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Andrea Camilleri's *Montalbano* and Elena Ferrante's *L'amica geniale*: the Afterlife of two 'glocal' series

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Abstract

This article brings together perspectives from world literature and translation studies to compare the international reception of two 'glocal' literary cases: Andrea Camilleri's *Montalbano* books, and Elena Ferrante's tetralogy *L'amica geniale*. The national and international success of these series raises important questions for scholars of translation studies, multilingualism, world literature and literary markets, and sheds light on the significance of different kinds of multilingualism in fiction and of their treatment in translation. The article addresses the following questions: how do monolingual book markets contain and discipline multilingual fiction? What happens when multilingual fiction travels through translation? How do we explain the present openness of the Anglo-American market to translated fiction with an emphasis on the vernacular? The author argues that while both Camilleri and Ferrante foreground cultural difference and linguistic incommensurability, the way in which they portray the experience of diglossia had an important impact in determining their national and international success as well as the route through which they achieved international visibility.

Keywords

Translatability, multilingualism, monolingual paradigm, dialect, literary markets, Camilleri, Ferrante

Introduction

In recent decades, authors who address the plurilingual experience in fiction, such as Yoko Tawada, Nancy Huston, Elif Şafak and Junot Díaz, have not only achieved global visibility, but have also become fully integrated into the Anglophone world literature canon. In conjunction with this development, much critical writing has emerged on how literary markets respond to today's 'post-monolingual' condition (Yildiz 2012), and scholars in comparative literature and translation studies have become concerned with the way in which the publishing industry regulates literary engagement with multilingualism (Gramlin 2016, Walkowitz 2015, Apter 2013, Yildiz 2012, Lennon 2010, Grutman 2006). Overall, this scholarship agrees that, to become publishable, a plurilingual experience must come to terms with the monolingual paradigm that still conditions national literary markets. As David Gramlin has demonstrated, the monolingual paradigm also regulates the international circulation of fiction, and plays a pivotal role among the factors that determine which books have access to world literature circuits. This is especially relevant for authors for do not come from an Anglophone or postcolonial Anglophone setting, for whom translation into English becomes a precondition for international visibility (Casanova 2007, 133; Lennon 2010, 37). At first sight, the association of world literature and monolingualism comes across as a paradox, since literary engagement with more than one language is associated with cosmopolitanism and transnational experiences. But world literature, as Emily Apter has noted, depends on translatability, underwrites cultural equivalence and tends to celebrate 'nationally or ethnically branded differences' (2013, 2). International literary markets rely on the identification

of language and nation (Grutman 1998, 159), and the monolingual paradigm continues to resist, indeed has become even stronger, in an age characterized by migration and hybridity (Gramlin 2016, 135). How do we explain, then, the popularity that fiction which engages with more than one language is presently enjoying worldwide? Brian Lennon has argued that, while the international book market requires national linguistic standardisation, it is ‘in no way upset by moderate challenge’ (2010, 11). In other words, ‘contained’, ‘soft’, ‘translational’ multilingualism is celebrated, so far as it does not challenge the national standard. What the publishing industry does not suffer is ‘hard multilingualism’, which involves a confrontation with linguistic alterity (Lennon 11, Gramlin 147). Considering these developments, this article examines the national and international reception of two Italian series of books that, in an age of multiculturalism and diversity, maintain a strong focus on ethnicity and engage with a movement inward towards Italian dialects: Andrea Camilleri’s *Commissario di Montalbano*, and Elena Ferrante’s *L’amica geniale*. I define these works as ‘glocal’ because, as I will illustrate, they both stress and fetishize the local but have circulated worldwide in their afterlife in translation. Camilleri is a best-selling author in Germany, France, the UK and the US, and his books have been translated into 120 languages (www.vigata.org). Ferrante’s sales constitute a record in the US; in the UK, she features next to Haruki Murakami and Karl Ove Knausgaard as one of the best-selling authors writing in languages other than English. In 2016, when *L’amica geniale* reached the apex of its popularity, translation rights were sold to over 60 countries (Flood 2016). The global success of these series raises important questions for scholars of translation studies, multilingualism, world literature and contemporary literary markets, and sheds light on the significance of different kinds of multilingualism in fiction and of their treatment in translation. More specifically, the article aims to discuss three questions that are rarely discussed together: how do monolingual book markets

contain and discipline multilingual fiction? What happens when multilingual fiction travels in translation? How do we explain the present openness of the Anglo-American market to translated fiction which emphasizes the use and function of the vernacular? To answer these questions, the article first compares the features that contributed to turn Camilleri's and Ferrante's works into international best-sellers, with a focus on the authors' rendering of the plurilingual experience. It then examines the translation routes and history of the two series of books and the role of agents involved in the process of translation. The central argument is that while both Camilleri and Ferrante foreground cultural difference and linguistic incommensurability, the choice of how they portray the experience of diglossia had an important impact in determining their national and international success as well as the route through which they achieved international visibility.

Analogies between two Series

As Emily Apter underlines, international best-sellers need to fulfill criteria that go beyond aesthetic value and involve issues of translatability and intelligibility (Apter 2001). While Camilleri and Ferrante have very different styles, these best-selling series of books share several features. First, they construct high suspense narratives and position themselves within established international genres. Camilleri's brand of detective fiction contributed to his popularity among international readers, who were able to rely on a familiar structure that compensated for unfamiliar references. Ferrante's blockbuster tetralogy has elements of the family saga, of *feuilleton* (in the French sense of literary trifle), of the *Bildungsroman*, and of feminist fiction. Secondly, both projects can be defined as political: the protagonists take a clear political stance, and their adventures intertwine with local and global historical developments. Thirdly, both Camilleri and Ferrante set out to represent life in the Italian South. Sicily and Naples have become *topoi* for literary and cinematic settings and are very well represented in the international imagination. At

the same time, these localities, since Italian unification, have been constructed as marginal in relation to the rest of Italy and to northern Europe. I use the term ‘constructed’ because margins, as David Forgacs has stressed, are not an objective reality and are always a product of discourse (8). Camilleri and Ferrante participate in this discourse by describing Naples and Sicily as unchanging and by foregrounding ethnic, cultural and linguistic difference. In doing so, Camilleri joins a long tradition of writers concerned with ‘Sicilianness’, from Verga to Pirandello to Sciascia (see Chu 1998), whereas Ferrante’s project has more to share with the Naples of Robert Saviano and Matteo Garrone than with the modern city described by Valeria Parrella. The writers’ preoccupation with marginality and subalternity is further emphasized by their strong sense of space and by the focus on the periphery: the fictional town of Vigàta in Camilleri’s novels, and a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Naples in Ferrante’s. Both Vigàta and Ferrante’s *rione* are described as microcosms, culturally and linguistically different from the rest of Italy. Both series revolve around a limited number of figures, with characters from other regions serving mainly to provide a contrast, and thereby underlining the specificity of Sicily and Naples.

In both cases, the representation of cultural identities borders on essentialism. Francesco Merlo notes that ‘Camilleri invents an archaic Sicily, an almost biological insularity, as if Sicilianness were a quality of seminal fluid, a Dna, a distinct entity that obviously does not exist except as a stereotype’ (Merlo 2000). Even sympathetic critics such as Nunzio La Fauci admit that ‘from a thematic point of view, Camilleri has built and builds a veritable catalog of clichés’ (2000). Ferrante’s characters similarly have *Neapolitanes*, as Bullaro and Love put it, ‘imbued in their bodies and language’ (4), and correspond to types that range from the educated northern Italian to the low-class Neapolitan to the local *camorrista*. Both series of books feature protagonists who were born shortly after the Second World War, who age throughout the

narrative, who are engaged in the fight against the mafia and the camorra and who take an anthropological interest in the history, customs and language of their towns, while being at the same time involved in global events.

Both the Montalbano novels and *L'Amica geniale* conjure a strong sense of authenticity and run the danger of confusing discourse with actuality. In several articles and interviews, Camilleri, who moved to Rome as a student and has been living there ever since, describes episodes of his own life that resemble the ones in the novels, and maintains that the character of Montalbano, with his passion for Sicilian food, traditional values, occasional misogynistic comments, is a portrait of his own father (2011, 136). Ferrante, who, if are to believe journalists' investigations, also lives in Rome, similarly reassures reader that there are direct connections between the events narrated and her own experiences: 'These events truly happened, it's my real life, the names are the real ones, I'm describing the real places where the events occurred' (Ferri and Ferri 2015, 213). Locals and foreigners have been quick to appropriate these suggestions: the inhabitants of Camilleri's hometown, Porto Empedocle, adopted 'Vigàta' as a second name for the town in 2003. Scholar Tiziana de Rogatis identified Ferrante's neighbourhood as Rione Luzzatti, located in the eastern outskirts of Naples (De Rogatis, 68), and the American journalist Ann Mah cartographically pinpointed all locations mentioned in the narrative on a map of the city (Mah 2016). Camilleri is actively engaged in Italian politics and regularly appears on television; his articles feature frequently in Italian newspapers. Likewise, the fact that the writer behind Ferrante refuses to reveal her identity did not hinder her presence in the media – she is currently the author of a weekly column in the British newspaper *The Guardian*. The sense of authenticity, the assurance that the authors describe a world of which they have first-hand experience, contributed

to the creation of two successful author brands backed up by – visible and invisible – media-friendly personalities.¹

Finally, the focus of the ‘local’ has been crucial for the series’ universal currency. As Italian scholar Antonino Buttitta noted, ‘The more Commissioner Montalbano ... remains in his ethnic space (locations, words, food and so on) the more he assumes universal, and therefore familiar connotations for readers of the most diverse cultures’ (2004, 16). Ferrante’s English translator Ann Goldstein and the editor at the US branch of *Europa Editions*, Michael Reynolds, similarly stress how the Neapolitan novels appealed to American readers because Ferrante’s neighborhood stands for ‘any place one needs to escape from’ (Goldstein and Reynolds 2015). It is significant that, in a recent article on ‘the new global novel’, Karolina Watrova places Ferrante with Haruki Murakami, Han Kang, Orhan Pamuk, ‘non western writers’ (2018, 54) who have produced works grounded in the local but who have been very successful internationally. Defined by marginality, Camilleri and Ferrante’s worlds are perceived as pockets of foreignness within Western culture, zones of otherness stuck in Europe’s past.

Multilingualism

In Camilleri and Ferrante’s series, the ‘local’ is closely tied to the use of the vernacular. Since dialects share a subordination to standard Italian, the setting in diglossic spaces in which the language of oral communication is not standard Italian but the Sicilian or Neapolitan dialect contributes to characterize these areas as ‘marginal’. The references to dialect also situate both projects in a dimension historically and geographically different from a modern Italy characterized by a homogenous use of language.² Both series foreground the imposition of a culturally

¹ On the creation of author-brands in the contemporary Italian context see Bassi 2015.

² See Camilleri’s interview with Fabio Gambaro (2002): ‘Today ... all Italians speak the same language, but it is a flat language, uniform and colonized by the Anglo-Saxon technological lexicon. In dialect, on the other hand, we can still find a vital lymph for our language and culture.’

dominant language, the language of the nation state, and a minority language, a dialect. Both emphasize the coexistence of dialects, regional and standard Italian and – to a lesser extent— foreign languages. In both series, characters are defined by specific ways of speaking, which immediately denote their origin and social class. They often master several languages and are constantly engaged in acts of translation. Before speaking, they measure their interlocutor and select the language they are going to use accordingly. To avoid miscommunication, they often repeat the same message in different codes. However, the use of multiple languages in fiction should not be confused with multilingualism in real life (Grutman 2006, 19). While dialect is a thematic focus in both Camilleri and Ferrante, for what concerns its actual use, the two authors take an opposite stance. These stylistic choices have important political repercussions. Lennon has gone as far as arguing that mixing languages is a ‘cosmopolitan’ gesture that involves the encounter and acceptance of Otherness, whereas the ‘containment’ of linguistic difference carries a ‘xenophobically nationalistic’ connotation (121).

Camilleri re-elaborates and juxtaposes standard Italian, regional Italian, Sicilian, and occasionally other dialects. His most innovative stylistic feature consists in not limiting the use of dialect to dialogues, but also extending it to the narrative voice. Dialect words, in Camilleri’s text, do not feature in italics, and are an integral part of the narrative. To guarantee accessibility and intelligibility, he resorts to strategies such as the frequent use of onomatopoeia and terms that closely resemble Italian, placing terms derived from Sicilian in a position in which their meaning can be inferred by the context. He also juxtaposes Sicilian terms with standard Italian synonyms or paraphrases them in standard Italian in the following sentence, and he repeats the same words with high frequency until they become part of his readers’ lexicon (La Fauci 2000; Guerrero 2001; Vizmuller-Zucco 2001 and 2010; Sulis 2007). Through these devices, readers become familiar

with linguistic alterity and make it their own. In fact, Camilleri's fans have actively engaged with *Vigatese*, going as far as providing a dictionary on Camilleri's official website *vigata.org*.

In interviews published in the 1990s, Camilleri describes the language of his books as a mirror of the linguistic experience of his childhood (Baudino 2000). In later interviews, however, he specifies how this creative strategy is the fruit of careful research: 'I was looking for words in the dictionary that, although they looked like dialect words, they were on the contrary pure Italian ... I was looking for words of Arab origins, like *giara*, for example. It has been an exercise' (2006, 154). He also mentions that a literary source, the Sicilian that Luigi Pirandello used to translate Greek classics, has been crucial for his crafting of 'Vigatese' (2011, 133).³ Italian critic Giulio Ferroni has criticized this recreation of dialect, deeming it 'a dish too seasoned. A caricature. The type of *Sicilian* that the average reader expects' (Serri 2001, 131). Other scholars, such as Salvatore Lupo, have underlined how these choices are in line with Camilleri's aim to reach as wide a readership as possible: 'We are not dealing with dialect, but the re-interpretation of regional Italian with strong inserts dictated by fantastic invention— a creation which refers to the Sicilian culture as imagined by non-Sicilians' (Lupo 2004, 21). Gigliola Sulis (2007) argues that, by reaching broad readerships, Camilleri's novels defied the preconception that multilingual fiction can only interest regional readerships who share the same dialect, or cultural elites fascinated by the stylistic complexity of the text, and that his project thus changed the way in which Italian audiences relate to multilingual fiction.

³ See the interview released for *La Stampa* on May 12, 2000: 'Many Sicilians tell me: we have never heard these words. But of course, because they belonged to the poor countryside; they are the words of the old farmer to whom I gave "milit" cigarettes immediately after the war, in exchange of fabulous stories of brigands. The stories have gone, I am left with the words that the little bourgeoisie does not know how to use, but that Pirandello knew well when he translated the classics into Italian'.

If we are to apply Lennon's categories⁴, we can say that the material structure of Camilleri's text, in the Montalbano series, stands between 'hard' and 'soft'/'translational' monolingualism. Hard, because by incorporating dialect, registers and slang on the same level, he defies linguistic hierarchies, and because he invites his readers to learn, rather than translate *Vigatese*. Weak, because he prioritizes legibility and limits reader's encounter with the foreign through strategies of 'containment', effectively domesticating Sicilian for non-Sicilian readerships. Whereas dialect is simplified and contained, Italian appears flexible, 'appealingly literally deformed' (Lennon 44).

Like the Montalbano cycle, Ferrante's tetralogy is designed to be distributed beyond regional readerships and contributes to readers' awareness of Italy's complex socio-linguistic history. Similarly to Camilleri, Ferrante emphasizes language hierarchies and makes the point that language choice is 'a political, economic, and social act' (Cavanaugh 57). Stylistically, however, Camilleri and Ferrante stand at the opposite side of the spectrum. While Camilleri reinvents Sicilian for non-Sicilian audiences, Ferrante engages with multilingualism implicitly. Throughout the series, the narrator specifies which dialogues take place in Neapolitan, which ones in standard Italian, comments on the use of register, underlines instances of code-switching: all dialogues, however, are rendered in standard Italian. Not only is the narrator engaged in acts of translation: translation is also embedded in the narrative on a structural/ thematic level. One of the two protagonists, Elena, frequently acts as a linguistic mediator between the characters of the neighbourhood and the members of society she meets in high school, university and through her career as a writer. It is Elena who, within the narrative, reports all the events that took place in dialect in standard Italian. Unlike the author of the Neapolitan novels, Elena does not hesitate to experiment with dialect in her own novel. In the last volume of the tetralogy, we learn that the

⁴ Lennon himself is drawing on the categories developed by Yaseen Noorani (2013).

other protagonist, Lila, is also writing a multilingual narrative that juxtaposes dialect, standard and erudite Italian.

If for Camilleri, dialect is the language of complicity and affection,⁵ Ferrante attributes to dialect a darker connotation, and links it to poverty, violence, desperation and disgust (Benedetti 2012; Lucamante 2008; Milkova 2013; Cavanaugh 2016). Questioned about her stylistic choice in a 2015 interview for *Corriere della sera*, Ferrante, like Camilleri, goes back to her childhood experience: ‘As a child, as a teenager, the dialect of my city scared me. I prefer if it echoes for a moment in the Italian language, but as if it threatened it’ (Di Stefano 2015). Neapolitan, in this interview as in the tetralogy, does not feature as a language with illustrious models and an established literary tradition, neither as one of the few Italian dialects that achieved national and international visibility through its music and theatre (see Segnini 2017a). It is rather the language of poverty and abuse, and its expressive potential is characterized as limited. Dialect words feature rarely in the text. More attention is given to neologisms, such as the word *smarginatura* (Ferrante 2011, 85) – used to describe the experience of an unsettled world in which boundaries merge into each other. In this case, the neologism carries the connotation of a unique signifier, of something that cannot be rendered in standard Italian. The plurilingual experience thus becomes the experience of incommensurability, of the impossibility of translation. The ‘Elena Ferrante project’ (see Segnini 2017b) thus involves two contradictions. The narrative makes a point of underlining the subaltern status of Neapolitan, but does so through a monolingual text in which the dialect is, in Lennon’s terms, ‘contained’, incorporated into standard Italian. It presents the encounter with the foreign – in this case ‘the foreign within’ – as an experience of incommensurability, but it has no

⁵ In several articles and interviews, Camilleri mentions that the inspiration for his writing came from a speech uttered by his mother, in which warm words in Sicilian made way for parental threats in standard Italian (1999, 93; 2011, 134).

issues with translating this experience according to the monolingual paradigm. Moreover, the limited range of references (Naples is associated with commonplace things like pizza, garbage, the camorra) and the superficial layer of cultural details (specially in the first volumes) contribute to the translatability of the book in different cultural contexts.

The tetralogy can be considered as belonging to the category of *Born Translated Books*, books that, following Rebecca Walkowitz's definition, 'are written for translation, in the hope of being translated, but they are also often written as translation' (2015,15). According to Walkowitz, such works weave translation into their narratives and often pretend to be written in a language in which they are not. They tell local stories, but they are designed for international circulation and 'address multiple audiences at the same time' (2015, 18). All these features can be recognized in the Neapolitan tetralogy. Like Camilleri, Ferrante does not cease to engage with the plurilingual experience, but does so implicitly, creating an 'illusion of multilingualism' that depends on style and form. The emphasis on the local is just as strong as in Camilleri, but it is conveyed through the description of habits, manners, and ways of thinking. As Walkovitz notes, in *Born Translated Books* 'the narration of languages retreats from the local since vernacular speech is often diminished. But narration also involves new ways of representing the local ... The local now involves thinking about the origin of audiences and the mechanisms through which audiences add meaning to books' (2015, 63).

Montalbano in Translation

Camilleri's hybrid language initially created difficulties for publishers and delayed publication of his works: Garzanti agreed to publish his first novel, *Un filo di fumo* (1980), provided that Camilleri add a glossary, and Elvira Sellerio, thinking that the engagement with dialect and the focus on Sicily would find little resonance in the rest of Italy, issued several of his

books (*La strage dimenticata* 1984, *La stagione della caccia* 1992, *La bolla di componenda* 1993) in a regional series. The first Montalbano novels, *La Forma dell'acqua* (1994), and *Il cane di terracotta* (1996), in contrast, were published by Sellerio within the series *La Memoria*, geared to national audiences. The enthusiastic public response demonstrated that the emphasis on regional and linguistic specificity was not an impediment, but rather one of the main ingredients of the novels' appeal. Another surprise occurred when Camilleri's fiction, in the second half of the 1990s, began to circulate successfully abroad.

While not necessarily profitable, translations can contribute to a publisher's reputation by increasing its symbolic capital. Small publishing houses, for example, can choose to specialize in translations from languages other than English to position themselves into a niche or to access government funding (Sapiro 2009a, 24). Multilingual texts are notoriously difficult to translate, and their translators and publishers are often praised for resisting the mechanisms of the international book industry (Grutman 1988, 159, Apter 2013). In France and Germany, Camilleri's socio-historical novels appealed to publishers not in spite of, but because of their untranslatability, and inspired experimental translators such as Dominique Vittoz and Moshe Kahn, who developed translation strategies drawing on the linguistic resources of the target context. Things functioned differently, however, for the best-selling Montalbano series. In fact, translations of these novels tend to privilege the plot, which in the original version is inextricably linked to language, over the linguistic tissue.

La forma dell'acqua, issued by Sellerio in 1994, was translated into French in 1998. The following year, translations were issued in Germany, Greece, Portugal, Brazil and the Netherlands. Thanks to Montalbano, Camilleri soon became a best-selling author in France and Germany. The American translation was issued only in 2002, at the same time as the translation into Castilian

Spanish, and into Catalan and Czech. As of 2018, Camilleri is translated into 120 languages, including ‘minor’ languages such as Norwegian, Croatian, Bulgarian and Near and Far Eastern languages such as Turkish, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Hebrew, and Chinese (<http://www.vigata.org/traduzioni/bibliost.shtml>). What can we infer from this route? According to Unesco’s *Index Translationum*, the nations that translate most from Italian are Spain, France, Germany and Poland, followed by the US and the UK. Overall, the translation history of Camilleri’s books reflects these statistics, since France and Germany were among the first countries to engage with his fiction, but it also foregrounds the hesitation of Spain – a country usually at the top of the list – the UK and the US towards multilingual fiction. Moreover, it indicates that the success of Camilleri’s fiction in Germany and France led to subsequent translations into ‘minor’ languages such as Catalan and Czech. Finally, whereas in France, Germany and even in Spain the popularity of the series led to an interest in the other strands of Camilleri’s fiction, in which Camilleri uses a ‘harder’ multilingualism (the use of dialect is more conspicuous), this also took place with considerably delay in the US and in the UK, where the first book that does not belong to the Montalbano’s cycle, *La stagione della caccia* (1992), was translated only in 2014.⁶

Many of Camilleri’s translators have described their strategies to render the use of dialect in metatexts in which they reflect on their own linguistic experience and philosophy as translators. Overall, translators have tended to separate the Montalbano cycle from the rest of Camilleri’s production, adopting experimental, creative strategies for the translations of the socio-political novels, and reserving few touches of “local flavor” for the Camilleri series. In France, this difference can be attributed to the fact that different strands were initially assigned to different

⁶ *The Sacco Gang* and *the Revolution of the Moon* have been published by *Europa* in 2017, in a translation by Stephen Sartarelli.

translators: Montalbano's adventures were originally published by *Fleuve Noir*, a publisher specializing in popular literature and crime fiction, and translated by Serge Quadrupani. The socio-historical novels are mostly published by Fayard, with translations by Dominique Vittoz; and by Gallimard, with translations by Louis Bonalumi. In the preface to *La forme de l'eau*, Quadrupani elaborates on how, in the Montalbano series, he chose to translate all dialogues that take place in dialect into standard French, referring to multilingualism implicitly by signalling to the reader that the conversation takes place in dialect, and occasionally reproducing a few sentences in the original, next to the French translation, 'for local flavour' (Quadrupani 1999, 250). To render the hybrid language of the narrator, Quadrupani uses a few terms in *francitan*, a regional variety of French influenced by Occitan that also happens to be the language of his own childhood. In addition, he slightly modifies the grammar, using the *passé composé* to render the *passato remoto*. Overall, these choices prioritize legibility, while maintaining touches of exoticism, but neutralize the political gesture inherent in Camilleri's use of non-standard language, thereby turning resistance into cultural homogenization. Dominique Vittoz, who translated Camilleri's socio-historical novels, instead chooses a more radical approach. In her own translations, Vittoz draws on France's fading linguistic heritage, and substitutes the almost-extinct dialect of Lyon, with which she has a personal relationship, for Camilleri's Sicilian.⁷

In Germany, Camilleri can count on numerous translators: Christiane von Bechtolsheim, Schahrazad Assemi, Monika Lustig and Moshe Kahn. The latter, a specialist in the translation of multilingual literature, translated all strands of Camilleri's works. For socio-historical novels,

⁷ In Vittoz's view, the fact that Lyonnais is almost extinct makes it sound to most readers like an invented language. 'The vitality of Lyonnais ... is almost nil. Its interest lies in the richness of its lexicon. I foregrounded this aspect, avoiding syntactic *calques* that would be fully authorized but would risk being perceived as a shameful "French fault". We emphasize in this occasion the paralyzing reverence to which we were educated towards the language of the academy (Vittoz 2002, 82).

Kahn did not hesitate to employ archaic or local dialects, arguing that his objective is to reproduce for the target audience the effect that multilingualism has in the source culture.⁸ In translating the Montalbano series, however, Kahn adopted a different approach. Starting from the premise that *Vigatese*, in these books, functions as an everyday language, and that Sicilians would read it as their native language, he opted for a ‘very normal everyday German’. His only concession to local flavour is the use of grammatical constructions more commonly used in the south of Germany, a trick ‘so subtle that not every reader will be aware of it’ (Kahn 2011, 111). These choices are motivated by his view that the plot, rather than the language used in the narrative, is the main ingredient in the series. He argues that ‘the stories are very solid and work well even without the ‘Vigatese’. Not for nothing is Commissario Montalbano the most beloved detective of all the Germans, and they have never heard of *Vigatese*’ (2011, 111).

In Spain, Camilleri’s novels have been translated into Castilian and Catalan by Barcelona-based publishers such as Destino, Salamandra, Gadir (Castilian), and Editions 62 (Catalan). María Muñoz Muñoz (2004) and María Calvo Montoro (2001) have underlined how the Castilian texts entail a systematic reduction of multiplicity to a standard register. Even beyond the Montalbano series, texts such as *Il birraio di Preston* – in which Camilleri employs five different dialects – have been translated into standard Spanish. In an interview with the *Corriere della sera*, translator Antonia Menini justified this choice by indicating that ‘To put into the mouths of his characters a dialect, for example, the Andalusian, would be misleading. ... at any case, the editor would not have allowed it’. The editor at Salamandra, Juan Milà, confirmed that his philosophy is to create ‘a

⁸ For example, in *La mossa del cavallo*, in which Camilleri uses several dialects, Kahn used plain German for Genoese and Italian, and reproduced the Sicilian original followed by a German translation. In other cases, such as in *Il re di Girgenti*, he recreated the effect of archaic Sicilian by going back to the archaic German used by the writer Jean Paul (Kahn 2004, 180-186).

text for global readers of Castilian, also outside of Spain' (Porqueddu 2008). A different strategy is suggested by the translations into Catalan. Among the Catalan translators,⁹ Pau Vidal, a crime fiction writer, translated both from the Montalbano series and the socio-historical novels. In an interview with *Revista Lletres*, significantly titled 'Les novel·les de Camilleri han de 'camillerejar' [Camilleri's novels should 'camillarize'], Vidal underlined his decision to adapt, rather than to translate the Montalbano series, modifying Catalan into an invented language to render the idiolect of the characters (Coromines 2014). In the translation of the historical novels, he went further and substituted Catalan dialects for the Italian ones.

By the time Camilleri made it to the US and the UK, the Montalbano books were already international bestsellers. They were thus issued by Penguin, a large and prestigious publisher whose support underlined Camilleri's place among the classics of Italian literature in English. As Lawrence Venuti has underlined, fluency generally prevails among translation practices in the Anglophone context (Venuti 1995). In line with this, Penguin's translator Stephen Sartarelli chooses to foreground legibility: 'I have always believed ... that a literary translator should be like the arbiter or umpire of a sporting event: the less noticed the better' (Sartarelli 2009, 7). Just like Camilleri's Castilian translator, Sartarelli considers dialect an 'inherently local phenomenon', and comments that 'Montalbano's world of cops, hoods, lovely ladies and eccentric petit-bourgeois could hardly be made to speak American ghetto Juve or Scots or Faulknerian Mississippian or any geographically specific idiom without appearing absurd' (2009, 8). In his view, using dialects in English cannot be a viable strategy, first because dialects in English speaking countries 'are rare and extinguished', and second, because, just like translations into Castilian, they are geared to a variety of Anglophone readers, and need to be intelligible to all of them. Like the Castilian

⁹ Camilleri's translators into Catalan are Pep Julià, Xavier Riu, Anna Casassas and Pau Vidal

translator, he also notes that this choice would be immediately rejected by an American editor. ‘The US accepts the other only if it becomes American ... first and foremost, linguistically’ (Sartarelli 2004, 213). Similarly to Quadrupani, he nevertheless foregrounds local flavour by rendering selected grammatical expressions literally, and some of the policemen’s speech with Brooklynese, ‘since many of the cops in New York City, where I used to live, happen to be (or used to be) of either Sicilian or southern Italian extraction’ (2009, 8).¹⁰

Overall, Camilleri’s popularity abroad defies the assumption that ‘the strength of a work’s plurilingualism correlates with diminished visibility’ (Lennon 159) or that, if authors want to be published by trade publishers, they have to render the plurilingual experience implicitly, through a monolingual text (Lennon 159). However, in treating the Camilleri series differently from the socio-historical novels, his translators confirmed that, the more popular a series, the more it is prone to homogenization in translation. The choice to engage with different languages, in Camilleri’s case, did not interfere with the selection for translation. However, by the time it reached Penguin, the Montalbano series had been transformed into a monolingual text.

L’Amica geniale in Translation

Ferrante’s first books initially followed a route not unlike Camilleri’s. *L’amore molesto* (1992) was first translated into German, Dutch and Norwegian (1994), subsequently into French (1995), Spanish (1996) and Danish (2003), with the English translation following in 2005. *I giorni dell’abbandono* (2002) appeared in France and Greece in 2003, in Spain in 2004, in Albania and Israel in 2007, and in the US only much later, in 2015.¹¹ This pattern completely changed with *L’amica geniale*. The tetralogy, issued in Italy between 2011 and 2015, was published in the US

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of Sartarelli’s strategies, see Gutkowsky 2009.

¹¹ I am using the publications dates as provided by Unesco’s *Index Translationum*. No record is yet available for the Neapolitan tetralogy.

and the UK by *Edizioni e/o* within one year of the original, from 2012 to 2016, and in Spain by Lumen: Random House within the time frame 2012 to 2015. The French, Danish, Polish translations started in 2014, the Dutch in 2013. Curiously, the novels were issued in German only in 2016, after the translation into Catalan, Norwegian and Hebrew (2015) and at the same time at the translation into Basque, Slovenian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Korean and Indonesian. For what concerned autobiographical material, the collection of letters *La Frantumaglia*, published in Italy in 2003 and in an updated edition in 2007, was first translated and published in English as an e-book and then issued in print, in an expanded edition, in 2016. Ferrante's interview on the *Paris Review* (2015), which contributed to the 'Elena Ferrante mystery', was issued directly in English. In 2016, the year in which *Europa Editions* issued the last volume of the tetralogy in English, the Neapolitan novels were also re-issued in Spanish by Lumen in the US and translation rights for the Neapolitan novels were sold to over 50 countries (Mensch 2016).

This literary case illustrates how translations into English have become increasingly important not only for authors writing in minor languages, but also for writers that occupy 'semi-central' positions in the world system of translation, such as Italian. The visibility reached through the English translation, combined with the space dedicated to Ferrante in Anglophone media such as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, contributed to the writer's consecration among contemporary 'literary titans' (Rothman 2015). In turn, this success functioned as catalyst for translations into major European languages such as French and German, and to other 'minor' European languages such as Danish, Norwegian, Catalan.

Sandro Ferri e Sandra Ozzola, funders of the *Edizioni e/o* and of its sister publishing house *Europa editions*, strongly promoted Ferrante's work in the UK and the US, often taking the role of co-authors in 'the Elena Ferrante project' (see Segnini 2017 b). But Ferrante's choice to render the

plurilingual experience implicitly played a crucial role in facilitating the process of translation and reception into global languages such as English and Spanish, in which translations are geared to multiple Anglophone and Spanish speakers. Ann Goldstein, Ferrante's English translator, who is also an editor at *The New Yorker*, has also played an important role. Goldstein translated major canonical Italian authors, such as Primo Levi, Giacomo Leopardi, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Alessandro Baricco. Her signature as a translator therefore implicitly places Ferrante among the most prominent Italian authors who have acquired a voice in English. Moreover, since Ferrante refuses to appear in public, in interviews and public events, Goldstein often takes on the role of spokesperson for the author.¹² In a 2015 conversation with Scott Esposito for the *Two Voices Salon*, and in the 2016 interview with Rachel Cook, Goldstein commented on her translation strategies, underlining how she tries to 'stay close to the text' rather than re-writing it or 'creating anything new' (Cook 2016). Michael Reynolds, the editor at *Europa Editions*, also emphasizes the literal quality of Goldstein's translation, the fact that *Europa*, as a philosophy, does not modify the text to tailor it to American readers. When interviewed about the challenges of translating dialect, Goldstein acknowledges that it does not entail difficulties, since allusions to dialect take place through indirect speech (Goldstein and Reynolds 2015). An analysis of the first volume of the tetralogy shows that Goldstein translates the very few expressions in Neapolitan with the corresponding American expression (i.e. the recurrent insults 'chillu strunz' and 'chillu càntaro' are rendered as 'that shit'/'that piece of shit'). This is in line with her approach to the text, in which specific references to Italian culture are rendered with American equivalents (i.e. *scuola*

¹² An example is Sidney's 2016 Writers festival, in which the moderator begins by stating: 'We don't have the author tonight. She decided from the beginning that she would not reveal her identity. Elena Ferrante is a pseudonym ... Only her Italian publishers know who she really is. We are, however, very fortunate to have Anne Goldstein, who has translated all Ferrante's books into fluid and pungent English, making them such a pleasure to read.'
<https://www.swf.org.au/audio-podcasts/>

media becomes ‘middle school’, traditions such as *comparato di fazzoletto* are simplified by changing the meaning to ‘speech master’). Neologisms such as *smarginatura* are paraphrased as ‘dissolving margins’ (Goldstein 2012 89). There are, however, words that she chooses to keep in the original. These are, curiously, Italian words, such as *stradone* and *disperazione*. Throughout the translation, these words are tagged as foreign by italics.

In France, Spain and Germany, where Ferrante’s early novels had already been translated before she became a literary phenomenon, Ferrante has had numerous translators.¹³ The fact that the author had multiple voices, among which those of several men, made it less likely for translators to become spokespersons for the author. This has changed with the publication of the tetralogy, which, in all these contexts, has been assigned to a single translator: Elsa Damien in French, Celia Filippetto in Castilian; Marta Hernández in Catalan, Karin Krieger in German. Nevertheless, in France and Spain Ferrante’s translators have not yet achieved a visibility comparable to Goldstein’s: at the time of the present contributions, there are few interviews and no statements available about their translation strategies. The case is different in Germany, where the first volume of the tetralogy was published only in 2016, when Ferrante was already established as an international writer. *Suhrkamp*, an established trade publisher, followed the strategies of *Europa Editions* in promoting Ferrante’s work: the author has her own website, maintained by the publishers, which includes reviews and links to social media, and Ferrante’s work has been supported through book launches and reviews in well-respected presses. The role of the translator Karin Krieger is prominent in all these venues. Moreover, German media frequently compare Krieger’s translation to Goldstein’s, emphasizing the poetic quality of the German and the

¹³ Ferrante’s first two novels were translated in France by Jean-Noël Schiafano, Italo Passamonti, and Elsa Damien; in Spain, by Juana Bignozzi and Nieve Lopez Burelli; in Germany, by Stefan Wendt and Anja Nattefort.

clumsiness of the English translation, and thereby encourage German readers to purchase the German, rather than the English edition.¹⁴ These approaches were successful, and Ferrante's novels in Germany immediately achieved an extraordinary success: within one week of the publication, *Der Spiegel* placed the first volume of the tetralogy on the top of its 2016 best-selling list, overtaking in popularity even the latest volume of the Harry Potter series (Mensch 2016).

Ferrante's emphasis on the relations between social classes and language registers, translation and code-switching remains strong in translation, and continuously reminds readers that the story is set in a diglossic space. Reviewers of the tetralogy in Anglophone venues underline how language is one of the main themes in Ferrante's novel and stress the emphasis on dialect (see Acocella 2015). While acknowledging that Ferrante does not explicitly quote dialect in the text, Jillian Cavanaugh goes as far as commenting that the author 'exploits the rich semiotic potentials of Italian and dialect' (Cavanaugh 45). Moreover, since, in the Anglophone tradition, dialects have mostly been translated into standard English, the lack of direct citations is often overseen by foreign readers. Literary engagement with different languages, therefore, appears stronger in translation than in the Italian text.

Conclusions

The comparison of Camilleri's Montalbano books with Ferrante's Neapolitan tetralogy suggests that Italian contemporary fiction that achieves global visibility tends to emphasize the 'local' while also being representative of well-established, international genres. While both Camilleri's and Ferrante's series are grounded in the regional and foreground the plurilingual experience, they have been consciously created for multiple audiences. Both contain translation from the start, either as a linguistic strategy internal to the text (Camilleri) or as a thematic focus

¹⁴ See Mensch's 2016 article on *Der Spiegel*: 'Krieger's translation sounds more poetic, literary and less clumsy, stubborn than the English translation'.

(Ferrante). In both cases, the strong sense of authenticity conjured by the author's (real or presumed) origins and by the interviews in popular and well established presses contributed to their national and international success.

Camilleri's work travelled successfully in translation, thus defying the preconception that multilingual fiction has harder access to world literature circuits. However, while Camilleri's engagement with multiple languages did not affect the portability of his work, and both the Montalbano series and the Neapolitan tetralogy have been widely translated, they achieved international visibility through different routes. Moreover, whereas the Montalbano series became an international phenomenon, but still followed a linear process in which success in Italy was followed by international acclaim, the reception in the Anglophone press has played a central role in the Neapolitan novels' commercial success as well as in establishing Ferrante's reputation in highbrow literary circles and academic settings. Finally, the editorial culture in the receiving context and readers' expectations also played an important role. Stephen Sartarelli and Maria Antonia Menini, responsible for translations into English and Castilian, underline that engaging with dialects is not considered an option in global languages designed to serve beyond national boundaries. This partly explains the success of Ferrante's fiction in English and Spanish: by 'containing' the foreign through implicit multilingualism, Ferrante avoids the challenges raised by Camilleri while offering a similar preoccupation with the local. However, Ferrante's fame has also been mediated by her publishers and translator, who played an active role in her reception in the UK and the US. Ferrante's enormous success demonstrates that writers and publishers working in languages other than English are not passive agents at the mercy of mediators in hegemonic culture, but that they can contribute by influencing international patterns of translations and reception of the literature produced in their own languages.

Both series draw attention to the role of translators as agents and cultural mediators, and, in Walkowitz's words, make us 'recalculate the meaning of author and translator, original and derivation, native and foreign' in relation not only to the local context of production but to an international network' (47). The role played by the translators of Camilleri is exemplified by the space dedicated to them on the website *vigata.org*, in scholarly venues and in interviews in both specialized and popular media. Moreover, several of Camilleri's translators have drawn on their own plurilingual experience to translate Camilleri's hybrid language, thus turning the translated text into a linguistic biography. On the other hand, the translation of Ferrante's tetralogy also led to the visibility of Anne Goldstein and Karin Krieger. Ultimately, since translations into English and Castilian Spanish sacrifice linguistic multiplicity for homogenization, by rendering multilingualism implicitly, Ferrante's tetralogy preserves the impression of multilingualism in translation. Thus, while for Italian readers, Camilleri's language is one of the most original features of his fiction, and Ferrante's style reads as choice not to engage with dialect, for Anglophone and Spanish readers the two series appear much closer, and their treatment of dialect comparable. If Camilleri and Ferrante's Italian style has opposite political connotation, and marks a different attitude towards the acceptance of the foreign, this political gesture is neutralized in series' afterlife in translation, when both appear as example of the translational multilingualism that is 'making world literature, now' (Gramlin 140).

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