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Global Masterpieces and Italian Dialects
Shakespeare in Neapolitan and *vicentino*

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Abstract

This essay suggests that the ultraminor can function as a paradigm to examine literature that emphasizes the minority status of the language in which it is composed. Engaging with Deleuze and Guattari's definition of minor literature and with Pascale Casanova and Lawrence Venuti's reflections on the role of translation in the shaping of world literature, it develops a comparison between two rewritings of Shakespeare into Italian dialects: Eduardo De Filippo's translation of *The Tempest* into Neapolitan and Luigi Meneghello's translation of *Hamlet* into *vicentino*. The essay underlines how these endeavors represent translations into languages that, at the time of writing, are considered by their authors in decline and doomed to extinction, and argues that both authors use translation to emphasize the historical memory of their native idioms. Both De Filippo and Meneghello, in fact, set out to challenge the subordinate status of Neapolitan and *vicentino* by proving that dialects are apt to express great thought as well as philosophical, abstract, and theoretical concepts.

Itamar Even-Zohar has argued that translations are especially influential when literatures are not yet established, when they occupy peripheral positions, are

experiencing a crisis or are at turning point in their development (47). In the last two decades, re-writings of world authors into the creole languages of the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean have displayed the vitality of the vernacular in these regions and promoted its legitimization as a literary medium, thus endorsing an emerging literature (Lionnet). In contrast, the same practice in twentieth-century Europe has built on the fading status of dialect as a means of daily oral communication and aimed at the preservation of endangered linguistic heritages (Nadiani). While these endeavors are often described in terms of "minor literature," Pascale Casanova has noted that the definition proposed by Deleuze and Guattari does not offer a useful model to address the power asymmetries between small and large languages in the global production of literary works (Casanova *Nouvelles* 247). For Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature is in fact the literature of the minority written in the language of a majority, and is characterized by "deterritorialization of the language, the connection of the individual and the political, the collective arrangement of utterance" (16). I would like to suggest that the "ultraminor" could function as a paradigm to examine literature that brings the deterritorialization of the language proposed by Deleuze and Guattari a step further by emphasizing the history and position of the language in which it is composed. More precisely, my focus will be on translations into languages that, at the time of writing, are considered by their authors in decline and doomed to extinction. My understanding of ultraminor literature is thus bound to the minority status of the target language, a status that, as Michel Cronin has stressed, must be considered dynamic, rather than static, since it is determined by variable political, economic and cultural forces (Cronin 86). [1] In this essay, the minority status of a language also appears as a subjective notion, linked to the authors' beliefs and experience.

In what follows, I will develop a comparison between two projects that engage with the ultraminor, as defined above: Eduardo De Filippo's translation of *The Tempest* into Neapolitan, and Luigi Meneghello' translation of *Hamlet* (and other

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[1] This definition of the ultraminor shares some features with Barry McCrea's conception of "minor language" as "those languages and dialects that, having been spoken by communities for many centuries, began to fall out of everyday spoken use in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, abandoned by large numbers of their own speakers in favor of powerful national or international languages, such as English, French and Italian" (XIII) and with Nadiani's notion of "defeated languages" as "all those languages with oral and written varieties and usage, which are not acknowledged as having any cultural or functional status by their own potential speakers" (35).

fragments) into *vicentino* – a dialect spoken in the province of Vicenza, in the Veneto region. While linguists have stressed the resilience of dialect in Italy, the fact that "dialect refuses to die in the midst of the most radically modern technological, social, and economical development" (Lepschy 43), I will underline how both De Filippo and Meneghello start from a very different premise, as they claim that Neapolitan and *vicentino* are on their way to disappearing. In the course of the essay, I will consider the role of dialect in De Filippo and Meneghello's poetics, the sociolinguistic position occupied by Neapolitan and *vicentino*, the authors' objectives and translation strategies. I will argue that both authors conceive of translation as a historical and geopolitical process that involves the historical memory of a language (Mignolo and Schiwy 251), and that they set out to challenge the subordinate status of their native idioms and to prove that they are apt to express philosophical, abstract, and theoretical concepts.

In the Italian context, dialects are romance idioms that, just like Tuscan, on which Italian is based, descend directly from Latin, and that were influenced by the way in which Latin was spoken in various regions. From a linguistic point of view, there are no differences between a language and a dialect: the distinction is not based on grammatical, but on socio-political criteria (Lepschy 36). All dialects can thus be considered languages; however, they have very different histories. Some of them, like Genoese and Venetian, are languages of historical capitals, were used by the aristocracy and frequently employed in official settings. Others, like Friulian and *calabrese*, are associated with the rural world and the lower classes. As the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* shows,[2] dialects frequently stand in opposition to one another, but they all share a subordination to standard Italian. Outside of Tuscany and Lazio, they were used for centuries as the language of daily interaction, whereas Italian was reserved for bureaucracy, education and literature. In this diglossic context, dialect literature developed in contrast to the tradition in the national language, and stands from the outset in opposition to the lofty literary model in Tuscan.[3] As Franco Brevini notes, its function is often parodic and its focus is on the popular and the comical ("L'altra letteratura" XXX).

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[2] This theatre genre typically juxtaposes *Venetian, Bolognese*, and the less prestigious *Bergamasco*.

[3] According to Franco Brevini, dialect literature was born in the second half of the fifteenth century; Benedetto Croce placed the date in the seventeenth century, with the establishment

Translating masterpieces of the Italian literary tradition was a common practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which saw numerous translations of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata,* next to rewritings of Greek and Roman classics. The genre became less popular in the nineteenth century, in which we nevertheless find several dialect translations of Dante's *Commedia* (Brevini *La poesia* 1282). As Casanova writes, the classics embody "the very notion of literary legitimacy, which is to say what is recognized as literature: the unit of measurement for everything that is or will be recognized as literary" (*The World Republic* 14). By stretching a dialect to literary use, these translations aimed to demonstrate the strength and vigor of the idioms with which they were concerned and the level of wealth and sophistication of the area within which the dialect was used. They were produced at a time in which dialects were widely spoken, and, in many cases, they contributed to the construction of a dialect literature: in fact, by recording a vast amount of vocabulary, they became important references for poets who took up the challenge of writing in the local idiom (Brevini "L'altra" XCVIII). The translators shifted the focus from the abstract to the physical, from the sublime to the comical, often transposing the adventures of the aristocracy into the world of the countryside. The audiences were not the lower classes, but those that had access to education, and dialect was not so much an instrument of naturalism, but a deliberate literary device. As Brevini remarks, commenting on the endeavors of the Milanese poet Carlo Porta, "Porta, by translating Dante in *milanese*, does not dream of competing with him in reproducing the drama of the Inferno. On the contrary, he puts to good use the resources of his substantial popular language to disguise comically this anachronistic material for the smiles of the Milanese bourgeois" ("L'altra" XCVIII).

Brevini and Herman W. Haller, among others, have documented the extraordinary renaissance of dialect poetry in the twentieth century, underlining the distance between dialect as a spoken language and as literary tool. However, translations of classics into dialects, at the time in which De Filippo and Meneghello set out on their projects, had become rare. Reviewing Meneghello's *Trapianti* in 2002, an Italian journalist commented: "who would take the trouble today to translate

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of the Tuscan norm; Gianfranco Contini argued instead that the birth of a dialect literature corresponds to the birth of national literature (see Brevini "L'altra" XXX).

a whole tragedy by Shakespeare or a poetic corpus in dialect? These were things that one used to practice centuries ago, when Domenico Balestrieri invested a lifetime to translate Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* into *milanese.* But already Carlo Porta, in translating the Divine Comedy, stopped after a few triplets, although he paraphrased them splendidly" (Mauri). Meneghello's choice to limit himself to fragment, in Paolo Mauri's view, was necessary to avoid sounding old fashion, farcical or pedantic. De Filippo's translation of an entire play by Shakespeare into Neapolitan, in contrast, was not perceived as eccentric or particularly unusual. To understand this difference, it is necessary to contextualize the projects against the background of the authors' poetics and their life-long engagement with their native languages.

De Filippo and Meneghello are both well-known figures in the Italian cultural landscape, but represent very different intellectual profiles. Eduardo de Filippo, known to Italian audiences as "Eduardo," was an author-actor for whom writing was inseparable from performance and who achieved extraordinary visibility through his roles in theatre and film and his engagement as a director. For a long time, Italian critics considered him a theatre practitioner and dismissed his production as a writer. Today, however, he is recognized as a skillful dramatist, author of plays that have entered the not only national, but also international repertoires. "Filomena Marturano" (1948), in particular, became well known for inspiring the film "Matrimonio all'italiana" [Marriage Italian Style]. Luigi Meneghello was a novelist and a scholar whose first book, *Libera Nos a Malo* (1963), achieved canonical status in Italian literature in the 1970s. He participated in the resistance movement and later played an important role as an academic in the UK. Both were raised in a diglossic context and share a life-long engagement with their native language, but while De Filippo remained in Naples throughout his career, Meneghello moved to England in the 1950s. The two authors also belong to different generations: De Filippo was born in 1900, Meneghello in 1922; however, they both lived through the 1930s, at a time when fascism was leading an aggressive political campaign against dialects, and witnessed the impact that mass media had on promoting standard Italian. When Fascist authorities, in a series of laws passed in 1934 and 1935, banned writings and performances in regional languages, De Filippo defended his family company by adopting the same rhetoric of the regime. In an open letter in the *Giornale d'Italia,* published in 1939, he wrote:

We know very well that the dialect will disappear; that in 50 years at the most in all our regions we will all be speaking *senese*; and I tell you more: that my brothers and I will play for only a few years, because dialectal elements are disappearing day by day. And it is thinking about this epilogue that I am more and more convinced that we need to print dialect plays. Not everything in them deserves to sink into oblivion. There are types, characters, moods and feelings of native people that synthesize the high quality of our Mediterranean race, and represent a living document in the history of custom. Posterity will be very interested in learning and studying them, especially to understand on what generous and fertile soil the new climate that reshapes the Italian life could plant its roots.

De Blasi LVI

By underlining that, since the death of Neapolitan was imminent, dialect drama would assume a documentary value, Eduardo managed to draw attention to his work as a kind of ethnography and to avoid the fascist ban. As a result, his company was not considered a dialect practice and he and his brothers were allowed to continue performing.

Meneghello was concerned with the disgregation of peasant societies, which, he argued, went hand in hand with the gradual effacement of dialects. He dedicated many of his works to recording a way of life that had already vanished, and the words that were used to address this reality. At a 1986 lecture, which was later published with the title "Il tremaio," he answered a question by the linguist Giulio Lepschy, clarifying his position towards linguistic preservation:

... it is obvious that to keep alive a dialect beyond the society that spoke it and nourished it would not make sense. … Lepschy asks me if I do not think that it may be too late for the survival of dialect. Of course it is too late. There are processes that cannot be stopped. As to the judgment that my book [*Libera nos a Malo*] referred to dying or dead things, it is the truth, I felt it when I was working on it, the book became increasingly gloomy as I got into the writing. After all this is evident in the other book that I dedicated to my hometown,

Pomo pero, that goes much further down this road, and records the almost fossilized state of the town and things.

"Il tremaio" 779

In line with this conception, his writing does not aim at a linguistic revival, and rather has an archival function. In particular, *Maredè, maredè* (1990) registers the grammar, vocabulary and poetics of his native language. With an allusion to Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia,* the treatise is subtitled *Sondaggi nel campo della volgare eloquenza vicentina* [*Inquiries on* vicentino*'s linguistic eloquence*], and is concerned with Dante's understanding of *gramatica* as a level possibly reachable by each language (Chinellato 144).

It is important to remember that the dialects with which De Filippo and Meneghello are concerned have very different statuses. Neapolitan was, and continues to be, widely spoken, although it is increasingly merged with and often replaced by regional Italian. Like most dialects, it includes several varieties (popular dialect, bourgeois dialect, the dialect spoken within the province), but illustrious models can be found in an established literary tradition. In addition, it is one of the few Italian dialects that achieved national and international visibility through its music and theatre. In contrast, *vicentino* is essentially a spoken language: its vocabulary is anchored to the rural world and lacks a literary tradition – although, as Meneghello stresses in *Maredè, maredè*, it has its own aesthetics and poetics. The consequence is that, as Meneghello specifies, "there is not a standard variety, more *vicentina* than the others, and any of the varieties of VIC in our century can be considered representative of *vicentino* as a whole" (*Maredè maredè* 649). [4]

Born into a family of actors, De Filippo grew up immersed in the dialect theatre, which in Naples included a serious as well as a comical repertoire. His own productions strove to reconcile these two modes, and he used dialect to reproduce realistic dialogues at a time in which Neapolitan was still the main language of communication. Later in his career, he adapted to the evolving linguistic reality and

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[4] Following modern classifications of dialects, which roughly coincide with divisions into regions, vicentino could be considered part of Venetan, and as such related to the more prestigious Venetian, which can count on an abundant literary and dramatic production. Aware of the socio-political gap that divides the two idioms, Meneghello, however, avoids this associations.

experimented with regional and standard Italian. Scholars have traced an increased use of regional Italian at the expense of dialect from the original manuscripts to the printed dramas. As Nicola de Blasi points out, these choices were also dictated by De Filippo's wish to reach national audiences (LXXXVIII). Moreover, as Paola Quarenghi remarks, dialect, for De Filippo, was not an end but a means, and he was not concerned with questions of purity or with recording linguistic varieties (Quarenghi XXIII).

Meneghello similarly experimented with ways to convey the experience of diglossia beyond regional boundaries. In line with authors such as Gadda, Fenoglio, Pasolini, and Testori, he created a type of multilingual fiction in which calques from dialect, expressions from regional Italian, but also terms from English, French and Latin are woven into the main narrative without sacrificing the text's comprehensibility for non-dialect speakers. He baptized the device used to convey dialects within an Italian narrative as "trasporto" [transfer, transposition], and defined it as "the creation of a word that sounds like Italian (not in the sense that people believe it to be Italian, but in the sense that it harmonizes with Italian) and at the same time reflects dialect" ("Il Tremaio" 772). In contrast, works such as *Maredè, maredè* are designed to speak to limited audiences: in the preface to the text, Meneghello underlines that the treatise is dedicated to the native speakers of *vicentino*, and that it could at the most interest other dialect speakers in the Veneto region.[5]

Both authors had been planning to translate Shakespeare for a long time. In both cases, the choice of Shakespeare is linked to the author's transnational status. Shakespeare not only exemplifies the "literary legitimacy" of the classics, but also offers an opportunity to link the target language (an Italian dialect) to a hyper central idiom, (English), creating a bridge between a local and a supranational context. It is perhaps significant that De Filippo translated the last of Shakespeare's plays in 1983 (a year before his death), and that Meneghello published the bilingual edition of *Trapianti* in 2002, close to end of his life. In a way, the translations can be read as a poetic testament, a demonstration of the level of sophistication that can be achieved in

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[5] "The present grammar is mainly destined to 'natives', those who already know VIC [vicentino], 'naturally', without even being aware of it. The grammar will have moderate interest for other speakers of the Veneto region, and maybe it will arouse the curiosity of other dialect speakers: I don't think it will be of interest to those without dialect" (*Maredè, maredè* 926).

their native idioms. In the notes to the translation, De Filippo recalls how translating the classics had always been one of his dreams:

> I have always desired to translate Molière and Shakespeare, but the commitment to present the audience with a new comedy each year – between writing, rehearsing and playing, not to mention the commitment as *capocomico* [head of the theatre company] – would not allow me the time to do it. Last year Giulio Einaudi came to dine at my place, spoke to me of his series of writers translated by writers and asked me if I wanted to translate a comedy by Shakespeare. I was very happy to accept and I chose *The Tempest*.

"Nota" 185

He further comments on how he selected *The Tempest* because the emphasis on magic and theatricality reminded him of a seventeenth-century *féerie* produced by Vincenzo Scarpetta in which he had participated in his youth. De Filippo's choice is therefore influenced by a Neapolitan experience. Moreover, he does not translate directly from English, but relies on the interlinear translation into standard Italian provided by his wife.

Meneghello's project of composing a text entirely in *vicentino* was from the outset designed to take place through translation. In the essay "Il Tremaio", he mentions how he had been playing with the idea of translating Hamlet since the sixties:

> …I had begun to compose, or attempted to compose, in dialect with literary intent, a bit earlier than *Libera Nos*, I would have liked to translate Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I attempted a draft here and there, but after a while I had to stop because, in attempting to say what peasants from Vicenza would have said in those contexts, all speeches became the same speech, composed almost uniquely of awkward profanities. And I thought that it would not be worth it.

"Il Tremaio" 782

The numerous pages that Meneghello dedicates to drafts of translations from the 1960s to the 1990s, however, indicate that the project meant more to him that he admits in this statement.[6] Traces of the undertaking are also present in *Leda e la Schioppa,* in *L'acqua di Malo* and in *Maredè, maredè,* in which we find the fragments from *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as from Coleridge's *Khubla Khan*, that he later reproduces in the appendix of *Trapianti.* [7] In 1997, Meneghello published the passages from *Hamlet* next to poems by authors that were important in his journey of discovery of Anglophone literature – G.M. Hopkins, E.E. Cummings, Roy Campbell, William Empson and W.B. Yeats – in a special issue of the academic journal *The Italianist.* As Meneghello explains, the title chosen for this collection, *Le biave* [The fodder], symbolically alludes to the poetic food that nourished the author's imagination.[8] A few years later, most of these translations were published in the volume *Trapianti* [transplants], this time juxtaposed against the English original, and with new titles for each of the sessions.

De Filippo chooses to foreground the historical dimension of the text. To do so, he translates the play into seventeenth-century Neapolitan, the language that the first prose writer in Neapolitan, Gianbattista Basile, used in *Lo Cunto de li Cunti*, a text that helped to shape Neapolitan as a literary language and that displays many of the characteristics of the popular *féerie* that fascinate De Filippo in Shakespeare's *Tempest.* In the notes to the translation, he defends the choice of using an extinct variant of Neapolitan by underlining how, in his view, this ancient language has properties that no living language possesses, such as "the extraordinary flexibility and the capacity to bring to life magical facts and creatures" (187). However, he specifies that he took care to modify the language enough to make it comprehensible to contemporary readers, including those who do not speak dialect: "I used seventeenth-century Neapolitan, but as a contemporary man can write it today; it would have been unnatural to look for complete adherence to a language not used for centuries" ("Nota"187). This approach allows him to conjure a sense of distance and

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[6] Brian points out that, in his private notes, Meneghello dedicated more than 500 pages to drafts and thought about this project (149-170). On the origin of *Trapianti*, see also Chinellato 139-153.

[7] Originally, Meneghello had planned to include in *Maredè, maredè* fragments from Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and Leopardi's *Zibaldone*.

[8] L. Meneghello, "Le biave. Canpiuni baucamente volgarisà, t'i so pegnanatei e in sachetei de ferùmene", In *In Amicizia. Essays in Honour of Giulio Lepschy*,   ed. Zygmunt G. Barańsky and Lino Pertile. Special Supplement to *The Italianist,* 17 (1997) : 327-343.

estrangement also for speakers of Neapolitan without sacrificing comprehensibility for non-dialect speakers. The same preoccupation leads him to add footnotes to ensure clarity for terms that may not be immediately comprehensible to the general reader.

In *Trapianti,* Meneghello does not comment on his use of language, but we can infer that it is the same language with which he is concerned in *Maredè, maredè*, in which we find the passages included in the appendix of *Trapianti*: *vicentino* as it was spoken from the thirties to the fifties. In the notes to *Maredè, maredè*, he explains the reason for this choice:

> … a reconstruction of the most ancient use (let's say the variety used at the end of the last century, or at the moment of the annexation of our province to the *Regno d'Italia*) would have only an archeological meaning; whereas by registering the variety in which we are speaking today (distinct from that of a generation ago, as a mix of VIC [vicentino] and IT [Italian]) I feel I would run the risk to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

> "Note ai testi" 649

While Meneghello does not aim to dig into the origins of *vicentino*, his writing is nevertheless concerned with recording a variety of speech no longer in use. By referring to a specific time-frame and codifying linguistic norms, he attributes to *vicentino* a level of stability that prevails over the arbitrariness of oral use, thus treating his native dialect as a literary language (Chinellato 145). Less preoccupied than De Filippo with reaching a variety of audiences, he refrains from adding footnotes, and by choosing to publish the translations in a bilingual edition, he encourages the reader to shift directly from English to *vicentino,* without the mediation of standard Italian.

In Einaudi's *Tempest,* De Filippo features as the translator, and William Shakespeare as the author. In the notes to the text, he declares himself to be concerned with faithfulness, and stresses the literal quality of his translation: "… my wife Isabella rendered into Italian, literally, the entire comedy, act after act, scene after scene, looking in her English books for the double, at times triple meaning of certain archaic words that did not sound convincing to me" (187). On the other hand, he

underlines the references to Naples already present in Shakespeare and transposes the text into the cultural framework of Neapolitan culture:

> Sometimes, especially in the comic scenes, the actor in me rebelled against puns that have nowadays become meaningless, and I changed them; other times I felt the need to add some lines to explain to myself and to the audience some concepts or to emphasize Prospero's great protective love for Miranda. Even the songs are different, more in form than in substance. Ariel retains his carefree and poetic character, but it came natural to me to make him behave, from times to time, as a clever and prankster street urchin.

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De Filippo's comments underline how, as Lawrence Venuti has emphasized, all commitments to faithfulness are designed to fail, as translation is "fundamentally a localizing practice," an interpretation that "reflects what is intelligible and interesting to receptors" (180).[9] Since most of these changes take place through additions, De Filippo's text is significantly longer than Shakespeare's. Additional variants include references to the cult of San Gennaro and of the Madonna, a stronger emphasis on physicality, frequent enumeration of Neapolitan food specialties, and allusions to Neapolitan poems, proverbs, and songs.[10] Most importantly, not only Alfonso and Ferdinand, Stefano and Trinculo, but all the play's characters, including Miranda and Caliban, express themselves in Neapolitan. This goes beyond the use of Neapolitan as a convention for narration. Thus, when Stefano is surprised to hear Caliban speak, the question "where the devil he learned our language" (act II, scene II, 67-68) becomes "*Ma addò canchero c'ha mparato lu Napulitano?* [where the devil did he learn Neapolitan?] (92); and when Stefano orders Caliban to worship him ("Come on, then;

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[9] Venuti has inspired Savario Tomaiuolo and Lucia Nigri's readings of the *Tempest*. Tomaiuolo has argued that De Filippo's *Tempest* uses a "foreignizing" strategy, since, as a result of his linguistic choice, the text sounds "foreign" both to Neapolitan and Italian speakers (130). Nigri argues instead that the play, by foregrounding references to Neapolitan culture, is a "domesticated" Shakespeare, but that it foreignizes the text for audiences who do not speak dialect (107).

[10] Scholars who have engaged in close readings of the text frequently underline how the sailors identify themselves as Neapolitan and call on San Gennaro, while Miranda underlines the importance of the family by asking about her mother. See De Filippis 2002, Lombardo 2004, 2008; Perteghella 2006; Tomaiuolo 2007; Nigri 2013.

down, and swear" (Act II, Scene II, 153), Caliban's answer to "*te voglio genuflesso*" [I want you down on your knees] is "*Parla Napuletano, ca nun capisco buono*" [Speak Neapolitan, I don't quite understand] (100).[11] These changes remind readers of De Filippo's role as a theatre practitioner, and bring the text in line with the rest of his production. To focus the readers' attention and avoid a comparison, the book presents only the Neapolitan version.

Unlike De Filippo, Meneghello does not declare himself concerned with faithfulness. In a lecture on translation, later published in the essay "Il turbo e il chiaro", he emphasizes how translation must be considered a creative transposition, how a literal translation does nothing but betray the essence of the text. In line with this notion, in the 2002 edition by Rizzoli, Meneghello features as the author of the series of fragments in *vicentino* presented next to their original text. In the notes to *Maredè, maredè,* he had underlined that a translation of classics into *vicentino* would have to avoid mimicry:

> One can think of a system of "translation" (or maybe paraphrase, or reformulation or reconception ...) of incipits, dialogues, *repartees* of famous texts ... Beware of giggly parody; mock or pity those who see in this traditional parody: at the core of the operation there should be an intensification of ancient or remote texts, infusing into their wonderful crystallized life a stream of new life.

"Note ai testi" 926

In *Trapianti,* he further clarifies that his objective is to compete with the originals, and positions his translation at the same level as Shakespeare's text: "the immodest idea was to renew the lyrical tone of the original: not to translate them, but to re-make them, in devoted emulation, in *vicentino*" (135). As he acknowledges, his translations entail a shift of register: the Shakespearean "Nay" becomes blasphemy; Hamlet is renamed "Ucio"; "honeying and making love" turns into "*miele e sboro*" [honey and cum]. Unlike De Filippo, however, Meneghello does not add to the text, only slightly modifies idioms, and is not concerned with simplifying mythological references or

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[11] To which Stefano answers with a translation into Neapolitan: "Te voglio addenucchiato pe' fa' lo giuramento."

passages that may be difficult to understand for non-dialect speakers. In the appendix, he adds fragments from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth*, and comments on the context in which these translations originated. He specifies that rendering the exact meaning of Shakespeare's text was not among his priorities, and that it matters little whether Macbeth's answer to the announcement of the queen's death, "She should have died hereafter" is translated as "*la dovea spetare a morire*" [she should have waited to die] or, more correctly, as "*E no la gavae da morire na volta o l'altra?*" [she would have died anyways, sooner or later]. His focus is rather on finding sound patterns that can compete with the original, and expressions that confer to the translation the same dramatic pathos. As Cinzia Mozzato has noted, "the source text triggers off a new semantic, structural and phonological tension" (131). [12]

Brevini points out that dialect literature is strictly bound to performance and "naturally theatrical," as it often involves dramatic monologue or dialogues ("L'altra" XVIII). De Filippo did not design his translation for a theatrical production, however, he recorded a dramatic reading that he planned to use as a background for a marionette play.[13] Meneghello, who had never written for the theatre, instead conceived his project during an improvised performance in Thiene. In the appendix to *Trapianti*, he recalls how, improvising Macbeth's lines in *vicentino* with a friend, he understood for the first time the meaning of theatre: "in a flash I realized (at my age!) what is the theatre, what is dramatic art" (118). A translation in a diglossic context, Meneghello underlines, takes on a full meaning only spoken aloud and inevitably stresses the text's performativity, even if the dialect in question is on its way to disappearing.

Finally, for Deleuze and Guattari, political engagement is an essential feature of minor literature, which, in their view, is characterized by "the connection of the individual and the political" and "the collective arrangement of utterance" (16). It remains to be assessed if this feature also characterizes the ultraminor, if this is understood as a category that foregrounds a language's status and its history. Shakespeare's *Tempest* has been adapted by writers such as George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, and Dev Virahsamy, who have re-written and

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[12] See also Brian: "The aim is not to be as faithful as possible to the English originals, but to appropriate poetry by other authors and to undertake a metamorphosis into *vicentino*, first at the level of language and, as a consequence, also in semantics, in meter, rhetoric, to create autonomous texts" (168).
[13] The performance was realized after De Filippo's death.

commented on Shakespeare's representation of colonialism (see Zabus). Unlike Meneghello, Eduardo was not an academic and had limited knowledge of English. Italian scholars who have engaged in close readings of the text mostly concluded that his translation does not entail a political meaning: Manuela Perteghella denies "any politically motivated, ideologically driven domestication" (120), and Lucia Nigri notes that "ideological commitments should not be overestimated" (106). However, the translation does comment, indirectly, on hegemonic and minor languages. In Shakespeare's text, the passage that addresses Caliban's ability to speak before Prospero's arrival remains ambiguous: it is not clear whether Caliban, as Prospero says, could only "gabble," or whether it is Prospero who is unable to recognize Caliban's language as such. In De Filippo's translation, the ambiguity does not subsist. He positions the two languages at the same level:

CALIBAN:	CALIBAN: Ognuno à lengua soja:
You taught me language; and my profit on't	io tenevo la mia
is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you	e tu la toja.
for learning me your language!	l'unica cosa c'aggiu guadagnato
	mò t'a dico:
(Act I, Scene II, lines 365-367)	te pozzo smalerì
	c'à stessa lengua
	ca tutt'e dduje sapimmo
	e ca capimmo!
	Din'a la peste rossa ammatuntàto
	te vulesse vedere arruvigliato,
	pe' chesta lengua ca tu m'he' mparata!
	(p.48)
	[To each his own language
	I had my own, and you had yours.
	The only thing I've earned
	now I will tell you:
	I can curse you
	because we both speak
	and understand the same language!
	I would like to see you beaten
	wrapped into the red plague
	because of this language you taught me!]

In addition, Caliban throughout the text, expresses himself in Neapolitan and complains of being unable to understand a dialogue in regional Italian. On the one hand, this choice has a performative function, since the lower-class character, in the Neapolitan tradition, must express himself in dialect. On the other hand, it follows that Neapolitan, in the text, features as the language imposed on Caliban after Prospero's arrival on the island: it therefore functions as hegemonic, rather than as a subaltern language. As Paola Quarenghi notes, De Filippo did not consider Neapolitan a marginal language, but a language with a prestigious past and an established literary tradition that engaged directly in conversation with the literature of other European powers (XXIII). It is against the background of this tradition that De Filippo built his own dramatic production. By translating *The Tempest* in seventeenth-century Neapolitan, he creates a link between British and Neapolitan culture at the time of their cultural splendor, and presents the two traditions as comparable. In doing so, he underlines the importance of the local cultural heritage and, by extension, validates his own production in Neapolitan.

As Cesare Segre remarks, Meneghello's approach to dialect is closer to that of the poet than of the novelist. The dialect he engages with is the language of his childhood, a language in which there is no separation between signifier and signified, and in which the grammar is governed by illogical associations (III, IV). In the preparatory notes for *Le biave*, Meneghello comments on the methodology for the project, and notes that he would have to examine *Hamlet* for "all the stunning, or perverse, or almost incomprehensible things" before testing these fragments in dialect (C4 f118, now in Brian 165). In the same notes, he also comments on how the project aims to juxtapose the linguistic imagination of two areas and their respective expressive spheres (C4 f6, now in Brian 165). As Meneghello notes, *vicentino* is "fresh" in a literary setting and therefore creates an immediate effect of estrangement, underlining new and unexpected connections between things and words. Orality thus becomes an instrument rather than an obstacle to rendering the scenes' dramatic pathos. If, for Mozzato, the inclusion of dialect words in an Italian narrative (what Meneghello defines as "trasporto") is already a political act, "tinged with a writer's anxiety about the possible extinction of regional culture" (124), his *trapianti* take his engagement with dialect a step further and demonstrate that all idioms, whether thriving or defeated, hypercentral or ultraminor, are capable of expressing great thought.

To conclude, De Filippo and Meneghello's endeavors entail important differences, but also share a number of features that can help us define the ultraminor in relation to rewritings and adaptations. By choosing to translate a world author such as Shakespeare into a local dialect, they underline how world literature functions, as Venuti writes, as "a special kind of textuality that combines foreign and local material" (181). Both authors begin their projects at a time in which their native idioms stand in a position of weakness, rather than strength, and, in both cases, Neapolitan and *vicentino* are not so much characterized as "minor" because of their opposition to standard Italian, but because the authors consider them languages in decline. De Filippo declares himself to be concerned with faithfulness; Meneghello recognizes the autonomy of the translated text. However, both engage in creative strategies. In translating *The Tempest* into seventeenth-century Neapolitan, De Filippo underlines the status of his native language as a very small, "major" tradition. Transposing Shakespeare into *vicentino*, Meneghello uses a spoken language outside of its usual domain. De Filippo moves between English (as mediated by his wife), Italian and Neapolitan; Meneghello translates directly from English into *vicentino.* Nonetheless, both emphasize that literature in their native languages can directly establish a dialogue with other major national traditions, without having to undergo a mediation by the national. Most importantly, De Filippo's poetics was from the outset geared to national readerships; he underlines that his works are set in Naples, but involve and represent national issues.[14] In line with this, his translation of *The Tempest* is issued by Einaudi, an established, historical national publisher. Meneghello's first drafts of Shakespeare, as contained in *Maredè, maredè,* appeared at first in an edition sponsored by the bank of Vicenza (1990), and a year later in the series "La scala" by Rizzoli. Similarly, the entire collection was first published for a scholarly audience in an academic journal in 1997, and only in 2002 in the edition by Rizzoli. Overall, Meneghello is less concerned with reaching wide readerships, and even in his most famous book, *Libera nos a Malo,* he admits that a perfect understanding would take place only with "a reader from my town, about my age, who spoke the dialect of the thirties, was familiar with certain ancient and modern

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[14] In an interview with Sergio Corbi, he commented "I do not think that the themes of my theatre as limited to a region, to a city. When I write I have in mind an Italian reality, even though the setting is Neapolitan" (Quarenghi XXIII).

languages, acquainted with my uncles and aunts and lived long enough in England; in short, myself. Or one of my sisters" (*Libera Nos a Malo* 769).

In De Filippo's translation, Neapolitan partakes in the category of the ultraminor as he engages with a language variety (seventeenth-century Neapolitan) that is already extinct. Moreover, although Neapolitan was still thriving at the time of writing, De Filippo had witnessed the decreasing number of speakers and envisioned its imminent death. By bending a spoken language to literary use and addressing a limited readership, Meneghello arrives instead at the paradox of an ultraminor literature that begins at a time in which the language has already been defeated, since it is no longer spoken by the children of the next generation. Both endeavors demonstrate that, as Brevini argues, there are no themes characteristic of dialect literature, but only specific ways to treat each theme ("L'altra" XCVI), and that a language in decline is not restricted in its expressive potential (Nadiani). In this light, ultraminor literature is not a stable category, but a dynamic and subjective construct, it has ideological implications and performative connotations, and it is not so much concerned with the number of speakers of a linguistic community, or with the wideness of audiences, but with a language's vulnerability in the face of linguistic change.

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