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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Résumé de l'article

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VOTATA A LLENGUA NOSTA: BAROQUE NAPLES AND THE LANGUAGE QUESTION

NANCY L. CANEPA

Abstract: One of the most striking reactions to the Renaissance codification of literary Italian was the development of dialects as "alternative" literary languages with their own distinct canons. During the seventeenth century, Naples, the undisputed centre of this experimentation, produced a remarkable corpus of original masterpieces by Giambattista Basile, Giulio Cesare Cortese, and others; translations into Neapolitan of Italian and Latin classics, old and new; and linguistic treatises and paratextual materials in praise of Neapolitan. What did this activity mean? How and why did these authors assert their alterity by constructing an ideal poetic community through their Neapolitan works? How did the questioning of the idea of a monolithic literary language relate to a wider interrogation of the traditional system of genres and of the concept itself of literary property? This essay explores these questions by considering the role of the supporting materials of paratexts and translations in the construction and legitimization of the Neapolitan corpus.

In the 1621 mock-epic poem *Viaggio di Parnaso* ("Journey to Parnassus") by Giulio Cesare Cortese, the autobiographical first-person narrator travels to the home of Apollo and the Muses with news about current literary developments in Naples. The god of poetry welcomes him with open arms, and proceeds to host elaborate festivities to celebrate the newly attained status of Neapolitan dialect literature—in particular, the recent honours awarded Cortese's friend and fellow Neapolitan author, Giambattista Basile. When the poet prepares to return to Naples at the end of the poem, Apollo leaves him with a magic tablecloth capable of producing unlimited food (the same object that an ogre gives to the protagonist of the first tale of Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*, "Lo cunto dell'uerco"), which during the journey he exchanges for an equally marvellous knife that becomes a castle when planted in the ground. But once he leaves Parnassus, the poet is unable to

Quaderni d'italianistica, Vol. 42, no. 2, 2021, 109–140

find a place for his knife—"Lo cortiello aggio, e n'aggio che tagliare!" ("I've got the knife, but nothing to cut!"; Cortese, *Opere* 382)—an allusion, perhaps, to the difficulties of finding a proper site for the as yet "virtual" edifice of Neapolitan literature.[1] Notwithstanding Apollo's accolades, the Neapolitan tradition was still a castle in the air.

This scene serves to introduce a discussion of what got the author of poems on the contemporary urban lives of Neapolitan *vaiasse* and *smargiassi* (servant girls and thugs) to Parnassus in the first place, and how the search for fertile ground in which to plant this new tradition continued over the course of the seventeenth century. Between 1600 and 1650, Naples was the undisputed centre of innovative and complex experiments in the literary uses of dialect, ultimately producing, in particular in the extraordinary corpus of works by Basile, Cortese, and Felippo Sgruttendio de Scafato, one of the earliest and certainly the most extensive canons of dialect literature in Italy. These works not only engaged in polemical or parodic exchange with established literary traditions but also explored new linguistic territory and generic paradigms such as the urban mock-epic and the fairy tale. What did this activity mean? How and why did these authors assert their alterity by constructing an ideal poetic community through their Neapolitan works? How did the questioning of the idea of a monolithic literary language—the already well-established Tuscan—relate to a wider interrogation of the traditional system of genres and of the concept itself of literary property? Or, in other words, how did this activity constitute a meditated cultural choice?

This essay will explore these questions by considering the role of the supporting materials of paratexts and translations in the construction and legitimization of the Neapolitan corpus. Paratexts in praise of the *lingua napolitana*—dedications, prologues, textual commentaries, linguistic treatises—pointed to and echoed wider discussions and debates around the texts of the developing tradition; they also suggested their reception by a determined audience. Translations into dialect cultivated a dialogue with ancient and modern "classics," expanded the expressive capacities of the new language, and recast the original texts in a distinctly Neapolitan key. The theoretical reflections and practices enacted in these materials thus comprise a fascinating case study of the self-fashioning and validation of a new literary tradition, shedding light on its aims and objectives, its relationship to the hegemonic literary culture of the time, and, ultimately, its significance in the larger context of literary history.

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[1] All translations are my own.

As is well known, one of the central literary debates of the Renaissance revolved around the *questione della lingua*. Discussions of language—and, in particular, which language(s) the still young Italian vernacular should draw from—had, of course, been present from the earliest moments of Italian literary history (most notably, in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*), yet it was in the early sixteenth century that the literary Tuscan of two centuries before, in particular that of Petrarch and Boccaccio, was put forth as a definitive model for literary Italian. This project of canonization, as clearly outlined in Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525), also, however, encountered resistance on the part of those who advocated for a more organic conceptualization of a standard literary language. Both of the two main camps opposing Bembo's "remote models," "those who proposed a language based on the supraregional usage of Italian courts, and those Tuscans who defended the right to follow the current usage of their region," argued that "the written language should draw on the living usage of the spoken language" (Degl'Innocenti and Richardson 15).

The development of dialects as alternative literary languages with their own distinct canons was one of the responses to the codification of Tuscan. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in fact, dialect production, a "uniquely integral part of Italy's literary civilization" from its very origins, experienced one of its most intense and fruitful moments: "It was during the Renaissance that the former Latin/vernacular bilingualism shifted toward a Tuscan/dialect bilingualism, and it was in this period of time that a distinct dialect literary canon began to take shape side by side with that of the official Tuscan production" (Haller 16, 13).[2] How should we interpret the fact that the heyday of dialect literature followed close on the heels of the partial resolution of the *questione della lingua* in the standardization of literary Italian? There has been much critical debate over whether the relationship between Tuscan and regional vernaculars was antagonistic or complementary. Benedetto Croce famously maintained that the position of the authors of the *letteratura dialettale riflessa* in Naples was not "l'eversione e la sostituzione della letteratura nazionale" ("the subversion and substitution of a national literature"), but, on the other hand, "l'integrazione di questa … come un modello" ("the integration of the same … as a model"; 227), a sort of cooperative competition. Others, while not denying dialogic interaction, have placed more emphasis on the oppositional strategies of dialect authors: their radical intervention in and reinvention of the language question. This was a moment of "mixtures, crossings, hybridities, and interactions" among speech, writing, and print, and Latin, Italian, and dialect and, as Peter Burke notes, "There is nothing like conflict for encouraging consciousness. The growing awareness of diversity within a given language was linked to campaigns for standardization and debates about the standard" (Oral and Manuscript" 24). He also observes how "writers who consciously chose dialect, often did so in deliberate opposition to the literary norm" (*Languages* 29). Dialects had been used in previous centuries not only to caricature those who used them (as, for example, in the *satira del villano*) but also to satirize the sacred cows of canonical tradition, and they continued to be used as a vehicle for linguistic and literary polemic, in particular with regard to Bembian classicism. Yet, as we shall see, writing in dialect was also an expressive choice that allowed for the possibility of exchange with and enrichment of this same canonical tradition by offering its own unique poetic models. Whether or not there was a rigid and explicit oppositional strategy at work in dialect authors (some of whom also wrote in Tuscan), the dialectic was never as cozy as Croce would have it: figures like Cortese and Basile engaged in the construction of a thematics and stylistics of difference that went beyond simple reaction or cooperation.[3]

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[2] This particularity of Italian literary history has often been noted. Gianfranco Contini, for example, considers how "Il bilinguismo di poesia illustre e poesia dialettale è assolutamente originario, costitutivo della letteratura italiana … l'italiana è sostanzialmente l'unica grande letteratura nazionale la cui produzione dialettale faccia visceralmente, inscindibilmente corpo col restante patrimonio" ("the bilingualism of 'illustrious' poetry and dialect poetry lies at the origins of Italian literature and is absolutely foundational … Italian literature is essentially the only national literature whose dialect production is a visceral and indivisible part of its heritage"; 18, 19).

Naples was, by 1600, one of Europe's largest and most cosmopolitan and multilingual cities, and a hub of baroque cultural production and experimentation. The best-known literary success story of seventeenth-century Naples is the ascendancy of the superstar Giambattista Marino and his flamboyant style, *marinismo*. But the rise of the new Neapolitan literature, which questioned, as did the *marinisti*, the adherence to classical models and the Bembian linguistic standard, was groundbreaking in its own right. The reasons for this rise were multiple: in a culture that valued experimentation and innovation, the transport of unfamiliar languages and contents into the literary realm was a brilliantly effective interpretation of the "poetics of the marvelous"; an expanding urban middle class of readers, including lawyers, merchants, skilled artisans, and members of other professions, were cultivating new literary tastes that the dialect production satisfied; the "accademizzazione dell'esercizio dialettale" ("academization of exercises in dialect"; Fulco 842), in particular at the Accademia degli Incauti, led to the validation of this production in intellectual circles as well; and a group of Neapolitan printers (e.g., Salvatore Scarano) was committed to publishing and circulating the new works. The protagonists of the foundational moment of this tradition cultivated satire and parody, served up unfamiliar speech and customs for a public eager for novelty, and championed municipal identities and local autonomy in a time of Spanish rule. At the same time, they stretched the boundaries of a language that before them had often limited itself to cataloguing places and practices of Naples or offering formulaic comic vignettes, instead elaborating a "poetics of the underside" that transposed into the literary arena the popular culture, folklore, and everyday life and rituals of contemporary Naples and southern Italy. In Giorgio Fulco's words,

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[3] For further discussion of the use of dialects in or against literary works in Italian at this crucial moment of linguistic standardization and shifts in poetic paradigms, see, for example, Segre, "Polemica linguistica"; Paccagnella, *Il fasto delle lingue* and "Uso letterario dei dialetti"; Stussi, *Lingua, dialetto e letteratura*. For a general introduction to dialect production in this period, see, for example, Vignuzzi and Bertini Malgarini, "L'alternativa regionale e dialettale."

> la realtà complessa, stratificata, della grande capitale del Regno, con i massicci fenomeni di urbanesimo, la peculiare e critica condizione politica e sociale, offre il terreno di coltura per le voci popolari e l'osservatorio ideale per chi per varie motivazioni vuole attingere alla lingua, alla gestualità, agli aspetti antropologici del "popolo" e della "plebe." (813)

> the complex, multi-layered reality of the capital of the Kingdom of Naples, with its massive urbanization and its peculiar and critical political and social context, offered an ideal terrain for the cultivation of popular voices, and an ideal observatory for those who, for various reasons, wanted to draw on the language, gestures, and anthropological aspects of the "people."

If the use of a language is "one of the means by which communities are constructed or reconstructed" (Burke, *Languages* 6), seventeenth-century Neapolitan dialect authors contributed to the city's evolving identity through the creation of a corpus that forms an extraordinary self-portrait of a city and culture in transformation. In doing so, they gave brilliant proof of a fully formed linguistic and literary consciousness that both revisited conventional forms and genres and struck out in strikingly original directions.[4]

Diastratic variation, or the copresence of diverse sociolects, has been a constant throughout the linguistic history of Naples (De Blasi, "Notizie" 89).[5] The sixteenth-century Neapolitan noble Giovanni Batttista Del Tufo, for example, in his *Ritratto o modello delle grandezze, delizie e maraviglie della nobilissima città di Napoli*, a celebration of Neapolitan history, culture, customs, and folklore, awards significant attention to the linguistic particularities of Naples. Del Tufo distinguishes between "high" and "low" dialect usage, or in his words, between the dialect-inflected "favellar gentile napoletano" ("genteel Neapolitan speech"), which was equal to or rivalled Tuscan and other dialects, and "street" Neapolitan, or the speech of "la nostra goffa gente" ("our gawky people"; De Blasi, "Notizie" 91–92).[6] Furthermore, for Del Tufo, "plebeian" language was not only of questionable taste but its close contact with and "contamination" of a more refined sociolect also reflected the precarious social and political equilibrium of the city, with its underlying potential for conflict (Fulco 820).

This situation, in which segments of the population who adhered to distinct social and cultural modes lived and interacted in close urban quarters, was also fertile ground for socio-linguistic permeability, in the form of the self-conscious use of "popular" Neapolitan dialect (*la dialettalità riflessa*) by authors best known for their Italian production. Indeed, by the seventeenth century, the corpus of literary Neapolitan had been a work in progress for almost 300 years, including, for example, early works such as Boccaccio's Neapolitan letters and Jacopo Sannazaro's *gliommeri* (arguably the earliest Neapolitan poetry).[7] These authors recognized the same reality that Del Tufo documented, though from a different perspective: the *parlar goffo* and *vocaboloni* of Naples become an inexhaustible and novel source of literary riches as well as a revitalizing antidote to the language of the Italian (Tuscan) tradition.

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[4] See, for example, Lorenza Gianfrancesco's assertion that "ideas concerning local identity, the representation of Naples's urban sphere, and its social diversity were all key themes debated in some Neapolitan intellectual circles. More specifically, the need to reassess the contribution of popular culture to the city's heritage became central" (150).

[5] For the history of Neapolitan, see Bianchi et al.; De Blasi, *Storia linguistica di Napoli*.

[6] Del Tufo's work was probably written around 1588; for a recent modern edition, see Olga Silvana Casale and Mariateresa Colotti, *Ritratto o modello delle grandezze, delizie e maraviglie della nobilissima città di Napoli*.

[7] A more courtly Neapolitan had also been used as koine in the Aragonese chancellery.

By the 1500s, Neapolitan had begun to be adopted in more sustained "semi-literary" fashion in poetry set to music (madrigals and *villanelle*), in the epic-like *canzune massicce*, and in the theatrical *farse cavaiole*. In the half century preceding the activity of Cortese and Basile, Neapolitan, as other Italian dialects, had also been used in plurilinguistic contexts (alongside other dialects and languages) for its comic potential, especially in theatre, both erudite Renaissance comedy and then, later, the *commedia dell'arte*. Most often, though, these works were not by Neapolitan authors, and presented sketches of Neapolitan characters that contributed to reinforcing stereotypes about Naples and its inhabitants. Finally, since dialects were the languages of everyday life and interactions, they also served to mediate textual culture: "From courts to churches, from streets to piazzas, pieces of text written in local vernacular were recited, sung, or publicly affixed to be read or spread orally in order to inform the uneducated" (Gianfrancesco 148).

These various iterations of Neapolitan prepared the ground for its transformation into a full-fledged literary idiom in the Seicento, when the three undisputed masters of Neapolitan production, Giambattista Basile, Giulio Cesare Cortese, and the enigmatic Felippe Sgruttendio de Scafato took on the *tre corone* of the Tuscan tradition in their reworkings of the standard genres and in their institutionalization of Neapolitan as a "writer's language" (Fulco 825). In Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* (1634–36), the novella morphed into the fairy tale in a framed collection that was the first of its type in Europe and a milestone for the future evolution of the literary fairy tale. Basile supplemented his early versions of some of the best known fairy-tale types ("Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty," "Puss in Boots," etc.) with flamboyant metaphor, pastiches of material borrowed from cultural repertoires ancient to modern, and encyclopedic references to the customs, everyday life, and popular art forms of seventeenth-century Naples.[8] Cortese refashioned the epic into a strikingly original urban mock-epic in poems such as *La vaiasseide* (*The Epic of the Servant Girls*, 1612), *Micco Passaro 'nnamorato* (*Micco Passaro in Love*, 1619), and *Lo Cerriglio 'ncantato* (*The Enchantment of the Cerriglio Tavern*, 1628); he also revised the pastoral genre in the tragicomedy *La Rosa* (*The Rose*,

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[8] Basile's Neapolitan output also included *Le muse napolitane*, a series of nine dramatic eclogues that celebrate Neapolitan popular culture: its music, language, courtship and wedding practices, taverns, and "stock" characters such as thugs, courtesans, chatty housewives, and aspiring social climbers.

1621) and the Alexandrine novel in *Delli travagliuse ammure de Ciullo e de Perna* (*The Laboured Loves of Ciullo and Perna*, 1614). In his *La tiorba a taccone* (*The Theorbo* [a lute-like stringed instrument]," 1645), Sgruttendio took aim at both the Petrarchan *canzoniere* and baroque Marinism as he celebrated the plebeian and grotesque Cecca in life and in death.

Interestingly, much of the "official" professional activity and literary output of an author like Basile was conducted in Italian, among the elite members of the academies and courts that he frequented; the circulation and the reception of his and others' dialect works most likely took place in this same courtly context, where they were read or performed.[9] Ultimately, the polemical engagement with the Tuscan canon in authors like Cortese and Basile was less an attempt to replace that canon *tout court* than an expression of a poetics of hybridity that questioned the impermeability of boundaries between "high" and "low" cultures and Italian and Neapolitan, and investigated how this developing corpus might expand the ways that literature related to and addressed the larger world.[10]

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In the course of the century, other authors continued to expand the expressive capacities of Neapolitan and to enrich this new corpus, and reflections on the literary value of Neapolitan proliferate in the dedications and prologues to works in dialect. We find an early statement, for example, in Silvio Fiorillo's *L'amor giusto* ("The Just Love," 1605), a bilingual pastoral play in which characters speak either Tuscan or Neapolitan.[11] In the prologue, Fiorillo justifies his stylistic choice through an appeal, not uncommon in praises of Neapolitan, to the aesthetic value of *varietas* and hybridity, which breed interest and beauty: "pe lo bareiare delli linguaggi, haggiate chiù gusto, e l'opera ve para chiù bella: comme pare lo cielo co le stelle, lo sole co la luna, o Maro co la terra" ("you'll savour things more with a variety of languages, and the work will appear more beautiful to you: like when you see the sky with the stars, the sun with the moon, the sea with the earth"; 12–13). He warns the audience that they should not expect to hear the rarefied language of Tuscan shepherds, but, instead, "cierte parole grosse, grasse, chiatte, a doie sole, e tonne comme ballane" ("certain fat, juicy, full-bodied, double-soled words, as round as chestnuts"; 15), and, in an aggressive preview of the play itself, which "teatralizza lo scontro di due lingue e di due culture" ("theatricalizes the clash between two languages and cultures"; Fulco 825), he concludes, "… vale chiù na scarpa cacata de no Napoletano … che quante Toscanicchie se trovano per lo munno" ("a shit-covered shoe of a Neapolitan is worth more … than all the little Tuscans in the world"; Fiorillo 16).

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[9] Basile's dialect works were published posthumously. For further notes on how these works were consumed see, for example, Rak 259, 311–15.

[10] For a position that downplays to some degree this operation, see, for example, Andrea Lazzarini's consideration of how "la scelta di una poesia 'popolare' nelle voci non corrispondeva … alla volontà di un pieno riscatto del vernacolo, alla proposta di una lingua che potesse realmente competere col Toscano o prenderne il posto. Non ci troviamo di fronte a opere accademiche, ma piutttosto a divertimenti letterari composti da accademici per accademici" ("the choice of 'popular' poetry as a vehicle did not correspond to … the desire for a full rehabilitation of the vernacular, to the offering of a language that could truly compete with Tuscan and take its place. These are not academic works, but rather literary entertainment by and for academics."; "Ancora" 173).

[11] Fiorillo (1560/70–1632?) was a Capuan *commedia dell'arte* actor famous for his character of Captain Matamoros but also for first giving Pulcinella a textual role in his comedy *Lucilla*

Cortese's *Vaiasseide* ("The Epic of the Servant Girls"), first published in 1612 but probably written earlier, is generally considered the work that heralds in the golden age of Neapolitan literature, and, together with Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*, is among its most significant texts. It is the first of a number of mock-heroic poems that Cortese would write, and it apparently enjoyed a widespread popularity; the annotator of the 1628 edition, Bartolomeo Zito, maintained that between 1604 and 1628 there were sixteen editions of the *Vaiasseide*, though we know of only a few of these. The *Vaiasseide* tells of the efforts by a group of Neapolitan servant girls to break out of their class-determined destinies, and is prefaced by the usual assortment of paratextual materials, including a burlesque dedicatory letter by Giambattista Basile, "A lo re de li viente" ("To the king of the winds"), in which he parodies pompous and empty dedications, and comments on the unstable professional lives of intellectuals and courtiers who eke out a living at the will of capricious patrons. But most importantly, he recognizes how this new sort of mock-heroic poem, "no poemma arroico a laude delle vaiasse de Napole" ("a heroic poem in praise of the servant girls of Naples"; "A lo re" 7), with its anonymous heroines engaged not in defending dynastic ideals but in everyday struggles for survival on the streets of a contemporary metropolis, necessarily lacks a viable dedicatee. Cortese himself, in his author's foreword to this work, compares his

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costante con le ridicolose disfide e prodezze di Policinella (*Steadfast Lucilla, with the Ridiculous Challenges and Feats of Pulcinella*, 1632).

enterprise to that of Icarus, emphasizing its ambitiousness but also the risk involved. Then, in the *praepositio* of the first canto, he sets up the mock-heroic lowering and underlines the unity of form and content: "Io canto, commo belle e vertolose / So' le vaiasse de chesta cetate, … Ma non faccio li vierze 'n toscanese / Azzò me 'ntenga onnuno a sto paese" ("I sing of the beauty and virtue of the servant girls of Naples … But I'm not writing my verses in Tuscan; that way, everyone in this town can understand me"; *Opere* 26).

In the dedication to another of his Neapolitan works published just two years later, in 1614, *Delli travagliuse ammure de Ciullo e de Perna*, Cortese develops the familiar trope of the intrinsic literary value of Neapolitan, maintaining that the present dominance of Tuscan is the result of a fluke of fate—Boccaccio got there first:

> La lengua nostra non have che 'nmediare alla shiorentina, né lo shummo d'Arno pò fare n'accepe cappiello allo Sebeto nuostro, perchè, se la lengua de Shiorenza oie è lo cuccopinto delli scritture, grammerzè allo Voccaccio, che co la vocca d'urzo le ieze danno forma, la nostra se avesse auto n'autro, che l'avesse scergata co na cotena de lardo, fuorze sarria deventata chiù lustra e chiù bella de na cascia de noce, tanto chiù che la materia è cossì atta a recevere bella forma, commo la shiorentina, e fuorze meglio. (93–94)

> Our language has nothing to envy Florentine, nor does the Arno have reason to thumb its nose at our Sebeto. If today the language of Florence is the darling of writers, this is thanks to Boccaccio, who with his bear's mouth has given it its form.[12] If our language had had someone to polish it up with a pork rind, it might have become shinier and more beautiful than a walnut chest, especially since the raw material lends itself just as well to assuming a lovely form as Florentine does, maybe even better.

But it is in the *Viaggio di Parnaso* (1621), which allegorizes the entrance of Neapolitan into the literary realm and with which I opened this essay, that Cortese presents his most eloquent defence of Neapolitan. (By this time, Cortese's own works had encountered success, and his friend Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* and *Le*

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[12] Lazzarini posits that Cortese is referring to a common belief in antiquity (found in Pliny) that bears give shape to their newborn cubs by licking them ("Ancora" 177).

muse napolitane were likely circulating in manuscript form.) In the first lines of "Lo poeta a li leieture" ("The Poet to the Readers"), Cortese both acknowledges the momentous occasion of Neapolitan's literary maturity and foresees criticisms:

> Non è possible che quarche travo rutto non strida, e che quarche strenga rotta non se mette 'n dozzana, decenno da quanno niccà le povere Muse so' deventate de lo Lavinaro … Perzò è chiafeo chillo che bole che siano necessariamente de chesta e de chella terra: … le Muse so' ghiommente d'alloghiero, ed ognuno se ne po' servire pe quarche viaggio, paganno perrò l'alloghiero de tiempo perduto e de gòveta rotte. (*Opere* 249, 252)
>
> It's possible that a few roof beams will creak and shoelaces break, and that they'll say, "Since when have the poor Muses come from Lavinaro [a poor section of Naples]?" … But whoever thinks that the Muses reside in this or that land is an idiot: … the Muses are mares for hire, anyone can make use of one for a journey, as long as you pay the stablemaster for the time and any broken limbs.

Here, the Muses appear as "mares for hire" (prostitutes?), women who go with the highest bidder—in this case, to those authors who produce works of the greatest literary value, regardless of the language they're written in.[13] Significantly, references to illicit sexual commerce, prostitution, and cuckoldry in particular, are often at the thematic heart of Cortese's poems—here in the *Viaggio*, for example, telling stories of cuckoldry is a major pastime on Mount Parnassus, occupying nearly two cantos. This preoccupation points, perhaps, to a certain anxiety about the transgressive dispersal of cultural capital, or the betrayal of the standard currency of the literary economy—that of the canonical tradition and the language it adopts—not so much on the part of the dialect authors themselves, but of those who are judging them (in the context of the *Viaggio*, a large roster of poets of the past).

In any case, Cortese continues in his foreword, the Muses do seem to have a predilection for Naples, here represented metonymically by the "cabbages" so beloved by its inhabitants: "Che le manca a Napole che non pozza isso perzì stirarese la cauza, e dicere ca le Muse so' nasciute 'nzino ad isso? … ca sempe so' de buono retuorno alle belle foglia torzute de sto paiese, ch'è la vera casa loro" ("What is Naples lacking to be able to wear ironed socks [a sign of distinction] and to say that the Muses were born in her womb? … They're always happy to return to the lovely cabbages of this land, which is their true home"; 252–53). The entire poem then sets out to prove just this. Upon the poet/protagonist's entrance into Parnassus in the first canto, there are some complaints, but earlier Neapolitan men of letters such as Tasso, Rota, Tansillo, and Sannazaro rally to his defence, thus allowing the poet to draw on an ideal community and to establish continuity with both earlier dialect writers and the more prestigious poets of the Tuscan canon (some of whom, like Sannazaro, also wrote in dialect).

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[13] Nicolò Capasso, in his *L'Iliade in lingua napoletana*, uses the same expression with an even more explicit sexual connotation: "Vennera è na jommenta d'alloghiero" ("Venus is a mare for hire"; 4.2).

Later in his visit to Parnassus, the poet contrasts the tired formulas of literary tradition to the virtues of his native language: its sweetness, showiness, and powerful musicality (parenthetically, Naples was one of the principal musical capitals of the time, and many of the librettos of early Neapolitan musical drama were written in dialect).

> Le parole de Napole 'mpastate
> Non songo, frate mio, d'oro pommiento,
> Ma de zuccaro e mèle: e Fama vola
> Se fanno a tutte lengue cannavòla
> ………………………………………………………………
> Siano tutte li vuostre e *quinci* e *unquanco*
> E l'*Ostro* e l'*Astro* e *cotillo* e *cotella*,
> Ch'io pe me, tanto, non ne voglio manco,
> De tant'isce bellezze, na stizzella.
> Tanta patacche avesse ad ogne Banco
> Quanta aggio vuce a Napole mia bella:
> Vuce chiantute de la maglia vecchia,
> C'hanno gran forza, ed enchieno l'aurecchia. (265, 266)[14]

> The words of Naples are kneaded, my brother, not from fake gold, but from sugar and honey; and the word must be spreading, if all

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[14] In the ninth eclogue of his *Le muse napolitane*, Basile also refers to the "parole chiantute" ("firmly planted words") and "conciette a doi sole" ("double-soled concepts") of the "bello tiempo antico" ("good old days"; 209).

> the other languages' mouths are watering. … You can have your "hereabouts" and "nevermores," and "purpureal" and "astral," and this one and that one. As for me, I don't want the smallest drop of such beauteous things. If banks only had as many shiny pieces as my beautiful Naples has words! Solid, firmly planted words of old coin, powerful words that fill the ears.

This characterization of Neapolitan points to a self-consciously alternative poetics, one based on the solidity and full-bodiedness of words and the material culture they aim to describe, one where a bank full of *patacche*, large "shiny" coins of minimal monetary value—an absurdity in the normative linguistic economy—has its own positive value, as do the *goffezze* and *vocaboloni* criticized by Del Tufo. This new poetics acknowledges its predecessors ("vuce chiantute de la maglia vecchia") but also champions models of contemporary orality—"Io scrivo commo parlo" "I write as I speak"; 266), the narrator affirms—taking the side of "i diritti della contemporaneità contro la tradizione, della innovazione contro *l'imitatio*, ossia, in sostanza, i diritti della *natura* contro *l'arte*" ("the rights of contemporaneity against tradition, of innovation against imitation, or, in essence, the rights of nature against art"; Vitale 313).

On its road to literary validation, any tradition-in-the-making also needs textual exegesis and commentary: proof that the works in question are being considered seriously and provoking debate. One of the most curious Neapolitan paratexts is Zito's 1628 edition and commentary of Cortese's *Vaiasseide*, which situates Cortese's poem at the centre of academic debate. Zito was, perhaps (his biography remains somewhat shadowy), a friend of Cortese and a *commedia dell'arte* actor who played the role of Doctor Graziano, though it has also been suggested that Cortese himself may have been responsible for the literary defence of his work (Nigro). The story of how Zito came to Cortese's defence makes suggestive (if perhaps fictional, at least in this context) reference to a literary culture of the time in which Neapolitan had an expanding role: "The process of written appropriation of Neapolitan … encouraged circulation of the local vernacular within elitist groups. From intellectual debates to courtly entertainment and encomiastic literature, the publication and circulation of texts in Neapolitan increased in importance throughout the seventeenth century" (Gianfrancesco 151). Zito recounts the activities of a certain open-air literary academy (of which no historical trace remains), the Scatenati (the Academy of the Unleashed) that met "mponta a lo Muolo," down by the pier:

> [P]ortaie ncampo lo Poemma de la Vaiasseide; e preganno l'Accademmece, che devessero conzederare chest'Opera, che de già correva co brava nnommenata pe bocca de la gente, l'arreddusse che ognuno s'affatecaie cenzuranno, e ghiodecanno lo ditto Poemma, ne formaro na mmettiva: de la quale essennone jute paricchie copie attuorno, scasualmente ne capetaie una mmano de Messere Sarvatore Scarano (notato Lebbraro de chesta Cetate), pe mmano de lo quale essennome venuta mpotere mio, e a chesta avennoce data na lejetura, fortemente nne restaie ammisso. (185)

> [A member of their Academy] brought the *Vaiasseide* down there and, begging the other members to take a look at this work, about which good word of mouth was already spreading, they ended up censuring and judging said poem, until together they had written an invective. Copies of the invective began to circulate, and one happened to fall into the hands of Mr. Salvatore Scarano (a well-known bookseller of this city), and this is how I came into possession of it, and once I had read through it, I remained quite astonished.

The Academy's critique focuses in particular on how the language, subject, and organization of the *Vaiasseide* deviate from those of a classic epic as defined by Aristotle and practised by the great poets. Zito responds to this criticism first with an "annutazejune e schiarefecazejune" ("annotation and clarification"), or canto-by-canto *lectura* of the *Vaiasseide*, and then with a *Defennemiento*, which reproduces each of the Scatenati's censures, followed by Zito's rebuttal.

Zito defends both the language and subject matter of Cortese's anti-epic. When the Scatenati maintain that "di una tanta qualità di Epica poesia, non poteva esserne capace questo Poemaccio, e questo per essere scritto nell'Idioma Napoletano, il quale è privo di ogni efficacia, oscuro, goffo, sterile, e di nessun preggio. … Sì che resta ormai questa goffaggine di componimento di Vaiasse per diletto di bottegai, e di simil gentaglia" ("this lowly poem could not possibly possess any quality of epic poetry, since it is written in Neapolitan, which is lacking in all efficacy, an obscure, awkward, sterile, and worthless idiom. … This clumsy composition about servant girls will give pleasure only to shopkeepers and similar lowlifes"; 235), Zito backs up the declaration that he had made in his prefatory note to the reader, "La belledessema lengua Napoletana eje atta a trattare d'ogne materia, e sia pur'auta, e sobrissima" ("The supremely beautiful

Neapolitan language is appropriate for treating any subject, even the highest and most sober of topics"; xxii), by providing arguments that trace the glories of the Neapolitan idiom to ancient times. When the Scatenati then continue to proclaim the *Vaiasseide* a deficient composition, since it does not begin with a siege of a city or other similar actions on the part of valiant warriors but is instead populated by "vile and abject" heroines who hardly embody the chivalric and moral virtues necessary for a hero, Zito replies by praising Cortese for adapting heroic conventions to the particular milieu he describes, an underclass of servant girls eager to right wrongs when they revolt against their masters, who refuse to let them marry:

> [N]on potennoce descrivere na guerra, nè na Cetate accampata, isso nce fa vedere Napole tutta a rommore: nè chiazza, o pontone nc'è, che non siamo trommettejate, e scorzete da la Corte. E revotate da li Patrune. Po, lo conziglio de le Bajasse, eie autro, che no retratto de l'Assemblee, e de le Diete che fanno li personagge granne? La fuga che pigliano le Bajasse eie autro, che chillo spediente, che soleno pigliare li puopole maltrattate ntiempo che se vonno rebbellare da li Segnure lloro? Lo resentemiento che nne fanno li patrune, non eie na mmaggene de chello, che soleno provedere li Rri contro li rebbelle lloro? (207–08)

> [N]ot being able to describe a war, or an encamped city, he shows us Naples in an uproar: there's not a square or corner of the city where there aren't trumpet calls, and police roundups. And revolts against masters. What is the council of the servant girls if not a portrait of the assemblies and diets that great personages hold? What is the servant girls' escape if not that expedient to which mistreated people resort when they want to rebel against their lords? Isn't the masters' resentment the image of what kings feel for those who rebel against them?

Epic pride, honour, and courage may reside in any social context, Zito tells us, in an endorsement of a mock-heroic model that does not limit itself to a parodic lowering of the conventions of the epic genre but, through documenting the struggles for survival on the streets of urban Naples, suggests that the combat that the *vaiasse* engage in on the battlefields of daily life is of epic proportions in its own right.

Zito concludes his defence with a curious anecdote. Even the Duke of Urbino, he tells us, likes the *Vaiasseide*: "[E] tanto delietto nne senteva, che quase ogne ghiuorno nne voleva sentire quarch'ottava, e cchiù bote nne restaie mmaravegliato, e stoputo" ("He derived so much pleasure from it, that almost every day he wanted to hear a few octaves, and many times he remained amazed and in a state of marvel upon hearing them"; 239). Here, Zito seems to be proposing that every day, plebeian epics may indeed replace traditional forms as the source of a new marvellous, and not only for a public of shopkeepers. Which would prove to be, looking ahead in literary history, not so far from the truth.

A survey of the paratextual material that accompanies another seventeenth-century Neapolitan milestone, Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*, further charts the evolution of the Neapolitan tradition. The publisher Scarano (the same one who had shared the Scatenati's invective with Zito) is the author of the dedication of the first edition of Day 1 of Basile's *Cunto* (1634). In support of his assertion of Basile's "grandezza d'ingegno," even while writing "favolette," Scarano defers to the authority of the great humanist Pico della Mirandola, whom he cites directly (though with questionable accuracy): "[L]ocularia, et Fabellas scriber erudite, acrioris ingenii est quam de gravissimis rebus vel ornate disserere. Operosius enim est ex limo, quam ex aere vel auro decoram essinguere statuam" ("To write in an erudite manner of funny things and fairy tales requires a sharper intellect than to hold forth on very serious subjects or to discourse eloquently. It is, in fact, more difficult to mold a beautiful statue out of mud than out of bronze or gold"; 4–5).

The focus of "A li vertoluse leieture Napolitane," the preface to a later edition of the *Cunto* (1674) by the bishop Pompeo Sarnelli, who was Pugliese by birth but an adoptive Neapolitan and aficionado of all things of that city, is more specifically on language:

> Me'nnnammoraie de ste belle parole, che me parevano tanta pataccune da potereme arrecchire lo cellevriello, tanto chiù ca m'allecordavo d'havere leiuto alle Pistole de Cecerone ad Atteco che chillo gran Pompeo 'Mparatore Rommano, lasciae lo parlare latino, e voze parlare Napoletano … perchè essenno lo parlare Napolitano miezo grieco, e miezo latino, le pareva na mmesca chiù saporita. (12)
>
> I fell in love with these beautiful words, which to me were like big shiny coins [again, *pataccune*] with which to enrich my brain. And the more so in that I remembered having read in Cicero's *Epistles* to

> Atticus that the great Pompey, emperor of Rome, left off speaking Latin, and decided to speak Neapolitan … being half Greek and half Latin, Neapolitan seemed to Pompey a tastier mix.[15]

Sarnelli planned to celebrate his adopted language by writing a dictionary, a spelling manual, and even his own compendium of tales modelled on Basile's *Cunto*, but the closest he got was his 1684 *Posilecheata* ("An Outing to Posillipo"), five fairy tales written in Neapolitan. In the foreword to that work, he foresees the criticisms that he may receive:

> E non se vregogna no paro tuio perdere lo tiempo a ste bagatelle? Haie scritto tant'opere grave e de considerazione, e mo scacàrete co sti cunte dell'uorco? E po' a lo mmacarto avisse scritto 'n lengua toscanese o 'n quarch'auto lenguaggio, pocca veramente la lengua napoletana non serve che pe li boffune de le commeddie. (4)
>
> Isn't someone of your station ashamed to be wasting your time on these trifles? You've written so many serious works worthy of consideration, and now you're shitting your pants with these ogre's tales? I mean, if you had at least written in Tuscan or some other language; Neapolitan really isn't good for anything but buffoons in comedies.

Some things never change, apparently. In fact, Sarnelli's response echoes the earlier Scarano dedication:

> Commo decette chillo Pico che cantava meglio de no rescegnuolo, non ce vò manco studio a fare na statola de creta che n'auta de oro e d'argiento. Anze, pe fare cheste abbesogna sapere fare lo modiello de chella. E po' co sta lengua Toscana avite frusciato lo tafanario a miezo munno! Vale cchiù na parola napoletana chiantuta che tutte li vocabole de la Crusca: e qual auto lenguaggio se le pò mettere 'mparagone? (5)

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[15] This episode with Pompey, together with the reference to Neapolitan's illustrious roots in both Greek and Latin, is cited in multiple sources as one of the primal scenes for the claim of the superiority of Neapolitan.

> As that Pico who sang better than a nightingale once said, it takes no less effort to make a statue of clay than one of gold or silver. On the contrary: to make the latter you have to first be able to make a clay model. And furthermore, you're breaking the ass of half the world with this "Tuscan language"! One firmly planted Neapolitan word is worth all the vocabulary contained in the Crusca dictionary, and what other language can hold up the comparison?

The development, at this point, of a certain consciousness of literary continuity is significant: the "clay models," the founding texts of Neapolitan literature, are now posited as the basis for future projects, just as the citations of earlier authors and commentators serve to further the cohesiveness of this new literary community.

In 1662 the mysterious "academico lunatico," Partenio Tosco, published *L'eccellenza della lingua napolitana con la maggioranza alla Toscana*, in which he argued for the greater expressive and naturalistic attributes of Neapolitan with respect to Tuscan. More than a theoretical treatise, Tosco's book is an impressionistic mélange of reflections on Neapolitan, accompanied by long lists of expressions and proverbs. Similar defences of the dignity of dialects represented a subgenre, in Naples and elsewhere, in the ongoing language debates, and echoed earlier praises of the vernacular such as Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542).[16] Although the authors of these treatises did not generally argue that dialects could substitute Tuscan, they too showcased how dialects, with their expressive potentialities and in their status as living, "natural" languages, might contribute to a more dynamic reconceptualization of the dominant literary language.

Tosco is a divided soul, as his name makes clear. He writes in Tuscan, he explains, so that he will be understood by those he is most trying to convince; nevertheless, "il fine del favellare si è lo spiegare, e persuadere il concetto interno, essendo la lingua banditrice del cuore" ("the purpose of speaking is to explain and tease out the inner concept, since language proclaims what the heart feels"; 5), and Neapolitan is the language best equipped for this due to its *dolcezza*, *proprietà*, *varietà*, *amorevolezza*, and *soccintezza del favellare*. The sounds and syntactical rhythms of Neapolitan are "sweeter" than those of other languages for its greater abundance of vowels, which Tosco finds more natural and more endearing. The fact that Neapolitan words evoke more precisely and exactly their referents, often creating an analogy between inner and outer, makes Neapolitan "più atta a persuadere un cuore" ("more suitable for moving hearts"; 20) and is what Tosco calls *proprietà*. *Varietà* is equally important, since "il cuore rimanga più persuaso con molti termini, che con uno. E qual lingua è più ricca di sinonimi, che la Napoletana?" ("the heart is more moved by the use of many terms than by one. And is there any language richer in synonyms than Neapolitan?"; 93). *Amorevolezza* refers to a "parlar naturale, che vi rubba il cuore" ("a natural mode of speech that steals your heart"; 106) and manifests itself, for example, in the use of diminutives, amplification, and above all in melodious speech, since "il parlar cantando è più efficace, e amoroso a persuadere un cuore" ("a song-like speech moves the heart more effectively and lovingly"; 109). The *soccintezza* of Neapolitan, its natural abundance of metaphors and proverbs, allows for a laconic and ingenious use of language.[17] Tosco concludes by reflecting on the dignity of all languages (another commonplace in similar literature), but also argues for the particular nobility of Neapolitan, which in his view lies in its affective excellence: its ability to transmit, through its sensual qualities, the innermost movements of the spirit.

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[16] Other treatises in defence of dialects from this period included the *Varon Milanes de la lengua da Milan* (1606) and the *Discorso della lingua bolognese* (1629) by Adriano Banchieri.

II

Translations are a more direct sounding ground for the capabilities of a developing literary language and in fact often develop in tandem with them: "Translation is the foremost example of a particular type of consecration in the literary world. … [I]t constitutes the principal means of access to the literary world for all writers outside the center. … Translation is a way of gathering literary resources, of acquiring universal texts and thereby enriching an underfunded literature—of diverting literary assets" (Casanova 133). In the overall early modern European context, translations served to conduct a conversation with the past of classical antiquity and to establish historic continuity while at the same time affirming the uniqueness of the present; this "annexation and reappropriation of a foreign patrimony" both conferred literary worth on the new vernacular traditions and rendered texts in unfamiliar languages accessible to a growing middle-class audience (Casanova 235). Translations and the strategies or ideologies that guided them, then as now, hinged on many questions. Should a translator abide by the "letter" or the "spirit" of a text (St. Jerome famously opined, "non verbum e verbo, sed sensu de sensu")? How should a translator position the translated text with respect to the author and to the reader, or, in a recent reformulation of Friedrich Schleiermacher's classic dictum, "How much of the 'otherness' of the 'foreign' should the translator highlight? How much of the foreign should he mute or erase in order to make texts easier for the 'home' (target) audience to assimilate?" (Berman and Woods qtd. in Newman and Tylus 2–3). How is a translation impacted by the relationship between "source" and "target" languages, in terms of their relative prestige and stage of development? What, at the end, is the purpose of the translation?

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[17] This can be seen as an oblique jab at the Ciceronian classicism of the Renaissance and its association of *brevitas* with *obscuritas* (Vitale 319–21). Vitale also discusses how many of the preferred baroque rhetorical figures—metaphors, witty conceits, puns, etc.—seem for these authors to reside naturally in dialect.

As distinct literary canons in dialect began to develop and position themselves in relation to the Tuscan canon, one of the most defining activities of Humanism and the early Renaissance—translation from Greek and Latin into the new "Italian"—was reproposed in the form of translation of both ancient and vernacular classics into dialects.[18] Naples was not the only city in which these sorts of experiments were taking place, though its production was certainly the most prolific. "Why should anyone make this effort? And for what kind of reader?" Burke asks in a recent discussion of early modern dialect translations ("Oral and Manuscript" 28). For these authors, encounters with the elite literary tradition through translation constituted "a training ground" for gauging and expanding the poetic limits of a literary language in the making, a way of "testing the literary dialect's potential" (Haller 20). And just as the choice itself to write in dialect, they could also constitute "a reaction against standardization and a sense of regional identity" (Burke, *Languages* 37). The confrontation with the dominant languages of culture often involved, as we shall see, "lowering" both the form and content of the source text, thus signalling, however playfully, that conflict and deviance from literary norms were essential elements in the creation of this new literary space. Ultimately, though, instead of posing the question in terms of the binaries of faithfulness/betrayal or foreignization/domestication, it will be more fruitful to think of these translations as sites of "contingency yet also of creativity" and as acts of "generative misprision," which by professing loyalty neither to source nor existing target language, in the very act of translation create new linguistic and literary spaces (Newman and Tylus 9, 2).

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[18] Burke mentions, for example, translations of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* into Bergamask in 1540, *pavan* in 1569, *lingua rustica padoana* in 1572, Genoese in 1595, and Leonardo Salviati's virtuosistic translation of one tale from Boccaccio into twelve different dialects in his *Avvertimenti* of 1584 ("Oral and Manuscript" 28).

A partial list of Neapolitan translations and adaptations of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries includes Vincenzo Braca's *Arcadia cavota* (unpublished; late 1500s or early 1600s), Domenico Basile's *Il Pastor fido in lingua napoletana* (1628), Francesco Bernaudo's *IV libro dell'Eneide* (1640), Gabriele Fasano's *Lo Tasso napoletano* (1689), Nicola Stigliola's *L'Eneide trasportata in ottava rima napoletana* (1699), Francesco Oliva's *Aminta* (1710), Nunziante Pagano's *Batracomiomachia d'Omero, azzoè la vattaglia ntra le rranonchie e li surece* (1747), Michele Rocco's *Buccoleca* and *Georgeca* (1749), and Nicolò Capasso's *L'Iliade di Omero in lingua napoletana* (1761). Significantly, many of the source texts and authors these translators chose either hailed from Naples or had some connection to it, as if to recognize a common "Neapolitan" line of descendancy: the pastoral had its earliest version in vernacular in Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, Tasso was born in Sorrento, and Virgil was the subject of countless Neapolitan legends. Furthermore, we might note the clear predilection for the genres of epic and pastoral, both of which engaged in potent myth-making—the myth of a golden age, and the myth of a foundational political and cultural moment. The attraction to the epic in particular, which often bears the "oral residue" of its history as a performed, recited work, may also be connected to the common objective, on the part of these authors, to transpose spoken language onto a new expressive plane.[19] By choosing to translate, transport, and adapt the myths of others into the new context of a seventeenth-century popular Naples, these authors radically reinitiate and reinterpret those myths, as well as the literary genres they inhabit. As Michele Rak notes, differently from the translations into the Tuscan vernacular, one of whose functions was to increase accessibility to the texts of classical tradition (but also to those of the new European vernaculars), these Neapolitan translations are "un falso volontario in cui, cambiando la lingua e i riferimenti culturali del testo, si scopre un aspetto segreto (e comico) di testi circondati dall'aura sacrale costruita e alimentata dalla letteratura umanistica" ("intentional fakes, in which by changing the language and cultural references, we discover a secret (and comic) aspect of texts usually enclosed in the sacred aura that was constructed and fostered by humanistic literature"; 136). Many of these translations are, in fact, what we would today consider adaptations or cultural transpositions. They present substantive changes not only in language but also in register, length, setting, and narrative elements: substituting remote and abstract Arcadias with bustling villages on the outskirts of Naples; interpolating lengthy encomia of Naples; referencing local customs and traditions; and, most of all, showing off the linguistic riches of Neapolitan in the form of proverbs, idioms, and lexical catalogues. A small sampling of these translations, the techniques they incorporate, and the metatextual discussions embedded in them, will elucidate their authors' translational strategies and philosophies, and overall aims.[20]

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[19] Burke uses the term "oral residue," referring to Walter Ong's *Literacy and Orality* ("Oral and Manuscript" 25).

Francesco Bernaudo, a jurist and man of letters born to the Calabrian branch of a noble Neapolitan family, took on one of the icons of the classical tradition in his *Dall'Eneide di Virgilio. Il Quarto libro in ottava rima napolitana (From Virgil's Aeneid: Book IV in Neapolitan verse)*, published in 1640. His choice of book 4, centred on the tragic love between Dido and Aeneas, affords him endless opportunities for riffs on Dido's outsized and transgressive passion as well as on the *topos* of the grotesque woman, who, in the Neapolitan tradition (as in the anti-classicist tradition as a whole, from Cecco Angiolieri on), becomes a sort of emblem of the carnivalesque upending of linguistic and literary conventions.[21]

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[20] Although I will focus on the translations by Bernaudo, Fasano, and Capasso as representative of the genre, Vincenzo Braca's and Domenico Basile's experiments also warrant a brief mention. Braca, who hailed from Salerno and was active during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, specialized in *farse cavaiole*, or burlesque pastoral plays, that aggressively ridicule the lives of the reputedly slow-witted inhabitants of the town of Cava dei Tirreni, a rural town near Salerno. They are written in a mix of Italian and Neapolitan verses, in explicit parody of Jacopo Sannazaro's classic pastoral eclogue *Arcadia* (c. 1480); in particular, Braca's *Arcadia cavota* is a virtuosistic free recasting of Sannazaro's work. As such, it is much more distant from the "original" than the other translations considered here, though it does share with later translations "an intentional form of plurilinguism" that establishes a dialogue between the refined language of an iconic text and a relatively unformed literary language as an exercise in the expansion of the potentialities of dialect; the "revision of geographical settings"; the introduction of colourful idiomatic material; and the parodic lowering of classic Petrarchan tropes of female beauty (Troiano 1, 6–7). The manuscript of the *Arcadia cavota* is still unpublished; many of the other farces can be found in Achille Mango's 1973 edition of *Farse cavaiole*. Domenico Basile's *Il Pastor fido in lingua napolitana*, a Neapolitan version of Battista Guarini's more recent pastoral classic *Pastor fido* (1590) was the first dialect translation to be published in Naples—significantly, in the same year (1628) as Zito's edition and defence of Cortese's *Vaiasseide* and several years after the publication of Cortese's pastoral drama *La rosa* (1621). Critics have pointed out that Basile, an actor and porter at the Vicaria court of Naples, had a "semi-literate" approach to his subject matter that was quite different from that of Cortese and Giambattisa Basile (no relation) as well as from that of some of the other translators, for whom "il dialetto costituiva … un sofisticato strumento di interazione con la letteratura 'nobile' in italiano" ("dialect constituted … a sophisticated instrument for interaction with the 'noble' Italian literature"; Lazzarini, "Una polemica" 194–95).

Virgil opens book 4 of the *Aeneid* with a solemn description of Dido's love-sickness; Bernaudo immediately undoes this effect by doubling the lines in length and colouring them with comic notes:

> Ma la reggina de no pertecone
> havea lo pietto smafarato e rutto
> e teneva a lo core nno focone
> che nge l'havea miezo abbrocsciato e strutto. (Rak 152)
>
> But the queen's breast was unplugged and had been broken by that beanpole, and her heart housed a fire that had half burned and destroyed her.[22]

Virgil's fifth verse, "nec placidam membris dat cura quietem" ("It [longing] witholds calm rest from her limbs"), is expanded into its own octave, which uses impertinent similes to convey Dido's agitation:

> Perzò mentre autro fa la nonnarella
> essa na gran catasta de penziero
> (iusto comme se fosse cioccarella
> e portasse la sarma de sommiere)
> ncuollo se sente e manco nna stezzella
> pote dormire o fare no crestiere
> a chelle membra soie malate e stracque
> e ha le chiocche comma ova sciaque. (Rak 152)

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[21] Significantly, the Latin text is placed in small font before each passage of Bernaudo's translation, to invite comparison and "per misurare l'esercizio deformante" ("to measure the deformative exercise"; Fulco 861).

[22] In Virgil, "At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura / vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni" ("But the queen, long since smitten with a grievous love-pang,/feeds the wound with her lifeblood, and is wasted with fire unseen"; *Aeneid* 4.1–2). See Rak 150–54 for parallel considerations of this translation. I have used Rak as a source for the citations from Bernaudo, since I was unable to access the 1640 original.

> And so while others are having their little night-nights, she feels like she's carrying a woodpile of worries on her back (just as if she were a little donkey carrying the load of a beast of burden); she isn't able to get even a drop of sleep or administer an enema to her sick and weary limbs; and her temples look like two rotten eggs.

In similar fashion, the following lines (6–8 in Virgil) swell to two octaves, employing techniques quite familiar to readers of, for example, Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*: playful manipulations of epic simile describing the sun's movements, and, as already mentioned, portraits of old hags (this one could be straight out of his tale "La vecchia scortecata"):

> Tutta chiena de shiure era venuta
> l'Aurora a semmenare l'allegrezze
> e la notte scontenta e necrecuta
> fuieva e vuonne cchiù tutta negrezze
> quanno lassaie lo lietto la verruta
> che le parea chino de suglie e frezze
> e a lo sore soia priesto scommoglia
> de la chiaia che ha la mala doglia.
> Era chesta na vecchia scartellata
> de mille mise e non haveva diente
> tutta sedonta e tutta scortecata,
> tenea le masche dinto a li morfiente,
> la catarozza ianca e spedata
> ma l'uocchie commm'a gatta stralluciente,
> parlava po cossì sguessosa e frolla
> comm'a peciucco che sbruffa pappolla. (Rak 152–53)

> Dawn had come, full of flowers, to sow good cheer, and Night, disgruntled and miserable, had fled, as had all darkness, when the restless soul left her bed, which felt like it was full of needles and arrows, and revealed to her sister the wound that so pained her. This sister was an old hunchback, a thousand months old; she was toothless and filthy and had barely any skin left on her; her cheeks had collapsed under her front teeth; the crown of her head was white and nearly bald, though her eyes glowed brightly like those of a cat;

> when she spoke she babbled so limply that she sounded like a little child gobbling up her mush.

Other examples of the "Neapolitanization" of Virgil's poem include the replacement of the "seers" (*praeterea vatum*) with old wives, a description of Dido's funeral pyre that recalls the elaborate funeral *apparati* of baroque Naples, and the transformation of the cave in which Dido and Aeneas take refuge into a haystack and of Dido's appeal to the gods into a curse that Aeneas may never again eat prosciutto and salami. Ultimately, this metamorphosis of the lofty epic world of Virgil into contemporary Naples tells, under the guise of offering an entertaining mock-heroic "variation" on Virgil's work, its own story. The editor's reassurance, in his prefatory remarks, that the original text will "shine through" (*traluce*), "a guisa ch'una ruvida veste ad un leggiadro corpo s'adatta, che pure lascia la proporzione e simmetria di quello comparire" ("in the manner that a rough dress adapts itself to a graceful body, still allowing its proportions and symmetry to appear"; Rak 151) seems to miss, or willfully elude, the point that the "rough dress" has itself refashioned the body, transforming it into something completely different.

In 1689, Gabriele Fasano's *Lo Tasso napoletano, zoè lo Gierosalemme libberata votata a llengua nosta* ("The Neapolitan Tasso, or Jerusalem Delivered Turned into Our Language") transformed the beloved masterpiece by a native son of Campania into another colourful mock-epic. Fasano was a silk merchant who translated in his free time—one of a number of middle-class translators, in fact, who responded to a perceived demand for translations of the classics into the local language. Fasano's version of Tasso's epic was one of the first books in Neapolitan not to be "villanamente stampato," in one editor's words, and also to encounter a certain commercial success (it had three editions between 1689 and 1720); its more serious self-presentation is reinforced by the presence of the original text alongside the Neapolitan (differently from many dialect translations), as well as footnotes that explain difficult lexical items and idioms. In his note to the reader, Fasano, in what was by this point a commonplace, advocates for a language that imitates "natural" orality, just as he complains about "ccierte capetuoste che bolevano che io avesse scritto comme l'antiche, ma … io aggio 'mpontate li piede e aggio volute scrivere comme se parla" ("certain hard-headed folks who wanted me to write like the ancients … but I put my foot down and insisted on writing like we speak"; 7). Here, for example, Fasano's transposition sparkles as Tancredi addresses Argante using the combative verbal invective that was a favourite item in the linguistic catalogue of these translators:

> “Animalone,
> cossì se vence, nè? Sbetoperato!
> Scrivela a lo paiese ss’azzïone!
> Stiratenne le bbraccia, sbregognato!
> Va’ a la forca, alarbaccio, forfantone!
> Che ffus’acciso a tte e cchi t’ha ‘mmezzato! …
> Bestia salata tu e sso Rre de mmerda!”[23] (200)

> “You stupid animal, is that the way to win? You’re despicable! Why don’t you write home about what you did? Raise your arms in victory, shameless one! Go get hanged, dirty Arab, wretched scoundrel! May you and whoever taught you your trade be killed! You’re salted [cruel?] beasts, both you and this shitface king!”

In the exordium (octave 4, in which Tasso addressed Alfonso II of Ferrara), Fasano deviates entirely from the original as he directly addresses his Neapolitan audience:

> Autera nobbeltà napoletana,
> a te sti vierze mieie porto ‘mpresiento,
> mente sto ttasseiare a la paesana
> t’ha grazia, perché ssaie c’ha fonnamimento.
> Tennimoce lo nnuosto, e stia ‘n Toscana
> la Crusca, …
> sta lengua nosta è llengua de tresoro,
> e fuorze ha ccose che no’ ll’hanno lloro. (12–13)

> Proud nobles of Naples: I regale you these verses of mine, since playing Tasso in the key of Naples [*tasseiare a la paesana*] is pleasing to you, for you know that there is a reason for it. Let’s keep what is ours, and let the Crusca stay in Tuscany … this language of ours is a language of treasures, and maybe it has things that they don’t have.

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[23] In Tasso, this scene reads, “Anima vile, / che ancor ne le vittorie infame sei, / qual titolo di laude alto e gentile / da modi attendi sí scortesi e rei? / Fra i ladroni d’Arabia o fra simile / barbara turba avezzo esser tu déi. / Fuggi la luce, e va’ con l’altre belve / a incrudelir ne’ monti e tra le selve” (6.37).

Fasano evokes the different potentialities of Neapolitan, in which unique riches unobtainable elsewhere can be cultivated, and he appeals to the evolving audience of this literature, which here includes the city's nobility. Only at the very end of the poem, in a final, unnumbered add-on octave to canto 20, does Fasano gesture at the modesty *topos*, typically included in the exordium, offering this apostrophe to the poet, in which he too adopts the dress metaphor to describe his project:

> Tasso, lo granne e sbesciolato ammore
> che te portaie da ch'era gioveniello,
> mm'ha ppegliato pe ppietto a ffa st'arrore,
> de t'have' fatto st'autro vestetiello. (736–37)

> Tasso, the great and passionate love that I have had for you since I was a boy has dragged me into committing the error of making you this other little suit of clothes.

The *L'Iliade di Omero in lingua napoletana*, a partial translation of the *Iliad* by the academic and professor of canonical law Nicolò Capasso, was published in 1761 but probably written around 1730. Although it exceeds the chronological bounds of this study, it will be useful to briefly consider how the strategies adopted by the earlier translators had become consolidated (as had also, by this time, the conventions of the mock-heroic). In the dedication, Capasso declares the aim of his project, using the clothes and cabbage *topoi* that we have already seen: "avea a Ommero voglia / de fare all'uso nuosto na casacca / e impara' puro a isso a mangia' foglia" ("I wanted to make Homer a jacket in our style, and to teach him, too, to eat cabbage"; 136)

In Capasso's translation of the *Iliad*, refashioned heroes and gods wage war and busily carry on their questionable affairs in the same streets as Neapolitan low-lifes. Before offering this list of deities that opens book 4 (and that is absent in Homer), Fasano complains about the Olympians, who "you can find shitting right next to you in the outhouse":

> Giove è carcosa cchiù de femmeniero,
> Ciannone è tutta zirrie e cardacia,
> Vennera è na iommenta d'alloghiero,
> Mercurio è latro, roffeiano e spia!

> Manco Pontannecchino se la sente
> d'ave' no Ddio de chisse per parente. (235)
>
> Jove is quite a bit more than a womanizer; Juno is full of whims and tantrums; Venus is a mare for hire; Mercury a thief, pimp, and spy! Not even Pontannecchino [a famous executioner of the time] would agree to have one of these gods in the family!

As Homer is demythologized and immortals are brought down to earth, both gods and epically challenged heroes join together in a human comedy that vividly celebrates the micro-rituals of urban Naples, providing an apt allegory for how these authors use satire and parody not only to playfully deconstruct canonical texts but also to question the distance between elite and popular culture.

III

Writing from the margins of one of the centres of European baroque culture, Neapolitan dialect authors questioned the relevance of linguistic and literary exemplarities of the past, and in their promotion of linguistic diversity engaged in building a new literary tradition that transported the forms and contents of "popular," spoken dialect (versus dialectal Italian or the *favellar gentil napoletano* mentioned earlier) onto the page. Their adaptive manipulations were by no means a simple exercise in transcription, or mere academic play. They were, instead, part of a larger project that drew on strategies of linguistic interanimation, generic deformation, and celebration of "little" heroes aimed at addressing developing aesthetic tastes and creating a new readership and cultural community in Naples.[24] We find, in the works of these authors, a first awareness that dialect literature does not have to be a burlesque of literature *in lingua*, but may take on themes and objectives of its own. As has been noted by Mikhail Bakhtin and others, this revitalization of dialects and their engagement with dominant languages and literary traditions—their dialogism, to use his term—created a situation in which "the parodying image of dialects began to receive more profound artistic formulation, and began to penetrate major literature" (Bakhtin 82). The innovative models and poetics of this evolving corpus, with their emphasis on spoken language, contemporaneity, and the everyday lives of common people prefigured, to some degree, one of the more general directions in which European literary culture was moving: towards the "fluttuazione delle barriere e la ricodificazione delle categorie letterarie tipiche del Settecento, in cui ha tanto peso l'ascesa del romanzo" ("fluctuation of borders and recodification of literary categories typical of the eighteenth century, in which the rise of the novel has such importance"; Bertoni 11). It also constituted an important precedent to the better-known Neapolitan dialect writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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[24] Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term "interanimation" in his discussions of polyglossia and heteroglossia: "the idea … that mixing encourages language consciousness and so linguistic and literary creativity" (qtd. in Burke, *Languages* 112).

Finally, this case study encourages, I hope, the consideration of larger questions of cultural policy and cultural politics. Who creates culture? For whom, and with which instruments? What is at stake when writing from the margins? What does it mean to promote and partake in a "local" culture? As was common in discussions of translation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of our authors adopted the analogy of dressing as expressing, and translation as tailoring a new garment. "Redressing" a tradition in order to create another one—the "little dress" (*vestitiello*) of Neapolitan—involved a conscious and willed refashioning of language, genre, and poetics that in its "radical heterogeneity" (Venuti 10) called into question the existing premises of a national language and a national culture. Redressing, of course, also means to remedy or set right, and we have considered the ways in which the nascent Neapolitan tradition redresses the marginalization of a language and of the rich culture that it expressed.

In the end, some might wonder if a now dusty corner of a "small" tradition at the periphery of the official world of Italian letters amounts to a drop in the bucket of literary history. Yet a genuine history of literature also describes the "revolts, assaults upon authority … inventions of new forms and languages—all the subversions of the traditional order that, little by little, work to create literature and the literary world" (Casanova 175). In a present moment when local languages and cultures confront their own threats of standardization and homogenization, awareness of past strategies of creative resistance to such pressures may prove to be not only historically illuminating but also relevant to the future creation of cultural identity and community.

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