

*Introduction*

Eduardo De Filippo (1900-1984) was a leading exponent of both Neapolitan and Italian twentieth century theatre and is among the few Italian playwrights whose works have been translated into English. He portrayed different facets of human nature using Neapolitan dialect as a language and not purely as a folkloristic factor. Dialect was, therefore, a powerful means to disseminate universal values while reaffirming the importance of local identities. This essay looks at translations into British and American English of three plays by De Filippo, and examines the implications of the translators' choices in the receptor theatrical system in terms of the portrayal of Neapolitan culture. Starting from the premise that at the basis of the translating process there is cultural transfer between languages, I will suggest that dialect theatre represents an autonomous genre, separate from standard Italian theatre, and in particular that language domestication reduces the cultural impact of the original plays. To support my argument, I will look at the representation of female characters in the translations of the plays *Filumena Marturano* (1946), *Napoli milionaria!* (1945) and *Natale in casa Cupiello* (1931), and I will illustrate how the translations have confirmed stereotypes about Neapolitan culture that depict it as loud, comic and over-excitabile, and in so doing have somewhat denaturalised the original works.

My suggestion is that the rendering of the source text is primarily determined by the target theatrical and cultural system's norms and conventions that aim to neutralize the alterity of the foreign text and to bring it closer to the expectations of the receiving audience. In fact, the translators' choices are often determined by cultural stereotypes embedded in the target culture.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, lexicological issues reflect the interpretation of a given culture, and the extent of cross-cultural transfer is linked to and dependent on choices made in translation. Indeed, the portrayal of Neapolitan culture seems to follow the canons of the receptor culture that, while framing it in the comic genre, stresses the element of passion and Mediterranean fervor. On the one hand, my analysis aims to investigate the effects of domestication through language standardization. On the other hand, I will look at cultural appropriation of the source text through assimilation of Neapolitan dialect to a working class local idiom. One of the consequences of neutralization of the linguistic factor and reiteration of preconceived representations of Neapolitans is the establishment of the target culture's supremacy over the foreign text, both in terms of reaffirming its language and in toning down or eliminating altogether the otherness of the plays. However, De Filippo's choice to write in dialect needs to be accounted for in translation, insofar as, while having clear cultural significance, dialect is employed for specific stylistic reasons, especially where it is juxtaposed to standard Italian.

*De Filippo's theatre in twentieth-century Italy*

---

<sup>1</sup> See Zuber 92-103.

De Filippo's theatre needs to be framed in the broader context of Italian and European theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century. Themes such as the conflict between individuals and society, non-communication, isolation and injustice were dominant in this panorama, in which new issues were being brought forward by cultural intelligentsias in different countries.<sup>2</sup> From a different viewpoint, in Italy the Futurist movement played an important innovative role, especially in the conception of a "total" theatre that professed the need for theatre to achieve an interaction between actors, lights, costumes and musical effects. The histrionic actor, who used improvisation and physicality, common to the genre of *varietà*,<sup>3</sup> as the basis of acting, became the emblem of Futurist theatre, as was announced in the *Manifesto del teatro di varietà* in 1913 (Angelini 120). These new ideas reached Naples as well, where the Neapolitan writer, poet and painter Francesco Cangiullo (1884-1977) took part with Marinetti in the creation of the manifesto of "Teatro della sorpresa," published in 1921. It is not at all surprising that De Filippo, who was developing as a playwright, was influenced by this cultural turmoil and opened up to a European perspective addressing themes such as introspection and non-communication, which are core elements in his theatre.

One of the most distinctive elements of De Filippo's theatre is the use of a minimalist acting style in comedy. This genre was and still is often associated with excessive gesticulation and loudness. Conversely, De Filippo's innovative approach was based on silence and minimal physicality. In fact, De Filippo's stillness has been admired by critics such as Michael Billington and Eric Bentley. The former in England and the latter in America, both praised the "*pianissimo*," – so distant from the stereotyped idea of Italian acting<sup>4</sup> – that characterized Gennaro Jovine's performance in *Napoli milionaria!*, Luca Cupiello's in *Natale in casa Cupiello* or Antonio Barracano's in *Il sindaco del Rione Sanità*.

Although De Filippo's theatre has strong links with Naples, where all his plays take place, this does not make it parochial, since its themes cross Neapolitan boundaries and extend to the whole of Italy and even beyond. For this reason he appears to be the spokesperson of an entire population and its expectations and frustrations. In fact, he is known to the Italian public and scholars of Italian theatre simply as Eduardo.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> For example, James Joyce published *Dubliners* in 1906 and *Ulysses* in 1921. Samuel Beckett was born in 1906 and would become one of the main writers of the so called 'theatre of the absurd' of which *Waiting for Godot* (1953) is one of the most famous examples. On this point see Rebora 8.

<sup>3</sup> Angelini notices that the main centres of production of this type of theatre were Rome and Naples, where actors such as Ettore Petrolini and Nicola Maldacea developed specific techniques in this sense, which would be adopted also by Raffaele Viviani, the De Filippo brothers and Totò, although *varietà* actors were present in other regions as well, since "dialettalità" was the main feature of this popular genre (121). On this point, see also Berghaus: "[a]fter several years of experimentation with the format of the *serate*, Marinetti felt the need to go beyond the use of theatre as a means of provocation and propaganda. The *serate* had offered an effective theatrical formula, but once established, it was not easy to avoid repetition. Therefore Marinetti began to search for a new model, which would offer more variety and open up new possibilities. He found this in a form of popular theatre usually referred to as music-hall, variety, cabaret, or *café-concert* [. . .]. In the 1920s, the movement's main operation shifted from Milan to Rome and a new artistic phase, usually referred to as Second Futurism, began" (6).

<sup>4</sup> See Bentley 291 and Billington.

<sup>5</sup> The elimination of his surname from the company's name and the adoption of his forename as his future art name coincided with two important events: his separation from his brother Peppino that put an end to the *Compagnia Teatro Umoristico I De Filippo*, and the beginning of the *Cantata dei giorni dispari* with a less comic and more dramatic repertoire.

numerous stage productions in different countries, both in Europe and in other continents such as Japan and South America, are testimony to the extensive interest in this author and the worldwide popularity of his theatre.<sup>6</sup>

### *Translation as cultural transfer*

Even though translation is an activity innate in human beings, such a quintessential characteristic of the human brain tends to be regarded as secondary in respect to the creation of a new concept. However, when one looks at both activities of production *ex novo*, and the process of re-encoding into another system (either of words, images, music or gestures), it appears that they are both governed by the same principle, that is, the transfer of an idea between two systems. When it comes to the transposition of one language into another there are various factors involved other than simple utterance, as language is not isolated from the context in which it is created and used. On the contrary it is the result of a series of conditions that operate on its formation and its manifestation. Such conditions are cultural as well as political, so that a given language is more than a conglomerate of linguistic signs: it is a cultural vehicle.

Ever since its appearance as an academic branch in the 1970s, Translation Studies has always dealt with the thorny problem of the transfer, firstly between languages and later between cultures. In the 1980s the so-called “Manipulation School” led by scholars such as André Lefevere, Theo Hermans, Gideon Toury<sup>7</sup> and Susan Bassnett introduced a cultural perspective in translation that was seen as an act of re-writing of the source text. According to these scholars, decoding the language coincides with decoding the culture in which that language is embedded. It follows that translators need to be not only bilingual, but bi-cultural. This line of thought shifted the attention to the target text, claiming that all translated texts reflect the cultural and social norms of the system to which they belong, and are by nature manipulations of the source texts. Unlike the linguistically oriented school, it emphasized the cultural constraints that act upon language, and therefore on translators, and the fact that translation is an act of cultural appropriation of the source text by the receiving culture. According to these scholars, decoding the language coincides with decoding the culture in which that language is embedded in order to re-encode it into the target culture, which is the ultimate beneficiary of the translated text.

An innovative approach to translation and cultural transfer has been suggested by Maria Tymoczko. She moves from an anthropological standpoint, considering translation a means to introduce the Other into a given culture. Her perspective is particularly interesting when applied to minority languages, of which dialects are an example, insofar as she rightly points out that “the use of a minority-language is a matter of cultural power: of resistance to foreign dominance and foreign cultural assertion” (17). In the case of minority languages, therefore, translation plays a crucial role since it represents the

---

<sup>6</sup> A new English version by Mike Poulton of *Il sindaco del Rione Sanità* with the title *The Syndicate* recently premiered, on 21 July 2011, at the Minerva Theatre at the Chichester Festival Theatre in Chichester. Ian McKellen and Michael Pennington played the main roles. Both actors represented De Filippo’s characters in the past.

<sup>7</sup> Gideon Toury’s collection of papers *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, published in 1980, consolidated the new descriptive trend in Translation Studies.

crossing point between the source and the target culture, inasmuch as the source culture is represented through the translated text. Tymoczko notes that in oral tradition as well as in mythic literature, the metonymic aspect of retelling is particularly evident. It is important to note the similarity between oral and dialect tradition, since both have a strong localised cultural base. From this premise, it follows that the translation of a given work of a particular author metonymically represents all works by the same author and of the same genre. For the sake of my argument, I will quote a long extract which is relevant to the issue of dialect translation:

the discourse about rewriting and about the metonymic aspects of literature being developed here is a particularly potent framework for the discussion of the translation of a non-canonical or marginalized literature. Since there are many types of non-canonical or marginalized literatures, it should be made explicit that here I am primarily speaking about literature that is marginalized because it is the literature of a marginalized culture [...]. There are often, in fact, massive obstacles facing translators who wish to bring the texts of a marginalized culture to a dominant-culture audience: issues related to the interpretation of material culture (such as food, dress, tools) and social culture (including law, economics, customs, and so forth), history, values, and world view; problems with the transference of literary features such as genre, form, performance conventions, and literary allusions; as well as the inevitable questions of linguistic interface. For all these reasons the information load of translations of such marginalized texts is often very high – in fact it is at risk of being intolerably high. Because neither the cultural content nor the literary framework of such texts is familiar to the receiving audience, the reception problems posed by marginalized texts in translation are acute. (47)

The translational problems regarding the “information load” also concern dialect literature and consequently dialect theatre, insofar as they are expressions of marginalized, resistant cultures, whose cultural elements are not familiar to the majority of people who belong to dominant cultures. When applied to the textual analysis of the plays, this hermeneutic approach will show that the cultural representation of Neapolitan theatre, i.e. the “material culture” and the “social culture,” metonymically represents Neapolitan dialect culture as a whole, and it is either domesticated or acculturated in translation. The peculiarities of Neapolitan culture are either neutralized through the standardization of the language or incorporated in the receptor system through clichés, so that the translated texts metonymically represent Neapolitan culture according to domestic stereotypes and preconceived ideas about such a culture.

#### *Translating dialect in Eduardo’s plays*

Writing vernacular theatre was for Eduardo a cultural choice, for Neapolitan was used as a language in its own right, capable of depicting the variety of human experiences beyond the boundaries of Naples. In addition, Eduardo’s acting style offered a different representation of Neapolitan theatre, still confined within the exaggerated acting of *commedia dell’arte*, which put emphasis on comicality. In fact, he employed in his plays the “domestic” type of dialect, used in a minimalist, anti-naturalistic way, employing lower tones and more constrained acting, which brought his theatre in line with Italian and European trends (De Simone 21). From a linguistic viewpoint, Eduardo’s theatre is the expression of a solid dialectal linguistic culture, where traditional structures and

vocabulary are preserved and kept alive. The originality of his language, particularly in the plays of the second phase of his production, rests on the use of both dialect and standard language. This code-switching depends essentially on register, since familiar and informal contexts are generally rendered in dialect, whereas formal language is expressed almost exclusively in standard Italian.

Translating dialect presents additional problems compared to standard language, as some words or phrases appear to be so embedded in the source culture that whatever substitute might be found in the target language may never fully render the actual meaning. In her enlightening article titled “Language and Politics on Stage,” Manuela Perteghella examines issues related to strategies and methods employed by translators of dialect theatre and their repercussions on the target language text. In particular, she describes how techniques such as the rendering of source language dialect into target language dialect could be motivated by instances of “linguistic freedom” (as in the case of plays authored in *joual* and translated into Scots). In other instances the source culture is transplanted into the target culture through the use of a local regional dialect that makes it more accessible to the target audience, as happens in the translation of De Filippo’s *Napoli milionaria!* (47). Thus, following Perteghella’s nomenclature, different strategies for translating dialect will produce different results on the target language receivers, whether dialect is rendered with another dialect, with slang, standard language, or a mixture of the three. Features above word level are particularly important when dealing with idiomatic expressions, set phrases, and proverbs, since these lexical items are frequent in dialect literature, and arise out of its traditional, essentially oral core. For this reason, the way they are rendered or the fact that they are not rendered in the target language will influence the reception and the perception of the source message.

Theatre is essentially linked to the social discourse of a given society; therefore, it adheres to its ideological assumptions, especially with regard to its world view. The appropriation of a text according to local expectations facilitates its acceptance by the audience while reinforcing a pre-existing idea. For this reason, foreign theatre, and in particular dialect theatre, is normally approached from a conservative viewpoint so that foreignisms are usually either eliminated or neutralised. What is more, the staging of a foreign play is dictated by financial norms of saleability that require the widest possible consensus by the target culture. That is why the source culture tends to be imported into the target culture and homogenised to it, and sociolects are most often converted into expressions that are familiar to the target language culture.<sup>8</sup>

### *Standardizing dialect*

What has been suggested in the previous section can be observed in different Anglophone translations, British and American, of *Filumena Marturano*, written in 1946 by Eduardo for his sister Titina. The play premiered on 7 November 1946 at the *Teatro*

---

<sup>8</sup> This approach has been confirmed in the course of two separate interviews I conducted with the director Gloria Paris, who staged a French version of *Filumena Marturano*, and with the translator and dramaturg Beatrice Basso, who translated into English *Sabato, domenica e lunedì*, and co-translated *Napoli milionaria!*. In both cases the main preoccupation had been the production of a play that would meet the audience’s expectations. In fact, the former representation was defined by the director as “very French,” and the latter generated in the audience a real sense of familiarity.

*Politeama* in Naples. It tells the story of an ex-prostitute who has been living for twenty-five years as the mistress/housekeeper of Domenico, a rich and spoilt man who rescued her from a brothel and who fathered one of Filumena's three undiscovered children. Filumena is determined to give them Domenico's name, and to do so she feigns a deadly illness and insists on getting married on her death bed. This study will examine three different translations authored respectively by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall (KW&WH, 1977),<sup>9</sup> Timberlake Wertenbaker (TW, 1998),<sup>10</sup> and Maria Tucci (MT, 2002).<sup>11</sup> In each case the Neapolitan dialect has been rendered with standard English. As a result, code-switching and dialect expressions have been removed in all the versions in question.

In the following extract from Act One, Filumena talks with Diana, Domenico's mistress. She is referring to the fact that the two lovers are kissing and hugging each other at her deathbed:

FILUMENA. [...] Naturalmente, dove non ci sono infermi malati non ci possono essere infermieri... e le schifezze... (*con l'indice della mano destra teso assesta a Diana dei misurati colpetti sul mento, che costringono la donna a dire repentini e involontari: «No» col capo*) ...le purcarie... (*ripete il gesto*) davanti a una che sta murenno... pecché tu sapive che io stevo murenno... 'e vvaie a fà â casa 'e sòreta! (*Diana sorride come un'ebete, come per dire: «Non la conosco»*) Andatevene con i piedi vostri e truvàteve n'ata casa, no chesta. (I. 550)

FILUMENA. [...] It therefore follows that where there is no illness, there is no need for camphor and adrenalin, and no need for nurses.

*Filumena strikes Diana on the chin with her index finger, making her head jerk from side to side.*

No filth. No cows. No farmyard animals. No filthy farmyard carrying on in front of a dying woman –because that's what you thought I was—a dying woman. So go away. Find somewhere else to bounce your tits and waggle your arse— there is no room for you in this house. (KW&WH, I. 16)

FILUMENA. [...] Naturally, where there are no sick people, there is no need for nurses... or any other kind of filth. (*With her finger she takes Diana's chin and makes her make a no*). Disgusting acts in front of a dying woman. So why don't you go and look after your sister. (TW, I. 19)

FILUMENA. [...] Naturally when you're not sick anymore you don't need nurses or your filthy carryings-on in front of a dying woman. Because you knew I was dying! So take yourself and all this garbage right out of here to some other house. (MT, I. 12)

<sup>9</sup> This version was first staged in 1977 at the Lyric Theatre in London and directed by Franco Zeffirelli, starring Joan Plowright as Filumena Marturano and Colin Blakely as Domenico Soriano.

<sup>10</sup> It was staged in London in 1998 at the Piccadilly Theatre, directed by Peter Hall. The main roles were played by Judi Dench as Filumena and Michael Pennington as Domenico.

<sup>11</sup> See Tucci 1-40. The commission for the American translation was given in 1996 to the New York born American-Italian actress Maria Tucci, who also played Filumena (Tony Amendola played Domenico). This production, directed by James Naught, was premiered at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts in August 1996.

Language domestication has produced an effect of transparency, which has eliminated the foreignness of the source text. The mixture between incorrect Italian and dialect has disappeared in translation. For example, the expression “e vvaie a fà â casa ‘e sòreta!” refers to Neapolitans’ strong sense of honor, since offending somebody’s sister or mother constitutes a dire insult. This cultural reference has been abolished in KW&WH’s version, while TW seems to have misinterpreted it altogether. While KW&WH’s version portrays Filumena as a vulgar, shrewd prostitute, and the language is deliberately crude and aggressive, MT’s translation quickly deals with the matter with a dry: “so take yourself and all this garbage right out of here to some other house.” At this point, it is important to underline that standardizing culture-bound items considerably diminishes the significance of the source text, as the foreign text is presented to the receptor milieu deprived of its distinctive features. The translation of terms and culturally loaded expressions is inevitably problematic, because dialect is tied to a very strong sense of locality and place. However, standard English does not seem to offer the variety of choices, both of vocabulary and register, to render the colorfulness and rhythms of the vernacular. The value of a foreign work lies in its capacity to introduce a different perspective in the target culture. Domesticating the source text’s language thwarts the cultural message embedded in it and incorporates it in the target culture’s discourse.

Another case in which domestication reflects on the dramatic impact of the play occurs with the usage of idiomatic expressions that are at the basis of a particular theatrical effect, in this case, the comic effect. In this scene of Act Two, Rosalia, Amalia’s maid, comes in pretending not to have seen Alfredo, Domenico’s butler, who is eager to ascertain the new developments in the affair:

ROSALIA. Nun t’aggio visto.

ALFREDO. Nun t’aggio visto? E che so’ nu pólice ncopp’a sta seggia?

ROSALIA. (*ambigua*) Eh, nu pólice c’ ‘a tosse... (*Tossicchia*). (II. 556).

ROSALIA. I didn’t see you sitting there.

ALFREDO. You didn’t see me? What did you think I was? Part of the furniture? Where’ve you been?

ROSALIA. To Mass, of course. Where do you think? (KW&WH, II. 21)

ROSALIA. I didn’t see you.

ALFREDO. You didn’t see me? What am I? A flea on the carpet?

ROSALIA. Yes, a circus flea with a cough. (TW, II. 24)

ROSALIA. Oh, I didn’t see you.

ALFREDO. That’s right. I’m so tiny, I’m invisible. I’m just a little flea on this chair.

ROSALIA. A flea with a big mouth. (MT, II. 16)

The words: “E che so’ nu pólice ncopp’a sta seggia?” refer to the fact that Alfredo is sarcastically comparing himself to a flea which is hardly visible. On the other hand, Rosalia replies with a traditional saying: “Eh, nu pólice c’ ‘a tosse...”, which describes worthless people who talk too much, comparing them to fleas that cough, that is, making insignificant yet annoying noises. With these quick and short lines the character is clearly portrayed as witty and sharp. Conversely, rendering this expression in standard English has inevitably deprived it of its cultural as well as its comic weight, so that the exchange

between the characters has a marginal impact and is perhaps also somewhat obscure. Furthermore, the omission of stage directions contributes to its ineffectiveness, since there is no reference to the fact that Alfredo “*non ha compreso l’allusione,*” making the allusion to the flea with a cough wholly irrelevant.

### *Cultural appropriation*

An innovative experiment in dialect translation was Peter Tinniswood’s 1991<sup>12</sup> adaptation of *Napoli Milionaria!* using the variety of English spoken in Liverpool. The play is set in the last days of the Second World War and it tells the story of the Jovine family dealing with the horrors of war., The female protagonist Amalia, to save her family from starvation, becomes involved in black market trafficking and turns from a dedicated mother into a ruthless racketeer, while her husband disapproves of her business dealings and stands aside. Tragedy will be avoided, if only by a narrow escape, and the family will be reunited in the end.

Among the various strategies which could be adopted to translate dialect, such as the employment of another dialect, a localized accent or slang, a dialect compilation, or a rendition in a standard language (Perteghella 50-51), Tinniswood opted for the use of another dialect. It is worth mentioning that in the foreword to his adaptation, he explained that he had not intended to use a dialect: “I’ve done this adaptation of Eduardo’s play in the accents of my native city. Not its dialects. I’m not keen on dialect writing in English. It relies too much on a heavily-coated treacled ear and too little on love and sympathy and affection.”<sup>13</sup> The use of Scouse was welcomed by most critics, as it accentuated similarities between the two cities and contributed to distancing the production from previous representations of Italian characters which put great emphasis on mockery of Italians. On the other hand, some critics disliked this choice as they thought it framed the play within an English working-class sit-com tradition. By using Liverpool speech-rhythms the identity of the characters was therefore acculturated and the emphasis shifted from the source to the target culture.

While the characters kept their original names, and the setting and costumes reproduced a Neapolitan ambiance, the language presented strong regional features operating a deep cultural relocation. Both the translator and the director intended to swerve from the 1970s productions of *Saturday, Sunday, Monday* and *Filumena* directed by Franco Zeffirelli; therefore, while the former highlighted “Italianness,” this adaptation accentuated “Britishness.” The exigencies of box office demands again played an essential role. The success of the performance depended on its innovative approach, and on its ability to generate interest, taking the audience by surprise.

Let us now look at the portrayal of Amalia. In this extract from Act Two she is arguing with a neighbour who used to be better off and took no notice of the Jovine’s modest finances. But now the tables have turned:

---

<sup>12</sup> On 27 June 1991, the English adaptation directed by the National Theatre director Richard Eyre opened in the Lyttelton. The two leading roles were played by Ian McKellen as Gennaro Jovine and Clare Higgins as Amalia Jovine.

<sup>13</sup> In the foreword to his adaptation, Tinniswood stated that the choice of Liverpool drew on the fact that both cities are port towns.

AMALIA. Ma scusate... Ma cheste so' belli cchiacchiere... (*Ad Errico che insiste nel guardarla per farla rabbonire, con tono che non ammette replica*) Oi ni', àssance fà. (*Si alza accesa*) Ma vuie 'e solde v'e 'e ssapìsteve piglià... Mo mi venite a dire, ca 'e duie quartine vuoste m' 'àccattaie io... E nun ve l'aggio pavate? (*Riccardo cerca di calmarla, temendo la chiassata*) Ma pecché, quanno dint' 'a casa mia simme state diune, simme venute addù vuie? (*Convinta e vendicativa*) 'E figlie mieie nun hanno sofferto 'a famma? Nuie, quanno vuie teniveve 'o posto e 'a sera ve faciveve 'e ppasseggiate a perdere tiempo nnanze 'e vvetrine, mangiàvemo scorze 'e pesielle vullute cu nu pizzeco 'e sale, doie pummarole e senza grasso... (*Perde il controllo. Va sempre più gridando*) Mo me dispiace! Ma io chesto me trovo: 'e duie quartine vuoste e 'a casa addó state vuie... Pigliateve 'e ccinquantamila lire 'a mano 'e ll'avvocato. E si vulite rummané dint' 'a casa, che v'arricorda quanno vuie mangiàveve e nuie stévemo diune, pagate 'o mensile. E si no ve ne iate ca ce facite piacere. Mo lassàtece, ca avimmo che fà... (*Mettendo Riccardo alla porta*) Sfullammo! Sfullammo! Iate, ragiunie', ca 'o gghi è sempe buono. (II. 103)

AMALIA. Oh yes, this is all very well. All this fine talk. All this eloquence. All this drama and tragedy. Well, listen to me, sunshine, you weren't behind the door when it came to grabbing the money I offered you. You knew when you were onto a good thing. Okay, so it was me [who] bought your two apartments. What are you suggesting – that you weren't paid for them. (*Before he can answer she ploughs on with increasing anger*) You make me sick. You make me want to throw up. When we were starving, did we come groveling to you? Did we come whingeing and whining? I suppose my children never went hungry, did they? Oh no, they never had to go without, did they? And you? While we were pinching and scraping, having to eat any old shit we could lay our hands on, you were in your secure and comfy well-paid job, weren't you, and you'd all the time in the world to gossip and go window shopping. You piss me off. All you had to do was find the money you owed me, and the house would still be yours. Well, you haven't, have you? So go round to my lawyers, collect your fifty thousand lire and get out of my hair. On the other hand if you want to stay on in the house to remind you of the times you were doing fine and dandy and we were wondering where the next meal was coming from, then pay the rent. That's all you've got to do, sunshine – pay the rent. If you can't, that's your problem. It's not mine. Right? So just go, will you? Bugger off. (*She pushes him towards the street door*) Clear off out of it. Out, out. (Tinniswood, II. 315)

Here, the representation of Donna Amalia's Neapolitan inflamed spirit has generated long-windedness and strong language. Amalia acknowledges the social distance between herself and the interlocutor, with whom she maintains the pronoun *voi* instead of using *tu*. Her simple way of referring to her starving family is rendered with strong language and aggressiveness. In fact, the words “piglià” (to take), and “simme venute” (we came) have been translated as “grabbing” and “groveling” with a much stronger connotation.

The same register applies to another female character, Adelaide, an old woman who also uses vulgar language when she welcomes Gennaro, who has just come back from a concentration camp: “This is your house, you silly old bugger... Come on Don Gennaro. Sit down. Park your arse, lad.” Noticeably, the register in the original is somewhat different, as Adelaide's words are, in the first example: “È cca, don Genna'... Trasite... Chesta è a casa vostra... ‘A mugliera vostra, ‘a vedite?,” and in the second

example: “Don Genna’ assettateve!,” where jargon and colloquialisms are absent, and the tone is reassuring rather than jolly, as she understands Gennaro’s distress.

It clearly appears that the cultural identity of the Scouse version resides in the language employed, since the working class element, which is the main feature of Tinniswood’s translation, is absent in the Italian play. Tinniswood has, in fact, rewritten the foreign text, establishing his cultural supremacy over it.

A different type of cultural appropriation has been made in the American translation, commissioned to Linda Alper and Beatrice Basso by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland in 2005.<sup>14</sup> As Beatrice Basso explained to me during a telephone interview, this translation was in American English, as on previous occasions the use of British English had proven incomprehensible for American audiences. In particular, she explained that the need to convey the cultural aspects of the text has to take into account the fact that “understanding the cultural elements does not necessarily mean being able to re-create them successfully in another culture” (161)<sup>15</sup> as clichés can constitute a predominant element of the translation. One point that Basso made very clear is that the translator’s choices had to fulfill both the conventions of acting and the expectations of the audience. This resulted in the adjustment of the theatrical language and tempo to meet the canons of the receiving milieu.

The play’s structure has been re-shaped in terms of the length of dialogues, but also with respect to the stage directions, which have been either condensed or cut altogether, and in the creation of a new theatrical rhythm through short, fast-paced dialogues. Even though standard English was used, Italianisms such as “mamma,” “mammeta,” “papa,” “maccheroni,” “buongiorno,” “signuri,” “pastina,” “malafemmena,” and some exclamations like “Madonna!” are interspersed with English to create a sense of exoticism in the dialogues. While this version moulds the original according to American theatrical canons, on the other hand it suggests an American idea of “Italianness,” implying a certain amount of melodrama and buffoonery.

Eduardo used stage directions, on the one hand to give instructions to the actors and on the other to express his own views on theatre and life, so they should be considered descriptive elements of the plays, and not simple instructions. The ambience is meticulously prescribed, and so are the characters’ psychological profiles. It is through the stage directions that rhythm and acting style are fixed; thus, manipulating them is equivalent to changing a substantial part of the play. In this extract from Act One, Gennaro Jovine is forced to feign death to prevent a police officer from searching for black-market goods which are stashed under the bed where the “corpse” is lying. But the police officer suspects that the death is a fiction and the risk that he might look under the bed is significant:

AMALIA. (*lo ferma con un gesto disperato*) No, brigadie’! (*Gli si aggrappa alle ginocchia, sciolta in lacrime. A questo punto l’attrice dovrà raggiungere l’attimo più straziante e drammatico, senza nessuna venatura di caricatura, un po’ per la perfezione della finzione che raggiunge sempre il nostro popolo, e un po’ pure perché il pericolo è grosso*) (I. 81)

---

<sup>14</sup> The play opened on 23 April in the Angus Bowmer Theatre at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and was directed by Libby Alper. Amalia Jovine was played by Linda Alper and Richard Elmore played Gennaro Jovine. The information about the production was provided by Beatrice Basso.

<sup>15</sup> Similar views are expressed by the translator in her article “Italian Dramaturg in a Translation Process.”

AMALIA. (*She throws herself at Ciappa's knees.*) No! Officer, please. (*She bursts into tears, achieving a totally believable Neapolitan grief*) (Alper & Basso, I. 28)

What a “totally believable Neapolitan grief” might consist of is difficult to divine unless the stage direction refers to the stereotypical image of an overexcited, melodramatic woman pleading for mercy. However, if this were the case, it would be in contrast with the stage directions of the source text. In this instance, on the one hand the stage direction has been substantially cut, on the other it has been wholly reinterpreted in light of a domestic idea of Neapolitan pathos, which seems to reappear in another stage direction describing Amalia’s outburst as a “full Neapolitan fury.”

Stage directions have also been manipulated to create a different rhythm with a quicker pace, as in the exchange in Act Two between Amalia and her partner and (as of yet platonic) lover Errico. Amalia has just received a letter that makes her believe that Gennaro, whom they thought dead, is indeed alive. This has created both surprise and a certain degree of disappointment for the two of them, who were becoming more and more affectionate with each other. Amalia has just told Errico about the letter and explained that she is not looking forward to her husband’s return since, she claims, it would interfere with her business with Errico:

ERRICO. (*messo di fronte all'evidenza, trova modo di insinuare*) Certo ca pe vuie sarrà nu piacere...

AMALIA. (*combattuta*) Nu piacere e nu dispiacere. Pecché, certamente, vuie ‘o ssapite.. accumencia a dimannà...: “Ma ched’è stu cummercio? Chesto se pò fà... chello no...”. Insomma, mi attacca le braccia ca nun pozzo cchiù manovrare liberamente...

ERRICO. (*avvicinandosi sempre più a lei e fissandola, quasi con aria di rimprovero*)  
Già...

AMALIA. (*volutamente sfugge*) ‘O pericolo... Stàmmice attiente...

ERRICO. E... non per altra ragione?

AMALIA. Per... tutte queste ragioni.

ERRICO. (*indispettito, come richiamando la donna a qualche promessa tutt'altro che evasiva*) E pe me, no? È ove’? Pe me, no!

AMALIA. (*non avendo più la forza di fingere per la prima volta, guarda l'uomo fisso negli occhi e stringendogli le braccia lentamente e sensualmente gli mormora*) E pure pe te!

*Errico ghermisce la donna e con atteggiamento cosciente da maschio avvicina lentamente la sua bocca a quella di lei, baciandola a lungo. Immediatamente dal fondo entra ‘O Miezò Prèvete frugando nelle tasche del panciotto e muovendo verso la “vinella”. Scorge la scena, ne rimane interdetto, poi torna sui suoi passi, fermandosi sotto la porta e voltando le spalle ai due amanti. (II. 105)*

ERRICO. Would that be a good thing?

AMALIA. (*torn*) Good. Partly. Partly I don’t know. He’ll start asking questions, telling me I can’t do this, I can’t do that.

ERRICO. And...

AMALIA. (*She knows where Errico is going and avoids it*) He’ll tell me the business is too dangerous, it’s not right...

ERRICO. No other reasons?

AMALIA. Yes, other reasons. (*For the first time, she looks him in the eye, then touches his arm. She says softly, sensually*) Of course, other reasons.

*A long kiss. Miezio Prevete enters, searching his pockets and heading for the kitchen. When he sees Errico and Amalia, he returns to the front door and turns his back. Caught, Errico and Amalia hurry away from each other. Amalia immediately exits.* (Alper & Basso, II. 47)

In the Neapolitan version the crescendo of pathos between Amalia and Errico is carefully described, both by the characters' lines and by the stage directions that build up the tension of the scene and at the same time instruct the actors. Amalia's lines show her inner suffering, torn between faithfulness and passion. Her indecision in revealing her feelings is rendered with slow, hesitant words. This is more evident in the stage directions describing Errico's barely contained passion and Amalia's desperate surrender. Here the rhythm is intentionally slow, to underline the inner conflict in both characters who, in the end, confess their feelings to each other. The American version, however, quickens the pace of the scene, reducing this rather important moment to a short interlude. Amalia's dilemma between being a faithful wife and giving in to Errico's advances is lost and the stage directions are merely practical instructions to the actors. This more vibrant and succinct approach of the American translation seems to respond to the need to cater to the audience's taste. In a society where dynamism inspires every sector of life, theatre needs to meet the same requirement. As Beatrice Basso confirmed in the interview, the translation had to fulfil American theatrical canons and the acting had to respond to American expectations about the source culture.

### *Creating a British Eduardo*

*Natale in casa Cupiello* is probably the play that best represents the Neapolitan Christmas, saturated in cultural elements, among which is the *Presepio*, that is, the scenic representation of the Nativity. It tells the story of a deep crisis experienced by the Cupiello family that will culminate in a tragic event. While Luca, the male protagonist, is all wrapped up in his dreams of a perfect world and a perfect family, his wife Concetta is the real "man" of the family, who administers the finances of their humble household. They have two grown-up children, Tommasino, called Nennillo, who is childish and lazy, and Ninuccia, married to Nicolino, a businessman she does not love. Luca Cupiello devotes himself to the construction of his *Presepio*, and in doing so avoids taking part in the crisis that is destroying his family, while also finding a way to justify his exclusion by his wife and daughter.

The theme of this play undoubtedly places it in the Italian and western European panorama of the twentieth century. Indeed, the conflict between being and appearing is the fulcrum of the play. The characters' feigned ignorance of their family crisis recalls the very center of Pirandello's theatre, whereas incommunicability and isolation were themes present in Beckett and Ionesco's theatre as well. In fact, while traditional ingredients characterize the play as truly Neapolitan, they put it into a European perspective as they lead the spectators to reflect, through laughter, on their own condition.

*Natale in casa Cupiello* was originally written as a one-act play, (the actual second act) for the début of the company *Il Teatro Umoristico I De Filippo* at the cinema and theatre *Teatro Kursaal*, in Naples on 25 December 1931. The following year Eduardo added a second act, the actual first act, in preparation for the season at the *Sannazzaro* in Naples. Two years later he wrote the third and last act.<sup>16</sup> The English adaptation by Mike Stott, with the title *Ducking Out*,<sup>17</sup> was the result of a literal translation. It operates an extreme form of manipulation that decontextualizes the source text, transplanting it in the receiving theatrical system and the target culture. In fact the source text has been entirely rewritten according to Scott's free interpretation, and the source culture has been transmuted into the receiving milieu, thus losing its identity. *Ducking Out* opened at the Greenwich Theatre on 9 November 1982, and then on 16 December it moved to London's West End to the Duke of York's Theatre.<sup>18</sup> It relocated the comedy to a housing project in Derwent Block, the Lakeview Estate, in a town in West Lancashire, Stott's homeland, making it a modern story set in 1980. Eduardo had made several requests to change parts of the adaptation, which he thought did not reflect the original idea; however, Mike Stott was reluctant to make such changes since he wanted to maintain his control over the text (Acqua 3). In this sense, the English adaptation revealed on the one hand the aim to anglicize the Neapolitan play and on the other hand the idea of establishing a new authorship entirely.

The choice of West Lancashire operated a geographical as well as a cultural transposition, since the northern accent spoken by the actors gave a clear regional connotation, and some of the actors were chosen for their distinctive accent. Interestingly, the reason for setting the play in that particular area was linked to the supposedly impassioned spirit of the people from that region, prone to easy arguments and animated relationships. Choosing a housing project operated a cultural shift and gave a working class connotation to the characters, as observed by Benedict Nightingale (619) and Milton Shulman (620). David Roper described the setting of the adaptation as a "kind of Hilda and Stan Ogden household" (619).<sup>19</sup> As for the language used in the English version, it shows a definite class connotation, marked by a frequent use of slang and characterized by a great deal of rudeness. However, Eduardo hardly ever used strong language in his theatre; besides, his renowned succinct dialogues and minimalist acting style contributed to creating a much stronger comic effect than wordiness and excessive gesticulation. On the contrary, the use of swear words and sexual references, which abound in the adaptation, reveals the intention of the translator to distance his work from the original, both in content and style. The conventions and expectations of the receiving theatrical system require that this Italian comedy be funny and loud, a feature which is accentuated in the adaptation by the frequent use of "bloody/bloody hell" and a quasi-constant quarrelling, although none of these features are present in the original. Such translational choices have not taken into account the style of the source text, its tone, nor

---

<sup>16</sup> The complete play was premiered in Milan at the *Teatro Olimpia* on 9 April 1934.

<sup>17</sup> Mike Stott explained during a telephone interview in 2007 that the title underscored the protagonist's refusal to accept his domestic crisis and his attitude towards the generational clash with his children.

<sup>18</sup> The director was Mike Ockrent, Warren Mitchell played Len, Gillian Barge Connie and Kevin Kennedy played Tommy. According to Mike Stott, the rights to the production had been bought by the company H.M. Tennent Ltd., owned by Bruce Hyman with the intention of presenting a truly English version of the play.

<sup>19</sup> Hilda and Stan Ogden were characters in the British television serial *Coronation Street*.

the use of dialect and standard language to characterize the different *dramatis personae*. Therefore, it seems that although this adaptation has freed the text from the language of “spaghetti English” (Strachan),<sup>20</sup> it has also annihilated the stylistic and cultural otherness of the play.

One of the characters who best reflects the cultural and linguistic shift is Ninuccia, Luca and Concetta’s daughter. Her quick temper is depicted throughout the play using an array of violent outbursts and foul language. For example, when she is complaining about her husband’s jealousy, both her register and language greatly depart from the source text, as in the following extract from Act Two:

NICOLETTE. Well that’s it. That is it! The lot! I’ve had it! Up to there! Tcha!  
LEN. Ur Love? Nicolette? Do you want to tell us all about it?  
NICOLETTE. Huh! Bloody, stupid, pig-ignorant, fat-gutted, obnoxious, self-centred, useless... gobbin!  
LEN. Are we talking about Norman, pet?  
NICOLETTE. Huh! Pasty-faced, pathetic, pock-marked pillock of piddling piss-artist!  
LEN. We are, aren’t we? We’re talking about Norman. I can tell. (Stott, I. 20)

The original text reads: “Io non ne posso più! È un uomo che mi tormenta con la gelosia,” in standard Italian, to underscore the fact that she is well educated, in contrast with her parents who speak dialect. However, where the language reaches its highest level of coarseness is in Act Two. Ninuccia and Concetta are in the kitchen, chasing the live *capitone*,<sup>21</sup> which eventually slips away, and during the fight Concetta bangs her head against the stove.

NINUCCIA. (*entrando*) Se n’è scappato nu capitone per tramente ‘o tagliàvemo!  
LUCA. Nun sapevo che era...  
NINUCCIA. Ma chella mamma p’afferrà ‘o capitone ha tuzzato cu ‘a capa vicino ‘o fucolare. (II. 794)

NICOLETTE. There’s a duck! There’s a fucking duck in there! It’s alive! It’s pecking!  
LEN. Oh...  
NICOLETTE. It’s quacking! It’s pecking! It’s not even fucking plucked! She’s banged her head on the stove! (Stott, II. 22)

Interestingly, such a portrayal does not seem to be in tune with the English cultural system, which is probably why some critics have suggested Ireland as a more realistic location.<sup>22</sup> However, the choice of Ireland, which is considered a more warm-hearted (and Catholic) country, would have represented an Anglo-Saxon stereotype, rather than rendering the play in a way that goes beyond regional and religious clichés. The main preoccupation of both the translator and the critics seems to concern how one might reproduce Mediterranean passion, whether in a Catholic environment or in a regional setting, whereas this element is secondary in the play, which contains very few animated scenes.

---

<sup>20</sup> Alan Strachan was the artistic director of the *Greenwich Theatre* in 1982.

<sup>21</sup> *Capitone* is an eel, and is a traditional Christmas dish in Naples. It has been replaced with the duck, a poor relation to the traditional Christmas turkey.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Nightingale 619 and King 1982.

In these cases of acculturation the story of the source text has been rewritten by the adaptor who has told his own story, although the plot has been left broadly unchanged. In other words, the source text has been “used”<sup>23</sup> to tell something culturally very different. If on the one hand they have contributed to freeing the texts from previous clichés, on the other they have framed them within a different stereotype of a British sitcom.

### *Conclusions*

The analysis of these Anglophone translations has raised a number of questions with regard to the representation of minority cultures and languages. In particular, we have seen that in dialect theatre linguistic structures permeate the message of the source text, and that a community’s world view is often summarized by words or expressions; thus, dialect theatre can be seen as an ideogram of the culture it represents. In particular, the choice of dialect rather than standard Italian reveals the author’s intention to transmit a precise cultural message and suggests that local identities should be enhanced, as opposed to concealing them under an uncharacterised idiom. It follows that the manipulation of the text, which tones down this feature, inevitably reduces the cultural transfer of the play as well.

It is important to underline that the representation of the source culture following working class clichés has both restricted the general discourse of the plays and also denaturalised it, since the characters belong to the petite bourgeoisie. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the standardization of the language has also denaturalised the source text as it has eliminated its linguistic specificity. Moreover, it is wholly inadequate to render the hues and the subtleness of dialect and the stylistic feature of code switching. In this sense, one could argue that dialect theatre and standard theatre should be regarded as different genres with their own characteristics requiring a different translational approach and specific competence of the source language and culture.

Translation of vernacular is certainly challenging, and perhaps we have to accept the fact that often dialect expressions are simply untranslatable. On the other hand, rendering dialect is a task with which the translator has to come to terms, so different strategies may and should be adopted. Although there are several English dialects one could employ, this could carry the risk of, quoting Christopher Taylor, being “simultaneously associated with social class, that is the lower the socio-economic grouping, the stronger the local speech variation” (114). This is due to the fact that dialects in England have historically been regarded as degradations of standard English, since they depart from “Received Pronunciation” which established itself throughout the centuries as a model of correct English.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, translating dialect with another dialect is a perfectly acceptable, even desirable, choice provided it does not generate social class associations. On the other hand, this might bring further problems were the plays to be performed in the United States. If the use of British English generated the

---

<sup>23</sup> On the concept of use of the source text see Eco: “among the countless possibilities, there is also one where the writer starts from a text only to draw ideas and inspiration from it in order to produce *his or her own text*” (341).

<sup>24</sup> On the political implications of Received Pronunciation see Holborow.

fiasco of Zeffirelli's productions of *Filumena Marturano* and *Sabato, domenica e lunedì* in the 1970s, employing English dialects would prove even more difficult.

Translating dialect theatre still remains problematic, as it deals with minority cultures resisting the linguistic colonialism of dominant societies and advocating their own cultural identity and independence. It is necessary to underscore that the elimination of the Otherness of the plays seems to be a precondition for the introduction of foreign theatre in the receiving milieu. It is also true that, since theatre translation depends on the practices and acting conventions of different times, it lends itself to reinterpretation and experimentation. In this sense, dialect theatre should challenge audiences, bringing them out of their comfort zone and presenting them with an alien standpoint. That is why a cultural approach to translation may represent a valuable tool to empower minority languages and cultures.

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

#### WORKS CITED

- Angelini, Franca. *Il teatro del novecento da Pirandello a Fo*. Rome: Laterza, 1976.
- Acqua, Virginia. "Eduardo a Londra: Ricostruzione e analisi degli allestimenti." Diss. U La Sapienza, 2000.
- Basso, Beatrice. "Italian Dramaturg in a Translation Process." *Theatre Topics* 13.1 (2003): 161-63.
- Bentley, Eric. "Son of Pulcinella." *In Search of Theatre*. New York: Atheneum, 1975. 281-95.
- Berghaus, Günter. *Italian Futurist Theatre 1909-1944*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1998.
- Billington, Michael. "Family at War with Itself." *Theatre Record* 11.12 (1991): 78.
- De Filippo, Eduardo. *Filumena: A Play. English version by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall*. London: French, 1978.
- . *Filumena*. Trans. Timberlake Wertenbaker. London: Methuen Drama, 1998.
- . *Natale in casa Cupiello. Teatro. Vol. 1. Cantata dei giorni pari*. 1st ed. *I Meridiani*. Ed. Nicola De Blasi and Paola Quarenghi. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2000. 743-812.
- . *Filumena: A Marriage Italian Style (Filumena Marturano)*. Trans. Maria Tucci. *Four Plays*. Hanover: Smith and Kraus, 2002. 1-40.
- . *Filumena Marturano. Teatro. Volume 2. Cantata dei giorni dispari. Tomo primo*. 1st ed. *I Meridiani*. Ed. Nicola De Blasi and Paola Quarenghi. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2005. 529-98.
- . *Napoli Milionaria*. Adapt. Peter Tinniswood. *Four Plays: The Local Authority, Grand Magic, Filumena Marturano, Napoli Milionaria*. London: Methuen Drama, 1992. 247-362.
- . *Napoli milionaria!. Teatro. Vol. 2. Cantata dei giorni dispari. Tomo primo*. 1st ed. *I Meridiani*. Ed. Nicola De Blasi and Paola Quarenghi. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2005. 45-151.
- . *Napoli milionaria!*. Trans. Linda Alper, and Beatrice Basso. Official Script of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival 2005 Production, 2005.
- De Simone, Roberto. *I segreti di Eduardo*. Naples: Prismi, 1996.
- Eco, Umberto. *Dire quasi la stessa cosa: Esperienze di traduzione*. Milan: Bompiani, 2003.
- Holborow, Marnie. *The Politics of English: A Marxist View of Language*. London: Sage Publications, 1999.
- Nightingale, Benedict. [no title.] *London Theatre Record* 2.23 (1982): 619.
- King, Francis. "Those Excitable Lancastrians." *London Theatre Record* 2.23 (1982): 619.
- Perteghella, Manuela. "Language and Politics on Stage: Strategies for Translating Dialect and Slang with References to Shaw's *Pygmalion* and Bond's *Saved*." *Translation Review* 64 (2002): 45-53.
- Shulman, Milton. "Sitting Duck", *London Theatre Record* 2.23 (1982): 620.
- Stott, Mike. Adapt. *Ducking Out (The Coppells' Christmas)*. Naples: Archive of Società Napoletana di Storia Patria, 1981.
- Strachan, Alan. [no title.] *Greenwich Theatre Sunday Telegraph* 22 Aug. 1982 : n. pag.
- Tinniswood, Peter. *Programme of Napoli Milionaria*. London: National Theatre, 1991.
- Rebora, Roberto. *Teatro di Samuel Beckett*. Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1970.

- Roper, David. [no title.] *London Theatre Record* 2.23 (1982): 619.
- Taylor, Christopher, *Language to Language: A Practical and Theoretical Guide for Italian/English Translators*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Toury, Gideon. *In Search of a Theory of Translation*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv U, 1980.
- Tymoczko, Maria. *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Early Irish Literature in English Translation*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 1999.
- Zuber, Ortrun. "Problems of Propriety and Authenticity in Translating Modern Drama." *The Languages of Theatre: Problems in the Translation and Transposition of Drama*. Ed. Zuber. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980. 92-103.