne parlano a occhio e croce, e giudichino il lavoro più dalla interpretazione degli attori che dalla conoscenza precisa di esso” (*La verità sul teatro* 189). He then complains about the self-serving interpretation that Grasso is giving of Nino: “Grasso che trasforma a modo suo tutti i caratteri dei personaggi che rappresenta, mi fa in *Malìa* il tradimento di ridurre violento e quasi *mafioso* il carattere placido di Nino.” (189) The distortion is particularly noteworthy, since in reality it is Cola, and not Nino, who represent the truly embodiment of the “mafioso:” Cola who likes conquering married or virgin women just for his own pleasure, and who arrogantly claims that “Quann u iu dicu ‘na cosa – ‘nti stu paisi lu sannu tutti – nun cci ha tantu gustu chiddu ca pritenni d i cuntraddirimi” (*Teatro Dialettale Siciliano* 43). By turning Nino into a mafioso, Grasso is indeed eliminating one of the fundamental oppositions of the play, flattening together two totally different character typologies.

In another letter to Antona-Traversi, Capuana blames the actor’s rather free and non-philological use of dialect, claiming that “purtroppo il pubblico, che non può intendere i particolari del dialogo dialettale, rimane più impressionato di quelle esagerazioni.” Finally, Capuana reacted in shock in hearing rumors of Grasso’s performance at the Hippodrome in Theatre, in which the script of *Malìa* had been allegedly cut to a 25’ pantomima recited in a fantasy language or “turchesco-italiano” (*Giovanni Grasso* 137). A few years later, he would complain that:

[Grasso] più non si rassegna ad essere il fedele interprete della creazione dell’autore, ma la sconvolge senza nessuno scrupolo, senza curarsi se, come si compiace di ridurla lui, sia in assoluta contraddizione col oncetto del lavoro. E, quasi questo non bastasse, si sbizzarrisce di far parlare il personaggio […] in un fantastico siciliano italianizzato, in un meno fantastico italiano sicilianizzato, dei quali non sembra avvertire l’orrore” (*Giovanni Grasso* 138)

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163 “When I say something – everyone in this village knows it – those who try and contradict me don’t have it very easy.” My translation.
Exactly like Di Giacomo before him and Pirandello after him, Capuana too had to join forces with another author in moving his first steps in the world of vernacular theatre: this fact alone is consistent with the collective, anti-authorial and performance-oriented nature of the medium, and shows how misplaced the author's pretension of a script-based art were in the context of Sicilian theatre.

Whether the reasons for seeking partnership and co-authorship are to be found in an instinctive repulsion for dialect (as Verga polemically hints in his 1911 letter) or in the author’s lack of linguistic confidence, it is interesting to note that the process of self-translation is less invested with authorial preoccupation, and therefore more open to hybrid practices of authorship.

Giusti Sinopoli, however, acted quite differently from Cognetti in assisting Di Giacomo with *Mala vita*. As we saw earlier in Chapter 2, the policeman turned playwright provided mostly dramaturgical advice to Di Giacomo, who was in charge of the linguistic aspect. On the contrary, Giusti Sinopoli did not noticeably alter the dramaturgic structure of the play already sketched by Capuana, but limited himself to translate the text as faithfully as possible. While Di Giacomo was an authority in the field of vernacular literature and a beginner in the field of theatre, the roles are completely inverted in the artistic trajectory of Capuana, who was an experienced playwright by the time he began his production in vernacular.

The different role played by Giusti Sinopoli partially accounts for the mechanic and derivative nature of *Malìa*, as well as for the artificial nature of its linguistic code, heavily influenced by Italian interferences. The strict literalism of this version often results in forms and constructions that are barely grammatical in the target language; yet, Capuana praises this fidelity in a letter to Domenico Oliva (May 29, 1903), seemingly overlooking his previous preoccupation the ‘spontaneity’ of expression:

*Malìa* non ha fatto che mutar veste e fino a un certo punto. È facile, riscontrando il testo italiano, convincersi che io, senza alterare menomamente con inopportuni sicilianismi lingua e stile, mi ero sforzato di rendere col dialogo il carattere nazionale dei miei personaggi. Infatti la traduzione in dialetto – non è mia ma del valoroso autore di *Zolfara* – è così letterale che spesso l’opera del traduttore si è ridotta a mutare soltanto le
desinenze delle parole italiane e l’ortografia. Non vi è stata tolta o aggiunta una sola parola”. (Mariani, *Ottocento romantico e verista* 638-639).

In the preface to *Teatro Dialettale Siciliano*, Mazzamuto describes the language of *Malìa* as “un dialetto decisamente nobilitato […] dalla sintassi di una lingua fondamentalmente letteraria” (Mazzamuto 33). This code is clearly identified with the Central-Eastern type of Sicilian dialect, as it respects some of its main isoglosses, such as the use of the conservative articles series [lu, la, li] as opposed to the innovative type [u, a, l] that is widespread in Western Sicilian dialects, the use of metaphony and the instability of stressed vowels (fikatu, fikutu, fikitu), a feature that Verga mocked in his 1911 letter; however, Western Sicilian features such as the diminutive suffix -iddu (as opposed to [-ittu] are also retained (Ruffino 370).

The most outstanding features of Giusti Sinopoli's translation are a tendency to translate word-by-word and his preference for lexical and syntactical structures that are compatible with standard Italian. Three recurrent translational strategies are mainly used in this respect: the preference for ambivalent words or structures, the use of Code-Mixing and Code-Switching into Italian, and the literal translation of idioms and proverbs. The first strategy is especially relevant for the vocabulary of the play: when choosing between a variety of possible equivalents Sinopoli appears to prefer the Sicilian word that has a direct equivalent in Standard Italian, as the following examples clearly show:

(1) Zia Pina (a Cola) Ti faccio la predica anch’io. (a Nedda) Spalanca gli orecchi pure tu. (a Cola) Lasciami stare… Oh, a me baci puoi darmene quanti vuoi! Non portano conseguenza; sono vecchia e potrei esser tua nonna. Per ciò ti dico: Scavezzacollo! L’hai infinocchiata questa povera figliuola? Non te la meriti, no. Bada, ora! Bada! (124)

Ze’ Pina (a Cola) Ti fazzu la predica puru iu. (A Nedda) E sbaranca gli oricchi anchi tu. (A Cola) Làssami stari… Oh, vasuna a mia mi nni poi dari quantu vuoi. Nun portanu consiguenza; sugnu vecchia e pozzu essiriti matri e puru nanna. Perciò ti dicu: - Scapizzacoddu! L’hai infinucchiata sta povira ficchia? Nun ti la meriti,
(II) COLA. [...] Vah, io sono piccoso; lo prendo da me, quasi l’aveste dato voi; e lo metto all’occhiello, dalla parte del cuore. (135)

(III) JANA: Scellerato! Scellerato! Non mi toccare, lasciatemi stare… Mi sento morire! (137)

JANA: Scilliratu! Scilliratu! Nun mi tuccati!… Lassatimi stari… Mi sentu muriri! (115)

This tendency can be carried out through direct, transparent equivalence (for instance, ‘spalanca’ → ‘sbaranca’164 or ‘scellerato’ → ‘sciliratu’) or by choosing a different word that does have a direct equivalent in the Italian lexicon (as in ‘piccoso’ → ‘tistardu’). On the contrary, lexical Sicilianisms are few and isolated: they are, at most,, iconic words such as ‘picciotto, picciottanza,’ ‘ngiuria,’ words that are highly comprehensible outside of the region and are universally associated with customs or attitudes that are typical of the Sicilian ethos.165

The second strategy is found at all levels, involving isolated words, phrases and entire sentences. In translating, Giusti Sinpoli leaves untouched phrases or verbal constituents that can be spelled in the same way in both languages; at times, this results in full-fledged cases of written code-switching, as “Nun ti la meriti, no. Bada, ora, bada!” (124). I am listing a few examples of this tendency below, showing both full-fledged occurrences of code-switching and isolated instances of code-mixing:

(IV) (Jana cade in convulsioni, mugolando parole scomposte. Tutti la circondano per soccorrerla). (125) (Jana cadi ‘n convursioni, dicennu palori scurrretti; tutti l’attorniano ppi succurrira). (84)

164 Not attested in Traina (Nuovo Vocabolario Siciliano Italiano) and most likely a loanword from Italian.
165 Add more examples.
Both in (V) and (VI) Sinopoli phonologically adapts the Italian words (perhaps revealing his own linguistic weakness in the target-code, and his uncertainties on the plural of *marmotta*) with minimal changes, while in example (IV) there is a stylistic enhancement: the Italian verb “l’attorniano” stands out as a heterogeneous linguistic block.

Thirdly, the translator reproduces idioms and proverbs verbatim, without looking for equivalent expression in the target language. In particular, the Sicilian version reproduces idioms and lexical choices that are consistent with a Florentine-based and dignified literary code, as in the following passages:

(VII) MASTRO NUNZIO: (*Un po’ imbarazzato, accorgendosi di Jana che entra*): Il contrabbasso aveva la gola riarsa, comare Jana; scusate. Su, allegra! Volete favorire? (TI 120)


(VIII) MASTRO NUNZIO: […] Oggi che sposa la sorella, bisogna avere buona cera, se no è malaugurio. (*pausa*) (TI 120)

MASTRU NUNZIU. […] Oggi ca si spusa vostra surella, bisogna aviri bona cera, si no è malaugurio. (TDS 88)

(IX) NEDDA. Dopo il matrimonio, *colui che pareva più bianco della neve, diventa più nero della pece* (TI 138)

NEDDA. Doppu lu matrimoniu, chiddu ca paria cchiù jancu di la nivi diventa cchiù niuru di la pici! (TDS 118)
The same tendency can be fully observed in the following examples, all taken from the part of Mastro Taddarita, in which a young Musco used to excel before his days as primo attore and brillante:

(X) MASTRO NUNZIO […] Il lupo perde il pelo ma non il vizio. Non parlo per dir male: ma Cola ha il cuore di stoppia: alla vista d’una falda di gonella prende subito fuoco. (TI 120)

(XI) MASTRO NUNZIO: (battendo su la spalla a Nino) Questo sì, è un bravo giovane, comare Jana! Non ha frasche per la testa. Tenetevelo caro. (122)

(XII) MASTRO NUZXIO: (…) Il bicchiere della staffa… Marcia! (120)

The high number of proverbs and idioms is a central feature of this role, whose main goal was to provide both comical relief and regional colour. In this respect, their rendition is a major test for the translator’s work. Many of the equivalent forms are, indeed, documented by Sicilian repertoires and dictionaries: Traina, for instance, lists ‘arsu’ with the main meaning of “being thirsty,” consistent with Giusti Sinopoli’s use. Similarly, in example (IX) the use of “frasche” might echo the meaning of the word frasca in the Sicilian proverb “frasca d’omu,” listed by Traina as “uomo da nulla; o uomo che inganna; uomo di paglia” (400), although the expression ‘non aver frasche per la testa,’ is not recorded as a Sicilian proverb. Traina also lists the proverb “lu lupu cancia lu pilu, nun perdi lu viziau,” almost verbatim echoed in both versions in example (x). In these examples, the Italian original text seems to be influenced by a Sicilian model, being

close to a mental translation of linguistic uses and idioms already used among the peasants of Eastern Sicily; on the contrary, an expression such as “il bicchiere della staffa” betrays its literary origin and sounds a direct Sicilian translation of an Italian wording. Also noteworthy is, in example (viii), the translator's choice of not translating 'malaugurio,' when there is a Sicilian equivalent available (‘malauriu,' which at times is spelled 'malauguriu') – perhaps in obedience to the choice of not translating the title, which – as Verga will bitterly remark in his 1911 letter, was also left untouched.167

With the exception of a small syntactical simplification (per dir male → pi malu), the Sicilian translation does not alter in any way the original text. More importantly, the highly idiomatic texture of the original version is reproduced verbatim, without any equivalent proverb, as the perfect correspondence between all the cited idioms shows:

il lupo perde il pelo ma non il vizio → lu lupu cancia lu pilu ma no lo viziu.
ha il cuore di stoppia → ha lu cori di stuppa.
non ha frasche per la testa → nun ha fraschi ppi la testa.

The use of lexical loanwords and the verbatim rendition of idioms are often combined, as it happens in the following example:

(XIII) ZIA PINA: Date retta a me, non vi confondete con i medici; non ne capiscono niente. E poi, hanno interesse a tirare le cose in lungo, massime quando sanno che c’è da spremere. (TI 129)

ZE’ PINA: Ascutati a mia, nun vi cunfunniti ccu li medici; nun ni capiscinu nenti. E poi, hannu ‘ntiressi a tirari li cosi a longu, massima quannu sannu ca cc’è chi sprèmiri. (TDS 102)

The case of ‘massime’ → ‘massima’ is particularly interesting, since the translator adopts with minimal changes an expression that, in the original, is a Latinism, and therefore belongs to a refined linguistic stratum. More importantly, “tirari li cosi a longu” appears to be a verbatim translation of the Northern Italian expression “tirare le cose in lungo,” whereas “purtari a longu

167 “Viditi ca non vi bastau l’armu di sbattisimarla e mancu a vui dda bedda gioia di Malia, e di chiamarla Mavaria?” (Verga e Capuana 218)
'na cosa” would have been a more idiomatic equivalent (Traina 542). On the contrary, the use of “confondere con” → “cunfunniri cu” seemingly bears the trace of a Sicilian original meaning, in particular that of “convincere, confondere le idee” also documented in Traina (267).

All three translational strategies converge in creating a literary and dignified language, which at times appears to be an Italian-based code “disguised” as dialect. In this respect, Sinopoli’s artificial stage dialect is not very different from the refined and literary version of lyrical Sicilian that Capuana himself had criticized in reviewing the biography of Meli.

The text also displays a constant tendency to semantic generalization, often combined with syntactic simplification. An example of the former can be seen in the following exchange, with the completely unmotivated change of ‘fratelli’ → ‘parenti:’

(xiv) NINO: [...] Ho detto all’avvocato: Fate voi, dirò sì, come volete, purché usciamo da quest’impiccio. Vostro padre, Jana, ha voluto così. Ha ragione. È uomo di esperienza; le liti tra fratelli sono le peggiori… o dunque?

JANA: Dunque che cosa? (121)

Also noteworthy in this passage is the form “chi cosa,” clearly a hybridation with the literary-based standard form of the interrogative pronoun ‘che cosa.’ Syntactical simplification, instead, can be observed in the following examples:

(xv) NINO (…) Che sei venuto a infinocchiare a mio padre? (138)

NINU (…) Chi ‘nfinucchiasti a me’ patri?... (118)

(xvi) COLA. Abbi prudenza, almeno per tua sorella! (138)

COLA: E tanticchia di prudenza, almeno ppi to’ soru! (118)

(xvii) MASSARO PAOLO: Avete letigato, come al solito? (134)

MRF PAULU: Quistioni, a lu solitu, è veru? (111)
The author often replaces complex Italian syntactical modes with elliptical sentences, both in the attempt to accommodate for the different syntactical patterns of Sicilian and also for synthesis.

The exceptions to the three tendencies outlined so far appear to be rare and isolated: for instance, Sinopoli replaces ‘sulle spalle’ with the semantic equivalent ‘ncoddu,’ and replaces Jana’s line “Che vi passa per la testa” (TI 124) with “Chi vi scappa di la vucca” (TDS 96). A slightly more common tendency is the expansion of the text, often aiming at compensating the many semantic losses in the text or clarifying possible sources of ambiguity. Expressive increment happens in a variety of forms, as the following examples show:

(XVIII) MASTRO NUNZIO: Anzi! Vino letifica core omini. Il violino canghò come un rosignuolo; sentirete. (TI 119)

MASTRU NUNZIU: Anzi! Vinu letifica core omini, dici don Piddu ‘u sacristanu. Lu viulinu canghò comu un ricignolu. (TDS 86)

(XIX) COLA. […] Cognata, ci avevo voi nel cuore; ma eravate promessa. […] (137)

COLA. […] Cugnata, iu v’avia nni lu cori, ma vui érivu appalurata ccu Ninu. (115)

(XX) COLA. […] E la curpa è di vostra sorella che è diventata una lima, non si cheta da mattina a sera; mi fa fuggire la casa. (TI 135)

COLA. […]E la curpa è tutta di vostra soru, ca è diventata ‘na lima surda! Zichi! Zichi! Zichi! di la matina a la sira. Mi fa fuìri la casa. (TDS 112)

(XXI) COLA. […] Nino mi avrebbe ammazzato. (135)

COLA. […] Ninu m’avissi scannatu. (112)

(XXII) NINO. […] Gliel’ho mandato a dire però alla strega: -- O questa storia finisce… o la faccio finire io! – Le schiaccio la testa con la zappa, come a una Tantu…

NINU. […] Ma cci l’hé mannu a diri: -- O sta storia finisci, o la fazzu finiri iu! – Ci scaccìu la testa a corpi di zappuni, come a ‘na vipìra e perdì la libìrtà…
serpe, e perdo la libertà. Tanto!...

(138)

(XXIII) JANA (quasi parlando a se stessa) In questo momento sono in chiesa… (TI 120)

JANA. (quasi parlannu tra idda) A st’ura sunnu a la Matrici (TDS 88)

In both examples (XVIII) and (XIX), the translator makes the sentence more specific by introducing references to the characters themselves or to the powers that be. For instance, in (XVIII) he mentions a priest as a plausible source for the macaronic Latin used by Mastru Nunziu. The addition in case (XIX) appears to be completely unmotivated and redundant, since it is known from the very beginning of the play that Nino is the fiancé of Jana.

Items (XX) and (XXI), instead, show an increase in the expressive force of the line: this is particular the case of #c, with the comical effect of the onomatopoeia “zichi! zichi! zichi!.” Similarly, ‘scannato’ is more violent and expressive than ‘ammazzato:’ in particular, its gruesome reference to the slaughtering of animal ominously foreshadows the tragic finale of the play. Finally, items #e and #f insert a culturally specific element: by replacing the generic “serpente” ['snake'] with the species “vipera” ['viper'], Sinopoli makes an explicit reference to a common danger in the Southern countryside, while also recuperating the semantic loss of “alla strega,” simply rendered with the indirect object pronoun 'cci.' Finally, in example (XXIII), the term “chiesa” is replaced with the cultural specific term “matrici,” indicating the mother church where the the most solemn ceremonies are celebrated – normally by the archpriest. The expression 'matrici' thus adds a social nuance, which is consistent with the relative wealth of the characters: the father of the girls, Massaro Paolo, is a small landowner who has animals in his stables, he is often seen give orders to his subordinates or giving charity to poor people and belongs to a relatively wealthy class of peasants. It is quite likely that his daughters’ wedding would be celebrated in the most important parish of the village, at a time where every small neighbourhood had its own church.

These small changes are not sufficient to compensate for the strict literalism of the translation, a tendency that Mazzamuto explains with the absence of a “fondazione autonoma del teatro dialettale:”
su *Malia* pesa non solo la redazione in lingua, ma anche molto tirocinio critico e letterario dello scrittore, come se l’opera fosse nata da una certa calcolata organizzazione tematica, da certa saldatura o giustapposizione di elementi prefabbricati. Manca in *Malia* la spontaneità di una autentica spregiudicata visione del reale e vi si ritrova una complessa e invadente letterarietà, vi si raccoglie tutta una tipologia umana e teatrale verificata dallo scrittore nei testi italiani e stranieri congeniali alla sua poetica e sperimentati nel corso della sua attività narrativa e drammatica. (TDS 31)

In other words, the play marks an inaugural stage in the work of Capuana, and reflects his progressive familiarization with the world of vernacular literature, to which he was not accustomed in a stable way. The overall result is a heavily hybridized code, closer to a phonological adaptation of Italian than to the Eastern Sicilian dialect spoken in rural villages. Yet, both the language and the dramatic structures are consistent with the author’s social conservatism and echoes with the paternalistic attitude displayed by a large part of his narrative. More importantly, as Mazzamuto has suggested, this code is consistent with his decision to depict not the outcast and the most marginalized classes of Sicily, but a relative wealthier social group.

For these reasons, the linguistic choices made by Sinopoli should not be seen as an alien infiltration in Capuana’s authorial work; on the contrary, they pave the road to the further exploration of Sicily later attempted by the author in his own bilingual plays. In his Sicilian theatre, Capuana is actively seeking to attain an original voice, equally distant from the graphic violence depicted in *Cavalleria Rusticana* and from the morbid fascination for the wretched and the destitute – a fascination that had been so central for the project of Verism until then. Sinopoli, with his hybridized and literary Sicilian, provided Capuana with a viable option for such artistic project: a linguistic code that will be significantly refined, altered and adapted, but never rejected.
6. Family Values in *Lu Cavaleri Pidagna* and *Bona genti*

If the language adopted by Giusti Sinopoli to translate *Malìa* can be described as the code of relatively wealthy farmers lacking formal education but by no means marginalized in society, the same choice is repeated in Capuana’s subsequent works *Lu Cavalèri Pidagna* and *Bona Genti*. Both plays also became part of the repertoire of the Grasso company, and they appear in the list of works whose rights were permanently sold to Grasso in 1908. More importantly, the two texts share a common ideological orientation, marking a change of tone after the stereotypical representation of passion shown by *Malìa*.

On the basis of textual evidence, the Sicilian of ‘*U cavaleri Pidagna* was recently retro-dated to 1903 as opposed to the previous reconstructions that placed its composition in 1908 or 1909, thus contradicting the hypothesis of a long hiatus following the Sicilian translation of *Malìa*. In turn, this adds to the consistency and relevance of his vernacular project, confirming its primary place in Capuana’s creative journey at this point in his career. Similarly, Mazzamuto suggests that the Italian version precedes the Sicilian one; yet, the 1907 letters to Antona Traversi provide direct evidence of the contrary, suggesting that Capuana re-translated his own work in Italian after countless tensions with Grasso.

From a translational point of view, however, *Lu Cavaleri/Il Cavaliere* (exactly like *Bona genti/Il mulo di Rosa*) can be considered a fully bilingual text, where the two different versions are closely related to each other in their very composition, and are as inseparable from each other like the two sides of a coin. In this regard, both *Lu Cavalèri Pidagna/Il Cavaliere Pedagna* and *Bona Genti/Il mulo di Rosa* are two-faced texts, in which the two opposite linguistic facets co-exist as elements of a unique textual system.

*U Cavaleri/Il Cavaliere* occupies a special role in Capuana’s organic project of Sicilian theatre, marking a sudden shift in the author’s inspiration. After having appealed to the most stereotypical aspects of Sicilian regionalism in order to promote his own dramatic project, the author is now reacting to the positive but somewhat limiting reception of *Malìa*, with a strong attempt at diversifying the dominating plots and characters in the landscape of Sicilian theatre. This view is voiced very clearly by Zappulla Muscarà, who suggests that: “Commedia di carattere, *Lu Cavalèri Pidagna* fu elabourata, come la successiva *Bona genti*, per variare il
monocorde repertorio di Grasso e offrire della Sicilia un’immagine non più violenta ma bonaria e moderata. Inevitabile fu la delusione e l’accusa, già da parte della critica e del pubblico contemporanei, di ‘aver scelto un vecchio motivo e di avergli dato una vecchia forma” (Carte Messaggere II 558). In other words, Capuana was trying to distance himself from the stereotypical image of blood and love made popular by Verga with Cavalleria Rusticana, and confirmed by his own Malìa.

The ongoing identification of Sicilian dramaturgy with stories of passion crimes is one the reasons leading to the crisis in the ventures of Sicilian theatre, leading to the temporary dissolution of the Grasso Company in 1908. After a brief season of enthusiasm, Sicilian theatre failed to embody a true vector of change in the National theatre: this disappointment is reflected in the skepticism of many influent intellectuals and writers, including Pirandello's harsh critic of the Grasso-Aguglia duo voiced in his “Teatro Siciliano”.

Actress Mimì Aguglia tried to react to this situation; in 1908, she went as far as to sponsor a competition for Sicilian comedy that had to meet certain thematic requirements (the project was launched on June 17 1908 in the local newspaper Il Corriere di Catania). Once again, it is Zappulla Muscarà who provides the most accurate reconstruction of this episode:

La polemica che ha investito i moduli recitativi di Grasso ed il suo repertorio influirà non poco sulla decisione di Mimì Aguglia di abbandonare, finite le recite londinesi, il capocomico. Lo testimonia il bando da lei indetto di lì a poco, di un concorso per un dramma o commedia, in due o tre atti, di soggetto siciliano e in dialetto siciliano, con l’obbligo assoluto di trattare l’ambiente borghese…. Scopo precipuo della banditrice del concorso è quello non soltanto di arricchire e completare il teatro siciliano, ma possibilmente di ingentilirlo, togliendolo cioè una buona volta dagli abusati confini del del fattaccio criminale. (Giovanni Grasso 136-137)

Although its composition seemingly precedes these events, Lu Cavalèri Pidagna fully echoes these growing tensions, clearly voicing Capuana's desire for change. Its plot breaks with the

168 See chapter 4, section 4.2 (“The Conversion to Sicilian Theatre”).
stereotypical depiction of violent passions in order to focus on the more intimate theme of generational conflict. At the same time, the play exploits regional conventions and culturally influenced practices: in particular, Capuana makes a cultural-specific reference to the practice of “fuitìna,” the shotgun weddings celebrated without the family consensus, which will provide the topos of many stereotypical depictions of Sicily throughout the Twentieth century, both in comedy and tragedy.\textsuperscript{169}

Roberto Pedagna (Pidagna in Sicilian), the eponym character, is an embittered old widower who lives by himself in Eastern Sicily. At the very beginning of the play, he is shown living alone and struggling with his senility: his rejuvenating antics include a catastrophic decision of learning how to ride a bicycle and the habit of dying his grey hair, for which he is often ridiculed by his friends and housemaid. His most dangerous obsession is his senile infatuation with a self-interested seductress (Elsa), a \textit{chanteuse} with a dubious reputation.

Pidagna's backstory is immediately revealed in the dialogue of the two supporting characters (a notary and a priest, Pidagna’s best friends and occasional confidences). Several years before, his only daughter Lia had run away in order to marry a non-blue-blooded lawyer (Nicola Meli) against her family will. Clouded by a toxic mixture of pride, shame and class prejudice, Pidagna had then disowned Lia, severing all ties with her and her children.

When the much hated son-in-law prematurely dies, Lia is left in poverty with her two young children. The notary and the priest try to facilitate some financial agreement between father and daughter, clearly seeking to salvage part of Pidagna's inheritance from the clutching hands of Elsa. At first, the old man struggles with the idea of forgiveness, which appears to him as a humbling and non-aristocratic practice; however, things take a better turn when he realizes that Elsa is the secret mistress of a younger rival, and that she has been fooling him for the entire time of their affair. Suddenly cured of his infatuation, Pidagna throws Elsa out of his life, begins to cope with his senility, and welcomes back his own daughter and his newly found grandchildren.

\textsuperscript{169} For a well-known contemporary example of this comedic stereotype, see Mario Monicelli’s parodic depiction of this practice in \textit{La ragazza con la pistola} (1968)
The play is indisputably a one-man-show, expressly written to highlight Grasso’s versatile recitation. This is especially evident in the many metamorphoses undergone by Pidagna, a bittersweet character whose exaggerated comicality reveals an unexpected soft side in the finale. Indeed, the happy ending coincides with an inner transformation of the character, who shows his inner turmoil on the stage:

Lu Cavalieri: (Abbattutu, nun rispunni, nun bada a li ragazzì). Si nni jiu?
(Riscutennusi) Pioggia davanti e ventu darreri! (Ai bambini) Ora vi dugnu i cosi duci! (Bruntuliannu, aggirannusi ppi lu salottu). Fazzu la figura d’un puddicinedda!... Peju ppi mmia! Sti poviri criaturi! (Accarizza, bacia li picciriddi, commosso, ccu li lacrims a l’occhi; poi li pigghìa ppi li manu, si ferma un pocu ppi rassirinàrisi e asciugarisi l’occhi; torna a vasarli).

Viniti ccà… Jemu a truvari la mamà!
(245)

Cavaliere (ai bambini) Un momento!
Un momento! (da sé, lottando con diversi sentimenti) Faccio la figura d’un burattino!... (A Roberto e Agatina). Un momento. (da sé) Non capisco neppure io quel che mi sento nel cuore!... è andata via? Pioggia davanti e tempesta dietro!...
(prende per mano i bambini, li accarezza, li bacia, con le lagrime agli occhi, poi dice) Venite con me a trovare la mamma!
(294)

However, with the exception of this pathetic finale, comicality is the dominant note in the role of Pidagna, which rests on a set traditional of theatrical conventions and stereotypes. Among these there is certainly Pidagna’s rejuvenating attitude, which is largely indebted to the conventional typology of the “vecchio amoroso,” directly deriving from Commedia dell’Arte.

The role also exploits Grasso’s typical heated manners and passionate style of recitation: see for instance the choleric and violent temper shown by the character in Act I and II, when he hires a band of mafiosi in order to spy on Elsa’s movements and to give a beating to a potential rival. In this respect, Lu Cavalieri/Il Cavaliere provides an early, and somewhat simplistic depiction of mafia on stage. In particular Capuana depicts a “mafioso,” Carlu Longu ‘u
Palermitano, as a minor role. The author also throws subtle hints at how the phenomenon is shaping the perception of Sicily at a national level, for instance in the following lines:

LU CAVALERI: Lassami stari! Lu to’ mpresariu… *(fa signu cu la manu di bastunari)*.

ELSA: Dopo quel ch’è avvenuto! … Povero impresario. Cose che accadono soltanto in Sicilia!

CAVALIERE: Eh, già! In altri posti non si bastona, non si ruba, non si ammazza, punto! Soltanto in Sicilia!

(TI 280)

Yet, mafia is not seen in its full social articulation but is mostly used as a plot device, seen as a folkloristic and unthreatening aspect of Sicily. Despite his condescending and arrogant manners, Carru Longu is not a real threat: to be really dangerous, he needs protection from above, as he himself admits:


Most importantly, the mafiosi are hired out of jealousy to spy on an unfaithful mistress and to scare her potential rivals: this plot turn is somehow consistent with the traditional justifications for many mafia crimes, and for a contemporary reader it strikingly resonates with Sciascia’s

170 From a linguistic point of view, the hesitation between the two forms ‘bastunari’ and ‘vastunia’ is also noteworthy, showing a maximum of Italianization and of Sicilianization in the same sentence.
sarcastic claim that “there are only passion crimes in Sicily,” famously voiced by Captain Bellodi in *Il giorno della civetta*. Pidagna himself defines his mafiosità as a consequence of extreme passion, in the famous line “Sissignura, mafusi! Mafusi pp'amuri!” (TDS 200)

Despite its heavy conventionalism, the human type of Pidagna represents a milder and more traditional type of comicality and therefore brings a moderate innovation to the farcical types embodied by Sicilian performers. The humorous vein of this play is deeply related to a satire of costume and characters: it is mostly based on a caricature-like depiction of excess rather than on farcical quips or corporeal humor. In this play, Capuana represents ordinary life in a rural society, with its rumors and small secrets, its underlying tensions and rivalries, its perks and downsides. The narrow-mindedness of characters such as Pidagna or his housemaid is finally redeemed by the people’s humanity and generosity. In such a world, small scandals and gossip are likely to replace of passional tragedies and Shakespearean bloodbaths, while the light-hearted smile of comedy takes over the irresistible laughter of farce.

Both La Monaca and Zappulla Muscarà have reflected on Capuana’s use of humour in this text, suggesting that its main lines and characters are inseparable from an organic depiction of Sicilian society and its dominating types. Zappulla Muscarà for instance suggests that a main source of Capuana’s inspiration is represented by the contrast between two typologies of characters, those respective of patriarchy rules (such as Massaro Paolo and Nino in *Malìa*), and those who transgress such norms (such as Cola) (*Carte Messaggere* II 570). La Monaca makes a similar statement when she writes that “Si può identificare una tipologia esemplare dell'impianto strutturale di questi intrecci nell'alterazione repentina ed inattesa di un equilibrio sociale o affettivo; anzi, spesso è proprio la trasgressione passionale che implica la violazione della norma sociale o, comunque, ne impedisce un nuovo consolidarsi secondo le borghesi logiche utilitaristiche dell'interesse.” (102).

Building on these premises, Zappulla Muscarà goes so far as to suggest that this “Sicilian anthropology” anticipates the Pirandellian character, with its denunciation of societal hypocrisy and its praise of the subaltern -- the fool-like character who has the freedom to reveal inconvenient truths:
L’adozione di agili strumenti antropologici di base, legati al codice linguistico e comportamentale dialettale, favorisce una tipologia teatrale che tenta di evadere dall’ambito esteriore, trascendendo dall’ormai stanco verismo, presagendo i motivi pirandelliano della maschera, della mistificazione, della duplicità umoristica, del ribellismo femminile, del conflitto generazionale, della dislocazione apparente. (*Carte Messaggere II* 571)

Despite the similarities, however, Capuana’s critique of society is not as deep as the one voiced by the authors of the following generations, including fellow Sicilians Pirandello and Rosso di San Secondo, and other Southern authors such as Luigi Chiarelli. Both poetics are deeply rooted in an insider’s view on Sicilian (or Southern) provinces; however the relation between the playwright and the world is completely different. Capuana is not rejecting the hypocrisy of society, nor is he seizing its intrinsic absurdity: he rather makes fun on its most ridicule extremes, such as the “rejuvenating” old man who falls in love with a young seductress or the idle aristocrat who makes a fool of himself by publicly displaying his eccentricities. These roles, however, are based on a traditional set of conventions and stereotypes. The highly stereotypical nature of these characters is further emphasized by their identification with a function or role: Pidagna’s friends are never indicated with their name, but only as “the Notary” and “the Priest,” as two typological characters taken from old Commedia dell’Arte. The same can be true of the housemaid, as Donna Mara, who is designated by a proper name unlike the other supporting characters, but who equally lacks any sign of individual identity or distinctive personality.

More importantly, there is no perceived rift between these token identities and the characters' true selves, and for this reason, none of these types entails a deep criticism to the behavioral rules and the norms codifying society. On the contrary, the eccentricities of Pidagna are compensated by the serious attitude of the other characters, who perfectly respect the societal expectations and adhere to the prescriptive norms of society. Capuana’s humor may play on social rules and hierarchies, but never challenges them: his comedies always end with a final twist accommodating conflicts and divisions, and restoring peace against those subversive forces that threatened social norms and shared beliefs. As La Monaca insightfully affirm, “Capuana si compiac[e] di giocare con il codice comportamentale isolano saggianone ogni trasgressiva potenzialità, senza mai eroderne le fondamenta” (105).
In this respect, Capuana seems to promote an ideal of moderate paternalism: in his play, social and moral transgression are met with forgiveness and comprehension, but not open support. In ‘U cavaleri Pidagna (and later on in Bona Genti), the playwright promotes the values of empathy and generosity as the sole forces able to solve conflicts in a peaceful way. A view perfectly summarized by the notary in act III:

NOTAIO: Li miraculi l’avemu a fari nui, ccu la bona voluntà, ccu l’insistenza, ccu lu curaggju, e nun scummudari li santi di lu paradisu e l’Animi di lu Purgatoriu, ca hannu tant’autri cosi di fari! (TDS 238)

NOTAIO: I miracoli, cara Donna Mara, dobbiamo farli noi con la buona volontà, con l’insistenza, col coraggio, e non scomodare i santi del Paradiso o l’anime del Purgatorio, che hanno ben altro a cui badare… (TI 290)

The good-tempered comedy of manners embodied by Lu Cavaleri Pidagna thus appears to be a possible alternative to the world of irresolvable conflicts displayed in the more “violent” tragedies set in Sicily. In this respect, one could say that Capuana is attempting at create a comedic equivalent of bourgeois theatre, thus echoing the ‘modernizing’ and reformative drive already seen in Di Giacomo’s project of founding a new Neapolitan theatre, already explored earlier in Chapter II.

The positive reception of ‘U cavaleri Pidagna did not meet Capuana’s unrealistic expectations, at least judging from the irritated tone of a letter to Stanis Manca:

La sua lettera m’ha fatto una graditissima sorpresa. Ero sotto la spiacevole impressione prodottami dal vedere che nessun giornale della Capitale si è degnato di accennare al gran successo di pubblico e di critica ottenuto a Milano dal mio Cavalier Pedagna, rappresentato da Giovanni Grasso al Fossati, Capisco ch’io non sia d’Annunzio, né Sem Benelli, da spingere la cronaca teatrale a tener dietro a tutte le vicende di un lavoro nei diversi teatri. Mi lusingavo di poter essere trattato come Simoni, Lopez, Monicelli o qualche altro minore. Ma io vivo troppo lontano, troppo appartato, e non dovrei stupirmi che la gente non si ricordi molto delle cose mie. (Carteggio Capuana-Manca)
More importantly, Capuana did not succeed in his declared intent of distancing his Sicily from the gory violence that was so congenial to Grasso’s recitation. In 1907, after the latter’s performance of *Malìa* in Paris, Capuana confided to Antona Traversi: “Ho scritto per lui un lavoro in tre atti, *Il cavaliere Pedagna*, tentando di farlo uscire dai *ruolo* di violenza che egli preferisce. Non è stato possibile. Anche del personaggio aristocratico del Cav. Pedagna ha fatto una specie di mafioso!” (*La verità sul teatro*, 189). This complaint is far from isolated: in a letter to Martoglio, the author insists that “Ho saputo da i giornali che il Grasso assassina in modo indegno quel povero *Cavalier Pedagna*, recitandolo in un pasticcio tutto suo per farsi capire da certi pubblici.” (*Carte messaggere*, II, 579-580).

These documents cast light on the main motives of tension between author and performer. On the one hand, Capuana is deeply dissatisfied with Grasso’s linguistic hybridism: in fact, Grasso did not hesitate to diverge from Capuana’s philologically accurate dialect, in order to be better understood by national and international audiences. In this respect Capuana’s approach to Sicilian dialect is still a puristic one, oriented by a quest for philological accuracy and grammatical normativity: in fact, he advocated for the correctness of his written dialect no less intransigently than he did in his early years for the correctness of a Florentine standard Italian. On the other hand, the playwright resents the performer’s interpretive freedom, reinventing characters and their function. Grasso’s acting might be a sublime instrument but is not a versatile one: when he is not provided with a suitable part, he adapts and reshapes all characters to his favorite and most successful stereotype, the hot-blooded and overly jealous Sicilian who is ready to shed blood to defend his honour.

These complaints are seemingly justified by Grasso’s actual interpretation of the character, which can easily be inferred even by the most positive reviews of the play. In an article titled “*Cavalier Pedagna* di Luigi Capuana all’Adriano” and published in the roman press *L’idea nazionale* on May 25, 1904, Domenico Oliva writes:

Alla parte del Cavalier Pedagna il Grasso ha dato un rilievo straordinario: questo attor tragico, terribile maneggiatore di quei lunghi e terribili coltelli, iersera era un caratterista perfetto, d’una comicità rude, ma efficace nel senso più esatto e più completo della parola. Certamente il comico del Grasso non è quello del solito brillante, tutto elegante e spesso tutto artifizio: no, egli è comico naturale, spontaneo, com’è spontaneamente,
Despite these limitations and tensions, *Lu Cavaleri Pidagna* still remained a part of Grasso’s repertoire, both in the 1905-1906 national tour and in the international tour of 1907 (for instance, the comedy is given in 1907 in Madrid).

If *Lu Cavaleri Pidagna* was an attempt of freeing Grasso of his most stereotypical ways as a tragic actor, the same aim is pursued even more radically in the subsequent *Bona Genti*, stage adaptation of the short story “Il mulo di Rosa” (first published in the collection *Nuove Paesan*). The play mainly focuses on the true notion of motherhood and on the tragedy of illegitimate birth. While its social setting is akin to that depicted in *Malìa* (that is, a family of relatively wealthy peasants), *Bona Genti* is devoid of violence or superstition, which are replaced by the more reassuring tones of religion and pathos.

Donna Rosa and Zi’ Minicu Sorba, a married couple of peasants, live a happy life with their eight-year old adoptive child Mummu. The boy fits well in the family, succeeding in school and being close to Ciccu, his mentally retarded uncle who also lives in the house (indeed, the introduction of this character represents one of the most notable changes in the page-to-stage adaptation, highlighting the natural generosity of the main characters and providing several moments of comical relief). The family dearly cares for the boy, and treats him much better than they would treat a natural son: instead of sending him to work in the fields as soon as he finishes mandatory grade school, they have bigger and greater plans of educating him to become either a lawyer or a priest. More importantly, they stand up for him against the prejudice-fueled comments of neighbors, who still see the boy as a “mulu,” a child of no status. They also take pride in hosting an annual miracle play at their own expenses, offering charity to a poor family in the village and to the local Church as a vow of gratitude for their newly found happiness as parents. On the day of the play, however, a sudden event breaks their peaceful lives: they receive a letter from Catania, stating that Mummu’s natural father has finally recognized him and married his mother, and will come to take him back in two weeks. Mummu’s natural father is also revealed to be a Knight and a prominent courtroom judge, who had an illicit affair with a woman of lesser status and gave the son for adoption because of social conventions.
Rosa and Minicu desperately look for ways to circumvent the court order, including a legal battle that they are likely to lose; meanwhile the child does not want to leave what he still considers to be his family, adoptive or not. In the final scene, a compromise is finally reached with the mediation of a local attorney, who helps the interested parties to come to terms: the play ends with a moralizing finale where Mommo’s two families have lunch together, celebrating the boy’s new fortune and reacquired status.

The play was highly appreciated for its tear-jerking and edifying content, so different from the gory violence of Verga’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* or Capuana’s own *Malìa*. Stanis Manca for instance writes in “La tribuna” on December 7, 1906 (“*Bona genti* di Luigi Capuana”):

Vi sono dunque in Sicilia altri lati della vita intima e paesana che si possono riprodurre sulle scene efficacemente anche quando non ci rivelano passioni selvagge o gente sanguinosa? Pare di sì, giacché un artista sincero come Capuana, che ha sempre ispirato tutte le sue concezioni alla più scrupolosa ricerca della verità, è riuscito iersera ad interessarci e perfino a commuoverci presentandoci alcuni quadri d’ambiente siciliano, nei quali non luccica il coltello e non infuria la tempesta vendicatrice.” (*Carte messaggere* II 586)

For the same reason, Grasso did not feature in it, since his violent temperament was not met by any of the available role. Given the failed attempt at influencing Grasso’s recitation and style, Capuana provided him with a comedy that was “untwistable,” to some extent forcing him off stage.

The actor who performed, instead, was a young Angelo Musco, who excelled in the short but highly memorable part of Don Irpinu Branca, a charlatan who poses as a lawyer and who briefly tries to exploit Zi Minico and Rosa financially.\(^\text{171}\) The part, which is striking for its linguistic hybridism, was intended to provide comical relief and was especially congenial to his

\(^{171}\) “Altrettanto famosa la sua interpretazione di Don Irpinu (non Agrippinu!) il faccendiere, “parte brevissima, episodica, ma intrpretata da lui diventò una parte di molto rilievo per la irresistibile invenzione umoristica, per la felice truccatura, per la comica verità della intonazione e dei gesti” (Domenico Oliva, cit in 134, da ‘*Bona genti di luigi capuana*, il giornale d’Italia, Rome, December 7, 1906). Cit. In *Capuana, Musco e il ruolo dell’attore* 134)
talent, becoming one of the many minor roles made popular mostly by Musco’s exuberant recitation:

Gli artisti della compagnia siciliana, i quali alla loro volta avevano dovuto moderare a consueta esuberanza passionale, tanto che per il Grasso non si era trovata una parte adatta, recitarono il bozzetto del Capuana con un suggestivo sentimento regionale. Specie Mimì Aguglia, riproducendo la figura di gna Rosa, ci palesò un altro lato del suo carattere artistico. Fu di una sincerità straordinaria, fondendo la rozzezza e l’affetto con un’efficacia di grande interprete. Quanto non avrebbero da imparare, molte nostre attrici che vanno per la maggiore, da Mimì Aguglia! Tipico, come sempre, il Musco, nella parte di Don Irpinu, ed espressivi lo Spadaro, il Majorana e il Sapuppo. Luigi Capuana ebbe numerose chiamate al proscenio insieme agli interpreti. (qtd. in Le carte messaggere 586-587).

Domenico Oliva made similar remarks in his review, titled “Bona genti di LC al Nazionale” and published in Il giornale d’Italia on December 7 1906:

Il pubblico desiderava vivamente ascoltare questa nuova commedia e fare omaggio a uno scrittore che gli è giustamente caro. L’illustre uomo pare si sia prefisso con questi due atti l’intento di rappresentare una Sicilia buona e bona ria, popolata di brava gente e con tanto di cuore; le scene di violenza, anzi di ferocia che il Grasso riproduce per abitudine artistica e che si confanno d’altro lume al suo singolare temperamento di attore, hanno ribadito nei più la leggenda dell’isola sanguinaria, leggenda triste e inverosimile che è impossibile vi sia un paese al mondo in cui non si pensi ad altro che ammazzare il prossimo e sia perpetuamente immerso in un bagno di sangue […]” (Cit. CM II 580)

Oliva’s review reflects the moralistic and consolatory nature of a play in which everyone shows their better selves – a moral turn from which, as the reviewer suggests, the actors themselves can benefit: “Nella compagnia diretta dal Grasso (nomino spesso l’assente, ma come dimenticarlo?) tutti non hanno che un intento solo, cospirare alla buona riuscita dell’opera, senza pregiudizi, senza morbose vanità: si bada innanzitutto all’insieme.” (Carte Messaggere II 580).
Lacking a strong role for the “mattatore” Grasso, the play is arguably tailored on the character of Rosa, who embodies a traditional image of femininity. At the same time, Rosa is an independent and outspoken woman, who never hesitates to contradict her husband or any other male representative of authority. The role was expressly written for Mimì Aguglia, whose interpretation was highly praised by Capuana: “L’Aguglia è assai più varia. Bisogna sentirla nell’altro mio lavoro Bona genti per ammirarla maggiormente.” (La verità sul teatro italiano 189). More importantly, the figure of Rosa is to some extent reminiscent of Nora in A Doll’s House, in particular in her rejection of the impersonal thinking of the law. This topic, already present in the narrative sketch “Il ‘mulo’ di Rosa,” is emphasized in the theatrical adaption. Rosa fails to grasp the impersonal nature of law, confusing the Deputies sitting in the parliament with a mythical figure. Her understanding of law is as mythical and fantastic as in a folktales or a legend:

(v) Rosa. E jemu ‘nti lu Dubitatu. Jemu a chiànciri a li so’ pedi, finu ca si cci smo’lu cori. (174)  
Rosa. E noi andremo dal deputato! Andremo a piangergli ai piedi, fino a spietrargli il cuore! (…) (322)  

More importantly, Rosa argues that the law should take into account feelings: a law that allows separating a child from his heart-parents is simply inhumane:


Similar feelings are voiced by Nora in A doll’s house, namely in her second showdown with Krogstad, taking place in Act II:

KROGSTAD. The law cares nothing about motives.
NORA. Then it must be a very foolish law.

KROGSTAD. Foolish or not, it is the law by which you will be judged, if I produce this paper in court.

NORA. I don't believe it. Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife not to be allowed to save her husband's life? I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that. Have you no knowledge of such laws--you who are a lawyer? You must be a very poor lawyer, Mr. Krogstad. (online edition)

Like Nora in A Doll’s House, Rosa is rejecting the impersonal thinking of bureaucracy in the name of the unwritten laws of the heart. To her, the written word of the law appears as the instrument of male oppression, crushing the reasons of true love, and clouding shameful actions with noble words.

As it was the case with Di Giacomo’s short stories and theatre, a female character shows her subalternity when faced with the oppressive power of male authority, arrogantly disguising itself in the form of written law. In this respect, Rosa is a close relative of Antonia Canserano, who revealed the unhappiness of her rape in a ‘semi-literate’ piece of writing, and of Carmela Battimelli, who showed her defenseless attitude towards a patriarchy law imposing her separation from her beloved natural son. Rosa’s ignorant naivety also becomes a symbol of her powerlessness against the coercion of law; more importantly, the similarities between Rosa and Nora’s instinctive rejection of law demonstrate that this anti-legalistic and irrational attitude is almost synonymous of femininity for Capuana: a view that is perfectly embodied in the aforementioned claim that “La stessa Nora, delle ultime scene di Casa di bambola, è, se vogliamo, una persona che ragiona male, unilateralmente, ma forse per questo schiettamente donna più di quel che non si creda” (Cronache letterarie 197).

Together with women, Capuana’s lar moyant portrait of defenseless marginalized subject includes another typically subaltern subject: children, who are minors by definition. Children are privileged subjects in realist and natural fiction; their hard living conditions are often treated in many enquiries on the Southern question, including the well-known enquiry promoted by Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino in 1876, stirring the nation’s thirst for truth. Indeed
childhood prominently features in *Bona Genti*, having a child as one of its main characters and two young actors in the supporting cast.

The play features young children as actors, an element of sure appeal to the audience. Oliva mentions this aspect in his positive review: “Erano intonati persino i bambini, il piccolo Spadaro che faceva il trovatello, e una piccolina vestita da Madonnina e un fantolino vestito da Gesù. Chiesi alla Madonnina che parte rappresentasse e mi rispose senza esitare e sorridendo: Fazzu la prima donna!” (*Carte Messaggere II* 587).

In its central depiction of childhood, *Bona genti* closely recalls *‘O mese mariano*, whose plot also focused on the tragic consequences of moral hypocrisy on the lives of illegitimate children. However, Capuana’s play is much lighter and has a happy ending: while in *‘O mese mariano* Peppino dies at the hands of the nuns who take care of him in the Real Albergo dei Poveri, the character of Mummu/Mommo finds two loving parents and is finally reunited with

172 The meta-theatrical device scene of the “mystery play” seems to correspond to an autobiographical memory of the author, as it closely echoes an episode recollected in his *Ricordi d’Infanzia*. The essay was first published in print in 1922 (Palermo, Sandron); however, an earlier version was published in installments in the periodic *Gazzetta Letteraria*, between September and October 1893. In this occasional writing, Capuana traces his interest for theatre back to his childhood and to his early experiences impersonating holy characters in mystery plays organized by his uncle, a priest: “In quel tempo fui scelto a fare da Bambin Gesù in una specie di Mistero che allora si recitava in Mineo il primo maggio d’ogni due anni e riusciva un gran divertimento pei ragazzi che agivano nella rappresentazione. Le parti, in versi dialettali, erano una scioccheria. Il babbin Gesù teologizzava in torno all’apostasi della SS. Trinità; La Madonnina, intorno al mistero dell’Incarnazione. Angeli, pastori, cacciatori, mugnai gareggiavano con quei sacri personaggi in sottigliezze teologiche; ma la festa era allegra. Dalla mattina fino alla sera, gran cavalcata per le vie della città addosso ad asini che ragliavano e tiravano calci; gli angioletti con ali di cartone, elmi e corazze fiammeggianti di dorature e spade di legno argentate; i pastori, vestiti in costume ma adorni di nastri di seta, d’ogni coloure, con cornamuse alle spalle, zufoli, fiscelle da ricotta e altri arnesi pastorali.” (*Capuana in archivio* 26). This colourful depiction is somehow recalled by the home-made play in *Bona genti*, in which non professional actors arrange their costumes with poor and simple materials taken from their everyday life, and where impersonation sustained with real devotion, is more important than any acting skill. In the same document, Capuana recalls his other child interpretation, as he played the role of Mary in 1848, in a ritual commonly named “*lu Dittu,*” later prohibited by the Bourbon regime because of its frequent political and social implication: “da Bambino Gesù, io ero diventato Madonna, e indossavo un bel costume bianco di seta con manto turchino sulle spalle e corona d’argento in testa. La corona, tolta alla statua d’una madonna, pesava troppo; me la mettevano soltanto nel momento della rappresentazione. La quale si faceva all’aria aperta, nelle piazze e nei larghi dove c’era più spazio per la folla che ci s’accalcava attorno (…) Se, dopo d’esser stato prima Bambino Gesù e poi Madonna, non sono ancora riuscito a quel che pare uno stinco di santo, la colpa è tutta mia” (*Capuana in archivio* 27). It is safe to assume that the scene of the mystery play featuring a young boy and a young girl in the roles of baby Jesus and Mary were inspired by this memory; so must have been the following line, where Rosa teases Ceccu with the idea of him playing the part of Virgin Mary: “Rosa: Tutti così voli essiri iddu? Madunnuzza magari? Armuzzza bona! Va’, pigghia la canna. Sì, sì; n’autru annu! (158)” (Italian translation: “Rosa (scherzando) E Madonnina, no? Anima buona! Su, va a pigliare la canna. Cecco (c.s.) Bambino io…. Quest’altr’anno! / Rosa. Sì, sì! Va a pigliare la canna intanto.” (312-313).
his natural father in a very unlikely course of events. Despite the customary labels traditionally attributed to the two authors, it seems that in this particular instance the “verista sentimentale” Di Giacomo was more concerned with realism than Capuana, the strict theorist of Naturalist fiction who is now mostly concerned with the self-imposed mission of providing a non-threatening representation of Sicily to the rest of the nation.

This ideological turn is also evident in the page-to-stage adaptation, significantly altering the final scene. While *Bona Genti/Il “mulo” di Rosa* ends on a tear-jerking hug between Rosa and her adoptive child, who proudly states “qua è la mia mamma,” in the narrative version the adoptive parents are denied such satisfaction. More importantly, in the story, the final is narrated in the perspective of the lawyer (approximately corresponding to the character of Don Nele in the play):

- Sia fatta la volontà di Dio, Rosa! Sia fatta la volontà di Dio!
E prèsala per mano, la conduceva via più morta che viva, senza un singhiozzo, senza una lagrima, ripetendole con voce grave:
- Sia fatta la volontà di Dio, Rosa! Sia fatta la volontà di Dio!
Dal loro dolore misuravano il dolore di quel padre che veniva in cerca di suo figlio dopo tredici anni! E si sentivano messi alla pari, e riconoscevano finalmente che era giustizia che il figlio fosse reso al padre.
Come sarebbero rimasti loro due?
Come voleva Dio! Se il ragazzo fosse morto, non sarebbe stato peggio?
- Sublimi! sublimi! - diceva l'avvocato, raccontando la scena. - Glielo condussero lì, glielo spinsero tra le braccia. - Purchè qualche volta si ricordi di noi! - Non chiesero altro, poveretti. Parevano gente a cui venisse strappato il cuore! - Ve lo manderò una volta all'anno, per la villeggiatura! - Ah! - esclamarono marito e moglie. - Non ho mai visto espressione di gratitudine più viva e più intensa negli occhi di creature umane. Sublimi!
Sublimi! (*Nuove Paesane* 54-55)

In the play, it is Zi’ Minicu who asks that the child be sent back to them at least during the summer; in the short story, instead, even this small compromise is bestowed from above,
suggested by the natural father of the boy, while the two adoptive parents stand silent, with teary eyes, not daring to ask for anything at all. While in the play Rosa has the final word, the short story ends on the final comment of the lawyer, paternalistically praising the humble attitude of the two peasants. Mommo’s adoptive parents are literally voiceless: they passively accept the situation as “God’s will,” accepting the loss of their child as an ineluctable fact of life.

From a linguistic point of view, *Lu cavalieri Pidagna* and *Bona genti* are quite homogeneous: they both adopt a slightly more refined vernacular than the one seen in *Malìa*, aiming at representing respectively the small gentry of the village and the wealthiest peasants. More importantly, they use the same dialect – a rigorous version of the Eastern Sicilian spoken in the rural areas between Mineo and Caltagirone, as defined by the author.

In both cases, the Italian translation appears to be mostly literal, with changes that rarely affect the semantic of the texts. However, the self-translator acts more freely towards his own text, occasionally engaging in instances of re-writing; consequently, neither play shows the same degree of literalism observed earlier in analyzing Giusti Sinopoli’s translation of *Malìa*.

In particular, the Italian version of *Il cavalier Pedagna* shows several cases of semantic expansion: the Italian lines are longer and more explicit, often dwelling on scandalous topics. For instance, Donna Mara’s disgust for Carru Longu and his henchmen becomes more explicit and evident in the Italian version, as the two following examples clearly show.

(I) CARRU: Cc’è cosa? DONNA MARA: Chi cci havi a essiri? Ssu sucarru fa ‘na puzza cc’appesta. CARLO: Che cosa c’è? DONNA MARA:: Che volete che ci sia? Non sputate per terra, si sporca il tappeto. CARLO: Non siamo abituati!

(CARRU: è astutatu. (TDS 205) DONNA MARA: Cotesto sigaro fa un puzzo che appesta! CARLO: Lo spengo. (TI 268)

(II) CARRU. Voscenza benedica (TDS 206) CAVALIERE (a donna Mara) perché non mi avete avvisato che c’era Carlo? CARLO: Voscenza mi benedica!
In exampe (i), Capuana adds the detail of Carru spitting on the carpet, a caricature-like sign of his lack of manners and his utter disrespect; he also is seen smoking a cigar in the house (whereas the Sicilian version reads “the cigar is off”). Similarly, in (ii) Donna Mara is seemingly delaying the admission of the guest, another not-so-subtle hint of the not-so-great consideration she has towards of Carlo and his methods.

Many changes are related to the character of Elsa and to her relation with the Cavaliere, a relation that is clearly charged with sexual aspects. In Act I, the appearance of Elsa and her subsequent interaction with the notary is subtly modified:

(III) Elsa (di dintra) Se c’è gente, che mi fa? Ditegli che ci sono pure io.

Elsa: Se c’è gente che mi fa? Ditegli che ci sono io.


NOTAIO. Lei! La cantante! E quel santo provosto? Che dovrò fare?

(Nu Nutaru si rimetti a sidiri e la guarda intentamenti). Lei attende il cavaliere?

NOTAIO (da sé) Bellina! Non c’è che dire.

Nutaru. È un pizzuddu chi aspettu; nun so se le capiscu lu sicilianu.

Elsa. Un poco (pausa)

NOTAIO. Da un pezzetto, in verità.

Nutaru. Artista di cantu, è veru?

(pausa) Artista di canto, la signorina, è vero?

ELSA. Contralto.

ELSA. Come lei.

Nutaru. L’haiu lettu ‘nt’u giornali. Iu frequento pocu li teatri. A la me età!

ELSA. Come lei.

Taliana, si nun sbagghiu!

ELSA. Come lei.

Nutaru. Già; vulia diri… di ddi parti… di quelle parti di lassù. (TDS 195)
In particular, the addition of two asides (“Lei! La Cantante! E quel santo provosto? Che dovrò fare?” and “Bellina! Non c’è che dire”) emphasizes the sexualization of the character: she is not only a sexual conquest for the character of Pidagna, but a potential prey for all the male representatives of the authority. The sexual intensity is also increased in several exchanges between Elsa and Pidagna, as the following examples clearly demonstrate.

(iv) Elsa: Con quale condizione? Gliel’ho giurato prima di partire. E se non fosse stata malata, ella sarebbe qui a tutelarmi, a impedirmi di commettere una follia che, mezza, ho già commessa! Ogni bacio che ti do è un rimorso; ogni tuo bacio che ricevo… (TI 264)

(v) CAVALIERE (…) (insistente) Ascolta; non ne posso più! Questa non è vita! Ho il piatto che mi fuma davanti, muoio di fame… e non posso mangiare! Ho sotto gli occhi il bicchiere ricolmo, ardo di sete… e non posso bere! È vita possibile questa? Resti? Resti? Non voglio sapere altro! È l’unica cosa che mi preme! … la modista te l’ha portato il cappellino nuovo? (Elsa indica, abbassando il capo, quello che ha in testa) Ti sta un amore!…

(vi) CAVALIERE (…) Levati il cappellino! Levati i guanti! Prendi possesso!

Elsa. E tua figlia!… L’hai fatta cacciar via! (TI 282-3)

Elsa. Vado a far visita a un malato. (TI 283)
While in the Sicilian play there is a generic hint at the sexual tension between the characters, the nature of their transaction is outlined more clearly in the Italian version. Elsa is here negotiating her boundaries, holding off Pidagna's full sexual enjoyment in order to obtain a material advantage from it: if not marriage, at least a financial agreement granting her alimony. In particular, in passage (v) she is clearly posing as Ariosto’s “vergine saggia,” conceding only minor sexual favors to her elderly lover; she uses his tantalizing sexual desire as a leverage. Pedagna’s heartfelt plea in example (v) seems to shows that her strategy is working: his desire is literally described as a tantalizing experience (“I have food besides my eyes and I cannot eat; I have a full glass of water besides my eyes and I cannot drink,” his plea reads). Similarly, in example (vi) Elsa reaffirms her decision to hold off Pidagna’s sexual advances, with a rather explicit use of the word of “possesso:” Elsa is clearly playing on the double meaning of the Italian word ‘possedere,’ indicating both material possession and carnal knowledge. These changes reinforce the character’s dominant association with sexuality, and her outspoken attitude in speaking overtly about physical love.

At a superficial reading, his greater insistence on the non-sexual nature of the relation between the two character could appear as a reassuring and moralizing self-censorship, aiming at reassuring a national audience. Several aspects could support such an interpretation: Elsa is falsely presenting herself as a girl of serious principles, who is committed to save her honourability and cannot be used for entertainment, as she “is different than the others” (“E’ n’autra cosa! Ora si parra di tia! Nun ti mèttiri a paru di l’autri: ti fai offisa,” says Pidagna when Elsa questions him about his past affairs). Of course, this appearance is miserably crushed when Elsa’s infidelity is discovered at the beginning of Act III, and the discovery of her less-than-chaste attitude is perhaps a greater blow than her actual cheating.

However, the text seemingly justifies also an opposite, much more cynical view. Elsa's constant references to sex spell out the market value of her virginity, which appears as a tradable commodity in the bourgeois society here described. In turn, the economic nature of such a transaction is emphasized. What appeared to be a problem of infidelity here appears as a 'fraudulent' transaction: Elsa is not simply an unfaithful mistress, but a dishonest woman who has feigned honourability to attract Pidagna in a potentially ruinous financial agreement. This view appears, in turn, more cynical and explicit.
It should be noted that the identification of a woman’s worth with her virginity is often challenged in Capuana’s plays: see for instance the ending of Malìa, where Nino proves his immense love to Jana by accepting to marry her regardless of her status, or Riricchia, the one-act play in which a young woman freely flirts with all the available bachelors, and tests her lover’s boundaries by falsely hinting she has lost her virginity to a previous courter. Echoes of this theme can also be found in the earliest Sicilian play by Luigi Pirandello, Lumìe di Sicilia, calling into question the sexual freedom of a famous singer: Micuccio Bonaviri is disheartened by Sina's disdainful and thankless attitude, but what sends him running out the door is the thought of her lost sexual purity.

While sexuality is a particularly crucial aspect in the reshaping of Elsa's character, an increase in explicitness can also be observed in the parts of other characters. See, for instance, the malicious overtones of Donna Mara’s Italian line in the following example:

(VII) DONNA MARA. E quannu s’ha tingiutu cchiù niuru di la pici, cci pari ca è picciottu! (…) (194)

DONNA MARA. E quando si è tinto più nero della pece, si figura d’esser ridiventato giovanotto e vuol farla da giovinotto! (insinuando) (…) (261)

The rather vulgar addition of a stage direction (insinuando) makes clear the sexual overtone of Donna Mara's lines: while her Sicilian lines could simply be read in relation to Pidagna's emotional immaturity, the sexual implications of his rejuvenating attitudes cannot be hidden in the Italian version.

Similarly, in Act II, the insinuations of Pidagna towards his moralizing friends become more obvious and explicit:

(VIII) LU CAVALERI: Vui stativi zittu! Si iu facissi comu a vui, ca ogni annu mannati la vostra serva ‘ncampagna, ppi canciamentu CAVALIERE (c.s.) state zitto, notaio! Se io facessi come voi che ogni nove mesi mandate la serva in campagna, per cambiamento di aria.

NOTAIO. Infamità!
d’aria perché ha male alla meusa!

… (216)

CAVALIERE: E l’aria di campagna le giova, e quella ritorna, tutte le volte, guarita. (274)

By specifying the duration of each “countryside” sojourn (exactly nine months), Capuana makes the allusion to illegitimate pregnancies much clearer, an effect that also results from eliminating the potentially misleading reference to “spleen pain” (“meusa”).

Most changes expand and clarify the original content, without drastically changing the significance of the translated lines. However, meaning can be significantly affected, as in the following example, also taken from Act II:

(ix) D’elia. (…) Nun vogghiu assignu, né nenti. Non ppi superbia, né ppi sdegno. Haiu boni vrazza e pozzu travagghiari. Nun sugnu di chiddi ca cridinu di avvilirisi travagghiannu. Un tozzu di pani ppi li me’ figghi cci lu pozzu guadagnari anchi facennu la cammarera. (221)

DONNA LIA: (…) Non voglio assegno né niente! Non per superbia, né per disdegno. Ho buone braccia e posso lavorare… Non sono io ancora di quelle che si avviliscono facilmente…. Un tozzo di pane pei bambini io sono ancora in caso di guadagnarlo… anche facendo la cameriera… Non è disonore buscarsi il pane col proprio lavoro!… (277)

This line is taken from the first direct confrontation between the Cavaliere and his estranged daughter, one of the emotional peaks of the play. Despite their apparent similarity, the two passages have a completely different meaning. While the Sicilian reads “I am not one of those who considers working a dishonour,” the Italian version reads “I am not easily discouraged.” The social implications of this change are evident: in the Italian version, Lia is simply asserting her strong will and bravery in the face of hardship, whereas in the Sicilian version she is claiming her willingness to work, despite her aristocratic upbringing: once again, Lia is defying social conventions, directly opposing her father’s deepest beliefs. Her statement is thus consistent with her anti-conventional decision of marrying a non-aristocratic husband and fiercely contrasts with her father’s class pride. Pidagna’s harsh and choleric reaction is thus better understood in light of the Sicilian sentence, as it sounds as an overt challenge to the character's bigoted and backward set of beliefs.
The examples seen so far mostly show an increase in expressivity and explicitness in the translation; however, the opposite also occurs. In particular, the violence of Pidagna is often attenuated in the Italian version. See for instance his dialogue with Elsa:

(x) ELSA Chi era costei?... Che cosa voleva?

LU CAVALERI Affari ca nun ti riguardanu; questioni d’interessi.

ELSA Un’antica amante! ... Non negarlo!

LU CAVALERI Lassami stari! Lu to’ mpresariu... (fa signu cu la manu di bastunari).

ELSA: Poveretto! Cose che accadono soltanto in Sicilia.

LU CAVALERI. Già! A l’altre banni nun si vastunia, nun s’arrobbia, nun s’amazzia! ‘N Sicilia sulamenti!... Dici cchiò tostu ca ccà sulu si trovau lu stùpiti comu a mia ca vonnu beni a certi persuni ca nun si lu mèritanu e... e...

ELSA non tentar di deviar il discorso. Chi era quella donna?

LU CAVALERI (Doppu un mumentu di esitazioni, serissimu) Me’ figghia! (224)

ELSA: Lo vedo che sei su tutte le furie, forse perché temi che io scopra qualche altarino!

CAVALIERE Ancora? Che cosa hai visto? Niente!

ELSA Ho visto e veggo abbastanza! Il tuo turbamento, la tua collera! Eri imbestialito, poco fa!

CAVALIERE Quistioni di interessi!

Non sono un bambino! E quando vogliono farmi fare certe cose per forza!

ELSA Chi? Non mi infinocchiare!

CAVALIERE (Cercando di sviare il discorso) Hai riflettuto bene? Resti?

ELSA Dopo quel ch’é avvenuto! ... Povero impresario. Cose che accadono soltanto in Sicilia!

CAVALIERE. Eh, già! In altri posti non si bastona, non si ruba, non si ammazza, punto! Soltanto in Sicilia! ... Di’ piuttosto che soltanto qui si trovano gli stupidi pari a me che vogliono bene a persone che non se lo meritano affatto! ...

ELSA: Parla! Parla! Butta fuori il veleno!

CAVALIERE Veleno! Dici benissimo!

Tutto il mio sangue l’ha fatto diventare
veleno! (affettuoso e galante) Cattiva!
Cattivaccia! Dimmi la verità: resti?
Resti? Dobbiamo scrivere alla tua mamma?
ELSA. Ci vuole una gran faccia tosta per parlarmi così dopo quel che ho visto e sentito! (il cavaliere l’abbraccia e la bacia) Son diventata di marmo! Puoi darmi quanti baci vuoi! Non passano la pelle!... Chi era costei? Voglio saperlo! Quistioni di affari! Affari di donne! Qualche antica amante! Vizioso! (il cavaliere nega scotendo il capo)
Poverino! Non è capace!
CAVALIERE. (indicando un punto di una gota) Qui! Attendo! … Di quelli che vengono proprio dal cuore.
ELSA Attenderai un bel pezzo! Era una donna?
CAVALIERE (deluso) Una donna!
ELSA Perché lo hai negato?
CAVALIERE. Perché non è… di quelle che tu supponi!
ELSA. Chi dunque?
CAVALIERE (serio) mia figlia! (281).

In the Sicilian version, Pidagna mentions the beating of Elsa's agent, which he had secretly organized: this line, which sounded particularly threatening to the knowing audience, is eliminated in the Italian version. Despite this elimination, however, the scene is much lengthier in the Italian translation, with a greater emphasis given to Elsa's paradoxical accusations of infidelity and to Pidagna's gallant attempts at distracting her. The Italian translations thus reverts
the relationship between the two characters, as the power is firmly in the hands of the woman – who relentlessly insists until she obtains what she wants.

The tendencies to expressive increase and attenuation also appear in the translation of *Bona Genti*. The Italian version (*Il mulo di Rosa*) is often more detailed, as the author clarifies allusions and covert references that were made in passing in the Sicilian original. See, for instance, the following examples:

(xi) Z’ MINICU. Chi San Giuseppe siti? Eccu ccà! Ora sì! (158)

(xii) ROSA: [...] E lu vastuni? Comu facemu, ppi lu vastuni? (158)

(xiii) MAURO: Iu mi nni vaiu. Nun vi la pigghiu ccu mia, pirchì v’hau purtatu ssa malanova. Lu purtalittri chi nni sa? (162)

These examples do not significantly alter the semantic of the lines; they simply spell out clearly some previous information, making the situation clearer for a potentially unaware audience. This is especially evident in (xi), when the self-translator makes it clear that Saint Joseph’s stick needs to have flowers on it, as in the Gospel story that is here being re-enacted, a theatrical convention of the popular Sicilian passion that might be not universally known across the nation.

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173 The translation of ‘malanova’ (‘bad news’, Traina 554) with ‘mala nova’ is symptomatic of the linguistic ambivalence between Tuscan form and regionalisms. For an Italian reader or critic, it would be easy to assume that the non-diphthongal form ‘nova’ is a homage to the conventions of current Tuscan-based Italian, in opposition to the historical vocalism of Italian. However, the translational analysis allows us to reject this superficial interpretation, revealing the underlying influence of a Sicilian form.
At the same time, the Italian version loses several semantic aspects to censorship and attenuation. For instance, the following sequence is significantly shorter in the Italian version, eliminating the choral dimension of the scene and reducing the space of supporting characters:

(xi) PADRE BENEDETTO: Cummari
Rosa! Chi vi scappa di la vucca?

STELLA: Puvaridda!

MUMMUZZU: Chianci? Pirchi?

CICC: N’autru annu... bamminu iu!

ZI MINICU: (a Don Irpinu) E vui chi nni 'mbrugghiati? (166-167)

Capuana's dialectal script places breaks the chorus in a plurality of minor characters always commenting the events on stage – a fact that is consistent with the conventions of Verist theatre, and which characterize many page-to-stage adaptations of the time, from Di Giacomo's Il voto and Assunta Spina to Verga's theatrical adaptation of Cavalleria Rusticana. The pathos of the scene is attenuated in the Italian version, as neither Mummuzzu nor his child-like adoptive uncle are present any longer; Ciccu, in particular, represents a potential distraction with his comical lines.

Consistently with a practice also recorded in Di Giacomo's Italian translation, references to religion are also eliminated or attenuated, as in the following two examples:


MASTRO PAOLO (dolente) O che ci entriamo noi? Penserò io; vi manderò tutto a casa! (TI 318)

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174 See in particular Gaillard’s comment on the subsequent theatrical and operatic adaptations of Cavalleria Rusticana: “Se gia nell’ opera teatrale il ‘coro’ perde la funzione di narratore e commentatore che aveva nella novella, e, individualizzandosi in quattro personaggi, diventa in un certo senso ‘macchettistico,’ ancora di piu esso viene snaturato nel libretto. In questo, divenuto ‘Coro di contadini e contadine,’” la sua unica funzione e quella di pretesto al compositore per una musica d’effetto, e un po’ di facile ‘coloure’ in scena; nessuna parte ha nella vicenda, niente in comune con i protagonisti, le cui parole ed azioni, così, restano prive di ogni contesto socio-comunitario” (188).
Zi Minicu: Scusati, Mastru Paulu!

Scusati, cunmari mei! ... Ci pensu iu;
vi mannu tutti cosi a casa. (TDS 167)

(XVI) ROSA. Nun mi nni parrati, 
‘cillenza! Ddu jornu, si l’avissi avutu 
’ntra l’ugni, n’eccessu avissi fattu!
(TDS 170)

(ROSA. Non è vero, eccellenza! Ma 
quell giorno, se lo avessi avuto tra le 
ugne, chi sa che cosa ne avrei fatto!
(TI 319)

While the attenuation of example (XV) appears to me motivated by a generic concern for synthesis, example (XVI) might be semantically motivated. In the Sicilian version, Rosa admits having made a blasphemous gesture out of rage (that is, having thrown the image of Saint Joseph out of the window), with great scandal of her judgmental interlocutor, Donna Lorenzina. In the Italian version, Rosa denies the allegations, thus eliminating a blasphemous reference: she admits that she would have been capable of nearly anything, but the disturbing episode of violence against a holy image is eliminated, and transformed into a malevolent rumor.

A semantically relevant change can also be observed in the following example:

(XVII) ZI MINICU: E si cci dicissimu ca 
lu picciriddu è mortu? Nni morinu 
tanti, ca li fimminazzi ca si li 
pigghianu ppi spiculazioni e ppi la 
miseria, li fannu moriri di fami. Si cci 
dicissimu ca lu picciriddu è mortu?
(TDS 172)

(MENICO: E se noi rispondessimo che il 
bambino è morto? Ne muoiono tanti, 
con queste femminacce che se li 
prendono per speculazione, per la 
mesata, e li lasciano perire di fame! Se 
rispondessimo che è morto? (TI 321)

The similarity between the two words ('miseria' and 'misata'\footnote{Meaning both "a whole month" and "a month's worth of wage" (Traina 597)} might authorize several explanations, including the likely hypothesis of a mechanical error in the transcription of the Sicilian script. As a consequence, the Italian translation contains a deep criticism at the charity
system and its abuses, shifting the emphasis from inevitable misery to people’s opportunism and greed.

In addition to their similar linguistic register and to their patent thematic similarities, *Lu Cavaleri Pidagna* and *Bona genti* share another important feature: the representation of Code-Switching between Italian and dialect, almost absent in *Malìa* and in the other bilingual plays authored by Capuana. The relevance of code-switching seems to correspond to two defining traits, which isolate these two plays from the rest of the vernacular plays: an accurate social stratification (or economic subordination) of characters, and the representation of a higher social setting, with some upper-class characters who have at least some marginal passive exposure to Italian (see the bourgeois setting of Don Neli’s house, or the wealthy conditions of Pidagna, the notary and the priest). However, the two plays also differ in their treatment of linguistic variation.

In *Lu Cavaleri Pidagna* the rift between Italianophones and dialectophones does not coincide with social divisions: for instance, Pidagna and his friends speak in Sicilian despite their social prestige, while Elsa (a singer with a dubious reputation) speaks Italian fluently. More importantly, the identity-value of linguistic codes here prevails on its social market: the only character who is a full Italophone is literally a foreigner coming from “abroad,” that is the mainland Italy. Elsa’s foreignness is particularly emphasized in an exchange between the Italian-speaking seductress and a deeply embarrassed Notary:

(xviii) **ELSA** *(di dintra)* Se c’è gente, che mi fa? Ditegli che vi sono pure io.

**ELSA:** Se c’è gente che mi fa? Ditegli che ci sono io.

**(Elsa entra; saluta lu Nutaru cu ‘nu ‘nchinu. Iddu si alza ‘mpiedi e rispunni ccu ‘nautru nchinu, ‘mpacciatissumu). Stia comodo, prego. (Lu Nutaru si rimetti a sidiri e la guarda intentamentu). Lei attende il cavaliere?**

**NOTAIO.** (da sé) Bellina! Non c’è che dire. **ELSA.** Stia comodo *(il notaio torna a*
Both the Notary's metalinguistic comments (“nun so se lei capisci lu sicilianu”) and his question about her being “Italian” highlight the cultural division between Sicily and the mainland; so does, Elsa's prompt answer (“come lei”), highlighting the acute tensions still surrounding the unification of Italy.

Both the Notary and Pidagna are uneasy with Italian, and they signal their linguistic through the use of participant-related CS:

(XIX) NUTARU: Comu lu nostru Cavaleri. Brava pirsuna, signuri cumpitu…. Già, amici ccà, amici ddà; ma quannu si parti bisogna lassàrli… Megghiu fussi ristari sempri a ‘na banna… Non so se ha capito. (TDS 195)

(XX) LU CAVALERI (dopu di aviricilli vasatu cerimoniosamenti)… Dimenticavo che sono in collera! Che Senti… lassami parrari a modu miu! ELSA. (ccu caricatura) E a me macare
In example (xix), the Notary returns to his code of choice after a few attempts at speaking in Italian. His adoption of Sicilian symbolically excludes Elsa from the linguistic community, reinforcing the content of his lines, which were suggesting that Elsa is a wanderer and an outsider. At the same time, his final CS to Italian also appears as clue of verbal courtesy towards the interlocutor (“mi ha capito?”), saving at least his appearances of civility. In (xx) Pidagna, instead, reclaims his right to “speak in his own way” (lassami parlare a modu miu), primarily suggesting his own uneasiness around Italian. While the linguistic choice was a sign of power in the previous example, here the dialectophone character shows his weakest side, prompting a further humiliation and the mocking reaction of his interlocutor (“E a me macare a modu miu!”). Both instances of CS are obviously lost in the Italian translation; similarly lost are Elsa’s other attempts at mocking the code of her lover, namely in the final scene:

(XXI) ELSA: Vecchio grullu! (TDS 245) ELSA Vecchio grullo! (TI 294)

Particularly interesting is her grotesque blend of Tuscan lexicon (“grullo”) and Sicilian morphology (the ending in –u), which is sure to produce a comical effect, lost in the Italian translation.

Mockery and imitation seem to be a common feature among female characters, who use their linguistic identity as a powerful weapon. This can also be observed in the following example:

(XXII) DONNA MARA. (…) E chidda ci arrispunna: (tentando di contraffarne la parlata) Artrimento mi nne vajo! – parra accussì, Bedda Madri! E lu cavaleri a DONNA MARA. (…) E quella rispondeva: Altrimenti me ne vo’!
E lui: sarai qui padrona di tutto! (260)
The clear diction of Elsa (who is not only a native speaker of Italian, but has also to meet certain pronunciation standards, being a professional singer) appears as a monstrous eccentricity to the old and uneducated housemaid, who mocks and imitates Elsa's foreign words. The traditional hierarchies of linguistic prestige are therefore subverted, with a subtle comical effect: Italian, traditionally seen as the standard, is here ridiculed as a foreign code. At the same time, Capuana displays his traditional and conventional linguistic humor on the maid, whose competence in standard Italian is limited and superficial at best. Donna Mara's attempt at speaking Italian is limited to a clumsy imitation of its vocalism (Artimente, vajo; vuoi). However, Donna Mara's obvious lack of competence is manipulated into its opposite, as she censors and sanctions the word of the other. The traditional prestige hierarchy between Sicilian and Italian is reverted, and the standard is now depicted as something exotic, unfamiliar and out-of-place.

In translating his own script, Capuana is forced to eliminate many lines or sequences that allude to linguistic differences, such as in the following example:


NUTARU: Gira il mondo sola? (195)

In the eliminated passage, Elsa's superficial proficiency in dialect is revealed to the audience: while she is able to overcome the barrier of Sicilian phonology, she is forced to ask for help when the Notary uses a lexical Sicilianism that has no direct equivalent in Tuscan-based standard Italian. In turn, this sentence demonstrates Capuana's awareness of the differences between subsets and registers in dialect: when using a word such as 'furria', he is not disguising his literary "Italian" as Sicilian, but he is using a language of its own.

While in *Lu Cavaleri Pidagna* the distribution of codes only partially overlaps with social prestige, the depiction of diglossia in *Bona Genti* is more conventional, and follows a prevailing social pattern. Male characters from the upper classes are fluent both in Italian and dialect, while the uneducated peasants (or women, regardless of social status) have a passive
understanding of Italian but use dialect at their only code. This model clearly resembles the
distribution of codes already encountered in Di Giacomo’s plays, and namely in ‘O Mese
Mariano. For instance, two “lawyers” face each other in the play: but only Don Neli, who is a
legitimate lawyer with real credential, speak Italian, while his impostor rival, Don Irpinu Branca,
translates terms and expression from the courtroom into a farcical and fantastic Sicilian.

The hierarchical distribution of codes is particularly evident in Act II, when Rosa and
Minicu are confronted with the language of legal paperwork and official documents. In this
context, the lawyer Don Neli acts as a linguistic mediator, and his linguistic behaviour that
corresponds to his role throughout the play. Don Neli can be rightfully included in the typology
of the 'translator-on-stage,' characters whose bilingual proficiency symbolizes their role as
mediators between the opposite worlds of the vocabulary and the street, and whose activity as
'cultura translator' is function of their role as raisonneurs.

Don Neli speaks Italian fluently when interacting with his peers or other representatives
of authority, is seen using dialect for the vast majority of the play, especially when addressing
Rosa, Minicu, or when he fights with his own wife, Donna ‘Nzina. His double proficiency
appears very clearly in the following example:

(XXIV) DON NELI ('interpunennusi) Ecco qua, brigadiere; noi stiamo trattando di far
tutto con le buone. Lei, mi figuro, ha avuto ordini dal Pretore. Ma non c’è bisogno di
adoperare la forza. Garantisco io.
BRIGADIERE. Il ragazzo è qui? Il padre…
ROSA (A lu brigadier schernennulu) Lu
patri? Si lu issi a truvari, si so’ figghiu cci
premi!
DON NELI (suta vuci a lu Brigadiere) È qua.
Povera donna! Bisogna compatirla. L’ha
addivatu ott’anni. Cci lu fazzu cunsignari
iu. Lei se ne può andare. (TDS 177)

DON NELI (interponendosi) Ecco qua,
brigadiere. Noi stiamo cercando il mezzo
di far tutto con le buone. Voi avete avuto
ordini dal pretore, mi figuro. Non c’è
bisogno di usare la forza. Garantisco io.
BRIGADIERE. Il ragazzo è qui? Il padre…
DON NELI (sottovoce, al brigadiere). È
pure qui! Povera donna, bisogna
compatirla. L’ha allevato otto anni!
Glielo faccio consegnare io. Voi potete
andarvene. (TI 324)
In this respect, the representation of linguistic differences is strongly related to Capuana's stereotypical and culturally coded depiction of gender variation. For instance, Rosa Sorba is pugnacious and has an annoying tendency to speak out of turn, which she tries to justify with the emotional implications of the situation. Donna Lorenzina, the wife of Don Neli, has no such excuse, and is frequently seen overreacting, interfering in her husband’s professional affairs, and acting for petty motives. This is made evident in the following line, with a proverb that Capuana often uses to represent feminine arrogance and incompetence:

**DONNA ‘NZINA.** Lu Signuri sbagghiau. La gunneda l’avia a mettiri a tia e li causi a mia. (180)

**DONNA LORENZINA.** Il Signore ha sbagliato! Doveva dare i calzoni a me e la gonna a te! (326)

At a superficial reading, this line could appear as a subversion of traditional power balances in the patriarchal family, showing Donna ’Nzina as a rebellious and strong-minded woman, along the lines of Assunta Spina or of some Pirandellian characters. However, several circumstances seem to point in a different direction. For instance, Don Neli is amused and completely unconcerned by her fits, and maintains his control throughout the play.

Donna Lorenzina is constantly put in a negative light, showing her unsympathetic, judgmental and petty side: for instance, she fails to appreciate her husband generosity towards a couple of poor and ignorant peasants, and she makes trouble until the very end:

**(XXVI) DONNA ‘NZINA.** Iu, caru cavaleri, tanta pacenzia nun haiu quannu vidu li cosi storti. E poi, nun sapiti chi lingua ha dda fimmina! (182)

**(XXVII) DONNA ‘NZINA:*** Iu, a ssi viddanazzi, tutta ssa soddisfazioni nun ci l’avissi

**DONNA LORENZINA.** Io, caro cavaliere, non ho troppa pazienza con le cose storte. E poi, voi non sapete! Quella donna ha una lingua, una lingua! (327)

**DONNA LORENZINA:** Io a cotesti contadinacci gliel’avrei fatto veder bella, con tanto di querela per sequestro di

**DONNA LORENZINA:** Io a cotesti contadinacci gliel’avrei fatto veder bella, con tanto di querela per sequestro di
Consistently with the paternalistic tone of the play, Capuana represents outspoken and independent women in a stereotypically negative light: men just know better and refuse to engage in the catty fights stirred up by their women. This happens in both households, consistently across the two different social classes. For instance, Minicu scolds Rosa, who is too vehement in defending Mommo from the other children’s abuse and is therefore setting a bad example:

(XXVIII) ROSA: E tu cci hai a rispunniri: Veri muli siti vuiatri, figghi di tanti caiordi!
Zi’ MINICU: Belli cosi cci ‘nsigni a lu picciriddhu! (A Mummuzzu) Tu nun cci hai a rispunniri nenti. Nun cci jucari cchiù ccu iddi; joca ‘ncasa. (154)

Similarly, Don Neli finally puts his wife in her place at the end of the play, in two different lines:

(XXIX) DON NELI (…) Capisci ora perché ho preso con le buone comare Rosa e suo marito? (181)
DON NELE. (…) Ti nni pirsuadi ora pirchì l’haiu pigghiatu ccu li boni a summari Rosa e a so’ maritu? (326)

(XXX) DON NELI. Lu vidi comu s’aggiustanu li cosi? (184)
DON NELE. Vedi come s’aggiustano le faccende? (328)

Both Zi’ Minicu and Don Neli act as the patriarchies of their respective families; however, it is the latter who embodies authority in Capuana’s hierarchical and paternalistic view of society, as ultimately social and gender hierarchies collide.

Whether he scolds the confrontational attitude of his wife or he fights against the “irrational” attachment shown by a couple of peasants toward their son, Don Neli emerges as the

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176 ROISA: Here’s what ou have to tell them: you’re the real donkeys! Sons of // Zi MINICU: The nice words you’re teaching our son! (To the child) You don’t have to reply anything at all. Just don’t play with them anymore. You can play here at home.” (My translation)
true mastermind of Act II and III, acting for the greater good of all characters and often going beyond their poor judgment. He thus manipulating an explosive situation into a moralizing and reassuring happy ending.

In this respect, the hegemonic role played by Don Neli continues and expands a feature of the narrative version of “Il mulo di Rosa,” whose finale is narrated from the perspective of an unnamed lawyer. The latter’s gaze acts as a framing point of view, a moral authority bestowing his moral judgment on the suffering and the pain of the characters. More importantly, the final comment frames the whole narration as part of a private conversation: the deep tragedy of Rosa, Minicu and Mommu is thus reduced to a fait divers, a subject for the conversation in the space of the bourgeois parlor. The paternalism displayed towards women, workers and children perfectly fits with Capuana’s ideology of bourgeois theatre: an ideal that Capuana sought to achieve throughout his career.

At the same time, the plot of Bona Gentì provides a clear example of Capuana’s dramaturgical imagination, recombining a set of recurrent tropes and situations in slightly different patterns. For instance, the backstory of Bona Gentì alludes to an affair between an upper-class character with a woman of no status, a situation that also occurred in Capuana’s well-known novel Il marchese di Roccaverdina (1895). Similarly, both in Bona gentì and Lu Cavaleri Pidagna an illegitimate liaison (the affair between Lia and Nicola Meli) is finally legalized after several years of scandal; and this circumstance also echoes a secondary plotline of Il marchese di Roccaverdina, the story of Pergola, whose civil marriage is seen as a stain ruining the reputation of the family. Finally, Bona gentì also alludes to a possible marriage between a Cavaliere (Mommo’s natural father) and a woman of no status, which closely recalls the feared union between Elsa and Pidagna, which is avoided only thanks to the joint effort of all the other characters. As these examples show, Capuana’s imagination builds on a few recurring themes, figures and stereotypes of a small-town world (at times drawn from autobiographical experience), recombined in slightly different configurations every time.

Both composed in the wake of Malìa’s bittersweet success, Bona gentì and Lu Cavaleri Pidagna are fully representative of the strengths and the weaknesses in Capuana and Grasso’s artistic cooperation. In particular, Grasso’s fervid and creative recitation is behind the creation of a complex character like Roberto Pedagna, while the psychological density and the vehemence
of Rosa would have been unconceivable for an actress other than Mimi Aguglia. At the same time, the thematic evolution of both plays derives from Capuana's pressing need to control and limit Grasso's expressive freedom, providing him with characters and situation he could not revolutionize. More importantly, both plays consolidate Capuana’s initial linguistic choice, showing a more solid grasp of Vernacular writing and, to some extent, overcoming the strict literalism characterizing the rapport between Malìa’s two versions. As a self-translator, Capuana acts with much greater freedom than his translator Giusti Sinopoli, partially rewriting a few lines of his script and adapting the pace and the meaning of the text to meet the needs of a different audience.

Finally, these two plays are the most perfect embodiment of Capuana’s new ideology of a bourgeois theatre, attempting a program of moral reform through regional characters and situation, and distancing itself from the excessive violence of other Sicilian plays; their linguistic code, favoring middle-class dialect over the “dialect-in-the-dialect proposed by Nino Martoglio, and showing realistic instances of Code-Switching, is perfectly consistent with such an ideology.

7. From Tragedy to Farce: the language of 'U Paraninfu

In 1911, an embittered Luigi Capuana wrote a private rebuttal to Manca, aiming at rectifying the latter’s considerations on Sicilian theatre, voiced in an article titled “Considerazioni sul teatro dialettale siciliano:”

This letter has a double aim: on the one hand, Capuana carves a primary role for himself in the venture of Sicilian theatre, alongside the figure of Martoglio and other Sicilian writers; on the other hand, he expresses a strong resentment for his lost earnings, complaining about his unfortunate 1908 contract with Grasso, in which the playwright had renounced the copyright on his first five dialectal plays (and on Ammattula, originally written in Italian by his wife Adelaide Bernardini) in exchange for a one-time compensation of 8,000 lire.

By 1911, the already difficult relation between Capuana and Grasso had completely fallen out, and the economic motives outlined in the letter to Manca cited above played no small role in this crisis. The playwright had attempted to cancel his contract with Grasso already in December 1909, signing a separate agreement with the acting company led by Agostino Ferrau. He then unsuccessfully tried to break his previous agreement with Grasso, also due to the growing pressure of the Società Italiana Autori (then directed by its founder Marco Praga), which vested interest was to prevent Grasso from forming a repertoire of works not governed by the society. As a consequence of the uncompromising stance of both parties, Malìa was covered by two separate agreements: one between Capuana and Grasso, and one between Capuana and the Society. The playwright had to refund Ferrau and his company for the financial damages caused by Grasso's ongoing vernacular representations, which resulted in heavy financial losses. On January 10, 1910, the author complained to Martoglio:

Ho perduto cinque mesi di proficuo lavoro per le agitazioni prodotte da quel contratto: ho perduto tremila e 500 lire che sto pagando a Ferrau per indennizzare delle rappresentazioni di Malìa fatte da Grasso. Il quale con esso e con le rappresentazioni del Cav. Pedagna si è già rivalutato di quel che ha dato e darà a me per sei lavori tre dei quali inediti e scritti appositamente per lui! La colpa di tutto questo è mia: ma è stato un bene, perché, come si dice, non tutti i mali vengono per nuocere; il contratto con Grasso mi ha
Capuana then voiced his desire of purchasing back the copyright on his work, also suggesting that financial need was the only reason why he signed the agreement in the first place: “Nelle quistioni con Grasso io mi sono conformato ai consigli del mio avvocato. Se ero ricco, la cosa sarebbe andata altrimenti; avrei indennizzato Grasso e lacerato il contratto. Ma già, se ero ricco, non avrei mai avuto occasione di firmare quel contratto.” (Carte Messaggere II 618-9)

His dreams were definitely shattered two years later, when Grasso sold the rights on Capuana's works to another company. As the author wrote to Martoglio on March 8, 1912: “Il Marazzi ha rilevato dal Grasso alcuni lavori miei e anche Ammatula di mia moglie. E così io non posso fare più quel che avevo in animo di fare, cioè di offrire al Grasso una certa somma e riscattare tutti i lavori a lui ceduti, stupidamente, per una miseria.” (Carte Messaggere II 627). In this letter, Capuana reiterates his hatred for vernacular theatre, which not only failed to bring him the hoped success, but resulted in financial losses:

Rileggendo la sua lettera, m’accorgo che Lei mentre la scriveva ha visto in me il peggiore concorrente, il peggiore sgobbone, il suo più acerbo nemico, mentre ho così poca volontà di lavorare per il teatro dialettale siciliano che, forse prima di morire, non darò più di uno o due lavori (...). Tra l’altro c’è Ada che odia a morte il teatro siciliano, per tutte le lacrime che le costa. (Carte Messaggere II 627)

Despite these emphatic claims, however, Capuana's involvement with the Sicilian theatre was not a closed chapter. Two years later, in 1914, the playwright began a cooperation with another important Sicilian comedian, Angelo Musco, who was no longer under the protective wing of Grasso and was finally emerging as the rising star of Sicilian theatre. After some brief and

177 This letter also shows the mounting tensions between Capuana and Martoglio, which will become evident in the last months of Capuana’s life, as we will see further in this chapter.
unsatisfactory arrangements with other Sicilian companies,\textsuperscript{178} Capuana was lured back into the environment of Sicilian theatre by the promise of wealth and glory, foreseeable in the newly established Musco-Martoglio Company (1914).

His last plays, including popular works such as \textit{Don Ramunnu}, \textit{Quacquaracquà}\textsuperscript{179} and the bilingual play \textit{'U paraninfu / Il paraninfo} are the result of the newly found enthusiasm in Sicilian theatre, and they were expressly written for Musco, who was also the dedicatee of the latter play (“A Angelo Musco con grande ammirazione e vivissima gratitudine” \textit{Teatro Dialettale Siciliano} 487). With his spontaneous and brilliant comicality, Musco had come to embody the new hopes for a renewal of the Italian theatrical scene, by infusing the vitality of his acting talent in the new scripts composed for him by leading playwright like Martoglio, Pirandello, and Capuana himself. His growing success was acknowledged with many prizes and official recognitions, including the prestigious nomination as “Grand’Ufficiale dell’Ordine dei santi Maurizio e Lazzaro” e “Grande Ufficiale della Corona d’Italia e di Cavaliere del Regno,” which he kept as his official signature until his death in 1937. Renato Simoni, in his obituary on \textit{Corriere della sera},\textsuperscript{180} retrospectively describes his acting style: “Non era un attore che recitasse bene; era il teatro stesso che riattivava alle sue remote sorgive, l’istinto della personificazione, nella sua commistura di umanità e di trasfigurazione, di imitazione psicologica e plastica della realtà e di beffa caricaturale, di intuizione e di osservazione” (\textit{Angelo Musco e il teatro} 140).

After a short-lived enthusiasm, however, the relation between Capuana and Martoglio was marked by the same tensions already seen in the difficult cooperation with Grasso. In addition to the usual power struggle between actor and playwright, Capuana failed to accept and understand the theatrical anthropology of his actor, believing he could “tame” and “domesticate” Musco’s instinctive talent and steer it towards his own artistic goal. As he had unsuccessfully done with Grasso, he attempted to “refine” and “improve” the crass humor of the Sicilian actor. This endeavour is particularly evident in the play \textit{Don Ramunnu} (never translated into Italian),

\textsuperscript{178} Namely, the company directed by Masi Marcellini, who was also the dedicatee of \textit{Don Ramunnu}'s first printed edition, in which he played the part of Luciu.
\textsuperscript{179} The work will be posthumously represented by Musco, who asks for the script in a December 18, 1915 cable (“Pregola Caldamente rimettermi subito lavoro postumo Quaquaracquà nostro compianto maestro dovendo metterlo scena Firenze Musco.”).
\textsuperscript{180} Simoni, Renato. “Angelo Musco” \textit{Corriere della sera}. Milan, October 8 1937
which sought to represent “un tipo comico-tragico… senza spargimento di sangue” (Carte Messaggere II 648):\textsuperscript{181} this definition clearly echoes the presentation of his Cavaleri Pidagna over a decade earlier, in which the author sought to reconcile Grasso’s vehemence with a more reassuring content. Similar concerns inspire his letter (dated August 10, 1914), in which he recommends Da cosa nasi cosa (a play written by his wife, which he himself translated into Sicilian) as a less trivial kind of entertainment:

Se è vero che aspiri a un repertorio dialettale vario ed elevato, bisogna che, col tuo mirabile e invidiabile ingegno, ti metta su la via di quel che han fatto Novelli, Zacconi, che han saputo essere soprattutto interpreti di grande varietà di tipi. Il lavoro che attendi da me, cioè il dramma, ti darà occasione di vivere una parte che si distacca completamente da quel che hai fatto finora. La commedia di mia moglie è – si può dire – il primo gradino che ti deve condurre a quel distacco. (Carte Messaggere II 637)

Still in September 1915, three months before his death, Capuana voiced the same hopes in an article published in the Turin-based newspaper La Gazzetta del Popolo: “Naturalmente, per soddisfare le più intime qualità del suo ingegno, Angelo Musco tende a formarsi un repertorio siciliano, in special modo ‘carico’ nel miglior senso della parola. Ma questo ‘comico’ può assumere con lui tali gradazioni che dal sorriso salgano al riso, alle sfumature sentimentali, alla drammaticità più impressionante che faccia ridere e piangere nello stesso punto.” (Carte Messaggere II 670-671).\textsuperscript{182}

\textsuperscript{181} Later in the same letter, Capuana describes the character of Don Ramunnu as follows: “Strozzino arricchito, uomo di volontà assoluta anche in famiglia, di orgoglio sconfinato, costringe la figlia giovinetta a sposare il nipote, molto ricco, di un suo amico. La ragazza, intanto, da due anni era segretamente innamorata del cugino; il quale alla sua volta, era allo stesso modo innamorato di lei. La figlia prende la rivincita diventando, dopo qualche anno di matrimonio, l’amante del cugino. Il padre, però, dapprima sospetta, poi è certo della colpa di lei; trema pensando alla possibilità di uno scandalo, e vorrebbe che la figlia rompesse la colpevole relazione, prima che la scoperta di essa coprisse di disonore e di ridicolo il nome della famiglia. Ma la figlia resiste: e Don Ramunnu è costretto ad essere il suo complice, pur di sfuggire al ridicolo e al disonore davanti alla gente. Questo è il nudo scheletro del mio lavoro, scritto appositamente per far risaltare il valore comico-drammatico di Angelo Musco. Il personaggio risulta intero, e son sicuro che egli ne farà una delle sue più meravigliose interpretazioni. (Carte Messaggere II 648-9)

\textsuperscript{182} Capuana Luigi “Angelo Musco e la sua ‘Compagnia comica siciliana’.” La Gazzetta del Popolo, Turin, September 25, 1915.
Once again, the playwright is establishing his relationship with the performer in contradictory terms. On the one hand, he takes advantage of Musco’s natural talent and of his contagious and irresistible acting, which were at the origin of his great success: on the other hand, he soon begins his attempts at changing and refining the performer's technique, consistently with his own ideal of a temperate, if not downright edifying, comedy. The latter attitude is clearly exemplified by the very detailed instructions for the performance of Don Ramunnu, given in his June 24 (1915) letter:

Ti auguro e auguro a me un gran successo per questa sera. E ricordati di non darmi il dispiacere di fare il minimo taglio nel 3º atto. La scena tra don Ramunnu e la figlia dev’essere recitata concitatamente, appassionatamente, da prima con imperiosità, poi, alla ferma risposta della figlia, con abbattimento e dolorosa rassegnazione, senza pause! Ti prego inoltre di sopprimere, nel 2º atto, quel tuo gesto di mettere più volte a sedere uno degli attori. Il gesto è sconveniente e inopportuno. (Carte Messaggere II 653)

As this letter demonstrates, Capuana is equally concerned with his own ‘respectability’ as a writer and with the accuracy of Musco’s interpretation. The letters of this last period show Capuana’s dark side: in the last months of his life, the author appears embittered, isolated and resentful. His letters alternate brief moments of enthusiasm and frequent outburst of rage, directed at Musco, at his rivals in the theatrical environment of Catania and even against his friend Martoglio. Burdened with debt and financial preoccupation, the author clearly resents the success of others, lost in a maze of self-aggrandizing thoughts and unrealistic hopes.  

Financial need appears to be a pressing concern in the last years of his life: this is evident in his many requests for loans to Musco, which the actor began to deny by the summer of 1915. Requests for help become particularly frequent during Capuana's last year of life, when Italy's entrance in the First World War made it more difficult to perform, with frequent theatre closures and several younger actors deployed at the front. For instance, on May 27 1915,

183 Capuana’s insistence that he should be awarded the Nobel prize, expressed in his frequent letters to Ferdinando Martini.
184 See for instance the letter on June 24, 1915 (Carte messaggere II)
Capuana confides to Martoglio his financial distress, resulting from the missing earnings from *Don Ramunnu*, whose planned performances were abruptly cancelled due to the general mobilization of Italy.

The relationship between Musco and Capuana unfolded in very similar terms to the relation between Capuana and Grasso. Constant highs and lows followed a brief season of enthusiasm, documented in many private letters to Martoglio. The letters of Capuana's last two years of life provide a contradictory portrait of Musco, who would be spoiling his natural gifts for the seductions of easy success and adulation. Capuana thus strives to detach the actor (a natural ‘talent,’ in need of a strong pedagogy that only a cultured playwright could provide) from his entourage, composed of parasites and sycophants.

Yet, the author’s impatience grew exponentially: for instance, in July 4, 1915, he scornfully depicted the actor in the following terms: “Si vede che anche lui, tornando quaggiù, ridiventa catanese… Meno male che sembra deciso di non sciogliere la compagnia e a prepararsi a battaglie di arte assai più degne! Ma quando so ch’egli passa molte ore in trattorie (quasi taverne!) con Grasso e con giornalistacci da bordello, ne provo un dolore vivissimo come se si trattasse di un mio parente” (*Carte Messaggere II* 681).

This letter also proves the author’s uneasiness in Catania, after his golden exile of Mineo and the many years spent in Florence, Rome, and Milan. The influence of his wife is probably also behind this disdainful attitude: several letters of the time suggest that Adelaide Bernardini had a hard time adapting to the life in the island. See for instance the following passage (from another letter of the same period), in which the author seems to take pride in describing his social isolation:

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185 See, for instance, the letter of Adelaide Bernardini to Martoglio, providing a late evidence to this judgment: “Lei, Martoglio, dice benissimo. Musco non è cattivo. È un debole; e il suo contorno lo fa deviare; ne abusa inumanamente. Io spero però nell’imprevisto, ché questo solo potrebbe salvarlo dalla decadenza e dalla… povertà! Anche Capuana diceva che *in fondo Musco è buono*, e capace di rinnovarsi. Lo incitava a studiare; gli strappava promesse… ma poi, c’erano i Fazio, i Marchese, i Giovanni Grasso che gli facevano dimenticare promesse e propositi….” (*Carte Messaggere II* 717)
Ada e io oggi conosciamo i catanesi quanto Voi…. Facciamo una vita di segregazione quasi monastica, e non vediamo l’ora di aggiustare onestamente i nostri affari, per venire a rifugiarcì nell’elevata atmosfera di Roma.

Quel che Ada ha sofferto quaggiù è quasi incredibile. Per fortuna, essa ha un carattere energico, e disprezza il catanesume alto e basso. Quaggiù ha un’amica soltanto, e un amico, il Verga, che la ricambia anche con rispettosa ammirazione. Ma il suo unico conforto è il lavoro, e la sua ambizione più grande è quella di conquistare, da sola, il posto che merita per il suo ingegno così vasto e forte. (Carte Messaggere II 648)

“Catanesume,” in this context, indicates an unpleasant blend of narrow-mindedness, malevolent gossip, personal rivalries and bad taste. This disdainful attitude is clearly echoed by Capuana's plea to Martoglio: “Io ho giurato che non si ripeterà mai quel che ho sofferto durante la prima rappresentazione del Don Ramunnu. C’era un gran pubblico, ma di negozianti, di bottegai, di studenti, di sedicenti autori dialettali. E veder ridere – per colpa di Musco – tutta questa gente che avrebbe dovuto forse piangere mi ha dato pena più che se mi avessero fischiato.” (680)

In another letter, he exhorts Martoglio to use his influence on the popular actor, with the hope that “forse in due riusciremo meglio a smussare certi suoi angoli” (657). Yet, the collaboration between the two is rapidly deteriorating, repeating the pattern of his previous experience with Grasso: “Grasso nel suo genere e Musco nel suo si equivalgono; ed è perciò inutile consumarsi il cervello per due bassi commedianti nell’arte e nella vita.”

Once again, Capuana is disappointed by the environment of Sicilian theatre, in which, he claims, he has invested so much of his energy and time. As he emphatically announces to Martoglio: “Io sì, lavorerò per Musco, ma non Le nascondo che parte del mio entusiasmo è svanito. Egli si compiace troppo delle stupide lodi che gli fanno, ed io non posso tollerare che una mia commedia venga ridotta a una farsa o quasi.” (656)

Many factors contribute to exacerbate the contrast between the actor and the playwright, from their different interpretations of scripts and characters to what Capuana sees as a dangerous lack of education and refinement. In the aforementioned letter of July 4, 1915, Capuana criticizes Musco's superficial interpretation of Don Ramunnu: “Aggiungo, confidenzialmente, che delle sue interpretazioni ora sono poco contento. Ah, se Musco facesse lo sforzo di studiare, e l’altro
di dimenticare i facili successi del macchettista! Pochi passi gli occorrono per essere realmente un artista come lo intendo io. Ma pare che non voglia vedere il pericolo in cui oggi o domani potrebbe miseramente cadere.” (655). Once again, Capuana is appalled at the performer’s liberty face to the text: his criticisms do not focus on the linguistic aspect of the play (as it had been the case with Grasso’s hybrid vernacular), but on what he considers as a full-fledged artistic betrayal. Consistently with his view of theatre as a trade, Musco replaces the original lines and scenes with “grossoane battute da farsa che io, autore, non posso approvare neppure quando vedo che lo sciocco pubblico le gusta!” (656)

A temporary reconciliation was reached during the summer: on August 5, 1915, Musco announces the triumphal reception of Don Ramunnu in Messina, soon followed by another face-to-face meeting. As a result, on August 20 Capuana expressed his renewed optimism on the fate of vernacular theatre and in Musco, its most talented interpreter:

Dimenticavo di dirle che sono ansiosissimo di veder Musco debuttare a Roma. Anche mercè di lei sarà accolto benissimo. Oh, Sì! Che il nostro sogno di autori dialettali si muti in bella e durevole realtà! Io non chiedo altro in premio di tante mie fatiche.
Dica a Pirandello che anche lui può fare molto per il Teatro Comico siciliano. Soltanto noi abbiamo diritto a imporci al pubblico e – perché no? – al tempo!
Se vive e vivrà il Teatro veneziano, perché non dovrà vivere, a traverso qualche secolo, il nostro che è più vario e più caratteristico?
E a me piace di stare tra voi due, come un buon papà (l’età me lo consente) che gode dei vostri trionfi quanto dei suoi. (Carte Messaggere II 664)

According to this letter, Capuana perceives a change of attitude when Musco leaves Sicily and opens his lungs to the ‘aria del continente:’ “Anche lui ripete che, passato lo Stretto, i suoi Santi protettori siamo Lei ed io; e me l’ha detto ricordando specialmente i forni delle serate in cui aveva recitato lavori non nostri,” reads another passage of the aforementioned same letter to Martoglio (662). As we will see in the next chapter, such an attitude has little to do with

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186 Represented on August 4 and 9 at the “Teatro Mastrojeni” in Messina
humbleness and seems to be consistent with an accurate commercial strategy. The comedian using the authority deriving from his cooperation with the giants of Italian literature in order to gain access to more refined audiences, to which he often proposed his old farcical repertoire – an attitude that we will see in detail in the next chapter, in examining Pirandello's relation with Musco.

The relationship between Musco and Capuana stayed positive until the end of the summer of 1915, as another cable from Musco (announcing the warm and positive reception of ‘U paraninfu at the Teatro Biondo in Palermo) documents: however, another crisis was already looming ahead.\(^{187}\)

A recurrent motive in the letters of the last months is Capuana's jealousy for Pippo Marchese, a reviewer in Catania and an author of Sicilian farces himself. Marchese appears to be a close friend of Musco and a stable member of his entourage; he often engaged in venomous, and somewhat self-interested attacks against Capuana,\(^{188}\) who in turn expressed resentment towards the “acerb[e] schifos[e] critic[he] del … pontefice Marchese” (Carte Messaggere II 656). In October 1915, Capuana warns Martoglio of the terrible influence that Marchese and other self-interested friends is having on Musco:

Dimenticavo di dirle che io, Lei, Pirandello, abbiamo nella Compagnia Musco i peggiori nemici, i più…. Arrabbiati critici illuminati… da Pippo Marchese ecc. ecc. […] E così,

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\(^{187}\) The play was represented on September 4 (1915); the cable was sent on the following day.

\(^{188}\) The spiteful tone of Marchese's reviews is quite evident. On June 25, 1915, he reviews Don Ramunnu in the following terms: “Capuana voleva evidentemente scrivere una commedia di carattere. E per Angeo Musco, cui aveva regalato il Paraninfo il carattere doveva, nella legittima aspettazione dei più, essere prevalentemente comico. Il pubblico, quando va a sentire il popolarissimo suo attore prediletto, si dispone più a ridere che a pensare. Gli son noti i mezzi che caratterizzano la singolare arte del Musco. Ogni gesto di lui, ogni atteggiamento, provocano lailarità più festosa. Anche Don Ramunnu diede a sperare, nel primo atto, in un po’ di buon umore che a traverso l’accenno di quel carattere di burbero benefico che prometteva una nuova tipica incarnazione, un nuovo gioiello del nostro teatro vernacolo. Ma l’autore volle toglierli tale onesta speranza” (qtd in CMII:. 658) While Marchese was not the only reviewer to find Don Ramunnu a mediocre play (a judgment shared by no less than Silvio d'Amico and Renato Simoni), his criticism appears to transcend the evaluation of Don Ramunnu, in order to focus on two different views of Sicilian theatre. Capuana is criticized because he refuses to satisfy the popular audience of the Politeama, giving them their most typical tricks; Marchese is explicitly targeting Capuana's pedagogical and moderate views of comedy, to some extent suggesting that only the farcical humour of his own plays is suitable for the audience of Sicilian theatre. Finally, Marchese’s positive comments on Lu Paraninfu seem to credit mainly the role of Musco, diminishing the role of the playwright. In other words, Capuana is blamed for his shortcomings as a playwrights, but is not credited for his successes, whose merit is entirely attributed to Musco’s performing ability.
According to an infuriated Capuana, Marchese did not simply express his venom in bitter reviews and malevolent gossiping, but went as far as to suggest changes and suppressions to Capuana's own scripts. In October 1915, the playwright laments Marchese's influence on the staging of *Don Ramunnu*, claiming that: "Mi è stato detto che Musco, sul mio copione di *Don Ramunnu* si è fatto segnare alcuni tagli da Pippo Marchese, e precisamente dove la parte della Prima Attrice soverchia, per interesse, la sua." (CM II 680). The character of *Don Ramunnu*, which Capuana created as an aristocratic and dignified character, is thus transformed in a farcical and crass buffoon.

The rivalry between the two playwrights reached an all-time high at the debut of Musco's company in Messina, when the popular comedian opened his program with Marchese's farce *Beneficenzando*, a satire against the self-interested world of charity. On that occasion, Marchese followed Musco, officially in their capacity as reviewers, and in fact as an unofficial member of of his entourage. Feeling betrayed, Capuana threatened to withdraw Musco's license to represent *Don Ramunnu* and *U Paraninfu* out of revenge with a cable to the local Prefetto. His disappointment is evident in livid lines, also from a letter to Martoglio: "Giacché Marchese gli preme più di noi (poteva benissimo debuttare con qualcosa di lei se non mio) se lo tenga e se lo grogioli! Musco finirà dove cominciò a farsi conoscere, su piccoli palcoscenici, per fare il buffone. Ben altro mi attendevo da lui, ben altro! La bassa lode l’ubriaca, e della vera grande arte non capisce un’acca.” (659)

The rift between actor and performer became even bigger when Capuana suspected that Musco, together with his son-in-law Pippo Crisafulli, might have played a role in the unauthorized stagings of *U Paraninfu* in a small theatre in Ognina (a popular neighbourhood in Catania). After denouncing the episode to Capuana, Musco and Crisafulli allegedly took back their testimony as soon as Capuana’s complaints reached the attention of the Society of Italian
Authors's new president, Sabatino Lopez (letter from Capuana to Martoglio, October 23, 1915; CMII 672-677).  

Their relationship kept deteriorating towards the end of Capuana's life, as it is proven by the heated letters immediately preceding Capuana's death. On November 11 1915, for instance, Capuana advocates for his own role in Musco's success, affirming that the Sicilian playwright could not have reached his national reputation without a solid repertoire. This position is not isolated, as both Martoglio and Pirandello also describe their roles in similar terms; however, Capuana's pleas sounds particularly emphatic and self-aggrandizing:

Alla sua amicizia chiedo assai, assai meno di una solidarietà che sarebbe dannosa per lei! Chiedo soltanto di dire a Musco che oggi, perché egli ha potuto affermarsi e accapparrarsi tutti i pubblici mercé le Sue e le mie commedie, non deve tirar calci e far la parte della vittima dei miei rari ma gravi e giusti rimproveri!... Quando il Musco fece Compagnia, io, per aiutarlo, mi misi nel rischio più grave in cui può cacciarsi un autore: In quello di scrivere appositamente una, due, tre commedie adatte a quell’Attore e Capocomico, senza sapere quale sorte avrebbe avuto la nuova Compagnia.

Egli ha detto a Lopez che ai miei consigli, ai miei rimproveri… preferisce rassegnarsi a perdere i miei lavori!... E, un mese fa, li piativa e chiamava capolavoro il mio Don Ramunnu!

Lopez mi consiglia di lasciar correre…

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189 Unofficial and unauthorized repeat performances were a common problem. In the same year, the author also complained about the slenderness of profits at the box office, as opposed to the number of tickets sold. It was Martoglio, and not Capuana, who discovered a fraud set by Michele Avola, the officer charged of collecting the copyright fees who significantly robbed Capuana of part of his dues. Capuana then unsuccessfully attempted to obtain his dues: “Ho tentato pure di far valere le mie ragioni a proposito di incassi miseri con teatroni zeppi di pubblico. Ho cozzato contro questa risposta: - Metà di pubblico non paga… perché i siciliani pretendono di andare a tetro gratis!” (CMII 674). Later on, on November 11 1915, he informs Martoglio of his ongoing investigation: “Lasciamo correre… e occupiamoci della cassetta! Me ne sto occupando, infatti, perché… a Palermo e a Messina sono stato derubato di parecchie recite di Lu Paraninfu. Sto tentando di avere in mano le prove da mandare alla “Società” Togliermi, in tre mesi, quattro o cinque incassi è un po’ troppo: non le pare? Io conservo i giornali di Palermo e di Messina; ma non bastano a provare quel che io affermo! Spero di riuscire diversamente; e, allora, credo che la mia protesta sarà un bene anche per gli altri Autori molto rappresentati da Musco, com’è Lei. Io do tutta la colpa agli Agenti e spero di non dover darla anche ad altri. Vedremo!” (Ibid.)
In lingua povera, questo consiglio significa che... gli Autori devono, soprattutto, pensare alla cassetta.

Le scrivo confidenzialmente, caro Martoglio, e per ciò Le dico che ho la bocca amara, amara, amara!

Ben altro dovrebbe fare per noi Autori colui che è su noi come un Santo protettore! Lo Turco a Palermo furoreggia, e i giornali, parlando specialmente di Altalena, han detto che mai, nessuna Compagnia ne aveva fatto risaltare tutti i pregi come han saputo fare Lo Turco e i suoi compagni! Lei dovrebbe esserne lieto! A Milano questa mia innocente constatazione è stata giudicata dispetto contro Musco! (Carte Messaggere II 684)

Meanwhile, the author's last months were also embittered by the disappointing reception of Don Ramunnu, which, according to its own author, was worth three Paraninfì ("Io darei tre Paraninfì per un Don Ramunnu"). The author sought in vain Martoglio's reassuring judgment on the script.

By November 11, Capuana was still seeing Martoglio as a potential ally in his tense relationship with Musco; however it was not long before their friendship started to suffer as well. Particularly interesting is the letter sent on November 23 (merely days before the author's death), showing the full extent of Capuana's growing paranoia and perhaps reflecting his rapidly declining health. In this last document, Capuana vents against everyone, including Martoglio, whom he clearly sees as a rival: “Da dieci giorni ho mandato una lettera a Musco, pregandolo di dirmi se dovevo spedirgli Quacquaracquà la nuova commedia scritta per ordine suo. Dovrei, anzi, scrivergliene un’altra, ma è meglio che gliela scriva lei, autore del suo cuore…” (685). Capuana, clearly annoyed by the solid relations between Martoglio and Musco, blames the fellow playwright for his own failures: “se egli crede di avermi buttato a mare perché ora a [sic] vicino Lei, e può sdilinquersi con Lei, come quaggiù faceva catanesamente con me, gli dica che a mare mi ci butto di mia volontà.” (685). Once again, the author voices his impatience about Don Ramunnu, his latest work, for which he was expecting a better reception.

Se Lei non ha ancora letto il Don Ramunnu, si risparmi la seccatura di leggerlo, tanto... è un’altra sciocchezza senile, e bisogna che io ne convenga!
Ora le chiedo di non credermi né pazzo né nervoso: sono uno che ha qualche verità e qualche amarezza da dire [...] Sarebbe stato tanto umano e giusto non premere il calcagno sul mio cure, per farsi proclamare oggi il preferito Autore, il rigeneratore del Teatro Siciliano, a cui io devo venti anni di fatiche (di Arte, badi) e di amarezze! E il solo premio di qualche onesta lode e di qualche biglietto da mille…

Buona fortuna a Lei, Martoglio, a lei che sa far valere il suo ingegno e che conosce bene i polli di ogni città!

Buona fortuna a Lei, infine, che è uomo di larghe iniziative…

Se vuol rispondermi, La prego di non adoperare la parola Maestro. Mi parrebbe di udire la voce di Musco allorquando veniva a coglionarmi fino a casa. (685)

In all likelihood, Martoglio was referring to the November 23 letter in his heartfelt condolences to Adelaide Bernardini, on December 1, 1915:

mentre compio, preso d’angoscia, un giro disperato per il fronte in cerca di un mio fratello combattente e forse ferito, mi giunge la ferale notizia che mi lascia annichilito…

Gli volevo bene, infinitamente, anche quando mi disconobbe e mi arrecò acerbo dolore con la sua ingiusta rampogna, coi suoi tristi sospetti. Non gli mancai mai di rispetto e devozione. Ora lo piango con Lei, lo piango come Maestro e come Amico, dolente solo di non poter correre a rendergli l’ultimo, sincero tributo del mio affetto. La prego di strappare l’ultima mia da Milano, per quanto anch’essa rispettosa. (Carte Messaggere II 687)

Despite these assurances of loyalty, the relationship between Bernardini and Martoglio continued to be equally tormented and negative (somehow suggesting Bernardini’s influence over her husband's resentment and recriminations), until a final clarification a few years later in 1920 (Carte Messaggere II 718).

Putting aside the constant tensions and its bitter conclusion, the collaboration between Capuana and Musco played a main role in the last few years of the author's career, orienting his late production towards a different tone and sensitivity. Abandoning the emphatic and pathetic
nuances that had characterized his production in the first decade of the century, Capuana finally moves towards a brilliant, fast-paced comicality, based on the actor’s wits rather than on the caricature of social extremes. Happy endings no longer revolve around the composition of the broken order, as it was the case with *Bona Genti, Lu Cavalieri Pidagna* or other works (*Riricchia* and *Comparaticu*), but end in an uncontrollable explosion of comical energy, fully embodied by the absurd and nonsensical laughter of the performer. In turn, the linguistic code of the last plays reflects the author's reduced concern with realism and his use of an increasingly spectacular, flamboyant and self-referential language, as the textual and translational analysis of *'U Paraninfu* will show.

*’U Paraninfu* debuted on May 12 1914 at the Teatro Mastrojeni in Messina and was later staged in other Sicilian theatres and in the mainland cities of Naples, Milan and Verona (between late 1914 and 1915). Both the Italian and the Sicilian versions of the work were published posthumously: the Italian translation *Il Paraninfo* appeared in three installments in 1919 in *Rassegna Italiana* (on March 15, April 15 and May 15, 1919), edited by Adelaide Bernardini. One year later, the Sicilian script was published by the Catania-based press Giannotta.

As it had been the case with *Malìa, Bona Genti* and several other plays, Capuana drew inspiration from a short story published several years before, also titled “Il paraninfo.” The narrative plot is substantially altered in the stage version, since the play no longer ends with a duel, but with two combined weddings and a happy ending.

The plot of *’Lu paraninfu* revolves around the character of Don Pasquale Minnedda, a retired Finance Guard officer who is nicknamed ‘The Paranhym’ because of his obsession with arranging marriages for his neighbors and acquaintances. Don Pasquale claims being animated only by disinterested generosity, and appears oblivious to the fact that most of the arrangements he made had disastrous consequences in the long run. When he receives the visit of two friends from the Italian mainland (Lieutenant Rossi, a young, handsome and reckless soldier who has

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190 The short story “Il paraninfo” was first published in the April 12 1904 issue of *Il Fanfulla della Domenica*, it was later included in the 1905 volume *Coscienze*, and later reprinted in the 1914 collection of short stories *Passanti*.
191 “E si buscò una sciabolata al braccio destro che lo tenne a letto tre settimane” (“Il paraninfo” 102). Similarly, in the narrative version don Pasquale fails to arrange a wedding for the two old sisters: “Ne ha poi maritate parecchie altre, zittellone e brutte quasi quanto esse – come occuparsi diversamente? - ma forse egli morrà col dispiacere di dover lasciare in questo mondo quelle due sciurate sorelle più zittellone e più brutte che mai!” (103)
dilapidated a fortune, and Professor Barresi, who is wiser and good-spirited but constantly sick), Don Pasquale foresees the possibility of matching them with the two oldest spinsters in the villages, the wealthy sisters Donna Venere and Donna Enrica Matamè. Don Pasquale secretively arranges a meeting between his friends and the two unsuspecting old women, disguising the two potential suitors as financial inspectors sent from the central Government to assess the damage caused by the recent earthquake. The two women fall in his trap all too well: they disguise in rags borrowed from the house servants in order to appear poor and obtain a bigger refund from the government, thus appearing much older and more unkempt than they actually are. A livid don Pasquale watches his dreams being crushed, as his horrified friends flee the house. The two old maids realize don Pasquale's trick and begin to warm up to the possibility of finding a husband, but things are complicated when Alessi and Calenna, two lazy layabouts from the town, trick Don Pasquale into believing that lieutenant Rossi has challenged him into duel. Don Pasquale reacts alternating moments of terror and virile exaltation, and in eventually beats up his deaf housemaid with a broomstick to 'practice' his fencing skills, in what appears to be the comical peak of the play. In the end, the prank is uncovered, the wedding arranged, and Don Pasquale can savour his final triumph.

The play, which is generally considered the most successful work in Capuana's last period, was warmly received by the audience and mildly praised by the most influential reviewers of the time, including Renato Simoni (April 13, 1915). A partial exception to this success can be seen in the negative review by Emilio Cecchi (“Tom”), published three months after the author's death: 192 “Luigi Capuana non ha scritto davvero un capolavoro col suo Paraninfu. […] il nodo della commedia è questo tentativo di duplice matrimonio, prolungato durante tre atti, che si frantumano, si spezzettano, di sperdono in episodii, destinati secondo l’intenzione dell’autore, a lumeggiare il cosiddetto colore locale, a descriver il così detto ambiente.” 193

In his review, Cecchi criticizes the disunity of the plot, while also denouncing the weariness of a poetics of ‘regionalism.’ Yet, this review should be read in light of Cecchi's known

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192 The review refers to the posthumous representations of Lu Paraninfu at the Teatro Morgana in Rome, on January 24, 25, 26, 28, 29 e 30 and February 3, 13, 19 and 27 (1916).
hostility both against vernacular theatre (evident also in his negative judgment of *Liolà*) and against Capuana.\textsuperscript{194} Despite the negative tone of his review, Checchi still praises the interpretation of Musco, whose mimic and gestural recitation makes up for the shortcomings of the text:

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il più delle volte neppure è necessario ch’egli pronunzi parole: parlano per lui gli occhi, il ciuffo, i baffi, le mani che s’incrocicchiano, s’intrecciano, le spalle che s’incurvano, le falde dell’abito che slabbrano, le tese del cappello che minacciose o impaurite adombrano. Anche le sedie rovesciate da lui, anche il tavolino a cui s’appoggia, anche il nodoso bastone che voltega roteando nell’aria, acquistano per opera di Musco, il dono della favella. Egli è il diavolo animatore di tutto e di tutti. (Ibid.)
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However, not all reviewers agreed in praising Musco’s interpretation. For instance, in reviewing a posthumous staging of the play, Domenico Oliva wonders if Capuana “avrebbe approvato Musco, suo interprete, quando nel rappresentare gli effetti della paura, non rinunziò all’ultimo effetto fisico, sul quale la decenza mi vieta di insistere, e che d’altronde, riprodotto con realismo integrale, pareva facesse crollare il teatro per risa inaudite”\textsuperscript{195} Indeed, this account seems to justify the vibrant protest of Capuana’s widow, who wrote an abusive and violent letter to Martoglio on February 4, 1916: among other things, Bernardini reminded her interlocutor that “*Lu Paraninfu* nel copione di Luigi Capuana non è la farsa muschiana presentata ai Romani! È una commedia!” (Carte Messaggere II 696).

On the basis of a close comparison between the two versions, Zappulla Muscarà has suggested that the Sicilian version precedes the Italian translation. This claim contrasts with Adelaide Bernardini’s note to the 1919 edition in *Rivista Italiana*, reading that: “Questa commedia del Capuana che noi pubblichiamo nel testo italiano è precisamente l’originale su cui fu condotta la traduzione siciliana.” This note could be a patent forgery, adding value to the

\textsuperscript{194} The two became sworn enemies in 1898, when the reviewer publicly mentioned *Giacinta* in a venomous preemptive attack, destroying the work’s already slender chances of success.

\textsuperscript{195} D. Oliva, “*Lu Paraninfu* di Luigi Capuana al Teatro Morgana.” *L’idea Nazionale*, Roma, 26 gennaio 1916.
Italian version published by her (which, she claims, dated to 1914). As the aforementioned 1953 letter to the General Director of the Italian Society of Authors shows, Bernardini and Ludovico Capuana (the transator of *Prima di li milli*) are not new to such manipulations, aiming at controlling the rights on Capuana's scripts against Sicilian companies and/or performers. In the apparatus to his edition of Capuana’s *Teatro Italiano*, Gianni Oliva supports Zappulla Muscarà; however, he dismisses the philological concern as a “questione oziosa” (*Teatro Italiano* 573), arguing that “nella maggior parte dei casi, i [testi dialettali] sono semplici versioni letterali e non stesure divergenti nella struttura d’insieme” (573).

Literalism indeed prevails in the Italian edition of *Il Paraninfo*, which brings few and superficial modifications to the linguistic surface of the script. These variants are clearly meant for the written page - they obey to a written-speech logic, rather than to specific necessity of a different acting company. Marginal variants can be observed in the description of characters. (‘Qualche nota intorno ai caratteri dei personaggi’ TI1: 577). In addition to a few metaplasm (anima → animo; nella voce e nel gesto → nella voce e nei gesti.; vanesio → vanitoso), a few descriptions are expanded, with additional details such as: “prossimo, e per ciò frequentano la casa di don Pasquale, dove trovano buona compagnia” (TI 577). Similarly altered are the descriptions of female characters, such as Donna Rosa Minedda: “Simpatica, buona, con qualche pretesa di eleganza cittadina. Affezionata al marito, vorrebbe guarirlo dalla fissazione di maritare la gente. Energica, risoluta, quando lo vede agitato o pure offeso da qualcuno. Un po’ gelosetta, quantunque creda poco alle dicerie dei maligni” (TI 577) and the Matané sisters:

Zitellone quasi brutte e goffe, che praticano, fuori del paese, un piccolo strozzinaggio per mezzo di persone di loro fiducia. Vestono sempre di nero, fanno vita ritirata, sperando di prender marito. E perciò si lasciano facilmente persuadere da don Pasquale. L’avarizia le induce a travestirsi da contadine quando don Pasquale conduce nella loro casina di campagna i finti Commissarii del Governo.” (*Teatro Italiano* 578)

As in the previously analyzed cases, the Italian translation is mostly literal, losing some of the most lively features of its original linguistic structure. The few changes can be classified as follows:
1) Change of morphological category (i.e. verbs or adjectives → names). Examples of this are piatusi → m'ispirano pietà; ammunziddati → un mucchio di; salottu di riciviri → di ricevimento; fingiti surdu → fingi di non sentire; divertimentu → divertirsi; scherzu → ridere; maritarisi → prender moglie.

2) Semantic attenuation. Example of this tendency are the transformations of gastimi → imprecazioni; bestia → animale; ‘cu ’du occhi malandrini → con certi occhi; mi sentu pigghiatu di li turghi → non mi raccapazzo più. Semantic attenuation is also evident in the following exchange, where the couple laida/brutta is replaced with brutta/bella (the latter clearly used in an antiphrastic way).

DONNA VENIRI: (rabbiosa) Si tu vidissi quantu si’ laida!
DONNA VENERE: Se tu vedessi quanto sei brutta!
DONNA RICA: (indispettita) Si tu vidissi quantu si’ brutta! (TDS 548)
DONNA ENRICA: Se tu vedessi quanto sei… bella! (TI 612)

3) Semantic compensation, for instance in armali [lett 'animals'] → animaloni [lett. Big animals] and cosa → bestialità. This particular transformation is significantly less frequent than its opposite, which would seemingly prove Berman's claim of general semantic impoverishment.

4) Replacement of idioms and proverbs with equivalent expression, a recurrent tendency in other self-translations by Capuana. Examples are Bedda Madri → Madonna Santa!; ‘invitari u gaddu a pasta’ → ‘invitare la lepre a correre’.

5) Elimination of syntactical reduplication, commonly used for emphasis in Sicilian and other Southern dialects (i.e. pedi pedi → ad ogni passo).

6) Syntactical reduction and simplification. The Italian version synthesizes and reduces the original script, suppressing parenthetic clauses and replacing verbs with elliptic forms (i.e. Tutti e dui l'haju a cullucari → tutte e due; pila, cosi da nenti, ca → peli che; picciotta schetta → ragazza (‘unmarried girl’ → 'girl’). Particularly frequent is the tendency to eliminate factitive verbs, for instance: farimi sparrari → per dire male di me; fa parrari → parlo così.
7) **Syntactical expansion.** These changes are related to the differences in the syntactical structures of the two languages. The Sicilian used by Capuana does not include the use of present subjunctive, nor future indicative (Mazzamuto pag), and consistently with a tendency displayed by many Southern dialects, the indicative is retained in exclamative sentences regardless of the tense of the main clause (Cordin 91). The Italian translation thus sounds more varied, with the use of syntactical resources that are unavailable in the source language: meritati > meritereste; l'accumpagnanu iddi → essi l'avrebbero accompagnato; godatilu tu → te lo godrai tu; veninu → verranno; mi permettono → mi permettano.

8) **Semantic expansion.** The self-translator feels the need to insert explanations or additional details, to ease the readers' comprehension. Examples are: “taliari” → “guardare il giardino;” “muci muci” → “muci muci, come per chiamare un gatto.” The insertion of parenthetic clauses, with attenuating value, also falls within this category.

9) **Elimination of diminutives,** in cases such as gunnedda → gonna; lu santuzzu → Gesù Cristo; santuzza → santa. The same goes for other derivative suffixes, as in: 'chiacchirazzi' → 'chiacchiere'; 'finicchio' → fine.

10) **Change of lexical stem:** pasta di l'ancili → pasta di zucchero; accuminzau → la colpa è (this example also falls in #1, verb → noun); nun c'haju parratu mai → le conosco solo di vista; picciotta → ragazza; conzu → rimedia; ditu → riferire; indovino → nsirtai?; pirsuadiri → convincere; scherzu → ridere; spicchiuni → ceffo; maritarisi → prender moglie. Several of these changes go in direction of a more literary and refined code and, in some instances, of Florentine-centric normalization.

A few of these changes might also explained with mechanical errors, especially considering that the Italian translation was published posthumously by Capuana's widow, who was not a native speaker of Sicilian and who might have interfered with the text. Particularly suspicious appear the following two changes: muluni → limoni (watermelons → lemons) and caciocculi → cavoli ( 'artichokes' → 'cauliflowers' or 'cabbages'). At the same time, these solutions might have been motivated by the phonetic similarity, keeping the rhythm and the

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196 Adelaide Bernardini was, in fact, from the central Italian region of Umbria.
sound over the meaning: in particular, limoni does not alter the prosody of the line as much as 'angurie' or 'cocomeri' would, and the citruses are a recurrent icon of Sicily (see also Pirandello's use of the same fruit in *Lumìe di Siclia*).

Other transformations take place at the dramaturgical level. The self-translator occasionally cuts lines from secondary characters, such as the following line of Donna Vennira (which, however, does not significantly alter the meaning of the scene):

D^NA VENNIRA. Nenti! Nenti! (a donna Paula) Dicitici cchiuttostu pirchì semu venuti.
(TDS 508)

Similarly altered is a sequence in I.x, during the first visit of Barresi and Rossi at Don Pasquale’s house. The exchange between Don Pasquale and the dim-witted housemaid ‘Ntonia, whose stereotypical tardiness is often a source for easy humor, is eliminated. Furthermore, while in the Sicilian version Don Pasquale's wife, Donna Rosa, is seemingly apologizing for her husband's oafish manners, this subtle tension within the couple disappears from the Italian version:

DON PASQUALE. ‘Ntantu, iu stuppu sta buttigghia. (A ‘Ntonia) Li bicchierini, stupita. (‘Ntonia esce e torna subito con i bicchierini e i biscotti).
DONNA ROSA. (agli amici del marito)
Divinu scusari. Ccà trattamu senza cirimonii.
DON PASQUALE: St’amici lu sannu
(TDS 516)

DON PASQUALE: Devono scusarci. Trattiamo senza cerimonie. Questi amici lo sanno.
(TI 592)

Another major change is observable in the opening exchange in III.ix (III.viii in the Italian translation):
Scena IX
DONNA ROSA. (non sa che atteggiamento prendere, si alza, si siede nuovamente. Non vorrebbe mostrare la sua indignazione). Iddi su’.
PROFESSOR BARRESI. Bongiorno, signura!
TENENTE ROSSI. Buongiorno, signora!
D^A ROSA. (Aggressiva) Chi vi pari?... Ca me’ maritu si scanta? È statu brigaderi di Finanza, e havi tri midagghi; e grazzi a Diu, è ancora beddu sanu e forti, ca po’ dari punti a qualcunu! Ma sugnu iu ca dicu di no!
Nun c’è liggi ca po’ forzarilu. Si avissi stati ppi mancanza so’... cu’ pecca divi fari la penitenza. Chi cci trasì Pasquali ccu ddi signurini? E vui, signuri tenenti, vi la pigghiati ccu me’ maritu... (TDS 572)

Scena VIII
PROF. BARRESI (entrando) Buon giorno, signora.
TEN. ROSSI. Buon giorno, cara signora!
DONNA ROSA. Il buon giorno ce lo avete dato diversamente, a mio marito e a me! E ora venite a fargli i salamelecchi pel vostro intento... e poi, sottomano, ne vorreste la pelle!
PROF. BARRESI Che dite mai, signora!
TENENTE ROSSI. Ma... cara signora...
DONNA ROSA. Crede, forse, che mio marito abbia paura? È stato brigadiere di finanza, ed ha tre medaglie! ... E grazie a Dio, è ancora sano e forte, da dar dei punti a qualcuno. Ma son io che dico di no!
Non c’è legge che può forzarlo... Se fosse stato per mancanza sua... Chi pecca deve far la penitenza!... Che c’entra mio marito con quelle signorine? In casa loro, esse potevano fare quel che gli pareva e piaceva. E voi, signor tenente, ve la prendete con mio marito? (TI 627)
The Italian scene is longer and more verbose, losing its dramatic impact. In particular, the translation eliminates Donna Rosa's initial display of embarrassment, replacing it with a rather verbose line (“Il buon giorno ce lo avete dato diversamente, a mio marito e a me! E ora venite a fargli i salamelecchi pel vostro intento.. e poi, sottomano, ne vorreste la pelle!”). Equally conventional and weak appear Barresi and Rossi’s objections, which are not particularly meaningful to the scene.

Finally, several changes and cuts are related to the loss of linguistic diversity, a stable feature of the vernacular script. Lieutenant Rossi is a native speaker of Italian, which he speaks fluently; Professor Barresi instead is a proficient speaker of both codes who states his preference for vernacular for emotional and identity reasons. Linguistic difference disappears in the Italian translation, as in the following example:

PROF BARRESI. Bellissimu! Virgilianu, dicemu nui pidanti. (A Donna Rosa). Io, signura, sugnu di la pruvincia di Siracusa; e mi piaci di parrari, putennu, e di sentiri parrari sicilianu. Lu cridi ca quannu stava a Milanu, a Turinu, cci suffriva? E appena era sulu, parrava ccu me stissu, a vuci auta... E nun vidia l'ura di turnari ccà jusu. (515)

Similarly, the self-translator eliminates the metalinguistic line “Sintennu parrai ‘ntalianu nun si ponnu scannaliari di nenti…. (520) [They cannot suspect anything, as they will hear us talking in Italian] from I, xix, the scene in which Don Pasquale begins plotting his intrigue. Linguistic difference does not have a structural value as it was the case in Bona Genti, where the ability to speak in Italian was a distinctive feature of the upper classes; still, different codes correspond to different personalities of the characters, while the difference between Italian and Sicilian is used to emphasize and highlight the instinctive diffidence of ordinary people towards the new bureaucracy of the Kingdom of Italy.
8. Conclusion

In his aforementioned Scrivere per gli italiani nell'Italia postunitaria, Sgroi has described Capuana as “uno scrittore condizionato dalla situazione sociolinguistica, plurilingue, pluridialettale, pluriglottica dell'Italia della seconda metà dell'800 e dell'inizio del '900, non meno che dalla poetica (naturalismo/verismo) dell'autore” (87). Sgroi then proceeds to lay out with admirable clarity the spectrum of linguistic options offered to the author writing in the fin de siècle culture: “[L]uigi Capuana, come ogni altro scrittore italiano, ha dovuto porsi il problema di quale codice di comunicazione scegliere: il dialetto materno (acquisito naturalmente) o la lingua nazionale (appresa soprattutto sui libri): se il dialetto, che tipo di dialetto (locale, regionale, letterario); se la lingua, che tipo di lingua (toscaneggianti, arcaizzante, dialettizzante).” (87) This complexity is masterfully summarized by Picone's remark that “si passa […] dal dialetto all'italiano, per ritornare di nuovo al dialetto” (“La Sicilia come mito in Capuana” 76), a contradictory movement that encompasses the dramatic quest for a viable language of expression.

As we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, all these codes are present in the literary journey of the author: from his initial belief in Purism – which emerged in his ideal of a “national” theatre, voiced in his reviews during the late 1860s – to his advocacy for a realistic, hybrid prose voiced in the naturalist proclaims of the 1880s and 1890s, to his final adoption of dialect. As seems evident, the latter shift was not merely the result of a conscious, rational decision based on theoretical speculation, but it was the fortuitous outcomes of concurring circumstances: for instance, the sudden notoriety achieved by Grasso in 1903 in Rome, putting Sicilian theatre in the spotlight, or Musco's decision to launch his own acting company in 1914.

More importantly, Capuana's journey through vernacular is marked by the same recurring phases emphasized in the trajectory of Di Giacomo. The same notion of -translation marked his relationship to the culture of Northern Europe: just think of the similarities between ludic pseudo-translation shown in “Un poeta danese” and the “tedescherie” written by the Neapolitan author. Similarly, both authors engaged in short phases of anti-translation when they both refused the hegemony of the French novel, respectively standing up against the Franco-centric fashion proposed by Vittorio Pica or against the accusations of servile imitation coming from Ojetti. Finally, they both engaged in self-translation in order to attain their ideal of a viable, realist,
regionalist theatre, engaging in the stable use of bilingual writing. In so doing, they questioned the boundaries of their linguistic identity, torn between their native proficiency (in dialect) and their second-nature as Italian writers. If Di Giacomo is the founding father of contemporary dialectal poetry, who perfected and polished the use of Neapolitan dialect for the expression of abstract and pure emotions, Capuana opted for a linguistic *medietas*, struggling to achieve a suitable, modern and 'realistic' code comparable to the 'hybrid' language he adopted in his novels. This linguistic choice was consistent with the themes adopted in his works – which Zappulla Muscarà has eloquently qualified as:

> tematiche che investono una umanità medio borghese variamente atteggiata di fronte all’amore, il più delle volte contrastato dall’atavico motivo della roba, al tradimento, aggravato dal comparatico, alla mavarìa, (...) alla bramosia di nobiltà, che urge nei nuovi arricchiti, allo strozzinaggio ed al tornaconto economico. I personaggi sono ora popolani (...), ora respirano l’aria della piccola borghesia isolana o della nobiltà decaduta ma ancora boriosa, reazionaria e chiusa nell’antico codice morale – la parola data – dal quale sorge tuttavia come per clonazione un soffio di ribellione. (*Angelo Musco* 106).

As Zappulla Muscarà suggests, Capuana's use of dialect is functional to a specific 'anthropology' and derives from a phenomenological reading of Sicilian society, “volutamente anacronistica, colta nel suo bonario aspetto esteriore, così come le principali fonti di committenza teatrale, attori e pubblico, richiedevano” (110). Unlike Di Giacomo – who fiercely despised the environment of traditional vernacular companies and kept a firm grip on the representations of his scripts – Capuana threw himself into the arena of Sicilian theatre, adhering with ingenuous fervor to the utopia of Sicilian theatre; in turn, he was completely swallowed by the petty rivalries between actors, reviewers, and playwrights, which poisoned the last years of his life.

In different ways, both authors shared a common thirst for renovation, seeking to free the vernacular stage of its crassest stereotypes in order to promote a temperate comedy of sentiments. The two authors also shared their faith in the preeminence of the script over the inventions and the artistic freedom of the performer: their intransigent adherence to what Anne Ubersfeld has defined “terrorism of the text” [terrorisme textuel] (*Lire le theatre* 9) is perhaps a
residue of their early position as “anti-translators,” entailing a deeper suspicion of all code- and medium-passages.

Finally, Capuana was true to his activity as a militant writer until the very end, and he promoted his renovation program in a more aggressive and self-conscious way than Di Giacomo. He sought to create a popular and regional equivalent to the bourgeois theatre (Zappulla Muscarà 105): in this respect, the dialectal comedies *Lu Cavaleri Pidagna* and *Bona Genti*, with their gracious melange of family ethics, happy endings, and pacific resolution, are consistent with the ideal of a “Italian National Theatre” promoted in his early Florentine years, pedagogically oriented to the building of a national character. However, his model of “Sicilian bourgeois theatre” could only achieve artistic completeness and realism through the energy and the spontaneity of the dialectal actors, who could not leave aside their crass humor, their linguistic impurities, and their instinctual recitation technique (be it tragical, as in the case of Grasso, or farcical, as it was the case of Musco). In turn, the main strength of Capuana's project became its main weakness – that is, the overwhelming personality of actors such as Grasso and Musco, who did bring the mediocre plays of Capuana to success, but also obscured his creative drive and modified the scripts in very visible ways. Yet, despite these shortcomings, his inventions did leave a tangible mark in the history of the Italian theatre, paving the way for the renovation later promoted by the giant of Sicilian theatre: Luigi Pirandello.
Chapter 4
Languages and realities of Luigi Pirandello

1. The Shadow of Sicily: the Linguistic Writings of Luigi Pirandello

In 1889, Luigi Pirandello, a student of Classics at the University of Rome, was sitting in a lecture by Onorato Occioni, Chair of the Faculty of Literature. As the professor was translating a line from Plautus’ *Miles Gloriosus*, he happened to make a mistake. The mishap did not go unnoticed by Pirandello and a fellow student, “un prete che s’intendeva di latino” (*La corda pazza* 108). When the two nudged at each other, the outraged professor stormed out and kicked Pirandello out of the class, forcing him to reveal to the other students the real reason for his amusement. As a consequence, Pirandello would have probably been expelled and forced to abandon his academic career, if another professor, Ernesto Monaci, had not advised him to transfer to the University of Bonn in Germany. Here, the future playwright devoted himself to philology and linguistics, completing a doctoral dissertation on the Sicilian dialect spoken in the region of Girgenti.

Leonardo Sciascia revisits this episode in a 1970 essay titled “Note Pirandelliane.”[^1[^17]] He compares Pirandello’s early rebellion to the attitude of another illustrious drop-out from the University of Rome, Gabriele D’Annunzio, one of Occioni’s favorites (“sotto la barba di Occioni, nel suo ‘magistero canoro,’ vediamo già esplodere le prime differenze tra D’Annunzio scrittore di parole e Pirandello scrittore di cose,” writes Sciascia in his *La corda pazza* 109), citing one of Pirandello’s best-known critical distinctions. Later in the text, Sciascia proposes a counterfactual version of Pirandello’s intellectual biography: “Il se è, dunque, riguardo a Pirandello, un problema critico preciso: se non fosse andato a Bonn, probabilmente avremmo avuto un Pirandello più opportunamente collegato a Luigi Capuana, ad Emanuele Navarro della

[^17]: Similar reconstructions of the episodes are also offered by Virginia Brancaleoni and by Giuseppe Bonghi. Also very important is the account provided by Giovanni Nencioni in his “Pirandello dialettologo” (*Tra grammatica e retorica* 176-190).
Miraglia e insomma alla tradizione culturale e letteraria siciliana, oltre che (e principalmente) alla realtà di Girgenti” (110).

If the casual event of Pirandello’s expulsion had the unexpected outcome of putting him in contact with the German philosophies of irrationalism, it also had the effect of intensifying and problematizing the author’s relation to his own land of origin, Sicily. As Sciascia acutely observes, “a Bonn Pirandello pensò a Girgenti più di quanto gli sia poi capitato nel resto della sua vita. E non nella dimensione della nostalgia e della malinconia, che forse mai sentì riguardo al suo paese; ma in quella della necessità, del lavoro.” (110) Sciascia’s view is partially contradicted by the author’s “Frammento d’autobiografia” (1893): “Ma la nostalgia mi avvinceva e provavo uno struggente desiderio della famiglia, della Sicilia, di Roma e quest’anno non ho potuto resistere e son tornato alla mia bella Italia anche senza sapere, come realmente non so, cosa sarà di me, né cosa farò...” (Saggi e interventi 57).

Whether mediated by nostalgia or, rather, by estrangement, Sicily did exist for Pirandello through the filter of memory and distance during the years he spent in Bonn, and arguably also in the following years. The Sicilian homeland provided him a much-needed space for relief and a mental escape during a particularly tense time of his life, 1916, the *annus terribilis* of his son Stefano’s imprisonment. It provided him with a free space for memory and imagination, and it inspired the powerful chthonic metaphors of Pirandello’s mythical works (see for instance *Lazzaro, All’Uscita* or *La nuova Colonia*), inspired by the icons of Persephone and by the local cult of the Deads. Sicily thus appears under a double light: on the one hand, it provides the actual setting to some of Pirandello’s early successes; on the other hand, it embodies a mythical space, seen through the filter of distance and memory.

The dialectic between the actual geographical location of Sicily and *Sicilianness* (the space of memory and myth) replicates another important dycothomy. I am here referring to the notions of dialetto and dialettalità, first described in the well-known 1920 public address on Giovanni Verga, first read at the Teatro Bellini in Catania (December 20, 1920). Shortly afterwards, the author returned on the dialetto/dialettalità notion in the essay “La dialettalità,” published in the September-October 1921 issue of *Cronache d’Attualità*. In order to define his notion of “dialettalità,” Pirandello recurs to a quotation from Dante’s *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, the first text of the national canon to address the vernacular fragmentations of the Italian peninsula:
“un vero e unico idioma, vale a dire [...] essenziale proprietà d’espressione, la quale, come Dante scrisse: ‘in qualibet redolet civitate, nec cubat in ulla’.” (Saggi e interventi 1027).

In the words of Pirandello, dialettalità coincides with the voice of things themselves: “le cose che nascono e vi si pongono davanti sì che voi ci camminiate in mezzo, ci respirate, le toccate: terra, pietre, carne, quegli occhi, quelle foglie, quell’acqua” (1027). Through such a poetics, authors can overcome a narrow-minded vision of their identity, made of exotic borrowings and linguistic trouvailles, finally enriching their national literature with the sapid reminiscence of their own region (Saggi e interventi 1028).

During his stay at the University of Bonn, not only did Pirandello think of Girgenti more intensely than in the rest of his life; he also developed a solid understanding of the relations between language and dialect, and developed a vision of language as a multilayered continuum, sharply opposed to the stiffness of normative Florentine-based purism. Such views were clearly influenced by Graziadio Isaia Ascoli’s “Proemio all’Archivio Glottologico Italiano,” the work that revolutionized the debate on the “questione della lingua” in 1872.  

Ascoli is an ongoing point of reference for Pirandello, who admits having read his Proemio all’Archivio glottologico Italiano “non so quante volte, perché quelle XLI pagine son così dense di pensieri, che alla nostra mente non più usata a lunghe e severe riflessioni non riesce facile di tener loro dietro in una volta sola, dalla prima all’ultima.” (Saggi e interventi 84) From this text, Pirandello derived his admiration of the German model (often referenced in his linguistic writings), his intransigent rejection both of the Manzonian position and of linguistic hybridisms, and his anti-traditionalist stance on the old problem of the “questione della lingua.”

These views fully emerge both from the linguistic analysis of Pirandello’s works – analyzed by Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi in her seminal volume La lingua in scena (1980) – and from his theoretical works on the “questione della lingua,” including a series of short articles written in the 1890s. Particularly interesting are two articles titled “Prosa moderna” and “Per la solita questione della lingua”, both published on Vita Nuova in 1890. The author later returned to the topic in a third article, a rebuttal to Ferdinando Martini’s new Vocabolario dell’italiano.

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198 For a detailed discussion of the “Proemio”, see Chapter I, section 1.
parlato, which was published in La critica in 1895. The latter article, however, does not bring any original contribution to the debate, being largely a self-citation from the previous two essays.  

In these early writings, Pirandello expresses his adamant faith in the views of Ascoli and denounces the inadequacy of the currently spoken Italian: a language that he classifies as “non-existent,” despite the claims of authors and intellectuals such as Ugo Ojetti or Ferdinando Martini (who had recently edited an ambitious Vocabolario della Lingua Parlata). Rejecting the project launched by Manzoni, Carcano and Bonghi twenty years before, Pirandello argues for the need to distinguish “spoken Italian” from the Florentine dialect – which has continued its evolution as every other Italian dialect and therefore does not provide a viable standard for the conversation of educated people, let alone a suitable code for literary expression.

Just like his inspirational figure, Pirandello emphasizes the distinction between oral and written speech. “Se letteratura, o meglio tradizione letteraria, ha fatto impedimento al libero sviluppo d’una lingua, questa più d’ogni altra è l’italiana,” he observes, immediately adding that “i letterati non conoscono altra lingua che quella dei libri, mentre gl’illetterati continuano a parlare quella a cui sono abituati: la provinciale, ossia i vari dialetti natali” (Saggi e interventi 78-80). Dialects, at least in their regional version or koiné, leave a deep mark on the reality of spoken Italian: “Il siciliano e il piemontese messi insieme a parlare non faranno altro che arrotondare alla meglio i loro dialetti, fiorettando qua e là questa che vuol essere la lingua italiana parlata in Italia, delle reminiscenze di questo o quel libro letto.” (80). This situation is an accurate reflection of the situation of diglossia characterizing the Italian peninsula at the end of the Nineteenth century, showing how realistic and solid was Pirandello’s assessment of the Italian linguistic reality.

The explicit self-citation of Pirandello in this article is consistent with the notion of “self-plagiarism,” elaborated by Catherine ‘O Rawe devoted her 2005 insightful monograph Authorial Echoes. In particular, she relates these practices of self-citation to the repetition of epiphanies (that is to say, the repetition of descriptive sequences leading to sudden philosophical illuminations: Authorial Echoes 53-55).

I am referring to the well-known report “Dell’Unità della lingua Italiana e dei mezzi epr diffonderla,” discussed earlier in the Introduction (Section I, “An Endless Debate”).
This position strikingly resonates with Capuana’s assessment of the Italian linguistic reality, voiced a few years before in *Per l’arte* (1885) (see above, section 3.2). However, the differences between the two positions should not be overlooked. Pirandello is speaking primarily as a linguist: his first aim is to chart the linguistic reality of his time and reflect on its implications for the work of novelists and intellectuals, rather than condemning or praising the speakers of Italian. Similarly, his description of the hybrid prose of his contemporary is not a proud declaration of intents, but a seemingly neutral assessment of a linguistic situation, and of its terrible implications for the birth of the Italian novel.

As these writings document, by the 1890s the absence of a standard spoken Italian denounced by Ferdinando Martini thirty years earlier was still perceived as the main obstacle to the rise of a modern literature capable of competing with the models imported from abroad. This appears to be equally true of dramaturgy (despite Martini and Capuana’s failed hopes of a “teatro nazionale”) and fiction. As for the latter, Pirandello harshly criticizes the taste of his contemporary for translated novels, a phenomenon that he satirizes: “il pubblico tira via […], fumando il suo sigaro e leggendo una traduzione, possibilemente anonima, fatta cioè senza intendimento artistico, d’un romanzo francese o inglese” (78). Once again, like his predecessor Capuana, Pirandello is rejecting the ideology of translation, seen as the culprit for the weakness of Italian’s original authors. However, Pirandello engages more deeply with the linguistic paralysis faced by the Italian authors of his times, seeing the abundance of translations as a symptom of the weakness of Italian prose rather than its main reason.

Pirandello places his contemporary novelists on the two extremes end of a *continuum*: they either write in an anachronistically *pure* language, or they write in a prose that is too heavily marked by regionalisms and dialectal forms. This dichotomy recalls Ascoli’s reading of the linguistic situation of Italy, torn between the contempt of all forms actually used by novelists across the nation (an attitude recalling the arrogant claims that “lo pseudo–italiano, di cui, nell’illusione di possedere una lingua, noi åfoni ci valiamo, altro non è che un informe accozzamento di variopinte parole,” *Scritti sulla questione della lingua* 27) and the boasting claims of purists (recalling the voices claiming that “l’operazione del fiorentinismo è ormai per quattro quinti bell’e compiuta e nel resto si compirà senza molto disturbo,” p. 27).
Like his predecessors, Pirandello mocks the attitude of purists, whom he calls “philologists” – perhaps echoing the anti-philological sentiments voiced by no less than Benedetto Croce. Philologist writers, Pirandello claims, end up betraying their declared concern for precision and rigor, since their artificial language disregards context and usage. They are incapable of adapting their language to the different settings portrayed and, even worse, they produce a “trionfo degli anacronismi filologici,” in which “forme e nessi sintattici vietì, propri à un dato secolo” blend indiscriminately with “idiotismi infelici” (Saggi e interventi 80). In other words, the exclusive concern for details obliterates their understanding of a “bigger picture,” creating a composite and hybrid language that is far remote from the rigorous coherence of art.

The author is more lenient towards the efforts of those writers who adopt a regional language in their misguided quest for a “prosa viva e spontanea.” However, regional writers also fail to achieve a considerable artistic effect, mostly due to the inadequacy of their philological background (81). In this respect, Pirandello is more radical than his predecessor Capuana, who had defended the inconsistencies of authors such as Antonio Lauria, claiming that a few grammatical mistakes are a small price to pay in exchange of artistic truth.201 Pirandello is too proud of his scientific background to accept “la comune della sintassi” (Per l’arte XXI-XXII) as a minor evil.

In light of these modern and anti-purist positions, it is ironic that over the twentieth century the language of Pirandello’s theatre has become almost synonymous with the standard of a theatrical ‘langue de bois,’ an artificial and traditional jargon condemned for its lack of linguistic realism and for its affectation. This anachronism is partially due to its crystallization in the works of his imitators, as Altieri Biagi recognizes in her fundamental volume La lingua in scena, where she opportunely distinguishes between Pirandello and pirandellismo:

Pirandello, se pur non ha attirato come meritava l’attenzione dei linguisti distratti da più vistosi oggetti, si è assicurato un posto significativo nella storia della formazione della nostra lingua nazionale. Perché è un fatto che la lingua dell’uso nazionale (nei limiti in

201 See Chapter 3, Section 1 (“Regionalism, or the Italian Way to Realist Prose”).
In these lines, Altieri Biagi seems to suggest that the “literary” and “academic” aspects of Pirandello’s “scrivere bene” are, in fact, live and modern features of the language spoken in his times. The linguist warns against the risk of anachronism, which is to say:

attribuire a volontà stilistica dello scrittore scelte che, alla sensibilità di utenti attuali della lingua, si configurano come ‘letterarie,’ ‘auliche,’ ‘professoral-magistrali’, e che tali effettivamente possono dirsi solo perché ‘ingiallite,’ ‘appassite’ o addirittura cadute nella lotta per la sopravvivenza ‘da esse sostenuta in una lingua sempre più usata, sempre più parlata, e quindi sempre più esposta a fenomeni di usura e di economia morfosintattica e lessicale’ (La lingua in scena 165)

The same cautions should be used in assessing the presence of regionalisms and colloquialism, which seem to overlap with corresponding Sicilian words but have instead a consolidated record in the XIX century linguistic repertoires. Altieri Biagi charts some of these words: entries such as “auguroso, rasposo, raschioso, lupigno, sorcigno” are not idiotisms or regionalisms, but viable options attested in the national literary history (169).

Consequently, Pirandello’s dissatisfaction with the language of literary tradition should not be mistaken for the indiscriminate adoption of low registers. Even as he praised the linguistic hybridism of Verga, Pirandello continued to build his linguistic architecture on a literary standard. At the same time, without rejecting the language of literature, Pirandello strived for a greater degree of consistency between the different socio-linguistic layers that his contemporaries were often blending without a solid rationale, being guided by an antiquarian-like love for the grammatical exception. Consistently with the analysis of Altieri Biagi, Claudio Salvatore Sgroi has described the language of Pirandello as:
una lingua aperta a una varietà di influssi: la tradizione letteraria (ma non quella aulica), l’apporto vernacolare toscano e regionale siciliano (ma non di tipo popolare), l’italiano ‘medio’ o neostandard, e più in generale parlato, secondo i diversi piani di analisi linguistica (grafico, fonologico, morfologico, sintattico e lessicale), l’apporto delle lingue straniere. L’effetto per il lettore contemporaneo, a distanza di quasi un secolo, è non di rado, va detto, quello di una prosa mescidata e qua e là raccogliticcia. (Sgroi 183)

Sgroi effectively describes the language of Pirandello as a multi-layered architecture, laced with elements of Tuscan derivation (such as the preference for the demostrative series “codesto, costà, costì” or the use of 1st person clitic “Si” – “come s’era rimasti jer sera”). Morphology and orthography also display idiosyncratic tendencies, such as the prevailing use of “j” for the semi-vowel [j] (‘jeri’), the use of subjunctive in subordinate clauses that require the indicative in standard Italian, the pleonastic use of “non” in completive clauses with an affirmative meaning, and the elimination of the conjunction “che” in completive clauses. The lexicon is usually conservative, with words from the literary tradition such as “adontarsi,” “alieno” (=‘estraneo’), “cura” (=‘preoccupazione’), “baja” (=‘sciocchezza’). His preference for formal and refined registers is also shown by words such as “affannoso, cagionare, cavare, discorrere, fomentare, picchiare (for ‘knocking’), reggere, requie, rincasare, riprensione” or even loftier words such as “accostarsi, appressarsi, apprestarsi, discernere, nequizia, ricevitore.” (Sgroi 184); so do unusual suffixes and prefixes, such as the ones we can observe in “dicacità,” “infoscarsi,” “irrefragabile,” “scherzevole.”

Pirandello’s lexicon is prevailingly drawn from the literary tradition, imbued with an ideal of philological balance and only occasionally connoted in the direction of regionalism. Even in the latter case, the Sicilian lexical items are often accompanied by an explanatory clause, as in the following examples:

…due vecchie ottuagenare, due zônne (zie-donne)…
… il luogo preciso di certe trovature, tesori nascosti… (Altieri Biagi 171)
In sum, the linguistic architecture displayed by Pirandello’s Italian one-act plays can be described by the following tendencies: firstly, an overall aspiration to a literary, refined, standard Italian, the exceptions to which tend to be idiosyncratic rather than regional; second, a composite lexicon, whose different component (literary and old Italian, Tuscan and Sicilian) are integrated in a unique and coherent style; thirdly, a tendency to ‘incorporate’ and ‘domesticate’ any linguistic abnormal elements, such as loanwords and calques from Sicilian dialect. Especially when compared to the composite and often uneven language of Capuana, the style of Pirandello stands out for its consistency, which explains its success as a standard of spoken Italian for theatrical purposes, and its modelizing value over the 20th century. However, it still bears the mark of its dialectal origin, no matter how craftily disguised under a variety of different linguistic layers and mediated by explanations and ‘translations.’

2. The Conversion to Theatre: Pirandello, Martoglio and Musco.

Pirandello’s experience as a vernacular playwright was extremely limited in time: his Sicilian production was concentrated in a few years, beginning in 1916, peaking in the 1916-1918 biennium and being already ended by 1922 (the year of Glauco, his last Sicilian translation). It can be rightly considered as a parenthesis, an episodic and marginal experiment that Pirandello abandoned without any regrets or afterthoughts; yet, it had relevant consequences both on the author’s artistic trajectory and for the Italian theatre as a whole.

Even though Pirandello is mostly credited with creating a viable standard of “scritto-parlato”202 for the national Italian theatre, dialect did play a major role in his career as a playwright. A Sicilian play, the vernacular translation of Lumie di Sicilia (1916),203 marks the beginning of his theatrical career. The choice of vernacular matches the marked regionalism of the play: as Sarah Zappulla Muscarà notes in her preface to Tutto il teatro in dialetto (p. XII), the

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202 See above, Introduction, paragraph 4.

203 The play was originally written in Italian in 1915, and adapted from a 1910 short story with the same title. While Lumie di Sicilia was first written in Italian and later translated in dialect, all subsequent self-translation followed the opposite process (that is, from Sicilian into Italian).
play thematizes the contrast between North and South, between the city and the province. These two dichotomies reflect the autobiographical perception of the author, whose youth was torn between the native land of Sicily and the seductions of Rome.

*Lumie di Sicilia* was not Pirandello’s first play: the author had composed and staged two one-act plays (*La morsa* and *Il dovere del medico*) as early as in 1910. However, those early works failed to achieve an organic conception of theatre and were still rooted in the narrative production (“sono ancora saldamente ancorate alla novellistica pirandelliana,” as Leonardo Bragaglia notes in his *Interpreti Pirandelliani*, p. 23). On the contrary, *Lumie di Sicilia* is the first display of an autonomous dramaturgy, whose structures are largely independent from the narrative architecture of prose.

The play tells the story of Micuccio Bonavino, a good-hearted and naïve fellow who plays the piccolo in a local Sicilian marching band. Being in love with Teresina, a penniless young woman from his village, Micuccio helps her rise above her striking poverty. As he becomes aware of her innate musical talent, Micuccio pays for her music lessons and helps her to discover and develop her wonderful voice, which prompts Teresina to move to Rome and enroll in the local Conservatorio. Eight years later, Micuccio goes to the capital in order to rekindle his relationship with the woman, who has meanwhile grown into a successful opera singer and now goes by the *nom de plume* of Sina Marnis. After his initial denial, Micuccio is horrified by the transformation of Sina into a steel-hearted diva. Before fleeing her villa, a heartbroken Micuccio leaves behind some citruses he had expressly brought as a gift (the “lumìe” to which the title refers), not without stating that Sina is unworthy of them, having lost her innocence and, as it is hinted, her sexual purity.  

*Lumie di Sicilia* was soon followed by several other works: while *Pinsaci, Giacominu* (1916) and *A birritta cu i ciancianeddi* (1916) expose the hypocrisy of family moral in the

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204 Once again, we are faced with the recurrent topic of lost virginity, a theme that was already highlighted in Capuana’s *Malia, Riricchia, and Lu Cavaleri Pidagna*: see before, Chapter 3, sections 4, 5 and 6.

205 First staged on July 10, 1916 at the Teatro Nazionale in Rome (Compagnia Musco)
context of Sicilian landowners, the two rural plays *Liola* (1917) and *‘A giarra* (1917)\(^{206}\) are characterized by a more comical tone. Unlike *Lumie di Sicilia* – which was translated from the Italian into vernacular – all these plays were adapted from short stories and were directly composed in vernacular; a decade later, after the conclusion of his bittersweet experience as a vernacular author, Pirandello was to translate them back into Italian.

These early works represent the main core of Pirandello’s involvement with regional theatre. A minor but noteworthy episode is represented by *‘U Ciclopu* (1918), the vernacular translation of Euripide’s satyresque play *The Cyclops*. Pirandello’s last dialectal works, *Cu ‘i ‘nguanti gialli* and the translation of Ercole Morselli’s *Glauco*, were respectively first staged at the Teatro Biondo in Palermo on September 9, 1921, and at the Teatro Giglio in Lucca, on March 31, 1922.

This short-lived involvement with vernacular theatre played a fundamental role in Pirandello’s conversion to theatre, overcoming both the author’s lack of faith in theatre as an expressive genre, expressed in his famous 1908 article “Illustratori, attori, traduttori,” where the author expresses his wariness of ‘mediating’ figures such as illustrators, actors and translators, (*Saggi* 635-658) and his lack of faith in the possibility of renewal of the vernacular scene, expressed in an other well-known 1909 article, “Teatro Siciliano?”

These two writings are crucial in shaping Pirandello’s early phase of anti-translation, partially evident also in the rejection of French translations, clearly voiced in his aforementioned essay “Prosa moderna.” Exactly as it was the case of Capuana, the journey of Pirandello towards dialect did open with an ideological rejection of both vernacular literature (seen as an inferior and limiting form of art) and translation (seen as an aesthetically degrading practice, somewhat closer to a craft than to ‘true’ art). If anything, Pirandello’s hatred of translation was even more radical, often taking the form of abstract and general arguments.

In “Illustratori, attori, traduttori,” the author likens the actor’s performance to the activities of the translator and illustrator. In all three practices, he argues, the original germ of aesthetic creation transforms into a second-degree work, which is more explicit and therefore

\(^{206}\) First performed by the Musco Company at the Teatro Nazionale in Rome, on July 9, 1917.
less “artistic.” Given the loss implicit in this medium passage, there is no such a thing as a 
perfect translation or illustration, Pirandello claims. Similarly, perfect acting is almost impossible 
to achieve: “Ora, quest’opera di realizzamento è estremamente difficile!” (654). Antagonism and 
competition are thus the prevailing aspects of the relation between playwright and actor: the 
actor can perfectly revive a text only if the latter is an incomplete work of art that needs the 
Further specification of acting (or décor, costumes, and stage design) in order to achieve its full 
Artistic potential.

After laying down this set of premises, Pirandello proceeds to describe the conflicting 
Mindsets of the actor and the author: the actor lives in the theatre and therefore emphasizes the 
Material aspects of a work, while the pure and more abstract gaze of the author is able to seize its 
Truest meaning: “L’attore, insomma, più che le ragioni ideali dell’arte vede quelle materiali del 
Palcoscenico, più che la verità superiore dell’espressione artistica, la realtà fittizia della sua 
Azione scenica.” (656). The praise of abstractness and immaterialism here overlaps with a clear 
Example of what Jonas Barnish has dubbed “anti-theatrical prejudice” in his influential 1981 
Volume.

Paradoxically, the only form of theatre that is valid in itself is represented by the popular 
Tradition of Commedia dell’Arte, where no script is given but there is only a scenario providing 
the basis for improvisation. In this particular case, the performer is essential to this medium, 
given the provisory and clearly incomplete nature of skits: acting therefore is not an ‘external’ 
element added to the artistic process, but a stable part of it. However, this authentic form of 
Creation (authentic insomuch as not involving any mediation) is seen as “triviale,” “ovvia” and 
“comune” (657), bound to represent the inferior stages of life – the same criticisms that 
Pirandello will later move to the performers of Sicilian theatre:

Once again, Capuana and Pirandello seem to agree in their critical paradigms; they both 
Express a hierarchical view of theatrical performance, where the actor is nothing but the 
Expressive tool of the playwright (see Capuana’s polemic against Zacconi, discussed earlier in 
2.3); and they both subtly deny the value of Commedia Dell’Arte, despite acknowledging its 
Place in the history of European theatre. Finally, and most importantly, both authors are building 
on the same set of conceptual notions – beginning with Meis’ theorizations on the absolute Form
(or the dichotomy between forma and Forma with a capital ‘f’), and De Sanctis’ organic ideal of artistic creation.

In “Teatro Siciliano?”, Pirandello adapts these arguments to his discussion of vernacular theatre. This is especially evident in his claim that “l’attore fa il contrario di ciò che ha fatto il poeta,” making “più reale e tuttavia men vero” the universal creation of the author. Again, Pirandello states his diffidence towards the practice of acting – a position somehow echoing Croce’s anathema against “le artistiche traduzioni, e aspiranti all’infedeltà della bellezza” (Breviario di estetica 78). “Non lo scrittore deve adattarsi alle qualità dell’esecutore; ma questi a quelle dello scrittore, o meglio, dell’opera cui deve dar vita sulla scena”, (Saggi e interventi 979) is the view of Pirandello: as we can see, there is no space for co-creation or collaboration in this hierarchical view of the playwright/performer relation.

If all theatre is deeply flawed, this is especially the case of Sicilian theatre, since vernacular actors typically lack the attributes of versatility and humbleness, Pirandello suggests. The idea of a Modern Sicilian theatre is therefore condemned to remain dead letter, as the author adamantly states: “Un teatro dialettale siciliano non esiste e, date le presenti condizioni, non si può creare, ma tutt’al più si possono far soltanto canovacci e scenari da commedia dell’arte per le spaventose bravura del signor Grasso e della signora Aguglia” (979), whose success, being mainly based on the comedians’ facial and postural expressiveness and on a set of crusted stereotypes, does more harm than good to the Sicilian culture (981). Once again, the author cites Commedia dell’Arte as the example par excellence of a genre that is effective and entertaining but is also trivial and vulgar, far remote from his notion of true art.

Pirandello’s criticism of the Grasso-Aguglia Company reflects the main tensions of the vernacular scene, and the failure of authors such as Capuana or Martoglio of redirecting the natural talent of vernacular actors towards a moderate regional comedy. As we saw earlier, even Capuana’s attempt at distancing Sicilian theatre from a stereotypical image of passion and violence failed, as Grasso completely altered his own role in Lu Cavaleri Pidagna and refused to perform Bona Genti. These tensions, widely known and advertised through the reviews of Oliva and Manca, and in the private letters between Capuana and Martoglio, are clearly underlying in Pirandello’s rejection of the Grasso’s stereotypical interpretation of the “Sicilian type.”
Two circumstances were to reverse this very solid set of beliefs, the first one being financial hardship (once again, the “maladittu bisognu” cited by Verga, cf. *Verga-Capuana* 189). The second one, however, was not an opportunistic motive: I am clearly referring to Pirandello’s encounter with the new rising star of Sicilian theatre, comical actor Musco, who presented himself as an alternative to the traditional ways of Grasso.

Indeed, the collaboration with Martoglio and Musco ignited a profitable and celebrated career as a playwright, resulting in the over fifty original works composed by Pirandello throughout his career (including thirteen vernacular plays). As Leonardo Bragaglia observes in his *Interpreti pirandelliani*, it should come as no surprise that “a provocare questo lungo periodo di intensa e prodigiosa attività artistica nel più grande drammaturgo del secolo sia stato l’attore più istintivo ed eclettico.” (*Interpreti pirandelliani* 23).

The choice of dialect was not devoid of negative consequences. Some Roman reviewers had a hard time accepting the use of vernacular. For instance, in a review of *Pinsaci, Giacuminu!* published on *Il giornale d’italia* on July 11, 1916, “Tom” (nom de plume of Enrico Cecchi) affirms: Luigi Pirandello è autore popolarissimo e diffusissimo di novelle e romanzi dettati in italiano, né a lui può mancare la fibra per farci anche un teatro italiano. Gli altri, che preferiscono il dialetto perché della lingua ignorano anche i principi fondamentali, sono pregati di non seccarci: ci sono tanti altri mestieri al mondo!” (*Interpreti* 27). The reviewer then proceeds to denounce the inintelligible quality of Musco’s dialect: “Ma quel diavolo di Musco che nel primo atto, in quell’ardita impostatura del carattere del protagonista, ebbe una sufficiente chiarezza d’eloquio, si smarrì poi negli scorci, nelle strettoie, nei geroglifici incomprensibili del dialetto e non capimmo più nulla!” (27).

However, Cecchi’s harsh judgment is not indicative of the general feeling of the audience towards Pirandello’s new vernacular theatre. On the contrary, Musco’s explosive talent, his skillful use of gestural and postural codes, and his expressive and natural style of recitation earned him the sympathy of the audience and critical praise from trendsetting critics such as Silvio D’Amico and Renato Simoni, respectively writing for *La Tribuna* and *Il Corriere della Sera*.

Despite their vast success, the cooperation between Musco and Pirandello was as short-lived and tormented as the one with Capuana. Their fluctuating relationship is documented,
among others, by the many heated the playwright sent to his friend Martoglio from 1916 to 1917. On October 23, 1916, right before the opening night of *Liòlà*, Pirandello shares his doubts about the performer:

"Tu sai bene, caro Nino, ch’io non mi aspetto nessun crescimento di fama da questi miei lavori dialettali: tutt’al più me n’aspetto qualche utile finanziario; ma sono prontissimo a rinunziarvi, se esso dovesse minimamente farmi correre il rischio, non dico di perdere la tua buona amicizia, ma anche d’intiepidirla soltanto. Sono prontissimo a ritirare tutti i lavori dati al Musco e bruciarli senza la minima esitazione. […] Musco è tuttora senza suggeritore (quell’ombra di suggeritore arrivatogli da Catania gli s’è ammalato) e con tutto questo vorrebbe dar *Liòlà* venerdì venturo. Io non sono affatto sicuro delle scene d’insieme che hanno bisogno d’un lungo ‘concerto.’ Non posso assistere ad altre prove e non so come fare. Possibile andare in scena senza suggeritore? (Pirandello-Martoglio 39-40)"

In this letter, Pirandello shows his attempt at controlling Musco and his excessive freedom in regard to the text, while also admitting the financial reasons for his involvement with vernacular theatre, which he saw as a minor component in his artistic endeavour, following the footsteps of Verga in this.

The letter provides evidence of a very tense moment in the relation between the two, negatively affecting the creative process. As it is known, tensions between Pirandello and Musco peaked during the rehearsals of *Liòlà*. One day before the debut, Pirandello eventually threatened to cancel the representation, from which he was dissuaded by Martoglio. The play met with success, and Musco later presented the averted crisis as the evidence that his acting skill did not fully display until the actors are facing the challenging presence of the audience. Years later Musco recounts the episode in his autobiographical interview:

"Pirandello, alle prove, era un autore… difficile. […] Dunque, era difficile nel senso di"
incontentabile. Le prove non lo soddisfacevano che assai raramente. Stava seduto, in palcoscenico, col volto fra le mani o appoggiato a una mano sola, mentre coll’altra si tormentava nervosamente il pizzetto grigio e si vedeva il movimento delle sue labbra che andavano ripetendo le parole degli attori, battuta per battuta. Anche se non diceva niente, si capiva dai suoi occhi ch’era scontento. Ed io zitto, perché pensavo: poi alla recita se ne parla. E infatti, quand’era la recita, la situazione cambiava di punto in bianco. Si mostrava felice, raggianti del successo ed anche dell’interpretazione.

Ricordo che a Roma, mentre si provava Liolà accadde lo stesso che tanti anni prima era accaduto con D’Annunzio per La figlia di Iorio quando la provava la compagnia Grasso. Il giorno della prova generale, Pirandello fece esplodere la sua indignazione e, tolto il copione dalle mani del suggeritore, se lo portò via proibendoci la recita per la sera.

- Professore, gli gridai correndogli dietro – è inutile che si porti il copione. Stasera lo recitiamo a soggetto.

Nell’uscire dal teatro, incontrò Martoglio che entrava. Questi, vedendolo stravolto, gli chiese:

- Che hai? Dove vai?

- Me ne vado. Non posso più sentirlì. È per questa sera, capisci?… e non ne sanno una parola. Non voglio essere portato al macello, e perciò ho tolto loro il copione.

Non so che cosa Martoglio gli abbia risposto: ma fu Martoglio stesso che cinque minuti dopo ci riportò il copione che Pirandello aveva abbandonato nelle sue mani.

- Non ci serve – dissi subito io – o con questo o senza di questo, stasera si recita lo stesso.

E la sera, quando Liolà ebbe un successo magnifico, ecco Pirandello in palcoscenico, che mi bacia e mi abbraccia commosso, con lo slancio, l’affezione e la sincerità del suo schietto animo di galantuomo e di siciliano! (qtd. in Angelo Musco e il teatro del suo tempo 148-149)207

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207 The original source of the passage is Musco, Angelo. Cerca che trovi... Ed. by Domenico Danzuso (Catania: Maimone 1987).
Aesthetic disagreements aside, the main source of contrast between the two – and the one eventually leading to a definitive rupture – was Musco’s annoying habit to replace Pirandello’s new plays with old works from his repertoire of vernacular farces. Pirandello was therefore only providing a way to Musco to access more refined venues nation-wide, in order to win more qualified audiences to his traditional repertoires.

The first falling out happened in July 1916, when the actor replaced the scheduled performance of Pensaci, Giacomino with his old-war horse San Giovanni decollato, a comical piece written by Martoglio for the first repertoire of Grassó’s Compagnia Comica Siciliana in 1903 (Giovanni Grasso 76). Pirandello freely complains about this in a letter sent to Martoglio on July 23, 1916: “non avrei immaginato, quando tu con tanta insistenza mi hai indotto a scrivere contro mia voglia una commedia per Musco, che questi dovesse usarmi il trattamento che mi ha usato” (28-29). He consequently authorizes Martoglio (who was acting as Pirandello’s de facto agent) to withdraw Musco’s licence on Pensaci, Giacomino and Lumìe di Sicilia (28-29). When Musco offered some partial reparation, Pirandello replied harshly, and proudly rejecting any “elemosina di repliche” (30) and reminding the actor that “era obbligo vostro, avendo messo in scena la mia commedia di lunedì, presentarla la domenica al pubblico nelle recite diurne” (30).

The two reached an agreement thanks to the mediation of Martoglio. The peace, however, was short-lived: in December 1916, soon after the opening of Pensaci, Giacomino in Milan, Musco replaced again Pirandello’s new play with his favourite San Giovanni decollato, despite a very warm reception and the positive reviews of a trend-setting critic like Renato Simoni.

Martoglio protests in a heated, rhetoric tone: “Se non che, leggendo l’annuncio degli spettacoli diurni di oggi, vedo che date il San Giovanni Decollato…. E allora mi metto le mani nei capelli e grido come un pazzo: Falla comu voi, sempri è cucuzza!” (41), he writes, using the same vernacular humour Musco was so fond of. In addition to condemning the actor’s lack of professional ethics, Martoglio naively argues against his business strategy:

E si fa, quello che fate voi, di annunziare un altro lavoro appena varata una novità?... Questo non significa dire al pubblico: Badate, noi stessi sappiamo che la novità che vi diamo non può resistere più di due tre giorni?
A me non farà meraviglia se, dopo il matinée col San Giovanni, i bordereau elle repliche del Pensaci Giacomo scenderanno, E allora voi lo leverete dal cartello, credendovi giustificato…. Ma no, caro, perché sarete stato voi a provocare la discesa con il balordo sistema che avete adottato e che pervicacemente volete seguire.  

(Pirandello-Martoglio 42)

It is clear, however, that Martoglio and Musco were not playing by the same rules and serving the same interests: while the writer is clearly thinking for the best interest of Pirandello, the comedian is acting in an opportunistic way, using the name of Pirandello as a key to access more dignified audiences and then establish his own name – and repertoire.

In the same letter, Martoglio also suggests that the comedian is under a negative influence by ill-intentioned sycophants: a view that seems supported by other evidence. Capuana, who was also struggling with Musco, had already warned Martoglio on October 23, 1915:

Dimenticavo di dirle che io, lei, Pirandello abbiamo nella Compagnia Musco i peggiori nemici, i più…. Arrabbiati critici illuminati… da Pippo Marchese ecc. ecc.! C’è quello che dice dovunque:- “Nica,” “don Ramunnu,” “Lumia di Sicilia” non possono darsi più di una sera per ogni piazza! C’è l’altro che dice: - Angelo Musco è il vero autore di certe commedie, perché è lui che fa ridere, e non quel che hanno scritto Martoglio, Capuana, ecc. ecc. C’è il terzo che dice: - Se Musco non recitasse, Capuana e Martoglio morrebbero di fame! Musco con me ha finto d’indignarsi di queste ciarle fatte nei Caffè, nei ritrovi siciliani... Ma io so, invece, che è lieto per sè.  

(Pirandello-Martoglio 30 n)

Without the mediation of Martoglio (now fully supportive of Pirandello’s betrayed interests), the second rupture between author and comedian was inevitable. On January 14, 1917, Pirandello communicates to Martoglio his final and irrevocable decision to withdraw Musco’s license to perform his plays. Both Renato Simoni (leaning towards Musco’s side) and Sabatino Lopez, the President of the Italian Society of Authors, intervened in the crisis: they were barely able to
avoid the fallout by obtaining a written commitment from Musco, as the January 30 letter finally proves. However, later in the spring Musco changes the play from the repertoire, of which Martoglio promptly informs Pirandello on May 31: “Ieri Liolà diede 500 lire. Stasera ha il Ratto delle Sabine!...” Simoni proclama sul suo onore che se quattro mesi fa credendoci eccessivi nelle nostre pretese, difese Musco, ora è tutto, tutto per noi e talmente nauseato che quasi quasi vorrebbe accopparlo col giornale. Dice che il giorno in cui vorremo metterlo piede a terra sarà il primo ad applaudirci.” (93)

Meanwhile, Pirandello intensifies his search for other companies willing to perform his newest works in Italian, thus opening the second phase of his poetic involvement. In May 1917, he initiates contacts with Virginio Talli (1857-1928), who enthusiastically accepts to perform his Italian work Così è (se vi pare). Shortly after, he signs a deal with Ruggero Ruggeri for Il piacere dell’onestà: the play successfully debuts November 27, 1917, at the Teatro Carignanano in Turin (Pirandello-Martoglio 90-91). By securing big names such as Ruggeri and Talli, Pirandello is abandoning the experience of vernacular theatre, redirecting his creative efforts to the more rewarding horizon of the “teatro di tradizione.” At the same time, he severed ties with Musco and initiates contacts with the latter’s competitors in the context of vernacular theatre. On June 10, 1917, Pirandello announces to Martoglio that he is trying to sign a deal for Il Berretto a sonagli either with the company of Giovanni Grasso or that of Claudio Marcellini, if not both. His relation to Musco is now dead and gone: “Non voglio più avere rapporti d’amicizia con questo signore. Per me è finita. E anche il teatro siciliano per me è finito. Se qualche cosa mi avverrà di scrivere per le scene, la scriverò in italiano.” (Pirandello-Martoglio 100).

The contrast between Pirandello and Musco is symptomatic of two opposite views of theatre, one heavily relying on the text and on the hierarchizing function of the stage director, and the other mainly based on the personal charisma of the actor. As Silvio d’Amico notes, “la sua fatale indocilità, la sua congenita infedeltà ai testi, la sua necessità fisica di tradirli e via via rifarli, in una perpetua improvvisazione, sera per sera (in ogni replica di una commedia,

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208 The historical delay with which the Italian language coined an expression to indicate the raising figure of the director seems to provide an evidence to the conservative allure of the national dramatic environment. The word “regista” was not coined until 1935, when the linguist Bruno Migliorini proposed it, in order to replace the French borrowing ‘régisseur,’ in the wake of the Fascist censorship of foreign expressions. (See Puppa-Farrel 271).
abbiamo detto altrove e qui ripetiamo, dava uno spettacolo nuovo), non lo resero mai quel che si
dice un’interprete” (“In morte di Angelo Musco – Nuova antologia, Milano, 7 ottobre 1937,
cited in Interpreti Pirandelliani 14). A philosophy of acting that is much closer to that of
Commedia dell’Arte than to the modern ideal of theatre launched by Pirandello.

At the same time, this tormented and fluctuating relation is also telling of Pirandello’s
own views of “dialettalità” in theatre. On January 29, 1917, when his relation to Musco was
already compromised beyond any possible repair, he confessed to Martoglio:

Ora servire, per dir così, da elemento decorativo a l Musco – e non dico per me solo, ma
anche per te – io con Pensaci Giacomino, Liolà, ‘A birritta cu i ciancianeddi, ‘A giarra,
Lumìe di Sicilia; tu col Riffanti e Scuri – perché il Musco s’acquisti benemerenze
artistiche di tanto in tanto, e poi ritorni a impazzire e a fare impazzire il pubblico con le
farset – non me la sento. Potevo tentare con te una rigenerazione artistica del nuovo teatro
comico siciliano, ma cooperare e tenere in piedi con sostegni d’arte una baracca da
burattini, per i fabbricatori di farset, non me la sento proprio. (14)

At the same time, characters such as Agostino Toti, Liolà, and Nociu Pàmpina did provide the
backbone to a new ideal of theatre; an innovation that could have been unthinkable without their
Sicilian characterization and the grotesque inspiration of Musco, which inspired at least partially
their creation. Yet, Pirandello fails to acknowledge his own creative debt towards the performer,
claiming that his characters “farebbero la fortuna d’ogni grande attore,” provided that the
interpreter knows how to play them, feeling “la linea grottesca del tipo che è subito caratteristico,
e, nel suo fondo, arcipieno di tragica umanità.” (Pirandello-Martoglio 81).

Despite its abrupt and fallimentary end, the utopian attempt at renewing the vernacular
theatre, briefly attempted in the 1915-1917 years will give way to an actual renewal of the
national stage. Pirandello’s reformative drive is also achieved through the Italian translation of
plays such as Pinsaci, Giacomino!, Liolà, and ‘A birritta cu I ciancianeddi, in addition to the
newly composed works of the 1920s for Italian companies such as L’uomo, la bestia e la virtù.
No matter how short-lived, this important experience laid the premises for a long-lasting ideal of theatre, overcoming Pirandello’s diffidence for the theatrical medium and for translation. More importantly, while the author abandoned the narrow ideal of “dialetto,” his theatrical philosophy expressed in Pirandello’s work was, in fact, born from the very concrete experience of Sicily; and it retained the mark of “dialettalità” until the very end.

3. The Ugly Face of Christ: The Rewriting of Christianity in *Liolà*

Both in the Italian and dialectal versions, *Liolà* opens with a formal citation of the form of the *lauda drammatica*, which would be a perfect fit in a Sicilian Easter play:

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Coru: E Maria darrè li porti,
chi sintia li currìati:
“Nun cci dati accussì forti,
su’ carnuzzi dilicati!” (TDS 1 221)
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While the Italian version of these lines is closer to the traditional operatic structure, the original Sicilian closely reminds of a “stornello,” one of the most common forms of popular oral poetry. As Alberto Cantù notes, music seems to be the privileged means of expression of *Liolà*, who introduces himself through a song, whose children are likened to singing birds (“cardelli”), and whose final teaching is an invitation to sing ("gl’insegnerò a cantare") (154-155). However, the first song on stage directly comes from the religious tradition of the island, as the Passion is, according to Maria Franini, “il primo tra i brani lirici di rimando etnico in quanto canto religioso della Settimana Santa in Sicilia.” (166)

Since Pirandello’s knowledge of the actual religious literature appears to be marginal and superficial, the mediation of locally represented passions seems to be here more pertinent

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209 For a useful assessment of the importance of stornelli in the popular Italian poetry, see at least Pasolini’s Introduction to his well-known *Canzoniere.*
Furthermore, the opening lines are not a direct citation from a vernacular script, but rather a crafty imitation of the genre. By providing a crafty, artificial imitation of an oral genre, Pirandello once again challenges the boundaries of the literary canon, questioning the rift between the voice and the book, and ultimately the dichotomy between written and oral language.

Religious motives appear in the play since its very beginning. The very first scene opens under the shadow of olive branches and is partially set during the Easter celebrations. Consistently, the play is also marked by a double citation of religious motives: not only the characters pronounce words of a *planctus Mariae*, but their stories partially mirror the sacred stories of the Gospel and the Old Testament. While the late conception by Mita echoes the Biblical episode of Sarah in *Genesis* 16.1, Mita’s instrumental conception is blasphemously likened to the Annunciation in the following lines:

DONNA MITA: Eh... chi vuliti! 'Un putemu èssiri tutti sperti a sto munnu... Ven’a ddiri ca cci avi a pinsari Diu pi mmia!
LIOLÀ: Diu, già. — Cci avissi a pinsari. — Cci pinsà una vota. — Ma pi quantu bona siti, vu’, timurata, rispittusa di tutti li santi cumannamenti — no pi dirivi mancanza — ma certu ca ’un vi putiti paragunari a Maria Santissima.
DONNA MITA: Iu? Chi diciti?
LIOLÀ: Si cci avi a pinsari Diu, scusati, comu? pi virtù d’ ’u Spiritu Santu?  

The play also contains clear echoes from Machiavelli’s *La mandragola*, whose plot is, in turn, a reversed imitation of Marian themes.  

Ironically, the reference to religion is also present in the opening scenes of ‘*A giarra*, which also opens on a choral scene and is set during the olive

210 [Donna Mita: What can you do? We can’t all be cunning in this world. God will have to take care of me! // Liolà: Yes, God: He should take care of you. He already did, once. But no matter how good and respectful of all the Commandments you are – no offense to you – you certainly can compare yourself to the Holy Virgin. // Donna Mita: Me? What are you saying? // Liolà: You say God has to provide for you, but how, excuse me? Through the Holy Spirit?] (My translation)

211 Such references have been explored by Franco Zangrilli in his *Pirandello e i classici*, and by Nerida Newbigin in her 2008 article “Pirandello, Machiavelli, and their Donne di Virtù.”
harvest. The overall value of scene, however, is completely opposite, as the theme of blasphemy appears quite early:

'MPARI PE': Oh! oh! picciotti! A tta nicu ddocu! Chianu, santu diavulu! stati accura!
TRISUZZA (venendo su con la gnà Tana, Carminidda e Nuiciareddu): Chi è, 'mpari Pe'?
GNÀ TANA: Bi’ lu cori! Puru vui vi 'nsignastivu a santiari?
CARMINIDDA: Puru l'àrvuli a n'autra tanticchia santianu nni sta campagna! (TD 2 221)

The vision of the personified ‘olive trees’ cursing the divinity and the saints strongly subverts the traditional Christian iconography (just think of D’Annunzio’s Franciscanism, clearly embodied by his well-known lines “e su gli olivi, su i fratelli olivi;/ che fan di santità pallidi i clivi”, “La sera fiesolana” lines 29-30). At the same time, these lines revert the initial situation of Liola in many different ways. For instance, Carminidda protests against ‘Mpari Pe’s prohibition to sing - something unheard of in the common practice of rural labour – exactly like Luzza does at the beginning of Liolà:

CARMINIDDA: Ah chi mancu cantari si po' cchiù?
GNÀ TANA: Santiari sulu si po'! Ca pari avissiru fattu scummissa, patruni e sutta, a cu' cci 'a sapi di cchiù! (TD2 221)

In both cases, Pirandello’s typical use of “meta-theatrical” devices is further articulated thanks to the reprise of a religious genre. The reference to sacred theatre has a twofold meaning in Pirandello’s universe: on the one hand, it fits in the general context of fascination with the popular theatre (as in Rolland’s notion of “théâtre populaire”), one of the main currents of the

\[212\] Rolland formulates this ideal in his well-known 1903 book *Le Théâtre du peuple*, which contains both a historical outlook and an aesthetic statement on the future of theatre. Rolland’s ideal of “popular theatre” transcends a merely economic view of accessibility and distances itself from the ‘debasement’ of theatre ["vulgariser"] (Rolland 51), in order to promote the ideal of a popular celebration or ritual [fête populaire]. The roots of this ideal lay in the experience of the French Revolution (p. 74). Building on this premises, we can understand how this notion of ‘popular theatre’ might help explains Pirandello’s use of ritual forms in his *Sagra del Signore della Nave*, or in his later “teatro dei miti.”
renovation of theatre in the early twentieth century; on the other hand, it provides the basis for a
depiction of a rural and insular anthropology, sensibly shaped by Christian values. 213

Building on Mario Apollonio’s distinction between the Florentine secularized tradition of Sacra Rappresentazione and the more religious and traditional genre of Rappresentazione Sacra, Andrea Bisicchia sees the latter as a possible inspiration for Pirandello’s religiosity. As the scholar points out, Pirandello did not frequently borrow structures and modes from the Sacra Rappresentazione; at least, not as often as other famous renovators of the modern stage, such as Ghelderode, Maeterlinck, Copeau or even D’Annunzio. As Bisicchia puts it, “l’interesse di Pirandello per il teatro non è legato alla scelta di un genere che porta avanti fino in fondo, ma a frammenti che inserisce all’interno dei testi.” (236-237). Pirandello’s use of religious topoi and structures is fragmentary also from the linguistic standpoint, as it takes the form of ‘hybridization’ and contamination, or, as Bisicchia dubs it, “farcitura”: “Pirandello non inserisce […] la lingua volgare nel contesto del dramma liturgico latino, ma contamina lingua e dialetto per pervenire alla immediatezza e alla comunicatività tipica della Lauda che non cerca appigli spettacolari per imporre la sua drammaticità e che, nella commedia pirandelliana, viene attenuata dal canto delle donne.” (237)

The citation of sacred theatre is not the only episode marking Pirandello’s relation to the sacred and his quest for an organic form of theatre, capable of conveying a feeling of popular, interclassist unity. Long before the celebrated Trilogia dei Miti, structural influences from the genre of Rappresentazione Sacra can be found in La Sagra del Signore della Nave (1925), a one-act play adapted from the short story with the same title (1916). Here, a religious topic encounters the distinctive traits of Sacred Play – including the use of typological characters,

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213 The religious aspect of Pirandello’s oeuvre has been the source for countless studies and conferences. A useful insight is given by Artioli in his L’officina segreta di Pirandello, where the scholar reads i Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore as a contemporary rewriting of the Itinerarium mentis in Dei; more recently, the scholar has returned on the subject in his Pirandello Allegorico, a deep analysis of Christian allegories in the entire Pirandellian oeuvre. Bisicchia devotes a chapter of his Pirandello e la scena to the reappropriation of the Sacred Play. The most complete exploration is perhaps the one provided by Paolo Jachia in his Pirandello e il suo Cristo (Milano: Ancora, 2007), a full reflection of the use of Christological motives in the history of the “Pirandellian character.” Also useful is Elio Gioanola, Pirandello la follia (Milan: Jaca Book, 1997). Finally, Nino Borsellino has inquired motives and themes of Pirandello’s spirituality in his Il dio di Pirandello (1998). The topic has also provided the subject to one of the annual conferences of Centro Studi Pirandelliani in Agrigento, whose proceedings are collected in the volume Pirandello e la fede, also cited in the bibliography.
identified by their social function rather than by name, in Sagra ("Il tavernaio", "Il ragazzotto", "La donnaccia", "Il primo operaio", "Il secondo operaio," and so forth), the reproduction of a procession on stage, and the display of a choral subjectivity – all three being fundamental traits of the Medieval sacred theatre.

The use of topics and forms taken from the tradition of sacred theatre casts a new light on the relation between d’Annunzio and Pirandello – whose radically opposite conceptions of regionalism and folklore were directly related to their opposite views of the body and of the sacred. As it is known, the relationship between the two was often marked by tensions and explicit dissent. In 1920, soon after d’Annunzio’s sudden disgrace and attempted suicide, Pirandello conformed to the surrounding climate by publicly distancing himself from the Vate, whom he publicly criticized in his aforementioned public speech for Verga’s eightieth birthday. While Pirandello praises Verga as a “poeta di cose,” d’Annunzio’s verbose and emphatic manner earned him the dubious distinction as “poeta di parole.” The two are thus seen as the most recent incarnation of a dualism spanning over the entire history of the Italian literature: “Lungo tutto il cammino della nostra letteratura corrono ben distinte e quasi parallele queste due categorie di scrittori e possiamo seguirle, accanto e opposte, dalle origini ai nostri giorni: Dante e Petrarca; Machiavelli e Guicciardini; l’Ariosto e il Tasso; il Manzoni e il Monti; Verga e d’Annunzio.” (Saggi e interventi 1010) Verga belongs to the “costruttori” and the “spiriti necessari”, while d’Annunzio, whose vitalistic mélange of art and life is dubbed a “fascinoso abbaglio,” belongs to the “riadattatori” and the “esseri di lusso” (1010). In the context of the history of the Italian literature, the dichotomy between ‘stile di cose’ and ‘stile di parole’ provides a potential framework for two opposite poetics of regionalism.

This paradigmatic value is further highlighted in the “Discorso alla Real Accademia d’Italia,” a commemorative address given eleven years after the first celebration of Verga (on December 3, 1931), a revised version of the author’s first address on the author.Originally

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214 Once again, Pirandello prefers to manipulate and rewrite a previous text, rather than writing a new lecture from scratch. The two speeches present many common points and some passages are quoted verbatim; yet, they differ in many respects. In the 1931 version, Pirandello attenuates some of his most polemic statements against important writers such as Luigi Capuana or D’Annunzio. Sweeping statements such as “Nazione da noi vuol dire o volgarità meccanica e stereotipata di stile burocratico e scolastico, o astratta verbosità di lingua letteraria e retorica” (Saggi e interventi 1011) are not present in the 1931 version.
associated with the lofty language of lyrical poetry, the pompous and lavish manner of the “stile di parole” is also connected to the Italian picturesque and, potentially, to many superficial and stereotypical depictions of regional identities:

Tanto che ripensando all'Italia, alle sue bellezze naturali, alle sue tradizioni, è quasi impossibile, specie per uno straniero, non raffigurarsi gl'Italiani tutti perduti a vivere nei sensi, ebbri di sole, di luce, di colouri, ebbri di canzoni e tutti sonatori di facili strumenti, un po' avventurieri, un po' attori, fatti per l'amore e per il lusso anche se miserabili; e i loro uomini rappresentativi, immaginosi letterati dal linguaggio sonoro, e magnifici decoratori, e rievocatori delle glorie passate; un popolo che viva della felicità d'una natura deliziosa e della dignità del suo grande passato: ne viva e ci riprenda anche le spese, come in un giuoco o in una fantasmagoria, in cui le cose siano di sogno e le necessità non esistano e tutto sia facile e fatto, e niente difficile e da fare. (Saggi e interventi 1418)

In these lines, Pirandello does not explicitly refer to any specific episode in the long story of the European travelogues to Italy – whose trajectory he was partially to reverse in the travels of his own Mattia Pascal, who tours through the landscape of Italy after an intense exploration of the German lands. Yet, the ideal of a splendid poverty and of a natural tendency to artistic expression seemingly echo many European travelogues to Southern Italy, often perpetuating the stereotypical view of Southern Italy as “un paradiso abitato da diavoli” (Moe 2002; Croce 2008). On the contrary, Pirandello relates the style of Verga and his fellows ‘scrittori di cose’ to an everlasting poetic of “dialectality.” Rather than entailing the adoption of one dialect (or, even worse, the indiscriminate use of words adapted from one dialect) ‘dialectal’ stands for locally rooted, autochthonous and grounded in the simple reality of everyday life:

Tutta la piú doviziosa lingua letteraria è in D’Annunzio; e dialettale è il Verga. Dialettale, sí, ma come è proprio che si sia dialettali in una nazione che vive della varia vita e

215 In his volume The view from Vesuvius, Nelson Moe traces a cultural history of the travelogues to Southern Italy, with their stereotypical depictions of hellish landscapes, rogues and bandits.
dunque nel vario linguaggio delle sue molte regioni. Questa ‘dialettalità’ del Verga è una vera creazione di forma, da non considerare perciò al modo usato, come a questione di lingua, notandone lo stampo sintattico spesso prettamente siciliano, e tutti gli idiotismi. *(Saggi e interventi 1422)*

If the artificial language of the “stile di parole” is especially oriented to the quest for visual details, highlighting the picturesque and the colourful, Verga’s sober dialectality is an aural category; while the “stile di parole” is characterized by an exotic trajectory, the “stile di cose” is closely related to a linguistic notion of identity. Pirandello thus links the notion of “idiomatism” to its etymological nuance: ‘tò idion’ [*tò òdòoν*], the quality of being rooted in a given place and in a specific reality.

In his “Discorso alla Reale Accademia,” Pirandello had finally formulated a poetics of ‘regionalism’ and ‘dialectality,’ which is no longer rooted in the imitation of Sicilian dialect but rather aims to achieve an ideal of aesthetic concreteness. Ironically, the ground for a concrete application of such ideals would be offered by a text of the very same author Pirandello had opposed from a stylistic standpoint, D’Annunzio. In 1934, Pirandello was called to direct a staging of *La figlia di Iorio*. The performance (staged on October 11, at the Teatro Argentina in Roma) ended the international congress “IV Convegno Volta” on dramaturgy: according to Sarah Zappulla Muscarà, it represented “un momentaneo punto di incontro sulla messinscena” between the diverging positions of Pirandello and D’Annunzio. (“Il congresso Volta” 357)

As Gianni Oliva suggests, the episode marks the public reconciliation between two intellectuals who overcame their artistic divergences and their past grudges and lined up in support of the Fascist regime (Oliva 28). However, as Zappulla Muscarà notes, “le concessioni al fascismo non escludono però la presenza d’una ratio ispirativa nata ora da un più armonico rapport con il teatro di poesia che costituisce, quasi nomadismo memoriale, il felice porto dei miti.” (“Il congresso Volta” 364)

Sicilianness had indeed inspired d’Annunzio’s ideal of pastoral tragedy; although its original setting was to be found in the Abruzzi region, he derived his inspiration from seeing a production of the Sicilian company by Giovanni Grasso. Furthermore, a Sicilian translation of *La
figlia di Iorio closely followed the national production in 1904: Giuseppe Antonio Borgese was responsible for the linguistic adaptation, sealed with the approval of d’Annunzio himself. The Sicilian version was first performed at the Teatro Biondo in Palermo, with Giovanni Grasso playing the main role; Angelo Musco, then a young supporting actor at the Grasso Company, made an appearance as the First Reaper.\footnote{Musco also recalls this episode, emphasizing his own role. D’Annunzio’s heated reaction in hearing the rehearsals of ’A figghia di Joria are strikingly similar to the depiction of Pirandello threatening to cancel the debut of Liolà, cited earlier in this chapter: whether both episodes are real or they are crafted according to a self-celebrating topos of Musco’s autobiography, they clearly illustrate the tense and often stormy relations between playwrights and vernacular acting companies.}

D’Annunzio’s pastoral tragedy provided Pirandello with the opportunity of experimenting with the archaic form of “canzone dialogata, come una tenzone dai tempi primitivi, un contrasto semplice e tremendo: tessuto a molte trame: religione, amore, delitto, purificazione.” (Oliva 35). A regional, local identity thus becomes the ideal setting where the author can fully stage his quest for a mythical truth. As Pirandello himself writes to d’Annunzio in the preparatory phases: “Sento anch’io La figlia di Iorio come una grande canzone da accentare popolarescamente, con ardore potente e toni schietti. Farò di tutto perché gli attori sotto la mia guida si guardino da quella preziosità letteraria di cui altre volte si sono compiaciuti.” (cited in “Il congresso Volta” 362). No longer seen as the opposite of his own view of “dialettalità” and of “stile di cose,” D’Annunzio’s pastoral tragedy thus comes to embody the very same ideal of ‘dialettalità:’ an ideal that transcends its specific regional location, in name of a deeper quest for the materiality of details and for the ancestral strengths of the myth.

The geographical setting (Abruzzo) is here revisited in a more abstract way, thus embodying the dreamy land of myth: a turn emphasized by the décor – designed by the painter Giorgio De Chirico.\footnote{The original stage design, by Francesco Paolo Michetti, emphasized the elements pertinent to the landscape of Abruzzo, the native region of both the author and the set-designer. On the contrary, De Chirico gives a generically Mediterranean tone to the setting, transcending the identification with a given geographical space. On the relations between De Chirico and Pirandello, see the article by Gale on the topic.} As an anonymous reviewer noted on Scenario, Pirandello’s reading of D’Annunzio is here faithful to the spirit, rather than to the letter: “Per lui l’Abruzzo della Figlia di Iorio non è quello delle guide, delle monografie, o d’un particolare folklore; è, genericamente, una terra di passioni e di estasi, tra favola e mito non meno che fra montagna e mare; un dramma
in cui, nel conflitto tra carnalità barbara e terrore superstizioso, s’apre la via, e nel sacrificio trionfa, il grido della purificazione.\(^{218}\) (“Il Congresso Volta” 366).

Pirandello’s staging of *La figlia di Iorio* builds on the same theatrical principle used in *La sagra del signore della Nave* or in the opening scene of *Liola*: that is to say, an ideal of performativity taken from Medieval sacred theatre, a genre intrinsically related to liturgy. Both in the Mass and in the sacred play, an action is performed according to a set of fixed and ritualistic conventions. The scenic action is therefore closer to the actual performance of an act, than to the fictive representation of an action; similarly, the performers enact themselves on stage, being first and foremost sinners engaged in a soul-searching exercise.

For an example, one might only consider tropes such as *Quem quaeritis* or *Ordo Stellae*, written in the form of a responsory, whose Latin versions had been circulating across the continent since the IX century. In his monograph *Quem quaeritis: teatro sacro dell’alto medioevo*, Johann Drumbl has proposed a hermeneutic reading of the Sacred Play, cautioning against simplifying and anachronistic interpretations:

Prima della riforma tridentina, o meglio della riforma liturgica francescana nel primo ’200, il concetto di liturgia era meno rigidamente definito e comprendeva tutto ciò che fu effettivamente usato in chiesa. Non si trattava solo di canti ma anche di azioni liturgiche, di processioni, azioni varie, gesti, usanze particolari, il giubilo collettivo o l’attesa in silenzio nella chiesa al buio… Non tutte queste usanze erano ‘religiose’ nel senso restrittivo della parola, cioè non tutto ciò che era liturgico doveva necessariamente seguire i precetti e l’insegnamento ufficiale della chiesa o essere conforme ad una presunta religiosità concordata o limitata dal pulpito. (Drumble 36)

Drumble criticizes previous distinctions, such as the dichotomy of “Spiel” (play) and “Feier” (liturgy) proposed by Helmut de Boor in his study of the Latin medieval liturgical theatre. As

Drumbl highlights, the thematic criterion is not compelling, given the existence of obscene tropes (Quem quaeritis 37): the specific kind of performative action is a more relevant criteria to the definition of the genre.

In his *Essai de poétique médiévale*, Paul Zumthor comes to the same conclusion from different premises, when whe considers “comic theatre” as a moderately “free” genres, given its licence to draw from a quite heterogeneous corpus of sources, varying from the Gospel to Boccaccio’s short stories, *Essai* 446). The distinction between genres, therefore, cannot be thematic, given the pervasivity of parody, but is based on performative modes and semiotic structures. Zumthor then proceeds to analyze the “hyper-realistic” nature of Medieval theatre from a semiotic point of view. In this genre, he argues, the external relations between the performer and its audience prevail on and, at times, foreshadow the relations among the different characters (431) – what the scholar respectively dubs as “exterior situation” [“situation externe”] and “interior situation” [“situation interne”]. In such a model, theatre is a collective speech act, unconceivable outside of a strong community. The use of typologies, as opposed to individual proper nouns, also falls in this communicative situation, further emphasizing the collective and choral nature of the sacred performance (435). All these elements – the choral and collective nature of enunciation; the use of typological characters; the elements of po– recur in the appropriations of the sacred play in Pirandello, whether as an imitation (as it is the case of *La Sagra del Signore della Nave*), or in their parodic reappropriation (as in the early vernacular works, and especially *Liolà*).

In Pirandello’s oeuvre, the reference to religion is never important in itself, but insomuch as it serves an artistic function – for instance, to give a meta-theatrical twist to a play set in rural Sicily, to evoke a potential theatrical community, or to represent credibly a world permeated by the influence of Christianity.

With a few notable exceptions, Pirandello’s Italian theatre is marked by a secular tone, effectively described by Cardinal Montini (the future Pope Paul VI) as “non avverso al cristianesimo,” in a 1939 letter to the bishop of Agrigento (Jachia 14). A clear example of radical anti-religiosity can be seen in plot of “Pensaci Giacomino!,” both in the play and in the short story from which the play is taken. The latter text did raise some eyebrows among the readers of *Il corriere della sera*, in which it was first published on February 23, 1910. The episode left
some animosity between Pirandello and Alberto Albertini, vice-director of the Corriere. In a private letter to Pirandello, Ugo Ojetti, despite showing solidarity to the playwright, privately admits that the short story was unsuitable for the conformist tastes of the Corriere’s audience: “La tua novella era una bellezza e una delizia. Ma io direttore del corriere non l’avrei stampata. […] Appena la lessi, previdi questo finimondo. Io li conosco, i miei corrieristi, o meglio, i miei direttori che ricevendo tredici lettere di protesta, non pensano che Il Corriere ha un poco più di tredici lettori” (Carteggi Inediti 55). As Ojetti suggests, the source of scandal lays precisely in the rejection of moralism, clearly expressed by the author’s empathy towards Agostino Toti. The motive is also central in his theatrical adaptation, but it did not raise the same scandal (as Pirandello acknowledges in writing to his son Stefano about the première of Pinsaci, Giacomini!: “la vittoria è stata bella perché il lavoro è audacissimo, e non era proclive all’applauso” (Carteggi inediti 150 n).

Even when Pirandello directly addresses religious and mystical topics, his exploration of the sacred often takes a negative guise, as Alison Booth has noted in her article “Mystics, madmen and mendicants:” It is important always to distinguish between the vision as a momentary experience and mysticism as a source of permanent transparency and plenitude. There is always something in Pirandello’s writing that indicates that the latter, in real terms, is an impossibility. It maybe a first person narrative that contradicts the content; the mystical awareness may depend on exceptional circumstances such as the imminence of death; a humoristic narrative may maintain the double perspective by referring the reader’s attention to the pretty details of the real world; where the mysticism is presented in a dream text or a myth, the author is openly acknowledging its hypothetical nature.” (Booth 28)

According to this view, religion is not a source of devotion or fervour: its space is that of an endless quest for the other, an intimate exploration culminating in the bitter awareness of its impossible fulfillment. Even in the most vivid representations of the hereafter, Pirandello’s remains close to the reality of men, without fully engaging in the depiction of metaphysical realities. The early vernacular plays, however, are a partial exception to this secular tone, since in them the mystery of mankind is related to the primitive force of holy – if not openly religious – symbols and forces. At the same times, Pirandello questions both the moral and the social significance of religion; he criticizes the fanatism and the moral hypocrisy of his native land, consistently with his religious skepticism.
From a linguistic point of view, the vernacular plays are laced with religious references, which appear first and foremost in the most conventional form possible: common religious invocations and idiomatic exclamations. This is especially true of Liolà, Pinsaci Giacomino, A birritta cu i’ ciancianeddi, and Lumìe di Sicilia. In these plays, the characters constantly cross themselves, accompanying their gesture with expressions of devotion, respect or social conformism. Invocations to the Virgin and to Christ are the most frequent kind, closely followed by invocations to the Saints, God and other religious entities. Invocations of this kind are especially (but not exclusively) recurrent in the lines of female characters, where they mark pathetic peaks, climaxes, or simply attempts at persuasion. The cold sophistry of male characters such as Don Nociu Pampina or Agostino Toti is counterbalanced by the heated rhetoric of female speakers, who address the divinity as the only relevant authority, and who voice the most emotional side of reality – be it in support or against the social status quo.

Quite meaningfully, most religious invocations are eliminated throughout the translational process. This is particular evident in the following examples:

[1] MARANNA: E pritinnia ca ci vinissimu pur nuatri, ‘nsemulla cu iddu! Nomu di lu patri (seguita a farsi la croce)  
NITTU: Zitta, Maranna -  
MARIANNA: E pretendeva che ci venissimo anche noi, insieme con quello!  
CINQUEMANI: Zitta, Marianna! - (PG)

GNÀ CARMINA: (accennando il segno della croce) In nome del Padre... e che lo vuol da lei, il figliuolo? (MN 879)  
LA MOSCARDINA: - Del figlio che non gli nasce? O come vuole che gli nasca? (MN1 352)

GNÀ CARMINA: E lei lo lasci piangere, zia Croce! Non è forse meglio, così,  
LA MOSCARDINA: E lo lasci piangere, zia Croce! Finché lui
a prigari ô Signurrzzu… (MN4: 1443) 
per voialtre? Anzi dovete pregare Dio… (MN1: 846) 
piange, lei ha motivo di ridere, mi pare! (MN1: 361)


ZIA CROCE: Infame! Infame! Ti sei perduta?
Afferrandola per le braccia e guardandola negli occhi.
Dimmi! Dimmi! - Vieni dentro! Vieni dentro! (MN1: 374)


This process of elimination closely recalls the plays of Salvatore Di Giacomo, analyzed earlier in Chapter 2 (especially sections 6 and 7). However, there is an important distinction between the two practices. In ‘O voto/Mala vita (and to a lesser extent in ‘O mese mariano/Il mese mariano), religious references were eliminate from the script, not from the play: verbal invocations to the
saints or the Virgin were replaced with gestures and deixis (for instance, pointing to the statue of Christ on stage), which made the presence of religion even stronger. Pirandello, instead, eliminates all reference to religion, with an overall effect of secularization.

In examples [1], [2], and [5] the author recurs to the stereotypical and formulaic “Nnomu do patri” (in the name of the Father) and the corresponding gesture. Examples [3] and [4] are more complex: for instance, in sequence [3], the character invokes the Lord (here altered with a diminutive suffix, which is not maintained in the 1917 version – see Lubello 24) to protect their own shady interest. Similarly, in example [4] the reference to Mary seems to be quite at odd with the quite unholy nature of the pregnancies shown in Liolà. A blasphemous note can also be perceived in the following example:

[6] GNÀ GESA: Nnà tutti dui, nnà tutti dui vaju! ’Ngalera avi a jiri stu vecchiu scumunicatu, c’appi lu curaggii di diri ca lu figliu è sò, com’è veru ca lu sangue di Gesù Cristu è nnô càlaciu di la Santa Missa! (MN4: 1465) GESA: Da tutti e due vado! L’ho da buttare in galera questo vecchiaccio scomunicato, che ha avuto il coraggio di dire che il figlio è suo, com’è vero che il sangue di Gesù Cristo è nel calice della santa messa! (MN1 903-905) GESA: Da tutt’e due, vado! In galera, vecchiaccio scomunicato! Ha avuto la tracotanza di dire che il figlio è suo, com’è vero che il sangue di Gesù Cristo è nel calice della santa messa! (MN1: 388)

From the stylistic point of view, these changes seem to prove Berman’s point of a general ‘loss of figurativity,’ which is conveyed by the ‘rationalization’ and the “stylistic ennoblement” (Berman 54; 57), two of the many tendencies that the scholar includes in his list of the most
common translational pitfalls. At the same time, they also reduce the local characterization of the text. The references to local culture, including lexicalized expressions of superstition, bigotry and devotion, might appear as part of that “Sicilian” crust that, initially met with success and critical appraisal, had started to alienate the sympathies of once favorable reviewers such as Piero Gobetti.

Not all the mentions of religion appear in highly conventional and stereotypical forms: some appearances of the sacred are more nuanced and problematic. One such example can be found in the following lines, coming from Act III in *Liolà*:

\[7\]

DON SIMUNE: È miu, è miu, è miu, sissignura, è miu! E nuddu s’avi arrisicari di diri cosa contra di me’.

DON SIMONE: È mio, è mio, è mio, sissignori, è mio! E non s’attenti nessuno di dir cosa contro mia moglie...

Nuddu s’avi arrisicari di diri cosa contra di me’ contorno mia moglie,
muglieri, ca vasannò vi altrimenti vi faccio veder
fazzu a vidiri a Cristu Cristo sdegnato! (MNI: 1484)
sdignatu! (MNI: 963)

The threat “vi faccio vedere il Cristo Sdegnato” is explained by the author itself as “vi faccio vedere come diventerò terribile” in a footnote to the 1917 bilingual edition (*Liolà* 105).

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219 Berman describes the rationalization in the following terms: “La rationalization fait passer l’original du concret à l’abstrait, pas seulement en ré-ordonnant linéairement la structure syntaxique, mais, par example, en traduisant les verbes par les substantifs, en choisissant, de deux substantifs, le plus general, etc.” (54). At the same times, as he claims, stylistic ennoblement complement rationalization: “L’ennoblissment n’est donc qu’une ré-écriture, un ‘exercice de style’ à partir (et aux dépens) de l’original.” (Berman 57).

220 Gobetti, a sworn enemy of vernacular theatre, comments the definitive rupture between Pirandello and Musco in 1923 in the following terms: “Luigi Pirandello ha ritirato le sue commedie dal repertorio di quel buffone che è Angelo Musco. Era ora! O l’arte di Pirandello sarebbe stata presto confusa (e già incominciava ad esserlo) con la produzione farsesca di altri autori (per modo di dire…) dialettali.” (Gobetti 101).
However, at a closer look, the line also contains an inter-textual reference to the narrative origin of the play: *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1904).

As is well known, *Liolà* can be considered a free adaptation of the events narrated in chapters III-IV in the novel - a circumstance that some recent critics have used to attenuate the relevance of Sicilianness in its plot. In this respect, Elio Gioanola polemically writes: “A mettere in ubbio la centralità del regionalismo in questa commedia così siciliana basterebbe questa considerazione: il personaggio di Liolà è nato da una costola di Mattia Pascal, protagonista del primo romanzo e liberamente ambientato, nell’esplicita volontà di liquidare ogni residuo naturalistico, fuori dalla Sicilia.” Gioanola further expands his argument, by claiming that Mattia Pascal “è anagraficamente ligure come potrebbe essere veneto o pugliese” (*Pirandello, la follia* 234).

Both the novel and the play are characterized by subtle and yet important references to Christianism. The expression ‘vedere il Cristo sdegnato’ first appears in Chapter VII of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*. Here, Mattia fantasizes about his counterfactual existence as Adriano Meis, inventing a displaced childhood in Argentina, an imaginary grandfather (perhaps a reflection of Pirandello’s own “stern” and indomitable heroic grandfather?) and, of course, a fugitive father:

> Misteriosi capricci della fantasia! Per quale inesplicabile bisogno e donde mi veniva d’immaginare in quel momento mio padre, quel Paolo Meis, come uno scavezzacollo? Ecco, sì, egli aveva dato tanti dispiacere al nonno: aveva sposato contro la volontà di lui e se n’era scappato in America. Doveva forse sostenere anche lui che Cristo era bruttissimo. *E brutto davvero e sdegnato* l’aveva veduto là, in America, se con la moglie lì lì per partorire, appena ricevuto il soccorso dal nonno, se n’era venuto via. (*Il fu Mattia Pascal* 412. My emphasis).

The coincidence is even more noteworthy, as the ‘invented’ story of Paolo Meis truly replicates the previous story of Mattia and of his own unhappy marriage – thus anticipating the foreseen, but never realized marriage of Liolà and Tuzza.
As is well known, the reference to Christ plays a crucial role in the novel, further articulating the development of Mattia Pascal as the archetypal Pirandellian character. The name of Christ is cited for the first time in chapter VII, when Mattia, who has recently come into money thanks to a lucky night of gambling, decides to take off and not to return home:

Viaggiavo con due signori che discutevano animatamente d'iconografia cristiana, in cui si dimostravano entrambi molto eruditi, per un ignorante come me.

Uno, il più giovane, dalla faccia pallida, oppressa da una folta e ruvida barba nera, pareva provasse una grande e particolar soddisfazione nell'enunciar la notizia ch'egli diceva antichissima, sostenuta da Giustino Martire, da Tertulliano e da non so chi altri, secondo la quale Cristo sarebbe stato bruttissimo.

Parlava con un vocione cavernoso, che contrastava stranamente con la sua aria da ispirato.

– Ma si, ma si, bruttissimo! bruttissimo! Ma anche Cirillo d'Alessandria! Sicuro, Cirillo d'Alessandria arriva finanche ad affermare che Cristo fu il più brutto degli uomini.

L'altro, ch'era un vecchietto magro magro, tranquillo nel suo ascetico squallore, ma pur con una piega a gli angoli della bocca che tradiva la sottile ironia, seduto quasi su la schiena, col collo lungo proteso come sotto un giog, sosteneva invece che non c'era da fidarsi delle più antiche testimonianze. (Il fu Mattia Pascal 407. My emphasis).

This conversation plays a crucial role in the novel, because it provides Mattia with the inspiration for his brand-new identity as Adriano Meis (a nom de plume inspired by the illustrious Roman emperor and the Idealist writer Camillo De Meis). Mattia Pascal, the narrative “father” of Nicola Schillaci alias Liolà, models his new identity on the imago Christi: his model is, however, that of a rather destitute Christ, devoid of any greatness, glory or beauty.

At the same time, the couple of anonymous travelers closely recall the two main characters of “Il tabernacolo,” a short story published in 1903 – roughly the same time of the composition of Il Fu Mattia Pascal. In the short story, the bigoted mason Scapolino confronts
Ciancarella, a devilish usurer with a scruffy appearance and a Boccaccio-themed name\textsuperscript{221}. The two couples of characters are likened not only by the stubborn opposition of their religious belief (“Il vecchietto seguitava a sostener pacificamente la sua opinione, che doveva esser contraria, perché quell’altro, incrollabile, guardando me, s’ostinava a ripetere: ‘Adriano’”, \textit{Mattia Pascal} 407), but also by their physical appearance, marked by details such as an ascetic and emaciated body (Scapolino and the older traveller) and a thick, oily, black beard (Ciancarella and the younger traveller). As in \textit{Il fu mattia Pascal} and \textit{Liolà}, in “Il Tabernacolo” the Pirandellian character is also identified with a destitute figure of Christ, and quite literally so. After being ordered by Ciancarella (a notorious atheist) to build a great tabernacle, Scapolino is left bankrupt when the usurer dies without leaving any record of their contract. Repeatedly defeated in trial, publicly humiliated and despised by his own family, Scapolino seeks refuge in the Tabernacle, taking on his shoulders the burden of a humbled Christ – or, as he says with a quite apt idiom, “un povero Cristo.” Scapolino therefore belongs to the militia of ascetic characters such as Pascal, Vitangelo Moscarda, Serafino Gubbio and so forth, who happily give up their mundane possessions to embrace a life of angelic purity (Jachia 205).

Both in the sketched figure of Scapolino and in the more detailed portrait of Mattia Pascal, one may recognize the image of “il Cristo bruttissimo e sdegnato” sought by Pirandello – one of the many masks of the Pirandellian hero, with its mixture of philosophical awareness and ineptitude, of humor and tragedy, of social misconduct and suffering. While the image of a comical Christ will later be replaced by more complex references in the successive development of Pirandello’s typology of characters, the author did look back at it, in recreating his Sicilian equivalent of Mattia Pascal.

This network of similarities and influences can help us casting further light on the anthropological significance of Liolà and Mattia Pascal, and on their relation to Pirandello’s native Sicily.

\textsuperscript{221} The similarities between Ciancarella and Ser Ciappelletto, the usurer of Decameron I, 1, are quite obvious: they both use their death as the means for a devilishly cruel mockery, and they both inadvertently provoke an explosion of religious fervor. Boccaccio’s presences in Pirandello’s productions have been mapped, among others, by Franco Zangrilli in his \textit{Pirandello e i Classici}.
The emphasis on religion appears to be a constant topic in the depiction of traditional Sicilian society: both the Sicilian version of *La giara* and of *Liolà*—the two plays more eminently concerned with the depiction of rural Sicily—are laced with religious references, a tendency that is consistent with . For instance, in her article “Cavalleria Rusticana from Verga and Mascagni to Zeffirelli” Daniela Bini notes how religious metaphors and tropes are increasingly emphasizes along the different adaptations of Verga’s archetypal play, with the gradual transformation of the mother (Gnà Nunzia in the short story, Mamma Lucia in the operatic adaptation) into a symbol of the Virgin Mary and in an archetypal mother (99); similarly, the Easter Mass provides a general framing for the entire dramatic situation, accentuating the opposition between sin and virtue that underlies the entire work. Bini concludes her argument noting how a similar opposition can be observed in another Pirandellian work, *La favola del figlio cambiato* (which was also the subject of an operatic adaptation, like ‘*A giarra/La giara* and *Liolà*). The identification of Sicilian setting, of Easter rituals (with their strong theatrical dimension) and Christian overtones thus appears to be a topos of Sicilian and bilingual theatre, a commonplace that bilingual authors exploited with expressive purposes.

At the same time, there are specific Christian overtones to the typology of the Pirandellian characters. Dwelling further on the similarities between Mattia Pascal/Adriano Meis and *Liolà*, in his *Pirandello e il suo Cristo*, Paolo Jachia has also proposed a reading based on Bakhtin’s notion of sacred laughter, seeing the novel as “a replica, parte seria, parte parodica, della passione di Cristo” (104). According to him, *Liolà* and Pascal/Meis respectively embody the Christological and the Dionysian penchant of the human mask; however, Jachia concludes that “la posizione ultima di Pirandello non è né ‘dionisiaca’ né ‘cristiana’ né in altro modo dogmaticamente religiosa, ma sempre profana, meglio umoristica e carnevale-polifonica” (100).

In his *Living Masks: The Achievement of Pirandello*, Umberto Mariani has proposed to use the notion of Pirandellian character as a paradigm to read his entire oeuvre, from the dialectal plays of the beginning to the metaphysical struggles of Cotrone. The Pirandellian character, who

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222 See, for instance the following expressions in *La giara*: “Sembra un libricino da messa!” (494) “Pare una badessa!” and “Suona come una campana” (501); Tararà’s glue is often compared to a *miraculous* invention, whereas the craftsman claims to have learned its recipe from the Devil.
“suffers, enduring thereby a timeless existential condition” (*Living masks* 3), can therefore be seen as a *Figura Christi* in the context of a Mattia-Liolà knot – both characters being a degraded version of Christological tropes and paradigms.

Liolà, with his cunning and his resourcefulness, is at the same time the most complete embodiment of the Pirandellian character and its most radical nemesis. He reverses the traditional outcome of the Pirandellian character by being able to work the social rules in his own favour – a role that in other works is normally played by *raisonneurs* such as Leone Gala and Ciampa. In other words, Liolà succeeds where Mattia Pascal had failed: he enjoys a new sexual conquest and yet walks away from the hypocrisy of rules, undefeated and unrestrained, thanks to his peasant and regional identity, and his undisputed acceptance of social norms.

These views are close to the ones expressed by Gramsci on Liolà, praised for its local roots and livelihood. In his essay “Gramsci, Pirandello e il dialetto” Nino Borsellino criticizes the interpretation of Gramsci as a generalization, based on an ideological reading: “Gramsci tends, in other words, to transform in a canon of cultural and esthetic judgment the dialectal experience of Pirandello and the result, in any case isolated, of Liolà.” (101). Borsellino reconstructs this ideological drive as based on three main elements: the criticism on the individualistic drive of Pirandello’s bourgeois characters, the intended opposition between folklore and Catholicism (henceforth the alleged “anti-Catholicism” of Pirandello) and the European origin of Pirandello’s vitalism (compared to the theories of the Russian director Nikolai Evreinov) (Borsellino 98-99).

A similar view is expressed by Renato Barilli in his *Pirandello: una rivoluzione culturale*, where the scholar criticizes the “populist” (rather than ‘popular’) label imposed to Pirandello by many critics: “Si è favoleggiato di un Pirandello finalmente disteso e sereno, ‘autentico,’ privo una volta tanto della maschera di cattiva filosofia, di tormento intellettuale con cui ci si presenta nella maggior parte delle occasioni” (169). As Barilli polemically comments such interpretations are mainly based on Liolà, seen as “opera genuina, improntata ad un felice vitalismo, a una distesa accettazione del proprio destino” (169). On the contrary, Barilli plays the genetic relation between *Mattia Pascal* and Liolà should against such interpretations. Far from representing a clash between the rural and the bourgeois worlds, Liolà would represent an anti-economic

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223 As Paolo Maria Sipalà notes in his article “Pirandello, Musco, e il caso Liolà,” Liolà “non rifiuta la logica della roba, anzi la rafforza fornendo a Mita un figlio legittimo per legittimare la trasmissione della ricchezza” (152).
mindset, praising the ‘dépense’ and the fully embodied by the gesture of the gambler in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* and by the unrestrained male fecundation in *Liolà* (Barilli 170).

Such views openly contrast with Sciascia’s reprise of Gramsci’s judgment. Sciascia violently rejects the consolidated interpretation launched by Adriano Tilgher, in the name of the opposition of “Form” and “Life:” according to him, the violent conflicts staged by Pirandello should not be seen as the result of an abstract, philosophical, clash of ideas, but they are rooted in the vivid reality of early twentieth century Sicily, on the faultlines of class and gender identity. If Sciascia has a valid point, by eliminating the seemingly marginal reference to his “Cristo Sdegnato,” the author has lessened the tie to Sicily, simultaneously effacing the presence of history and an important echo to his most famous novel, *Il Fu Mattia Pascal*.

4. From Persephone to *Lazzaro*: Sicily as the Afterworld

In his well-known review of *Liolà*, Gramsci also highlights the importance of classical tradition, by stating that “Liolà è una farsa che si riallaccia ai drammi satireschi della Grecia antica” (*Letteratura e vita nazionale* 73) and by citing the influence of the popular traditions of Magna Graecia. It is easy to recognize, in these lines, a reference to another episode revealing the author’s philosophy of translation: his Sicilian version of Euripides *U’ Ciclopu*, a satyr play based on the sequence of events narrated in Book IX of the *Odyssey*.

Partially published on *Il messaggero della domenica*, on November 13 1918, *U Ciclopu* was first staged on January 25, 1919, at the Teatro Argentina in Rome. The play was not published in volume until 1967. The text, edited by Antonino Pagliaro, is based on a stage manuscript: a circumstance that seems to suggest that *U Ciclopu* was never meant for the durable form of a published book, but was meant to be confined to the ephemeral world of theatre. The play was part of the repertoire of the *Compagnia del Teatro Mediterraneo*, together with works by Rosso di Sansecondo and Nino Martoglio. Therefore, despite its minor importance in the Pirandellian corpus, this translation has the value “di sintesi fra esigenze locali e soluzione di una crisi culturale latamente europea e mediterranea, qualcosa più che una riflessione sul declino dell’Occidente,” embodying the ideal of a Mediterranean literature (Favaro 41).
An avid reader of the classic in his youth, Pirandello expresses a non-conformist view of translation. From a theoretical point of view, his position often clashes with the more traditional views of Ettore Romagnoli, a scholar and a translator of classical languages, who had also translated Euripide’s *Cyclops* in 1911. In comparing the two author’s philosophies of translation, Favaro opposes Pirandello’s ideal of translation as a *conversio* to Romagnoli’s philological view of translation, aiming at reproducing formally the pace and the rhythm of the original. Pirandello believed that “non sia tanto necessaria una perfetta conoscenza del testo di partenza in sé considerata, quanto invece una perfetta conoscenza dell’opera da tradurre nel suo complesso, delle sue peculiarità stilistiche ed estetiche, del messaggio che l’autore avrebbe voluto trasferire ai suoi destinatari” (Favaro 48). He thus seems to reject the ideal of translation as equivalence, seeking not to repeat an equivalent version of the source text (“come se Euripide avesse scritto oggi il drama satiresco del *Ciclope*”) but rather to ‘recreate it,’ reproducing its original inner dialectics.

If Pirandello distances himself from Romagnoli’s translational philosophy, he closely follows its work from a textual standpoint. In his *Forma e tradizione*, Pagliaro demonstrated the genetic relations of the two texts beyond any possible doubt (Forma e tradizione 263). The collected evidence includes common missing lines, coinciding changes to the word order, and coinciding lexical choices. Finally, as Pagliaro claims, Pirandello follows and amplifies a preexisting tendency to “avviamento verso toni colloquiali facili e spregiudicati” (263), first established by Romagnoli in his earlier version.

One of the most compelling examples can be seen in the translation of vv 313-315:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Σιληνός</td>
<td>Siléno (Al Ciclòpe):</td>
<td>Silénu (a lu Ciclopu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>παραίνεσαι σοι βούλομαι:</td>
<td>Ascolta un mio consiglio.</td>
<td>Ascuta a mmia chiuttostu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τῷ ν θρό κρεν</td>
<td>Della carne</td>
<td>Non lassari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μηδὲ ν λίπες τὸ δί κρε, ἔν</td>
<td>di costui, non lasciare un solo bricciolo;</td>
<td>mancu ‘na muddichedda di la [carni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τε τῷ ν γλῶσσαν δάκτυλος,</td>
<td></td>
<td>di chissu! Comu trasi la so’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κομψός γενήσό κα</td>
<td></td>
<td>[lingua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>λαλίστατος, Κύκλωψ.</td>
<td>diverrai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Σιληνός

| Ascolta un mio consiglio.
| Della carne
| di costui, non lasciare un solo bricciolo;
| diverrai

Ascolta un mio consiglio.
Della carne
di costui, non lasciare un solo bricciolo;
diverrai
As Pagliaro notes, the translation with “tutto lingua” and “tuttu spirito” is quite different from the original (which simply reads, “And if you chew on his tongue, you will become clever and cultured,” Cyclops Kovacs) but it directly mirrors the solution proposed by Romagnoli. Furthermore, both “briciola” and “muddichedda” semantically expand on the original wording along the same line—literally meaning “don’t leave untouched a single bit of this man's flesh” (Kovacs).

This detail can help us understand one of the main directions of Pirandello’s expressionism: he emphasizes animal or alimentary metaphors, a typical feature of comical-realistic poetry. Consistently with the tradition of macaronic poetry that Pirandello cited in his Umorismo, both the Sylenus and the Cyclops see the world is a giant meal, ready to be crushed and digested.

Pirandello employs many lexical items referring to animals, either following an innovation by Romagnoli or adding a new element to the sentence. A few examples are ‘sutta ‘u so’ mussu’ (as opposed to Romagnoli’s literal rendering of ὀρκυς with “rete” [v. 196]); ‘dda bestia/di Ciclòpu’ for τὸν Κύκλωπος μαθίαν (literally, “the stupidity of the Cyclops”; but already Romagnoli animalizes the reference, with “quell’asino di Ciclope” [vv. 172-173]); ‘lu bistioni’ (as opposed to Romagnoli, ‘arfasatto’ [v. 489]); ‘cchiù muti di li pisci’ (following Romagnoli’s solution ‘siam muti più dei pesci’, as opposed to the original γνάθοις αθέρα = ‘holding our breath’, [v. 629]), ‘armalu’ (‘animal,’ as opposed to the original

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224 This and all following Greek citations, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the online edition of the Perseus Collection on the institutional website of Tufts University. See Euripides, Cyclops, “Perseus Collection”: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text;jsessionid=B165AB27E9BFEC7A521E9FD5B62A13F0?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0093 >. Retrieved on March 6, 2013.

225 All citations from the translation by Ettore Romagnoli are taken from the online edition: Euripide, Ciclope. Traduzione Ettore Romagnoli: <http://www.filosofico.net/euripideciclope42.htm>.
‘τλὀµον’, ‘merciless’, rendered by Romagnoli with ‘sacrilego’ [v. 370]), ‘porcu’ (an addition to Romagnoli’s text, which reads “poi che gonfio/ fu della carne dei compagni, e cadde / rovescioni, emettendo un fiato greve” [v. 410]). A zoomorphic connotation can also be seen in the choice of translating the vocative ‘ἀνθρωπίσκε’ (small man or mankin) with ‘scramuceddu’ (“newborn calf”). Pirandello thus animalizes the human nuance of the original wording, decidedly shifting the meaning of the text. Finally, it is noteworthy the choice of translating the plain τι δράσοµεν; [v.193] (“E adesso che si fa?” in Romagnoli;) with the culinary metaphor, no matter how crystallized, of “Semu fritti!”.

In addition to highlighting the most vulgar aspects of the text, Pirandello also accentuates the meta-theatrical aspect of the play, adding some original twists. See, for instance, the following lines:

[...] ὄλλῳ, εἶ θανεῖ δεῷ, κατθανοῦµεθ᾽ ὦ γενὸς ὄζοντες αἴνον τὸν πάρος συσσώσοµεν. [... No! Se d'uopo è morir, morrò da prode, o vivo serberò l'antica fama. [...] S’haju a moriri, vogghiu mòriri d’omu, e éssiri sempri pi chiuddu chi sugnu! (TD2 173)

[nn. 201-02]

(Online edition)

While Pagliaro maintains the literal meaning of the source text (“Rather, if I must die, I will die nobly—or live on and also retain my old reputation”), Pirandello adds an ironic twist to it. Ulysses, who will escape the revenge of the other Cyclopes’ by calling himself “Nobody,” demands to be called by his real name: ‘numinatu éssiri sempri pi chiuddu chi sugnu!’ (Teatro Dialettale 2 170).

Meta-theatricality is also achieved through the use of lexicon; once again, Pirandello often emphasizes a direction already undertaken by his predecessor. See for instance, the colourful translation of the following lines:
In the last example, Pirandello follows Pagliaro’s innovations quite literally. For instance, he phonetically adapts ‘brache a fiorami’ into ‘vrachi a ciurami.’ Both choices are quite distant from the original word “ποικίλους,” simply meaning ‘multi-coloured.’ Later on, Pirandello follows Romagnoli’s translation but makes it more explicit, replacing ‘princisbecco’ (pinchbeck) with ‘ramazzu argentatu’ (a literal explanation of what pinchbeck is, an alloy of cooper and zinc used to fake the appearance of gold). In particular, both translators eliminate the semantic element of ‘gold’ present in χρύσεον (literally meaning ‘golden’). While in Euripides’ play Helen is seduced by real wealth (powerfully symbolized by gold and dyed clothes, the status symbols of the time), for the translator she is merely seduced by the theatrical display of it. The wealth and the nobility later praised by Polyphemus in his well-known tirade on richness [vv.316-345] are nothing more than a scenic illusion, one of the countless tricks in the arsenal of the comedian: indeed, we are not very far from Pirandello’s well-known “strappo nel cielo di carta.”

As Pagliaro notes, “la traduzione di Pirandello si studia di rendere vivo e popolare il discorso mediante interrogazioni, esclamazioni, sospensioni, amplificazioni” (256). Common interjections, stock phrases and oral conjunctions are therefore introduced in the text, making its pace more lively and spontaneous. The version of Pagliaro belongs to the grandiose style of poetry; while the lexicon shows the occasional presence of popular and lower entries, his syntax
and rhetoric are still very conservative. On the contrary, the language adopted by Pirandello is striking in its immediacy, modernity, and conversational realism. Finally, Pirandello emphasizes the vulgarity of the script, even recurring to obscene language, as ‘assalarma’ [TD2 167] (as noted by Pagliaro, “una bizzarra imprecazione di bassa lega,” 269), and ‘mannu a futtirisi’ (TD2 168), a rather obscene translation of ‘κλαίειν κελεύων’ [v. 174].

The lines of Sylenus and the other Satyrs are laced with pejoratives (-azzu) and diminutives (-uzzu and, to a minor extent, -eddu), increasing both the expressive violence and the vulgarity of their speech. Some examples are vintazzu, figghiazzi (twice), sirvazzi picurara, vagabunnazzi, ‘nfamazzu, ramazzu, vilunazzu, ucchiazzu (twice). Non-suffixed substantives such as ‘pazzu’ and ‘matarazzu’ (TD1 184) also recur in rhyming position, reinforcing the same sound pattern. A few pejoratives, such as ‘vicchiazzu’ and ‘cuttiddazza,’ are also found in the lines of the Cyclops, where none occurs in the parts of Ulysses.

Diminutives are often used in naming animals, foods, cooking tools or wine: agnidduzzi, vinuzzu (twice), crapuzzi, vinareddu, minnuzzi, vitedduzzi, mulunedda, muddichedda, scramuceddu, sulu suliddu (twice), caruseddi. Also noteworthy are the addresses ‘patroneddu miu’ and ‘Ciclopuzzu,’ (TD1 174): here the diminutive serves an affective purpose, a sort of grotesque flattery towards Polyphemus).

Significantly, Ulysses’ lines do not display the same Sicilian modifying suffix listed above, but hybrid Italian-Sicilian forms such as ‘sorsellinu,’ (TD1 166) and ‘farcettu’ (TD1 180), two phonological adaptations of Italian diminutives (respectively ‘sorsellino’ and ‘falcetto’). Ulysses does, however, use a traditional form, ‘occidduzzi’ (TD1 180). Quite meaningful, this word coincides with an emotional peak, as the hero is relating the gruesome feast of the Cyclops. In this passage, as Andrea Camilleri suggests, Ulisse “perde di colpo, dimentica [la propria parlata], quando vede i suoi compagni mangiati dal Ciclope: qui egli ritrova il dialetto natio puro e semplice, senza ricercatezze. E’ un bellissimo effetto teatrale” (“Totò contro i ciclopi”).

This different distribution of lexical and morphological elements is clearly related to the particular image of Sicily that Pirandello achieves, in choosing his linguistic tools. Not surprisingly, the main innovation brought by Pirandello lays in the diversified use of the language, as critics and reviewers of this text have not failed to notice. For instance, Pagliaro
qualifies the language of Sileno as “urban-sounding” [“cittadinesco”]: the language of “un vecchio che dalla lunga esperienza ha tratto un’elementare e gretta capacità di destreggiarsi in ogni frangente” (268). The language of Ulysses also belongs to the city, but falls into a more refined sub-set, being mostly an Italian-sounding version of Sicilian. “Il linguaggio di Ulisse,” writes Pagliaro, “si tiene sempre a un livello di rusticana ricercatezza, che ricorda quella di un uomo del contado che voglia darsi un tono; egli è un eroe, e il suo parlare ha una forte venatura borghese, un’intenzione di superiorità che fa pensare ai modi di un mafioso dozzinale” (266). This hybrid language naturally creates comical effects thanks to the clash of lofty language and vernacular forms. Pagliaro substantiates his claims with an example from line 171, “Te l’hai infilatu per beni il cannarozzu” [v. 171]. In particular, the scholar highlights the sharp contrast between the use of an Italian determinative article (‘il’, as opposed to the Sicilian ‘u’) and a dialectal voice such as ‘cannarozzu’, Pagliaro 266).

While Sylenus and Ulysses both belong to the world of the city, the Cyclops represents a rural and ancestral identity, perfectly embodied by his archaic language. According to Pagliaro, the Cyclops expresses “un’affettività elementare per gli animali e le forze della natura,” alongside an instinctive fear of the foreigner and the alien. At the same time, the scholar highlights the intrinsic contradiction of a character the Cyclop, who persuasively advocates for the practice of anthropophagy in a terrifying mixture of rational and irrational thinking. While this apparent contradiction might prove Baudrillard well-known statement on the complex nature of cannibalistic societies,226 for Pagliaro it simply shows that the rural and patriarchal ideology of the Cyclops is not devoid of complexity and, to some extent, sophistication.

A more simplistic interpretation of the Cyclops is provided by Franco Zangrilli in his otherwise insightful Pirandello e i classici. For Zangrilli, the Cyclops embodies all the downsides of the ancestral society (its backwardness, its bestiality), while Ulysses represents its positive features, such as the instinctive sense of honour and the sacred respect for the guest (Pirandello e i classici 40). At the same time, Ulysses and Sylenus are also in contrast: there is a latent conflict between “la personalità lasciva, buffonesca ed oscillante di Sileno” and “quella

226 In his work The Symbolic Exchange of Death, the French philosopher claims: “Cannibals themselves do not claim to live in a state of nature, nor in accordance with their desire at all; they quite simply claim, through their cannibalism, to live in a society, the most interesting case being a society that eats its own dead” (138)
inflessibile, seria ed onesta di Ulisse” (40). Zangrilli relates these different psychologies to archetypes of Pirandellian characters, and to the social types of his vernacular plays:

Infatti nei tre personaggi di questo dramma Pirandello avrebbe potuto vedere caratteri e comportamenti dei suoi personaggi siciliani: Sileno possiede l’astuzia che sarà di Liolà e Chiarchiaro; Ulisse l’onestà e l’intelligenza di Ciampa e di Baldovino; Polifemo è rustico e primitivo come Tararà, Zi’ Dima. (41)

Andrea Camilleri also notes important similarities between the Sicilian setting of Pirandello’s plays (particularly Liolà and La giara) and his translation of ‘U ciclopu in a brief article, partially based on the writer’s personal experience in directing ‘U Ciclopu for a stage performance in 1978. In his essay, Camilleri affirms that “Pirandello certamente avrà trovato delle affinità, che la sua traduzione avrebbe reso più evidenti, tra il mondo contadino di Liolà (1916) e di ‘A giarra (1917) e quello del Ciclope.” To this fascinating genealogy, one might be tempted to add aldo d’Annunzio’s La figlia di Iorio, and namely Lazzaro’s affirmation of patriarchy in Act I Scene 2, which sounds particularly gruesome in Borgese’s Sicilian translation:

LAZARO: Io sono il tuo padre; e di te far posso quel che m’aggrada, perché tu mi sei come il bue della mia stalla, come il badile e la vanga. E s’io pur ti voglia passar sopra con l’erpice, il dosso diromperti, be’, questo è ben fatto. E se mi bisogni al coltello un manico ed io me lo faccia del tuo stinco, be’, questo è ben fatto; perché io son padre e tu figlio, intendi? E a me data è su te ogni potestà, fin dai tempi

LAZZARU: Iu sugnu to’ patri e di tia pozzi fari ‘nzoccu mi piaci, ca tu si’ pi mia comu la pala e lu zappuni. E macari si vogghiu passariti cu l’erpici e rumpiritu li schini, beni, chistu è ben fattu. E si hai bisognu di un mànicu di cuteddu e iu mi lu fazzu cu li to’ ossa, beni, chistu è ben fattu, pircihi iu sugnu patri e tu fégu iu ntenni? E m’è data supra di tia ogni potestà di li tempi di li tempi, supra ogni liggi.
Building on the triadic structure already identified by Pagliaro, Camilleri claims that “l'invenzione più geniale e sorprendente di questa traduzione è nell'uso, del tutto assente tanto in Euripide quanto in Romagnoli, di tre parlate diverse tra loro, quella del Ciclope, quella di Ulisse e quella di Sileno, ognuna delle quali connota l'appartenenza a un diverso status sociale.”

Camilleri does not dwell on the rural identity of the Cyclops and the urban identity of Sylenus, but defines the urban word of Ulysses as a a salesman pitch [“parlata di rappresentanza”]: “Il modo di parlare di Ulisse fa venire in mente immediatamente Totò che si ritiene uomo di mondo perché ha fatto il militare a Cuneo.” (Camilleri, online edition)

Although his views of translation sharply contrast with the praxis of translational equivalence, in replicating the linguistic layers (and their dialectic relationships) of the original text Pirandello ends up problematizing the social stratification of his ‘target’ code. By choosing to give a Sicilian face to his notion of Classicity, Pirandello problematizes his own linguistic tool, describing its social tensions and conflicts. The linguistic stratification of U Ciclope is closely related to the theory of language already emerged in Pirandello’s own dialectal works, and namely with the distinction between urban and rural dialect theorized in the introduction to Liolà. None of the characters, of course, speak the ‘dolce parlata natia’ chosen by Pirandello for his ‘commedia campestre’. However, it is easy to relate Ulysses’s hybrid language to the notion of “dialetto borghese,” a urban variety spoken by the wannabes of the new rising class:

Si tu, sopra un bon pranzu, nni tracanni
senza risparmio, e ti abbrevìri il ventri
fino a saziità, poi, dormi in chino.
Se cci vai fiacco, t’ardi, e poi baschii.

(TD1190)

These few lines display traits belonging to a variety of linguistic codes: Standard Italian (‘senza risparmio’, ‘sopra’), Literary Italian (‘t’ardi’), phonologically adapted Italian or Sicilian regional koiné (ventri, saziità, bon), and traditional rural Sicilian (‘tracanni’, ‘baschii’). The syntax is fully Italian; however, the language is far from being a realistic imitation of a koiné, closely resembling the multilingual speech of Commedia dell’Arte.

Rather than reproducing the “dialetto borghese” of Toti and Ciampa – who, in fact, are highly proficient in both Italian and dialect, and therefore rely on code-switching as an expressive strategy – the language of Ulysses recalls that of Nittu Cinquemani, heavily marked by the recurrent use of code-mixing.227

Rather than being a realistic reproduction of contemporary linguistic stratification, the dialect of ‘U Ciclopì acts as an ‘archaizing’ filter on the text. “Sicilianness” therefore coincides with a cultural root, an identity seen in close conjunction with the elaboration of Mediterraneism and the short-lived illusions of a new classical age.

The connection between Sicily and the return to a pre-Christian, Mediterranean, golden age can also be found in a different wave of works, which directly question the boundaries between reality and illusion, drawing on the anthropology of the local celebration of the Dead. Sicily thus becomes Trinacria, the mythical land where Classic forms and topoi (such as the descent to Hades) resurface, against the pressure of modern social norms.

If the vernacular translation of the Cyclops represent Pirandello’s own classical take on the farcical language already degraded by crass Sicilian comedians (beginning with the farces of Musco and Marchese), a completely view of Classicism emerges from All’uscita (1916), one of Pirandello’s darkest plays, which the author oxymorically defines “mistero profano.” This

227 For the difference between Code-Switching and Code-Mixing, and its implications in assessing the speaker’s competence, see Poplack 1981.
definition, however, should not be interpreted too rigidly: as Ilona Fried has noted in her article “Teatro e… dizionari,” for Pirandello “i generi son o fondamentalmente categorie larghe,” while historical categories such as Mystery or “Tragedy” also require a certain degree of “re-conceptualization” (170-171). Therefore, if a first glance the definition as “mistero” would seem to point in the same direction of the many christological and evangelical references already seen in the opening scene of Liolà and in other Sicilian plays, All’uscita overwhelmingly resonates with classical and folkloristic reminiscences.

In this short one-act play, Pirandello presents his audience with a pagan vision of the afterlife. The souls of the deads appear under the guise of evanescent “illusioni,” lingering on earth for a few final instants before vanishing in the void: their lack of status closely resembles the condition of the shadows in the Reign of Hades. More importantly, these ghosts denounce the deceitful nature of life, which is, in turn, nothing but a mere game of illusions:

IL FILOSOFO: Perché voi forse, pover'uomo, vi figuraste in vita di vederle e toccarle come cose vere, codeste forme; mentre erano soltanto illusioni necessarie del vostro essere, come del mio, che per consistere in qualche modo, capite? avevano bisogno (e l'hanno tuttora) di creare a se stessi un'apparenza. Non capite proprio? (Maschere Nude I 1050)

The sophistic attitude of the Philosopher echoes the similar attitude displayed by the Pedagogo in La sagra del Signore della Nave – not surprisingly, both characters are in an antagonistic relation to an obese man [un uomo grasso], whose abnormally fat body symbolizes the crassness of material pursuits. This rationalistic attitude can be seen as a typical manifestation of the Pirandellian anxiety of “guardarsi vivere, e non vivere,” the abstract posture that emphasizes the underlying contradictions of existence; at the same time, some elements of the character’s materialistic philosophy are also derived from the views of Stoicism or Epicureanism, further articulating the Classical legacies of this play.

If the speech of the philosopher reminds key element of Classical philosophy, the most remarkable reference to classicity points in a different direction, to a mythical depiction of Sicily. In the play, the last ghost to enter the scene is that of a young boy, who hastily gulps a pomegranate before fading away. As the philosopher explains, that pomegranate was the last
desire left to the little boy: his soul was clinging to that unfulfilled desire and is now ready to melt into thin air.

This scene establishes a direct reference to the myth of the Rape of Persephone, which is also set in the mythical land of Trinacria. In Ovid’s version of the myth, Persephone – her name changed to Proserpina – is unable to fully return to the surface of the Earth as she inadvertently ate a few grains from a pomegranate,\(^\text{228}\) and is therefore forced to return to the Kingdom of Hades for a corresponding number of months, thus providing a mythological explanation for the cycle of seasons. The mention of a pomegranate is thus a spatially connoted metaphor, directly pointing to Sicily as the true land of the deads.

Finally, the ruralism of All’uscita should also not be overlooked: while there are not specific geographical cues – except for the Sicilian setting of the myth of Persephone, clearly evoked by the pomegranate –, the landscape is both Southern and rural. More importantly, the mystery of death is partially shown to a family of peasants, who stumble upon the objects and the symbols the dead left behind. The ghosts are incorporeal, but, the oldest peasant senses their presence thanks to his own ancestral knowledge – a set of beliefs that, we can assume, coincides with the syncretic cult of the dead well alive in Sicily.

Not only the symbol of an oppressive anthropology and of an all-encompassing social control, Sicily also becomes the space of a mythical cult of dead- thus identifying with the land of an mythical, archaic, pre-Christian Mediterraneism.

\(^{228}\) “Dixerat, at Cereri certum est educere natam;/ non ita fata sinunt, quoniam ieiunia virgo/ solverat et, cultis dum simplex errat in hortis, / puniceum curva decerpsen arbore pumum /sumptaque pallenti septem de cortice grana/ presserat ore suo, solusque ex omnibus illud/ Ascalaphus vidit, quem quondam dicitur Orphne, / inter Avernales haud ignotissima nymphas, / ex Acheronte suo silvis peperisse sub atris;/ vidit et indicio reditum crudelis ademit.” Ovid, Metamorphosis, V, 533-543.
5. The Translator on Stage: Functions and Uses of Code-Switching.

In his 1997 volume *Pirandello e la Follia*, Gioanola has highlighted the relevance of Bakhtin’s paradigms for a full understanding of Pirandello’s notion of “umorismo” and the liberating value of folly in his plays. Common features include the composite nature of the text, the use of dialects and argots, the presence of a philosophical message and of a rationalistic attitude, the use of parodist or comic reversal, the reversal of perspective, the metaphors of crowning and dethroning, the recurrent *topos* of the double, and the deep crisis of epic-tragic heroes (*Pirandello e la follia* 23-26). Double-coding and irony are thus essential notions in order to understand the subversive poetics of narrative works such as *Il Fu Mattia Pascal* and later plays such as *Enrico IV* and *Così è se vi pare*. A similar view is also expressed by Giancarlo Mazzacurati in his 1993 preface to *Il fu Mattia Pascal*; here the critic presents the raisonneur “come una maschera dell’autore” (4): once again, the apparent monologism of narration opens up, in order to include other voices and presences.

Given the importance of double-coding and irony, it should come as no surprise that, together with the tradition of Medieval sacred theatre, Pirandello also cites the secular vernacular comic tradition of the early Renaissance. Not only does Nociu/Ciampa’s final eulogy of madness in *A biritta cu i’ ciancianeddi / Il berretto a sonagli* recall themes and arguments from Erasmus’ well-known *Praise of Folly*, but in the stratagem ending the play one might be tempted to recognize an echo of the finale of *The Farce of Maître Pathelin* (1457). In the latter text, the Shepherd, who has been instigated by his lawyer Pathelin to simulate madness for the whole duration of a trial, recurs to the same trick in order to avoid paying his dues to Pathelin.

The similarities between this episode and the ending of *A biritta/Il berretto* are evident. In both plays, a character recurs to the same farcical motive, as they mimicking an animal voice to simulate madness. The creative use of onomatopoeia encompasses at once the rejection of verbal thought and the complete adhesion to the subversive world of folly:

PATHELIN: Dis, Agnelet.
LE BERGER: Bée.
PATHELIN: Viens çà, viens.
Ta besogne est-elle bien faite ?
LE BERGER: Bée.
PATHELIN: Ta partie s'est retraite.
Ne dis plus bée, il n'y a force.
Lui ai-je baillé belle entorse ?
t'ai-je point conseillé à point ?
LE BERGER: Bée.
PATHELIN: Hé déa, on ne t'orra point.
Parle hardiment, ne te chaille.
LE BERGER: Bée.
PATHELIN: Il est temps que je m'en aille.
Paie-moi.

The Farce de Maistre Pathelin is not listed among the bibliographical records of Pirandello, reconstructed in detail by Alfredo Barbina in his La biblioteca di Pirandello. Yet, the anonymous author of the farce left his mark on the works of François Rabelais, and most notably on the latter’s Thiers Livre, centred on the verbal funambulism of Panurge and containing a parody of courtroom language. While there is no direct evidence suggesting that Pirandello did know the text of Pathelin, Rabelais was certainly part of his cultural background: the author cites him several times, from his early article on the comic poet Cecco Angiolieri “Un preteso poeta umorista del secolo XIII,” to his lecture “L’Umorismo” (see in particular Saggi e interventi 827-28).²²⁹

As Carol J. Chase and Marie-Sol Ortolà have noted, The farce of Maistre Pathelin is characterized by a fervid linguistic creativity. The farce enacts the adoption of a communicative system that is distinct from ordinary language, obeys its own rules, and allows its user to debunk the system of shared values and beliefs – whose only function is to allow the economic

²²⁹ Once again, the two texts are genetically related, as Pirandello several passages of his previous, much less known, work in L’umorismo, reverting to his usual “self-plagiarizing” ways.
exploitation of the poorest. Pathelin’s display of verbal agency normally takes place in the public setting of the market or the trial (the open space of the Fair, as Bakhtin would have it), a public speech that subverts the word of the other: “In this section [the trial] Joceaulme loses control of his language and uses strong oaths, similar to those used in Pathelin's mad scene. In the draper's mouth, however, these oaths assume a negative or destructive value; they express his anger and frustration and lead to his defeat. In contrast to Pathelin, Joceaulme does not know how to use words, since he has no wit.” (Chase-Ortolà 142)

Pathelin triumphs because he is able to free his own language from the restrictions and limitations of judicial language; he primarily does so by assuming a playful, carnivalesque and heterogeneous language. In the finale, however, the resourceful laywer succumbs to the Shepherd, who is able to subvert the language at a deeper level by virtue of his own marginality. By adopting the onomatopoeia of his own mask, the Shepherd ventures one step ahead of Pathelin, as he renounces logical human reasoning: no matter how flamboyant, none of Pathelin’s verbal inventions had gone so far. Chase and Ortolà describe the difference between the two characters in the following way:

Pathelin and the shepherd (with Pathelin's word) degrade the official language of classification and social domination. Because of his position at the margin of society (he is nothing in a world ruled by money), the shepherd is able to destroy the power of officialdom by negating meaning in its communication system and reducing its language to a mere sound: "Bee." The comical effect of such a linguistic reduction is indubitable. The parody of authority that Pathelin sketches through double entendre and puns is completed by the shepherd with his use of the onomatopoetic word, which serves as a barrier between his world and the official one represented by the draper and, to a certain extent, by Pathelin. Thus language becomes powerful as a means to break down hierarchy (143).

Words are therefore reduced to their nature of ‘verbal gesture’: a burst of echolalia, devoid of any meaning. The Shepherd’s onomatopoeic mockery is therefore close to the notion of “jargon absolu,” coined by Zumthor to describe self-referential, absolute, use of language: “Il s’agit là d’un pur effet sonore, inséparable d’une mimique qu’il a pour fonction de renforcer, et qui ne
tient plus au langage que, justement, par le lien du vers” (Essai de Poétique Médiévale 433). To some extent, the same is also true of the onomatopoeic line of Donna Biatrici, which starts as a mocking onomatopoeia and progressively turns into an inarticulate, hopeless, inhuman cry.

However, differences prevail over similarities, and the apparent outburst of folly represented by Pirandello completely subverts the early-modern mockery of the Shepherd. Biatrici is not voluntarily “playing the fool” in order to take advantage of her marginal position; on the contrary, she is forced to wear the derogatory and slanderous label of folly by her family, who unexpectedly sides with Don Nociu/Ciampa in order to protect their reputation. The power dynamics of the episode are especially evident in the Sicilian version of the play, where the final episode was sanctioned and “amplified” by the choral comment of the neighbors:

VICEI E VICINE: Signor Delegatu, ma è veru?
DELEGATO SPANÒ: Purtroppo, purtroppo!
VICEI E VICINE: Oh povira signura! Oh chi focu granni! Povira signura! Ma, veru piazza? (TDS2 153)

In the Italian translation, instead, the curtain falls on the “wild, pleasured and desperate” laughter of Ciampa, which appears to be charged with many possible nuances.

While the Shephard fools the powerful lawyer by stealing the latter’s own trick, Donna Biatrici lacks the necessary strength to subvert her ‘imposed’ disguise of madness: the linguistic power is firmly in the hands of Nociu, who knows how to exploit the alternation between the code of the court and that of his native countryside. The latter is in turn a skilled and effective cultural mediator, capable of reframing the situation that others seemingly have already written on his body. His double linguistic proficiency, evident in his fluent and non-chalant use of Code-Switching, is seemingly a metaphor of his cultural double coding: a truly twofold character, don Nociu/Ciampa is at ease both when adopting Italian (the code of the records he diligently
transcribes) and when returning to his vernacular, a code of honour. Although his verbal cunning would appear to make him similar to Maistre Pathelin, the role of Nociu/Ciampa is indeed closer to that of the Shepherd: both characters successfully play their inferior and subaltern status by “playing the fool,” tricking their masters into sheer madness.

Both in the Italian and the Sicilian version, Nociu/Ciampa manipulates the scandalous breach that Donna Beatrice has opened in the language, by insisting in naming what should not be named, her husband’s sexual escapades. Exactly like Liolà, Nociu/Ciampa is a victorious peasant; however, he does not achieve his goal by rejecting social conventions, but by playing on them, taking advantage on his own cultural ambivalence.

From a social point of view, Ciampa belongs to the rising class of “campieri” and “faccendieri”, the same that Verga has depicted in his Vita dei campi or Mastro-Don-Gesualdo, and that Pirandello himself had portrayed in his 1913 novel I vecchi e i giovani, which offers a bitter portrait of the disillusion following the Italian unification and a crude depiction of the failed rebellion of the Fasci Siciliani in 1894. From a social point of view, Don Nociu/Ciampa has risen above the unskilled labourers or peasants he now controls and manages, but he still formally needs the seal of approval of the ‘notabili’ – a label that includes the incompetent Don Fifì, idle and burdened by a growing gambling debt. Even his physical appearance, cheerfully described in both versions of the play, bears the mark of this ambiguity: the ‘pen’, a tool of his craft, places him in the world of the literate people, but his own name, “Pampina” (the Sicilian for ‘grape leaf’) stands as an undeniable reminder of his peasant roots.

If the reference to the double coding of Renaissance comedy is the natural paradigm to voice the feeling of social ambiguity, at a textual level the same meaning is conveyed by bilingualism and by its most typical manifestation, code-switching.

Contrarily to what one might expect, the linguistic surface of the play is not a unique, homogeneous “vernacular.” In the play, dialect constantly alternates with spoken Italian. On the

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230 See in particular Joseph Farrel’s article “The duel and the code of honour in Pirandello:” where the scholar notes that Pirandellian characters like Ciampa, Professor Toti or Biagio Speranza belong to a “chosmos open to other forces, including irony, self-awareness, a sense of the absurd and the fatal tendency to watch oneself alive,” as opposed to the “closed world” of Alfio and Turiddu.
one hand, we have occasional instances of code-mixing, like the ones already detected in the urban dialect of Cinquemani in Pinsaci, Giacominu! or in the hybrid language of Ulysses in 'U Ciclopi. In this regard, the hesitation between equivalent forms such as ‘mogghi,’ ‘mugliera’ and ‘mogli’ could be seen as the evidence of different degrees of language-interference among the characters; this is also the case with the many linguistic puns or nonce-borrowings, and other stylized embryos of inter-language. On the other hand, we have the presence of structured code-switching, occurring in the same conversational turn and in correspondance with syntactical boundaries – that is, seemingly fulfilling the Equivalence constraint. The lack of code-switching therefore appears not only as a major translational change, but as the single most relevant consequence of the decision of translating the script into Italian. Such change could be easily described by Berman’s claim of the loss of inner multilingualism, or “destruction ou exotisation des réseaux langagiers vernaculiers.” As Berman claims, every great language of prose has a close relation to its vernaculars, due both to the polyphonic nature of prose and to the need for immediacy and concreteness: “seules les koinai, les langues cultivées, peuvent s’étraduire.” (La traduction de la lettre 63-64).

Far from being an isolated patch of linguistic colour, code-switching is one of the main conversational strategies available to the speakers in A Birritta a sonagli and it give structure to entire scenes. As Monica Heller has pointed out in her article “Strategic Ambiguity: Code-Switching in the Management of Conflict”, code-switching in culturally marked contexts

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231 In her original description of the phenomenon, Shana Poplack had proposed only two constraints, the free morpheme constraint and the equivalence constraint. The free morpheme constraint states that “codes may be switched after any constituent provied that constituent is not a bound morpheme. This constraint holds true for all linguistic levels but the phonological one. The equivalence constraint stated that “code-switches will tend to occur at points in the discourse where juxtaposition of L1 and L2 elements does not violate a syntactic use of either language, i.e. at points among which the surface structures of each languages map onto each other.” However, several constraints were added to that, such as the Government Constraint (DiSciullo, Muysken and Singh), according to which CS is not supposed to take place between verb and its governed object (be it a sentence or a phrase), nor between a preposition and its governed complementizers. While several studies on typologically distinct varieties seemed to question the universal validity of such questions (Bentahila Davies), Anna Giacalone Ramat and Giovanna Alfonzetti brought counterexample within the Italian/Dialect case, demonstrating that neither typological similarity necessarily guarantees the validity of syntactical constraints. However, the dialects of Northern Italy and Southern Italy do not show the same syntactical behaviour: systematical infractions were detected by both scholars only in southern Italian varieties, such as in the following example, taken from Northern Calabrese, showing an infraction to Government Constraint: No, ca iu vuolliu vide mio figlio, ca io cce l’aju lu jatu. [No, I want to see my son, I've got enough breath] // (qtd. in Giacalone Ramat 58) Similarly, Sicilian dialects violate the Equivalence Constraint with reference to the syntactical rule of verb position within the sentence, allowing final position in Sicilian but not in Italian.
expresses meaning in three different ways: “One level of meaning derives [...] from the social organization of language use in the community; [...] [t]he second level of meaning derives from the interpersonal relationship between speakers in the particular context of the activity in which they are engaged[...] . A third level of meaning [is] the semantic content of specific instances of switching” (“Strategic ambiguity” 81). All three levels (the community, the interaction, the semantic content) are present in A Birritta.

Most importantly, code-switching is not universally distributed among all characters. While most characters are monolingual speakers of dialect (with occasional borrowing from Italian or even instances of Code-Mixing), Donna Biatrìci, Don Nociu, and Delegato Spanò use code-switching consistently throughout the play. Their double proficiency in Italian and vernacular seems to suggest that these characters – who are bi-dialectal and bi-cultural speakers – can operate as ‘mediators’ and ‘translators-in-the texts.’ Their linguistic proficiency thus mirrors their social identity, which is hybrid and contains both elements of subalternity (gender, for Donna Biatrìci; peasant origin for Nociu) and of power (social status for Donna Biatrìci; economic power for Nociu). This is especially the case of Don Nociu and Spanò, two ambitious characters who act as mediators and take advantage of pre-existing social conflicts.

Code-switching occurs both in relation to the content of the exchange and to the dynamics among participants, that is to say, as discourse-related and participant related CS (Auer 34). The difference between these two functions can be clearly illustrated by the following examples:

[1] DON NOCIU: Ma questa è la vita, don Fifì! Conservare il rispetto della gente, signora! Tenere alto il pupo – qual egghié – ca tutti ci facissiru sempri tantu di cappellu! Non so se mi sono spiegato. Vinendu a nui, signura: - Chi cc’è jiri a ffari ‘nPalermu?

232 In her seminal article “Sometimes I’ll start a sentence in English y termino in Español,” Poplack argues that CS is generally considered the most suitable code for bilinguals, since proficient bilinguals tend do switch within the boundaries of a same sentence (Poplack 588).
In the first example, code-switching allows Nociu to switch from his role as ‘interested party’ to his meta-theatrical role, for instance when the speaker resorts to Italian to offer implicitly a further clarification (“non so se mi sono spiegato”). At the same time, the word “pupo” acts as a *tag* (“Sometimes I’ll start a sentence” 589), since its clear connection to the cultural identity of Sicily triggers the speaker to switch from Italian to vernacular.

In the second excerpt, the characters maintain their preferred codes: CS appears to be Participant-related, rather than Discourse-related. Don Nociu sticks to Italian – the language of rationality and social civility – while Biatrici sticks to vernacular, a more suitable choice to express rage and rebellion. The lack of verbal cooperation among characters further emphasizes their open conflict: each character maintains their own code, without any concession to the opponent.

It should come as no surprise that, among all the strategies displayed in the dialectal version, CS has no space or suitable equivalent in the Italian translation *Il berretto a sonagli*. In fact, in the new philosophical view of Pirandello, the only possible equivalent for the use of CS is provided by folly itself: the most powerful metaphor of madness, that of a string [“la corda pazza”] does not appear in the vernacular script, but came to Pirandello’s mind only in the 1923 translation. In an essay titled “Code-switching and the politics of language,” Heller has suggested that

> Code-Switching works where there is ambiguity to be created or exploited in a situation where participants agree as what the ambiguity is. It permits people to say and do, indeed to be, two or more things where normally a choice is expected. It allows people to take refuge in the voice of the other, in order to do or say things that normally
they would not be able to get away with. Or it allows them to assert their own voice to claim new roles, new rights and obligations. (93).

Talking the language of the other in order to say things that “normally one would not be able to get away with” is, in fact, very similar to wearing a madcap, or a fool’s mask, allowing you to tell the truth in a safe fashion. Being deprived of the chance of speaking “the other’s tongue” through creative use of conversational code-switching, characters have no other escape from their linguistic reality. Their only possible Otherness is that of ‘madness’ – one that, however, can only speak the aseptic, monotone Italian of the bourgeoisie.

6. Lost (Women) in Translation. The Re-Writing of Female Characters in the “Trilogy of Dishonour”

Not only do translational changes affect the representation of cultural systems at large, such as the class conflict between the parvenus and the traditional rural elites or the folkloristic value of religion; they also affect the gender dynamics of the plays, completely reinventing the agency, the perspective, and the voice of female characters. This is especially the case of Pensaci Giacomino, Il Berretto a Sonagli and Liolà, the three plays that Andrea Bisicchia has suggestively dubbed “la trilogia del disonore.”

All three plays subvert traditional family rules, approaching scandalous topics such as illegitimate births, infidelities and broken marriages. Moreover, they all represent deep and complex female characters, speaking with a voice of their own, expressing personal beliefs and wishes and, at times, making rebellious statements. Finally, in all three plays the author represents a conflict between the conventional dimension of marriage and the true links of blood, motherhood, and love.

In these plays, the representation of gender is affected in a variety of ways: the reshaping of the relation between characters (by means of suppressed or merged lines), the different use of social markers such as honourific titles or courtesy forms, and finally, the censorship of vocabulary, with the consistent elimination of certain lexical spheres.
In the Sicilian version, the audience (or the readership) comes immediately to understand the social status of each different honourific title. This is especially evident in the case of *A birritta cu ‘i ciancianeddi / Il berretto a sonagli*:

**Don** Nociu Pampina  
La **Si-Donna** Biatrici Fiorica  
La **Si-Donna** Assunta Labella, sua madre.  
**Don** Fifì Labella, fratello  
Il Delegato Spanò  
**Donna** Rocca ‘A Saracina  
**Donna** Sarina Pampina, moglie di **Don** Nociu  
La **Gnà** Momma, serva di **Donna** Biatrici  
Vicini e vicine di Casa Fiorica  
*In una cittadina della Sicilia meridionale, oggi.*

**Ciampa**, scrivano  
La signora Beatrice Fiorica  
La signora Assunta La Bella, sua madre  
Fifi La Bella, suo fratello  
Il Delegato Spanò  
La Saracena, rigattiera.  
Fana, vecchia serva della Signora Beatrice.  
Nina Ciampa, giovane moglie del Ciampa.  
Vicini e vicine di Casa Fiorica  
*In una cittadina dell’interno della Sicilia. Oggi.*

**Table 3** *Dramatis personae in ‘A birritta cu ‘i ciancianeddi/Il berretto a sonagli*

At the higher-prestige end of the spectrum the author posits the variant Si-Donna (“Signora-Donna,” as Pirandello explains in a note to the short story “Il vitalizio,” *Novelle per un anno* I 171), exclusively used for the wives of landowners. At the lowest extreme, one finds the epithet of “Gnà,” roughly translatable as ‘comare.’ Through these diversified titles, the playwright shapes a complex set of social hierarchies: indeed, social status overlaps with gender and age throughout the play. However, such elements are lost in the Italian version, where the characters are presented by their first names only. Pirandello makes their presentation more detailed, introducing precise information such as their profession (“rigattiera” or “scrivano”), but these elements are no longer part of a coherent and hierarchical system. As a result, the importance of social conventions is weakened, and the private tensions between the family members overshadow the social display of respect and manners. The loss of authority is particularly relevant in the case of Beatrice, who goes from a very prominent social status as a female “landowner” to being merely a wife in the private space of the household. Similarly, the class conflict between **Donna Biatrici** and **Nociu** is overshadowed in the Italian version.
A similar change also takes place in the 1928 Italian version of *Liolà*, where only the qualifications of “zio” and “zia” are retained. Gnà Carmina is rendered simply with “Càrmina, *detta* La Moscardina” – the epithet being both a partial way to recuperate the lower prestige designation of ‘Gnà,’ and a recurrent feature in Pirandello’s onomastics. Only in the case of Gesa, the epithet is replaced by the equivalent definition of “Comare:” a diversifying translational strategy that closely echoes Berman’s notion of ‘contro-concordance’, the use of the same word to render different terms in the source language. The importance of honourific titles in *Liolà* is particularly evident in the following lines, which Pirandello radically alters in the 1928 version:


ZIA CROCE: Che figli volete che gli facesse quella poverina! Era così *mostra il mignolo* e teneva l’anima coi denti! Non potete negare che, rimasto vedovo, partiti per riammogliarsi non gliene sarebbero mancati! A cominciare da me, mia figlia, se me l’avesse chiesta, glie’ avrei data. Non volle mettere al posto della morta nessun’altra del nostro parentado e nemmeno del nostro paraggio. Prese vostra nipote soltanto per averne
The self-correction of ‘gna’ → ‘donna’ signals that Zia Croce sees Mita’s newly acquired social status as abusive and transitory: this reference is lost in the Italian version, which simply reads “your niece.”

In his 2002 article “Contextualizing Contextualization Cues”, Stephen Levinson classifies honourific titles as contextualization cues. The latter can be defined as empirical signs (mostly, but not exclusively, prosodic variations) that help framing the conversation and its cultural underlying assumptions. According to Levinson, honourifics are to be included in the list of contextualization cues: in particular, they belong to the subset of “conventional coding devices,” that is to say, devices that help framing a conversation through its semantic implication. So are “presupposition triggers like definite articles, expressions which carry conventional implicatures like ‘even’”, or prosodic contrastive stress (34).

Honourific titles clearly act as contextualizing devices in the following exchange, taken from Pinsaci, Giacominu and eliminated in the Italian translation Pensaci, Giacomino!:

TOTI: A vui non vi rispunnu, donna Maranna.
NITTU: Si voli rispunniri a mmia, cc’u pattu ca mi devi del lei o del voi. Voglio il mio rispetto. Sugnu suo ‘nferiuri ‘a la scola, poviru bidellu, ma in facci a la liggi - suo soggiro, e voglio il mio rispetto. (TDS2 64)

In this exchange Toti and Nittu – respectively a professor and a janitor in the same school- are negotiating their social prestige. Traditional “conventional code devices” such as honourifics and courtesy forms play a crucial role in their interaction, together with Nittu’s nonchalant use of code-switching.
A real act of face-negotiation takes place in this sequence, as Stella Ting-Toomey, the first proponent of this category, would have it. Originally proposed for intercultural communication, the notion of Face Negotiation is also suitable for the context of *Pinsaci, Giacomino*, since the play also represents two conflicting cultures: the urban world represented by Toti is at odds with the traditional ethics represented by Rusaria Delisi, Padre Landolina and their allies, including Nittu Cinquemani and his wife Maranna. As a result, several negotiations take place in the span of a few lines.

On the one hand, Professor Toti is rejecting his mother-in-law Maranna as a qualified interlocutor: an act that violently contrasts with the otherwise rationalistic, modern and non-conformist stance of the character. This rejection is particularly more meaningful, since it targets the only female character on stage: a nuance that is lost in the Italian version, where the whole line is suppressed. On the other hand, Nittu reclaim his own space in the conversation building on his family relation to Toti, which should grant him a hierarchical superiority despite his lower social rank. In order to assert his own power, Nittu gives his interlocutor a choice between the social conventions of Italian (‘il lei’) and those of vernacular (or, at least, regional koiné), ‘dare del voi.’ As long as family hierarchies are in place, both choices are acceptable to him.

This act of linguistic negotiation is consistent with the linguistic mask of the character, who generally strives to imitate bureaucratic language in his hybrid, sovra-regional koiné. His linguistic efforts are, in fact, an important trait of his comical mask. However, the use of ‘lei’ is not used a source for cheap “linguistic humour,” as it was the case with the women portrayed by Di Giacomo (see, in particular, the language of Carmela Battimelli in *O mese mariano*, Chapter 2.3). Unlike the popular speaker mocked by Di Giacomo, Nittu is a relatively proficient user of both varieties. He seems to employ both the “lei” and the “voi” correctly and consistently, respecting both the grammatical rules (i.e. as the verbal agreement of the ‘lei’) and the conversational implications.

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233 See in particular the chapter “Toward a Theory of Conflict and Communication” (1985) and the chapter “Toward a Theory of Conflict and Communication” (1988).

234 A contextualization cue, often (but not necessarily) involves a prosodic trigger that, in conjunction with lexical material, will invoke frames and scenarios within which the current utterance is to be interpreted as an interactional move.
By using just one linguistic device, the author reveals the different identities at play and un masks rules and frames of the talk-market of the comedy\textsuperscript{235}. Cinquemani, proudly standing in his janitor uniform, is clearly imitating that ‘urban’ and ‘bourgeois’ variety of Sicilian that the author indicated as his code of choice in the well-known preface to \textit{Liolà}:

> Quasi tutti gli altri lavori presentano personaggi, usi e costumi borghesi, e sono scritti, o recitati, in quell’ibrido linguaggio, tra il dialetto e la lingua, che è il cosiddetto dialetto borghese, siciliano qui, in altri lavori del genere piemontese e Lombardo, Veneto o napoletano: dialetto borghese che, con qualche goffaggine, appena appena arrotondato, diventa lingua italiana, cioè quella lingua italiana parlata comunemente, e non soltanto dagli inculti in Italia. (\textit{Liolà} 1917 836)

The \textit{koiné} attempted by Nittu Cinquemani is that of ‘bourgeois dialect’; a dialect that is already in an osmotic relation with the Italian of culture or bureaucracy; a dialect that is the main source of the ‘spoken Italian’; the dialect spoken by bilinguals – as Pirandello was – and, most importantly, a language from which women are artificially excluded, as Toti’s rejection symbolically marks. Yet, this ideal of “dialetto borghese” fails to include women, whose desires and rebellions thus fall outside the boundaries of any “acceptable” language.

Not only is the space of women reduced through their social marginalization and their reduced linguistic agency; the discourse of women is also different, affected by small but powerful changes. For instance, semantic attenuation is a common feature of all three translations. While the self-translator partially recuperates the nuances of the original by inserting new figures of speech in the Italian versions (mostly metaphors based on the animal world, and rural proverbs), the outcome is very different, as the tension shifts from the most troublesome sexual realities to the more reassuring field of ‘nature.’

In the rewriting process, Pirandello eliminates many references to the traditional Sicilian family ethics; at the same time, female bodies literally disappear from the stage. This is especially the case with problematic issues such as infertility, a central topic in \textit{Liolà} that also

\textsuperscript{235} For a definition of the ‘talk-market,’ see in particular the work of the Canadian linguist Monica Heller and her study of English-French CS in the post-Bill 101 Quebec society.
plays an important role in *A Birritta*. In the latter play, the absence of a legitimate heir is given as one of the main conditions allowing a legal separation between Biatrici and her husband. In the vernacular play, Donna Rocca insists on the infertility of the marriage, indulging to a stereotypical and pathetic depiction of the children in an unhappy ménage; on the contrary, the topic is simply mentioned in the Italian lines:

DONNA ROCCA (...) Ci ffussiru figghi p’u mezzu, avissuvu raggiuni vui. LA SARACENA: (...) Ci fossero figli di mezzo...
GNÀ MOMMA: Ah, chistu è tuttu lu guaju! FANA: Questo è il vero guaio qua: che non ci fossero figli di mezzo...
DONNA ROCCA: Ah, i figghi, si sapi, attàccanu mani e pedi a una povera marit; e pi l’amuri dê figghiuzzi una madre si cunsigna accussì, ligata, a so maritu, comu a li judè, e ci dici macari “Ammazzatimi!” Ma ccà figghi, pi grazia di Diu, ’un ci nni sunnu. E pircië avi a cripari ‘ncorpu sta povira signora? Si dici ca si nni voli nèsciri...
DONNA BIATRICI: Subbitu, gnorsì, subbitu Donna Rocca! 'Un mi pari l’ura!
(BC 102. My emphasis.)

It should also be noted that Donna Rocca’s lines contain a religious reference, echoing the popular genre of Sacra Rappresentazione, already cited in the opening scene of *Liola*. However, the function and value of such references are completely subverted in the context of *Pinsaci, Giacominu*. By rejecting the mask of a *Christus Patiens* that her relatives and friends are casting on her, Donna Biatrici deepens the degree of her rebellion: in her lines references to traditional family values appear briefly, only in order to be rejected and subverted.

Infertility and infidelity are not, of course, the only scandalous topics of these plays, as the well-known conclusion of *Liola* clearly shows:
While the daring attitude of Liolà offering his fresh blood is clearly charged with sexual connotations, the ominous line “nun lu fari muriri” carries a not-so-hidden reference to the possibility of infanticide. Such practices might have had a place in the dire reality of an archaic peasantry or as a reference to the darkest tales of Greek mythology: however, they have no space in the artificial recreation of a solar, reassuring, image of Sicily for the enjoyment of the national audiences.

While most female characters appear to be in a subordinate position both from a social and a linguistic standpoint, they do talk back. In the “trilogy of shame,” women act insubordinately in their words and deeds, fully resisting their marginalization. However, their bold attitude is often attenuated in the Italian versions. This is especially evident in the comparison between ‘A birritta cu i ciancianeddi and Il berretto a sonagli.

In the process of self-translation, the relation between Donna Biatrici and the other characters is consistently altered, due to the suppression of lines and the restructuring of the lexicon. Authorial changes affect both the overall balance among characters and the language of Beatrice herself. For instance, the following lines are eliminated from the Italian translation, consistently with Pirandello’s quest of a more effective, and faster, dramatic pace:

**DONNA BIATRICI:** Vajiti! Vajiti, un vogghiu sentiri cchiù a nuddu! L'aviti ntisu ca l'è finiri? L'è finiri e 'un nni s'avi a parlari cchiù! Bellu frati haju iu! E me matri, povira vecchia... Comu s'un sapissi chiddu chi mi dirrianu: “Eh bonu... E chi voi? Chiudi
'occhi... omini! 'Un ti leva nenti!...". E iu staiu scattannu, ccà! Iu hai la tintazziuni
d'ammazzallu ogni notti, donna Rocca....

DONNA ROCCA: L'avi a diri a mmia?

DONNA BIATRICI: Quannu mi lu viu alatu nni lu lettu, chi dormi e agghiutti 'nsonnu
accussi, comu si surchiassi, sbiahu; mentri iu mi sbattulu di ccà e di ddà e mi sentu
crisciri l'ugna... Avi a finiri! Avi a finiri! - (TDS2 102-103).

These lines provide a powerful and vivid image of Biatrici’s neurosis, to some extent
anticipating her final madness scene. The character goes as far as to envision her husband’s
death; his mere presence makes her shiver. At the same time, the character is able to express
lucidly the reasons for her exasperation, which lay in the judgmental attitude of her relatives.
While the Italian translation is undoubtedly smoother and more effective, the character of
Biatrici certainly loses its complexity and its depth.

Another remarkable case is the suppression of the opening scene in Act II, marked by an
episode of hysterical possession. In this well-known episode, Beatrice screams upon finding a
scorpion in her linens, while hastily clearing her house and packing her own cloths. As in the
previous example, Biatrici’s delusions anticipate the motive of madness concluding the play. Not
only does the episode resonate with symbolical and religious values; its symbolism also evokes
the bite of the tarantula, cited in traditional accounts of ritual possession in Southern Italy. Such a
reference, with its gruesome and archaic taste, did not fit well in Pirandello’s renovation of the
national theatre.

Self-translation does not only affect the social balance of Pirandello’s characters and their
hierarchical value: it goes as far as to transform the whole affective economy of the play, re-
shaping the relations between female characters and their familiar environment. Once again, the
character of Donna Biatrici is a vivid example of such a transformation. In Il berretto a sonagli,
Beatrice becomes more passive in her interaction with the other characters; in translating,
Pirandello suppresses several lines in which she violently give orders to other characters,
including her own brother.

Her scene with Delegato Spanò (I.5) is also significantly altered. While in the vernacular
play Donna Beatrice insists on pressing charges against Spanò’s suggestions, in the Italian
version Beatrice simply presents herself as a defenseless woman, merely playing on the feelings of her interlocutor and renouncing to any other rational attempt to persuade him:

**DONNA BIATRICI:** (…) *E s’è amicu miu, lei allura avi a rappresentare la giustizia e la forza, qua – pi mia chi sugnu una povira fimmina debuli e sula* (TDS2 121. My emphasis)

**BEATRICE:** E questa è la sua giustizia?

Così lei sostiene una povera donna debole che non può difendersi da sé?

(BS 379)

More importantly, the explicit request “Mi facissi fari ’a denunzia” (TDS2 123)” is altered in “Mi detti la denunzia” (BS, 380)”. Even in her most subversive act, Beatrice is subordinate to the authority of a male character, who literally dictates her words and actions.

The relationship between Biatrici and her brother Fifì is also subverted. In *A birritta* the balance of power between them gradually shifts from substantial equality to domination, as an initially strong Biatrici ends being at the margin. On the contrary, in *Il berretto a sonagli* Fifì is never subject to his sister’s authority. Biatrici’s bossy line “Vidi ca i mittisti ddocu, supra stu tavolineddu” (BC 115) is thus rewritten in a kinder tone: “Lì, mi sembra, su quel tavolinetto” (BS 370), softened by the attenuating clause “mi sembra.”

The suppression of lines also play an important role. For instance, in the following lines Biatrici’s fierce character is described through an idiomatic reference to Sicilian popular culture, the tradition of puppeteers. These lines, however, are eliminated in *Il berretto a Sonagli*:

(9) **DONNA BIATRICI:** Ma chi vi scantati? Si so muggheri fu arristata, si l’avi a pigghiari cu idda e non cu mmia! Jiti a grapiri, ca cci parlu iu, cu stu galantomu!

**DON FIFÌ:** Tu ti nni vai dda intra cu ’a mamà, e finiscila cu st’arji d’Orlannu, ca ’a casa po’ ci pensu iu, a faritilli passari!

**DONNA BIATRICI:** Chi? Vidi ca iu mi nni pozzu stari sula ca me’ doti e cu ’u mantinimentu ch’iddu m’avi a passari!

**DON FIFÌ:** Puru chistu sai? (TD2 133. My emphasis)
In the vernacular play, Donna Biatrici is a rebel and indomitable woman, whom only a united family can hope to tame. In order to control her, the other characters must cooperate and enact a complex strategy of social control, both inside and outside the closed space of the household. The pervasiveness of social control is indeed more marked in ‘A birritta: consider, for instance, the following lines (II, 1):

DON FIFÌ: Libera? Chi libera?
Ca ti nni veni a casa nni mia ora, senza
putiri cchiù nesciri 'u nasu fora d'a' portà, cu tutti l'occhi supra di tia, cu' sa ti vidinu movirì un jiritu! Senza statu cchiù, né schetta, né viduva né maritata! (TD2 130, corsivo mio)

FIFÌ: Libera? – Pazza! – Che libera?
Libera di venirtene a casa mia, ora, senza poter più cacciare il naso fuori della porta! Libera, dice! Senza più stato... (BS 386)

In A birritta, the judgmental presence of the community is introduced from the very beginning, in all its oppressive force. Don Fifì indulges in the representation of the fellow villagers, showing their prying gazes and their spying attitude: a detail that is suppressed in the Italian version, more abstract and concise. In ‘A birritta, Biatrice’s lost reputation is not a metaphor of the human condition, but a very material and concrete scandal, an object for small talk and local gossiping: in the final scene, all fellow citizens are called as witnesses of Biatrici’s insanity. In the vernacular play, her folly is a public verdict, whereas in the Italian version the outbreak of madness remains a shameful secret, jealously hidden behind the closed walls of the house. Furthermore, in the Italian version madness is played as a two-role game, involving the jealous wife and her direct opponent, the triumphant cuckold Ciampa, who seemingly assumes folly as his own mask, in his final laughter that slowly turns into a scream. There is no space left for the voices of the other relatives. Lines from other characters are therefore suppressed, as in the following example:

DONNA ASSUNTA: Chi manicomiu, figghia, no!
FIFÌ: Nnô, 'na casa di saluti, privata. Ti nni vai ddà, p'un paiu di misi... (TD2 151)
While in ‘A birritta the whole family cooperates with Nociu’s strategy, folly becomes a one-man-show in the Italian play. The quest for conciseness and dramatic intensity is also a recurrent strategy: the declaration of Biatrici’s folly is shortened to a single line: “È pazza! È pazza! …Se la portano al manicomio! È pazza!” (BS 405), whereas in ‘A birritta the madness is sanctioned by a choral lamentation:

VICINI E VICINE: Signur Delegatu, ma è veru?
SPANÒ: Purtroppo! Purtroppo!
VICINI E VICINE: Oh povira signura! Oh chi focu granni! Povira signura! Ma, veru paza? (TD2 153)

The topic of jealousy, with its clear autobiographical implications, is a recurrent topic in the production of the mid-1910s: for instance, it is also found in Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore (1925), whose first draft (Si gira) was composed in the same years as ‘A birritta.236

The couple of Dottor Cavalena and his pathologically jealous wife Nené is therefore closely related to the abnormal bond of Biatrici and her husband, Cavalier Florica:

Conoscevo per fama Cavalena, suo padre, notissimo alla Kosmograph sotto il nomignolo di Suicida. Pare che il pover'uomo sia terribilmente oppresso da una moglie gelosa. Per la gelosia della moglie, a quanto si dice, dovette prima lasciar la milizia, da tenente medico, e non so quante condotte vantaggiose; poi anche l'esercizio della professione libera, e il giornalismo, in cui aveva trovato modo d'entrare, e alla fine anche l'insegnamento, a cui per disperazione s'era appigliato, nei licei, come incaricato di fisica e storia naturale. Ora, non potendo (sempre a causa della moglie) dedicarsi al teatro, per il quale crede da un pezzo d'aver spiccatissime attitudini, s'è acconciato alla confezione di scenari cinematografici, con molto sdegno, obtorto collo, per soprire ai bisogni della famiglia, non bastando al mantenimento di essa la sola dote della moglie e quel che ricava dall'affitto di due stanze mobiglie. (Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio 67)

236 Having been originally composed in 1915, Si gira was published in installments between June and August 1915; it was reprinted in volume the following year, and reprinted, with a different title and several corrections, in 1925.
Many references in this passage point to the autobiographical experience of Pirandello, including his brief teaching career (an episode also reflected in professor Toti’s unprofessional demeanor in *Pinsaci, Giacominu!*) and his materialistic concerns in approaching the entertainment industry (both cinema and theatre). Yet, while the folly of Mrs. Cavalena takes a tragicomic turn, the folly of Donna Biatrici is still a hybrid, certainly mirroring an existential condition, but mainly generated by the morbid atmosphere of the family and sealed by the authority of popular wisdom:

(13) DON NOCIU: (A parte) 'U vidi, signor Delegatu, chi tocca fari a un poviru maritu, a una povira mogghi? - Non si mariti, sa!  
SPANÒ: Come? Se io ho moglie!  
DON NOCIU: Ah, dico – si cci mori chista... Non ne pigli un'altra, per l'amore di Dio!  
(TD2 154)

While the final exchange between Spanò and Don Nociu sinisterly highlights Biatrici’s condition as a ‘living dead’, a non-persona who will never be able to maintain normal social interactions (a condition that Barilli dubs as that of a “sepolta viva”,237, *Pirandello* 173), their comments also resonate with a tradition of misogynist assumptions and proverbs, well grounded in the popular culture of the time. All these historical and local connotations are lost in the Italian translation, where Pirandello finally attains his most powerful metaphor, that of madness as a universal condition.

If the Sicilian setting had initially provided Pirandello with the “spazio potenziale dei micro-successi” and for the “esplorazione del margine”, somehow reinforcing the authority of “un blocco di potere the è tanto più greve quanto più è debole” (Giarrizzo 109), by the early 1920s the author had freed himself from these geographical boundaries, as both his linguistic and his thematic choices demonstrate. Pirandello is thus ready to abandon the theatricality of Sicilian

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237 Ironically, in this definition Barilli is also referencing a 1896 novel with the same title by Carolina Invernizio, often cited as one of the most kitsch examples of the Italian popular fiction (Arslan 1991; Eco 1987; Praz 1937).
society – with its heavily conventionalized language and its formalistic rituals and codes – that had originally fuelled his exploration of madness. No longer linked to a given geography nor to a set of personal experiences, the cap with bells is now the reference to a universal condition.

Vernacular versions are also characterized by a higher degree of verbal freedom, particularly evident in the sexual sphere. Going back to the plays in the 1920s, Pirandello attenuates or censors many lines, too explicit for a national audience. This tendency is consistent in all three plays, but it is particularly evident in *Liolà* and *Pensaci, Giacomino!*. Consider for instance, in the following example from *Liolà*: while in the 1916 vernacular play Zia Croce hints at her neighbours’ questionable behaviors by saying that “their conscience is dirtier than their shirt,” her Italian lines simply mention jealousy, without implying any other sin.

References to sexual intercourse are also eliminated or shortened, as in the following example:

A similar act of self-censorship can be observed in some of the most explicit lines of Beatrice. In ‘A birritta, her unrestrained vulgarity escalates, culminating in her final moment of “madness,” whose coarse language seemingly justifies her mother’s repeated appeals to ‘decency.’ As we can see in the following example, the most explicit lines are suppressed in the Italian version:

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Già! Riparamu! Vistemuli, sti vergogni! Armee cu
cammisa e fadetta! ca 'un si scannaliassì nuddu! Li
vraza di fora, lu pettu di fora, 'un fa nenti! Cu sta
calura! 'A virgogna, è dirli, sti cosi! Farli è nenti!
(BC 137)

Not only does Biatrici break the unspoken rules of society by publicly exposing her husband’s
escapades: in these lines, she is also violating the linguistic rules of decency, by literally
‘undressing’ unspeakable actions. The same lines are less violent and explicit in the Italian
translation: no longer indulging in the scandalous depiction of naked bodies, these lines merely
contain a passionate outcry against society and its gendered hypocrisy.

Similarly, Pirandello reshapes the character of Tuzza, the ‘loose woman’ in Liolà. Instead
of begging for her mother’s pardon (as does Luzzidda, the fallen woman in Pensaci Giacomino),
Tuzza faces her mother’s wrath with a fierce attitude, expressed both by words and deeds:

TUZZA (tinennucci testa, pettu
a pettu): Mi lassa parrari, sì o
no, ca un c’è tempu? Chi cci
cunchiudi ora cu ‘i vastunati?
Mi lassassi parrari! (TD2 177)

TUZZA (tenendole testa,
petto a petto): Vuol
lasciarmi parlare, sì o no,
che non c’è tempo? Che
conchiude ora così,
strillando e bastonandomi?
Mi lasci parlare! (Liolà
1917 934)

TUZZA: Prima: “Parla!
parla!” - tacevo – e lei,
pugni e schiaffi; per farmi
parlare; ora che voglio
parlare... (Liolà 1444)

The elimination of the stage directions (“tinennucci testa” and “tenendole testa”) immediately
signals a shift in attitude. While in the Sicilian version (and in its first literal translation) the
young woman is defiant, her attitude acquires a self-pitying note in the Italian translation: the mention of physical violence further emphasizes her victimization.

Pirandello eliminates many lines that convey a feeling of unrest and insubordination; however, it would be incorrect to assume that only rebellious female characters are reshaped in the Italian rewriting of the plays. All female parts are shortened—a change that is, to some extent, consistent with the modernizing tendency of Pirandello’s Italian theatre. Therefore, practices of attenuation, semantic loss and self-censorship can also be found in lines where characters state their subordination or their acceptance of moral and social norms. This is the case of Liolà II.1, when a prying Gnà Carmina speculates on the possible secrets behind Tuzza’s scandalous pregnancy:

GNÀ CÀRMINA: Sò figliu, sissi, cu idda, cu Tuzza! Tant’è veru ca cci la jì a dumannari a sò matri!
Tuzza: (a la zà Ninfa): 'U sta vidennu ca è veru?
LUZZA: Gna s’u sannu tutti!
ZÀ Ninfa: E iu no!
Gnà Càrmina: (Si la tira arassu; li picciotti chianu chianu cci vennu darrè, e idda ogni tantu si vota a taliarli cu tantu d’occhì):

GNÀ CARMINA: Suo figlio, con lei, con Tuzza! Tanto è vero che andò a domandarla in moglie alla madre!
CIUZZA (A zia Ninfa) Lo sta vedendo che è vero?
LUZZA: MA se lo sanno tutti!
ZIA Ninfa: E io no!
ZIA Ninfa: Che c’entri mio figlio, sì!
Gnà Carmina: (Se la tira in disparte: le ragazze, piano piano, le vengono dietro, e lei ogni tanto si volta a far gli occhiacci) Ma dia ascolto a me! Fatta la frittata, di suo
ZIA Ninfa: Che che! che che!

A different view is offered by Sipalà in his aforementioned “Pirandello, Musco, e il caso Liolà,” suggesting that Tuzza cannot be included among the “coraggiose eroine pirandelliane che dicono no” because of her opportunistic relation with Liolà: she rejects his offer for marriage out of interest (as she sees an opportunity of gaining access to wealth through Zi’ Simuni), while, he argues “la sua reazione finale, quando si avventa contro l’ex amante con il coltello, dimostra che ora, fallito il piano, lei accetterebbe di sposarlo” (152).
Ma sintissi a mmia! Fatta 'a frittata, di sô figliu nun n’èppiru cchiù chi nni fari; e allura idda, pezza di svrigugnata... mi capisci? cu sô ziu... pi ffàricci cridiri ca ’u figliu era sò! ZÀ NINFA: Chi jiti dicennu, santa cristiana, chi jiti dicennu? Iddi, iddi, gnursì, ch’eranu comu lu catu e la senia, cuscinu e cuscina: jttatu notti e jornu ddà, purcarìa, ch’era la sparlacìa di tutti! Ma pirchì cci avi a tràsiri me’ figliu nni stu discursu? (TD2 185-186)

LA MOSCARDINA: Perché figlio non hanno più saputo che farsene; e lei, allora, pezza di svergognata... mi capisce? Con lo zio... per era suo!

ZIA NINFA: Ma che andate dicendo, benedetta donna, che andate dicendo! Loro, loro, sì, ch’erano come il pozzo e la secchia, cugino e cugina: notte e giorno insieme, vergogna, ch’erano sulla bocca di tutti! Ma perché deve entrarci mio figliuolo in codesto discorso?

(Liolà 185-186)

(Liolà 1917 953)

Not only does Pirandello eliminate the reference to a possible affair between the two cousins (a detail that rings a deep autobiographical note); in translating these lines, he conceals a very scandalous detail, namely the possibility of actual intercourse between an old man and his niece. The Italian translation runs shorter and is vaguer; the characters allude to the episodes without insisting on the most scandalous details of the affair, including its many incestuous references.

Similarly, a long sequence is suppressed from the Italian translation of Pensaci Giacominu in Act II. The lower social status of Luzzidda is taken as the evidence of her sinful and challenging attitude, summarized in the epithet “tinta figghia di bidellu,” the evil daughter of a janitor:
RUSARIA: Ragiuni, sissi, ragiuni! D’idda, specialmententi nn’avemu a scantari, patri! Di ‘sta tinta figghia di bidellu, c’ha pututu aviri ‘a facci…. (si copre il volto con le mani, piegandosi innanzi) ah, iu non sacciu, non sacciu comu si po fari!
LANDOLINA: Eh, sì, pi daveru ccà non sapi comu si pò fari! Mah!... La corruzzioni del popolo oggi è tanta, donna Rusaria, tanta!
RUSARIA: Aviri l’ardiri di mettirsi cc’un picciutteddu, poviru sì, ma di bona famiglia, educatu comu l’haiu potutu edicari iu, vossia ‘u sapi – e indurlo, Diu, indurlu in peccatu murtali! – Figuramuni s’ ‘u vurrà lassari cuetu! Perciò era necessariu, cci dicu, avirla subitu st’assicurazioni… (TD2 283)

The long sequence is suppressed in the Italian version, thus attenuating the social dimension of the scandal. While Pensaci, Giacomino! is more balanced and effective as a play, it is also less realistic and specific in its depiction of the Sicilian society.

While all these authorial interventions seem to serve a general aesthetic criterion (the elimination of rhetoric and verbosity; the quest for a fast pace; a modern idea of theatre) they also have the effect of consistently reshaping the space of female subjectivity. In a 1991 volume titled Lo specchio magico, Luciana Martinelli has analyzed the representation of female characters in Pirandello’s narrative, highlighting its constitutive ambiguity and duplicity. Silence and allusivity, two fundamental ingredients of Pirandello’s art, are especially emphasized in connection with the female subject. As Martinelli states, “l’interesse che suscita il personaggio pirandelliano non consiste […] in quello che dice, ma in quello che sta sotto o oltre il suo dire. Non è il detto ma il non detto o il dicibile a fornire la mappa del senso del testo. Le frasi pronunciate testimoniano la non verità loro e di chi le pronuncia e connotano di espressività il silenzio” (31). This fascinating reading seems to suggest that there is more than self-censorship behind many of the semantic changes analyzed so far. Eliminating many rhetoric pleas, many explicit claims, many violent denunciations, Pirandello is formulating a new poetic mode, where the untold weighs more than what one can explicitely say.

At the same time, this new poetics of silence and allusivity seems to coincide with the expulsion of the women from the formal logic, into the realm of the non-formalized language and of the irrational. Feminine language loses its significance, identifying with a vocal outburst.
The voices of women, mere sound devoid of meaning, now belong to the dreaded space of alterity and madness: “Da strumento di comunicazione, di espressione di sé all’altro, la parola si riduce a una cascata di rumori. Da espressione di sentimenti, di pensiero, si trasforma in inganno. Da mezzo di relazione, di rapporto, si rovescia in strumento di isolamento.” (31). Female alterity thus stands for the language of the unknown – the secret door of madness through which Donna Biatrici walks at the end of her journey, and to which Tuzza (with her homicidal fury) gets dangerously close in the ending of *Liolà*.

The language of women is not simply marked by a certain concentration of topics, such as descriptions of bodies or sexual desire: it is also marked by a specific flow, where the law of juxtaposition replaces and overcomes ordinary syntax, with its subordinating clauses, conjunctions and complex rhetoric structures. In her 1994 essay “La lingua del femminile in Pirandello,” Daniela Bini describes this language as a “linguaggio del corpo, linguaggio della terra che scorre spontaneamente senza argini formali, come l’acqua della vena” (138), directly defying “il linguaggio del logos, della verità incontrovertibile coincidente con il linguaggio del potere, dell’autorità e della violenza che ostracizza il diverso” (140).

While this language is transversal across different genres and modes, it is specifically achieved in the portrait of Pirandello’s last dramatic heroines, such as La Spera, Sara, or Ginevra:

Tutte le protagoniste femminili degli ultimi drammi pirandelliani parlano questo linguaggio. Un linguaggio che a volte inconsapevolmente, altre volutamente, mina la logica del discorso forte, del logos, mostrandone i limiti e cerca invece di comunicare i suoi messaggi umili e relativi, servendosi di un altro discorso che, scarno di preposizioni subordinate, simbolo di uno svolgimento logico, si basa invece sull’elencazione, la paratassi, le esclamazioni, gli spazi vuoti. Un linguaggio del corpo che s’oppone a quello mascile […]” (136).

Yet, this dualism between logos and mythos, between the voice of reason and that of blood is already latent in the negotiation of identities displayed in the early plays of Pirandello, and in the staggering conflicts between outstanding female characters such as Biatrici or Tuzza and the petrified cunning of a raisonneur.
7. Conclusions

Pirandello composed thirteen vernacular plays from 1916 to 1922, including both original works and translations of plays by authors ranging from Euripides to Ercole Morselli. Most of this activity took place over four years (1916-20), a relatively short span of time in comparison with the longevity of his career as a playwright. No matter how short-lived and disappointing, this experience remains central to his pursuit as a playwright, and played a fundamental role in his ground-breaking renovation of Italian theatre.

As we have seen in this chapter, Pirandello came to formulate his recurrent oppositions, his themes and his most typical character (the so-called “Pirandellian character”) by transposing the conflicts of his native region on stage. His early poetic of languages was deeply rooted in his understanding of the standard-vernacular relation, and his quest for concreteness outlasted his actual experience as a writer in Sicilian [“scrittore di cose siciliane”].

After his utopian hopes for a new Sicilian theatres were crushed by his failed cooperation with Angelo Musco, Pirandello's self-translations into Italian marked the beginning of a new poetic: the regional background of his early stories gave way to a philosophical reflection on the clash between the individual and the society. No matter how short-lived, Pirandello's experience as a dialectal author is a meaningful episode in the history of modern Italian theatre, and one that deserves an account. So is the story of his self-translations and his achievements as a bilingual writer.
Conclusions: The Space of Bilingual Theatre

In his *Storia dell’italiano: la lingua moderna e contemporanea*, Riccardo Tesi convincingly argues that nineteenth-century Southern Italian authors were particularly active in the elaboration of a linguistic standard suitable as an expressive code for dramatic and the narrative prose. In particular, Tesi recognizes important commonalities in the *oeuvre* of Verga, Pirandello, and Capuana (*Storia dell’italiano* 164), whose work is emblematic of the problems faced by prose writers and playwrights in the post-Unification decades (1870-1915). Tesi lists several practices shared by these authors, such as their prolific activity as reviewers, their ongoing collaborations with important newspaper and literary reviews, and their long sojourns in important cultural centres such as Milan, Florence, and Rome (165); however, he fails to reflect on their common use of translation and self-translation between regional dialects and standard Italian—a practice that is instead mentioned, albeit very briefly, in Serianni’s *Il secondo Ottocento* (156).

Together with the production of reviews and the use of linguistic hybridism, self-translation for the stage emerges as one of the main practices bridging the two contrasting linguistic realities of post-Unification Italy: the regional dialects, offering direct access to the large masses of uneducated workers, and the standard language spoken by just 22% of the newly unified Italian population (Migliorini 578).

Gramsci was the first to recognize the revelatory value of self-translation for the stage: in a 1929 note on the linguistic thought of Capuana, he drew attention on his bilingual plays, which, alongside those by Pirandello, he considered to be an emblematic document of the struggle for linguistic unification. In particular, Gramsci challenges the commonplace categorization of dialectal theatre as the first step on a path naturally leading to the invention of a “national theatre.”

239 His brief note foreshadows some of the main research questions of twentieth-century linguistic research, such as the ideological rift between dialect and language, the importance of

239 “Come, in tali condizioni, si potesse passare dal teatro dialettale a quello nazionale è affermazione per enigma e dimostra solo scarsa comprensione dei problem culturali nazionali” (Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale* 168)
foreign models for the formation of Italian highbrow culture, and the specific role of theatre in the formation of standard spoken Italian.

Gramsci identifies the main weakness of Italian in its lack of historical depth and in its artificial, rhetoric quality (“la lingua non ha ancora acquistato una storicità di massa, non è ancora diventata fatto nazionale,” 168): for these reasons, standard Italian fails to represent the feelings and the experiences of the Italian peasant masses. Far from being the result of an intellectualistic and abstract choice, bilingual writing derives from this patent expressive limitation. To support his point, Gramsci notes that Capuana entertained private correspondences in dialect with his lover of almost 20-years, choosing dialect because of its immediate resonance with the experience of a working-class speaker: “È da ricordare ancora che il Capuana scriveva in dialetto la sua corrispondenza con una ‘mantenuta,’ donna del popolo, cioè comprendeva che l’italiano non gli avrebbe permesso di essere capito con esattezza e ‘simpaticamente’ dagli elementi del popolo, la cui cultura non era nazionale, ma regionale, o nazionale-siciliana.” (168)

The same ideological divide can be found in the works of Pirandello: in this respect, Gramsci argues that the Sicilian version of Liolà is superior to the Italian translation, because: “nel testo italiano l’autore non riesce a mettersi all’unisono con il pubblico, non ha prospettiva della storicità della lingua quando i personaggi vogliono essere concretamente italiani dinanzi a un pubblico italiano.” (168).

Perhaps confusing the notions of “language” and “style,” Gramsci identifies a dichotomy in Italian culture. On the one hand, there are the authentic “lingue popolari” constituted by dialects, “i dialetti regionali che vengono solitamente parlati nella conversazione intima, in cui si esprimono i sentimenti e gli affetti più comuni e diffusi” (169); on the other hand, standard Italian appears to be an “artificial” language created by the intellectual classes on the basis of literary models (“ancora, per molta parte, una lingua cosmopolita, una specie di ‘esperanto’, cioè limitata all’espressione di sentimenti e nozioni parziali” 169). As a result, works written in standard language fail to embody the historical conflicts shaping the Italian society, representing instead the self-referential and secluded world of intellectuals.

Finally, Gramsci seems to hint at the reason for theatre’s importance in the process of linguistic unification: that is, theatre’s deep and constitutive relation with spoken, informal and
familiar language. In order to be effective, theatrical dialogue needs a lively and familiar language, something that can only be provided by the regional dialects:

Nel dialogo teatrale è evidente l’importanza di tale elemento; dal palcoscenico il dialogo deve suscitare immagini viventi, con tutta la loro concretèzza storica di espressioni; invece suggerisce, troppo spesso, immagini libresche, sentimenti mutilate dall’incomprensione della lingua e delle sue sfumature. Le parole della lingua famigliare si riproducono nell’ascoltatore come ricordo di parole lette nei libri e nei giornali, o ricercate nel vocabolario, come sarebbe il sentire in teatro parlar francese da chi il francese ha imparato nei libri e senza maestro: la parola è ossificata, senza articolazione di sfumature, senza la comprensione del suo significato esatto, che è dato da tutto il periodo, ecc. (169)

Following these key suggestions, in the present dissertation I examined Gramsci’s apparently trivial question (“perché certe commedie sono scritte in italiano e altre in dialetto,” 168) through the lenses of Translation Studies; in particular I charted the main elements of a poetics of self-translation through the analysis of three authors that were comparable for historical, stylistic and geographical reasons. In the conclusive chapter, I will outline the main commonalities in their bilingual activity, seen as the key element for a politics of self-translation in the post-Unification era (1870-1915).

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Despite their different artistic affiliations, Di Giacomo, Capuana and Pirandello shared many traits in their approach to translation and self-translation. In fact, there are important similarities both in the ways in which these three authors incorporated the practice of bilingual writing in their overall artistic trajectory, and in their actual work on the text.

Self-translation between dialect and Italian served a purpose of aesthetic renovation for all three authors, who also shared an extensive activity as reviewers of art, theatre and literature. Di Giacomo’s intention to break with the old ways of Neapolitan theatre is particularly evident in his critical essays such as “Storia del Teatro San Carlino,” launching a violent attack against
Sciosciammocca’s coarse comicality.\textsuperscript{240} Equally violent was Pirandello’s rejection of Grasso’s emphatic and stereotypical style, famously voiced in his 1909 article “Il teatro Siciliano.” Similarly, Capuana blamed the negative rejection of his early Italian plays on the superficial and cheap interpretation of his performers.\textsuperscript{241} Within such a context, self-translation between dialect and Italian came to embody a potential hope of renewal. Both for the “verista sentimentale” Di Giacomo and for the champion of Italian naturalism Capuana, dialectal theatre provided an alternative to the artificial reproduction of bourgeois setting and personal psychologies derived from French models, in constant linguistic osmosis with the Italian canon—hence the importance of self-translation from and into Italian. Sicilian and Neapolitan dialect appeared as a clear path for the creation of multidimensional drama, depicting familiar tragedies and personal conflicts in a truly realistic fashion: these motives and themes were then to be brought back into the Italian dramaturgy, through a constant activity of self-translation, rewriting and adaptation. Later on, Pirandello was to find a source of inspiration for his prevalent character typology in the expressive force of Angelo Musco, while the most ritualistic aspects of Sicilian anthropology were to provide an inspiration to his grotesque criticism of societal hypocrisies.

Such aesthetic renovation clearly depended on the energy of dialectal performers, free from the vices and affectations of traditional ‘grandi attori.’ Particularly emblematic is, in this respect, Capuana’s discussion of Duse’s performance as Santuzza in his preface to the collected edition of *Teatro Dialettale*, where he contrasts the mannerism of the great actress with the natural spontaneity of an unknown Sicilian performer.\textsuperscript{242} However, the three authors heavily relied on the centrality of the script, and to some extent they attempted to tame and channel the very force that had inspired them in the first place. This “textual terrorism” (Ubersfeld 9) is perfectly exemplified by Di Giacomo’s refusal to allow even minimal changes to his scripts, and

\textsuperscript{240} See above, chapter 2, section 2: “Theatres and theatricality in Naples”

\textsuperscript{241} See, for instance, his 1903 letter to Stanis Manca, cited earlier in Chapter 3, section 5, “Malia or the Conversion to Theatre.”

\textsuperscript{242} “Santuzza-Duse era risultata, ai miei occhi di siciliano, una specie di falsificazione della appassionata creatura di Giovanni Verga, nei gesti, nella espressione della voce, nei vestiti (…), non ostante lo scatto passionale che unicamente la Duse poteva farvi vibrare; mentre la povera attrice regionale, con gli abiti tolti in prestito dalle contadine del paese dove si trovava (…) diventava una ‘Santuzza’ viva e reale, come forse ce n’era qualcuna fra i suoi spettatori” (*Teatro Dialettale Siciliano* 73-74). For a detailed discussion of this passage, see above, Chapter 3, section 5.
by the incandescent letters Martoglio exchanged with both Pirandello and Capuana. As seen in chapters III and IV, such an attitude resulted in significant tensions between playwrights and performers, eventually leading to the failure of important ventures and productive collaboration.\textsuperscript{243} This appears to be especially relevant for Pirandello and Capuana, whose involvement with vernacular companies was often the result of external circumstances (including dire financial need) and heavily depended on the collaboration of outstanding performers such as Grasso and Musco.\textsuperscript{244}

Important similarities can also be found in the authors’ textual practices, often involving regimes of co-authorship and multiple collaborations, sometimes resulting in complex attribution problems.\textsuperscript{245} In fact, all three authors recurred to collaborators or linguistic informants in the early phase of their self-translation endeavors. As discussed earlier in chapter 2, Di Giacomo’s first involvement with Neapolitan theatre came in the guise of a co-authorship (the joint translation of Torelli’s early work \textit{I mariti} from Italian into Neapolitan); even when he started adapting his own work for the stage, he initially asked for the support of a more experienced connoisseur of the Neapolitan underworld, the policemen-turned-playwright Cognetti. Similarly, Capuana put the Italian script of \textit{Malía} (originally composed in 1892) in the hands of Giusto Sinopoli, closely monitoring and eventually vetting his Sicilian translation. Finally, Pirandello’s dive into Sicilian theatre would have been unconceivable without his friendship with Nino Martoglio and without the inspiration provided by Angelo Musco, the “attor brillante” who had just inherited the artistic legacy of Giovanni Grasso.

\textsuperscript{243} For instance, just consider the failure of the Grasso-Capuana collaboration, or the public split between Pirandello and Musco in 1918, discussed earlier in Section 3.7 and Section 4.2.

\textsuperscript{244} In turn, this difference also helps explain the different temporal distribution of the bilingual production over the three author’s corpora. Di Giacomo’s bilingual plays span over many decades, from 1888 to 1915; on the opposite extreme, Pirandello’s bilingual production was concentrated in a very short period of time, from 1915 to 1918.

\textsuperscript{245} This is especially evident in the case of Capuana, whose documentary tradition has at times been manipulated by the author’s wife, Adelaide Bernardini. In 1916, for instance Bernardini claimed that the Italian version “Il paraninfo” was to be considered as the true original, a claim that both Zappulla Muscarà and Gianni Oliva have questioned on the basis of documentary evidence. On the contrary, on July 21 1953 Bernardini claimed in a letter to the Director of the “Società Italiana Autori” that Capuana had originally composed all of his plays in Sicilian, and none of the Italian versions are to be considered as the originals: “Luigi Capuana non scrisse mai il Cavaliere Pedagna in lingua italiana, come non scrisse \textit{Don Ramunnu, Lu Paraninfu, Malía}, ed altre opere, perché occupato in altre creazioni.” In addition to contradicting Bernardini’s original claim about \textit{Il paraninfo}, this claim appears to be completely unfunded for \textit{Malía}, whose Italian version was already complete by 1892, a fact clearly documented in countless private letters of the author. Source: Ludovico Capuana, Private Letter, July 27 1953, “Fondo Capuana,” Biblioteca Teatrale SIAE, Rome.
The similarities do not stop there. Not only did Pirandello, Capuana, and Di Giacomo share the initial need for a dialogic relation with another collaborator; they also followed similar patterns in the direction of their translational work. The authors mostly translated from their native dialects into Italian, with the significant exception of their first bilingual works (respectively *Mala vita*, *Malìa*, and *Lumìe di Sicilia*). In fact, they initially adapted a short story into an Italian play of regional subject, following the conventions of Verist theatre: for instance, *Malìa* derives its theme and characters from the short story “Il mago”; *Mala vita* is the adaptation of a short story titled “Il voto,” and *Lumìe di Sicilia* is the adaptation of the short story of the same title. Self-translation in dialect came at a later time, often following a hiatus of a few months (in Di Giacomo and Pirandello’s cases), or even years (as seen earlier in chapter 3, it took Capuana almost a decade to recover from the unsuccessful reception of *Malìa* in 1892).

In all three cases, the first Italian script seems to have a formative value: this is particularly relevant for those authors who, like Di Giacomo and Pirandello, did not already have a substantial record of theatrical activity. Once they mastered the conventions of realist and regionalist drama in Italian, the authors no longer needed the mediation of an Italian script, and started to compose their works in dialect. However, the vernacular script was almost immediately translated into Italian to allow for its publication on gazettes and literary magazines, and for subsequent stagings by other performing companies across the nation. At least in the cases of Di Giacomo and Capuana, the Italian component thus appears to be “secondary” and derivative, playing a secondary role in the global artistic process. In particular, the passage from vernacular to Italian appears to serve a varieties of purposes, which range from practical and utilitarian reasons (for instance, being able to reach a wider audience across the nation. In Pirandello’s case, instead, self-translation into standard language marked the abandonment of the Sicilian process, as the aesthetic ideal of vernacularism (“dialettalità”) came to replace his frustrated hopes in the actual use of “dialect.”

Bilingual theatre is also characterized by recurrent topics and themes: in fact, the use of regional dialects allowed authors to focus on settings others than the upper- and middle-class settings, otherwise so prominent in Nineteenth-century bourgeois theatre. In particular, the three authors establish a special relationship between linguistic marginality and female characters. Women such as Biatrici Fiorica, Tuzza, Assunta Spina, Crestinella ‘a Capuana, Carmela Battimelli, and Gnà Rosa express their marginality through their lack of linguistic access to
Italian, the linguistic code of law and male authority. Their freely flowing language is often a metaphor for their loose status as female outcast—be it as unwed mothers, as adulterous wives or simply as outspoken women. Alongside with women, dialect allows for the representation of deprived childhoods and for a more radical exploration of the theme of the family, often treated in a tragic light and far beyond the stereotypical representation of passion crimes launched by Verga in his first Verist play, *Cavalleria rusticana*. In that respect, the use of dialect is consistent with the notion of linguistic “mimicry” (Bhabha 1994), allowing the authors to represent different facets of otherness and to voice the subaltern on stage.

Finally, in addition to sharing similar modes of activity and similar thematic orientation, the three authors examined also follow recurrent patterns, which govern their view of the multilingual creation. I chose to define these as **ANTI-TRANSLATION**, **PSEUDO-TRANSLATION**, and “**LIVING-IN-TRANSLATION**.” These three modes emerge from a close reading of their bilingual works, from their explicit statements, and from their direct experience in translating from other tongues, showing a range of options that go from Di Giacomo’s “Néapolitanisant French”246 to Capuana’s poetics of the equivalence.247

Anti-translation emerges as a two-fold attitude, as a rejection of translated literature (seen as the sign of cultural subalternity) and as a suspicion of translation as such. All three authors shared an intense criticism of the passive imitation of foreign models (namely those coming from France,248 to which one should add the fashionable “romanzieri russi” and “drammaturghi norvegiani” criticized by Capuana)249. Similarly, they all exhibit a suspicion of translation early

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246 See the interventions on the French translation of “Notte della Befana,” translated by Jean Casamassimi in 1896 and altered by Di Giacomo himself, who restored several syntactical regionalisms in the French version, analyzed earlier in Chapter 2, Section 4 (“Foreignizing and Domesticating Translation”).

247 Defined as follows: “rifare con colourito francese, con forme dialettali di qualche provincia francese, un libro dove le forme dialettali si fondono assolutamente nella lingua comune e vestono e rivestono l’idea in modo così organico che la forma non può scindersi dal concetto.” (Capuana, *Per l’arte.*, 11-12). See also Chapter 3, Section 3.

248 See for instance Di Giacomo’s overt conflict with the French-leaning sympathies of Pica in 1882: A me pare che l’articolo pecchi di questo, prima, di lunghezza, come al solito, secondo di troppa ammirazione. Poi non mi va per niente che in un giornale italiano si parli in ogni numero di cose francesi mentendo sugli autori. L’altro numero è pieno di de Goncourt e di un altro del quale non ricordo il nome, ecco, Duranty. Ora daccapo con il de Goncourt e la solita chiusa: speriamo che l’autore voglia darci menò.” Cit. in Villani, Paola. *La seduzione dell’arte* (Napoli: Guida, 2010) 108. See earlier, Chapter 2, Section 4. Pirandello also criticizes the enthusiasm for foreign models and the “traduzioni fatte senza intendimento artitico in his article “Prosa moderna” (Saggi e interventi 78; cf. earlier, Chapter 4, section 1, “The Shadow of Sicily”).

249 Cf. the following passage. “Ed ecco i drammaturghi norvegiani, ecco i romanzieri russi. Ibsen irrompe sul palcoscenico spingendosi innanzi una folla di creature della sua Norvegia, strane, malate d’ideali, con la coscienza
in their career. For an example, one might just consider Capuana’s plea to a younger Sicilian author who was considering rewriting his own work into Italian: “No, no, per carità, non traduca” (Teatro dialettale siciliano 74) —a plea that directly contradicts Capuana’s own practice as a bilingual writer.

Of all three authors, Pirandello is the one who expressed his penchant for “anti-translation” with the greatest philosophical clarity, associating his rejection for translation with his mistrust for all forms of art that are marked by adaptation between different media. His famous 1909 article “Illustratori, attori, traduttori” strikingly anticipates Jakobson’s well-known partition of *intra-lingual*, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation. Both in acting and translating, Pirandello acknowledges an intermedial shift: he thus argues that in both practices a second-degree work is created. In this secondary and derivative process, the original germ of aesthetic creation is inevitably lost. Therefore, Pirandello adamantly concludes, there is no such a thing as a *perfect* translation or illustration – nor, as he states, a perfect theatrical interpretation onstage: “l’attore […] più che le ragioni ideali dell’arte vede quelle materiali del palcoscenico, più che la verità superiore dell’espressione artistica, la realtà fittizia della sua azione scenica.” (Saggi e interventi 656) In this respect, anti-translation goes hand in hand with what John Barnish has dubbed “anti-theatrical prejudice” in a fortunate 1981 monograph.

Within this context, *pseudo-translation* appears as a natural complement of anti-translation: in fact, the rejection of translation depends on the belief that no perfect translation can be accomplished. In turn, such a belief relies on an *essentialistic* view of languages, seen as the most authentic embodiment of a nation’s ethos. This view rests, in turn, on the notion of artform as an ‘organic creation,’ expressed by Francesco De Sanctis and originally based on Vico’s theorizations in his *Scienza nuova*, and on the fundamental analogy between the creation of art and the spontaneous generation of nature, dating back to Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and to Goethe’s *Metamorphosis of plants* (both published in 1790). Pirandello’s early lack of faith in derivative media such as translation, illustration and recitation, Di Giacomo’s quest for an
“organic form of art,” and Capuana’s stern rejection of “hybrid forms” can all be traced to this conception, according to which a form of art cannot be truly recreated through a different medium or code.

Pseudo-translation also takes two different forms. It primarily describes the appropriating tendency towards other national literatures and the involuntary mimicry of other language’s most distinctive and exotic features: an effect of involuntary caricature that derives from the utter belief in the “fatal” link of language and nation. A perfect example of such essentialism can be seen in Di Giacomo’s “tedescherie,” famously misread as translations of a non-credited German original in 1878. At the same time, pseudo-translation can also appear in the guise of parody, as an extreme form of representation of linguistic otherness. Capuana’s 1882 hoax “Un poeta danese,” perfectly serve this label, bringing the author’s polemic against the slavish imitation of foreign works to an entirely new level.

In her taxonomy of such practice in nineteenth-century French culture, Christina Lombez has affirmed that: “la pseudotraduction, tel un poste d’observation idéal, renseigne autant sur la façon dont une énonciation littéraire fictive se construit que sur les traits distinctifs – voire stéréotypés – qu’une culture donnée, à un moment précis de l’Histoire, a considéré être ceux d’un texte traduit.” (108). Pseudo-translation, which according to Lefevere belongs to the class of “literary refractions,” therefore allows an author to challenge the literary system from within, without calling into question one’s set of assumptions and beliefs on language and literature. In this respect, pseudo-translation and anti-translation appear to be complementary attitudes, serving different components of the same literary poly-system—and particularly so in those systems that face pressure from other national literatures and foreign traditions, as was the case of post-Unification Italian culture.

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250 See above, Chapter 2, Section 4: “Foreignizing and Domestication Translation”.
For the same reason, ‘translatability’ is often taken as a sign of low artistic quality: for instance Capuana sees the disappointing reception of Verga’s translations in French as a sign of his artistic value, as opposed to the shallow and derivative Cosmopolitanism of d’Annunzio.251

Untranslatability thus becomes the ultimate test of artistic value: in particular a text’s innate resistance to translation is taken as the evidence of its originality and of it “ethnic” quality. In these positions, a new view of “dialettalità” begins to emerge, anticipating Pirandello’s seminal distinction of ‘dialetto’ and dialettalità, and echoing Montale’s famous distinction of the two possible options for vernacular authors: “in due modi, quando si è uomini di qualche cultura, si può essere dialettali: o traducendo dalla lingua, giocando sull’effetto di novità che il trasporto può imprimere anche a un luogo comune, o ricorrendo al dialetto come ad una lingua vera e propria, quando la lingua sia considerata insufficiente o impropria a una ispirazione.” (Sulla poesia 175)

Clearly, the three authors examined belong to the former tendency enucleated by Montale (“traducendo dalla lingua”): even when they are not “mental translations” (as Verga polemically hinted in his aforementioned 1911 letter to Capuana), their works are meant to be translated, and conceived in the constant osmosis between language and dialect.

Leaving aside the foreignizing attitudes of pseudo-translation and the domesticating attitude of anti-translators”, a third attitude emerges from these conflicting views: living-in-translation, or a state of permanent osmosis between the standard and the regional. “Living-in-translation” is grounded in the mental habit of those authors who were born bilingual and who, to different extents, were actively engaged in the creation of a standard literary language capable of realistically representing the new reality of a unified Italy. In this respect, the start of their bilingual activity (whether prompted by a fortuitous encounter or dictated by financial need)

251 See the following passage, discussed above in Chapter 3, section 5: il lavoro del Verga non ha avuto […] successo presso i lettori francesi, e non poteva averne soggiunto io. La personalità del suo stile, il carattere speciale di esso nella traduzione era sparito; il traduttore era riuscito a diventare traditore per la evidentissima buona intenzione di non tradire l’originale. Invece quello era il caso, se mai di rifare con colourito francese, con forme dialettali di qualche provincia francese, un libro dove le forme dialettali si fondono assolutamente nella lingua comune e vestono e rivestono l’idea in modo così organico che la forma non può scindersi dal concetto. Che ne è avvenuto? L’opera del Verga nella veste straniera è apparsa scialba, stinta. (Capuana, Gli “ismi” contemporanei, 12-13).
cannot be detached from their endeavour as canonical writers struggling to find their voice in Italian. Their hybrid linguistic subjectivity is evident in several of their linguistic choices, including their frequent adoption of code-switching between Italian and dialect in their vernacular scripts, their metalinguistic awareness (explicit in forms of linguistic humor or in the reproduction of documents written by semiliterate), and in the very choice of self-translation. Living-in-translation is especially reflected in the specific adoption of a dramaturgical typology, which is reflective of the authors’ hybrid positioning and consciousness. Characters such as Don Ferdinando in ‘O mese mariano, Nociu/Ciampa in ‘A biritta cu i ciancianeddi/Il berretto a sonagli, and Don Nele in Bona genti/Il mulo di Rosa effectively act as cultural translators onstage, structurally adopting code-switching and mediating between two conflicting universes: as per a sharp definition of the famous Italian comedian Ettore Petrolini, “il vocabolario e la strada” (Livio 220).

Overcoming their essentialistic view of dialects as the true repositories of authentic regional characters, the examined authors embrace a view of language that is dynamic and transparent: an interstitial space that allows them to represent both extremes of society as two dialoguing voices. Translation from and into thus marks the rebirth of a national Italian for the stage: an “Italian” that is perhaps secondary and derivative, but which nonetheless carries the echo of a more lively code, maintaining inflections, structures and idiomatic forms borrowed from popularly spoken dialects. In this respect, the linguistic solutions implemented by dialectal performers authors such as Eduardo De Filippo, Cesco Baseggio and Gilberto Govi in the mid-1900, both onstage and onscreen, are heavily indebted to the “inner transparency” of language and to the “dialettalità” engrained in the bilingual theatre of the late nineteenth-century theatre, progressively leading to a dialect-flavoured standard Italian. These and other legacies will be left, however, to future research.
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Appendix

‘O Mese Mariano

Trascrizione integrale delle varianti documentate nel Manoscritto MSS B a I B (10, Sez. Lucchesi Palli, Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli. (Napoli, Gennaio 1900 Teatro San Ferdinando)

[1] Variante scena IV

Carta 9, recto e verso

Carmela: Vuie che dicite? E pecché neh, suora ma? E che male ce sta?
La suora: Ma se le dico che è proibito!
Carmela: E comme! Chillo ò signore l'ha mannato pur e a chiamà... (Indica l'economo)
La suora: E appunto... son venuta io....
Carmela: No, sora mia, vuie mm'avite fa na carità!... E chi se move à ’ccà 'ncoppa! Aggio fatto nu miglio 'e cammino!...
La suora: Un'altra volta... (Sorride)
Carmela: No... no... (prega, supplica)
(Dall'interno si ode un canto a coro, infantile, confuso e lieve)
(La suora si scuote, pare che abbia trovato la ragione per negare ancora)
La suora: Ascolti.... (A Carmela)
Carmela: Chi è?... (ascolta)
(II canto si fa un poco più vicino e cresce, ritmato. LA suora e Carmela guardano verso il ballatoio).
La suora (dolce, persuasiva) Li sente? Vanno in chiesa, adesso ... (Carmela rimane interdetta, dispiaciuta, sorpresa) Vanno a pregar la Madonna... Il Canto si fa più vicino
Carmela: <Iusto mo!> E perché, neh, suora ma? Ogge è martedì.... (indecisa)
La suora: è il mese mariano, figliuola.... Vanno a portar fiori alla Vergine... a pregarla per... tutti... (si commuove. Carmela si commuove) (Le voci si avvicinano. Appaiono sul ballatoio i bambini in fila. Una suora li segue e batte il tempo con uno scatolino che si apre e si chiude. I Ragazzi cantano e procedono)
[2] Variante 1, Scena Ultima

Carte 9 e 10.

Durante il passaggio dei ragazzi, gli impiegati si sono tratti addietro. Il ballatoio è rimasto scoperto così da lasciar vedere i bambini. Carmela si fa avanti: la suora le si mette avanti, le raccomanda con cenni di non avanzare. La bambina sale su d'una seggiola. Scena a soggetto.

Brevi parole di Carmela che vede e non vede.

Carmela: Sta lì? Sta lì a mmiezzo? ... Scusate... Faciteme vedè... Addò sta? Peppeniè?

La suora: Ssst!.... Silenzio .... è passato...

Carmela: è passato!... E addò steva?....Io nun l'aggio visto!....

La suora (commossa) Li! ... in prima fila...

Carmela: M'ha vista? Mi ha vista?

La suora: Sì... sì... v'avarà vista.....

Carmela: Matalè, l’è visto?

Matalena: Ni, ma'!.... (scende dalla seggiola).

Carmela: E dint'a chiesa nun pozzo ì?...

La suora: Non è permesso...

(Continua la conversazione con Carmela, che si dimostra comprensiva e accomodante.)

Carmela: E va bene.... Stateve bbuone.... Me ne vaco.....

La suora: (XXX) Lo vedrà un altro giorno.... Le scriverò io stessa, ecco.

Carmela: Facite comme vulite vuie... Me n'aggia i, ovè? Nun pozzo aspettà?...

La suora: Ma figliuola mia! Resteranno in chiesa più di un'ora!...

Carmela (dopo un po' a don Gaetano) Signurì, avitore visto? ... 'On Gennà?... (Don Gennaro s'avanza, commosso) Avite ntiso? Me n'aggia i....

Don Gennaro (balbettando) Embè.... nun fa niente... facite à vulontà è Dio...

Carmela: E nun à sto facendo 'a tanto tiempo? Vuie 'o ssapite! (un silenzio). Sarranno 'è peccate c'aggio fatte!.... Matalé, ammuncenne.... Suora Cristì.... ve vaso 'a mano.... (fa per baciarle la mano)

La suora (commossa): No... M'abbracci... (L'abbraccia) Povera Carmela!... (Carmela la guarda, quasi meravigliata.) Un'alàra volta! Un'alèra volta!... Glielo prometto!...
Carmela: Aspettate... (Caccia la mano in saccoccia; ne cava un pacchetto) Almeno, faciteme 'a carità,... quannn'esce... lle date sta sfugliatella... S'è fatta pure fredda!.... (La dà alla suora)
La suora: Sarà fatto... (La mette sulla scrivania dell'econ)

La scena è riscritta ai fogli 11-15 senza correzioni, e in blu, nella versione simile a quella attuale.

[3] Variante 2, scena ultima

Foglio 29 recto, numerato 31

Scena iv uscita
Carmela: Embé... (decidendosi) I nun ve voglio tené cchiù mpedite,,, ve cerco scuse... signò... (a don GaetL) Aggiate pacienza... scusate d'è chiacchiere
Carmela: Signore, a tutti... (prende per mano la piccina)... stateve buone... ce vedimme n'ata vota...
Don Gaetano: Sentite, figlia mia... quanno turnate, nun saglite fino a ccà ncoppa... 'O parlatorio sta a pianterreno...
Carmela: Va bene, comme vulite vuie oscelenza... Viene Matalé... jammuncenne... Bongiorno a tutte... (Dà un ultimo sguardo alla porta grande. S'avvia. Tutti l'accompagnano fino alla porta di sinistra. Essa esce.)

Un silenzio. Ciascuno ritorna alla sua scrivania e siede. La suora torna dalla porta a sinistra, con le breaccia conserte. S'avvicina, parla all'economo che è in piedi.
La Suora (a voce bassa) Ha da dirmi qualche cosa?..
Don Gaetano (scuotendo la testa) Grazie... niente. (la suora esce)

(un silenzio. L'economo passa, si ferma, guarda Mazzia che s'è preparato per continuare a scrivere).
Don Gaet: Mazzì, vuie vulite... continuà...?
Mzzia: Sissignore...
Don Gaet: Addò eramo rimaste? (ricomincia dentro il canto)
Mazzia (Legge): che trovandosi in impellente urgenza di denaro...
Don Gaet (dettando): Si rivolgeva perciò alla Signoria Sua Illustrissima... (camminando si arresta presso la scrivania e vede il pacchetto) (azione)
Mazzia: Illustrissima...
Don Gaet (commosso, cerca una sedia. Siede.) nella speranza... (quasi singhiozzando) (comincia a chiamare la tela) che.... la bontà... della ... signoria... vostra.... illustrissima... (cala lentamente la tela)
Fine.