

## ***Lengua che no' la 'ntienne, e tu la caca. Irony and Hilarity of Neapolitan Paroemias in Pompeo Sarnelli's *Posilecheata* (1684)***

**Daniela D'Eugenio**

*Department of French and Italian, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA*

**Abstract.** This paper analyses how Pompeo Sarnelli's *Posilecheata*, a collection of five fables written in Neapolitan dialect and published in 1684, conveys comedy and irony differently through paroemias. Proverbs and proverbial phrases mostly occur in sections where a realistic context and popular wisdom are depicted, or else where the hyperbolic structure of the collection is underscored. Their linguistic features reflect a debt to the Baroque literary framework as well as a local perspective, especially in the way that they explain facets of the Neapolitan area or refer to its cultural aspects. In the prefatory letter, comic and ironic paroemias set the ambience for a linguistic treatise, whereas in the introduction they outline a carnivalesque dialogue; in the five fables, they advance the plot or evaluate characters and events.

**Keywords:** Baroque; Comedy; Dialect; Fable; Irony; Neapolitan; Paroemias; Proverbs; Proverbial Phrases; Pompeo Sarnelli; *Posilecheata*

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### **1. Introduction to Pompeo Sarnelli's *Posilecheata***

Fifty years after the posthumous publication of Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti, overo lo trattenimento de' peccerille* (1634–1636)<sup>1</sup>, Pompeo Sarnelli, under the pseudonym of Masillo Reppone de Gnanopoli, published a collection of fables in the Neapolitan dialect entitled *Posilecheata*. His collection included five fables or *cunti*, along with a prefatory letter to "li vertoluse lejeture" [the virtuous readers], an introduction or "commito d'ammice fatto a Posileco" [banquet amongst friends in Posillipo] and a "scompetura" [conclusion] to the collection<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In 1674, Sarnelli published an edition of Basile's collection with the alternative title *Pentamerone*, clearly referring to Boccaccio's *Decameron*: *Il Pentamerone del cavalier Giovan Battista Basile, overo Lo cunto de li cunte, trattenimento de li peccerille, di Gian Alessio Abbattutis Nuovamente restampato, e co' tutte le zeremonie corietto*. Napoli: Ad istanza di Antonio Bulifon.

<sup>2</sup> Sarnelli wrote several other works on a variety of topics: a treatise on the Greek alphabet (*L'alfabeto greco*, 1675); a translation of Giovanni Battista della Porta's works as *Della chirofisionomia* and *Della magia naturale del signor Gio. Battista della Porta Napolitano libri XX* (1677); *Specchio del clero secolare* (1679); *Cronologia de' vescovi ed arcivescovi sipontini* (1680); a *Bestiarium Schola* (1685); two guides: *Guida de' forestieri curiosi di vedere ed intendere le cose più notabili della real città di Napoli e del suo amenissimo distretto* (1685; reprinted by Antonio Bulifon in 1697) and *Guida de' forestieri curiosi di vedere e considerare le cose notabili di*

A Bari native who moved to Naples and later to Bisceglie as a bishop, Sarnelli (1649–1724)<sup>3</sup> was for years considered a follower of Basile, and consequently the brighter and long-lasting success surrounding *Lo cunto de li cunti* overshadowed his work. The inclusion of Sarnelli in Frederick Crane's 1886 article, "Some Forgotten Italian Storytellers", confirms the relegation to obscurity that *Posilecheata* suffered for almost two centuries after its publication. Even though Benedetto Croce redeemed Sarnelli's work from being designated as a copy of Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* and defined it an "imitazione intelligente ed elegante" (Croce 1948, p. 74), *Posilecheata* still did not manage to disseminate among the community. Not even Enrico Malato's 1963 and more recent 1986 Italian translation of Sarnelli's *Posilecheata* (Sarnelli 1986) helped to promote his work in either academic or non-academic venues, as did Croce's translation of Basile's collection (Basile 1925).

As far as Sarnelli's proverbs and proverbial phrases concern, Charles Speroni and Francesco Montuori published significant articles on them. Speroni's "Proverbi della *Posilecheata*" (1953a) lists all the proverbs and proverbial phrases in Sarnelli's work and indicates their possible sources, which is similar to what he had done, just a decade before, with Basile's. In his article "Sui proverbi della Campania", Montuori (2014, p. 158, note 27) mentions Sarnelli's *Posilecheata* as an important work for identifying Neapolitan proverbs. However, no other scholar has engaged in an extensive critical analysis of Sarnelli's collection and of its paroemias, nor of the original and personal elements that make his work a jewel of linguistic virtuosity representative of the Neapolitan culture and identity and of the Baroque poetics.

Let us define a key term in our discussion. *Paroemia* or *paroemia* is a calque from the Greek word *παροιμία* and indicates a sequence of terms with figurative meaning. It includes proverbs and proverbial phrases. Proverbs are composed of two parallel hemistichs, linked by a rhyme, an assonance, or a consonance, and by a topic and comment structure. They frequently convey a moral message, distribute wise recommendations, or simply describe aspects of human life (for instance, *Chi serve fedele aspetta premio*). Proverbial phrases, instead, are characterized by a non-conjugated verb and, even though a figurative meaning defines them, they are devoid of moral and ethical intentions as they express a quality or an aspect in a sort of shortened comparison; their main verb appears in the infinitive, which is why they can modify their form more easily depending on the context or sentence (for instance, *Fare na lavata de capo senza sapone*).

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*Pozzuolo, Baja, Miseno, Cuma, Gaeta ed altri luoghi circonvicini* (1685); *Antica Basilicografia* (1686); *Lettere ecclesiastiche* (1686–1716); a chronology of bishops and archbishops in Benevento (1691); and memories of the bishops in Bisceglie (1693). Sarnelli also published many elegies and odes in Latin, a commentary on Latin poems (i.e. *Il filo d'Arianna*, 1672), and paraphrases of religious texts (i.e. *Salmi penitenziali*). In 1676, he released *Degli Avvenimenti di Fortunato e de' suoi figli, Historia comica Tradotta, et illustrata da Masillo Reppone da Gnanopoli. Libri due. Al molto Ill. e Rev. Sig. e Pad. Oss. Il signor Pompeo Sarnelli Dottor delle Leggi e Protonotario Apostolico* (in Naples by Antonio Bulifon), which is a translation, personal interpretation, and illustration of a Spanish story, narrated through the intermediary of a French version. Together with Bulifon, Sarnelli coordinated the second edition of Giovanni Antonio Summonte's *Historia della città e regno di Napoli* (1601–1602; 1640–1643) and Ferrante Loffredo's *Antichità di Pozzuoli* (1570), both republished in 1675. For a list of all of Sarnelli's works, see Gimma (1703, pp. 285–301 for an annotated description of Sarnelli's works, and pp. 301–303 for a list of his printed books). In addition, in the *Catalogo de' libri composti, e dati alle stampe dall'illustrissimo et reverendissimo signor Pompeo Sarnelli vescovo di Bisceglia* in Bulifon's 1697 edition of Sarnelli's above-mentioned *Guida de' forestieri curiosi di vedere ed intendere le cose più notabili della real città di Napoli e del suo amenissimo distretto*, Bulifon lists some of Sarnelli's works (p. 254).

<sup>3</sup> Sarnelli was born in Polignano (today Polignano a Mare, near Bari) and moved to Naples when he was an adolescent. For further information on his life, see Malato (1986, pp. xxv–xxix), which contains a list of all the sources that mention Sarnelli's life as well as a critical bibliography. On Sarnelli's biography, also consider Canepa (2008) and Iurilli (2011).



Figure 1. *Posilecheata*: Title page  
Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Bonaparte 5634



This analysis of *Posilecheata* is the first to highlight the specific literary and linguistic features of paroemias that Sarnelli employs as recurrent elements throughout his work and as a means of interpreting, commenting, and offering a comic or ironic view on reality, language, and society. In the treatise-like ambience of the prefatory letter, the popular and carnivalesque dimension of the introduction, and the fairy-tale atmosphere of the fables, proverbs and proverbial phrases become comic elements to advance the narration and resonate the hyperbolic culture and spirit in that area and at that time (Picone 2003, p. 302). Specifically, in the prefatory letter, they convey linguistic irony as Sarnelli praises the Neapolitan dialect over the Florentine vernacular (Sarnelli 1986, pp. 3–8). In the banquet amongst friends of the introduction, they depict the diastratic dimension of the Neapolitan region (Sarnelli 1986, pp. 9–33; 209–214). Most of all, in this section, they support a Neapolitan explosion to the greatest degree and satisfy the Baroque idea of fascination “suitable for the plurilingual early-seventeenth century courts for which it [*Posilecheata*] was intended” (Haller 1999, p. 253). In the five fables, comedy is achieved by means of humorous modifications in the traditional structure of a paroemia and their hilarious evaluations on characters and events (Sarnelli 1986, pp. 35–207).

In order to allow for all these aspects to emerge and acquire significance in the text, Mirko Grimaldi's (1997) pragmatic analysis of paroemias is employed when considering paroemiologic irony. According to this approach, paroemias, and all other kinds of macro-terms<sup>4</sup>, present three distinct levels of meaning. The first level is a literal and compositional one, since it is given by the sum of meanings related to each of the components of a paroemia. It does not require a figurative interpretation and is tightly bound to the situation or to the personality that created the paroemia. The second level is the conventionalized meaning. It is figurative and non-compositional since it transcends the meaning of each of the paroemia's components. Unanimous acceptance and continuous repetition by a community make the paroemia's meaning valid exclusive of any connection to a specific context. The human mind recognizes the paroemia and immediately relates it to a specific meaning, which has been codified by tradition (Bybee 2006, p. 715). The conventionalized meaning is made of a potential of infinite metaphorical meanings, whose ambiguity cannot be solved unless the paroemia is placed in a context. The third level is, therefore, the contextual meaning, which is supplied by the message that the paroemia assumes when subjected to a context. Despite maintaining a relationship with the conventionalized meaning, the paroemia in context explicates a message that is appropriate only and exclusively to that situation. Reciprocally, the context is capable to make the paroemia assume a slightly changed valence: in this study, primarily comic and ironic. In other words, different contexts can actualize the paroemias' semantic capacity, depending on the characters involved, the relationships among them, the situations and the events recounted, the significance given by the author to paroemias, and the role assigned to them inside the narration<sup>5</sup>. All these aspects provide substance to the potential polisemy that a paroemia can convey and to its best actualization. In the following paragraphs, paroemias are perused by placing them in their context; in this way, their meaning can be unraveled and their comedic and ironic twists or messages evaluated from a linguistic perspective, which inevitably blends with literary, social, and cultural aspects.

<sup>4</sup> Temistocle Franceschi defines macro-terms [macrolemmi] as follows: “[...] unità lessicali più ampie che sono comunemente dette ‘espressioni idiomatiche’ [...] sequenze sintattiche che fungono da significanti □ pluriverbali, e motivati da figura □ di segni retorici”, as opposed to terms [lemmi] which consist of “sequenze fonematiche che fungono da significanti □ monoverbali, e immotivati □ di segni linguistici” (Franceschi 1999, p. 5).

<sup>5</sup> This is also Michael Bakhtin's idea of “dialogic relations” between different utterances that are linked by “semantic ties” (Bakhtin 1986, pp. 103–131). It explains how a text (paroemias included) deprived of its own context would lose the contextual information that makes it unique.

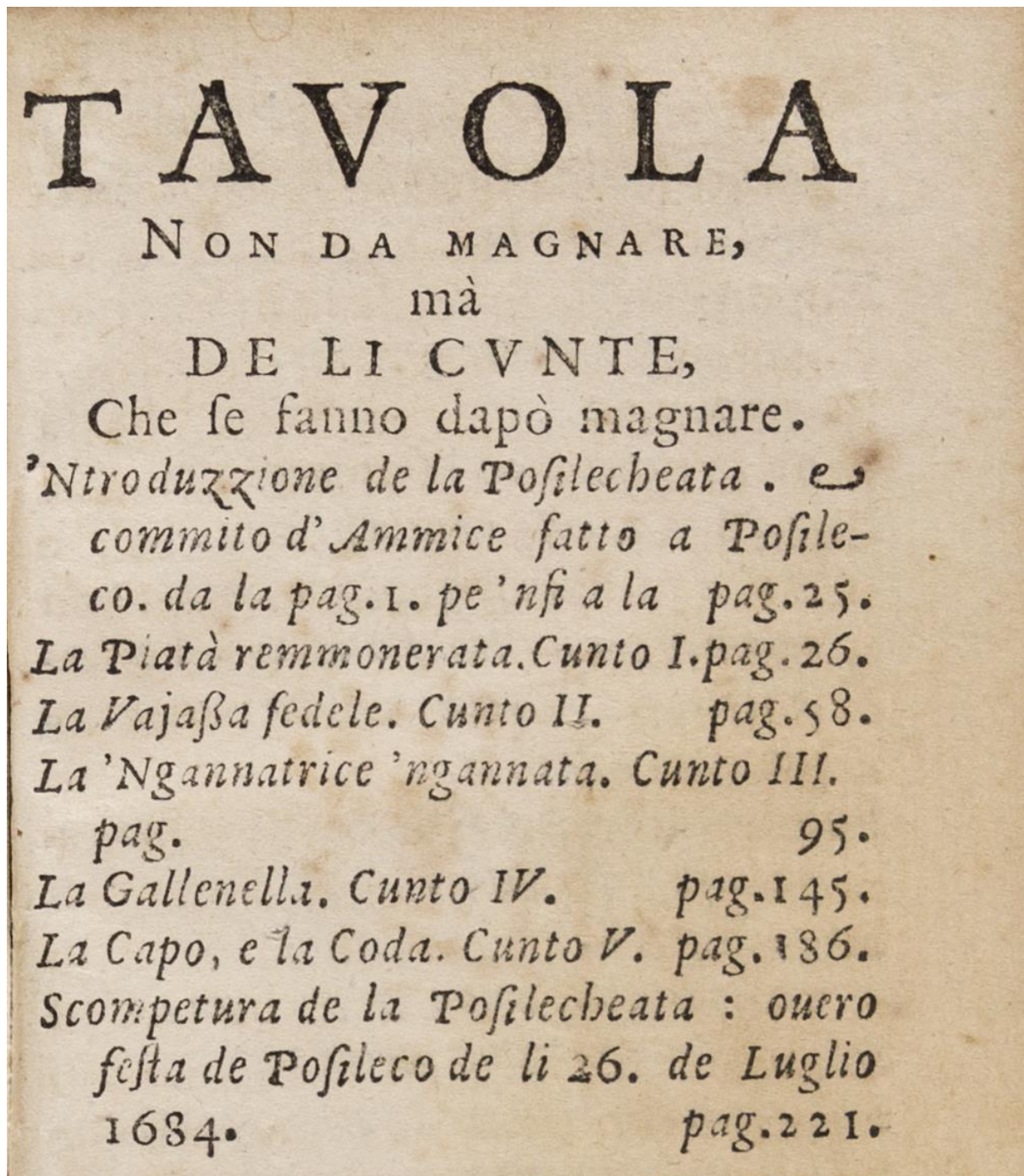


Figure 2. *Posilecheata*: "Tavola non da magnare ma de li cunte che se fanno dapò magnare"  
 Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Bonaparte 5634

## 2. The Fusion of Naples, Baroque, and Dialect for Comedic Purposes

As a collection of fables, the abstract and the fantastic permeate *Posilecheata*<sup>6</sup>; nonetheless, the *cunti* also perceive and depict the true essence of the Neapolitan cultural, social, and linguistic reality, anchored, as they are, in the real world that creates them and constitutes the starting point of the utopian dimension they promote (Canepa 1999, p. 24). As such, the five fables position themselves between fact and fantasy, reality and imagination, where the first member of the dichotomy allows for comedic and ironic aspects to emerge. Indeed, Sarnelli's comedy entirely and exclusively depends on Naples and is later applied to the fairy-tale feature of the fables.

The recounting of the fables happens in Posillipo and all the fables are set in Naples with a limited centrifugal movement towards distant lands. Naples is the epicenter of almost all the stories, for they offer an etiologic explanation of buildings, statues, and inscriptions in the city, making real and human what is originally fantastical. Naples also affects the social dimension, as depicted in the dinner amongst friends that introduces the collection. Finally, Naples defines the work linguistically: the Neapolitan dialect both outlines Sarnelli's conscious act of "dialettalità riflessa"<sup>7</sup> (Paccagnella 1983) and expresses the subjectivity of the Neapolitan characters who appear in the different parts of the collection. As Mario Petrini (1989, p. 133) argues, the fairy-tale dimension, the popular sphere, and comedy are tightly bound to the Neapolitan language<sup>8</sup>.

A fundamental aspect of fables, and specifically of Baroque fables is connected to language: the "ricerca [...] dello stupefacente" (Spera 2001, p. 29). This aspect had been the object of scrutiny since the sixteenth century when Francesco Bonciani, in his *Lezione sopra il comporre delle novelle* (1574), asserted that wonder, caused by a certain novelty, was one of the most important reasons for enjoyment (Ordine 1996, p. 66). As Giovanni Getto shows in his 2000 book on the literary Baroque in Italy, trying to channel the Baroque novella inside a historical and literary catalogue is a burdensome enterprise. However, he underscores some elements that characterize and unify Baroque novellas: the shared goal to delight and marvel the audience, and to reproduce the corpulent, explosive, and pompous spirit of the period, which is always different and always elusive. Not surprisingly, most of these characteristics pertain to language: accumulation, specifically accumulation of words; metaphorical transformation and deformation as a literary ornament to the narration and its resulting augmentation of reality; and ludic enthusiasm for linguistic games (Getto 2000, pp. 276, 300).

All these aspects, according to Angela Albanese (2013), pair marvel and comedy. While analysing the English translation of Basile's paroemias, she declares that elements of comic accumulation, pompous rhetoric, and hilarious multiplication of reality, in other words Baroque "linguistic freedom", created polyphonic literary works that could appeal to the different senses of the human being (*ibid.*, p. 11). This is particularly true for Basile's language, dominated by an absolute freedom that explodes in a comic, concrete, at times vulgar, vision of reality and popular life. Likewise, Sarnelli's language in *Posilecheata*, despite being at times more controlled probably due to the author's engagement with the

<sup>6</sup> For further references on the fairy-tale tradition and on Basile's role in shaping and introducing the genre, see Calabrese (1984); Chlodowski (1985); Rak (1986); Lavinio (1993); Ragone (1996); Tarzia (1996); Canepa (1999); Getto (2000); Spera (2001); Picone and Messerli (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Used by Benedetto Croce, "dialettalità riflessa" indicates the deliberate use of a dialect when a language standardized by literature is available for use. The definition can be found in Croce, Benedetto, 1926. "La letteratura dialettale riflessa, la sua origine nel Seicento e il suo ufficio storico". *La Critica*, 24, pp. 334–343; later in Croce, Benedetto, 1927. *Uomini e cose della vecchia Italia*. Vol. 1. Bari: Laterza, pp. 222–234.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on dialectal elements and choices in collections of short stories before the 1550s, refer to Stussi, Alfredo. "Scelte linguistiche e connotati regionali nella novella italiana". In: Malato (1989), pp. 191–214.



Church, reveals the strength, expressiveness, dynamism, and comedic capacities and potentialities of the Neapolitan dialect.

Already in the fifteenth century, the insertion of comedic elements represented a way to acknowledge the traditional stigma against the Neapolitan dialect and, at the same time, use it to the advantage of the local culture and language in order to testify the many potentialities of the dialect. Neapolitan authors would employ words and structures as expressions of authenticity and popular materiality, hence as an antidote to the affectation of the high literature identified with the Tuscan language (De Blasi 2002, p. 95). Comic poetic exchanges called *gliommieri* demonstrated a fertile dialect expressing a colorful and lively community of people, and featured paroemias, maxims, and an array of idiomatic expressions recited for pure amusement and linguistic virtuosism. Poets also wrote entertaining songs in dialect called *villanelle*, which recalled oral practices exercised during communal events for the local society. Paroemias filled another considerably large recipient of the Neapolitan dialect, theater, especially in *farze* (or *farcze*) *cavaiole* □ farces that hybridized Neapolitan and Tuscan □, in performances of the *commedia dell'arte*, and in puppetry, where Neapolitan characterized the language of mean and vicious Pulcinella<sup>9</sup>.

In the seventeenth century, both Giambattista Basile and Giulio Cesare Cortese, himself a member of the Accademia della Crusca, wrote in Italian and in Neapolitan (Radtke 1997b, p. 82). Along with Felipe de Scafato Sgruttendio, more than parodying the earlier high literature or canonized authors by means of using dialect, they aimed to shape an autonomous literary reality, equally independent and respectable, which could express messages usually associated with literature in Italian (Cortelazzo 1980, p. 75; Rak 1994, pp. 22–25). They elaborated new poetic and prosaic forms that could give voice to local identity and to popular culture, satisfy the taste for realism, and transcend boundaries between high and low literature, while at the same time creating a new readership and raising awareness of the existence of a different literature<sup>10</sup>. Using an individual language, style, and rhetoric, filled with classical and mythological references, while indirectly excluding those works that did not fall into their category, they became the crowns of the Neapolitan language. Thus, as a triad, after more than two centuries, they could compete with the established crowns of the Florentine language, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio<sup>11</sup>.

Sarnelli and his *Posilecheata* are one of the products of such a tradition of literary productions in the Neapolitan dialect. In his opinion, the dialect answers to the necessity of creating a geographical identity that is situated in the streets of Naples, with its people, voices, and objects. It is a strong declaration of belonging and faithfulness to the culture that accepted and nurtured him after leaving Apulia. Neapolitan, for Sarnelli, becomes a language of inclusion and exclusion, the statement of a collective of which he was a member (Grimaldi 1997, p. 533). As a tool to express comedy and entertain his readers, Sarnelli's paroemias adapt to the textual, stylistic, and cultural exigencies of the three parts of the work to convey

<sup>9</sup> For further information, see Malato (1996); Rak (1994, pp. 47–74 on songs, and pp. 240–251 on Pulcinella); Haller (1999, pp. 243–278); and De Blasi (2012, pp. 57–60).

<sup>10</sup> Cortese's *La vaiasseide, poema* (1612), *La Rosa, fiaba* (1621), *Viaggio di Parnaso* (1621), *Lo cerriglio 'ncantato poema eroico* (1628); Sgruttendio's *La tiorba a taccone* (1646); Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* (1634) and *Le Muse napoletane* (1635). For more information, see Sammartino (1977–1978) and Fulco (1997). On the traditional novella as opposed to the Neapolitan example, see Capucci, Martino. "La novella nel Seicento". In: Malato (1989), pp. 497–512.

<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the Neapolitan culture and language from the thirteenth century to 1648, see *Storia di Napoli*, in particular Michele Rak's essay on the popular and dialect tradition from the Spanish conquest in 1503 to 1648 (Ghirelli 1973, pp. 573–747). For a general overview of Neapolitan history and literary enterprises in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including references to the other parts of the reign, see De Blasi (1988). On Naples and Neapolitan language during the period of the Spanish viceroys, see De Blasi (2012, pp. 65–88).

moral teachings, interpret events and characters, and transmit pleasant delight and humor<sup>12</sup>. In the prefatory letter, which is a pseudo-linguistic treatise, paroemias in Neapolitan are used as satirical and playful tools to minimize the traditional prestige associated with the language of the city of Florence, attack the Northern dialects, and thus confirm the creativity of the Neapolitan language<sup>13</sup>.

The clash between two linguistic codes, especially if one is dialect and the other represents the standardized or more prestigious language, is a powerful tool for satire and comedy (Gibellini 2010). Dialect is a productive tool in Sarnelli's introduction too, which includes a carnivalesque dialogue and a banquet amongst friend, which is the perfect moment to allow for laughter, but also to discuss socio-cultural elements and practices: comedy explodes while ethical values emerge. Moreover, the accumulation of paroemias and popular structures to express a point shows how rich and pompous the Neapolitan language can be, and how many meanings can be conveyed with an incredible amount of synonymic expressions (Cortelazzo 1980, p. 86). Finally, following the Horatian principle, Sarnelli makes the newly-created seventeenth century genre of the fable convey moral teaching by way of resorting to the narrative patrimony transmitted by and preserved among the common people. Simultaneously, he provides entertainment and comedic scenes for the sake of the public's attention and approval (Rak 1994, p. 298; Tarzia 1996, p. 180; Getto 2000, p. 298). Undoubtedly, paroemias are the perfect tools to achieve this dual purpose of moralizing and pleasing the readers.

### 3. The Prefatory Letter: "Those Beautiful Words So Huge and Robust That We Do Not Even Miss a Letter"

Before the collection of fables is introduced in the realistic narrative frame, Sarnelli dedicates a prefatory letter to the supposedly virtuous readers of his work. The letter becomes a manifesto of Sarnelli's polemical and subversive idea on linguistic supremacy and of his attitude toward the Neapolitan language. He powerfully and comically compares Neapolitan to other languages with stronger literary traditions, thus elevating the Neapolitan language. The first victim of his derision is the dated and antiquated idea of language promoted by the Accademici della Crusca in their two published editions of the *Vocabolario* (1612, 1623); the second are the Northern dialects, stereotyped as more sophisticated and refined languages<sup>14</sup>.

Sarnelli is conscious of the supremacy of the Tuscan vernacular<sup>15</sup> and of the great literary traditions in Lombard and Venetian dialects. In all fairness, literature in Neapolitan had embraced more genres and shown more original aspects than dialect literature in Northern Italy. The sole exception was Venice, where production in the local languages was quite robust, especially in theater (Malato 1996, p. 260). Yet, literature in the Neapolitan dialect was not granted the same respect as other dialects throughout the peninsula. One of the first stereotypes of literature in Neapolitan dialect was its alleged satirical and comedic representation of life, its buffoonery, and its comic and hilarious language<sup>16</sup>. As it was

<sup>12</sup> Sarnelli had already employed paroemias in his *Degli Avvenimenti di Fortunato e de' suoi figli*, drawing them from a variety of sources (Greek, Latin, and Spanish) and making them express a contextual meaning related to religious matters, social practices, erudite disquisitions, and literary matters.

<sup>13</sup> On the Neapolitan *questione della lingua*, see Radtke 1997a.

<sup>14</sup> In his research on theoretical approaches on comedy, Giulio Ferroni argues that in comedic events, including literary ones, a subject triggers comedy (actor and author), a subject laughs (the audience), and a subject or object is the victim of the comedic act (Ferroni 1974, p. 14).

<sup>15</sup> At that time, the Accademici were working on the third edition of the *Vocabolario* to be eventually published in 1693.

<sup>16</sup>For instance, see Caniato (2004).



mentioned above, Neapolitan was associated with hilarious language, used to entertain and likely to appear in works that were quintessentially associated with a popular or lower social sphere, compared to the presumably dignified literature in Italian. Therefore, Sarnelli plays with this stereotype but overturns it with a harshly ironic tone.

Sarnelli starts his letter by asserting that those who have always engaged in grand literature consider his *Posilecheata* a "passiatempo" [a pastime], or a work that does not deserve the recognition that is typically awarded to other literature (P, 4.3)<sup>17</sup>. He refers to the writers of those high-level literary works by the epithet of "pennarulo", namely a pen-wielder, but in *Posilecheata* used as an ironic and derogatory remark for writers who use their pen only after being paid. Two proverbial phrases express his decision to write a work that does not meet the expectations of an obtuse community of critics as well as his derision of those who censure his work:

Pocca li primme uommene de lo munno porzi songo state cenzorate, essenno 'mpossibbele che *quarche travo rutto no' strida* e che *quarche strenga rotta non se metta 'n dozzana*: anze, trattannose de livre, vide pe infi' a li strunze (parlanno co lleverenzia de le facce veste) che dicenno: *Nos coque pomma natamus*. (P, 3.2)

[Indeed, the very first men of the world were censored, for it's impossible that there's no beam that doesn't creak or that in a dozen shoelaces there's not a broken one or two. In fact, in the matter of books, you'll see that pieces of shit (speaking with reverence for your faces) will say: "We can swim, too" (Bottigheimer 2012, p. 76)]

Before Sarnelli, Cortese had used the two expressions together in his *Vajasseide: Non è possibile che quarche travo rutto non strida e che quarche strenga rotta non se metta ndozzana* (I.19; Rocco 1882–1991, s.v. *dozzana*). The first expression (*essenno 'mpossibbele che quarche travo rutto no' strida*) conveys the message that anything defective, despite seeming strong as a beam, creaks and shows its flaw, and, consequently, when an imperfection occurs, it is impossible to hide it. Critics who do not excel in their job and are "travi rotte" [broken beams], cannot help expressing their own, incorrect ideas. In fact, the first writers fell victim to these incompetent critics, who blamed them for their supposed imperfections and literary inappropriateness. The second proverbial phrase (*essenno 'mpossibbele che quarche strenga rotta non se metta 'n dozzana*) confirms this message, as it refers to blustering people who cannot avoid intruding in matters that do not concern them. They put themselves in a dozen groups, and are therefore grouped all together without distinction and thus intermingled with the others. This happens with "stringhe rotte" [broken shoelaces] that are together in inappropriate places or without being distinguished from the good ones, which is a metaphor for the above-mentioned critics.

The message is even more apparent when considering that some unworthy authors believe themselves to be "apples" when in fact they are "pieces of shit". Here, sarcastically, Sarnelli refers to the Latin expression, *Nos quoque poma natamus* (phonetically transcribed in Neapolitan, *Nos coque pomma natamus*), "We are floating apples", which Malato tracks down to the Aesopian fable, *Poma et sterquilinum*<sup>18</sup>. Malato identifies Aesop's fable as a

<sup>17</sup> All quotations from the text come from Malato's critical edition of *Posilecheata* (Sarnelli 1986) and are introduced by the letter P (for *Posilecheata*). References to the English translation of the prefatory letter and of the final paragraphs of the introduction by Ruth Bottigheimer are provided (Bottigheimer 2012, pp. 76–79); for other quotations, the meaning of the paroemias is rephrased according to the context, and thus without providing a literal translation. In these quotations, paroemias are italicized.

<sup>18</sup> On the English tradition of this saying, see Taylor (1931, p. 209). My translation of Aesop's fable, *Sterquilinum et Poma*, which argued against the vanity of praise, follows: "Some dung, which happened to be carried up along with some apples in a sudden runoff of water, was floating in that place where till recently it had been lying. Believing itself so excellent then, in riding on the water and being ferried in the company of

source of a Neapolitan story about a shipwreck that left oranges floating in the water besides some dung. Sarnelli applies the literal meaning of the expression to the context of the prefatory letter, where it refers to those who are not able to write and dare to criticize other writers. These people deem themselves to be on the same level as the brightest writers, in the same faulty way that excrement is believed to be apples. By inference, this group of unskilled critics includes those who would attack Sarnelli for the enterprise he has undertaken, his *Posilecheata*. The sarcastic devaluation of Sarnelli's attackers is fully achieved.

The paid writers continue to denigrate Sarnelli's project and consider it void of any significance, a "bagattella" indeed:

E non se vregogna no paro tujo perdere lo tiempo a 'ste bagattelle? Haje scritto tant'opere grave e de considerazione, e mo scacarete co sti cunte dell'uerco? E po' a lo mmacaro avisse scritto 'n lengua toscane o 'n quarch'auto linguaggio, pocca veramente la lengua napoletana non serve che pe li boffune de le commedie. (P, 4.3)

[Isn't someone of your station ashamed to be wasting time on these trifles? You've written so many serious works worthy of consideration, and now you're shitting your pants<sup>19</sup> with these ogre's tales? I mean, if you had at least written in Tuscan or some other language; Neapolitan really isn't good for anything but buffoons in comedies (Bottigheimer 2012, p. 76)]

The first tale of Basile's collection, *Lo cunto dell'uerco* [The Tale of the Ogre] (I.1)<sup>20</sup> is mentioned here in order to devalue the literature in dialect in its entirety. The motive lies in Sarnelli's inability to write high-level literature in Neapolitan, as the opening tale of Basile's collection supposedly shows. Sarnelli's work would have been appreciated and considered in a different light had he written in another language, preferably Tuscan. However, once he wrote in a language apt only for the buffoons of comedies, his work became worthless. This is the argument made by his imaginary critic<sup>21</sup>.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the Neapolitan region, Pietro Bembo's prescriptions were only blandly accepted since local scholars were promoting a rather more eclectic language, in which Neapolitan could play a major role (Bianchi, De Blasi, Librandi 1993, p. 83; Haller 1999, p. 244). Naples was far from the center that the Tuscan language promoted since the first edition of the dictionary of the Accademia della Crusca, and was eager to protect its independence and the appropriateness of its dialect over Tuscan (Malato 1996, pp. 265–266). The constant presence of discussions about the supremacy and superiority of the Neapolitan language, such as, for instance, *Eccellenza della lingua napoletana con la maggioranza alla Toscana* (1662) by unknown Partenio Tosco, confirms how the dichotomy between Neapolitan and Tuscan was deeply felt, still at the time when

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apples, it said «How skillfully we apples swim!». But a little later, dissolved by the humidity, it vanished in the water".

<sup>19</sup> A more appropriate translation would be: "[...] and now you are dirtying the page [...]" (Rocco, s.v. *cunto*).

<sup>20</sup> For more information on this fable, see Sanguineti-White (1992); Rak (1986, 1994); Canepa (2004). Basile in *Muse napolitane* 5, *Tersicore overo la zita*, uses the expression with the same meaning, namely thoughts of no importance (Basile 1976, p. 287). Similarly, in Basile's *Cunto*, eglogue 2, *La tenta*, the cluster "cunte dell'uerco" is used to indicate the nonsensical discourses that tincture provokes in human beings.

<sup>21</sup> Sarnelli had already explored this topic in the preface to his 1674 edition of Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* (Basile 1674), where he claims that Neapolitan lacks any formal recognition and any instruments that could vouch for its literary endeavours, and thus is inferior to other languages. When discussing the best dictionary in each language, Sarnelli mentions: Latin and its dictionary by Ambrogio Calepio (known as Calepino), titled *Dictionarium Latinum* (1502); Greek and its *Lexicon Linguae Graecae*, after which lexicographical studies intensified in the 1500s; and Tuscan with the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*. He compares it to the absence of any recognized dictionary or linguistic analysis for the Neapolitan dialect. Sarnelli is indirectly saying that, since there are no dictionaries and grammar books to attest the correct orthography of the Neapolitan dialect, his orthographic choices are the result of a thorough study which places his own edition of Basile's collection at the same level of the best literary editions in Greek and Latin.

Sarnelli was writing (Malato 1996, pp. 265–266; see also, Vitale 1988). Given these premises, the only way Sarnelli could find a meritorious place in the linguistic canon for Neapolitan and claim its literary dignity was to play with the stereotype created by the Tuscan tradition. Therefore, he activates an antagonistic “*parodia del diverso*”, based on diatopic aspects, and demolishes it (Cortelazzo et al. 2002, p. 1003)<sup>22</sup>. He accepts the stigma of dialect literature as humble and immeritorious, but also compares it to the Tuscan language in order to demonstrate that Tuscan cannot be given the label of a more literary language and emphasise that his work is a “*recreazione leceta ed onesta*” [a legitimate and honest recreation] (P, 4.4)<sup>23</sup>. Proverbs and proverbial phrases are Sarnelli’s satirical and playful tools to minimize the traditional prestige associated with the language of the city of Florence, attack it, and thus confirm the creativity of the Neapolitan language.

In order to show the resonant power of the Neapolitan language, Sarnelli sets forth a classical source: he mentions Pompeus Magnus who, upon arriving in Naples and falling in love with the local dialect, abandoned Latin<sup>24</sup>. When Cicero scolded him for his decision, Pompeus responded that if Cicero had been acquainted with the Neapolitan language, he himself would have chosen it over Latin, because of its greater sweetness. Cicero’s reprimand is described by means of a proverbial phrase<sup>25</sup>:

Quanno Cicerone ne le fece na lavatella de capo senza sapone [...] (P, 5.7)

[When, as a result, Cicero gave Pompey’s head a good washing without soap  
(Bottigheimer 2012, p. 77)]

*Lavare il capo a uno col ranno caldo, o senza sapone* means to scold someone (GDLI<sup>26</sup> 1961–2002, s.v. *sapone*). Sarnelli modifies the expression by replacing the more traditional *lavare* with *fare una lavatella*, where the word *lavatella*, resulting from a derivative process, typical to southern Italy (Serianni 1988, p. 653), is infused with an ironic pun in comparison

<sup>22</sup> This seems to confirm Radtke’s idea that “la scelta del dialetto [...] s’intende come un divertimento intellettuale, come un pretesto, ma non come necessità letteraria” (Radtke 1997b, p. 81). Rak also comments that the presence of Tuscan in the Neapolitan tradition is always comic and parodic (Rak 1994, p. 23). On the topic, see also Brevini, pp. LXXVI–LXXXII.

<sup>23</sup> Here, he probably refers to Cervantes’s *Don Quijote*, where in Chapter 48, the canonical says that, “No es posible que esté continuo el arco armado, ni la condición y flaqueza humana se pueda sustentar sin alguna licita recreación”. The priest is here saying that it is impossible that the arch is always tense, meaning that the tension sometimes needs relaxing, and that the human relaxation cannot sustain itself without a licit recreation. As in Cervantes’ discussion, where well-written and well-organized comedies are a precious example of eloquence and a good pastime for intelligent people, *Posilecheata* is an appropriate and permitted way to pause from virtuous enterprises.

<sup>24</sup> This anecdote is taken from Book 1, Chapter 6, of Giovanni Antonio Summonte’s *Historia della città e regno di Napoli* (1601–1602), which refers to one of Cicero’s letters *Ad Atticum*. Summonte specifies that it is from Book 7, where the only possibile reference to Summonte’s quotation might be from the second letter (even though the topic is completely different): “Quo modo exspectabam epistulam quam Philoxeno dedisses! Scripseras enim in ea esse de sermone Pompei Neapolitano” [Impatiently indeed did I await the letter you said you had given to Philoxenus! For you wrote that it contained an account of your conversation with Pompey at Naples]. For more information, see Sarnelli (1986, p. 5, note 5).

<sup>25</sup> The concept of sweetness refers to Dante’s *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and his goal of finding the best vernacular in the Italian peninsula. When the poet needs to choose the most suitable words for his compositions, the only option left are words that are combed, decorative, and glossy (II.7), thus as sweet as hydromellum. Surprisingly, Dante, in his linguistic analysis of the dialects of the peninsula, does not linger upon Neapolitan. He mentions it when he states that Naples and Gaeta belonged to the same tribe (I.IX.4). Later, in chapter 12, he inserts the Neapolitan vernacular in the bigger area of Apulia, whose inhabitants, according to him, use many gross barbarisms, such in *Bolzera che chiangesse lo quattraro* [I would like the boy to cry].

<sup>26</sup> The acronym stands for *Grande Dizionario della lingua italiana* by Battaglia and Squarotti (1961–2002).



to the neutral *lavata*<sup>27</sup>. A reprimand is usually firm and direct, and difficult to soften. *Lavatella* grammatically seems to lessen the meaning of the expression or, at least, make it nicer so to reveal an affectionate feeling or emotion. However, in the context where it appears, by saying it with a comedic grin, the phrase ironically means that the rebuke was in fact very harsh<sup>28</sup>. Sarnelli is saying that Cicerone is not simply giving Pompeo a washing without soap, but rather a good washing.

The proverbial phrase *Fare na lavatella de capo* achieves many objectives in this section of the prefatory letter: it situates Cicero and Pompeus Magnus in a colloquial context, since they are not placed in a political setting. If Cicero can scold Pompeus for his choice of spoken language, then the paroemia also shifts their relationship to a level of friendly banter. The Neapolitanization of the proverbial phrase makes the entire event local, and places the two men far from Rome. Additionally, the contrast between Neapolitan and Latin creates a dichotomy between a highly recognized language and a dialect. Since Tuscan is not present in the comparison, Neapolitan can compete with Latin and is even the victor of this competition, as Pompeus chooses it over his native language. The proverbial phrase also makes light of Cicero's inability to convince Pompeus. The great philosopher and rhetorician appears powerless, and fails in demonstrating the superiority of Latin over Neapolitan. It is almost as if Sarnelli is comparing Cicero's unsuccessful attempt to convince Pompeus in Latin with his successful praise of the Neapolitan language over Tuscan. The paroemia, despite having no connection with the Latin–Neapolitan dichotomy, indirectly contributes to the Tuscan–Neapolitan contrast. In both of these situations, Neapolitan is on the winning side, whereas its opponents are ironically derided. Finally, the presence of the paroemia is fundamental to the narration to understand the meaning of Pompeus's subsequent answer, concerning an event of linguistic clash between Naples and the North of Italy. The paroemia expresses Cicero's reprimand and, because of his disapproval, Pompeus replies in a demonstrative and epideictic way. Without it, it can be speculated that Pompeus's discourse would have probably been less passionate and less reasoned.

In a seventeenth-century dialectology lesson, Pompeus recounts of a philosopher from Posillipo who, as the embodiment of Sarnelli, engages in a derogatory and critical analysis on the Lombard vernacular, expressed by means of a harsh linguistic prank and an obscene pun. The philosopher acts like a "protoquamquam", ironically meaning that he behaves like a pedantic and know-it-all person, and frequently appears ridiculous in his display of knowledge:

Na vota, cammenanno no cierto filosofo de Posileco pe la Lommardia, perché parlava napoletano chiantuto e majàteco, tutte se ne redevano. Isso, mo, *pe farele toccare la coda co le mmano*, decette a uno che faceva lo protaquamquam: "Vedimmo no poco, de 'ratia, si songo meglio le parole voste o le noste!" (P, 6.10)

[Once, when a certain philosopher from Posillipo was walking around in Lombardy, everyone started laughing at him because he was speaking his vigorous and succulent Neapolitan. So, to make sure they'd go off with their tails between their legs, he says to one of them who was acting like a know-it-all: "Now, let's just see, if you please, if your words or ours are better!" (Bottigheimer 2012, p. 77)]

Rocco (1882–1991, s.v. *coda*) explains that the expression *Pe farele toccare la coda co le mmano* means to make someone "rimaner confuso, sgarato, avvilito" [to be confused, defeated, and discouraged]. Thus, in the context of the letter, it acquires the meaning of

<sup>27</sup> The suffix -ella comes from the Latin -ĒLLUS, that progressively substituted -ŪLUS in Romance Languages. See Serianni and Castelvechi (1988, p. 653), and Renzi, Salvi, Cardinaletti (1995, Vol. 3, pp. 507–509).

<sup>28</sup> On paroemiatic irony, see Grimaldi (1997). On irony, refer to Knox (1973–1974), Mizzau (1986), Barbe (1995) Hutcheon (1995).

beating Sarnelli's critic in this linguistic competition. Again, a paroemia emphasises a moment of linguistic conscience dominated by ironic tones.

The apocopation of words typical of the Lombard dialect introduces a comparison between the beauty of Neapolitan and the ungraceful Lombard words.<sup>29</sup> Sarnelli criticizes the latter in order to heap praise upon the phonetic and morphological regulatory principles of the Neapolitan language,<sup>30</sup> which he considers more meaningful and productive than those of the Northern dialects. After demonstrating that the Neapolitan words *io capo casa* [I house head] become *mi ca co* in Lombard, the philosopher says:

Dì alla 'mpressa le parole meje a lengua toja: *Io, Casa, Capo*. E lo Lomardo, subeto: "*Mi Ca-Cò!*" "E si te cacò" decette lo Napoletano "te lo 'mmeretaste!" (P, 6.11)<sup>31</sup>

[Say my words in your language fast: *Io, Casa, Capo*". And the Lombard right away replied: "*Mi Ca-Cò.*" "If you shat yourself", said the Neapolitan, "you deserved it!" (Bottigheimer 2012, p. 77)]

The Neapolitan philosopher deflects the malevolent laughter originally directed at him by the Lombard, whose inconvenient and inappropriate dialect makes him instead the victim. Other than its scatological and vulgar references, the pun also mocks the grammar of those who cannot speak the Lombard dialect correctly. By using the third person singular of the verb *cacare* (*cacò*) for both the subject pronouns "mi" and "tu", the philosopher, a master of language and rhetoric, mocks the ungrammatical way in which people from the North of Italy talk. The philosopher's wordplay paves the way to the apex of the prefatory letter, where Neapolitan is said to be "chiantuto e majateco",<sup>32</sup> vigorous, consistent, solid, and flourishing; at the same time, it introduces a paroemia expressly created for this context.

As Boccaccio's *Decameron* (*Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti* [To take pity on people in distress is a human quality (Boccaccio 1995, p. 1)]) and Basile's *Cunto* (*Chi*

<sup>29</sup> On the mockery and critique of Northern dialects from a Neapolitan perspective and on examples of Neapolitan dialect, see Del Tufo, Casale, Colotti (2007, pp. 624–883, *Ragionamento* V). On the dichotomy between literature in dialect and Tuscan tradition, see also Vignuzzi, Bertini, and Malgarini in Cortelazzo et alii (2002, pp. 996–1028).

<sup>30</sup> On Northern dialects, see Ottavio Lurati's "La Lombardia" in Cortelazzo et alii (2002, pp. 226–260). For an account of the history of Italian dialects, see Coluccia, Rosario. "Storia dei dialetti nella Romania. Italo-romania". In: Ernst, Gerhard, Glessgen, Martin-Dietrich and Schmitt, Christian, 2009. *Romanische Sprachgeschichte*. Vol. 3. Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, pp. 2478–2499.

<sup>31</sup> In the *Atlante linguistico italiano*, nowadays the extended Lombard area (Brescia, Milan, Bergamo, Como, Trento) is identified by the form *ko* for *capo*. The pronunciation of *casa* as *ka* starts in Forlì and includes the entire Paduan area, indicatively corresponding today to Emilia Romagna, Lombardy minus Brescia, Liguria except a few areas around Genova and Savona as well as Piedmont excluding the areas along the border (Asti and Vercelli).

<sup>32</sup> D'Ambra (1873) describes *chiantuto* as "ben piantato, ben tallito, attecchito", and metaphorically "robusto, vigoroso, tarchiato, atticcato, fattoccio, aitante". Rocco (1882–1991) too defines *chiantuto* as "ben piantato, grosso, robusto, ed anche sodo, massiccio". He reports an example in Niccolò Amenta's comedy *La Fante* (Napoli, 1701), where in III.9 one reads: "No lo siente lo parlà chiantuto e aggrazejato?". Cortese also uses *chiantuto* in *Viaggio di Parnaso*, I.24; Sgruttendio in *Torbis*, I.5; Basile in I.1, I.2. Sarnelli uses the adjective in *cunto* 4 when he says that on Belluccia's gravestone the proverbial phrase *Non c'è peo de vellane arresagliute* is carved "a lettere chiantute" [in big letters] (P, 174.92). For *majateco*, D'Ambra (1873) explains that "questa voce adoperata del continuo, ha molti significati, come quella che soventi ad un tempo vuol indicare in una cosa freschezza, rotondità, pastosità, succhio, sincerità, e bel colore". D'Ascoli (1993) proposes that the meaning of *majateco* is "marchiano" and "robusto", whose reference to a flourishing robustness comes from the cherries in May (*majateco* derives from the Latin *maiaticus* from *maius*, May), which are particularly big and pulpy. *Maiateco* is used in Sgruttendio's *Torbis*, I.5, and Niccolò Capasso's sonet 186. Galiani (1779, p. 11) links *chiantuto* and *majateco* to "quelle piante o frutta polpate, e succulenti, che riempiono la bocca, e lusingano gratamente il palato", while Serio (1780, p. 17) asserts that the two words came from healthy broccoli with a strong stalk and a thriving top.

*cerca quello che non deve trova quello che non vuole* [Those who look for what they should not find what they would not (Basile 2007, p. 35)] are introduced by a paroemia, a proverbial phrase features in the climactic point of *Posilecheata*'s prefatory letter and sets its tone:

Pocca se dice a lo pajese che non è mio: *Lengua che no' la 'ntienne, e tu la caca*. Ora vide chi parla a lo sproposito, nuje o vuje? (P, 6.11)

[Because it's said in a town — not mine — that 'If you don't understand a language, you shit it right out.' Now let's see who's talking out of turn, us or you? (Bottigheimer 2012, p. 77)]

Instead of healing melancholy or presenting a moral and didactic appeal, as it happens in the texts of his predecessors, the philosopher's paroemia in Sarnelli's *Posilecheata* expresses an intensely ironic and hilarious view of the Northern dialects, confirming the supremacy of the Neapolitan dialect over any other vernacular.

Malato comments that the paroemia was used in Naples in the seventeenth century to indicate the Neapolitan people's indifference to foreign languages (Sarnelli 1986, p. 6).<sup>33</sup> In the context of the prefatory letter to *Posilecheata*, by means of a defecatory metaphor, the parahypotactical paroemia affirms that the Northern dialects, though supported by a stronger tradition, are incomprehensible, and thus they should be discarded. This is further explained by another comic example that demonstrates how the farther North one goes, the fewer words one uses. Sarnelli proves that the Neapolitan *pane* becomes *pan* in an area that can be identified with central Italy and then *pa* in the Northern regions of Lombardy<sup>34</sup>. For the traveler, therefore, it is better to return home instead of continuing his journey, because "se cchiù 'nnanze jammo non trovarrimmo cchiù pane, e nce morarrimmo de famme!" [If we go any farther we're not going to find any more bread, and we'll die of hunger!] (P, 7.13). In other words, as one goes farther North, one finds less food, hence less linguistic sustainment. Thus, food and hunger become a metaphor for linguistic criticism and ironic assessment on the prestige of languages (Rak 2005, p. 257).

One comparison that comes to mind better illustrates Sarnelli's ironic attitude in his prefatory letter. In 1564, under the pressure of the Medicean politics of promotion and diffusion of the Florentine language, Lionardo Salviati recited an *Oratione in lode della Fiorentina lingua e de' Fiorentini autori* in the Florentine Academy. Even though the two works differ in length, rhetorical as well as aesthetic devices, moral purposes, and modes of delivery, Salviati's oration and Sarnelli's prefatory letter to *Posilecheata* can be compared in the way each author praised his own language.<sup>35</sup> Salviati urges his fellow citizens to restore the linguistic centrality of the Florentine language, emphasising the recognition given to it by

<sup>33</sup> In Rocco's dictionary (1882–1991), the entry *cacare* mentions the paroemia, which is said to appear both in Sgruttendio and in Sarnelli. In Sgruttendio's *Torbis al Taccone* (I.12), though, the paroemia appears in a completely different context that describes how fear intervenes in front of the loved one and leads to loss of language. Thus, the following advice is given: "Parla chiaro, tu saie comm'è lo mutto: Lengua, che no' la 'ntienne, e tu la caca".

<sup>34</sup> In the *Atlante linguistico italiano*, at the point 835 (Naples), *pane* is transcribed as *q ppānə*. *Pan* can be found in central areas such as Porciano (Ferentino) in Frosinone (point 666), Monte Romano in Viterbo (618), Sorano in Grosseto (580), Paganico in Grosseto (562), Monticiano in Siena (553), Cortona in Arezzo (548), Bibbiena in Arezzo (525), Sillano in Lucca (502), and Mulazzo in Massa Carrara (501). It also appears in the province of Trento, but evidently Sarnelli does not reach so far when moving towards the North of Italy. *Pa*, instead, is located in Lombardy starting from point 142 (Ceresara, Mantova), 125 (Crone, Brescia), 124 (Redona, Bergamo), 120 (Collio, Brescia), 119 (Sale Marasino, Brescia), 118 (Spinone al Lago, Bergamo), 114 (Cimbergo, Brescia), 111, 112 and 113 (Piazza Brembana, Gromo, and Barzesto, Bergamo). The nasalized final vowel in *pā* and the semi-nasalized one in *pā* start to appear in Modena and include the entire Paduan area, along with *paŋ*, and Parma, namely all the area affected by Gallo-Italic aspects.

<sup>35</sup> It is not necessary to linger much on the analysis of the oration, for which refer to two articles, respectively by Franco Musarra (1982) and Nicoletta Maraschio (2001).



other people who spontaneously study it. The *dolcezza*, or the sweetness of the vocabulary, morphology, and syntax makes the Florentine language superior to any other vernacular, as well as Latin and Greek. Hence, Florence has to rely on an academic institution to set and codify the rules of its language. Similarly, Sarnelli is endorsing the rules of his own language, even though he does it by way of creating an ironic context that makes his statement even stronger than the Florentine linguist does. As Salviati supports the idea that a language needs to be spoken in order to be alive, Sarnelli lists examples of spoken language, which the above-mentioned proverbs and proverbial phrases demonstrate. He also manufactures a work definitely rooted on oral tradition: the short story, and consequently the fable, was the genre *par excellence* to read aloud and perform in courts and academies. Sarnelli does not focus on the positive aspects of the language, as Salviati does, but rather concentrates on a negative one. He describes the language as being corpulent and heavy, worthy of common people, suitable for depicting the rural world instead of the refined world of letters. He also succeeds in demonstrating that the Neapolitan language has "pataccune<sup>36</sup> [...] belle parole accossi grosse e chiatte<sup>37</sup>, che non ce manca na lettera" [those big, fat, beautiful words, where not one letter is missing] (P, 7.12). By way of exalting these supposedly negative characteristics, he ironically denies the other vernaculars any form of linguistic dignity. Paroemias give strength to Sarnelli's arguments, and are placed in crucial sections of the letter to employ comedy or sarcasm, to create ambiguity, or to express in a more tangible way the wisdom of the Neapolitan culture. They ultimately exemplify the dialect's ability to adapt to various contexts and help Sarnelli express a powerful message on the recognition of the Neapolitan language and culture.

While defining his own acquired identity and underscore his loyalty to the Neapolitan language and culture, Sarnelli declares,

Chi ha fatto lo stromiento co li Toscanise de parlare a lengua loro, s'aggia pacienza: Io non ce l'aggio fatto, e perzò voglio parlare a lengua de lo pajese mio. E chi no' lo pò sentire, o s'appila l'aurecchie, o *cinco lettere*. (P, 7.14)

[If you've made a pact with the Tuscans to speak their language, you'll have to bear with me: I haven't, and I intend to speak in the language of my own country. And if you can't stand hearing it, either plug your ears, or take those five letters and do with them what you wish (Bottigheimer 2012, p. 78)]

Sarnelli's unwillingness to find a compromise demonstrates his intolerance of the Tuscan language. By now totally integrated in the city that he considers his ("pajese mio"), he only offers two possibilities, neither of which is agreeable to speakers of languages other than Neapolitan. The options are either a voluntary choice of deafness, or "five letters". In his edition of the collection (Sarnelli 1986, p. 7, note 7), Malato explains that the meaning of the proverbial phrase *cinco lettere* is lost and that it might be a periphrasis for "shit" [merda]. Rocco (1882–1991, s.v. *cinco*) identifies *cinco lettere* with "crepa [snuff it] o altra voce simile che abbia cinque lettere", and reports Sarnelli's quotation without offering further explanation<sup>38</sup>. However, *pazienza* and *cinque lettere* are usually coupled in the proverbial

<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that Giuseppe Frizzi in his *Dizionario dei frizzetti popolari fiorentini* (1975, s.v. *punto*) mentions the word *pataccone*. Pataccone is presumably the name of a person who possesses shoes without any stitching points, as it was usual to make shoes at the time; therefore, the proverbial phrase *Essere come le scarpe di Pataccone, senza punti* is used to play around the lack of money, something opposite to the robustness of Sarnelli's words.

<sup>37</sup> *Chiatto* is explained by Rocco (1882–1991) as "grasso, pingue".

<sup>38</sup> Rocco (1882–1991, s.v. *cinque*) lists an example from Michele Zezza's *Artaserse*, II.11, where *cinco lettere* means "forca" [death]: "Aggia lo reo la vita o cinco lettere". Frizzi in his *Dizionario* (1975) relates the word "cinque" to the vulgar term for the male genital organ, "cazzo".

phrase, *O pazienza o cinque lettere*. In Sarnelli's text, the word *pacienza* (*pazienza*) refers to those who have enough patience to tolerate the Tuscan language, unlike himself who has lost it and wishes to speak in the language of Naples. Consequently, in this context, *cinquè lettere* means that the alternative to "pazienza" relates to pain, and a possible explanation may be "dolor" or "morte". This is a metaphorical and slightly ironic pain or death since it affects only those who do not recognize the value of the Neapolitan language, thus of Sarnelli's work. In his opinion, Neapolitan demonstrates its greater aptness at all levels of literature, as well as its naturalness, as opposed to the artificiality of the Tuscan language, exclusively based on an atrophied bookish tradition (Valente 1977). The paroemia, being elliptical or monophrastic and thus more concise than other paroemias, should communicate a direct message to the readers or listeners (Bessi 2004, p. 65). However, in this instance, that is not the case. It is, instead, the most ambiguous structure that could have been used and its indeterminant meaning, one that lies somewhere between surrendering and irreverence, is also a sentiment that characterizes Sarnelli's entire prefatory letter.

#### 4. The Introductory Banquet: "Because the Number Three Has More Virtues Than All the Other Numbers Together"

Umberto Eco (1983, p. 257) writes that "il comico pare popolare, liberatorio, eversivo perché dà licenza di violare la regola". Bakhtin would have said that in the popular explosion of vitality for which Carnival allows, it is normal to overturn the typical order of life: freedom is one of the most appropriate manifestations of these new rules of behavior and social relationships, and laughter becomes the tool for understanding reality and revealing truth (Bakhtin 1984, pp. 83–101, 196–303). Even language is affected during Carnival practices since it becomes freer. That is, linguistic hierarchy is abolished, and neither decency nor respect are required any longer.

The lunch described in Sarnelli's *Ntroduzione de la Posilecheata e commito d'ammice fatto a Posileco*, which represents a frame for the five *cunti*, epitomizes these elements. Linguistic and cultural creativity and freedom, accumulation of paroemias, word games, and funny expressions, coupled with a background of gastronomic erudition, contribute to a popular atmosphere<sup>39</sup>. The realistic scene and "hyperboles of food" (Bakhtin 1984, pp. 184–185) also create a comic effect, while at the same time attesting to the inventiveness of the dialect. Proverbs and proverbial phrases help demonstrate this linguistic superiority as well as the greater literary versatility of the Neapolitan dialect, and thus show a tangible proof of the speculations expressed in the prefatory letter.

In contrast to Boccaccio's frame, Sarnelli's is filled with comic and parodic elements and, as a response to Basile's fantastic world, its atmosphere is real and as robust as the language that Sarnelli employs. Masillo Reppone, an alias for Sarnelli, accepts his friend Petruccio's invitation to spend time with him in Posillipo. As in Sarnelli's prefatory letter, he excuses himself for being naïve and willing to leave Naples for entertainment: even the most proper and formal men enjoy a distraction from time to time "pe pegliare ajero e non fetire de 'nchiuso e de peruto" [so that they can get a breath of air and not reek of staleness and mold]

<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to read what Galiani (1779, p. 23) writes about the expressiveness of Neapolitans: "Ma il Napoletano, l'ente della natura, che forse ha i nervi più delicati, e la più pronta irritabilità nelle fibre, se non è tocco da sensazioni, tace: se lo è, e sian queste o di sdegno, o di tenerezza, o di giubilo, o di mestizia, o di gusto, o di rammarico (che ciò non fa gran differenza), subito s'infiamma, si commuove, e quasi si convella. Allora entra in subitaneo desio di manifestar le sue idee. Le parole se gli affollano, e fanno groppo sulla lingua. S'ajuta co' gesti, co' cenni, co' moti. Ogni membro, ogni parte è in commozione, e vorrebbe esprimere. Così senza esser facondo è eloquentissimo. Senza ben esprimersi si fa comprender appieno, e sovente intenerisce, compunge, persuade".

(P, 9.1). Consistent with his overarching agenda, Sarnelli is again defending his own work, which can be considered an escape into fresh air from the erudite studies to which he had been devoting himself up until that point. Considering the subsequent etymological reasoning that Sarnelli proposes, the idea that his *Posilecheata* can be read as a useful and worthy *divertissement* becomes significant. He explains that the word "Posileco", the name of the town of Posillipo at Sarnelli's time (nowadays Pusilleco in Neapolitan dialect), carries in its same etymology (Posillipo means remedy against melancholy)<sup>40</sup> an implicit acceptance of entertainment and pleasure<sup>41</sup>. In the title of Sarnelli's collection, the word is given the typical denominative suffix "-ata" that produces feminine words (Renzi, Salvi, Cardinaletti 1995, Vol. 3, p. 489). This suffix, which is common in improvised constructions that are not highly productive (*ibid.*, pp. 512–513), makes "Posilecheata" mean "to go on a trip in Posillipo in a leisurely way without much programming". In other words, *Posilecheata* is a brief extemporaneous recreational event dominated by a light and delightful atmosphere that allows for pleasing and funny conversations. As the word also conveys the idea of an enjoyable and relaxed stroll without a clear direction, the description of the banquet in the introduction appears to be subjected to mere randomness, which nonetheless leads to the recounting of the five fables.

On July 26, 1684, Masillo arrives at his friend's, Petruccio, house "justo justo ad ora de magnare" [at exactly the right time to eat] (P, 11.4). The two friends are unaware, though, that an uninvited host would join them and stage a gigantic scene in both words and actions. The comic characterization of Marchionno, the doctor who shows up at the dinner, is achieved by single words, comparisons, and paroemias; the result is a comedy, whose humor results from the absurd and the illogical inversion of common sense and from the excessiveness of both words and acts.

From the initial description, the reader understands that Marchionno is a meritorious descendent of Rabelais's Pantagruel or almost an ogre (Allasia 2015, p. 262):

[...] nce vedimmo adduosso no ciert'ommo, co na sottanella nfi' a lo denuccio tutta sbottonata pe la gran panza c'aveva: teneva no paro de spalle che pareva vastaso de la Doana, aveva na vocca cossi larga che pareva de lupo, e no naso apierto comm'a cavallo. E co na facce tosta che no' l'avarria sperciata no pontarulo. (P, 12.7)

[We saw, almost over us, a certain man with a knee-length tunic, unbuttoned because of his huge belly: he had such a pair of shoulders that he seemed to be a porter, he had such a large mouth that it resembled that of a wolf, and a nose as open as that of a horse. And with such infallible audacity that a punch would have not been able to run through it]

The focus on a specific aspect of a person's appearance or behavior and its link to a member of the animal realm, namely subjects that do not have any apparent connection to the

<sup>40</sup> In the letter by Eugenio Desvati to Masillo Reppone, the academician Sgargiato refers to Posilleco as the "luoco assaje delizioso, ca fa sano ogne malato" (Sarnelli 1885, p. XXIII). Del Tufo celebrates Posillipo as "gran spasso d'un cor ferito e lasso" (Del Tufo, Casale, Colotti 2007, p. 82). In *cunto* 3 of *Posilecheata*, an etiologic explanation on Naples and its gulf includes Posilleco too, which is said to be always green and merry, characterized by amusement and happiness (P, 108.40–41). Posilleco acquires a mythological dimension when it is said to be a young man transformed into a mountain because of love sickness (P, 108.42). Giulio Cesare Capaccio in his 1634 *Il forastiero. Dialogi di Giulio Cesare Capaccio Academico otioso* (day X, pp. 100–102) and Carlo Celano in his 1692 *Notizie del bello, dell'antico e del curioso della città di Napoli, per i signori forestieri, divise in dieci giornate* (day IX, pp. 77–78) describe Posillipo in the same encomiastic tones.

<sup>41</sup> In Antonio Bulifon's edition of Sarnelli's *Guida de' forestieri curiosi di vedere ed intendere le cose più notabili della real città di Napoli e del suo amenissimo distretto*, Bulifon describes *Posilecheata* as follows: "Posilicheata di Masillo Reppone, cioè trattenimento, ed honesta ricreazione in Pausilipo, scritto in lingua Napoletana [...]" (in the third page of the *Catalogo de' libri composti, e dati alle stampe dall'illustrissimo et reverendissimo signor Pompeo Sarnelli vescovo di Bisceglia*).



described scene, activate a host of expectations for the person's character and general attitude. The results is a comic twist, triggered by the apparent contrast to normal social behavior<sup>42</sup>. The mouth as huge as that of a wolf and the nose as open as horse's nostrils clearly indicate that Marchionno is a devourer without restraints or judgement, something that is emphasised by his huge belly that the tunic cannot hide. Later, Marchionno is described while grabbing a roll of bread, "aprenno chella voccuzza che l'arrivava nfi' all'aurecchie" and "sbotanno l'uocchie com'a gatta frostera" [opening that cute mouth of his, which was large enough to reach his ears, and opening his eyes as wide as a wild cat's]<sup>43</sup> (P, 14.13). As it has been argued in the preceding paragraph, the alteration of a noun carries an ironic perspective: in this specific example, transforming *vocca* (*bocca*) into *voccuzza*, which is usually used to describe a mouth in gentler terms, instead emphasises the largeness of Marchionno's mouth and depicts his stomach as being incredibly insatiable.

As Bakhtin's (1984) "grotesque realism" emerges from his description, Marchionno is presented as a member of the lower social class. The corporal reality that he introduces, though obscene and contrary to any form of stature, is worthy of appearing in a literary work. Marchionno's voracity is a mainstay for feasts, banquets, food and the pleasure of eating, as well as for an exploitation of each possible aspect of the language. The author creates an everyday reality that is far from being repetitive and predictable, and ultimately leads to an explosion of physical pleasure and linguistic fun<sup>44</sup>. With a long speech on the significance of the number three, and in employing all of the tools on which logic and rhetoric can count, Marchionno skillfully dupes his hosts into inviting him to their meal:

Non sapite vuje, signorielle mieje, ca a lo 'mmito non deveno essere né manco de le Grazie, né cchiù de le Muse? Azzoè o tre o nove, ma duje è troppo poco. Otra po' che lo numero de lo tre ha cchiù bertute che non hanno tutte le nummere 'n chietta. (P, 12.8)

[Don't you know, my lords, that at a banquet there should be neither fewer people than the Graces nor more than the Muses? That is, either three or nine, but two is way too few. Aside from that, the number three possesses more virtues than all the other numbers together]

After this, Marchionno enumerates all the elements in the world with a tripartite structure: the natural principles, the types of animal, the components of the soul, the things that control the world, and so on. In this section of Marchionno's Baroque and expressivist tirade, a significant quantity of paroemias and maxims underscore the properties of this number, as they are all, accordingly, based on the presence of three members. They are an expression of Marchionno's "lingua libera" and "libertà linguistica" (Terracini 1963), which, as it was discussed above, is a primary characteristic of Baroque literature.

The paroemiac type (Taylor 1931, p. 10) that Marchionno employs is composed of an initial proposition that cites the characteristic(s) of the three things and starts with the word *tre*, and then the list of the three things themselves (Croce 1883, p. 66–67). A few examples out of the 27 tripartite paroemias appearing in Marchionno's speech follow:

*Tre cose non songo stemmate: forze da vastaso, consiglio de poverommo, e bellezza de pottana* (P, 13.9)

[Three things are not valued: the strength of a porter, the advice of a poor man,<sup>45</sup> and the beauty of a whore]

<sup>42</sup> For further information, see Bakhtin (1984, pp. 303–368).

<sup>43</sup> In this case, *frostera* means an outsider because the cat is wild.

<sup>44</sup> For more information, see Bakhtin (1984, pp. 145–154).

<sup>45</sup> [Editorial note: the likely source is *Ecclesiastes* 9:16, "and the wisdom of the poor is despised".]

*Tre cose non possono stare annasose: le fusa dinto de lo sacco, le femmene 'nchiuse 'n casa e la paglia dinto de le scarpe* (P, 13.10)

[Three things cannot be hidden: purring inside a bag, women shut up in the house, and straw inside shoes]

*Tre cose abbesognano a lo ruffiano: gran core, assai chiacchiare e poca vregogna* (P, 14.12)

[Three are the things that the ruffian needs: a brazen heart, endless chatter, and little shame]

*Tre cose cacciano l'ommo da la casa: fummo, fiato e femmena marvasa* (P, 14.12)

[Three things send a man away from a house: smoke, stench, and an evil woman]<sup>46</sup>

Works containing tripartite paroemias, as well as collections of tripartite paroemias, on the basis of the Latin formula "Tria sunt...", were published in Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Its first instances are found in the *Old Testament*, in Chapter 25 of the *Ecclesiasticus*, which lists a paroemia containing up to nine members, and in Chapter 30 of Solomon's *Proverbs*, where a few tripartite paroemias appear<sup>47</sup>. In 1519, Ulrich Von Hutten published *Trias Romana*, which contains a list of tripartite paroemias, specifically forty-eight Latin *sententiae* followed by fifty-eight German *sententiae*, mostly dealing with the immoral customs and the corrupted institutions in Rome (Besso 1889, pp. 151–156). Additionally, in 1614, Giulio Cesare Croce published a work titled *Il Tre*, featuring sixty-two paroemias from both oral and written traditions. Speroni, who re-published this text in 1960, mentions that paroemias with three elements were particularly suited for moral and didactic purposes and for being easy to remember (Speroni 1960, p. 5)<sup>48</sup>.

One work undoubtedly crossed Sarnelli's path when he was enumerating his tripartite paroemias, and that is Francesco Alunno's *Della fabrica del mondo*, published in 1546–1548. During his tirade at the banquet, Marchionno declares that if someone aspires to know all the other virtues of the number three, he should read Alunno's *La fraveca de lo munno*. In fact, Alunno mentions all the paroemias that Marchionno lists and many more in his ninth book, entitled *Quantità* (section *Tre*, pp. 232r–233r), thus demonstrating that this paroemiatic type can be productive in different contexts and genres. Some of the tripartite paroemias listed by Marchionno also appear in Basile's collection, specifically in *cunto* IV.6, *Le tre corone*, inside a hyperbolic conversation between a young woman called Marchetta and a female ogre. In Basile's fable, the paroemias are present in the ogre's discourse on a succulent dinner. When Marchetta prepares a juicy dinner for her so that she, herself, can avoid being eaten by the ogre, the ogre recites several tripartite paroemias. All of the paroemias in this section are focused on the number three and on the rhetorical strength of the three members. This serves to emphasise the character's ecstatic disposition before the meal and her never-ending praise of Marchetta's food. Consequently, in Basile's fable, the tripartite structure is not directly linked to the situation *per se*, but is introduced for rhetoric and stylistic reasons as well as to give voice to an emotional status. Conversely, in *Posilecheata*, Marchionno's tripartite paroemias are inserted in the prose for their distinctive structure and for their capability to

<sup>46</sup> [Editorial note: cf. in *Proverbs* 21:9 and 25:24, which only differ because of a Hebrew preposition preceding or missing before the first verb's infinitive: "It is better to sit on a corner of the [flat] roof, than a quarrelsome wife and a house of witchcraft". That is antecedent for the husband exiting the inside of the house, only he is leaving for the roof.]

<sup>47</sup> For more information on collections based on a tripartite structure ("three things are" or "three things do") in the French, Italian, and Catalan tradition and on the interchangeability with other numbers, specifically two and four, see Morel-Fatio (1883). For examples of tripartite paroemias in other languages, see Taylor (1931, pp. 159–164).

<sup>48</sup> Even in a modern collection of Neapolitan paroemias, such as Vittorio Gleijeses's (1978), under the letter T, a considerable number of paroemias presents a tripartite structure (*ibid.*, pp. 397–402).

express "multivocità verbale" (Fasano 1975, p. 486). As they are strongly related to the narrative context, they underscore the main objective of his monologue: the number three is the best number possible for fellow diners.

The accumulation of tripartite paroemias inside Marchionno's appraisal of the values of the number three falls within the Baroque intention to delight and astonish the readers, as well as within the typical Neapolitan oral tradition. The presence of such a considerable number of paroemias and their excessive and hyperbolic use in a work that is not devoted to them accords to *Posilecheata* a specific significance. Other than creating a feeling of wonderment, it results in a comedic effect since it aims to achieve a goal that could be accomplished efficiently with less waste of energy and linguistic material. It should not be forgotten that the display of paroemiac wisdom is intended to convince Masillo and Petruccio to invite Marchionno to dinner, a far too easy target for such a demonstration of knowledge and rhetorical skills. Yet, Marchionno employs paroemias to achieve his goal, exploiting their value to the utmost while creating comedy.

When the demonstration of the virtues of the number three concludes and Marchionno is invited, the supper can officially begin. During the meal, funny comparisons to animals or unexpected elements emphasises Marchionno's excessive behavior and introduce a popular dimension, such as:

Lo gattenaro de Marchionno (*da dove viene? da lo molino!*) accommenza a menare le mmano comm'a sonatore de pifaro. (P, 18.22)<sup>49</sup>

[That mischievous cat of Marchionno (Where does it come from? From the mill!) started to move his hands frenetically as a piper]

Sarnelli plays with the language in order to depict the grotesque events of the dinner. The insertion of a proverbial phrase, *Da dove viene? Da lo molino!*, underscores this concept: even though Marchionno wants to conceal his origins, the paroemias *Chi va al mulino s'infarina* or *Chi va al mulino (o usa col mugnaio) bisogna (o è forza) che s'infarini*, testify that everyone brings signs of the place where he comes from. Moreover, the rapidity and ravenousness of Marchionno's behavior, i.e. his extreme hunger, suggests the image of a millstone that relentlessly swallows wheat<sup>50</sup>. Emotively, the paroemia expresses Masillo's and Petruccio's astonishment and intolerance of Marchionno's behavior, and, at the same time, ironically highlights Marchionno's popular manners.

Irony continues as paroemias express Masillo's and Petruccio's sarcastic judgements on him or become provocative tools. They, however, prove to be unsuccessful since Marchionno continues acting in the same way and requesting for more food. Since he had smelled a conger eel that was still in the kitchen, Marchionno stages a scene and asks a small fish the whereabouts of his dead father. This supposedly prompts Marchionno to make inquiries about the dish that has not yet been served, which leads Petruccio to tease him with a proverbial phrase:

<sup>49</sup> A similar comparison appears in Basile's *Lo Cunto de li Cunti*, II.10.8: "Comme si fosse abbrammato allancato ammolato a rasulo assaiato comme cane de presa e co la lopa 'n cuorpo, co na carrera che bolava, *da dove vene, da lo molino? menava le mano comme a sonatore de pifaro*, votava l'uocchie comme a gatta forastera ed operava li diente comme a preta de macena" [As if overcome with cravings, dying of hunger, sharp as a razor, fierce as a hound sent to sic, and with a wolfish craving in his belly and lightning speed, "Where are you coming from, the mill?", he would wave his hands around like a piper, roll his eyes like a wild cat, and work his teeth like a grindstone (Basile 2007, p. 204)]. Rak (Basile 1986, p. 432, note 6) writes that a theatrical precedent exists in Giovan Battista della Porta's comedy *La Sorella*, printed in Naples in 1604 (I.5).

<sup>50</sup> See also Sarnelli (1986, p. 18, note 15) and Basile (2007, p. 204, note 6). GDLI (1961–2002, s.v. *mulino*) lists another meaning for a quite similar expression (*Di dove vieni, vengo dal mulino*), that of indicating the numerous and harsh blows given to somebody. However, this meaning does not seem to apply in Sarnelli's introduction.



Ma Petruccio, pe darele cottura e ped annozzarele lo muorzo 'n canna, responnette: "Io no' approvo chillo proverbejo: *Carne giovane e pesce vecchio*, pocca sti pescetelle me piaceno. E così, sio Dottore mio, haje sbagliato o coll'uocchie o co lo naso". (P, 21.29)

[However, Petruccio, in order to bother him and make his morsel go down the wrong pipe, answered: "I do not agree with that proverb: Young meat and old fish, because I like this little fish. So, my dear Doctor, you got it wrong either with your eyes or your nose"]

*Carne giovane e pesce vecchio* refers either to a relationship between an old man (usually fish is a phallic symbol) and a young woman (indeed fresh flesh), or to the relative merits of tastier mature fish over softer, fresh young flesh<sup>51</sup>. There is, however, a specific pragmatic significance to the paroemia's use in context. Petruccio naturally prefers a mature fish such as a conger eel to small, fried fish. By saying that he does not approve of the proverbial phrase, Petruccio tries to silence Marchionno and make him eat the fried food without longing for the huge eel. Thus, the proverbial phrase serves as a rather comic tool to divert the attention toward a different matter and to advance the narration by way of dropping an unwanted topic.

However, Marchionno will later bring the topic of food back to the conversation. Upon his wish to drink more wine, Petruccio says to his servant Cianna:

Ma pocca non chiove, ca delluvia<sup>52</sup>, veccote la chiave de l'autra cantenetta 'n grazia de lo sio dottore. (P, 23.35)

[But because it does not rain, but it pours down, here is the key to the other canteen to please the Doctor]

The paroemia comes from the Neapolitan expression *I' dico ca chiove, ma no' che delluvia* [I say it rains, and it does not pour]. It literally speaks about weather conditions, but also has a metaphorical meaning: one acknowledges the reality ("rain"), but not its exaggeration ("downpour") (Sarnelli 1986, p. 23, note 20). By reciting *Non chiove, ca delluvia*, Petruccio twists the original expression making it comically suitable for the scene. The fact is acknowledged (it definitely rains) but it is not sufficient, and its exaggeration (it is pouring down) needs to be taken into account. Out of metaphor, Petruccio is facing the fact that food is not just given to Marchionno, but is given in such huge quantities that it seems to pour from the sky directly into his mouth, and hence disappearing in his stomach.

Sarnelli's dinner recalls a powerful tradition of lavish banquets associated with facetious and hilarious exchange of lines between fellow diners. In Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus's *Moralia*, the *Quaestionum convivalium libri VI* present ten questions for each book concerning topics liable to be discussed during meals □ from natural science to platonic issues □ especially when wine unbridles the tongue. The result of a controlled and gracious inebriation is the enjoyment of skillful and clever jokes that entertain the company (II.1.631) and of a pleasant conversation that establish a bond as strong as friendship (I.4.621). Similarly, in *Posilecheata*, most of Marchionno's witticism relates to wine: yet, his paroemias and mottos are not a consequence of his drinking but rather means to outwit his interlocutors and ask for more wine.

Another sympotic dialogue is Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius's *Saturnalia*, the title of which refers to the festivals in honour of the god Saturn that were celebrated in Rome in December and were characterized by a carnivalesque atmosphere, excessiveness of

<sup>51</sup> For the second meaning, see Lapucci (2006, sub litera C, note 751). The paroemia is also listed in Giuseppe Giusti's 1853 edition of his *Proverbi* (Giusti 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Rocco (1882–1991, s.v. *delluvia*) lists Luigi Serio's similar expression, *Non è chiovere, è delluvio* (cap. IV, pp. 29–44). More common is the proverbial phrase *Credere che dovesse piovere, ma non diluviare*, meaning that one believes there is abundance, but not annoying excessiveness.

manners, and reversal of social codes. In the second book, the characters participating in the conversation discuss about humour and the pleasantness that witty jokes bring in many occasions of life. One of the final remarks, borrowed from Plato's *Laws* (672A-D), is that wine provides the necessary spark for courage and, most of all, wit (II.8.4), a lesson that Marchionno embraces fully during the dinner described by Sarnelli. In *Saturnalia* VII.3, after dinner, the fellow diners briefly talk about how *skômma*, or witticism concealed by a certain deceptiveness, may entertain and please the bystanders. During banquets, however, when people are more incline to extreme feelings, ironic and witty expressions bordering on insults should be avoided and should leave space to more appropriate topics, such as philosophy. In *Posilecheata*, Marchionno's jibe proves to irritate Petruccio, though without jeopardizing the general atmosphere of the dinner and actually leading to the narration of the five fables.

A lavish banquet specifically happened in the same Neapolitan region of *Posilecheata*, in a *Graeca urbs*, which was probably Pozzuoli: the *Cena Trimalchionis* (pars. 27–78) from Arbiter Petronius's *Satyricon*. In this cena, excessiveness of food is emphasised by unrefined and vulgar opulence and an uninvited guest's immoderate request for something to eat. The language helps reveal the personality of the speakers, the atmosphere of the event, and the identity of the geographical area. In *Posilecheata*, the accumulation of paroemias and popular expressions to express Marchionno's point shows how rich and pompous the Neapolitan language can be, and how many meanings can be conveyed with an incredible amount of synonymic expressions. In other words, Sarnelli represents the Neapolitan "realismo popolare" by means of proverbs and proverbial phrases (Getto 2000, p. 300). Since reality can be multiplied and even projected on a fantastical world, one paroemia is not enough to represent it; a vast number of paroemias is needed to give credit to the multiple facets of reality and to leave the reader almost breathless<sup>53</sup>. As Nancy Canepa (1999, p. 61) states, Baroque poetics was based on the pervasive application of *inventio* to rhetoric and on the value given to the author's ability to create "a world of words".

Even though Marchionno is described in grotesque and animalesque terms, all of Sarnelli's admiration is for him and for his virtuosity as a member of that Neapolitan community that *Posilecheata* aims to recreate. Sarnelli indirectly shows devotion to Marchionno's linguistic creativity and appreciation for the popular wisdom that he discloses. Even though Petruccio's paroemias might convey irony or sarcasm against Marchionno, in fact Sarnelli accepts Marchionno's behavior good-naturedly since it truly represents the culture and the community that he aims to depict in his collection.

## 5. The Five Fables: "I want to wash your head without lye"

Already from the five storytellers of *Posilecheata*, Ciulettella, Popa, Tolla, Cecca, and old Cianna, whose names smell of the people's land and sweat (Chlodowski 1985, p. 195), the five fables are provided with a popular dimension. This aspect conveys a genuine message and depicts the authentic reality of the local people, the value of their oral tradition, and their centennial wisdom and morality, while at the same time indulging in some comedic touches<sup>54</sup>. Proverbs and proverbial phrases are the language elements best suited to reflect the importance given to orality and the connection between comedy, realism, popular

<sup>53</sup> The same rhetorical aspect appears in Basile's *cunto* IV.2 (*Li dui fratielle*), where almost the entire fable is filled with proverbs and proverbial phrases expressing moral teachings to a couple of young brothers.

<sup>54</sup> In *Posilecheata*, though, the proper names of the five storytellers do not carry the same level of comedy as those in Basile's *Cunto*. For more information on the meaning of Basile's ten women's names, see Picone (2003).

contextualization, moral teachings, communal cultural and linguistic identity, emotional evaluations, and narrative structures.

Even though Sarnelli employs a considerably smaller number of paroemias than Basile (Speroni 1941, 1953a), and even though his fables include fewer paroemias than those present in the prefatory letter and the introduction, proverbs and proverbial phrases still play a considerable role in the *cunti*. Other than the concluding paroemias for the five fables and the introductory paroemias for *cunti* 1, 4, and 5, paroemias appear in the narration, where they can be moral maxims, ironic assessments, short and frequently witty rhetorical forms, or a means to construct the varied structure of the fable. They may shed light on a particular aspect, present alternative perspectives, centralize a concept by adding a specific twist or moving the narration forward as "narrative propellers". They actualize their meaning(s) in the stories and assume specific characteristics within that specific context (Sarnelli 1986, pp. LXIII–LXVII). As Fabio Tarzia (1996, p. 180) states, paroemias are not a-posteriori tools to fill a blank, but are rather crucial integration to the narration as they refer to "una saggezza altra e popolare, nutrita di una intima e sottilissima venatura comica"; in other words, "la stessa sapienza del popolo diveniva [...] spettacolo a suo modo arguto e sentenzioso, divertimento nuovo".

In the first *cunto*, ironic paroemias mark Pacecca's lack of critical judgement and her generosity. Simultaneously, they express her husband's, mastro Cocchiarone, insensitiveness and mischievous behavior. As Pacecca begs her husband to buy her a pair of shoes unsuccessfully, Sarnelli, with a tolerant and good-natured eye towards her ingenuity, comments:

Ma non s'addonava la scura ca lo marito la 'nfenocchiava, e decea chelle parole pe *darele la quatra*. (P, 37.7)

[But the unfortunate woman did not realize that her husband was fooling her, and was saying those words to make fun of her]

Both D'Ambra and Andreoli report the expression *Fare na quatra de vierme*, literally to make the fourth part of a worm, meaning to be greatly afraid and experience an extremely frightening situation<sup>55</sup>. GDLI (1961–2002), however, lists two other meanings for the expression. The first, which does not apply to this context, is to flatter someone. The second meaning, which Malato adopts in his Italian translation of *Posilecheata* (Sarnelli 1986), is to fool or deride someone, as reported by the first edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Accademici della Crusca 1612, s.v. *dare* and *quadra*). Therefore, in Sarnelli's context, Pacecca's husband is both mocking and covertly fooling her.

Another proverbial phrase confirms the two characters' personality, when the narrative voice sarcastically hints at Pacecca's naïveté and condemns her husband's narrow-mindedness:

*Longa se vedde, corta se trovaje*. (P, 38.8)

[Long she saw herself, short she found herself]

The paroemia functions as an "indicatore di lettura", a prolepsis of the next development of the narration. The readers infer that later in the story Pacecca will be humiliated. And, she is: she believed that she was wealthy (long) when in fact she was a pauper (short) since mastro Cocchiarone abandons her without clothing, in the woods.

<sup>55</sup> In this meaning, it appears in Basile, I.5.23.

Throughout the story, a sort of Bakhtinian laughter, which is derisive but still constructive and resuscitating (Bakhtin 1984), conveys Sarnelli's sarcasm: from it new opportunities will come to Pacecca's attention, specifically her wedding with a resuscitated Prince. Before her final reward, though, Pacecca needs to face a charge of murder for the death of the Prince's young brother, when in fact mastro Cocchiarone killed the boy and orchestrated the entire scene to get rid of his wife. When Pacecca resuscitates the young boy, who accuses mastro Cocchiarone of being the murderer, everyone at court would like to castigate him harshly, but Pacecca asks that he is spared. The final paroemia refers to the content and significance of the entire story, summarizing its moral tension and didactic orientation:

*Chi vò male ped aute a sè non jova,  
E chi fa bene, sempre bene trova.* (P, 61.79)

[He who wants evil for others is not useful to himself,  
and he who does good, always finds good]

The meaning of the proverb is clear: those, like Pacecca's husband, who wish bad events upon others, always pay the consequences of their evil. Meanwhile, those, like Pacecca, might be the victims of ironic and sarcastic assessments, but, since they commit themselves to helping others, are rewarded in turn for their worthy deeds.

In the second *cunto*, *La vajassa fedele*, comic metaphors co-mingle with paroemias concerning food when the King of Red Land selects Pomponia as his future wife. Eager to marry his beautiful daughter to him, because an alliance to that family would be of incredible advantage, Pomponia's father expresses his thoughts on the profitability of the marriage with a culinary reference:

[...] vedenno ca sto parentato le 'mportava assaje, e che se l'avesse cercato co lo spocchettiello no' l'avarria potuto asciare meglio, e che a la figlia *le cadeva lo vruoccolo dinto lo lardo, lo maccarone dinto lo ccaso*<sup>56</sup> [...]. (P, 70.20)

[Considering that this relationship mattered a lot to him, and that had he been looking for it carefully, he would have not been able to find a better one, such that it suited his daughter the way broccoli goes with lard and macaroni with cheese]

The two proverbial phrases comically mean that someone might experience unexpected good luck or that an event can be solved in the best way possible or that simply an event happens conveniently (Rocco 1882–1991, s.v. *caso*). Everything goes into the right place by chance, such as broccoli on lard, and something fits perfectly, such as cheese over macaroni pasta (D'Ambra 1873, s.v. *caso*). Pomponia and the King of Red Land are the appropriate match since perfect suitability and profitability bless their marriage.

This culinary reference is not surprising in a Neapolitan context and in a text where food constitutes the *fil rouge* of the different parts of the collection<sup>57</sup>. Again, food is mentioned by

<sup>56</sup> The two proverbial phrases appear in Basile's *Cunto*, I.1.53, when Antuono takes advantage of the profitable situation, namely the innkeeper and his wife beaten by the magic club, to have them return all the magic objects that the ogre donated to him. Basile also mentions both paroemias in *Muse Napolitane*, 5, *Tersicore overo la zita*: "L'è caduto Lo vroccolo a lo lardo, Lo maccarone dinto de lo caso" (152–154), on the perfect opportunity occurred for a recently celebrated marriage.

<sup>57</sup> Sarnelli plays with culinary metaphors in different ways. In the prefatory letter, when referring to the usefulness of his collection to different categories of readers, his book is said to substitute a meal (P, 8.17). When Reppone arrives at Petruccio's house, his stomach is empty and ready to receive nutrients, i.e. fables. Descriptions of food also appear in the fables (P, 11.4). In the conclusion, a reference to food is present but in a privative way: after having watched the fireworks in honor of Viceroy Gaspar Méndez de Haro y Guzmán in the



means of paroemias when Pomponia is looking for a faithful servant by way of testing three sisters from Villanova, whose genealogy corresponds to the one Pomponia is looking for. The first sister is Livia, a rough and poorly educated young girl, who does not appreciate the endeavour that she needs to undertake, which is to form a string out of a good amount of linen by the next day. Upon her poor results, Pomponia discharges her and one of Pomponia's servants is sent to eavesdrop on her reaction:

E mettenno la lingua 'n mota accommenzaje a ghiastemmare la Precepessa, comme femmena senza descrezzione, e come ca *lo sazio non crede lo dejuno*<sup>58</sup>, e ca *lo piso de la corona fa calare tal'ommore all'uocchie che non vedeno lo deritto*, e tant'aute felastoccole che non le avarria ditto manco no poeta. (P, 74.32)

[And, setting her tongue in motion, she started to curse the princess as an insensitive woman, and as a well-fed person who does not believe a starving one, and that the weight of a crown clouds eyes so that they cannot discern the right way, and many other verse that not even a poet would have been able to declare]

Livia rebukes the princess for not understanding those who are not as rich and wealthy as she is, just as a well-fed person does not believe a starving one. She also argues that those who are healthy or rich do not give credit to complaints from the sick or poor, nor do they believe that they are as sick or as poor as they claim (*lo sazio non crede lo dejuno*). The second proverbial phrase (*lo piso de la corona fa calare tal'ommore all'uocchie che non vedeno lo deritto*) underscores this even more, by connecting the weight of a crown (a coin indeed)<sup>59</sup> to an impaired judgement possibly caused by an imbalance of the four Hippocratic humors. Wealth causes anyone to overlook the implicit and correct perspective, as the haughty princess does. Since *Portare corona sopra qualcuno* means to surpass him in fame and merit, the proverbial phrase might also say that an excessive consideration of oneself, as Livia does, leads to inconsiderate and inappropriate behaviors and choices.

The ironic aspect of the two paroemias lies in the dichotomy between poetic writings and Livia's expressions, high literature and popular knowledge, written tradition and oral wisdom. Poets usually sing "filastrocche", nursery rhymes characterized by a metric scheme. Evidently, Livia's paroemias do not belong to this category of poetic productions, but more to the category of traditional and everyday practices. Therefore, since poets are those who criticize Sarnelli, as it was shown above, Livia's paroemias acquire a greater significance in demonstrating that the words of the people are more powerful and even more meaningful than poetic examples. Even though the rhetoric and stylistic elements of popular paroemias do not achieve the same level of sophistication of verses modelled by poets, they succeed in conveying a dense as well as appropriate and effective meaning as much as literary-constructed experiments.

In *cunto 3*, *La 'gannatrice 'ngannata*, paroemias comically or ironically comment on people's behavior, and hence are linked to emotional conditions. For instance, the character Jannuzzo, fooled by the beauty of a place, is transformed into a statue after he dares touching

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area of Mergellina (on the west side of Naples) during the festivity of Saint Anne, Reppone goes back home in Naples exhausted by hunger. So, he satisfies his sudden need with a teaspoon full of honey (P, 214.10), to replace with a culinary product the same sensation he received from the stories (for more information on this reference, see Allasia 2015, pp. 256–257). Finally, at the end of the book, the index's title maintains the food-related metaphor: "Tavola non da magnare ma de li cunte che se fanno dapò magnare" (P, 215). Comically, Sarnelli shifts the semantic area of the word "tavola" as a table of contents to the same word as a table to eat and, thus he connects reading and listening to fables to eating.

<sup>58</sup> Rocco (1882–1991, s.v. *dejuno*): "Prov. *Panza sazia non crede a lo diuno*. Basile M[use]. N[apolitane], VIII, p. 332: *Lo satoro non crede a lo diuno*".

<sup>59</sup> The word *corona* indicated a crown from the thirteenth century and a coin from the sixteenth century.

a talking bird with his own hands<sup>60</sup>. A proverbial phrase describes Jannuzzo's scarce consideration of his action and indirectly depicts him as a naïve young boy who does not have much wordly experience. He is said to believe to insert pearls in a reed, a rather difficult enterprise and impossible to conclude:

[...] credennose de *infilare perne a lo junco*. (P, 123.83)

[Thinking that he could have inserted pearls in a small stick]

Basile adopts the paroemia in his *cunti* II.5 and IV.2. In the first one, it appears in the discourse that a snake gives to Cola Matteo, asking him to gather all of the stones that he can find and to plant them in the park so that "ne vederrai perne 'nfilate a lo iunco" (II.5.15)<sup>61</sup> [You'll see pearls strung on rush stems (Basile 2007, p. 171)]. Even though this was thought to be an impossible mission, the snake was able to accomplish it. In V.2, when the month of March gives Cianne a stick he says: "Sempre che te vene desederio di quarcosa, e tu di: 'Scorriato, dammene ciento,' e vederrai perne 'nfilate a lo iunco" (V.2.25) [Flail, give me a hundred of them! and you'll see the rushes strung with pearls (Basile 2007, p. 397)], meaning that the stick would be able to perform marvels. Instead, in *Posilecheata*, the proverbial phrase acquires a different contextual meaning, compliant with the described situation. It ironically comments on the young boy's lack of sufficient cleverness and ability to decode reality: Jannuzzo did not consider the fact and thought that it would be an easy task; therefore, now he pays the consequences of his poor judgement. Another proverbial phrase confirms it when an old man tells Jannuzzo's sister, Ninella, that,

[...] ca ne'è 'ncappato lo fratiello tujo pe non avere avuto jodizio de chiammareme, *credennose de fare da cacciatore, ed è stato cacciato*. (P, 124.87)

[Your brother was trapped because he wasn't smart enough to call me, because he thought that he would be the hunter, and instead he was hunted]

It expresses, in ironic tones, how Jannuzzo easily fell into an error due to his scarce consideration of the circumstance.

In *cunto* 4, titled *La gallenella*, Cecca is given a hen, which discovers a secret passage to the palace of her parents, where a lizard then shows her many riches and advises her of her future life. Since Cecca needs to assess her brother's, Mineco, wisdom before disclosing to him the incredible treasure, she asks him what they should do with the hen, to which he answers that they should eat it. When Cecca scolds Mineco telling him that common sense dictates that the hen should be preserved and that it would be better to have it become a mother hen and collect eggs, Mineco answers:

E chi vò aspettare tanto? [...] *Primma de vedere sto gallinaro sarriamo cennere. Non saje ca se dice: È meglio la gallina oje che l'uovo craje?* (P, 152.31)

[And who wants to wait that long? [...] Before we go and see these chicks, we would be ashes. Don't you know that it is commonly said: It is better a hen today than an egg tomorrow?]

Mineco is telling his sister that *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*. The use of a common proverbial phrase and its actual modification is an interesting adaptation of the paroemia for ironic purposes. The traditional form of the paroemia, *Meglio n'uovo oggi ca na*

<sup>60</sup> The recounted events seem to refer to Basile's *cunto* IV.9, where Iennariello and Liviella, whose names appear similar to Sarnelli's characters, undergo similar events to Jannuzzo's and his sister's.

<sup>61</sup> The number of the paragraphs refers to Carolina Stromboli's edition of *Lo cunto de li cunti* (Basile 2013).

*gallina dimane* [It is better an egg today than a hen tomorrow] (D'Ambra 1873, s.v. *uovo*), suggests that waiting could not be advantageous if one hopes for future luck or wealth. Since Mineco wishes to eat the hen, and not the egg, he flips over the two parts of the proverbial phrase, conveying the message that it is better to have a hen today than an egg later. Sarnelli's change makes the proverbial phrase specific to the context of the fable, as it is translated for the immediacy and contingency of the situation. Ironically, the proverbial phrase confirms Mineco's immaturity in the given scenario, as opposed to his sister's wisdom, and thus shows how he lacks good judgement and cannot be trusted.

Paroemias are also employed as a repository of ancient wisdom such as in a comment about Belluccia's jealousy toward her sister-in-law Cecca, who enabled her to become wealthy:

Perché li proverbie antiche sempre so' rescute, ca non *se dice lo mutto e non è miezo o tutto*: azzoè ca non c'è peo de pezzente arresagliuto, pocca lo grasso le dà subbeto a lo core, e lo cavallo c'ha uorgio e paglia soperchia tira cauce. (P, 158.48)

[Because ancient proverbs always succeeded, since one does not say a motto if it is not half or all of it: there is nothing worse than an enriched villain, since fat immediately strikes one's heart, and the horse that has excessive barley and straw kicks]

Belluccia cannot control the surge of pride given only and exclusively by her new social status. Originally, she was a beggar who, by seeing richness (here lard), lost her reasoning and common sense □ like a horse that is ungrateful to its master and kicks him without appreciating the refinement of its food. As it was seen above, the comparison of Belluccia to a horse provides comic relief.

*Cunto* 4 also features another revision of a paroemia, whose meaning consequently takes on an ironic tone. Attempting to get Cecca out of the house and make her look dishonorable, Belluccia feeds her serpent's eggs, which make her seem pregnant, and then tries to convince her husband, Mineco, to disown her. She reproaches him as follows:

Meglio che tu te lieve da casa na scrofa ch'essere mostato a dito comm'a ciervo; è meglio che tu lighe no chiappo a lo cannuozzo sujo ch'esserete ditto: *L'ommo se lega pe le corna e li vuoj pe le parole*. (P, 161.56)

[It is better to deprive your house of a sow rather than be pointed at as a deer; better to have your hands tied than have it said: Men are tied up by horns, oxen by words]

*Gli huomini si legano per la lingua* [le parole] *e i buoi per le corna* [Men are tied up by their tongue, oxen by their horns] signifies that for each person and each personality a specific behavior is required. Sarnelli's paroemia can be understood by looking at what Rocco reports (1882–1991, s.v. *cuorno*): he lists the expression *Fare corna comm'a boje* [To grow horns like oxen], meaning "rassegnarsi" [to give up]. It can be inferred that the paroemia *Gli huomini si legano per la lingua e i buoi per le corna* means that in order to dominate people, the only way is to use the tongue, hence to employ all the devices that rhetoric offers. In other words, if animals can be limited only with material things, such as a rope, men realize their will through words<sup>62</sup>. By inverting the two sections of the paroemia, thus the two types of behavior, Belluccia satirizes the horns, which are culturally associated with betrayal. Appropriately, in this context, the reader is confronted with fraternal betrayal and social scandal. Words usually restrain men when they are unreasonable; when betrayed, though, men are wild, dangerous, and almost skittish. Therefore, a rope in their horns can only control

<sup>62</sup> For the traditional form of this paroemia, see Lapucci (2006, sub *litera* L, note 747), which also lists a variant: *Le funi legano i buoi e le parole gli uomini* (*ibid.*, sub *litera* P, note 558).

them, the same way an ox is fastened to work. Since the "memory" of the traditional form of the paroemia is vivid, and a listener can immediately realize its twisted meaning, the paroemia is effective and sends out a strong message about human social behavior, while at the same time criticizing Mineco's lack of judgement.

In the fifth and last *cunto*, a comedic atmosphere is given since the beginning by a wellerism; indeed, wellerisms<sup>63</sup> usually carry a satirical, ironic, comic, or humorous twist:

Se b  de tutte li vizie se p  dicete chello che decette no cierto foretano de li lupe, che addommannato che nce nne trovasse uno buono, responnette: "*Sempe che so' lupe, malannaggia lo meglio!*", puro l'avarizia   no vizio accossi brutto che fa venire l'avar  'nzavuorrio a tutte. (P, 177.1)

[Even though, of all the vices you can say what a certain farmer of wolves said, who, when asked to find a good one, answered: "As long as they are wolves, and may misfortune get the better", yet avarice is such a bad vice that it makes everyone hate the avaricious person]

The wellerism, *Come disse quel che vendeva i lupi: malanno habbia il meglio: o trist'  quel poco di buon che vi  *, is listed by Lena twice: *Come disse quel che vendeva i lupi: malanno habbia il meglio: o trist'  quel poco di buon che vi  *, *Sardi venales alius alio nequior* (Lena 1694, p. 140) and *Malanno habbia il meglio: disse quello che vendeva i lupi, Simiarum pulcherrima deformis est* (Lena 1694, p. 408). It refers to a bad situation that cannot be ameliorated, given the circumstances and aspects of the situation itself. That is, even if there is a small quantity of good, this good is surpassed by the bad. The wellerism derives from Benvenuto da Imola's comment on the passage in the *Divina Commedia* that refers to Conte Ugolino's dream while imprisoned in the tower:

Questi pareva a me maestro e donno,  
Cacciando il lupo e ' lupicini al monte  
Per che i Pisani veder Lucca non ponno (*Inferno* 33, 28–30)

[This man appeared to me as lord and master;  
he hunted down the wolf and its young whelps upon the mountain  
that prevents the Pisans from seeing Lucca]

Benvenuto da Imola comments on these lines as follows:

Ideo bene dicit ille qui portabat parvulos lupos ad vendendum. Rogatus ab emptore ut daret sibi unum bonum respondit: "*Omnes sunt lupi*".

[And so he spoke well who was bringing small wolves. Having been asked by the buyer to give him a good one, he answered: "They are all wolves"]

In Sarnelli's context, the paroemia means that all of the vices are bad and they do not differ from each other; even if a better one exists, it cannot be praised because it always remains a vice. However, avarice is so bad that everyone despises it, and so the wellerism cannot be applied to it, as avarice differs from all other vices. Sarnelli's repulsion by avarice is evident in his disposition against the character that embodies it in the story, Roseca-chiuove. Her initial description recalls a long tradition of *vituperatio ad vetulam*, aimed at emphasising the

<sup>63</sup> Wellerisms are a subcategory of proverbial phrases characterized by a fixed structure: *As said (come disse or come diceva)* followed by a proper or common name and by a famous saying or sentence with paroemic meaning. The name comes from Sam Weller, the main character in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, who used to tell anecdotes, jokes, and witty remarks related to historical figures, well-known characters, or even invented people, having the structure *as so* and *so said*.



most repulsive attributes of an old woman. In a few words, her physical appearance corresponds to the ugliness of her mind and soul, which are described in comic ways<sup>64</sup>.

*Cunto* 5 can be considered the most Baroque of the five fables because it is the story where the greatest accumulation of derogatory remarks happens as a vivid and strong representation of the Neapolitan expressiveness and creativity. This undoubtedly answers to the Baroque exigency to create comedy, to demonstrate virtuosity, and to incite marvel and fascination. The effect is a chaotic accumulation of words, which is nonetheless fruitful, since they do not specifically relate to reality nor aim to describe it, but instead seek to express the metaphorical potentiality of combinations of words and to achieve a specific pragmatic effect (Fasano 1975, p. 486).

Sarnelli lists derogatory epithets in two occasions in the text. The first instance happens when the fairy arrives at Nunziella's palace covered with rags and blood to test her, and Nunziella's butler addresses her with a long list of derogatory remarks; through them, he highlights the disgust he feels towards an old and poor woman who dares approach the house of a rich family (P, 195–96.53).

The second instance occurs when Nunziella realizes what has happened and she answers back to her butlers and all the onlookers with a likewise astonishing list of derogatory remarks, which convey all the rage and fury that she feels against those inconsiderate men (P, 196–99.54–56). Sarnelli aims to excite an emotional state both in his recipients in the narrative context and in his readers, who perceive the same violent feelings that the speaker of derogatory epithets conveys. He wishes to create a satiric and offensive atmosphere, while, at the same time, being playful in accordance with popular and Baroque expressivism.

## 6. Conclusion

As it was shown in this brief overview of comic and ironic elements connected to paroemias, Sarnelli's collection is a *summa* of oral and folkloristic culture in a flourishing and rich language that is used to compete with high literary standards. It is a celebration of Neapolitan dialect and of the local, popular, and traditional culture it conveys, in accordance with the pompous, revitalizing, and eloquent precepts of the Baroque culture of the seventeenth century and the creative potential of the Neapolitan language. Popular culture and dialect define the conditions upon which *Posilecheata* can convey ironic, comic, and sarcastic messages upon people and events in the linguistic context of the prefatory letter, the concrete framework of the introduction, and the fables.

Even though paroemias appear in different ways and with different purposes inside the narration, they form a continuous thread that from the prefatory letter to the last recounted fable accompanies the reader (or listener) through a discovery of the least apparent aspects of Neapolitan culture and of the infinite possibilities of textual interpretation. The Neapolitan context and the surrounding elements (from words to sentences, from paragraphs to fables) contextualize a paroemia affecting its meaning, as it becomes more understandable and meaningful in context.

If, as Giuseppe Chiecchi argues, proverbs follow the rules of the *captatio benevolentiae* since they aim to orient readers in the text and focus on the demonstration of moral or cultural elements, then Sarnelli succeeds in employing paroemias to facilitate the remembrance and

<sup>64</sup> Her description resembles that of the two old sisters in Basile's *cunto* I.10.5–6. Her head is full of bumps, her front is wrinkled, her eyebrows are spare, and her ears are long and transparent. Her eyes are as those of a cat, since they try to scrutinize you and they are as open as a split, probably recalling the tightness of a greedy person; her throat is as that of a magpie because she is unappeasable and constantly greedy, and the neck is that of an ostrich, wrinkled and ugly. Her breath smells like a cemetery, and her mouth is corrugated and toothless (P, 178.3).

the maintenance of the cultural environment in which they emerged. He also manages to express and convey a message with comedic and/or ironic twists that add enjoyable and hilarious seasoning to the entire collection.

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### **Electronic Resources**

Accademia della Crusca, database *Proverbi*: <http://www.proverbi-italiani.org/index.asp>  
Columbia University, *Digital Dante*: <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/>

**Dr. Daniela D'Eugenio** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of French and Italian at Vanderbilt University. Her interest focus on paroemiography, history of Italian language, and dialectology. In 2010–2011, she participated in a project on Italian proverbs promoted by the Accademia della Crusca. She has published articles on proverbs in *Forum Italicum* and with the Accademia della Crusca printing press.

Address correspondence to Daniela D'Eugenio, at [daniela.deugenio@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:daniela.deugenio@vanderbilt.edu)