A History of Neapolitan Drama in the Twentieth Century

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For Valeria and Michelangelo

I legami che i napoletani stabiliscono con cose e persone sono determinati dall'emozione, più che dall'intelletto, perciò sono tanto impressionabili, ma abituati da sempre a questa permeabilità psichica non provano choc gravi o irreversibili dinanzi a nuove impressioni, per quanto sconvolgenti, come quelle dei terremoti e dei bombardamenti. Nemmeno l'esperienza così frequente dell'emigrazione li traumatizza. Il loro mare ricopre tutta la terra e dovunque vi rechiate nel mondo, al Polo artico o dove risplende la Croce del Sud, troverete delle piccole Napoli.[1]

—Fabrizia Ramondino

[1] (The bonds that Neapolitans establish with people and their surroundings are determined by emotion rather than intellect, therefore they are so sensitive, but through the ages being accustomed to this psychic permeability, do not feel serious or irreversible shock when dealing with events as shocking as earthquakes and bombings. Not even the frequent experience of emigration traumatises them. Their sea covers the whole earth, and wherever you are headed in the world, the Arctic Pole or where the Southern Cross shines, you will find a small Naples.) Ramondino, *Un Giorno e mezzo*, 201. This and the following translations are by the author.

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INTRODUCTION

In a world that tends to homologate thus becoming, in every aspect of our lives, grey, flat and uniform, so creating the world of universal similarity (including language), I wonder if, today, it still makes sense to talk about vernacular theatre. Tackling such a question implies uncovering the reasons for the disappearance of the many regional theatres that were present in Italy in the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that, first the unification of the country in 1861, and then the language policies of fascism in the 30s, were the final nail in the coffin for local theatres. But it is also true that what really determined their downsizing was the progressive loss of connection with their own environment. If we give an essentially superficial interpretation to the adjective "vernacular", and in a play we see a *canovaccio* (plot) that the local star uses as a vehicle to show his talent through a series of modest mannerisms, then "vernacular" implies the death certificate of this type of theatre (once the star dies, his alleged dramaturgy dies with him and his mannerisms). On the contrary, if we identify in this adjective the theatre's healthy attempt to develop a local, social, and cultural analysis of its environment, it opens a whole new meaning and acquires a perspective that a national theatre can never aspire to.

This is, in my opinion, the case of Neapolitan theatre. It managed to survive and thrive producing plays that were capable of critically describing modern and contemporary reality. Neapolitan playwrights forcefully proclaimed their roots as a primary source for their work. The city, in fact, became a direct expression of that cultural microcosm that provided them with the living flesh of their plots. Nevertheless, such a relationship is, inherently, subjective, and changes when its writers change, absorbing the many moods of this urban environment and its people. In fact, within this frame of continuity, the various plays present elements of discontinuity in their interpretations of this culture.

The first playwright I shall discuss in my research is Eduardo Scarpetta. His reform of Neapolitan theatre represented a major step towards more contemporary times. Such reform had two pillars: innovation of the theatre practice, and the advent of the bourgeoisie as a comic subject in Neapolitan theatre (in conjunction with the political rise of this social class after the birth of the new unitary state in 1861). In that same period,

another Neapolitan playwright, Salvatore Di Giacomo, imagined a theatre where not only the middle-class but also the lower classes, with their suffering and pain, could find appropriate representation on stage. In his plays, the social condition of the characters acquired a significant meaning. In fact, the protagonist was the proletariat constantly struggling with a daily routine cursed by misery and unhappiness, and represented in an extreme situation.

The third playwright is Raffaele Viviani. He put Naples on the map, for the first time the city was represented on stage, street by street and block by block, to reveal the varied and contradictory reality of its inhabitants. Plots, rooted in poverty and social alienation, were developed through the author's choice of setting, the social status of the characters, and the language used on stage. The performance settings and the characters that live in these plays would create an environment in which the linguistic selection could only be the Neapolitan dialect, as this was the language that most of them spoke in real life.

The fourth author, Eduardo De Filippo, was the most famous Neapolitan playwright in the twentieth century. With his work, Neapolitan theatre entered a new phase since it left its regional confines and tried to go out into the world. Eduardo was the first Neapolitan playwright whose plays were performed internationally. His international journey entailed a shift from the constant use of the dialect, which, up to that point had defined Neapolitan theatrical production. By analysing some of his plays, it is possible to see how Neapolitan became an increasingly marginal element in his productions. Nevertheless, if we look at the themes in his scripts, we could say that he never really left his hometown: in actual fact, Naples never stopped being the cultural epicentre of his theatrical production. While his journey was certainly different from the one embarked on by playwrights who were active on the Neapolitan stage before (Scarpetta, Di Giacomo, Viviani) or after him (Patroni Griffi, Ruccello, Moscato and Santanelli), he managed to take vernacular theatre to a level of meaning it had never previously reached: being Neapolitan was no longer only about belonging to a particular geographical area, but also the expression of a specific *Weltanschauung*.[3]

Yet, Giuseppe Patroni Griffi is a crucial figure in order to understand the evolution of Neapolitan theatre in the twentieth century. His works (*In memoria di una signora amica*, *Persone naturali e strafottenti*, *Cammurriata. Canti di malavita* and *Una tragedia reale*) represented the

[3] (View of the world).

birth of contemporary Neapolitan theatre. They expressed an uninhibited and concrete manifestation of those dramatic and ideological ideas brought to the extreme that inspired the Neapolitan playwrights of the eighties. Each of these works can be seen as the painful process of revisiting his city and thus culture, portraying glimpses of Naples, as it was and is now, and as it had never been seen before. The two elements that best describe the parting of Patroni Griffi's theatre from tradition are the type of characters that live in his works and the relationship with the Neapolitan language. While over the years Eduardo had distanced himself from his native language, Patroni Griffi moved in the opposite direction, willing to gradually re-evaluate his roots as an essential source for his career as a writer.

In the eighties, Neapolitan theatre was represented by the works of Ruccello, Moscato, and Santanelli.[4] While writing his plays, Annibale Ruccello adopted a purely sociological approach. He paid attention to the violent changes in the socio-economic condition of the people of Campania and conceived his characters as tools to investigate those changes, especially the ones that were influencing the lower classes (the proletariat and the agricultural labourers). He analysed the urbanisation process of these masses, their life in the suburbs of the big cities. Ruccello understood that there were no new cultural forms for these characters in which to recognise and express themselves or to replace the old ones. His characters were the expression of a new, as yet still undefined, Neapolitan identity, trapped in its different contaminations and contradictions.

Like Ruccello, Enzo Moscato found a connection with the big names of Neapolitan theatre in the 1900s in the threefold capacity of author, director, and actor. This choice, however, did not deprioritise the script, which did not become just a plot or a vehicle for expressing the qualities of the actor, but remained a fundamental element of the performance as its linguistic component. Indeed, theatrical language was always one of Moscato's main interests; his research led his writing to be almost phonetic. Words were stripped bare, to the point of losing their original meaning, creating a sonority that became the work's main expressive element, and eventually replacing the action on stage. The basis of such

[4] Other Neapolitan playwrights whose works have played a significant role in the development of modern and contemporary Neapolitan theatre are: Roberto Bracco (Naples, 10 November 1861 – Sorrento, 20 April 1943), Gennaro Pistilli (Naples, 4 July 1920 -), Fortunato Calvino (Naples, 25 June 1955 -), Francesco Silvestri (Naples, 16 April 1958 -), Ruggero Cappuccio (Torre del Greco [NA], 19 January 1964 -), Mimmo Borrelli (Naples, 7 May 1979 -).

stage language is a low and harsh Neapolitan, which is the first existential, semantic language, the first semiotics that Moscato learned in the *Quartieri Spagnoli*[5] when he was a child. Nevertheless, language is not just a biographical legacy for this author; rather it is a shining example of belonging to the anthropological, cultural, and social context of Naples.

Differently, Manlio Santanelli established with his own culture an ambivalent relationship. Although the Neapolitan tradition represents a cornerstone of his theatre, he has an unusual relationship to it. He is certainly one of the main exponents of contemporary Neapolitan Theatre, but when we refer to the contents of his plays, Santanelli appears to be influenced more by European contemporary playwrights than Italian theatre. From the beginning, he elected as his main references such authors as: Ionesco, Mrozeck, Pinter, and Beckett.

What finally emerges from such a survey is a complex, multifaceted but solid culture, capable of incorporating various foreign customs, and giving back to the city of Naples its historical role of cultural epicentre.

[5] A neighbourhood in the historic centre of Naples.

CHAPTER ONE

EDUARDO SCARPETTA AND SALVATORE DI GIACOMO

Eduardo Scarpetta. The Reform of Neapolitan Theatre

Eduardo Scarpetta (Naples, 13 March 1853 – Naples, 29 November 1925) was the first playwright who began to work towards a reform of Neapolitan theatre. He believed that:

> Oh una riforma…una riforma è necessaria e desiderata. […] E s'abbia anche a Napoli il suo buon teatro in dialetto. Bisogna fare della verità e non giuochi di prestigio; si vuol essere uomini e non pupattoli; si vuole avere un viso, si vuol parlare e sentire come tutti gli uomini in mezzo ai quali viviamo […].[6]

The philosopher Benedetto Croce praised Scarpetta's work writing:

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[6] (A reform is needed and desired. [...] We have to tell the truth and not play tricks, and if we want to be men and not puppets; we want to have a face, we want to talk and be heard like all the men among whom we live [...] a good vernacular theatre is necessary in Naples.) Scarpetta, *Don Felice. Memorie*, 125-126. The scholar Vittorio Viviani emphasised the value of dialect in the theatre of post Risorgimento Italy "Fu il vernacolo il caratteristico mezzo espressivo del nuovo tempo; «il dialetto», cioè, che aveva la possibilità di tradurre nel suo dettato innumeri significati e che veniva, così riscoperto nella sua essenza filologica, nella sua speciosa ed anche curiosa tipicità, e non più considerato, perciò come apporto, rivolto a rinvigorire ed a rendere più concreta la lingua italiana." ("It was the vernacular that was the characteristic means of expression of the new time; «the dialect», that had the ability to translate innumerable meanings and so it was, in its essence rediscovered in its philological essence, in its specious and even curious typicality, and no longer considered, therefore, a contribution aimed at reinvigorating and making the Italian language more concrete.") *Storia del teatro napoletano*, 577. A brief survey about Neapolitan theatre in the twentieth century was developed by Gaetana Marrone in "Neapolitan Theatre," 247-50.

> Non è stato solo testimone e collaboratore dell'arte degli ultimi comici del San Carlino, ma anche un rinnovatore fortunato che ha saputo espellere da quell'arte elementi invecchiati e aggiungervene altri vivi e freschi.[7]

Yet during this historical period Neapolitan theatre was resistant to any change. Scarpetta criticised this resistance, noting:

> Guai a parlare di riforme di innovazione ai vecchi attori dialettali e agl'impresari che memori dei successi strepitosi delle commedie dell'Altavilla e del Petito, non si stancavano di citarle come modelli insuperabili del genere! Essi si ostinavano a non voler comprendere che il pubblico chiedeva qualche cosa di diverso, qualche cosa che meglio rispondesse ai tempi nuovi, e, piuttosto che mutare repertorio, piangevano la fine del teatro comico dialettale accusando il pubblico d'indifferenza.[8]

Scarpetta's reform had two pillars: innovation of the theatre practice and the advent of the bourgeoisie as a comic subject in Neapolitan theatre (in conjunction with the political rise of this social class after the birth of the new unitary state in 1861). The play *Pulcinella spaventato da un cadavere di legno* (Pulcinella Scared by a Wooden Corpse), later known as *Sciosciammocca mariuolo de 'na pizza* (Sciosciammoca Pizza Thief, 1871), written for Scarpetta by the Neapolitan actor and comic playwright Antonio Petito[9] can be considered an important moment in the development of Neapolitan theatre,[10] as it represented the debut on stage

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[7] (He was not just a witness and artistic collaborator of the last comedians at the San Carlino Theatre, but also a lucky innovator who was able to remove from that art the old elements and add living and fresh ones.) Croce, "Prefazione", *Cinquant'anni di palcoscenico.* 43.

[8] (You couldn't talk about reforms or innovation to the old vernacular actors and the impresarios who, still thinking about the sensational success of Altavilla and Petito's plays, would continuously mention them as unsurpassable models of that genre! They could not understand that the public demanded something different, something that could better represent the new times, and, rather than changing repertoire, they mourned the end of the comic vernacular theatre accusing the public of indifference.) Ibid., 249.

[9] Antonio Petito (Naples, 22 June 1822 – 24 March 1876). Details about his life can be found in Antonio Petito, *Celebrità del San Carlino. Un'autobiografia*. His works are collected in Antonio Petito, *Tutto Petito*.

[10] Scarpetta recognised the help he received from Petito "Per me egli scrisse farse piacevolissime che mi resero vie più gradito al pubblico, e mi aprirono l'adito a più lieti trionfi." ("For me he wrote pleasant farces that made me more pleasing to the public, and opened the way to most pleasing triumphs.") *Don Felice*, 117-118.

of the character Felice Sciosciammocca (Scarpetta's onstage alter-ego) who immediately presented himself as a break from the traditional portrayal of the Neapolitan character, and drew immediate comparison with the well-known, historical mask of *Pulcinella* (interpreted by Petito).[11] Petito, who wrote many more plays for Scarpetta, had seen in the character of Felice Sciosciammocca a new polymorph mask with a wide range from the silly character to the resourceful and clever lover.

While Pulcinella remained the star of the stage, Scarpetta was entrusted with the comments, affectations and badly timed entrances. Moreover, in comparison with the old mask, Sciosciammocca appeared less puppet and more human, less fairy tale and more mischievous, more elegant and less plebeian. He would walk on stage with his face powdered, shoes a few sizes bigger than necessary, the plaid jacket on drainpipe trousers and the bamboo stick.[12]

After Petito's death, Scarpetta began to write plays for himself and his

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[11] About Petito's works and his role in Neapolitan theatre Silvana Monti wrote "Egli scrisse per sé dei testi, in cui si mescolavano temi e modelli drammatici ricavati dalla commedia dell'arte, dalle tradizioni locali e dalla cultura borghese. Petito manipolava con molta abilità, spesso ai confini con la pochade, spunti eterogenei. Da cui talvolta emergeva un'attenzione partecipe alle vicende ed alle miserie dei ceti subalterni. Le farse di Petito erano per lo più un collage di tecniche teatrali diverse, utilizzate anche consapevolmente per ottenere effetti comici, stranianti rispetto al patetico di alcuni episodi o di singoli personaggi." ("He wrote some plays for himself, in which he mixed themes and dramatic patterns taken from the Commedia dell'Arte, local traditions and the bourgeois culture. Petito manipulated with great skill, often on the edge of farce, heterogeneous ideas. From these works emerged his attention to the events and misery of the lower classes. Petito's farces were mostly a collage of various theatrical techniques, he also consciously used them to achieve comic effects, different from some pathetic episodes or individual characters.") *Il teatro realista della nuova Italia, 1861-1876*, 45. Details about Petito's life can be found in Antonio Petito, *Celebrità del San Carlino. Un'autobiografia.*

[12] In his biography Scarpetta wrote about the futility of the masks in the Neapolitan vernacular theatre

> "La maschera moderna non è dunque il segno, il distintivo di onore di questa o di quella città; ma il simbolo dei creduti difetti di un popolo messo a dileggio, a scherno, e gettato nel fango dagli *Arlecchini*, dai *Pantalone* e dai *Pulcinella*." ("The modern mask is not the sign, the badge of honor of this or that city; but the symbol of the supposed defects of people mocked, and thrown into the mud by Harlequins, by Pantalone and Pulcinella.") *Don Felice*, 169.

company, gradually removing the mask of Pulcinella from the plot.[13] He had been aware, for quite a while, that the changes happening in the urban context during those years would lead the audience towards a new type of play. It seemed clear to him that the old popular comic repertoire was no longer attractive to the public because their taste had completely changed. So, inspired by the economic prosperity of the emerging middle-class, Scarpetta decided to neglect the poorer classes in favour of bourgeois characters. This new audience also had to be guaranteed the taste and the luxury necessary in order to feel equal to those attending the major national theatres. On the contrary, the Neapolitan mob, now transformed into proletariat, while organising in associations to fight and reclaim their participation in the renewal of the social structure, remained in a state of deep misery. Such a condition made them unfit to be protagonists of Scarpetta's fledgling theatre:

> La plebe napoletana è troppo misera, troppo squallida per comparire ai lumi della ribalta e muovere al riso. Il vizio che germoglia come un'erbaccia parassita negli infimi strati del nostro popolo, rende quasi sempre doloroso anche il sorriso. E rivoltando quella melma fangosa si potrà scrivere un bel dramma passionale, un acuto studio sociale, ma non mai una commedia brillante.[14]

Certainly, Sciosciammocca, like Pulcinella, was always hungry, and also his hunger made people laugh, but now no one was beating him up

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[13] As Raffaele La Capria wrote "Pulcinella fu scacciato via dalla scena della città e cedette il posto allo Sciosciammocca piccolo-borghese. La cacciata del sulfureo Pulcinella fu un evento storico non sufficientemente ricordato negli annali della nostra storia metropolitana, perché significò il trionfo dell'integralismo linguistico, e quindi morale, sentimentale e politico, della piccola parassitaria seduttrice borghesia napoletana..." ("Pulcinella was removed from the stage of the city and gave way to Sciosciammocca's petty bourgeois. The ousting of sulphurous Pulcinella was a historic event not sufficiently remembered in our urban history, because it meant the triumph of the linguistic fundamentalism and therefore a moral, emotional and political triumph of the small parasitic, seductress Neapolitan middle-class…") *L'armonia perduta*. *Opere*, 656. On this point see also Grano, *Pulcinella e Sciosciammocca. Storia di un teatro chiamato Napoli*.

[14] (The Neapolitan mob is too poor, too shabby to be represented on stage and make people laugh. Vice sprouting like an annoying weed in the lowest strata of our people, makes even smiling almost painful. And with that muddy slime you can only write a nice passionate drama, an acute social study, but never a comedy.) *Cinquant'anni di palcoscenico*, 260.

anymore. A century after the French Revolution, adapting to the life and customs of his time, Scarpetta claimed the right to represent the middle-class as "the third state". While in Italy a bourgeois national theatre was born, in Naples a bourgeois vernacular theatre was born. Scarpetta began to make fun of the audience that he was representing on stage, making his theatre a place where this part of society could look closely at their moral and cultural contradictions, their aspirations and their ambitions. This new popular theatre had replaced the traditional masks with middle-class characters. The Neapolitan traders, owners and employees suddenly became new comic subjects.

Such theatre would so unveil the counterfeiting of a class that even before imitating the aristocracy, was more worried about hiding with vain illusions, their decline and the irreparable crisis of their own power. The texts of this playwright, therefore, are populated by misguided or repressed young women, possessive and jealous wives who intend to repay the infidelity of their husbands with infidelity; very young and older men, married or not, who see in the extramarital affair a prestige and superiority of their own sex; enriched people, loaded with money but missing any solid moral values; exhausted servants; hungry, squalid and disinherited ghosts. All these figures represent the living material from which the plot develops. They are the ones who, in the formula of Scarpetta's theatre, activate a number of impulses, which are the foundation of the story that is being narrated. The social context in which the playwright lays his own roots is rich in elements that contribute to the creation and growth of the thematic thread, which is gradually built in the first act and reaches its climax by the end of the same act. In the second act, the thread reaches its conclusion and incorporates new elements (although minor ones) that widen the narrative structure even more. So, the constant elements in Scarpetta's theatre are the contrast between the ideal and the real, between everyday life and a dream life, between what you want and what the other characters that live in the same context force you to do or take from you. Such contrast is usually symbolised by a female character (present in every play) that loves and is happily loved, and the father, who opposes and acts against the dreamed union of the daughter. He has usually planned a union with another suitor who is usually disliked by the daughter (*Miseria e nobiltà* [Poverty and Nobility]). Instead, when the protagonist of the play is a bourgeois couple, Scarpetta conceived marriage essentially as an economic institution based on mutual convenience, in which the husband is simply a commodity that must be managed wisely (*'O scarfalietto* [The Warming Pan]). Based on this formula, the author created a number of situations and dialogues that, on

the one hand, exacerbated the contrast, and on the other, laid the foundations of the solution, which would soon arrive. Moreover, Scarpetta intended his theatre as a vehicle to dream, like a pause to regain energy and breath and then resume one's journey into reality. If outside of the theatre everyday life was dreary and no hope for change was to be seen on the horizon, in theatre miracles had to be possible, even necessary.

From a linguistic point of view, it should be noted that Felice Sciosciammocca already spoke a dialect that was very close to the Italian language. His humour did not arise from grammatical errors, typical of poorly educated comedians, but awkwardly he imitated the gentlemen, being aware that the new audience was seeking a more refined comedy. It was quite a revolution compared to the characters in the theatre of Petito and Altavilla[15] and gained immediate success among the bourgeois audience.[16] But, like the plays and the repertoire, to align the Neapolitan theatre to the standards of national theatre, Scarpetta took care to provide his theatre company with a sense of decorum. He imposed on his actors an order, a discipline, and a new professional conscience. They were asked, even those belonging to the older generation, to appear on stage with well-made and more decent costumes. The artists' grotesque hairstyles were replaced by normal ones. The set designs were built so that the furniture painted on canvas paper was replaced by authentic and fashionable pieces, and finally, being not only an actor but also a playwright, he introduced a written script. Therefore, the comedy in his plays would not arise from improvised acting or from the insistent search for spectacular effects by the actors through the *lazzi* (jokes), but it leaned on situations and dialogues that were thoroughly written and rehearsed. Such elements

[15] Pasquale Altavilla (Naples, 6 December 1806 – Naples, 2 August 1875) was an actor and playwright.

[16] Greco wrote about the differences between Petito's idea of theatre and Scarpetta's "Scarpetta optava per una comicità normalizzata, edulcorata, esorcizzata, appetibile. La sua era una rispettabile operazione mercantile capace di garantirgli l'agiatezza economica, cioè un'uscita dal ghetto del proletariato comico per entrare invece nel mondo benestante di una sana classe imprenditoriale […] la sua scelta di campo era, necessariamente, una scelta di poetica, per la quale il comico rinunciava a qualunque valenza oppositiva, a qualunque istanza alternativa." ("Scarpetta chose a normalized, sweetened, exorcised and palatable comedy. It was a respectable commercial operation capable of guaranteeing him a financial well-being, that is an exit from the ghetto of the proletariat to enter, instead, into the wealthy world of a healthy entrepreneurial class [...] his choice was, necessarily, a poetic choice, for which the comedian gave up any opposition to any alternative.") Carmelo Greco, "Il comico a Napoli", 31.

placed Scarpetta among the forerunners of the modern concept of directing.

Having realised that the structure of vernacular theatre was still solid, Scarpetta moved within the theatrical tradition, transforming characters and situations without substantially changing the structure. Nevertheless, having chosen comedy as his theatrical genre, both Petito's fantastic and strictly dramatic elements had to be removed from the plot which became, in turn, more coherent. It included a greater extension of the lines whose rhetorical structure (the language, the syntax) became essential for the comic effect.

As a playwright, Scarpetta devoted much of his activity to translating the standard French *pochades* into Neapolitan. Noted works include the play *Tetillo* (1880) adapted from *Bebè* by Najac and Hennequin,[17] *Duje marite 'mbrugliune* (Two Cheating Husbands) (1881), adapted from *Les dominos roses* by A. Hennequin and A. Delacour, *'O scarfalietto* (1881) adapted from *La Boule* by Meilhac and Halevy, *Tre pecore viziose* (Three Particular Sheep, 1881) adapted from *La Procès Veauradieux* by Hennequin and Delacour, *Na paglia di Firenze* (A Hat from Florence,1883) adapted from *Un chapeau de paille d'Italie* by Labiche and Michel, *Lu marito de Nannina* (Nannina's Husband,1885), adapted from *115 rue Pigalle* by Alexandre Bisson, *Nu turco Napulitano* (A Neapolitan Turk, 1888), adapted from *Le Parisien* by Hannequin, *'Na santarella* (A Little Saint,1889), adapted from *Mam'zelle Nitouche* by Henri Meilhac and Albert Millaud, *'O miedeco d'e pazze* (Doctor for Lunatics, 1908), adapted from *Pensione Chottle* by Laufs.[18] Within these works, Scarpetta did not merely convey the Parisian world in a Neapolitan setting but completely rewrote the content, adding new characters and a new language.[19] Through

[17] The play opened at the San Carlino Theatre in Naples on September 1880**.** It was performed 160 times.

[18] Scarpetta wrote about one hundred plays. Some of his plays are collected in Scarpetta, *Tutto il teatro*.

[19] As Eduardo De Filippo confirmed "[…] conservò solo l'idea, la trovata di base, mentre l'ambiente, I personaggi e a volte perfino i risvolti della trama venivano modificati, e spesso inventati di sana pianta." ("he kept only the basic idea, while the environment, characters and sometimes even the implications of the plot were changed, and often totally reinvented") *Eduardo De Filippo presenta quattro commedie di Eduardo e Vincenzo Scarpetta*, 55. *'O scarfalietto* is a good example of the work done by Scarpetta on the original French play. The author, while retaining many of the original characters, added the stuttering lawyer whose courtroom harangue (a highly funny moment) was instrumental to the success of

the *pochade*, he found a form not in conflict with the existing structure, but at the same time able to guarantee his desired renewal of forms and situations. As Scarpetta wrote:

> Tradurre è un conto, ridurre è un altro, e anche su ciò bisogna intendersi, giacché a misura che la riduzione diventa trasformazione crescono le difficoltà e gli ostacoli da superare. Tagliare, condensare, trasportare le scene e i personaggi da un ambiente all'altro e farli vivere e muovere e parlare come fossero nati e vissuti fra noi, così da ricordare con una frase, con un gesto…un tipo o una macchietta caratteristica, non è poi un lavoro da nulla, come vorrebbero dare ad intendere.[20]

It is true, though, that his most famous comedy ***Miseria e nobiltà*** (Poverty and Nobility, 1888) was not an adaptation, but entirely written by Scarpetta, who in this work condensed years of theatrical reflections learned from his teacher Petito.[21] The characters on stage are symbols of the Neapolitan society of those years: the poor and the nobility.[22] The first

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the play. He also inserted at the end of the first act the role of the Coffee Boy, forced to testify about the slap given by Amalia to Felice (another moment of great hilarity).

[20] (Translating is one thing, re-writing is another, and you must well understand this, because once the adaptation becomes a re-writing, difficulties and obstacles become harder to overcome. To cut, condense, move scenes and characters from one environment to another and make them live and move and talk as if they were born and lived amongst us, able to remind us with a sentence, a gesture ... an individual or a characteristic macchietta (a caricature), is not, then, a simple task, as some would like you to believe.) *Dal San Carlino ai Fiorentini*, 347. In an interview with Pandolfi, Eduardo De Filippo recognized Scarpetta's merits "E' stata una forza quella di Scarpetta che ha dato una nuova impronta al teatro napoletano, poiché sebbene traducesse e riducesse dal francese le commedie dell'epoca, le cambiava totalmente e trovava dei riferimenti alla vita del momento." ("Scarpetta manged to reform the Neapolitan theatre, even though he translated and adapted the comedies of the time, from French, he totally changed them and found some references to the life of that time.") Pandolfi, "Intervista a quattr'occhi con: Eduardo De Filippo", 5.

[21] Both Altavilla and Petito had previously dealt with the contrast between poverty and nobility in their works. Altavilla wrote in 1850 *No sviluppo de nobiltà e no sviluppo de miseria* (A Touch of Nobility and a Touch of Poverty), while Petito wrote in 1873 *La palummella* (The Dove).

[22] With reference to *Miseria e nobiltà*, Di Giacomo stated "provò che la verità trova sempre buon posto sulla scena ed, anche, dimostrò che lo Scarpetta, quando si fosse voluto mettere, con più onesti intendimenti d'arte, a scriver commedie che

suffer from perennial hunger; like the Harlequin and the Pulcinella of the *commedia dell'arte*, they become the subject of a histrionic game. The author does not attempt any critical survey (and even less an emotional participation as will happen in Di Giacomo's works) but he focuses on a comic accentuation of poverty. On the other end of the social ladder there are the nobles, whose ridiculous and farcical representation is offered to the curiosity of the public and their desire to laugh, rewarding in this way the natural inclination of the lower classes to mock the upper classes. While trying to highlight the declining social position of the aristocracy, the author also showed how much charm they could still have on lower classes in Naples who, while rarely managing to achieve a better life, continued to pay a heavy toll of psychological subjection to them.

Pasquale, Felice and their families belong to the first group of characters. They are two poor, dispossessed outcasts in a changing society. They pursue their old jobs: the first a bleeder, the other a scribe. They are left overs from a social organisation that no longer depends on people's illiteracy and old-fashioned medical practices. They are two survivors who feel left behind by progress and complain about it without understanding that their condition derives from the inability to innovate, to adapt to a changed reality (as always happens when the times progress). Within this group, there is a previously poor person, the ex-chef Semmolone who became rich thanks to an inheritance from his master, a wealthy Englishman. Semmolone lives in a house full of pomp and likes to be called His Excellency. His only complaint is his son Luigino who steals money for his high life. His joy is his daughter Gemma, trained as a dancer at the San Carlo Opera house in Naples, whom he would like to marry off to a member of the nobility. In the plot, the story of each character is intertwined with those of other characters, and then all the different situations are eventually led back together. So it happens that the wayward Luigino loves being loved by Pasquale's daughter, the pretty Pupella. The main problem of this young man is to convince his father Semmolone, clearly oblivious of his own origins, to accept the marriage of his son with this poor girl. Gemma also has a lover, the young Marquis Eugenio Favetti; Semmolone would definitely be fine with him, but there are two

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fossero state della verità e della sana comicità che ne scaturisce, geniali riproduzioni, ne sarebbe potuto uscire con onore." ("he proved that the truth finds always a good place on stage and, also, it showed that Scarpetta, when he wanted to write, with more honest intentions of art, plays based on the truth and healthy humor, brilliant reproductions, he could achieve great honor.") *Storia del teatro San Carlino*, 386.

problems, one is to get the consent of Eugenio's parents and the second is to satisfy Semmolone's request to meet the distinguished parents. Here is the purely theatrical solution to both problems: the game, the farce, and the disguise. A kind of theatre within the theatre and the Marquis Eugenio has no choice but to go along with the farce. The beggars will play the parts of nobles and wear their fancy clothes:

> EUGENIO: - Ora scusatemi, che posso fare io, povero giovane? Posso andare da mio padre, da mia madre, mia zia e mio zio e dir loro: "venite in casa di Gaetano Semmolone, l'ex cuoco, a parlare del mio matrimonio con la figlia ballerina?" Ditemi voi se lo posso fare.
> PASQUALE: - Oh. È impossibile. Chille so' la crema della nobiltà! Proprio chello de coppa coppa la nobiltà.
> FELICE: - Comme a nuie, per esempio, che simme chille de sotta sotta la miseria.[23]

Of course, there is a great fear that the only ones to pay the cost for such cheating, as often happens, will be the poor bastards who will end up being beaten:

> FELICE: - Ma, marchesì, scusate, qui non bisogna abbordare. Voi adesso vi trovate accecato dall'amore e non badate alle conseguenze. Qua bisogna ben ponderare le cose. Chesta non è na pazziella. Si chillo se n'addona e nce fa nu paliatone, nuie addo' nce lo iammo a chiagnere?[24]

But Eugenio knows how to convince them:

> EUGENIO: […] Se fate bene le vostre parti, io saprò ricompensarvi. E poi mangerete, berrete…Per esempio a colazione: omelette, cotolette,

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[23] (EUGENIO: - Now excuse me, what can I do, poor fellow? Can I go to my father, my mother, my aunt and my uncle and tell them: "Come to the home of Gaetano Semmolone, the former chef, to talk about my marriage with his daughter, the dancer? Tell me if I can do that.
PASQUALE: - Oh. It is impossible. They are the cream of the nobility! The absolute best of the best of the nobility.
FELICE: - like us, for example, we are the absolute worst of the worst of the poor.), Scarpetta, *Miseria e nobiltà*. In *Miseria e nobiltà e altre commedie*, edited by Wanda Monaco, 241.

[24] (FELICE: - But, marquis, sorry [....] You are now blinded by love and do not mind the consequences. We must reflect deeply before acting. This is not a game. If the man suspects something he'll beat us up, who will be to blame then?), ibid., I. 242.

> formaggio. A pranzo: maccheroni, ragù, patatine, funghi, fagiolini, pesce, polli, dolci…[25]

The argument is compelling and Felice, resigned:

> FELICE: - Jamme, che potimmo ave' cchiù de na mazziata?[26]

So Pasquale becomes the Marquis Ottavio Favetti and Felice becomes the Prince of Casador, while Concetta and Pupella rise to the ranks of Countess. When Semmolone meets them, he is overjoyed:

> GAETANO: Oh che onore, oh che grande onore onore! E chi se l'aspettava mai tanta fortuna. Tenere in casa mia quattro signoroni come voi. Io non ce capo dinte a li panne pe la contentezza.[27]

It is a comedy of the commoner who, elevated to the middle-class, aspires to climb even higher and does not realise the hoax. But there are a few more complications in the plot. In the house of Semmolone works Bettina, a waitress, and the real wife of Felice Sciosciammocca, who had left him because of his affair with Luisella. In that same house was hired their son Peppeniello, unknown to the mother and presented as the son of the butler Vincenzo. Also the Marquis Ottavio Favetti, the real father of Eugenio, will come to the house. He is a vain *viveur* who, using the false name Bebè, woos Gemma, known as a dancer at the Opera House. In this flow of situations the only one who has not understood anything is Semmolone. It will be Luisella, Sciosciammocca's lover, left in the hovel and excluded from the intrigue, who goes to Semmolone's house and, disguised as the Princess of Casador, as an act of revenge and with wicked mockery, reveals the deception:

> LUISELLA: - Vuie qua' principe, qua marchese? Signò vuie che dicite? V'hanno 'mbrugliato… Chiste so' quatto disperatune […] E vuie ve l'avite credute? Mamma mia e che piezzo de battilocchio site, Neh! (*A*

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[25] (EUGENIO: […] If you play your parts well, I will reward you. And then you'll eat, drink ... For example at breakfast: omelets, cutlets, cheese. At lunch: macaroni, sauce, chips, mushrooms, green beans, fish, chicken, desserts ...), ibid., I. 243.

[26] (FELICE: - C'mon, if worst comes to worst all that happens is we get beaten.), *Miseria e Nobiltà*, 243.

[27] (GAETANO: Oh what an honour, oh what a great honour honour! Who would ever expect such luck. To host, in my house, four gentlemen like you. I am overjoyed.), ibid., I. 280

> *Donna Concetta, Felice, Pasquale e Pupella*). Chillo era lo marchese, chillo era lo principe, chella era la contessa, chell'auta la contessina… Sti quatto muorte de famma […] Sciuh, pe li facce voste! Che pozzate essere accise! Accise![28]

As usual in these types of comedies, there is always a happy ending. The young lovers Luigino and Pupella and Eugenio and Gemma finally get the consent for their marriage; the misunderstanding about the fatherhood of Peppeniello is cleared; Felice and Bettina are back together; Pasquale and Concetta's debts are paid.

But Scarpetta's deliberate refusal to confront relevant existing social problems would hinder him from creating a completely realistic portrait of Naples, putting his productions into a world in which the anxieties of the proletariat were intentionally neglected in the name of a theatrical and commercial optimism.[29] The condition of the city rarely conformed to such happy and prosperous endings, with marriages, inheritances, the providential arrival of a rich uncle, lottery winnings, brilliant professional successes, or profitable enterprises. The city had gone into decline after the cholera epidemic in 1884 and the reorganisation of the tax system of the newly born unified country (1861). The pain of the lower classes would come back as a protagonist in the theatre of Salvatore Di Giacomo and Raffaele Viviani.

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[28] (LUISELLA: - But what prince, and what marquis? What are you talking about? They have cheated you [...] They are just a bunch of losers [...] And you believed them? Mamma mia, you are a simpleton, Neh! (*To Concetta, Felice, Pasquale and Pupella*). That was the marquis, that was the prince, that was the countess, that other one was the countess ... These losers [...] Go to hell! Hell!), ibid., III. 300.

[29] Wanda Monaco discussed the dramaturgical limits of Scarpetta's work "In quegli anni la città vide scioperi operai molto duri, vide una lunga e aspra lotta dei commessi dei negozi, vide cortei di cinque o seimila tabacchine che sfilavano per via Toledo. In basso la società cercava di organizzarsi in forme nuove di lotta e di aggregazioni. Tutto questo resta estraneo al teatro napoletano di quegli anni, che diventa un teatro delle classi medie." ("In those years the city saw very serious workers' strikes, saw a long and bitter struggle of the shop assistants, saw five or six thousand tobacco workers parading along Via Toledo. At the bottom, society was trying to organize itself in new forms of struggle and aggregations. All this remains alien to the Neapolitan theatre of those years, that becomes a theatre of the middle-classes.") "Eduardo Scarpetta un riformatore?". In Scarpetta, *Miseria e Nobiltà e altre commedie*, 10.

Salvatore Di Giacomo. Common People and Poetry on Stage

The success achieved by Scarpetta in those years was enormous. However, in that same period, another Neapolitan playwright, Salvatore Di Giacomo (Naples, March 13, 1860 - Naples, April 4 1934) set out to show that Scarpetta was wrong in believing that Neapolitan theatre did not offer any possibility of representing more dramatical works. Although Di Giacomo also supported the necessity of going beyond the *lazzi* (jokes) and buffooneries of the old dialect theatre, unlike Scarpetta, he imagined a theatre that was inspired by real life, where not only the middle-class but also the lower classes, with their suffering and pain, could find appropriate representation on stage.[30] His theatrical productions followed the success that he was receiving as a poet. His works, despite being part of the tradition of realistic art, contained highly innovative elements.[31] As later with Viviani, the social condition of the characters acquired a significant meaning in the theatre of Salvatore Di Giacomo.[32] In fact, the protagonist is the Neapolitan proletariat constantly struggling with a daily routine cursed by misery and unhappiness and represented in an extreme situation (as in the works of the French Naturalists).[33] Of the eight plays (largely characterized by growing pathos, although never in conformity with the three Aristotelian rules about tragedy), two express with greater completeness Di Giacomo's theatrical vision: *'O mese mariano* (The

[30] Di Giacomo's critics to the theatre of Scarpetta can be found in: S. Di Giacomo, *Storia del teatro San Carlino*, as well as in his articles: "Teatro dialettale"; "Pel Teatro dialettale"; "Per un repertorio dialettale".

[31] Di Giacomo's poetic works are collected in: *Poesie e prose*.

[32] With reference to Di Giacomo's influence on the works of later Neapolitan playwrights, Paolo Sommaiolo wrote "I riverberi delle sue scelte stilistiche, sempre rivendicate nel segno di una convinta dignità artistica della scrittura dialettale, hanno inevitabilmente propagato le loro suggestioni estetiche sulle due esperienze più significative della drammaturgia napoletana della prima metà del Novecento: l'opera di Raffaele Viviani e quella di Eduardo De Filippo." ("The effects of his stylistic choices, always made in the name of a convinced artistic dignity of dialect theatre, have inevitably spread their aesthetic influences on the two most significant experiences of Neapolitan drama of the first half of the twentieth century: the work of Raffaele Viviani and that of Eduardo De Filippo.") "Salvatore Di Giacomo: Il teatro come urgenza poetica", 48.

[33] Not to be forgotten on this topic is the investigation into the conditions of poverty and backwardness of the city of Naples conducted by Matilde Serao in those years: *Il ventre di Napoli* (The Belly of Naples), published in 1884.

Month of the Virgin Mary) and *Assunta Spina* (Assunta Spina).

The one act ***'O mese mariano*** (1900)[34] is based on an earlier short story by the same author, *Senza vederlo* [Without Seeing Him], published in the volume *Mattinate napoletane* [Neapolitan Mornings] in 1886. In this, as in other theatrical works, and unlike in fiction, Di Giacomo would mainly use dialect, as it was the language of popular theatre in Naples. The first part describes the environment of the Bursar's office of a Neapolitan hospice, the *Albergo dei poveri* (Hospice of the Poor), occupied by lazy, inefficient and idle employees. Life for them, flows like a long quiet river, pleased as they are to be fed with pizza and olives and dreaming of one day becoming rich by winning the lottery. The arrival of the protagonist in this office, Carmela Battimelli, moves the plot in an unexpected and dramatic direction. It is nine months since her last visit and Carmela wants now to embrace again her firstborn child, Peppeniello who is being cared for in the hospice. While in the short story, the protagonist is a widow, now she is married. Unfortunately, the day after the wedding, she was forced by her husband to get rid of this child (as the child had been fathered by a worker who had deserted her):

> CARMELA […] Dice: «Sa' che c'è de nuovo? Stu guaglione ca nun è dd''o mio, io nun 'o voglio vedè 'int''a casa mia. O nn'o manne, o mme faie saglì 'o sango a ll'uocchie ogne bota c''o veco!»[35]

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[34] The play opened at the San Ferdinando Theatre in Naples on 24 January 1900. In the cast: Marietta Del Giudice, Giuseppe Cecchi and Annetta Lazzari. *'O mese mariano*, translated into English by Costance Hutton, was presented in UK on 18 May 1923 by the Pioneers Players. Regardless of the success received in Italy, here the play was a failure. The scholar Ettore Massarese underlined an important similarity between Di Giacomo's writing technique and the one used by another well known Italian writer, Giovanni Verga "La ricodificazione teatrale delle novelle e di alcuni frammenti lirici è una costante del laboratorio drammaturgico di Salvatore di Giacomo. Si tratta di un modello operativo caro anche a Verga, testimonianza cosciente del privilegio del versante letterario rispetto ad altre componenti della scrittura scenica." ("Adapting for the theatre short stories and some liric fragments is a constant in the dramaturgical laboratory of Salvatore Di Giacomo. This is what also Verga used to do, a conscious evidence of the privilege of the literary side on other components of playwriting.") "Dal 'vero' al 'simobolo'. Percorsi del teatro Digiacomiano", XIII.

[35] (CARMELA [...] He says: «you know what's new? This kid is not mine, so I don't want to see him in my house anymore. If you don't send him away, he'll get on my nerves every time I see him!»), Di Giacomo, *'O mese mariano*, in *Poesie e prose*, 657.

So the woman had to entrust little Peppeniello (at the time he was sixteen months old) to an acquaintance who, not having any children, welcomed him with great joy. With her old friend Don Gennaro, who she had met that morning in the hospice, Carmela is in tears as she relives the day she had to leave her son:

> CARMELA […] 'O guaglione…durmeva 'int'a cònnela…
> *commossa trattiene le lagrime*
> Io mm'accustaie…mm' 'o vasaie chiano chiano, pe nun 'o scetà…Lle pigliaiechella manella ca teneva 'a fora 'a cònnela… e a vasaie… come si fosse stata 'a mano 'e nu genitore…
> *singhiozza*
> E lle dicette: Peppenié!... Peppeniello mio… Aggiu pacienza!... Perdoname!...
> *S'asciuga gli occhi al grembiale.*[36]

But fate had willed that the adoptive mother would die prematurely and so, in the end, the child was brought to the *Albergo dei poveri*. The drama looms when the time for their meeting comes, as in reality it will never happen, because the night before, Peppeniello has died of meningitis.
None of the employees has the courage to tell the woman the truth, and also a nun, in charge of giving the sad news, tries to soothe the pain through untruths. She will tell her that the regulation does not allow any visits at that hour. While the woman curses her own soul for such persistent misfortune, she hears a heavenly sound of the voices of the children going to the chapel to offer flowers to the Virgin:

> I BAMBINI
> *Cantando*
> Noi siamo piccoli
> Ma cresceremo
> Sempre ameremo
> Dio e la virtù![37]

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[36] (CARMELA [...] The child... was sleeping in the cradle ...
moved, holding back tears
I approached him ... I kissed him softly, so as not to wake him up ... I took his little hand he was holding out of the cradle ... and kissed it ... as if it was the hand of a parent ...
sobs
And I told him: Peppenié! my Peppeniello ...Be patient! ... Forgive me! ...
She wipes her eyes on the apron), ibid., 659.

[37] (THE CHILDREN

The mother looks out to see if her Peppeniello is among the other children dressed in white as they pass below in slow procession. Obviously she does not see him. Saddened by the missed meeting, Carmela is about to leave with the illusion that her child is still there. She will see him next time, but before going out she gives the nun a package that she had brought for her child:

CARMELA […] Ll'avevo purtata na sfogliatella…
tastando il pacchetto
S'è fatta fredda…[38]

After the woman leaves, life in the office continues. Don Gaetano, who was dictating a letter, goes on:

DON GAETANO
Commosso, cerca una sedia e siede
« Nella… speranza…
la tela comincia lentamente a scendere
« Nella… speranza…
quasi singhiozzando, con voce rotta
«Che…la bontà…la bontà della…Signoria Vostra…
Signoria Vostra…Illustrissima…»
La tela cade [39]

No longer using words, but catching these emotional states that stubbornly make their way to the surface, Di Giacomo clearly explains how that glimpse of tragic life and the bewildered look of the young mother have left a profound mark in the soul of those employees (and audience).

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singing
We are small/but we'll grow/Always we will love/God and virtue!),*'O mese mariano*, 671.

[38] (CARMELA [...]And I brought him a sweet pastry…
testing the package
It has become cold ...), ibid., 675.

[39] (DON GAETANO
Moved, seeks a chair and sits «In ... hope ...
the curtain slowly begins to fall
«In ... hope ...
almost sobbing brokenly
«The ... goodness ... the goodness of Your Lordship ... Illustrious Lordship ... »
The curtain falls), ibid., 677.

Also ***Assunta Spina*** (1909)[40] is based on a short story by Di Giacomo (published in the collection *Rosa Bellavita* [Beautiful Rose] in 1888). The play is divided into two acts. The first act (absent in the novel) takes place in a courtroom of Naples. Mindful of his experience as a journalist of judicial matters, Di Giacomo presents a complex multitude of characters, typical of this type of environment: lawyers, errand boys, ushers, the accused, relatives of the accused, witnesses, and hawkers. The cases on trial concern a variety of issues: from bankruptcy to illegal gambling. That day, among the various trials, there is also the case against the butcher Michele Boccadifuoco, lover of Assunta Spina. The man is accused of scarring Assunta on the cheek as a punishment for her infidelity (the woman was apparently seeing, on the side, a policeman from the same neighbourhood). Assunta is also there in the crowd. After testifying in favour of her lover (she has denied, in front of the court, that he is the one who scarred her), she is now confidently awaiting the judgment, but the man will be sentenced to two years in prison. By the end of the first act, the Deputy Registrar of the Court, Federigo Funelli approaches Assunta claiming to be able to intervene so that Michele will not be sent to a faraway prison but will at least stay in Naples. At the beginning of the second act, ten months have gone by. It is the evening before Christmas Eve, and the scene takes place in the home of the protagonist. Federigo and Assunta have been lovers for some time, but she feels that he is now moving away. The woman does not understand the reason and curses herself for letting him use her in such an ignoble way: "[…] Tutto, tutto s'ha pigliato! M'ha arruinata!...M'ha arruinata! E mo mme lassa! E fa buono! Fa buono! Io mm'o mmèreto!..."[41] But that night, rewarded for good behaviour, Michele returns home three months earlier than expected. Talking to Assunta he praises the qualities of the Vice-Chancellor, who allowed him to stay in Naples, and hints at the return to the hometown of Federigo's wife (she was in Cosenza to look after her father, now deceased). And it is at this point that Assunta understands that she was nothing but a temporary distraction for Federigo. Blinded by her desire of revenge, she tells the whole story to Michele:

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[40] The play opened at the Nuovo Theatre in Naples on 27 January 1909. In the cast: Adelina Magnetti (Assunta) and Enrico Altieri (Michele).

[41] ([...] Everything, he took everything from me! He ruined me! ... He ruined me! And now he's leaving me! He has done well! He has done well! I deserve it! ...), Di Giacomo, *Assunta Spina*, in *Poesie e prose*, II. 765.

ASSUNTA
Frettolosa vorrebbe dir tutto in una volta
Sì…chella sera…ca tu fuste condannato…io truvaie a…uno…ncopp'o stesso Tribbunale…uno…ca mme dicette ca putive rummanè a Napule…e ca isso stesso era buono 'e te fa' rummanè a Napule..si..io…l'avesse vuluto…[42]

Shortly thereafter, when Federigo arrives at Assunta's house, the inevitable happens. He is stabbed by Michele. Being a victim of her condition as a desired but lonely woman, Assunta repeatedly makes illogical choices. Already the mistress of a man who, despite loving her, had battered her, she got together, regardless of the initial blackmail, with the Vice-Chancellor and ended up believing in their relationship. But once she learns the truth, she reacts with the typical composure of a woman scorned. She is also consumed by her own sense of guilt, and understands that, even before punishing Federigo, in order to recover her lost innocence, she must punish herself. Her untruthful confession is just the first step to exercise her natural sense of justice, which will find in her own sacrifice, the only possible way towards atonement. Once the police arrive, Assunta admits to the murder:

IL BRIGADIERE
[…]
Iammo! Nun facimmo scherzetti!... Chi è stato?
ASSUNTA
S'avanza, pallida, decisa. Si mette la mano in petto. Con voce chiara e commossa
Io…brigadié […][43]

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[42] (ASSUNTA
She wants to tell him everything at once
Yes ... that evening ... when you were sentenced ... I found... someone ... ... right there... he ... told me that you could stay in Naples ... and he could make sure you would stay in Naples ... ..If...I... had wanted it ...), ibid., II. 781.

[43] (THE SERGEANT [...]C'mon! Let's be serious!...Who did it?
ASSUNTA *Moves forward, pale, firm. She puts her hand on her chest. With clear voice and affected*
I did it ... Sergeant [...]), ibid., II. 786. With reference to the positive reviews about the drama, Vittorio Viviani wrote "Il chiasso fatto intorno ad «Assunta Spina» fu un chiasso nazionale e contribuì a far dire di Napoli sui giornali le solite sciocchezze denigratorie. Si gridò interessatamente al «capolavoro» puntando sugli aspetti esterni del dramma; e si applaudì alla coltellata di Michele Boccadifuoco proprio perché quell'«exploit» veristico così sfacciato qualificava la «verità» di