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Article:

Sulis, G (2019) Gigliola Sulis speaks to Ann Goldstein: writing locally, translating globally. *The Translator*. ISSN 1355-6509

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2019.1578549>

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The Translator

Gigliola Sulis speaks to Ann Goldstein: Writing locally, translating globally --Manuscript Draft--

Full Title:	Gigliola Sulis speaks to Ann Goldstein: Writing locally, translating globally
Manuscript Number:	RTRN-2018-0093
Article Type:	Dialogue and Specialist Conversation
Keywords:	
Abstract:	This is an interview article.
Order of Authors:	Gigliola Sulis

Gigliola Sulis speaks to Ann Goldstein: Writing locally, translating globally.

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7 Ann Goldstein, the head of the copy department and an editor at The New Yorker, is one of
8
9 the most prominent translators of contemporary Italian fiction into English. She was part of
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11 the team that translated Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone* (2013), she has translated twentieth-
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13 century Italian classics by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Primo Levi (for the Complete Works of Primo
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15 Levi, 2015, a project that she coordinated as general editor), Anna Maria Ortese and Elsa
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17 Morante, and she has given voice in English to many key figures of the Italian contemporary
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19 literary scene, such as Alessandro Baricco, Roberto Calasso, Pia Pera, Alessandro Piperno,
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21 Giuseppe Genna, Giancarlo De Cataldo, Milena Agus, Amara Lakhous and Emanuele Trevi.
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23 She also translated the autobiographical essay *In Other Words* (2016), written in Italian by
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25 Jhumpa Lahiri, an American writer of Indian origin.
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31 Since the early 2010s her name has been associated with Elena Ferrante (Wood 2013) and
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33 especially with her internationally best-selling series, the Neapolitan Novels (2012-2015), the
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35 last book of which, *The Story of the Lost Child* (2015), was on the shortlist for the Man
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37 Booker International Prize, which is awarded to both author and translator. In addition to this
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39 tetralogy, Goldstein has translated other novels by Ferrante, as well as the collection of letters
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41 and interviews *Frantumaglia: A Writer's Journey* (2016), all with Europa Editions. In
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43 addition, she translates Ferrante's interviews and articles into English, including her column
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45 in the British newspaper The Guardian. Since Ferrante publishes under a pseudonym and
46
47 does not appear in public, Goldstein, as her English voice, has been a kind of spokesperson
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49 for the books in interviews, talks, and literary festivals (Dodson 2016); in a reversal of the
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51 usual paradigm, the invisibility of the author has fostered the visibility of the translator
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58 (Milkova 2016).
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2 This conversation focuses on attitudes and trends in the US publishing market toward
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4 translated fiction, and on the challenges faced by the translator when moving the many local
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6 Italies represented in the novels and their languages into other linguistic and cultural
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8 contexts. The conversation confirms the different emphasis on local specificity within and
9
10 outside Italy – a determining factor for both the creation of an Italian literary canon in
11
12 translation and the positioning of Italian authors within the map of world literature (Venuti
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15 2016).
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22 **Gigliola** – In contrast with the usual experience of translators, who work in the shadows of
23
24 the publishing industry and whose role in the editorial process is often unacknowledged, you
25
26 have become a very recognisable figure, reaching a celebrity status. According to Robert
27
28 Weil, editor in chief of Liveright Publishing, with whom you worked on the Primo Levi
29
30 Complete Works, your “name on a book now is gold”, and new titles are now advertised as
31
32 “translated by Ann Goldstein”, using your prestige as a guarantee for quality (Maloney
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35 2016).
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42 **Ann** – I always say that “celebrity translator” is an oxymoron, but I admit that that may be
43
44 changing. It is a very new situation, for me. Natasha Wimmer, who translates the Chilean
45
46 Roberto Bolaño into English, is in a similar position: because the author, who became very
47
48 popular, is dead, she is presenting the books, going to festivals, giving interviews. If we
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50 think, though, of another author who has done really well in translation, Karl Ove
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52 Knausgaard, in this case the translator Don Bartlett does not have the same level of media
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54 exposure, because the writer has such a personality himself and presents himself. Even so,
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56 there is a turn towards the translator being recognised.
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5 **Gigliola** — The percentage of translations of foreign books on the Anglophone market is very
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7 low, with 2-4% as the most quoted figure (Venuti 2008, 11). Yet, Three percent
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9 <<http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/index.php?s=database>>, a
10
11 database of original translations of fiction and poetry published or distributed in the United
12
13 States since 2008, shows that translations rose from below 400 titles per year before 2011 to
14
15 an oscillation between 470 and 633 in the following years (the peak is in 2016). Amongst
16
17 translated works, Italian books rank in fourth position after French, Spanish and German and
18
19 account for 4-7% of the market. In 2017, out of 531 translated books, 30 were Italian (6%)¹.
20
21 From your privileged point of view, both as a translator and as an editor at The New Yorker,
22
23 do you think we are witnessing the inversion of a trend in relation to the access of foreign and
24
25 in particular Italian books in the American market? What reasons do you see for the recent
26
27 upward trajectory?
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36 **Ann** – I think there is a real reason for that, and it is that there are many small presses that
37
38 have started up in recent years. There is obviously Europa Editions, but many of the other
39
40 small presses are also doing Italian books, even if the big publishers are not doing many—in
41
42 fact are probably doing fewer and fewer. I think of Archipelago, New Directions, New
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44 Vessel, New York Review Books, Akashic, Graywolf². Publishers of translations are always
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51 ¹ Three percent – a resource for international literature at the University of Rochester. Editor: Chad Post.
52 <http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/index.php?s=database>. Accessed May 31st 2018. Here
53 are the complete data: 2008: 367 titles (Italian: 14 = 4% - all figures are rounded up); 2009: 374 (Italian: 24 =
54 6%); 2010: 356 (It.: 18 = 5%); 2011: 394 (It.: 22 = 6%); 2012: 470 (It.: 35 = 7%); 2013: 554 (It.: 35 = 6%); 2014:
55 618 (It.: 36 = 6%); 2015: 599 (It.: 41 = 7%); 2016: 633 (It.: 31 = 5%); 2017: 531 (It.: 30 = 6%). In 2008 Italian
56 ranked ninth after French, Spanish, German, Arabic, Russian, Japanese, Portuguese and Chinese, and in 2010 it
57 was in fourth position, preceded by French, Spanish, German and Japanese.

58 ² For a list of publishers that have a record of publishing translations, or that specialize in publishing translations
59 see Pen America's website, Publishers of works in translation. [https://pen.org/publishers-of-works-in-](https://pen.org/publishers-of-works-in-translation)
60 [translation](https://pen.org/publishers-of-works-in-translation). Accessed May 31st 2018.
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going to be part of a small market in the US, but then they are part of the huge market of readers of fiction in English, worldwide. There is an ongoing debate on the market for translated books in America, and the internet has become an important space for discussion in this area. In addition to the Three percent website that you quoted, there is the site Words Without Borders <<https://www.wordswithoutborders.org>> and Asymptote, along with The Translation Database <www.publishersweekly.com/translation>. There are a number of blogs, such as Translationista. Dispatches from the World of Literary Translation <<http://translationista.com>>, by Susan Bernofsky a translator from German and winner of the 2017 Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, or the one run by Esther Allen, <<http://estherallen.com>>, who translates from Spanish and is a professor at the City University of New York: they all contribute to increasing the visibility of translated texts. There is also a Tumblr blog with figures regularly updated, Women in translation <<https://womenintranslation.tumblr.com>>.

Nevertheless, the picture is not rosy for novels in translation. I don't think that the success of writers like Knausgaard, Ferrante and Bolaño or the phenomenon of the Nordic noir have to do with translation; I think they caught readers' interest for some inner quality, for their ability to create a fictional universe that readers found compelling, but this was in spite of the fact that they are translations, and not because of it.

Gigliola – You mentioned Europa Editions, which is a noteworthy case of a relatively young independent publishing house with offices in New York and London. It was founded in 2005 by Sandro Ferri and Sandra Ozzola Ferri, who were already founders, owners and publishers of the Italian press Edizioni e/o (established in 1979). The Ferris had identified in translated novels a neglected area of the Anglo-American editorial market and took the challenge of

1 expanding it, as their catalogue of international authors reflects. What is their role in the
2 context you have sketched?
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7 **Ann** – Europa Editions is successful in a small market, in bringing to that market Italian,
8 French, Spanish, German and other authors. Since the mother company, so to speak, is
9 Italian, Europa has done a lot to support and disseminate new Italian titles. Europa has an
10 influence in small, independent bookstores, but it’s also a tiny publisher in the international
11 market, and translated books do not sell much, in general. Ferrante is a remarkable exception
12 to translated books, but how many people buy or read translated novels? Nevertheless,
13 Asymptote, a journal of world literature in translation, singled out specifically the case of
14 recent successes of Italian texts, with speculations on a possible “renaissance in Italian
15 literature” (Bonner 2016).
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34 **Gigliola** – One common tenet in the field of translation studies is that both readers and
35 publishers tend to associate the quality of a translation with its readability as a non-translated
36 text. It is what Lawrence Venuti defined as “the translator’s invisibility” (2008). Do you
37 aspire to be invisible in your own work? Internationally, many translators tell of pressures
38 from publishers to make the language of the book compatible with the reader’s expectations,
39 and therefore enhance fluency, accessibility, and transparency of style, especially when they
40 translate middlebrow fiction.
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53 **Ann** – No, this has not been my case. I try to keep fairly strict control of my translations, and
54 I would not submit to this type of overseeing from publishers. At the same time, I don’t know
55 if I have a conscious, predetermined strategy when I translate. What I can say is that if you
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1 stay close to the text through the whole process of making the translation, then you convey
2 what is in there. I follow the text I am working on, its voice, its story, and I translate aiming
3 at something that works for me and for my readers. Overall the text must flow well, and yes, I
4 agree that it needs to be accessible, without impediments, even if sometimes the language can
5 stretch, a bit. For example, Ferrante uses a lot of run-on sentences, or what in English we
6 would consider run-on sentences, and many readers have remarked on it. I tried to keep her
7 sentence structure as much as possible, because there is purpose in it – she is often trying to
8 get you somewhere – but English doesn't tolerate that type of sentence as well as Italian, so it
9 was sometimes hard.
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26 **Gigliola** – Michael Reynolds, Europa Editions' editor in chief, has defined you as “the
27 perfect Europa translator”, and highlighted the following features of your translating practice:
28 “She does not invent things. She goes back to the original. She takes risks” (Goldstein and
29 Reynolds 2016). What risks do you take?
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39 **Ann** – In some ways it's a risk to be literal, and I am quite a literal translator, essentially. I
40 don't think it's bad, if something is peculiar in Italian it should also stay peculiar in English.
41 Yet, you don't want it to be too peculiar. One example is the “absence of sense”, that is a sort
42 of theme in Ferrante's *The Days of Abandonment* (2005). It is an idiomatic usage, and many
43 translators and many editors would have worked around this, but within the text it soon
44 became iconic. In this perspective, the translated novel does not sound as if it had been
45 written in English, and it shouldn't. I must say that my work is based on experience and
46 instinct. I have an unorthodox background for a translator: I did not study Italian literature, I
47 don't have academic training, I haven't lived in Italy for an extended period of time. My
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1 knowledge of the language, literature and culture comes mainly from books, and many
2 translations I do come to me by chance, or thanks to suggestions of friends-informers.
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9 **Gigliola** – Like many scholars in my field, I read Italian literature as the intertwining of a
10 multilingual line, from Dante to Carlo Emilio Gadda, and a monolingual line, from Petrarch
11 to Calvino (Contini 1963). This is combined with a national history of polycentrism
12 (Dionisotti 1967), in which regional cultures have developed over the centuries their own
13 traditions, literatures and languages, which are still thriving. Nowadays, even the average
14 reader is not surprised by the presence in Italian fiction of borrowings from dialects and
15 foreign languages. The question is what happens to this linguistic richness when Italian
16 novels in translation travel to countries that do not have the same socio-linguistic context or
17 the same level of acceptance of multilingualism in fiction, and obviously the role of
18 translators and publishers is key.
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33 Some translators of Italian into French, German, and Spanish (often referred to as the
34 “translators of the untranslatable” (Biagi 2014)) have chosen in recent years to resort to the
35 linguistic variation existing in the receiving country, in order to parallel in creative ways the
36 relationship among languages of the original. This is for example what Dominique Vittoz and
37 Moshe Kahn do in their French and German translations of Camilleri’s historical novels, in
38 which they insert dialects or other regional varieties, either currently in use or adapted from
39 texts of the past (Sulis 2014, Segnini 2018). Other translators use local slang, especially for
40 contemporary Italian authors, as in the case of Serge Quadrupani and Steven Sartarelli in
41 their translations of Camilleri’s Montalbano series. Where would you position your working
42 practice in relation to this issue?
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Ann – Translating dialects is always a problem, of course. There aren't dialects in English the way there are in Italian: languages that are used now mainly in informal situations but were also spoken for centuries – in opposition to Italian as the written, official language – and have in some cases literary traditions. In America we have regional accents, while probably England has something closer to dialects. I don't recall experiments in American translations similar to those you mention, but maybe they are more common in other traditions.

My feeling is that translating dialect into some kind of American slang, say a Brooklyn accent, sounds ridiculous in English. It is also out of place: if the story is set in Italy (or better: in Sicily, Rome, Naples, Sardinia), it doesn't make sense for characters to speak with an American accent. I believe that Lawrence Venuti used a gangster slang for the translation of a noir by Massimo Carlotto: it wasn't successful, in my opinion, because it was like reading something constructed, not like a novel, while in Italian you are reading a novel. The same is true for archaic forms: You cannot put a Chaucerian word into a modern novel, because it is anachronistic, and it would not ring true. In similar cases, I don't know of a solution that sounded plausible.

Interestingly, I listened to a BBC4 radio play on Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels (Reading Europe – Italy 2017), and although I am not an expert, friends told me that the young girls had a Liverpool accent. To me it sounded all wrong. Furthermore, Ferrante doesn't even write in dialect, although I should add that in the TV adaptation that is being made of the Neapolitan Novels the characters speak in Neapolitan. The books are written in basically grammatical Italian. It is different for example from Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita*, where the characters do speak a version—Pasolini's version—of Roman dialect.

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Gigliola –I am interested in understanding how you approached the translation of *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) for your *The Street Kids* (2016), which is the second translation of the work after *The Ragazzi* by Emile Capouya (1968). The novel is for me an exemplary case of the discrepancy existing between the Italian literary canon in Italy – where *Ragazzi di vita* is one of the masterpieces of the rich tradition of multilingual fiction, together with the novels of Carlo Emilio Gadda and Beppe Fenoglio – and the same canon abroad, where multilingual novels find very little space. Pasolini’s international fame seems based on his public persona as an artist and a committed intellectual with a critical position against bourgeois society, and on his films, rather than on his novels, which have failed to attract strong interest. Set in the Roman slums over the decade following World War II, *Ragazzi di vita*’s language alternates and blends Italian (with peaks of poetic lyricism) and a creative, lively Romanesco prone to vulgarity and dysphemism – a language that conveys the life philosophy of the ragazzi. At the request of the publisher, Garzanti, Pasolini added at the end of the novel a glossary of the “parole del gergo della malavita o della plebe romana” (243, “words from the jargon of the Roman underworld and underclass”), something that represents the anthropological substratum of the story. How did you treat this Romanesque dimension, this linguistic memory of another world, in your English translation?

Ann – I used the glossary for my understanding of the text, of course (and it was not enough, because in the novel we find Pasolini’s personal reworking of that language), but I did not keep the Romanesco or the glossary in translation, because I think that people don’t expect to find a lot of foreign words when they read translated texts. For all non-standard language, I prefer not to manipulate the target language. My solution for the parts in Romanesco, like the dialogues of the street kids, was to make the English looser, more slangy, but not always, because it would become too heavy and difficult to read. I relaxed the grammar, leaving out

1 articles or verbs, or using contractions. Some examples: “What’re you doing?” (17), “What’s
2 he want?”, or “Gimme!” (26), “You from Naples?” (29), “Whadd’ya mean?” (33), “You all
3 right?” (36), “Cuz, what’s up?” (99). As you can see they are all very short sentences, as in
4 the original, so they don’t create problems of comprehension. I used them to keep the
5 distinction between the lines of the boys and youths and the voice of the narrator, an
6 opposition which is very strong in the novel.
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19 **Gigliola** – I notice that even without the extensive presence of Romanesco in the dialogue
20 and free indirect discourse, the translated novel keeps some traces of its non-English origin.
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22 Single Italian words within English sentences are very rare, limited mainly to the title
23 “signora”, also shortened into the popular “signò”, and its Romanesque translation “sora”.

24 However, there are recurring toponyms (neighbourhoods, streets, bridges, hills, buildings and
25 factories) and anthroponyms, including the boys’ nicknames and their diminutives, as in
26 “Ricchetto” (little curly one) / “Riccè”, “Borgo Antico” (“ancient hamlet”)/ “Borgo Antì”.

27 Plus, there is an extended network of literary quotations from Dante’s Divine Comedy,
28 Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli’s 19th-century poems in Romanesque, and popular songs: some of
29 them are present only in translation, while others appear in Italian or Romanesque, but
30 followed by your translation (all in italics). I understand that by keeping some foreign terms,
31 but decreasing their frequency, you manage to make the text fluent and readable while not
32 completely hiding its foreignness from the English language and Anglo-American culture.
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53 **Ann** – Titles (“signora”, “sora”, etc.) and place names I tend generally to leave in Italian,
54 because to address or refer to let’s say a woman in a Roman slum as “Mrs.” would I think be
55 jarring. It becomes a bit more of a problem when you have a place, like St. Peter’s, which has
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1 a known English version; but I think lately I've tended not to mind inconsistencies (although
2 in *The Street Kids* I left it as San Pietro). Nicknames are a difficult decision. Generally, I
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4 would tend not to translate those as well—to me it would seem awkward to call a Roman
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6 street kid “Curly”. Another solution, which I didn't use, would be to translate the nickname at
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8 the first mention, which would give the reader the information without losing the context. So
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10 I guess I would agree with what you say, I want the reader to always be aware that he is in
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12 1950s Rome, not somewhere in America. I would add that every book is different, however,
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14 and you might make a different decision in a different situation.
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24 **Gigliola** – Among the literary quotations in *Romanesco*, I would like to focus on the verses
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26 by Belli used as an epigraph in the final chapter, which in your translation read “... the Lady
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28 Death / of Via Giulia raises her scythe.” (215) It struck me how different it sounds from the
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30 original: “... *la Commaraccia / Secca de Strada-Giulia arza er rampino*” (217). In both cases
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32 they explain the title (“*La comare secca*” / “Lady Death”) and introduce the theme of death
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34 that closes the novel on a dramatic note, but while Belli's *Romanesco* has a popular tone that
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36 belongs to the same low social classes and underworld of the protagonists, the English lexis
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38 elevates the register and creates a distance.
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46 **Ann** – This is a good example of why I don't translate poetry. Maybe if you were translating
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48 the whole poem you could find a lower register, so to speak, but it's especially hard in a line.
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50 And a line that presents one could almost say a familiar image: death and the scythe. The
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52 original *Romanesco* would not have an equivalent anyway in English.
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Gigliola – What was your approach to translating multilingualism and linguistic variety in the books in which Primo Levi writes of his life in Auschwitz and the long journey back to Italy after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp?

Ann – Translating Levi had its difficulties, as for all authors. He is such a beautiful writer, but his sentences are long and complex, and they go against the syntactic structure of English. In terms of vocabulary, he resorts to made-up words and many scientific terms, for which you have to make choices on what to use in translation. He also wrote essays about language, in which he reflects on it, and this is not easy for a translator, because there is so much that has to be explained. For the novels based on his experience at Auschwitz, in translating *The Truce* (2015) I chose to leave the foreign languages where they appeared: Polish, Russian, German, Romanian. Otherwise, I would have translated them twice, first into Italian and then into English. There is also another reason for keeping them as in the original, which has to do with Levi's intention to present Auschwitz as a Babel of languages, in order to convey his personal experience of the concentration camp. Therefore, in *Se questo è un uomo* (1947) one can find German, French, Italian. In the first English translation by Stuart Woolf (1959) everything was translated, but in the revision that I did with Woolf for the new *Complete Works* (2015) we decided to leave them untranslated, even if this choice might be off-putting for the reader. In this case, I preferred to remain faithful to the original text. It's a particular example of wanting to convey the experience. This is why I say that I don't have a general strategy in my work: each text requires a different approach to the translation.

Gigliola – Another novel with a multilingual dimension among those you translated is *From the Land of the Moon* by Milena Agus (2010). The story is set in Sardinia in the second half

1 of the twentieth century, and some episodes take place in Milan. The novel is in plain Italian,
2 but in the dialogue and free indirect discourse some words or sentences in the local language,
3 Sardinian, and a few borrowings in Milanese dialect are used³. Or I think of the novels by
4 Amara Lakhous, an Italian-language writer of Algerian origin, that present an ironic, bitter-
5 sweet portrait of contemporary postcolonial Italy from the point of view of migrants.
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13 **Ann** – In these cases I followed what the writers had done in the original texts, so that the
14 translations incorporated dialects and foreign languages. Agus’s *From the Land of the Moon*
15 has a simple linguistic structure: the non-Italian words and sentences – which represent the
16 Sardinian way of life, traditions and customs, as different from those of the mainland – are
17 normally in italics and accompanied by a translation, either in the text or in a footnote. I also
18 kept these dialect words in italics, and translated their Italian translation into English. When
19 the protagonist goes to mainland Italy it is a big trip for her, and there are a few short
20 sentences and words in Milanese dialect, and here, too, I followed the original text, adding
21 the English translation. The text dictated the choice I made. The only difference is that I
22 avoided footnotes, which are not usual in novels, and put the translations inside the text. I
23 also kept in the translation a few Italian terms, the function of which is to remind the reader
24 of the original language of the text: “signorina”, “signora”, easily recognisable, but also “casa
25 di ringhiera”, which is a typical block of flats in Milan, to which I added an explanation
26 (“where the apartments opened onto a balcony overlooking a courtyard”, 32, 62).
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48 I’ve translated three books by Amara Lakhous: *Clash of Civilisations over an Elevator in*
49 *Piazza Vittorio*, *Divorce Islamic Style*, and *Dispute over a Very Italian Piglet* (2008, 2012,
50 2014). If we take *Clash of Civilisations* as an example, we see that the prose and vocabulary
51 are plain, even if he borrows words from the native languages of the characters, who are
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60 ³ On translating Agus’ Sardinian novels for Australian readers, see Maher 2014.
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either foreigners or from different Italian regions. I kept this dimension in the English translation, where readers can find borrowings from Italian dialects, like Neapolitan, and from French, Farsi, Spanish, Arabic. They tend to be single words, and mostly elements of material culture, or greetings or prayers, which are either translated (and I kept two footnotes that I did not know how to incorporate in the text) or easy to guess from the context, or not relevant in terms of semantic precision (e.g. the names of dishes). Here, too, I kept some Italian words, as in the following list: “Do you eat pizza, spaghetti, fettuccine, lasagna, ravioli, tortellini, parmigiano in Shiraz?” (29). The novel plays on linguistic and cultural misunderstandings, as for the Dutch student who repeats “I am not Gentile”, by which he means he does not behave like the Italian football player Claudio Gentile, but everybody thinks he is weird in saying that he is not “kind”, “polite”; to keep the world play I used the term “gentile” in English, even if this changed the meaning. Overall, the language of the two authors is kept at a simple level, is not complicated, and must also be kept simple in translation.

Gigliola – Some Anglophone readers of Elena Ferrante think that her novels are written in Neapolitan, at least in part, in a way not dissimilar from Andrea Camilleri’s Commissario Montalbano crime series. In fact, while Camilleri’s Sicilian and his regional Italian are dramatically reduced in translation, owing to the fluency regime adopted by Stephen Sartarelli, many of the few Neapolitan borrowings in Ferrante’s writing remain in the English translation, and the significant metalinguistic dimension of the novel – based on the diglottic situation of Italy from the 1950s onwards (Villarini 2016), in which people would use dialect in informal and personal situation and Italian in formal ones – suggests an extended presence

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of the local language in her prose, thus creating an “illusion of multilingualism” (Segnini 2018).

Ann – The question about Ferrante’s dialect comes up as a common misinterpretation among American readers, who often ask me how I managed to translate from Neapolitan. As you say, this happens because on the one hand the relationship between Italian and Neapolitan dialect is one of the main subthemes of the novel, both historically and in relation to the two main characters, Lila and Elena, and on the other the narrator signals clearly when characters switch from Italian to dialect, or vice versa, on the basis of the situation they are in.

Gigliola – The syntagm “in dialect”, in sentences like “she said in dialect”, “she moved into dialect”, recurs frequently in the tetralogy, more than 30 and less than 50 times per book.

Ann – Some English-speaking readers inferred that those phrases were my way of indicating that the original text presented sections in Neapolitan, but actually it is the original that is presented as the written translation into Italian of lives that we should imagine were carried out, up to a certain point, entirely in Neapolitan, as you would expect, given the historical and social context: a poor, peripheral neighbourhood in Naples, in the second half of the twentieth century. This non-use of dialect is justified within the novels by the fact that the narrator is Elena, who has become an important author and writes the story of her own life through her friendship with Lila, and outside the fiction by the fact that Ferrante wants her books to be read, and therefore wants her language to be broadly accessible. So, dialect has a large presence, but almost always filtered by the Italian.

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Gigliola – As in the other translations we discussed, you kept a few Italian terms in English. Again, there are titles (“maestra”, “signora” / “signò”, “mamma”), magazines and newspapers (e.g. *L’Unità*, *Napoli notte*, *Cronache meridionali*), some random words like “disperazione” (followed by Ferrante’s explanation: “a word that in dialect meant having lost all hope but also being broke”, in *My Brilliant Friend*, 83), the Italian feast of the “Befana” (Epiphany) (79, with an explicatory footnote), a few ancient and modern games (*Lost Child*, 447). For the most part, though, remain in Italian the names of typical dishes and food, which are confirmed as some of the most powerful signifiers of national identity (some examples: “cotognata”, “taralli”, “lupini”, “sfogliatelle”, “ciccioli”, “salami and provolone”, “insalata di rinforzo”, “struffoli”, “gattò”, the “napoletana” coffee machine, “frittelle”). However, the only Italian word that is repeated constantly throughout your translation of the series, with more than 80 occurrences, is “stradone”, defined in *My Brilliant Friend* as “the wide avenue that ran through the neighbourhood” (40).

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Ann – The original has more Neapolitan terms (not many), which I could not accommodate in the English translation; for them, I tried to find words or expressions that were colloquial without being slang. I tried to give them a glaze of orality. I kept “stradone” in Italian because it refers to an extremely effective theme in the books. It seemed a better solution than the others I thought of, and in addition it reminds you that you are in a different place. The Italian language modifies words with endings that slightly shift the meaning, as in the case of “strada” / “stradone”, while in English you would have to add another word to the main one: “the large street”, “the wide street”. There didn’t seem to be good alternatives, since terms such as “avenue” or “boulevard” clearly do not convey the same meaning as “stradone”. In a conversation, Michael Reynolds linked the “stradone” of Ferrante’s novels to Virginia Woolf’s *The Edge*, as a place you cannot cross, you cannot go beyond (Goldstein and

1 Reynolds 2015). By the time I came to translate the fourth book I had a doubt that “rione”
2 (“neighbourhood”) should have been left in Italian even more than “stradone”, for the
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4 importance it has for the protagonists.
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7 On the other hand, I translated one of the most significant words of the series, the authorial
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9 neologism “smarginatura”, that in Italian is presented as a word created and used only by
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11 Lila: “Il 31 dicembre 1958 Lila ebbe il suo primo episodio di smarginatura. Il termine non è
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13 mio. Lo ha sempre utilizzato lei, forzando il significato comune della parola [forcing the
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15 common meaning of the word]. Diceva che in quelle occasioni si dissolvevano all’improvviso
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17 i margini delle persone e delle cose” (*L’amica geniale*, 85). I translated it as follows: “On
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19 December 31st of 1958 Lila had the first episode of dissolving margins. The term isn’t mine,
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21 she always used it. She said that in those occasions the outlines of people and things suddenly
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23 dissolved, disappeared” (*Brilliant Friend*, 89). I could not create an adequate neologism in
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25 English, so I gave an interpretation of its meaning as “dissolving margins”, which later, in
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27 following occurrences, I changed into “dissolving boundaries”. Here, I had to work around
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29 practical constraints, because I was translating the books as they were published and I could
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31 not know that, after appearing only once in each volume, in the last one, *The Story of the Lost*
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33 *Child*, “smarginatura” was going to be charged with important meaning, that the writer was
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35 going to elaborate on it and that it would be picked up by critics as a metaphor. With
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37 hindsight, I don’t know if I would have translated it differently if I had read the whole series
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39 in advance, but certainly I would have made my decision on the basis of what it meant for
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41 Ferrante.
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51 For me, though, the biggest difficulty in translating Ferrante was to construct a good English
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53 syntax without betraying the intensity of the long sentences of the original.
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Gigliola – The last point on which I would like to have your opinion is the representation of a polycentric Italy that, as an Italian and a scholar in Italian literature, I see as an important feature of our national identity. The novels we have discussed are Italian and at the same time, no less importantly, Neapolitan, Roman, Piedmontese, Sardinian. For Italian readers, minor hints are sufficient to underline the regional element in the novels, because this information is part of their background and life. The image of Italy seen from afar, on the other hand, is fixed in different national stereotypes which, in my opinion, tend to ignore this internal differentiation. How relevant is the representation of place in your translations of Italian novels?

Ann – Of course it's relevant, but it also depends on the writer. I think the reader gets a strong and intimate sense of Turin in Primo Levi's work. Certainly Pasolini's Rome is extremely vivid—it's a Rome of which you can still find some signs, or landmarks, but that in many aspects no longer exists. Lakhous's Piazza Vittorio is a specific, recognizable place, as is his Via Marconi and his Turin—which is not Levi's. An exception is Baricco, many of whose novels do not have a sense of a particular place.

In Ferrante there is a strong sense of belonging to a place, but actually there are not many physical descriptions of Naples. The "rione" is unnamed, and we know only that it is isolated, cut off from the city by the "stradone". Only in *The Story of the Lost Child*, where Elena's daughter talks about the history of Naples as she has heard it from Lila, are there descriptions of the city: here the sentences are long and complex, and through the description of places Ferrante looks at Neapolitan history, something that Anglophone readers, especially perhaps Americans, probably don't know much about. In general, though, the representation of Naples is more evocative than particular. The place is important for the characters because it is where they are born, and where Elena returns. As Michael Reynolds commented, this is

1 (also) a book about people trapped in poverty, and the setting of the story could be anywhere,
2 that owing to social circumstances, people feel trapped where they live (Goldstein and
3 Reynolds 2015). These are processes that are not exclusive to Naples. What Ferrante does is
4 to create an atmosphere, so that people read her novels in a sense as if they were reading
5 about their own place, or situation. A while ago I discussed Ferrante's series in a book club
6 made up of wives of diplomats. There were women from all over the world and they all felt
7 that there was something personal in the stories, they all read Ferrante in connection with
8 their own places and lives.
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24 **Gigliola** – Yet, it seems that Ferrante fever also had the effect of creating a new interest in
25 stories of Naples in the Anglo-American publishing market, and especially those narrated
26 from a female point of view. Two central figures of twentieth-century Italian literature such
27 as Elsa Morante and Anna Maria Ortese, who have relatively limited visibility among foreign
28 readers, are now being (re-)published in your translation, respectively with *Arturo's Island: A*
29 *Novel* (forthcoming 2019), set in Procida, in the Bay of Naples, and *Neapolitan Chronicles,*
30 (2018, with Jenny McPhee; the book is in print also with the title *Descending upon the Hills:*
31 *Stories from Naples*). In both cases, the elements highlighted in the paratexts are the role of
32 Morante and Ortese as models for Ferrante, your name as the translator, and the
33 Neapolitaness of the stories. The English title of Ferrante's tetralogy, which brings the
34 reader's attention to the local element (*Neapolitan Novels* instead of the original *L'amica*
35 *geniale*), seems to influence the strategic choice of titles for Ortese's *Il mare non bagna*
36 *Napoli*, which becomes *Neapolitan Chronicles / Stories from Naples*.
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1 **Ann** – This is also true; one can only hope that this interest continues, and that more works
2 by these female writers and by other Neapolitan works will be published. In the meantime,
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4 my colleague Jenny McPhee is working on another of Morante’s novels, *Menzogna e*
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6 *sortilegio*, for New York Review Books.
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Gigliola Sulis speaks to Ann Goldstein: Writing locally, translating globally.

Ann Goldstein, the head of the copy department and an editor at *The New Yorker*, is one of the most prominent translators of contemporary Italian fiction into English. She was part of the team that translated Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone* (2013), she has translated twentieth-century Italian classics by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Primo Levi (for the Complete Works of Primo Levi, 2015, a project that she coordinated as general editor), Anna Maria Ortese and Elsa Morante, and she has given voice in English to many key figures of the Italian contemporary literary scene, such as Alessandro Baricco, Roberto Calasso, Pia Pera, Alessandro Piperno, Giuseppe Genna, Giancarlo De Cataldo, Milena Agus, Amara Lakhous and Emanuele Trevi. She also translated the autobiographical essay *In Other Words* (2016), written in Italian by Jhumpa Lahiri, an American writer of Indian origin.

Since the early 2010s her name has been associated with Elena Ferrante (Wood 2013) and especially with her internationally best-selling series, the Neapolitan Novels (2012-2015), the last book of which, *The Story of the Lost Child* (2015), was on the shortlist for the Man Booker International Prize, which is awarded to both author and translator. In addition to this tetralogy, Goldstein has translated other novels by Ferrante, as well as the collection of letters and interviews *Frantumaglia: A Writer's Journey* (2016), all with Europa Editions. In addition, she translates Ferrante's interviews and articles into English, including her column in the British newspaper *The Guardian*. Since Ferrante publishes under a pseudonym and does not appear in public, Goldstein, as her English voice, has been a kind of spokesperson for the books in interviews, talks, and literary festivals (Dodson 2016); in a reversal of the usual paradigm, the invisibility of the author has fostered the visibility of the translator (Milkova 2016).

This conversation focuses on attitudes and trends in the US publishing market toward translated fiction, and on the challenges faced by the translator when moving the many local Italies represented in the novels and their languages into other linguistic and cultural contexts. The conversation confirms the different emphasis on local specificity within and outside Italy – a determining factor for both the creation of an Italian literary canon in translation and the positioning of Italian authors within the map of world literature (Venuti 2016).

Gigliola – In contrast with the usual experience of translators, who work in the shadows of the publishing industry and whose role in the editorial process is often unacknowledged, you have become a very recognisable figure, reaching a celebrity status. According to Robert Weil, editor in chief of Liveright Publishing, with whom you worked on the Primo Levi Complete Works, your “name on a book now is gold”, and new titles are now advertised as “translated by Ann Goldstein”, using your prestige as a guarantee for quality (Maloney 2016).

Ann – I always say that “celebrity translator” is an oxymoron, but I admit that that may be changing. It is a very new situation, for me. Natasha Wimmer, who translates the Chilean Roberto Bolaño into English, is in a similar position: because the author, who became very popular, is dead, she is presenting the books, going to festivals, giving interviews. If we think, though, of another author who has done really well in translation, Karl Ove Knausgaard, in this case the translator Don Bartlett does not have the same level of media exposure, because the writer has such a personality himself and presents himself. Even so, there is a turn towards the translator being recognised.

Gigliola — The percentage of translations of foreign books on the Anglophone market is very low, with 2-4% as the most quoted figure (Venuti 2008, 11). Yet, Three percent <<http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threeppercent/index.php?s=database>>, a database of original translations of fiction and poetry published or distributed in the United States since 2008, shows that translations rose from below 400 titles per year before 2011 to an oscillation between 470 and 633 in the following years (the peak is in 2016). Amongst translated works, Italian books rank in fourth position after French, Spanish and German and account for 4-7% of the market. In 2017, out of 531 translated books, 30 were Italian (6%)¹. From your privileged point of view, both as a translator and as an editor at The New Yorker, do you think we are witnessing the inversion of a trend in relation to the access of foreign and in particular Italian books in the American market? What reasons do you see for the recent upward trajectory?

Ann – I think there is a real reason for that, and it is that there are many small presses that have started up in recent years. There is obviously Europa Editions, but many of the other small presses are also doing Italian books, even if the big publishers are not doing many—in fact are probably doing fewer and fewer. I think of Archipelago, New Directions, New Vessel, New York Review Books, Akashic, Graywolf². Publishers of translations are always

¹ Three percent – a resource for international literature at the University of Rochester. Editor: Chad Post. <http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threeppercent/index.php?s=database>. Accessed May 31st 2018. Here are the complete data: 2008: 367 titles (Italian: 14 = 4% - all figures are rounded up); 2009: 374 (Italian: 24 = 6%); 2010: 356 (It.: 18 = 5%); 2011: 394 (It.: 22 = 6%); 2012: 470 (It.: 35 = 7%); 2013: 554 (It.: 35 = 6%); 2014: 618 (It.: 36 = 6%); 2015: 599 (It.: 41 = 7%); 2016: 633 (It.: 31 = 5%); 2017: 531 (It.: 30 = 6%). In 2008 Italian ranked ninth after French, Spanish, German, Arabic, Russian, Japanese, Portuguese and Chinese, and in 2010 it was in fourth position, preceded by French, Spanish, German and Japanese.

² For a list of publishers that have a record of publishing translations, or that specialize in publishing translations see Pen America's website, Publishers of works in translation. <https://pen.org/publishers-of-works-in-translation>. Accessed May 31st 2018.

going to be part of a small market in the US, but then they are part of the huge market of readers of fiction in English, worldwide. There is an ongoing debate on the market for translated books in America, and the internet has become an important space for discussion in this area. In addition to the Three percent website that you quoted, there is the site Words Without Borders <<https://www.wordswithoutborders.org>> and Asymptote, along with The Translation Database <www.publishersweekly.com/translation>. There are a number of blogs, such as Translationista. Dispatches from the World of Literary Translation <<http://translationista.com>>, by Susan Bernofsky a translator from German and winner of the 2017 Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, or the one run by Esther Allen, <<http://estherallen.com>>, who translates from Spanish and is a professor at the City University of New York: they all contribute to increasing the visibility of translated texts. There is also a Tumblr blog with figures regularly updated, Women in translation <<https://womenintranslation.tumblr.com>>.

Nevertheless, the picture is not rosy for novels in translation. I don't think that the success of writers like Knausgaard, Ferrante and Bolaño or the phenomenon of the Nordic noir have to do with translation; I think they caught readers' interest for some inner quality, for their ability to create a fictional universe that readers found compelling, but this was in spite of the fact that they are translations, and not because of it.

Gigliola – You mentioned Europa Editions, which is a noteworthy case of a relatively young independent publishing house with offices in New York and London. It was founded in 2005 by Sandro Ferri and Sandra Ozzola Ferri, who were already founders, owners and publishers of the Italian press Edizioni e/o (established in 1979). The Ferris had identified in translated novels a neglected area of the Anglo-American editorial market and took the challenge of

expanding it, as their catalogue of international authors reflects. What is their role in the context you have sketched?

Ann – Europa Editions is successful in a small market, in bringing to that market Italian, French, Spanish, German and other authors. Since the mother company, so to speak, is Italian, Europa has done a lot to support and disseminate new Italian titles. Europa has an influence in small, independent bookstores, but it's also a tiny publisher in the international market, and translated books do not sell much, in general. Ferrante is a remarkable exception to translated books, but how many people buy or read translated novels? Nevertheless, *Asymptote*, a journal of world literature in translation, singled out specifically the case of recent successes of Italian texts, with speculations on a possible “renaissance in Italian literature” (Bonner 2016).

Gigliola – One common tenet in the field of translation studies is that both readers and publishers tend to associate the quality of a translation with its readability as a non-translated text. It is what Lawrence Venuti defined as “the translator’s invisibility” (2008). Do you aspire to be invisible in your own work? Internationally, many translators tell of pressures from publishers to make the language of the book compatible with the reader’s expectations, and therefore enhance fluency, accessibility, and transparency of style, especially when they translate middlebrow fiction.

Ann – No, this has not been my case. I try to keep fairly strict control of my translations, and I would not submit to this type of overseeing from publishers. At the same time, I don’t know if I have a conscious, predetermined strategy when I translate. What I can say is that if you

stay close to the text through the whole process of making the translation, then you convey what is in there. I follow the text I am working on, its voice, its story, and I translate aiming at something that works for me and for my readers. Overall the text must flow well, and yes, I agree that it needs to be accessible, without impediments, even if sometimes the language can stretch, a bit. For example, Ferrante uses a lot of run-on sentences, or what in English we would consider run-on sentences, and many readers have remarked on it. I tried to keep her sentence structure as much as possible, because there is purpose in it – she is often trying to get you somewhere – but English doesn't tolerate that type of sentence as well as Italian, so it was sometimes hard.

Gigliola – Michael Reynolds, Europa Editions' editor in chief, has defined you as “the perfect Europa translator”, and highlighted the following features of your translating practice: “She does not invent things. She goes back to the original. She takes risks” (Goldstein and Reynolds 2016). What risks do you take?

Ann – In some ways it's a risk to be literal, and I am quite a literal translator, essentially. I don't think it's bad, if something is peculiar in Italian it should also stay peculiar in English. Yet, you don't want it to be too peculiar. One example is the “absence of sense”, that is a sort of theme in Ferrante's *The Days of Abandonment* (2005). It is an idiomatic usage, and many translators and many editors would have worked around this, but within the text it soon became iconic. In this perspective, the translated novel does not sound as if it had been written in English, and it shouldn't. I must say that my work is based on experience and instinct. I have an unorthodox background for a translator: I did not study Italian literature, I don't have academic training, I haven't lived in Italy for an extended period of time. My

knowledge of the language, literature and culture comes mainly from books, and many translations I do come to me by chance, or thanks to suggestions of friends-informers.

Gigliola – Like many scholars in my field, I read Italian literature as the intertwining of a multilingual line, from Dante to Carlo Emilio Gadda, and a monolingual line, from Petrarch to Calvino (Contini 1963). This is combined with a national history of polycentrism (Dionisotti 1967), in which regional cultures have developed over the centuries their own traditions, literatures and languages, which are still thriving. Nowadays, even the average reader is not surprised by the presence in Italian fiction of borrowings from dialects and foreign languages. The question is what happens to this linguistic richness when Italian novels in translation travel to countries that do not have the same socio-linguistic context or the same level of acceptance of multilingualism in fiction, and obviously the role of translators and publishers is key.

Some translators of Italian into French, German, and Spanish (often referred to as the “translators of the untranslatable” (Biagi 2014)) have chosen in recent years to resort to the linguistic variation existing in the receiving country, in order to parallel in creative ways the relationship among languages of the original. This is for example what Dominique Vittoz and Moshe Kahn do in their French and German translations of Camilleri’s historical novels, in which they insert dialects or other regional varieties, either currently in use or adapted from texts of the past (Sulis 2014, Segnini 2018). Other translators use local slang, especially for contemporary Italian authors, as in the case of Serge Quadrupani and Steven Sartarelli in their translations of Camilleri’s Montalbano series. Where would you position your working practice in relation to this issue?

Ann – Translating dialects is always a problem, of course. There aren't dialects in English the way there are in Italian: languages that are used now mainly in informal situations but were also spoken for centuries – in opposition to Italian as the written, official language – and have in some cases literary traditions. In America we have regional accents, while probably England has something closer to dialects. I don't recall experiments in American translations similar to those you mention, but maybe they are more common in other traditions.

My feeling is that translating dialect into some kind of American slang, say a Brooklyn accent, sounds ridiculous in English. It is also out of place: if the story is set in Italy (or better: in Sicily, Rome, Naples, Sardinia), it doesn't make sense for characters to speak with an American accent. I believe that Lawrence Venuti used a gangster slang for the translation of a noir by Massimo Carlotto: it wasn't successful, in my opinion, because it was like reading something constructed, not like a novel, while in Italian you are reading a novel. The same is true for archaic forms: You cannot put a Chaucerian word into a modern novel, because it is anachronistic, and it would not ring true. In similar cases, I don't know of a solution that sounded plausible.

Interestingly, I listened to a BBC4 radio play on Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels (Reading Europe – Italy 2017), and although I am not an expert, friends told me that the young girls had a Liverpool accent. To me it sounded all wrong. Furthermore, Ferrante doesn't even write in dialect, although I should add that in the TV adaptation that is being made of the Neapolitan Novels the characters speak in Neapolitan. The books are written in basically grammatical Italian. It is different for example from Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita*, where the characters do speak a version—Pasolini's version—of Roman dialect.

Gigliola –I am interested in understanding how you approached the translation of *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) for your *The Street Kids* (2016), which is the second translation of the work after *The Ragazzi* by Emile Capouya (1968). The novel is for me an exemplary case of the discrepancy existing between the Italian literary canon in Italy – where *Ragazzi di vita* is one of the masterpieces of the rich tradition of multilingual fiction, together with the novels of Carlo Emilio Gadda and Beppe Fenoglio – and the same canon abroad, where multilingual novels find very little space. Pasolini’s international fame seems based on his public persona as an artist and a committed intellectual with a critical position against bourgeois society, and on his films, rather than on his novels, which have failed to attract strong interest.

Set in the Roman slums over the decade following World War II, *Ragazzi di vita*’s language alternates and blends Italian (with peaks of poetic lyricism) and a creative, lively Romanesco prone to vulgarity and dysphemism – a language that conveys the life philosophy of the ragazzi. At the request of the publisher, Garzanti, Pasolini added at the end of the novel a glossary of the “parole del gergo della malavita o della plebe romana” (243, “words from the jargon of the Roman underworld and underclass”), something that represents the anthropological substratum of the story. How did you treat this Romanesque dimension, this linguistic memory of another world, in your English translation?

Ann – I used the glossary for my understanding of the text, of course (and it was not enough, because in the novel we find Pasolini’s personal reworking of that language), but I did not keep the Romanesco or the glossary in translation, because I think that people don’t expect to find a lot of foreign words when they read translated texts. For all non-standard language, I prefer not to manipulate the target language. My solution for the parts in Romanesco, like the dialogues of the street kids, was to make the English looser, more slangy, but not always, because it would become too heavy and difficult to read. I relaxed the grammar, leaving out

articles or verbs, or using contractions. Some examples: “What’re you doing?” (17), “What’s he want?”, or “Gimme!” (26), “You from Naples?” (29), “Whadd’ya mean?” (33), “You all right?” (36), “Cuz, what’s up?” (99). As you can see they are all very short sentences, as in the original, so they don’t create problems of comprehension. I used them to keep the distinction between the lines of the boys and youths and the voice of the narrator, an opposition which is very strong in the novel.

Gigliola – I notice that even without the extensive presence of Romanesco in the dialogue and free indirect discourse, the translated novel keeps some traces of its non-English origin. Single Italian words within English sentences are very rare, limited mainly to the title “signora”, also shortened into the popular “signò”, and its Romanesque translation “sora”. However, there are recurring toponyms (neighbourhoods, streets, bridges, hills, buildings and factories) and anthroponyms, including the boys’ nicknames and their diminutives, as in “Ricetto” (little curly one) / “Riccè”, “Borgo Antico” (“ancient hamlet”)/ “Borgo Antì”. Plus, there is an extended network of literary quotations from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli’s 19th-century poems in Romanesque, and popular songs: some of them are present only in translation, while others appear in Italian or Romanesque, but followed by your translation (all in italics). I understand that by keeping some foreign terms, but decreasing their frequency, you manage to make the text fluent and readable while not completely hiding its foreignness from the English language and Anglo-American culture.

Ann – Titles (“signora”, “sora”, etc.) and place names I tend generally to leave in Italian, because to address or refer to let’s say a woman in a Roman slum as “Mrs.” would I think be jarring. It becomes a bit more of a problem when you have a place, like St. Peter’s, which has

a known English version; but I think lately I've tended not to mind inconsistencies (although in *The Street Kids* I left it as San Pietro). Nicknames are a difficult decision. Generally, I would tend not to translate those as well—to me it would seem awkward to call a Roman street kid “Curly”. Another solution, which I didn't use, would be to translate the nickname at the first mention, which would give the reader the information without losing the context. So I guess I would agree with what you say, I want the reader to always be aware that he is in 1950s Rome, not somewhere in America. I would add that every book is different, however, and you might make a different decision in a different situation.

Gigliola – Among the literary quotations in *Romanesco*, I would like to focus on the verses by Belli used as an epigraph in the final chapter, which in your translation read “... the Lady Death / of Via Giulia raises her scythe.” (215) It struck me how different it sounds from the original: “... *la Commaraccia / Secca de Strada-Giulia arza er rampino*” (217). In both cases they explain the title (“La comare secca” / “Lady Death”) and introduce the theme of death that closes the novel on a dramatic note, but while Belli's *Romanesco* has a popular tone that belongs to the same low social classes and underworld of the protagonists, the English lexis elevates the register and creates a distance.

Ann – This is a good example of why I don't translate poetry. Maybe if you were translating the whole poem you could find a lower register, so to speak, but it's especially hard in a line. And a line that presents one could almost say a familiar image: death and the scythe. The original *Romanesco* would not have an equivalent anyway in English.

Gigliola – What was your approach to translating multilingualism and linguistic variety in the books in which Primo Levi writes of his life in Auschwitz and the long journey back to Italy after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp?

Ann – Translating Levi had its difficulties, as for all authors. He is such a beautiful writer, but his sentences are long and complex, and they go against the syntactic structure of English. In terms of vocabulary, he resorts to made-up words and many scientific terms, for which you have to make choices on what to use in translation. He also wrote essays about language, in which he reflects on it, and this is not easy for a translator, because there is so much that has to be explained. For the novels based on his experience at Auschwitz, in translating *The Truce* (2015) I chose to leave the foreign languages where they appeared: Polish, Russian, German, Romanian. Otherwise, I would have translated them twice, first into Italian and then into English. There is also another reason for keeping them as in the original, which has to do with Levi's intention to present Auschwitz as a Babel of languages, in order to convey his personal experience of the concentration camp. Therefore, in *Se questo è un uomo* (1947) one can find German, French, Italian. In the first English translation by Stuart Woolf (1959) everything was translated, but in the revision that I did with Woolf for the new *Complete Works* (2015) we decided to leave them untranslated, even if this choice might be off-putting for the reader. In this case, I preferred to remain faithful to the original text. It's a particular example of wanting to convey the experience. This is why I say that I don't have a general strategy in my work: each text requires a different approach to the translation.

Gigliola – Another novel with a multilingual dimension among those you translated is *From the Land of the Moon* by Milena Agus (2010). The story is set in Sardinia in the second half

of the twentieth century, and some episodes take place in Milan. The novel is in plain Italian, but in the dialogue and free indirect discourse some words or sentences in the local language, Sardinian, and a few borrowings in Milanese dialect are used³. Or I think of the novels by Amara Lakhous, an Italian-language writer of Algerian origin, that present an ironic, bitter-sweet portrait of contemporary postcolonial Italy from the point of view of migrants.

Ann – In these cases I followed what the writers had done in the original texts, so that the translations incorporated dialects and foreign languages. Agus’s *From the Land of the Moon* has a simple linguistic structure: the non-Italian words and sentences – which represent the Sardinian way of life, traditions and customs, as different from those of the mainland – are normally in italics and accompanied by a translation, either in the text or in a footnote. I also kept these dialect words in italics, and translated their Italian translation into English. When the protagonist goes to mainland Italy it is a big trip for her, and there are a few short sentences and words in Milanese dialect, and here, too, I followed the original text, adding the English translation. The text dictated the choice I made. The only difference is that I avoided footnotes, which are not usual in novels, and put the translations inside the text. I also kept in the translation a few Italian terms, the function of which is to remind the reader of the original language of the text: “signorina”, “signora”, easily recognisable, but also “casa di ringhiera”, which is a typical block of flats in Milan, to which I added an explanation (“where the apartments opened onto a balcony overlooking a courtyard”, 32, 62).

I’ve translated three books by Amara Lakhous: *Clash of Civilisations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, *Divorce Islamic Style*, and *Dispute over a Very Italian Piglet* (2008, 2012, 2014). If we take *Clash of Civilisations* as an example, we see that the prose and vocabulary are plain, even if he borrows words from the native languages of the characters, who are

³ On translating Agus’ Sardinian novels for Australian readers, see Maher 2014.

either foreigners or from different Italian regions. I kept this dimension in the English translation, where readers can find borrowings from Italian dialects, like Neapolitan, and from French, Farsi, Spanish, Arabic. They tend to be single words, and mostly elements of material culture, or greetings or prayers, which are either translated (and I kept two footnotes that I did not know how to incorporate in the text) or easy to guess from the context, or not relevant in terms of semantic precision (e.g. the names of dishes). Here, too, I kept some Italian words, as in the following list: “Do you eat pizza, spaghetti, fettuccine, lasagna, ravioli, tortellini, parmigiano in Shiraz?” (29). The novel plays on linguistic and cultural misunderstandings, as for the Dutch student who repeats “I am not Gentile”, by which he means he does not behave like the Italian football player Claudio Gentile, but everybody thinks he is weird in saying that he is not “kind”, “polite”; to keep the world play I used the term “gentile” in English, even if this changed the meaning. Overall, the language of the two authors is kept at a simple level, is not complicated, and must also be kept simple in translation.

Gigliola – Some Anglophone readers of Elena Ferrante think that her novels are written in Neapolitan, at least in part, in a way not dissimilar from Andrea Camilleri’s Commissario Montalbano crime series. In fact, while Camilleri’s Sicilian and his regional Italian are dramatically reduced in translation, owing to the fluency regime adopted by Stephen Sartarelli, many of the few Neapolitan borrowings in Ferrante’s writing remain in the English translation, and the significant metalinguistic dimension of the novel – based on the diglottic situation of Italy from the 1950s onwards (Villarini 2016), in which people would use dialect in informal and personal situation and Italian in formal ones – suggests an extended presence

of the local language in her prose, thus creating an “illusion of multilingualism” (Segnini 2018).

Ann – The question about Ferrante’s dialect comes up as a common misinterpretation among American readers, who often ask me how I managed to translate from Neapolitan. As you say, this happens because on the one hand the relationship between Italian and Neapolitan dialect is one of the main subthemes of the novel, both historically and in relation to the two main characters, Lila and Elena, and on the other the narrator signals clearly when characters switch from Italian to dialect, or vice versa, on the basis of the situation they are in.

Gigliola – The syntagm “in dialect”, in sentences like “she said in dialect”, “she moved into dialect”, recurs frequently in the tetralogy, more than 30 and less than 50 times per book.

Ann – Some English-speaking readers inferred that those phrases were my way of indicating that the original text presented sections in Neapolitan, but actually it is the original that is presented as the written translation into Italian of lives that we should imagine were carried out, up to a certain point, entirely in Neapolitan, as you would expect, given the historical and social context: a poor, peripheral neighbourhood in Naples, in the second half of the twentieth century. This non-use of dialect is justified within the novels by the fact that the narrator is Elena, who has become an important author and writes the story of her own life through her friendship with Lila, and outside the fiction by the fact that Ferrante wants her books to be read, and therefore wants her language to be broadly accessible. So, dialect has a large presence, but almost always filtered by the Italian.

Gigliola – As in the other translations we discussed, you kept a few Italian terms in English. Again, there are titles (“maestra”, “signora” / “signò”, “mamma”), magazines and newspapers (e.g. *L’Unità*, *Napoli notte*, *Cronache meridionali*), some random words like “disperazione” (followed by Ferrante’s explanation: “a word that in dialect meant having lost all hope but also being broke”, in *My Brilliant Friend*, 83), the Italian feast of the “Befana” (Epiphany) (79, with an explicatory footnote), a few ancient and modern games (*Lost Child*, 447). For the most part, though, remain in Italian the names of typical dishes and food, which are confirmed as some of the most powerful signifiers of national identity (some examples: “cotognata”, “taralli”, “lupini”, “sfogliatelle”, “ciccioli”, “salami and provolone”, “insalata di rinforzo”, “struffoli”, “gattò”, the “napoletana” coffee machine, “frittelle”). However, the only Italian word that is repeated constantly throughout your translation of the series, with more than 80 occurrences, is “stradone”, defined in *My Brilliant Friend* as “the wide avenue that ran through the neighbourhood” (40).

Ann – The original has more Neapolitan terms (not many), which I could not accommodate in the English translation; for them, I tried to find words or expressions that were colloquial without being slang. I tried to give them a glaze of orality. I kept “stradone” in Italian because it refers to an extremely effective theme in the books. It seemed a better solution than the others I thought of, and in addition it reminds you that you are in a different place. The Italian language modifies words with endings that slightly shift the meaning, as in the case of “strada” / “stradone”, while in English you would have to add another word to the main one: “the large street”, “the wide street”. There didn’t seem to be good alternatives, since terms such as “avenue” or “boulevard” clearly do not convey the same meaning as “stradone”. In a conversation, Michael Reynolds linked the “stradone” of Ferrante’s novels to Virginia Woolf’s *The Edge*, as a place you cannot cross, you cannot go beyond (Goldstein and

Reynolds 2015). By the time I came to translate the fourth book I had a doubt that “rione” (“neighbourhood”) should have been left in Italian even more than “stradone”, for the importance it has for the protagonists.

On the other hand, I translated one of the most significant words of the series, the authorial neologism “smarginatura”, that in Italian is presented as a word created and used only by Lila: “Il 31 dicembre 1958 Lila ebbe il suo primo episodio di smarginatura. Il termine non è mio. Lo ha sempre utilizzato lei, forzando il significato comune della parola [forcing the common meaning of the word]. Diceva che in quelle occasioni si dissolvevano all'improvviso i margini delle persone e delle cose” (*L'amica geniale*, 85). I translated it as follows: “On December 31st of 1958 Lila had the first episode of dissolving margins. The term isn't mine, she always used it. She said that in those occasions the outlines of people and things suddenly dissolved, disappeared” (*Brilliant Friend*, 89). I could not create an adequate neologism in English, so I gave an interpretation of its meaning as “dissolving margins”, which later, in following occurrences, I changed into “dissolving boundaries”. Here, I had to work around practical constraints, because I was translating the books as they were published and I could not know that, after appearing only once in each volume, in the last one, *The Story of the Lost Child*, “smarginatura” was going to be charged with important meaning, that the writer was going to elaborate on it and that it would be picked up by critics as a metaphor. With hindsight, I don't know if I would have translated it differently if I had read the whole series in advance, but certainly I would have made my decision on the basis of what it meant for Ferrante.

For me, though, the biggest difficulty in translating Ferrante was to construct a good English syntax without betraying the intensity of the long sentences of the original.

Gigliola – The last point on which I would like to have your opinion is the representation of a polycentric Italy that, as an Italian and a scholar in Italian literature, I see as an important feature of our national identity. The novels we have discussed are Italian and at the same time, no less importantly, Neapolitan, Roman, Piedmontese, Sardinian. For Italian readers, minor hints are sufficient to underline the regional element in the novels, because this information is part of their background and life. The image of Italy seen from afar, on the other hand, is fixed in different national stereotypes which, in my opinion, tend to ignore this internal differentiation. How relevant is the representation of place in your translations of Italian novels?

Ann – Of course it's relevant, but it also depends on the writer. I think the reader gets a strong and intimate sense of Turin in Primo Levi's work. Certainly Pasolini's Rome is extremely vivid—it's a Rome of which you can still find some signs, or landmarks, but that in many aspects no longer exists. Lakhous's Piazza Vittorio is a specific, recognizable place, as is his Via Marconi and his Turin—which is not Levi's. An exception is Baricco, many of whose novels do not have a sense of a particular place.

In Ferrante there is a strong sense of belonging to a place, but actually there are not many physical descriptions of Naples. The "rione" is unnamed, and we know only that it is isolated, cut off from the city by the "stradone". Only in *The Story of the Lost Child*, where Elena's daughter talks about the history of Naples as she has heard it from Lila, are there descriptions of the city: here the sentences are long and complex, and through the description of places Ferrante looks at Neapolitan history, something that Anglophone readers, especially perhaps Americans, probably don't know much about. In general, though, the representation of Naples is more evocative than particular. The place is important for the characters because it is where they are born, and where Elena returns. As Michael Reynolds commented, this is

(also) a book about people trapped in poverty, and the setting of the story could be anywhere, that owing to social circumstances, people feel trapped where they live (Goldstein and Reynolds 2015). These are processes that are not exclusive to Naples. What Ferrante does is to create an atmosphere, so that people read her novels in a sense as if they were reading about their own place, or situation. A while ago I discussed Ferrante's series in a book club made up of wives of diplomats. There were women from all over the world and they all felt that there was something personal in the stories, they all read Ferrante in connection with their own places and lives.

Gigliola – Yet, it seems that Ferrante fever also had the effect of creating a new interest in stories of Naples in the Anglo-American publishing market, and especially those narrated from a female point of view. Two central figures of twentieth-century Italian literature such as Elsa Morante and Anna Maria Ortese, who have relatively limited visibility among foreign readers, are now being (re-)published in your translation, respectively with *Arturo's Island: A Novel* (forthcoming 2019), set in Procida, in the Bay of Naples, and *Neapolitan Chronicles*, (2018, with Jenny McPhee; the book is in print also with the title *Descending upon the Hills: Stories from Naples*). In both cases, the elements highlighted in the paratexts are the role of Morante and Ortese as models for Ferrante, your name as the translator, and the Neapolitaness of the stories. The English title of Ferrante's tetralogy, which brings the reader's attention to the local element (*Neapolitan Novels* instead of the original *L'amica geniale*), seems to influence the strategic choice of titles for Ortese's *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, which becomes *Neapolitan Chronicles / Stories from Naples*.

Ann – This is also true; one can only hope that this interest continues, and that more works by these female writers and by other Neapolitan works will be published. In the meantime, my colleague Jenny McPhee is working on another of Morante’s novels, *Menzogna e sortilegio*, for New York Review Books.

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Page numbers refer to the downloaded file (text only)

1. p.3, first line of footnote 2: delete comma between 'publishing translations' and 'or'
2. p.4, line 5: and *Asymptote*, correct as follows: '*Asymptote*, an online journal of world literature in translation <www.asymptotejournal.com>,'
3. p.5, line 7: delete the underscore between 'general.Ferrante'
4. p.5, line 9: delete after *Asymptote* the words ',a journal of world literature in translation,'
5. p.7, line 9: insert '(Sulis 2007)' after 'foreign languages.'
6. P.8, line 20: insert '(*My Brilliant Friend* 2018 –)' after 'speak in Neapolitan'
7. p.9, line 16 correct from 'this Romanesque dimension' > 'this Roman dimensions' (all occurrences of 'Romanesque' must be corrected)
8. p.10, line 10: correct 'its Romanesque translation "sora"' > 'its translation in *Romanesco*, "sora"
9. p.10, line 13: delete the inverted commas in ("ancient hamlet") > (ancient hamlet)
10. p.10, line 15: correct 'poems in Romanesque' > 'poems in Romanesco'
11. p.10, line 16: correct 'in Italian or Romanesque' > 'in Italian or dialect'
12. p.11, line 2: insert inverted commas for San Pietro > "San Pietro"
13. p.14, line 8: LASAGNA? DOUBLE CHECK
14. p.18, line 7: correct 'in my opinion tend to ignore' > 'seem to ignore'
15. p.20, line 2: correct 'and by other Neapolitan works' > 'and other Neapolitan works' (= delete 'by')

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16. p.20, line 11: correct 'In: *Id, Varianti*' > 'In *Varianti*' (= delete 'Id.')
17. p.20: for the entries Ferrante E. (2005), Ferrante E. (2011), Ferrante E. (2012), and p.21: Ferrante E. (2013), Ferrante E. (2014): delete the parentheses and leave only the date > Ferrante E. 2005., Ferrante E. 2011., Ferrante E. 2012., and p.21: Ferrante E. 2013., Ferrante E. 2014.
18. Pp.21-22: all Ferrante entries: add comma between 'Ferrante' and 'E.' > Ferrante, E. 2005. (and similar)
19. P.21, entry Leopardi, G.: correct 'Eds. Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino' > 'Edited by M. Caesar and F. D'Intino'
20. P.22, entries Levi P. 2015b and Levi P. 2015c: Delete : in 'In: *The Complete Work*' > 'In *The Complete Work*'
21. ADD one entry between Morante E. and Ortese A.M., as follows: '*My Brilliant Friend* [TV serie]. 2018. Directed by S. Costanzo. Italy - USA. HBO'
22. ADD one entry between Segnini E. and Sulis G. 2014, as follows: 'Sulis, G. 2007. Un esempio controcorrente di plurilinguismo. Il caso Camilleri". In *Les enjeux du plurilinguisme dans la littérature italienne*. Edited by C. Berger et al. Toulouse: L'Écrit, 214-230'