Social and Linguistic Marginalization, and the Question of ‘Standard’:

An Analysis and Translation of Giulio Cesare Cortese’s *La vaiasseide*

By

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on Giulio Cesare Cortese’s *La vaiasseide*, a mock epic poem written in 1612 in the Neapolitan language, a marginalized Italo-Romance language. This poem is incredibly innovative within the genre of chivalric epic poetry, for it challenges the genre’s established linguistic, literary, and gender conventions, offering insight into the intersection of linguistic and social norms. *La vaiasseide* is structured as an epic poem and, more specifically, is clearly based on traditional chivalric epic poetry, which by the early sixteenth century had become one of the most popular and influential genres in Italian literature. However, the poem deviates from the norms of the genre – canonical chivalric epic poetry most features chivalric male knights as the main protagonists; *La vaiasseide*, in contrast, portrays female domestic servants, or *vaiasse* as the main protagonists. The poem’s storyline centers on three *vaiasse* – Renza, Carmosina, and Pretiosa. The women wish to get married, but are barred from doing so by their masters, or *padroni*. In response, the women unite and lead a revolt against the social rules imposed on them. Cortese’s revolutionary approach to the genre, characterized by the deviation from socio-cultural and literary norms, is reinforced and, in turn, supports a radical linguistic choice, as the poem is written in Neapolitan. In other words, in *La vaiasseide*, Giulio Cesare Cortese diverges from the social and linguistic standard by writing about marginalized people – working class women – in a marginalized language – Neapolitan. In pushing back against the linguistic norms by writing in his home language, Cortese pushes back against the social norms that dictate who can be written about; in advocating for his marginalized language, he is advocating for marginalized people.

For this project, I have engaged Cortese’s poem in two ways. On the one hand, I conducted a literary and socio-linguistic analysis of *La vaiasseide*. In the first part of the thesis, I
discuss the linguistic background of Italy in order to contextualize Cortese’s choice to write in Neapolitan. Furthermore, I draw upon Cortese’s own words in order to analyze the social impact of his linguistic choice and his choice to portray working class women in a genre they are often left out of. On the other hand, I translated a canto of the poem. Of the poem’s five cantos, I chose to work with and translate the second canto. I felt drawn to the second canto due to the story arc it contained and the ways it represented the intertwined themes of gender and class. Due to my prior study of translation, I had a method I usually followed when encountering a new word – my first step was always to read the piece in its entirety, in an effort to get a feel for the text. However, right from the start, my translation of La vaiasseide departed from that which I am familiar with; I am not fluent in, nor have I ever formally studied, the Neapolitan language; I asked myself – what did it mean to write this poem in Neapolitan? How can that significance be maintained through the act of translation? As Cortese’s translator, I had to confront the question of ‘standard’ language and, in turn, the question of what it means to be a ‘non-standard’ language. I faced many obstacles as a translator, with issues ranging from practical issues to theoretical. In a practical sense, the act of translating from Old Neapolitan to modern English is difficult, if for no other reason than for the lack of resources, such as dictionaries and vocabularies, between the two languages. In a theoretical sense, I was faced with the daunting task of deciding which languages and language varieties to translate into, and how to best translate a marginalized language. Consequently, my translation is an intrinsic part of my thesis, for it serves as an interpretive tool that complements my literary analysis. Together, the translation and the analysis illuminate La vaiasseide as Cortese’s response to the growing standardization of the Italian literary and linguistic canon, while raising broader questions about the intersection of linguistic, literary, and socio-cultural norms.
The Neapolitan Language within the Linguistic History and Background of Italy

In order to best understand the marginalized social status of the Neapolitan language, it is necessary to understand the linguistic development of languages in present day Italy, and the ways in which those relationships changed throughout history. Throughout time, the linguistic situation in the Italian peninsula has undergone many periods of change. At every point in the history of the peninsula, there have been multiple languages or language varieties present in coexistence with one another. Italy did not exist as a political entity until the 1860s, and thus, for the majority of its history, the area was broken up into different regions, each of which had a spoken language variety distinct from one another. In many regions, Latin was the language spoken, starting in the 700s; however, it is not a monolithic language. There were two main varieties of Latin – latino classico Classical Latin and latino volgare Vulgar Latin, also known as vernacular (Patota, 2002). By the mid 700s, both of these varieties were being used, though in different social situations (Eskhult, 2018). Classical Latin was a highly codified written variety of Latin, used only by the educated elite and in formal environments. Vulgar Latin, on the other hand, was the spoken variety of Latin, not subject to as strict of norms and used more informally. In other words, Classical Latin was reserved for a higher register, whereas the vernacular was used more colloquially, within a lower register. Vulgar Latin varied diatopically, as the variety of the vernacular differed from region to region. The language of each region was unique, as they had developed from Latin with the influence of other languages specific to each region. The different varieties of Vulgar Latin continued to develop over time and to depart from the Classical Latin model, eventually leading to linguistic variation which constitutes the ‘dialects’ or regional languages of modern day Italy.
Despite being languages in their own right, the regional dialects derived from Latin were restricted to informal use, as Classical Latin was the official language of the social elite and of academia. However, as time went on Classical Latin began to lose its prestige. This shift in the social standing of Classical Latin was seen for various reasons, some of which include the decline in prestige of the aristocratic social class, and the spread of Christianity, which utilized the vernacular to make religious services more accessible to the populace (Patota, 2002). By the 1200s, many regions throughout the peninsula had started to develop their own literary linguistic varieties based on their local vernaculars (Alkire, 2010). Thus, regional languages began occupying a linguistic function that had previously been reserved for Classical Latin. The decision regarding which language, and form thereof, should be used as the literary standard by academics and writers in place of Classical Latin was constantly discussed in an the everpresent linguistic debate known as *la questione della lingua* in Italy. Of the aforementioned local literary varieties, the literary Florentine variety was chosen to be the standard literary language of the peninsula, instead of the original Classical literary Latin, due to both the economic prosperity of Florence in that time, and to the respect the variety received after its usage by prominent 14th century Florentine authors, such as Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch. Florentine (Italian) was eventually codified, first by Pietro Bembo’s *Prose della volgar lingua* in 1526. Consequently, Florentine came to occupy the role that Classical Latin had done centuries before; it was the prestigious language, codified and used for literary purposes and amongst the social elite.

Neapolitan greatly differs from others languages of Italy, on every linguistic level, even with the smallest segmentable parts of the language, such as phonetic components of speech. These phonetic and phonological patterns help demonstrate the ways in which Neapolitan differs from Florentine, and are important to an analysis of Neapolitan. There are a multitude of
fascinating phonetic and phonological phenomena present in Neapolitan, such as the palatalization of /s/ and /z/ when they appear before labial and velar consonants. This is seen, for example, in words like *sfizio* [ˈʃʃiːzjo] ‘pleasure’ – wherein the /s/ palatalizes to /ʃ/ before the labial-dental consonant /f/ – and *scugnizzo* [ʃkuˈɲːitːsə] ‘rascal’ – in which the /s/ palatalizes to /ʃ/ before the velar consonant /k/ (Ledgeway & Maiden, 2016). Other phonological processes include the weakening of final vowels and consequent merger of final vowels to schwa [ə] (Loporcaro 2013). An example of this is seen in the word ‘amore’, with the final unstressed vowel is reduced to /ə/, rendering the pronunciation as [amˈmɔrə] (Repetti, 2000). While these phonological processes are typical of the spoken word, some of them can be observed in a written text such as *La vaiasseide*. For example, in Neapolitan, tonic closed /e/ remains in words, unless the vowel in the final syllable is etymologically derived from Latin I or O(U), in which case the vowel shifts and becomes /i/. This is seen in the contrast between masculine *chisto* ‘this’ – wherein the tonic vowel is shifted from /e/ to /i/ due to the fact that the vowel in the final syllable is ‘o’ – and feminine *chesta* ‘that’ – wherein the tonic vowel remains as /e/, since the vowel in the final syllable is not derived from Latin I or O(U) (Vaughan, 1915). This phenomenon is observed in *La vaiasseide* in the phrase *chisto penillo* in Octave 16, literally translated as ‘this suffering’, and in *chesta semmana* ‘this week’ in Octave 10. While this vowel shift is an example of a phonological process observable in written text, most phonological characteristics of Neapolitan are less decipherable in a written text such as *La vaiasseide*.

Instead, linguistic characteristics of Neapolitan are more evident in this text in regards to syntax, morphology, and the lexicon. Take, for example, the gender system present in Neapolitan. Gender is a characteristic of nouns that can be observed in the ways in which associated words, such as articles, change to reflect the gender information of the noun.
(Ledgeway & Maiden, 2016). The ways in which grammatical gender functions and is expressed differs from language to language. In Old Neapolitan, gender is expressed through a four-part system; three of the grammatical gender categories are directly derived from Latin, representing the masculine, neuter, and feminine categories. In Old Neapolitan, there is a fourth category derived from Latin neuter nouns that differ synchronically from their etymological origins, an example of which being a-plural, a subcategory of plural nouns wherein the plural is formed through vowel alternation (Ledgeway & Maiden, 2016). The four-gender system in Old Neapolitan can be observed through the articles that precede the nouns. In regards to singular nouns, the articles are llo for typical neuter, lo for both masculine and irregular neuter nouns (such as a-plurals), and la for feminine. For plural nouns, the articles are li for masculine nouns, llo for typical neuter nouns, la/lle for irregular neuter nouns, and lle for feminine nouns. This four-part system of grammatical gender is observed throughout Canto Two of La vaiasseide. For example, in Octave 14, the masculine plural li is observed in li guai suoie ‘her problems’; in Octave 5, the irregular neuter plural (l)le is observed with an a-plural in le vraccia ‘the arms’, while the same written form (le) is used to represent the feminine plural in Octave 11 with le doglie ‘the contractions’.

Giulio Cesare Cortese and the Neapolitan Language

Though Cortese was known for his promotion of Neapolitan through writing, he was part of a era of scholarship that highly valued Florentine as the standard language. Like many other scholars of his time, he studied law, receiving his degree in 1597. Following his degree, Cortese was a member of various courts, most notably that of the Grand Duke of Florence, Ferdinando de’ Medici; this goes to say that Cortese was an established, well-connected member of the leading academic groups of his time. In fact, Cortese was a member of L’Accademia della
Crusca (Serrao & Bonaffini, 2005), an exclusive group of intellectuals focused on determining which language should be regarded as the standard literary language. Cortese used his position within the academic community to promote his language, Neapolitan, promoting it as an alternative to Florentine Tuscan and emphasizing his pride in his language. In the opening octave of *La vaiasseide*, Cortese explicitly connects his linguistic choice to the choice of his subject (the *vaiasse*) and audience (the people of his city):

```
Io canto comme belle e vertolose
So’ le vaiasse de chesta cetate,
E quanto iocarelle e vroccolose,
Masema quanno stanno
‘nnamморate;
Dirraggio po’ l’autre isce belle cose
Che fanno quanno sogno mmaretate:
Ma non faccio li vierze ‘n toscanese
Azzò me ‘ntega onnuno a sto paese.
```

I sing of the beauty and virtue of the servant girls of this city, and how playful and cuddly they are, especially when they’re in love. I’ll tell, too, of the other nice things they do when they’re married. But I’m not writing my verses in Tuscan; that way everyone in this town can understand me. (Canepa, 2012, p. 8)

In line with the plan laid out in the first octave of the poem, with *La vaiasseide*, Cortese pushed back against the norms of literary tradition in both language and subject. The choice to write in Neapolitan was direct reflection of Cortese’s thoughts about the *questione della lingua*. Cortese was not in support of Tuscan being used as the standard literary language, as he took much pride in his native language. This opinion bled over into his literary works, both in implicit ways – such as his choice to write literature in Neapolitan, a minority language – and in explicit ways,
with him oftentimes directly stating his love for his language and the inherent beauty he saw in it. This can be seen, for example, in his *Viaggio di Parnaso*, as cited by Nancy Canepa (2002):

Siano tutte li vuostre e *quinci e unquanco*  
You can have your ‘hereabouts’ and

E l’*Ostro* e l’*Astro* e *cotillo* e *cotella*,  
‘nevermores’, and ‘purpureal’ and ‘astral’,

Ch’io pe me, tanto, non ne voglio manco,  
your ‘that one yonder’ and ‘that other one

De tant’isce belleze, na stizzella.  
thither’. As for me, I don’t want a drop of

Tanta paticche avesse ad ogne Banco  
such beautified things. If banks only had as

Quanta aggio vuce a Napole mia bella:  
many shiny pieces as my beautiful Naples has

Vuce chiantute de la maglia vecchia, C’hanno  
words! Solid words of old coin, powerful

gran forza, ed enchieno l’aurecchia [1.24]  
words that fill the ears. (Canepa, 2012, p. 2-3)

Cortese ardently defended his language and sought to honor its beauty by using it in literary works. Even within his city, many writers did not write entirely in Neapolitan. However, Cortese (and his colleague and old friend Giambattista Basile) endeavored to tell stories and write poetry entirely in Neapolitan, with Cortese having the most works written in solely Neapolitan at the time. In fact, *La vaiasseide* was one of the first dialect literary works in Neapolitan to be widely discussed and treated as a literary classic (Rak, 1994). For this reason, Cortese is considered to be the father of the Neapolitan literary tradition.

Cortese’s linguistic choice – to write in Neapolitan – supports and intensifies the non-traditional content his poem reflects. Cortese’s desire to push back against the thematic norms of the traditional epic was intrinsically intertwined with his desire to promote the Neapolitan language. This endeavor had a lasting effect on people, an example of which is seen in the “Defennemiento de la *Vaiasseide* contra la cenzura de L’Accademmece Scatenate”
(‘Defense of the *Vaiasseide* against the censure of the Scatenati Academicians’), a defense of the poem, written in 1628 by Bartolomeo Zito. In his defense, Zito emphasized the way in which Cortese took the themes of traditional epic poetry – battle, loyalty, love – and placed them in Naples, making the usually unrelatable elements of epic poetry tangible to his people, as cited by Canepa (2012) in her aforementioned article:

> Il’eie abbasto de mostrarence le chase da lo nnaturale… non potennoce descrivere na guerra, nè na Cetate accampata, isso nce fa vedere Napole tutta a rommore: nè chiazza, o pontone nc’è, che non siamo trommettejate, e scorzete da la Corte, e revotate da li Patrune. Po, lo conziglio de le Bajasse, eie altro, che no retratto de l’Assemblee, e de le Diete che fanno li personagge granne? La fuga che pigliano le Bajasse eie eutro che chillo spediente, che soleno pighiare li pupole maletrattate ntiempo che se vonno rebbellare da li Segnure lloro? Lo resentemiento che nne fanno li patrune, non eie na mmaggene de chello, che soleno provedere li Rri contro li rebbelle lloro? [207-208]

It was enough for him to show things as they are, naturally… not being able to describe a war, or an encamped city, he showed us Naples in an uproar: there’s not a square or corner of the city where there aren’t trumpet calls, police roundups, and revolts against masters. What is the council of the servant girls if not a portrait of the assemblies and diets that great personages hold? What is the servant girls’ escape if not that expedient to which mistreated people resort when they want to rebel against their lords? Isn’t the masters’ resentment the image of what kings feel for those who rebel against them? (Canepa, 2012, p.12)
In using the Neapolitan language, Cortese was able to comment on the linguistic issues of his time, in support and defense of his language by using Neapolitan to write an epic poem, in contrast to the traditional literary Florentine Tuscan language. Furthermore, his unconventional choice of language contextualizes and strengthens his departure from the traditional content of epic poetry.

**Women in Epic Poetry**

In addition to departing from the linguistic norms of traditional epic poetry, Cortese also challenged the predetermined thematic norms of the canon. The content of traditional epic poetry tends to revolve around themes of romance, love, and war, typically centered around chivalric male knights in the pursuit of women and glory for their people. Canonically, women in epic poetry are limited to a select few roles, and are generally relegated to being the love interest of a chivalric man; a damsel in desperate need of saving. As femininity was socially tied to passivity, vulnerability, and submissiveness, there were not many female characters displaying strength and independence. However, that is not to say that strong women were never depicted in epic poetry. Strong female characters are most often remembered in *Orlando Furioso* of Ludovico Ariosto (published in 1516), one of the most popular and read epic poems in Italian literature, seen primarily through the characters of Bradamante and Marfisa, who are female knights. Ariosto was recognized for his innovative methods of representing women in poetry, which spoke the women in his readership, as described by Virginia Cox (2011):

One reason why chivalric romance in its Ariostian formula appealed strongly to women was without a doubt the innovative quality of its representation of women, and especially its creation of the figure of the female knight, one of the most fascinating and distinctive new literary types of the age. (p. 177)
The figure of the female knight is echoed in later epic poems as well; seen, for example, in the *Gerusalemme liberata*, another popular epic poem written by Torquato Tasso in 1581. Tasso follows in Ariosto’s footsteps by representing strong women in the role of female knights, namely with his character Clorinda, who is well known for her prowess as a warrior. This pattern is followed even in epic poetry written by women, which can be seen, for example, in *Il floricoro* by Moderata Fonte (written also in 1581), with her depiction of Risamante, a female knight seen as equally powerful to her male counterpart in the poem, Floridoro. Though this representation of women as powerful knights was novel, praise of women through female characters of this variety only spoke to the virtues of a very specific type of women – the female warrior. Masculine women are seen as a flawed being, except in the case of the female knight, as her ability to be both a woman and to excel in a masculine role is seen as phenomenal, as described by Pamela Benson (1992):

> A woman who is masculine violates nature, with one exception: if this violation of nature is socially beneficial, it may be described as miraculous rather than unnatural; the woman might be described as temporarily containing a male soul within her female body. Usually, however, those who employ this theory praise women’s feminine virtue as superior in kind to men’s masculine virtue. (p.5)

Chivalric epic poetry’s propensity to represent strong women as inherently masculine overtly ties power to manhood. The masculinization of female knights in epic poetry even goes as far as dictating the perception of the women’s bodies – many epic poems with female knights include a scene in which the women are perceived to be men, until they remove their helmet or armor and reveal their gender, much to the surprise of those around them (Benson, 1992, p. 125-126). Thus,
strong women are seen as masculine both in appearance and profession in the case of the female warrior archetype.

In other words, traditional epic poetry only demonstrates a positive portrayal of powerful women when they are depicted as possessing traditionally masculine traits. However, positive views of women’s independence in epic poetry is contingent upon their inability to disrupt order or preexisting social codes. Bradamante, for example, is a fantastic knight, but she does not physically challenge any of the male warriors in *Orlando Furioso*. Furthermore, Bradamante fights her battles and makes her journeys in the pursuit of one goal – to be reunited with her lover, Ruggiero, in order to fulfill the prophecy stating that they will be the predecessors of the Este dynasty in Italy. Thus, despite her occupying a traditionally masculine role, she does so in order to fulfill a traditionally feminine one – that of the wife and mother. Strong women in traditional epic poetry are praised when they display an ability to succeed in a traditionally male arena, which inherently limits the type of woman represented as powerful. Furthermore, this style of representation instills the belief that women should be respected, but only when they are accomplished and live up to a set of ideals created by men; this is again echoed by Benson (1992). “The Narrator’s goodwill toward accomplished women does not seem to be in doubt, but the actual existence of such women does” (p. 133). Ariosto, with his *Orlando Furioso* praises his ‘accomplished’ female characters, neglecting the fact that women, in reality, rarely lived up to his lofty ideals, as the standards he created for women were fundamentally unachievable.

The female characters in Cortese’s *La vaiasseide* contrast greatly the traditional representations described above, as seen in various women throughout the poem. In *La vaiasseide* women are primarily represented as *vaiasse*, or female domestic servants, with the three main characters – Renza, Carmosina, and Pretiosa – filling this role. In this way, the
vaiasse are depicted in a traditionally passive role and feminine occupation; they do not fulfill the masculine ideals of independence and strength like those of the female knights in traditional epic poetry. However, this does not mean that Cortese portrays these women as weak or helpless. Rather, he recounts a story of those very women revolting against the social order imposed upon them. The vaiasse wish to marry their lovers; however they are restricted from doing so by their padroni, or masters. In response to the rules preventing them from doing as they please, the vaiasse band together to push back against these rules, finding power in collective will. Thus, the role of the vaiasse goes directly against the role of women in traditional epic poetry; they are described as powerful, even within their traditionally feminine role of servitude, and they use said power to disrupt the social code that governs their lives. Furthermore, the vaiasse are physically depicted as feminine, another contrast between them and the female knight. There is never any doubt that the vaiasse are women, unlike the moments in which the female knights are mistaken as men. Therefore, their independence and power is divorced from masculinity in a way that was not seen in the canonical representation of women in epic poetry.

The vaiasse are not the only strong women seen in La vaiasseide, for one of the most important roles in the poem is that of the mammana, or midwife. The midwife plays a central role in Canto Two of the poem, wherein she delivers Renza’s daughter and emotionally supports her through the process of childbirth. Madamma Vasta, the midwife, has a detailed knowledge of anatomy and medical science regarding childbirth, and is able to safely deliver Renza’s baby despite early-on complications. In a time when medical knowledge was typically seen only in male medical professionals, her knowledge is seen as spectacular. Thus, the role of the midwife does, in some ways, reflect the idea of the “accomplished woman” seen in traditional epic poetry, through the success found in a traditionally masculine field, that of medical professions.
However, Madamma Vasta situates herself in an complex position in regards to the gendered perceptions of her occupation. Midwifery occupies a particularly interesting role in terms of gender dynamics, for it is a medical position – an occupation traditionally relegated to men in that time period – but is also seen as a feminine role, for it deals with birth and childcare. Thus, the midwife occupies a traditionally feminine role, but finds power within that. In fact, she is depicted as so knowledgeable that she, at times, appears to be almost magical. This is seen, for example, in her concoction of remedies that resemble potions, in the effort to aid the pained Renza. In addition to being incredibly knowledgeable in regards to her medical position, Madamma Vasta is also seen as a sage woman with valuable wisdom to impart on her younger counterparts. Her wisdom is a fountain of knowledge that could only have been gained through her life as a woman – she gives Renza advice on relationships, sexual dynamics, and ways to navigate the world more generally, all of which she knows from her lived experience. Thus, despite being depicted as powerful, independent, and wise in the ways in which men typically are portrayed in epic poetry, Madamma Vasta finds power in her femininity through both her female-centered occupation and her wisdom gained through womanhood. In this way, in the roles of both the midwife and the vaiasse, Cortese depicts women as powerful, independent, and autonomous through a valorization of traditionally feminine roles and characteristics, departing from the confines in which traditional epic poetry places women.

Translation Methodology and Theory

My literary and socio-linguistic analysis of La vaiasseide reveals how Cortese’s poem defied both the emerging linguistic standards of Italian and the norms of chivalric epic poetry as a genre. Building upon and expanding this analysis, my translation of the second canto of the poem aims at communicating the significance of this poem and the weight of this history.
Though I had studied translation prior to embarking on this project, I had never before worked so closely with a singular text in the way I have with *La vaiasseide*. Early on in my translation process, I read Roman Jakobson’s article “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” (2007) and had my first encounter with an old Italian adage — *traduttore, traditore*, literally translated to ‘translator, traitor’. In essence, *traduttore, traditore* encompasses the idea that a translation is inherently a betrayal, thus making the translator a traitor. It would be impossible to perfectly communicate every single aspect of a text from one language to another; something is bound to get lost in translation. This was far from my last encounter with this Italian expression, as I would often happen across it in the following months. Despite its seemingly pessimistic view of the act of translation, I felt liberated each time I read it; if betrayal is an inherent part of translation, then it is pointless to try to avoid the inevitable. In accepting that I would never, could never, create a ‘perfect’ translation — the elusive thing that be — of *La vaiasseide*, I was free to decide the aspects to which I wanted to be the most faithful. For example, I knew from the beginning of this project that I intended to abandon the rhyme scheme present in the original text, for the phonetic aspects of the poem were not of the utmost importance to either my interpretation of the text or the characteristics which I hoped to communicate through translation. I was, of course, aware from the start that this project would be a reflection of the text I am translating, and wanted to produce a translation that honored the work of Giulio Cesare Cortese. I began translating first from Neapolitan to Italian, and initially found myself proceeding quite tentatively; I would have many versions of each line of poetry, sometimes as many as eight versions for a single sentence, as I was terrified of mistranslating a word or phrase or the storyline itself. As time went on and I became more comfortable with both translating and the
text itself, I was able to move much quicker, with more confidence, though I never fully lost my fear of misrepresenting the poem.

After having translated into Italian, I began the second part of my translation, from Neapolitan and Italian into English. Though translating into English of course had its benefits, it was much more difficult than translating into Italian had been, at a structural level. The syntax and morphology of Neapolitan is not entirely dissimilar to that of Italian, and thus, I faced no major problems when translating Neapolitan lines of poetry into Italian lines of poetry. English, however, is quite removed grammatically from that of Neapolitan; things such as the order of words in a sentence or the ways in which clauses were pieced together is different between Neapolitan and English, and even between Italian and English. For example, in my original attempt to translate Octave 3 into English, I remained faithful to the structure of the poetry line format and produced the following reading:

She simply gives birth, and is put in salvation
Which arrives at once, and birthed a daughter,
That seemed like a bladder full of air
And directly after the birth, pooped
And Menechiello prays, and pleased
Says “Go to Tata, daughter of cow/slut,
That which has the beautiful legacy to do
Needs it to start with a daughter.

With a translation based on faithfulness to the sentence and poetry structure, I felt the meaning of the words slipping away. Thus, I wrote another version of the same octave without following the line structure, producing the following:
Thus, she gives birth, for when the time came she is brought to salvation and births a daughter. Directly after the birth, she looked like a bladder full of air, she pooped. Menechiello happy and pleased said, “Go to Tata, daughter of cow, for if you want to have a good legacy, it starts with a daughter.”.

Allowing myself to deviate from the poetry line format freed me to focus on the element of the poem I value most – the plot and themes the text presents. Adhering to the poetry line format obscured the meaning of the instructions, for a fidelity to the original syntax rendered the section unclear; in contrast, the significance of the text can be better understood in prose format as it allows more change to happen structurally within the sentences. For example, the first translation reads, “That seemed like a bladder full of air / And directly after the birth, pooped”. Though it is structurally faithful to the original, it is entirely incomprehensible. On the other hand, the second version written in prose reads, “Directly after the birth, she looked like a bladder full of air¹, and she pooped”. By switching the order of the clauses to put ‘directly after the birth’ earlier in the sentence, the order of events becomes clearer. As seen in my struggle with this octave, I found it particularly arduous to render the words of Giulio Cesare Cortese into poetry line format in my English translation, and soon came to realize that if I were to prioritize the line structure of the poem, I might lose the storyline. Thus, I decided to write the English translation in prose format, with each octave of the original poem translating into a small paragraph of prose. This decision allowed me to focus on the plotline of the poem, the part of the text which I desired to communicate most to my readers.

Though I was constantly working to communicate the plotline of the poem effectively, through the process of translating into English, I noticed something interesting – I didn’t fully

¹ Balloons were originally made of pigs’ bladders. Thus, Renza is being compared to a balloon directly after birth, for her stomach is still protruding but no longer holding a child
understand my own translation. I understood each word individually, and oftentimes whole sentences and fragments of the plot or the broad outline of the storyline; however, I was unable to decipher the fine details of the story arc in its entirety. For example, in Octaves 19 and 20, a group of vaiasse are gathered together and discuss their plans to get dressed up. Two women compare themselves to the mythological figures of Bacchus and Charon. One woman, Rosa, asks who they are, and another, Caradonia, initially thought that they are vegetables rather than gods. Another woman, Caradonia, responds condescendingly and with an air of superiority, informing Rosa that they are the gods of beauty. I had previously understood that the vaiasse were together and chatting, and that they were discussing their desire to spruce up. However, it was not until I translated the text into English that the full force of the irony hit me – Bacchus is a male god of wine and pleasure, and Charon is the guide to the underworld, notoriously hideous; neither of them are goddesses of beauty. Thus, though I had understood the general information about the scene through my translation of the octaves into Italian, the humor and details of the joke were lost on me until I translated the text into English. I was shocked; how could I have produced a draft of a translation that my thesis advisor was pleased with, when I couldn’t wholly understand what I myself had written? In this way, my initial draft of my English translation proved to be a test of knowledge, a way of reading, a method of studying the text; as Italo Calvino notes in his 1982 essay Tradurre è il vero modo di leggere un testo, “Translation is the true way of reading a text… the drama of translation as I've described it is more powerful the closer the two languages are, while between Italian and English the distance is such that translating means recreating to some degree, and the smaller the temptation to make a literal transcription, the more likely the translator is to preserve the spirit of a text” (Calvino, 2023, p. 91). By translating the text into English – my first language, quite removed from Italian – I had to translate not just the words,
but the feeling of the story itself. It felt much like putting on my glasses; though I had been able to see the storyline in my Italian translation, it felt ever so slightly blurry, the plotline always just out of reach. However, as I translated it into English, the story line became clearer to me, more defined. Translation is a method of reading, interpreting, familiarizing oneself with a text, and through my process of doubly translating, I was able to understand the story in a way I may not have been able to otherwise.

Keeping in mind my priorities as a translator – to communicate the story and cultural significance of *La vaiasseide* – I was often being asked and asking myself a range of questions as to how I should translate this text, the most pressing of which regarding what language I should translate into. The decision regarding which language(s) to translate into was not simple. Immediately I knew I wanted to translate into both Italian and English, a choice that was at once both logistical and theoretical. In a logistical sense, I wanted to produce a written work that could be read by members of both the Transnational Italian Studies Department and the Linguistics Department, which would necessitate the use of English in addition to the use of Italian. Moreover, translating the poem two times over would be structurally beneficial as well, as it would be nearly impossible to translate directly from Neapolitan to English. There are very few Neapolitan-English dictionaries or grammar guides, and of those, virtually none focus on the translation of seventeenth century Neapolitan to English. Thus, the task of translating from Neapolitan into English is inherently a multistep process. As stated by Balma (2011), making this process evident to the readers is a valuable endeavor, “The decision to include a version in Standard Italian in a published trilingual work reflects the editors’ awareness of the importance of bearing evidence of the gradual process of translation” (p. 5). Thus, producing a tripartite
translated work would also be beneficial in a theoretical way, as it would demonstrate the many steps I had taken in order to translate such a text.

The act of translation is one that is inherently influenced by the translators themselves. A translation is an intervention in the ‘life’ of a text, and calls into question the definition of authorship, as stated by Venuti (2018):

On the one hand, translation is defined as a second-order representation: only the foreign text can be original, an authentic copy, true to the author's personality or intention, whereas the translation is derivative, fake, potentially a false copy. On the other hand, translation is required to efface its second-order status with transparent discourse, producing the illusion of authorial presence whereby the translated text can be taken as the original. (p. 6)

A translator produces texts that are neither fully original, nor fully derivative; instead, they are an interpretation of the original text itself. Thus, according to Venuti, it is crucial for a translator to make their position within their translation apparent to their readers. Making the gradual and multifaceted process of translation overt to my readers is one of the ways in which I render myself visible within my translation. It is imperative to make it overt that this work is a translation, and that a translation is always colored by the decisions of the translator.

The question of language did not stop once I decided to translate into both Italian and English; not only was the question of which languages pertinent, but also which variety of each language I would (or should) utilize. Since La vaiasseide is a work originally written in a regional language of Italy – Neapolitan – I heavily debated which varieties of English and Italian I should use for my translation. Is it better to translate such a text into an antiquated or modern linguistic variety? Is it more faithful to translate into a standard or non-standard linguistic
variety? Translation scholars within the field of Italian dialect poetry have conflicting theories regarding such problems. Some argue that to render a work of Italian dialect literature into a standard language erases the social significance of the use of dialect in the first place, a stance explained by Bonaffini (1997), “In other words, translating into a standard language, the translator cannot capture the eccentricity of vernacular speech, its function as an alternative, a non-normative deviation from the norm” (p. 280). Within this school of thought, to translate a non-standard language into a standard language neglects the significance of the language choice by ignoring the sociocultural relationship between the standard and non-standard languages. Other scholars, however, argue that translating Italo-Romance dialect literature into non-standard linguistic varieties of Italian emphasizes the peripheral position of the marginalized language by underlining its distance from the standard in a pejorative manner, as asserted by Balma (2011) “… arguing instead that ‘if we render the poems into any kind of dialect, slang, or jive talk, we hear them only as the middle- and upper-class Roman would have heard them and hears them now’” (p. 3). In other words, translating a piece of Italo-Romance dialect literature into non-standard varieties of Italian only goes to alienate the readers from the text in a way that reinforces the linguistic hierarchy by forcing the marginalized language and culture to remain in the social position of otherness.

With the aforementioned translation theory in mind, I myself decided to translate La vaiasseide from Neapolitan into modern Italian, and modern American English - or more precisely, into my own variety of American English. I did so for two main reasons – firstly, I thought of the effect I wanted my translation to have on my readers, and the feelings I wished to evoke within them. When reading my translation, I want the readers to feel as though they can connect and feel close to the text, in the way that readers of La vaiasseide might have felt in
seventeenth century Naples. This, of course, cannot be true for all readers, since we all utilize different linguistic varieties of English and/or Italian, and it would be impossible to tailor the translation to each individual reader. However, with my choice to translate into modern speech, I intend to make the text more generally accessible in the hopes that my translation will transport readers into the text, rather than leaving them feeling as though they are stuck on the outside looking in. Secondly – and to me, more importantly – I thought about the ways in which my linguistic choices would ultimately reflect on Neapolitan, especially for those unfamiliar with the language. To render La vaiasseide into a marginalized variety of modern English or Italian, I would inherently be making the argument that the linguistic and sociopolitical situations of a modern-day Italian or English variety can be equated with that of seventeenth century Neapolitan, which would ultimately be both untrue and a disservice to all languages involved.

The Question of ‘Standard’

The choice to translate La vaiasseide into ‘standard’ Italian and English forced me to confront a question that seemingly had no answer – what truly is a ‘standard’ language? As mentioned above, one could clearly pinpoint a variety of Italian that has been designated as the national standard, mainly for writing, but for spoken language as well. However, within an American context, it is much more difficult to clearly discern what the standard is. The main difference between the linguistic context of Italy and that of the United States is that a discourse such as la questione della lingua has never taken place in a similar fashion in America; even amongst intellectuals and scholars, there is no agreed-upon designated standard language. Furthermore, as stated by Bex (1999), different Americans value different varieties of American English, influencing what they consider the ‘standard’ to be, “A commonplace in United States (hereafter US) linguistics is that every region supports its own standard; none is the locus (or
source) of the standard. Historically that is a fair assessment, for no long-term centre of culture, economy and government has dominated in the US…” (p. 236). Thus, Standard American English is more an abstraction than an actual language variety. As expressed by Bex (1999), “SAE [Standard American English] is an idealization. Nobody speaks this dialect; and if somebody did, we wouldn't know it because SAE is not defined precisely” (p. 236). Even within singular dialects or regional variations of American English, there is still linguistic variation. This variation, as stated by Greenfield (2011), is on the basis of diverse social identities, “Even within a community of people that speaks one of these more regional varieties, variation intrinsically occurs, often according to age group, social class, gender, political orientation, and other factors, influenced both by proximity to others and as a means of identification” (p. 41). Thus, it is obvious that the concept of ‘standard’ American English is not based on any central qualities of the language itself. Rather, it is instead based on the privilege of the speaker, as argued by Greenfield (2011), “‘Standard English’ is a qualifier ascribed to many ways of speaking (and by extension, though differently, writing) by privileged white people or, perhaps more accurately, any variety of English that has not been associated historically with resistance by communities of color” (p.43). In other words, there is no true standard in American English, but instead ‘standard’ English is merely an intangible conglomeration of the ways in which privileged people speak in America.

As we now know, while there is a clearly designated standard language in Italy, as has been decided through the extensive intellectual debate of questione della lingua, the same concept does not exist in America. This, in turn, calls into question what it means to be a ‘standard’ language, in a linguistic sense of the term. In order to best understand what it means to be a ‘standard language’, it is imperative to define the term. As stated by Bex (1999), a standard
language is one that has undergone a process of standardization. Language standardization entails the codification and stabilization of a language. However, even this precise definition gives way to more questions, one of which regards the mode of communication; does standardization refer to that of written or spoken language? Written language tends to change and evolve slower than spoken language. Thus, it is more likely to be the method of communication that scholars attempt to standardize, as it is easier to fixate on a variety of language that is more stable. However, it is important to remember that although written language is more fixed than spoken language, it is far from stagnant. In fact, languages are in a constant and everpresent state of change and variation; as stated by Greenfield (2011) modern language cannot be standardized as they are in a constant state of flux, “Living languages cannot be standardized. The only standard languages—languages with finite boundaries and comprehensively accountable features—are dead languages” (p. 39). Thus, standardization is a process without an end goal, as affirmed by Bex (1999), “I have suggested elsewhere that standardisation is best treated as a process, since attempts to locate a specific standard (product) are doomed to failure, given that all languages (except dead languages) vary and are in a constant state of change…” (p. 199). It then makes sense that attempts at language standardization in Italy have been ongoing for centuries, since the process of standardization is one without a foreseeable end.

While in Italy scholars have extensively debated what the standard language is or should be, I argue that a more important question has long been ignored: should there even be a standard at all? The concept of a ‘standard’ language should be rejected on two levels – firstly, on a sociopolitical level, and secondly on a evolutionary linguistic level. Regarding the sociopolitical argument against ‘standard’ language, as we can see in the context of American English, a ‘standard’ language is more so a social abstraction than a definable linguistic variety. The
concept of a ‘standard’ language is based on social privilege; thus, the linguistic variety designated as the ‘standard’ often goes to further privilege those with sociopolitical power and marginalize those without. On a logistical level, even when a country designates a linguistic variety as the standard – as seen in Italian linguistic history with Classical Latin, and then again with Florentine – it is nearly impossible to truly standardize a language. Languages are constantly shifting and evolving; to attempt to standardize language is to engage in a neverending chase in pursuit of an unattainable linguistic idealization. Though it is interesting and valuable to discuss what the standard languages of Italy and America are, it is much more important to note the impracticality of attempting to standardize a language, and the negative social consequences such a process could incur.

**Conclusion**

How can we understand Cortese’s defiance in the face of the imposition of social and linguistic norms, and how can this defiance be maintained through the act of translation? In response to these questions, I have provided a literary and socio-linguistic analysis of *La vaiasseide* and the context in which this poem was written, conceptualizing the significance of Cortese’s choice to write in Neapolitan, a marginalized language. Such an analysis enriched and in turn was deepened by the translation of part of Cortese’s poem. As Cortese’s translator, I had to confront the question of what it means to be a ‘non-standard’ language, and, in turn, the question of what it means to be a ‘standard’ language in the first place.

My investigation of the socio-cultural significance of Cortese’s choice to write in a marginalized, ‘non-standard’ language raises broader questions about what are standard languages and what it means to exist outside of them. As we have seen, the question of what a standard language is has pervaded the minds of intellectuals, linguists, and writers alike for
centuries. It is a common misconception that a ‘standard’ language – a term with a convoluted definition – is the most sophisticated form of a given language, in terms of linguist structure. As my thesis shows, this is an oversimplification. In reality, the concept of a standard language is inherently tied to the identity of the speaker; linguists have found time and time again that the designation of a standard language is predicated on the social power and privilege of the speaker, rather than on the linguistic value of the variety itself (Greenfield, 2011). Thus, a ‘standard’ language does not only create a set of linguistic norms, but a set of social norms as well. In declaring what a standard language is, we are also declaring who can speak it, where it can be spoken, and what it can be used to be spoken about.

La vaiasseide, thus, exists as a blatant effort to push back against the socio-cultural and linguistic regulations inherently imposed by the designation of a standard language. In writing an chivalric epic poem centered on working class women, and by having done so in the Neapolitan language, Cortese departs from tradition and mocks the social and linguistic norms that define the chivalric epic genre. Together, the analysis provided above and the translation presented below elucidate the ways in which La vaiasseide was an act of cultural and linguistic defiance; the poem gives voice to Cortese’s rejection to the growing standardization of the Italian literary and linguistic canon, while simultaneously shedding light on the intersection of linguistic, literary, and socio-cultural norms.
Figliai Renza, e facette na figliola
Che lo marito n'appe à spantecare:
Ogne vaiassa n'have cannavola
E se ne sbigna pe se sgoliare,
Vace lo banno, Prezzosa sola
scrive à Cienzo, e se vole mmaretare
Nce la dà lo patrone, e Carmosina
Non pò fuire, e posta à na cantina.

Renza partori una figlia
Che suo marito spasimava da tanto tempo:
Ogni vaiassa ne aveva desiderio
E se ne fuggono per togliersi la voglia
Emesso il bando, Prezzosa
scrive a Cienzo e vuole sposarsi
Il padrone non lo permette e Carmosina
Non può fuggire e viene rinchiusa in una

cantina.

CANTO SECUNNO.

CANTO SECONDO.
Renza campaie commo na segnora

E scette prena ncapo de no mese;
Ogne uno le diceva à la bon hora
Te vea mamma de Conte, e de Marchese,
A Mineco parea mille anne onne hora
Che la mogliere trasesse à lo mese
Ped havere no ninno o na nennella
Che la portasse à mammara nocella.

(1)

Renza visse come una signora

E in un mese, lei rimase incinta,
Ognuno le diceva, “Alla buon’ora,
Ti vedevi mamma di Conte, e di Marchese”,
E a Mineco ogni ora sembravano mille anni
Che sua moglie arrivasse all’ultimo mese
Per avere un bimbo o una bimba
Da portare sulla sedia papale

(1)

Renza lived like a lady, and in a month, she became pregnant. At last, everyone told her, “Go see the mothers of Conte and Marchese”. To Mineco, every hour felt like a million years as he waited for his wife to give birth to the little boy or girl to put on the papal chair.

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1 la ‘mammara nocella’ era un gioco: due persone si tengono per le braccia e la terza sta seduta sopra
2 the ‘papal chair’ is a game: two people link arms in order to seat a third person upon their arms
Venne chessa hora, ma la creatura
Poco mancaie, che no moresse nfoce,
Ma la mammana, che n’havea paura,
La capo le ntronaie ad auta voce:
Spriemmete figlia, spriemme ca non dura
Troppo st’ammaro, e verrà lo doce;
Spriemete bene mio sta ncellevriello
Aiutate, te shioshia st’agliariello.

Venne quest’ora, ma ci mancò poco che
la bambina non morisse all’uscita,
Ma l’ostetrica, che ne aveva paura,
La testa le rintronò ad alta voce:
“Spingi figlia, spingi che non dura
Troppo quest’amaro, e verrà il dolce
Spingi cara, stai calma
Aiutati, soffia in questo agliariello”

(2)

Then came the hour, but it was a close call, as the baby girl almost died during on the way out. However, the midwife, who feared that, stunned her head with her loud voice. “Push my dear, with an exertion that doesn’t last. First too much pain, and then relief will come. Push hard dear, keep calm. Help, blow into this little bottle”

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3 era una specie di ampolla in cui la partoriente soffiava dentro
4 this is a type of small bottle into which women in labor breathe in and out
Puro figliaie, e scette à sarvamiento,
Ca ionze l’ora, e fece na figliacca,
Che vessica parea chiena de viento,
E subeto che scio fece la cacca,
E Menechiello preiato, e contento,
Disse anna à Tata figlia de na Vacca,
Ca chillo c’have bella reda à fare
Besogna da na scacquera ncignare.

(3)

Così partori, e fu salva,
E quando giunse l’ora, diede alla luce una
bambinona,
Che sembrava una vescica piena di vento
E immediatamente dopo che uscì, fece la
cacca
E Menechiello, felice e contento
Disse “vieni da papà, figlia di una vacca,
che chi deve fare una bella discendenza
deve cominciare con una figlia.”

(3)

Thus, she gave birth, for when the the time
came, she is brought to salvation, and
birthed a daughter. Directly after the birth,
she looked like a bladder full of air, and
she pooped. Menechiello, happy and
pleased said, “Come to Dad, daughter of
cow, for if you want to have a good
legacy, it starts with a daughter”.
Ma la mammana disse: “mo, compare, La meco nterra, e po tu pigliatella, Ma lassamela nnanze covernare Ca piglia friddo pò la pacionella, Cossì pigliaie lo filo pe legare Lo vellicolo, e po la forfecella, E legato che l’appe tagliaie Quanto parette ad essa ch’abbastaie.

Ma ora l’ostetrica disse, “ora, compare, La poggio a terra, tu prendila dopo\(^5\) Ma lasciamela prima sistemare Altrimenti prende freddo la pacioccona, Così prese il filo per legare L’ombelico, e poi le forbici, E legato che l’ebbe, lo tagliò Quanto a lei sembrò sufficiente”.

Ma ora l’ostetrica disse, “ora, compare, La meco poggio a terra, tu prendila dopo\(^6\). But first, let me take care of her, otherwise this chubby one will get cold”. So she took the thread to tie the umbellical cord. As soon as it was tied, she took the scissors, and she cut it as much as seemed to be adequate.

E de lo sango che sghizzato n’era Le tegnette la facce, azzò che fosse, La ninna pò chiu rosolella ncerta, Perzò ne vide certe accossi rosse, E po la stese ncoppa la letèra,

E con il sangue che ne era schizzato Le tinse la faccia, affinché le guance Della bambina avessero una cera più rosata: perciò ne vide certe cosi rosse.

She painted her face with the splattered blood, so that the baby’s cheeks were rosy, thus he saw they were so red. She then she laid her on top of the bed, and she cleaned up the arms, legs, and thighs. Then she

\(^5\) era una tradizione per il riconoscimento del figlio appena nato

\(^6\) it was a tradition for the father of a newborn child to as an acknowledge them as their own by picking them up
E conciaiele le vracca, gamme, e cosse, 
Lo filo de la lengua po rompette, 
E zuccaro è cannella nce mettette.

E le sistemò braccia, le gambe, e cosce, 
Dopo tagliò il filetto della lingua 
E ci mise zucchero e cannella.

(5)

Po saliaie dinto la sportella 
No pocorillo de sale pisato, 
Decenno: Te’, ca chiu saporitella 
Sarrà quanno hai po lo marito à lato, 
E le mettette la tellecarella 
Dapò che lo nasillo appe affilato 
Co lo cotriello, e co lo fasciature 
L’arrauogliaie, che parze pisaturo.

(6)

Poi cosparse la vagina con 
Un po’ di sale pestato 
Dicendo: “tieni, che più saporita 
Sarà dopo, quando avrai il marito a fianco”, 
E le fece il solletico 
Dopo che il nasino affilò 
Con il coltello, e con le fascie 
L’avvolse, che sembrò un pestello.

(5)

(6)

broke the thread of the tongue, and put sugar and cinnamon on it.

Then she sprinkled her vagina with a bit of fine salt, saying, “Hold still, she’ll be tastier later on when she has a husband by her side”, and tickled her. After that she sharpened her nose with the knife, and wrapped her up in the swaddling cloth so that she looked like a pestle.
Po pisaie maiorana, e fasolara,  
Arùta, menta, canfora, e cardille,  
E n’erva che non saccio, puro amara, 
Che se dace pe vocca a peccerille,  
E disse: Te’ se la tenite cara 
A bevere le date sti zuchile,  
Ca n’haverrà de ventre maie dolore, 
E se farrà commo no bello shiore. 
                    (7)  
Postala nterra po disse, ora suso  
Auzala mò compare allegramente,  
E benedicetella, e chillo musso  
Le vasa, e po la mostra à s’aute gente.  
Isso lo fece, e se facette russo  
De prieio, e po la deze à no parente, 

Poi pestò la maggiorana, e la fagiolara,  
Ruta, menta, canfora, e cardi  
E un’erba che non so, anch’essa amara, 
Che si dà per bocca ai bambini  
E disse: “tieni, se vi è molto cara 
Datele da bere questi succhi,  
Così non avrà mai dolore di ventre 
E si farà come un bel fiore”.  
                    (7)  
Posatala in terra poi disse, “orsú  
Alzala ora, compare, allegramente  
E benedicila, e quel grunno  
Bacia, e poi mostrala a queste altre persone”  
Egli lo fece, e si fece rosso  
Di contentezza, e poi la diede a un parente  

Then she weighed the marjoram, *fasolara,* rue, mint, camphor, cardoon⁷, and an herb that I know is quite bitter, which one gives orally to children. She said, “Hold onto this, and if she is very dear to you, give her these these concoctions to drink. Then she’ll never have stomach pains, and will be like a lovely flower”.

After he put her on the ground, she said, “Come now, pick her up my friend, go on now merrily, and bless her. And kiss her scowling face, then show her to the others”. He did so and blushed with pride.

Then he gave her to a relative, and then

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⁷ Cardoon is an herb used to make amaro liqueur, which is typically drank after a meal to help with digestion.
E così l’uno à l’auto la mostraro
Che commo palla la pallottiaro.

(8)

Mora mo la mammana vertolosa
Redenno se nzeccaie co la figliata,
E disse non me stare regnolosa
Ca chiu fatica è fare na colata,
- Non dicere commare tale cosa
Ca tutta quanta me sento schiattata -
(Essa respose) io tengo cellevriello
De non nce stare chiù co Menechiello.

(9)

De chesto me ne rido, la mammana
Respose tanno, ca non tanto preisto
Passarà figlia mia chesta semmana,

(9)

E cosi l’uno all’altro se la mostraron
Che come una palla la palleggiavano.

(8)

Ma immediatamente l’ostetrica virtuosa
Ridendo si avvicinò con la figlia,
E disse “Non mi stare piagnucolosa
Che è più fatica fare un bucato”
- “Non dire, comare, tale cosa
Che tutta quanta mi sento schiattata” -
(Lei rispose) io ho in mente
Di non stare più con Menechiello”:

(9)

“Di questo me ne rido - l’ostetrica
Rispose subito - che non tanto presto
Passerà figlia mia questa settimana,

“At this, I laugh” – the midwife responded
at once – “for this week will pass so
quickly, my child, that you will stay with
Che farrai il resto con tuo marito. 
Tu dici questo adesso che non stai bene
E il dolore ti fa perdere la testa
Ma prima di tre giorni te ne pentirai
E farai come fece un’altra. Ora mi senti. (10)

Dice ch’era na vota na zitella,
C’have le doglie, e non poteva figliare,
E strillanno chiamava chesta, e chella
Che venessero presto ad aiutare,
- Che me venga (dicea) ncapo la zella.
Se chiunce cappo à fareme mprenare,
Marito traditore e che m’haie fatto
Ca me sento morire, e crepo, schiatto. (11)

Si dice che una volta c’era una ragazza al
primo parto,
Che aveva le doglie, e non poteva partorire,
E gridando, chiamava questa e quella
Che venissero presto ad aiutare,
“Che mi venga (diceva) in testa la rogn.
Se di nuovo mi capita di farmi ingravidare,
Marito traditore e che mi hai fatto
Che mi sento morire, e crepo, schiatto”.

She said that there once was a girl who
was having contractions but couldn’t give
birth. The women, screaming, called for
someone, anyone, to come and help her, “I
would rather contract scabies the become
pregnant again” she said, “Traitorous
husband you’ve made me feel like death,
like I’ll kick the bucket, like I’ll burst”.

your husband. You say this now that you
aren’t well and that you’re losing your
mind with the pain, but in three days time
you’ll change your mind and act as though
nothing happened”. 

(10)
36

(11)

A chille strille corze la Vocciera, A quelle urla corse la Vocciera, At these screams, the butcher ran. All of
E tutte le vecine della strata E tutte le vicine della strada the people in the neighborhood put
Mettettero na cosa à la spallera Misero una cosa alla testiera del letto something at the head of the bed, so that
Tanto che nquattro doglie fù figliata, Tanto che in quattro doglie fu partorita, she gave birth after four contractions. But
Ma manco la seconna sciuta l'era Ma neppure la placenta era ancora uscita the placenta hadn’t even come out yet
Quanno essa disse à chi l'havea aiutata, Quando lei disse a chi l’aveva aiutata, when she said to those who had helped her
Stipame sore mia sta chella; ascota “Riponimi, sorella mia, questa cosa; ascolta and said, “Listen here my sister: just you
Pe quanno figliarraggio n’auta vota. Per quando partorirò un’altra volta”. wait for when I give birth again”.

(12)

Voglio dicere mo ca buono saccio “Allora voglio dire che so bene “Now, I want to say that I know well you
De vuie aute zitelle l'appetito Di voi altre ragazze la brama girls’ desire for even a little morsel of a
Ca tutte pagarissevo no vraccio Che tutte pagherebbero un braccio husband, for which you’d pay an arm and
Pe no morzillo schitto de marito, Per un piccolo morso di marito, a leg. And I know you’d rather have hugs

_________________________

8 la macellaia
E chiu priesto volite quarche abbraccio,
E più presto volete qualche abbraccio,
than a new dress. Ugh, poor me, for when

Che ve ncignare nuovo no vestito,
Che indossare per la prima volta un vestito
I was young, I so often caressed my
Uh, mara me, quanno era giovene io
nuovo
Fonzo.
Quante carizze fice à Fonzo mio.
Quante carezze feci a Fonzo mio.

(13)

Uh, povera me, quando ero giovane io
Quante carezze fice à Fonzo mio.

(13)

Gaude mo, figlia, che gaudere puoie
godi ora, figlia, che puoi godere
Be happy now, dear one, while you still
Ca commo po si vecchia non porraie:
che quando poi sarai vecchia non potrai:
can, for when you become older you
Giovene tu puoie fare zò che vuoi,
da giovane tu puoi fare tutto quello che
cannot. When you are young you can do
Ma vecchia nò, ca si chiena de guaie,
vuoi,
whatever you want, but when you are
Se na vecchia vo dire li guaie suoie,
Ma da vecchia no, che sei piena di guai,
older you can’t, because you are full of
Uh, negra me, ca no la scompe maie,
Se una vecchia vuole dire i suoi guai,
problems. If an old woman wants to talk
Ma lassammo da banna ssò parlare
Uh, povera me, che non la finisce mai,
about her problems, ugh, poor me, it will
Ca passa llora de te covernare.
Ma noi lasciamo da parte questi discorsi
never end. But let us leave this
Che passa l’ora di aver cura di te.
conversation aside. It’s time to sort you
(14)
out.

(14)
Hora pruóieme cha chillo arvariello
Addove stace chello metredato
E damme puro ssò fiascheriello
Con chello grieco che non è adacquato
E sta grasta co l’uoglio de lauriello
Co l’aute cose, ch’aggio apparecchiato
Acqua ed uoglio de shiure, e lo
cemmino,
E nnonza, e meza de zuccaro fino”.

(15)

Subeto tutto chesto le portaie
Madamma Vasta, e derole pe vocca
Lo metredato, e grieco, e po l’ontaie
Con chelle ogliora, e disse: “Mo te
tocca

Le portò tutto questo subito
La signora Vasta, e glielo diede per bocca
La medicina, e il vino greco, e poi la unse
Con quegli oli, e disse, “Ora ti tocca

Ora porgimi quel barattolo
Dove sta quel medicamento
E dammi pure questo fiaschetto⁹
Con quel vino greco che non è annacquato
E questo vasetto con l’olio di alloro
Con le altre cose, che preparai
Acqua ed olio di fiori, e il comino
E un’uncia e mezza di zucchero fino.

Now pass me that sapling, where the
down, and the jar of laurel oak oil with the
other things that I prepared – water and
flower oil, cummin, and an ounce and a
half of fine sugar”.

She brought this to Signora Vasta right
away, who gave it to her orally – the
medicine, the fenugreek, and lastly
anointed with the oils. She said, “Now you
have to eat the cake and the pigeon, of

⁹ bottiglione
La torta, e lo peocione, pocca l'haie,
E mangia presto, e poi va’ a riposare.
which you have little. Eat it quickly and
E magna à la bon'hora, e po te cocca.
E se per caso ti facesse fare un po’ di cacca
then go get some rest. And if it somehow
E se purgasse fuorze poccorrillo
Inserisci (ah, ora lo sai!) questa supposta”
makes you poop a little bit, insert (ah, now
Npizzare (àh, tu sai mò) chisto penillo
(16)
you know!) this suppository”
(16)
Ma lassammole mo co li guaie lloro
Ma ora lasciamole con i loro guai
But let us leave them with their problems,
E decimmo de Zeza, e de Grannizia,
E diciamo di Zeza, e di Grannizia,
and turn to speak of Zeza, Grannitia,
De Meneca, de Ciancia, e quanta foro,
Di Meneca, di Ciancia, e quante furono,
Meneca, Ciancia, and those who went
Che contra Amore gridaro iostitia,
Che contro Amore gridarono giustizia,
against love screaming for justice. Every
Onne vaiassa fece concestoro
Ogni vaiassa fece una congiura,
vaïassa conspired and became angry that
De chelle che trasetterto a malitia,
Di quelle che se la presero
Renza – who was so plain and ugly – got
Pocca primmo de lloro mmaretata
Perché poco prima di loro si era sposata
married before them.
S’è Renza, tutta scura e sciallacquata.
Renza, tutta brutta e slavata.
(17)
Meneca fu la prima che parlò
E con una rabbia che buttava fuoco,
E gli occhi lagrinosi cominciò:
“Avete visto Renza con il cuoco
Come se la gode? e noi stiamo nella nostra condizione
E come, paralitiche non cambiamo mai posto:
Ora su, facciamo in modo
Che ognuna goda prima di domani sera”.

(18)

“Mo m’allisso”, Grannizia le rispose,
“Ora mi faccio bella”, Grannizia le rispose,
“Now I’ll make myself pretty” Grannitia responded, “I’ll dress up and then do my makeup that makes my cheeks rosy. Then
I’ll just like the goddess Bacchus”.
E tanto me strellico, e po me nchiacco,
“E mi agghindo tanto e poi mi trucco,
Nessuna di voi mi sorpassa in queste cose”.
Che faccio queste guance come le rose,
E proprio assomiglio alla Dea Bacco”.
E proprio pareraggio la Dea Bacco”.

(18)
“Nulla de vuie me passa de sse cose, Respose Ciancia, io tutte mo ve smacco, Ca faccio schitto quattro ricce nfronte, E pareraggio po la Dea Caronte.

(19)

“Ah ah che riso, ma non n’aggio voglia Chi è so Caronte, e Bacco, che decite?” Le disse Rosa fosse huorto de foglia, Response Caradonia, te sentite Eie no sanguinaccio, eie na mnoglia! Ente megnogne, è chesto non sapite, Mara me vregogna, ù che scioccheza! Chesse songo le Dee de la bellezza!

(20)

“None of you outdo me in these things” responded Ciancia, “Now I’ll show you all up by making only four curls in front of my face, so that I look just like the goddess Charon”.

(19)

“Ah ah how funny, but I don’t want to do that. Who are this Charon and Bacchus that you all speak of?” said Rosa. “Maybe they are edible vegetables”.

Caradonia responded. “Listen to you all – ‘it’s black pudding, it’s salami’. What the hell, you all don’t know this? Poor me, what a shame, how foolish, they are the Gods of beauty!”.
“Ma parliamo di quello che ci importa
Ognuno parla ora con il signore,
Everyone speak now with your man. Or

Onne una parla mo co lo segnore,
O per la finestrella, o per la porta,
Or speak out of the window or door, let him

O pe lo fenestriello, ò pe la porta,
E le faccia sapere il suo amore;
know your love. Make him a gift or favor,

E le faccia à sapere lo suo ammore;
E per mostrare che muore d’amore per lui
like an intricate handkerchief with

E pe mostrare ca ped isso è morta
Le faccia un regalo, o un favore
embroidery or lace edging, to show him

Le faccia no presiento, ò no favore
Cioè un fazzoletto lavorato
that you’re dying with love for him”

Zoè no moccaturo lavorato
A piede di mosca , o con l’orlo traforato”.

De pede moscha, ò d'afreco perciato.

(21)

(21)

Manco essa havea scomputo de parlare,
Neppure fini di parlare,
They all together agreed before she had
even finished speaking. When the sun

Che tutte quante nzembre s’accordaro,
Che tutte quante insieme si accordarono,
When the sun went down, tired of hanging in the sky,

Quanno lo sole stracquò de trottere
Quando il sole, stanco di trottere
they went down to the sea to look for that

Pe fare de lo cuorpo scenne à maro,
Per andare di corpo scende a mare,
which they had often longed for. Thus, I

De ire tutte quante ped asciare
Di andare tutte quante per cercare

Chille pe chi zi vote spantecare.
Quello per cui più volte spasimarono.

“But we speak of important matters.
Cossì concruso, onne una s’abbiaie
Decennno: Po’nce vederimmo craie”.

Dicendo: Poi ci vediamo domani”.

(22)

Ma Pretiosa che non potea scire,
E se sente a schiattare de martello
Pe non volere ntutto asevole
Da lo puzzo chiammaie no scolariello,
Che le screvette quanto sappe dire
C’havea no bello nciegno, e
cellevriello,
E fecero na lettera amorosa,
Bene mio bello, è che pentata cosa.

(23)

Magnifeco (dicea) muto lustrisseo,
Che me fai spantecare è ire nzuoccole,

“Extraordinairy” the letter read, “very
distinguished, which makes me yearn and

conclude, everyone left saying, “see you
tomorrow”.

But Pretiosa couldn’t go out. She felt like
she’d be tormented to death, terrified of
failing everything. She called on a
schoolboy from the well, who wrote what
she said to him with great wit and smarts,
writing a love letter. My dear ones, what a
marvelous thing, what a lovely thing!

“Extraordinairy” the letter read, “very
distinguished, which makes me yearn and
Segnò Cenzullo mio caro, e bellissimo, 
Chiù saporito ca non sò li vruoccole, 
Deh vienem’a trovare ca certissem 
Haie tuorto, e non me fare tanta nguoccole. 
Viene, musso mio d’oro, à conzolareme 
Se no sò resoluta de sbentrareme.

(24)

Subeto la chiuudette; e seiellaie 
Co pane mazzecato, e lo scolaro 
Pe farele piacere la portaie 
A Cienzo zuo moscoliatò, e caro, 
Ntra tanto onne vaiassa se trovaie 
Lo guzzo, è gia contente ne restaro,

SIGNORE CENZULLO MIO CARO, E BELLISSIMO, 
PIÙ SAPORITO DEI BROCCOLI 
DEH, VENIMI A TROVARE CHE CERTAMENTE 
HAI TORTO, E NON FARMI TANTE MOINE. 
VIHENI, LABBRO MIO D’ORO, A CONSOLARMI 
SE NO, SONO RISOLUTA DI SVENTRARMI”.

(24)

LA CHIUSERO SUBITO; E LA SIGILLARONO 
CON PANE MASTICATO, E LO SCOLARO 
PER FARLE PIACERE, LA PORTÒ 
A CIEZO SUO PROFUMATO DI MUSCHIO, E CARO, 
FRATTANTO OGGI VAIASSA SI TROVÒ 
IL GOZZO¹⁰ E GIA NE RESTARONO CONTENTE

SWAY NOW. SIR CENZULLO, MY DEAR, YOU ARE 
BEAUTIFUL, TASTIER THAN BROCCOLI. COME ON, 
COME TO ME TO FIND THAT YOU ARE CERTAINLY 
WRONG, AND NOT TO FLATTER ME TOO MUCH. 
COME TO CONSOLE ME, GOLDEN LIPS OF MINE. 
IF YOU DON’T, I’M DETERMINED TO GUT 
MYSELF”.

SHE ENDED IT AT ONCE, AND SIGNED IT WITH 
CHewed BREAD. TO MAKE HER HAPPY, THE 
SCHOOLBOY BROUGHT HER TO HER DEAR 
MUSK-SCENTED CIEZO. MEANWHILE, EVERY 
VAIASSA FOUND THE SHIP¹¹, AND FOR THIS THEY 
REMAINED HAPPY. BUT EVERY PADRONE WAITS

¹⁰ È UN TIPO DI BARCA, TIPICA DI SORRENTO. QUI HA UN RIFERIMENTO SESSUALE.
¹¹ THIS SPECIFICALLY REFERS TO A SHIP TYPICALLY SEEN IN SORRENTO. THIS SHIP IS ALSO AS SEXUAL INNUENDO.
Ma la Vaiassa onne patrone aspetta
Non la vedeno vace à lo trommetta.

Andò il banditore per la città
E se ne andò al Mercato, all’Orto del Conte;
De lo Conte, perzi à la Caretate,
Ai quartieri spagnoli, in mezzo al Porto,
Né mai furono trovate dai padrioni
E se ne andò al Mercato, all’Orto del Conte;
De lo Conte, perzi à la Caretate,
Ai quartieri spagnoli, in mezzo al Porto,
Né mai furono trovate dai padrioni

Ma ogni padrone aspetta la vaiassa
for their vaiassa, and, not seeing her, goes
to the herald.

(25)
(25)

The herald went around the city, going to
the market, the count’s vegetable
garden, to the Spanish steps, in the middle
of the port, and even to the charity. They
were never found by their padroni. And
with the half dead trumpet, the herald said,
“every padrone is gracious, and to those
who leave, he’ll give a coin”

Ma lasciamole ire à la bon hora
E parlammo un po’ di Cenzullo
Ma lasciamole andare alla buon’ora
E parlammo no poco de Cenzullo

But let us leave them at last, and talk a bit
about Cenzullo, who got the letter from

---

12 una moneta
Che la lettera havie de la Signora, nullo, e non nce veda punto.

E disse: “Ahimè, so cuotto co no vullo
e no iuorno me pare onne meza ora,
Che siamo nzembra, e non ne vedo
Pe fare co le iedeta lo cunto
De quante vote m’haie co ss’uocchie

(27)

E iez de corzera à lo Segnore Patrone de la bella Pretiosa,
E le decette: Io svisciolato ammore
Porto à sta toa Zitella vroccolosa,
E ped ella aggio mo no crepacore,
Che ne pozzo morire, e non è cosa
Ca vago (arrasso sia) co lo Demmonio,

E ebbe la lettera dalla Signora, Per contare con le dita
Che siamo insieme, e non ci vede nessuno, Di quante volte mi hai punto con quegli occhi”.

(27)

E andò di corsa al signore Padrone della bella Pretiosa,
E le disse: “Io, amore sviscerato
Porto a questa tua zitella leziosa
E per lei ora sono malato di cuore,
Che ne posso morire, e non è cosa
Che vado (lontano sia!) con il demonio

And he went in a rush to the gentleman, padrone of the beautiful Pretiosa. He told him, “I passionately love your prissy woman. I’m lovesick for her, so much I could die, I’ll be damned (though far from the Devil!). Thus, we will now go ahead with this marriage”.

his lady. It said, “Alas, I burn with love, and every half hour feels like a day that we are together. We don’t see anyone. Count on the fingers how many times I have seen you”.
Perzò facimmo mò sto matremmonio. Pertanto ora facciamo questo matrimonio”.

(28)

Lo patrone ch’havea buono iodiitio, Il padrone che aveva sentito bene, The padrone heard well and knew the
E sapea ca lo Munno era mbrogliato, E sapeva che il mondo era sottosopra world was upside-down, and that it all
E de chelle foiute havette nnitio E da quelle fughe ebbe inizio started with the runaways, and he
Subeto se fù bello contentato, Subito se ne rallegrò immediately rejoiced. He called her and
E chiammanno essa co Nota Prabitio E fece chiamare lei e il notaio Prabitio the notary Prabitio, who then established
Se concrudette lla lo parentato, Si stabilì così la parentela their kinship. He scheduled the
E s’appontaie che pò l’auta semmana, E si fissò l’appuntamento alla settimana appointment for next week, and told them
S’abballasse, e corresse la quintana. successiva, that one should dance and joust.

(29)

E che si ballasse e si corresse la quintana\(^{13}\)

(29)

Ma mentre se concerta pe la danza Ma mentre si decide per la danza But while they decide on the dance, let us
Tornammo à chelle che se ne foiero Torniamo a quelle che se ne fuggirono turn to those that who escaped. They ran

\(^{13}\) un torneo
Pe farele vassalle à Rè de Franza, Per fare le vassalle al Re di Francia\(^{14}\), away, and got syphilis. Now who
Hora chi penzaria fi dove iero? Ora chi penserebbe mai fin dove andaronò? would’ve thought how far things would
Chi ieze à la Chiazzetta, e chi pe stanza Chi andò nella Piazzetta e chi come stanza go? Those who went to the piazza and
Pigliaie la Cagliantescia, ò lo Quartiero Prese il quartiere malfamato della those who took to the bad neighborhoods
Vasta ca pe lo primmo carnevale Cagliantescia o il Quartiere of Cagliantescia or the Quartiere ended up
tutte iero à morire à lo spetale. Basta dire che per il primo carnevale dying in the hospital by the time of the
(30)
tutte andaronò a morire all’ospedale. (30) first carnival.

Ma Carmosina nò perché l’asciarò Ma Carmosina no perché la trovarono But not Carmosina, because they found
Quanno foiea, mmiezo li scalandrune Mentre fuggiva, in mezzo alle scale dei her as she fled, on the middle of the
Perzò li ture buono le menaro bordelli brothel’s steps. They then beat the crap out
Sempre a cuorpo de tutare, e sgrugne Perciò la testa le riempirono di botte of her, hitting her head, and clubbing her
E à bascio la cantina la chiavaro, Sempre al corpo la bastonarono e in faccia body and face. Then they tossed in the
Che steze sempre ncoppa li cravune. E giù in cantina la chiusero a chiave cellar under lock and key, and punished
Commo à gatta frostera. Ma dirraggio her, like a cat without an owner, by having

\(^{14}\text{per ammalarsi di sifilide}\)
Craie commo scette, e de lo
mmaretaggio.

(31)
Che fosse punita stando con le ginocchia sui carboni
Come una gatta senza padrone,
Ma dirò domani come usci e come si maritò.

(31)

Scompetura de lo secunno Canto.  Fine del secondo canto.  End of the second Canto

her kneel on hot coals. But I’ll tell you
tomorrow how she got out and how she
got married.
### Personaggi; List of Characters

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