

A Comic Vision in a Folk-Taxonomy of Folk: Considerations about Giacoma Limentani's *Un'identità ebraica romana* (A Roman Jewish Identity)

Ephraim Nissan

London

Abstract. This study is concerned with a particular text of the Italian Jewish writer Giacoma Limentani. Hers is a brief text in Italian, based on autobiographical reminiscences, but important ethnographically, and, in the context of humour research, for how it documents how the traditional vernacular culture of Roman Jews used to taxonomise families and human behavioural types within that community. That taxonomy was informed by a comic vision and an irreverent way to observe people, resulting in humorous nicknames for human types within the Ghetto (the original social function apparently was to subserve the alchemy of matchmaking). Limentani's text is also interesting, again in respect of humour studies, because of how incongruity is given comic prominence; after incongruity produces its effect, Limentani partly resolves and makes this into an argument.

Keywords: Giacoma Limentani; Roman Jews (early 20th century); Ethnography; Folk-taxonomies; Italy.

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1. Introduction: Giacoma Limentani and her Output

The writer Giacoma Limentani is mainly known in Italy because of her writings on Jewish matters. She is sometimes the subject of some study in Italy (Boni 2009), but I have not come across references to her in the English-language scholarly literature. The present article is a partial remedy, and hopefully other authors will also take notice.

Giacoma Limentani was born in Rome on 11 October 1927. She has achieved fame in Italy, especially with a Jewish audience but also by addressing a general Italian audience on Jewish themes, as an essayist and narrator. And yet, professionally she began and always remained a translator. She began by translating from English and French. She did so by catering to the cinematographical industry, but also, in the 1960s, by translating what could be called pulp literature, either detective stories, or love stories, which she did for the Grandi Edizioni Internazionali in Rome.¹ Giacoma Limentani evolved, professionally, in two directions: she made Jewish culture into a conspicuous component of her written production; and she became also an author, in addition to her being a translator. As the latter, she has also translated from Hebrew texts that have appeared in book form.

¹ http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giacoma_Limentani

In particular, in 1981 the Adelphi publishing house in Milan published *La principessa smarrita* (*The Missing Princess*), being Limentani's translation from Hebrew of the mystical fables of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav (Ukraine, 1772–1810), a prominent but uncharacteristical Hasidic leader, and the great-grandson of the Besht, the founder in the 1740s of the Hasidic movement. Limentani jointly edited *La principessa smarrita* with Rabbi Shalom Bahbout.

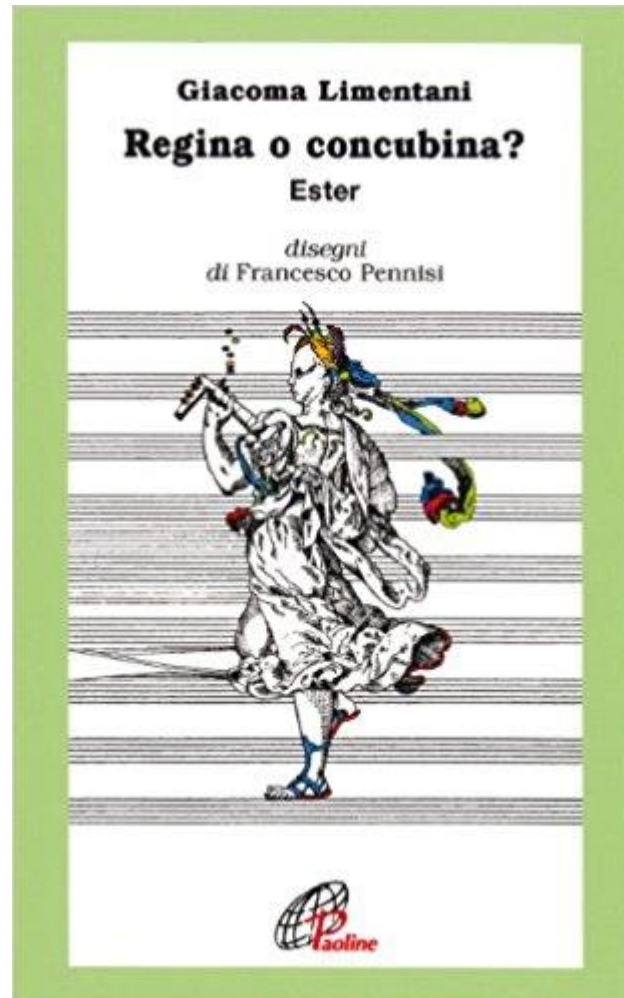


Giacomina Limentani.

That professional involvement with the fables of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav also resulted in two texts for the stage by Giacomina Limentani, namely, the "sacred representation" *Il narrastorie di Breslav: sacra rappresentazione in due tempi* (published in Frascati by the Tusculum publishing house, undated), and *Nachman racconta: azione scenica in due atti*, published in Florence by La Giuntina, in 1993.

There is another category of books translated from Hebrew by Limentani: these are a few books of the Hebrew bible (*Jonah, Ruth, Hosea, and Esther*), so re-entitled as to provoke the

curiosity of prospective readers, and some of which have, significantly, been published in Milan by the Edizioni Paoline, a Catholic publishing house — when published by the latter, then most often with illustrations by Francesco Pennisi — apparently because such retranslations aim at a kind of outreach which is of interest for both the Church and Judaic concerns. Such books include for example *Il libro di Osea: il profeta e la prostituta* (1999) and *Regina o concubina? Il libro di Ester* (2001).



Cover of Giacomina Limentani's Book of Esther.

Giacoma Limentani has also *authored* books about Jewish culture. One of these is *Il midrash: come i maestri ebrei leggevano e vivevano la Bibbia*, published in Milan by the Edizioni Paoline, in 1996. This concern with the late antique and medieval rabbinic genre of the Midrash Aggadah, parascriptural narratives filling in narrative gaps of the Hebrew Bible, has also seen Limentani lead learning groups, the subject being the Midrash. Also consider her books *I discorsi della Bibbia*, being texts for two audio-books, published in Milano by Mondadori in 1979, and *Il vizio del faraone e altre leggende ebraiche*, published in Turin by Stampatori, in 1980. She also wrote *Gli uomini del libro: leggende ebraiche* (a retelling of Midrashic narratives), illustrated by Emanuele Luzzati, and published by Adelphi, in 1975.

A book dedicated to Giacomina Limentani is Paola Di Cori and Clotilde Pontecorvo's *Parole e silenzi: scritti per Giacomina Limentani*, published in Turin by Traube, in 2002. Also Limentani's monograph with Clotilde Pontecorvo, *Aiutare a pensare: itinerario di un ebreo*, has to be mentioned. published in Florence by La Giuntina, in 1996.



Giacoma Limentani.

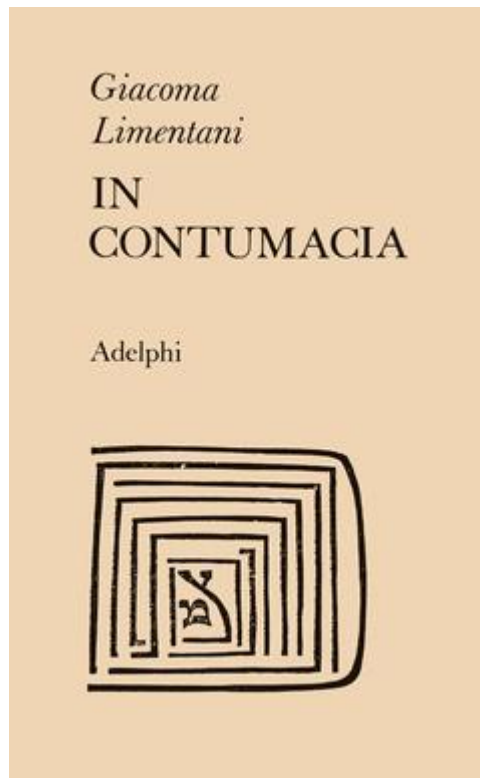
Limentani herself is the author of a book of collected essays, adopting a Jewish and at the same time, belles lettres perspective, *Scrivere dopo per scrivere prima: riflessioni e scritti* (Writing Afterwards, in Order to Write Beforehand:² Reflections and Essays), published in Florence by La Giuntina, in 1997. Those essays include "Tempi mode etichette e sentimento" ("Times, fashions, labels, and sentiment"), "Scrivere dopo" ("Writing afterwards"), "Il riposo di Noè" ("Noah's rest"), "Il patto sul Titanic" ("The pact on board of the Titanic"), "Profeti o uteri?" ("Prophets or wombs?"), "Saul fra gli ebrei" ("Saul among the Jews"), "Il gigante di rame" ("The copper giant"), "L'itinerario midrashico di Giobbe" ("Job's midrashic journey"), again "Scrivere dopo", "Tradizioni traduzioni e tradimenti" ("Traditions, translations, and betrayals"), "Il pensiero narrato" ("Narrated thought"), "Il papavero Praga" ("Prague, a poppy"),³ "Per un Golem verità" ("For a Golem being truth"), "Nel mondo di Marc Chagall" ("In the world of Marc Chagall"), "Il linguaggio del corpo" ("Body language"), "Primo Levi e il rifiuto dell'urlo" ("Primo Levi and refusal to scream"), "Uccidere per salvare" ("To kill in order to save"), yet another "Scrivere dopo", "Tra realtà e finzione" ("Between reality and fiction"), "Un Angelo per amico" ("An Angel for friend"), "Londra Berlino Odessa Sodoma" ("London, Berlin, Odessa, and Sodom"), "Veleni" ("Poisons"), "Sul ghiaccio" ("On ice"), "Dal Muro del Pianto al Muro di Berlino" ("From the Wailing Wall to the Berlin Wall"), "La cavalcata del pregiudizio" ("The ride of prejudice"), "Hooligans scaccianoia" ("Hooligans so you are not bored"), "Se una Gattila a Mauschwitz" (sic, on the representation in *Maus* of the Holocaust), "Scrivere dopo per scrivere prima" ("Writing afterwards, in order to write beforehand"), "La vita del gatto" ("A cat's life"), "Gli specchi della Haggadah" ("Mirrors in the Passover Haggadah"), and a glossary: "Termini Personaggi Testi".

As an author of books, Limentani has especially published narratives, short stories, or novels. Such books include *In contumacia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1967), *Il grande seduto* (Milan: Adelphi, 1979), *L'ombra allo specchio: Racconti* (Milan: La tartaruga, 1988), *Dentro la D* (Genoa: Marietti, 1992), *Il più saggio e il più pazzo* (Viterbo: Stampa alternativa, 1994), ... *e rise Mosé* (Torino: Einaudi ragazzi, 1995), *Da lunedì a lunedì* (Torino, Einaudi ragazzi, 1999), and *La spirale della tigre* (Varese: Giano, 2003).

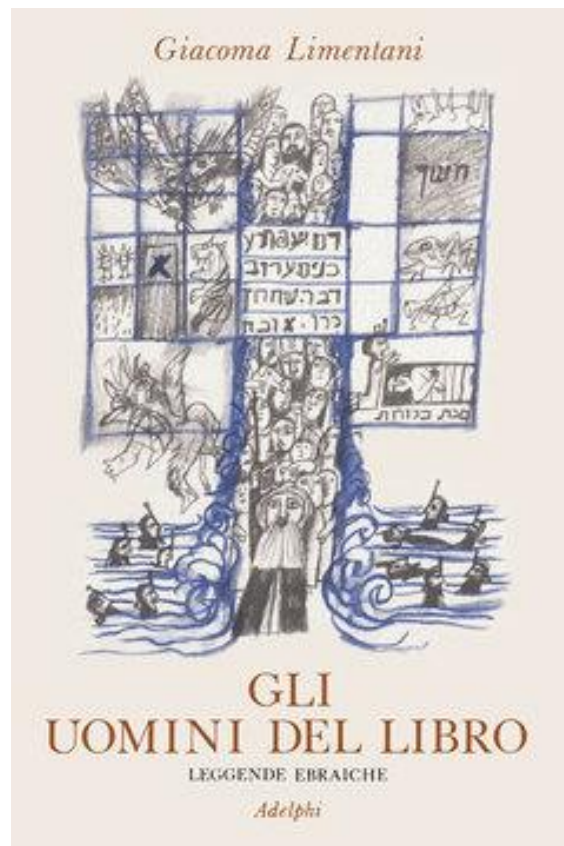
The novel *In contumacia* (*In Hiding*) is set in Rome towards the end of German occupation. The narrative is seen through the eyes of a young Jewish girl. She withdraws from the facts themselves, and the narration is like a nightmare or hallucination.

² "Writing beforehand", as preparation for the future.

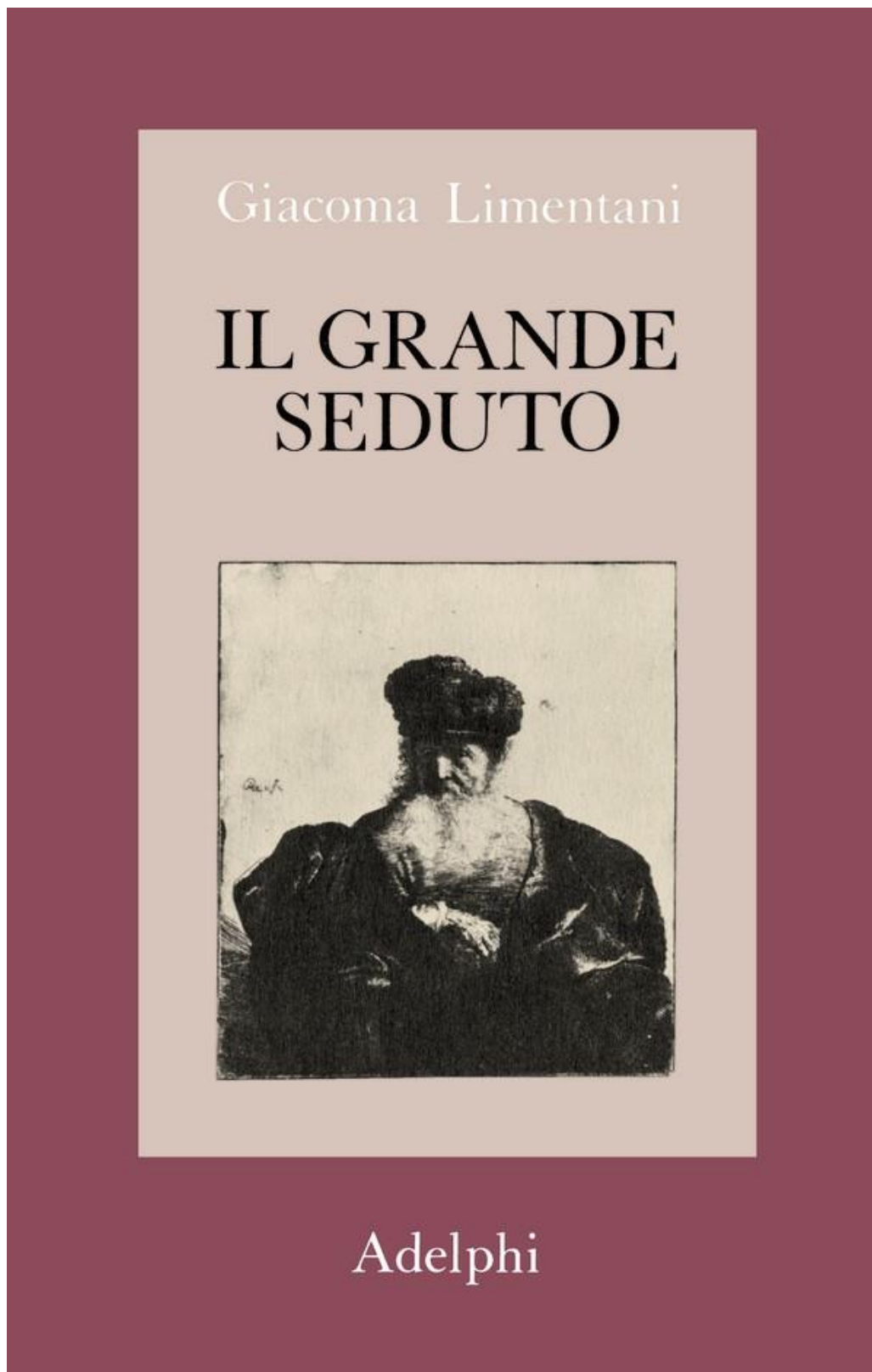
³ This was the opening speech of a January 1992 conference held in Genoa. The city of Prague is also a poppy in the sense that Hebrew *prg* can be read as *Prag* or as *péreg* ('poppy').



Cover of Giacomina Limentani's novel *In contumacia*.



Cover of Giacomina Limentani's *Gli uomini del libro*. The cover image shows the Ten Plagues and the Exodus.



Cover of Giacomina Limentani's *Il grande seduto* (*The Great Sitting One*). The cover image is by Rembrandt, *An Old Man in a Black Velvet Coat* (1632). This book is about the character of Job in rabbinic homiletics. The evaluation that emerges of Job is rather negative. It must be said that in Jewish studies, it has been claimed (Urbach 1971) that this rabbinic view reacted in late antiquity to a Christian view extolling Job. And yet, early rabbinic views of Job are not uniform, and space from negative, to positive. At any rate, the rabbinic view problematises both Job and what he undergoes.



Cover of Giacomina Limentani's *Il vizio del Faraone* (*Pharaoh's Vice*).



Cover of Giacomina Limentani's *L'ombra allo specchio* (*The Shadow at the Mirror*).

2. The Context of the Text Examined: Clotilde Pontecorvo's 2008 Edited Journal Section about Jewish Identities

The periodical *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* has long been the flagship of Jewish studies in Italy. It was established in 1925. In living memory, there have been times when (catering as it did to Italy's Jewish community) it basically was a combination of a magazine, with here and there a journal-worthy article, but since the editorship of the late Guido Fubini, and for decades now, it has clearly become a scholarly journal, although one that still aims at attracting a readership from the educated public, not just scholars. Issue 3 in vol. 74 was dated September–December 2008. The journal editor ("Direttore e Direttore responsabile") at the time was Giacomo Saban. The editorial committee ("Comitato di Direzione") had three members, one of whom was Clotilde Pontecorvo.⁴ The scholarly advisory board ("Comitato Scientifico") included, among its 23 members, Giacomina Limentani. That journal issue included, on pp. 171–222, a special section, edited by Clotilde Pontecorvo, and opened by her own brief contribution, entitled "La pluralità delle identità ebraiche" ("The Plurality of Jewish Identities"). This was followed by a contribution about Turkish Jewry by Giacomo Saban, Libyan Jewry by Livia Genah, Argentinean Jewry by Paola Di Cori, and (on pp. 199–204) Roman Jewry by Giacomina Limentani, numbered I-D, entitled "Giacomina Limentani: Un'identità ebraica romana", and concluding the first part of the special section. Limentani's contribution began with childhood reminiscences set in Rome, but with a scene set in Venice.

3. The Beginning of Limentani's Text

Giacomina Limentani's "Un'identità ebraica romana" is wholly one section, with no internal subdivisions, but after a puzzling utterance on its first page, it is followed by a blank line. A scan of that initial part is reproduced below, and if followed by my translation.

Io appartengo a un nucleo familiare romano che lasciò relativamente presto l'area del ghetto per stabilirsi nell'allora nuovo rione Prati.

Alla scuola elementare Pistelli, vicina a Piazza Mazzini, ero stata esonerata dall'ora di religione, in casa osservavo coi miei le ricorrenze ebraiche, il venerdì sera e alla vigilia delle altre feste andavo coi miei alla sinagoga di Lungotevere o Tempio Maggiore, come dicono gli ebrei romani, ma non avevo ben chiaro fino a qual punto l'area della sinagoga e quella del ghetto combaciassero.

Sapevo che per comprare "un quarto di pizza" – il più noto dei dolci "giudii" – bisognava andare in Piazza, che con "la Piazza" un ebreo romano intendeva Piazza Giudia e che Piazza Giudia è il cuore dell'ex ghetto di Roma, ma non avevo idea del senso di tutto ciò.

Cominciai a rendermi conto della diversità del ghetto dal resto di Roma verso i 6 o 7 anni, quando mio padre mi portò a Venezia. Lì, a Piazza San Marco, mentre davo da mangiare ai colombi, papà fu avvicinato da uno di quei merciai ambulanti che portavano le loro merci su una tavoletta appesa al collo. Sei o dopo che lui e il babbo erano andati insieme a Talmud Torah.

"Guarda chi si vede! – lo salutò allegramente papà – E cosa fai qui?"

"Non lo vedi? Vado pe' Roma!"

⁴ Clotilde Pontecorvo, an academic scholar in education studies, is the subject of Rossi-Doria (2014, 2015), and the jubilarian celebrated by Aiello and Ghione (2011).

[I belong to a Roman household that left relatively early on the area of the Ghetto, settling in the Prati neighbourhood, which at the time was new.

At the Pistelli primary school, near Mazzini Square, I was exempted from religion lessons.⁵ At home I kept with my family the Jewish festivals. On Friday evening and on the eve of the other festive days I used to go with my relatives to the synagogue on the Lungotevere (riverside) street, the Main Temple, as it is called by Rome's Jews, but it wasn't totally clear to me to what extent the area of the synagoguer and that of the Ghetto overlapped.

I knew that in order to buy a quarter of pizza — the best known of Jewish cakes [see **Appendix A**] — one had to go to the Piazza (Square), that by "la Piazza" ("the Square"), a Roman Jew meant Piazza Giudia (Jews' Square [officially: Piazza Santa Maria del Pianto]), and that Piazza Giudia is the heart of the former Ghetto of Rome, but I had no idea of what it all meant.

I began to be aware of the difference of the Ghetto from the rest of Rome around the time I was aged six or seven, when my father took me to Venice. There, in St Mark's Square, while I was feeding the pigeons, Dad was approached by one of those peddlers⁶ who used to carry their merchandise on a shelf hanging down from their neck. Later on, I learned that he and Dad had been classmates at the classes of Judaism (at the Talmud Torah).

"Glad to meet you! [literally: Look whom one sees!]", Dad greeted him merrily. "What are you doing here?"

"Don't you see? I'm going around Rome!"]

The child understood that reply literally, so she thought the man was crazy. He intended an idiomatic sense instead, one in use in the dialect of Roman Jews. As we are going to see, current research has shown that even the idiomatic sense is not what it seems: it developed by folk-etymology out of a complex cultural situation and professional roles current in the early modern period. As for the pizza of Roman Jews, it is a cake with candied fruits and raisin.



Piazza Giudia, in an engraving by Giuseppe Vasi (Vasi 1752).

⁵ Religion lessons were taught by a Catholic priest. In my own experience of sixth to eighth class in Milan, starting in 1966/67, I was exempted from religion class, but obtained to remain sitting in the classroom, having been advised that it was a precaution, to prevent being instigated against in my absence. A Calvinist child was exempted and used to leave the classroom, and references to Protestantism followed with "like that companion of yours" (fingering the door) may well have played a role in isolating him. I tried to befriend him, to no avail. He would stare back grimly at me, with no verbal response. He was not promoted, that first year.

⁶ A *merciaio* in Italian denotes a haberdasher, but a *merciaio ambulante* denotes a peddler.



A photograph of Piazza Giudia.



Another photograph, of 1890, of Piazza Giudia, which after its demolition became Via Portico d'Ottavia. The Jewish school had not been built yet, when this photograph was taken.



Piazza Giudia in 1890, in a photograph from the Raccolta Foto de Alvariis.



Piazza Giudia in Rome in 1900 (it was later demolished). From the Raccolta Roma Sparita.



Another photograph of Piazza Giudia from the Raccolta Roma Sparita. The bakery is shown.



In this other photograph of 1900, Piazza Giudia is shown from the side of the Manli house, and the bakery is shown.

3. Giacoma Limentani's Explanation for the Encounter in Venice, and Claudia Di Cave's Hypothesis for the Origin of *peromante*

Let us consider, in the first page of Giacomo Limentani's text with which we are concerned in the present study, the encounter in Venice, and then the explanation she was given for an utterance that had puzzled her:

Cominciai a rendermi conto della diversità del ghetto dal resto di Roma verso i 6 o 7 anni, quando mio padre mi portò a Venezia. Lì, a Piazza San Marco, mentre davo da mangiare ai colombi, papà fu avvicinato da uno di quei merciai ambulanti che portavano le loro merci su una tavoletta appesa al collo. Seppi dopo che lui e il babbo erano andati insieme a Talmud Torah.
 "Guarda chi si vede! – lo salutò allegramente papà – E cosa fai qui?"
 "Non lo vedi? Vado pe' Roma!"

Pensai che fosse matto, ma papà mi spiegò che quel suo strano amico era un *peromante*, uno che va per Roma a vendere le sue merci. Io non sapevo che l'espressione risaliva ai tempi in cui il ghetto era chiuso, e così, nella mia mente infantile Roma si configurò non proprio come un paese straniero, ma certo come un luogo dove si va e non certo dove si sta. Questo almeno per un ebreo romano che nel suo ghetto sentiva pulsare il cuore del cuore di Roma. La parte per lui più viva di un'URBE per più versi estranea agli ebrei, pur avendo accolto il primo insediamento ebraico d'Europa.

[I began to be aware of the difference of the Ghetto from the rest of Rome around the time I was aged six or seven, when my father took me to Venice. There, in St Mark's Square, while I was feeding the pigeons, Dad was approached by one of those peddlers⁷ who used to carry their merchandise on a shelf hanging down from their neck. Later on, I learned that he and Dad had been classmates at the classes of Judaism (at the Talmud Torah).

"Glad to meet you! [literally: Look whom one sees!]", Dad greeted him merrily. "What are you doing here?"

"Don't you see? I'm going around Rome!"

I thought he was crazy, but Dad explained to me that this awkward friend of his was a *peromante*, [i.e., a peddler,] one who goes around Rome (*per Roma*) to sell his merchandise. I did not know that that expression dated back from the times the Ghetto was closed [i.e., when the Jews were segregated there], and so, in my mind as a child, Rome took on a configuration not quite as though it really was some foreign country, but definitely as a place where you go to, rather than as a place where you stay. That was the case, at any rate, for a Roman Jew who in his Ghetto used to feel that the heart of Rome's heart [sic] was beating. To him, the part most alive of an URBE [the ancient Romans' *Urbs* and the Pope's *Urbe*], the cuty that was in more than one respect extraneous to the Jews, even though it had hosted the first Jewish settlement in Europe.]⁸

Claudia Di Cave (2016) has explored the history of the Roman Jewish word *peromanti* 'peddlers', and has rather cogently argued that derivation from "going *pe' Roma* = *per Roma* (around Rome)" is a folk-etymology, and that originally (in the early modern period) the word was *piromanti*, denoting such diviners who used to practise their art by observing flames (pyromancy). What is shared is low and disliked social status; diviners and Jews were

⁷ A *merciaio* in Italian denotes a haberdasher, but a *merciaio ambulante* denotes a peddler.

⁸ Apparently however, other than in insular and peninsular Greece.

marginalised. Di Cave (2016, pp. 86–87) points out the roles of necromancers, astrologers, and Jews in Italian comedies from the 16th century. In Ludovico Ariosto's comedy *Il Negromante*, the servant Nibbio describes his wandering boss, Mastro Iachellino as a philosopher, alchemist, medical doctor, astrologer, magician, and exorcist. Nibbio also states that Mastro Iachellino takes on different personal identities, and that moreover, he claims to be Greek, Egyptian, or African, whereas he actually is of Jewish origin, descended from the Jews expelled from Castile. Other 16th-century comedies made much of the Jewish peddler, and this further evolved in the 17th century in the genre of the *commedie ridicolose* from Rome or Latium (Di Cave 2016, p. 88), where diviners, Jews, and vagrants are stock characters. Such comedies underwent censorship by the Church, and their use of such stock characters fulfilled the function of ridiculing and marginalising the respective human categories. The boundaries between those categories are permeable, in such comedies; for example, Gypsy women are made to claim Jewish ancestry, and astrologers are made to utter incomprehensible formulae which suggested would-be Hebrew words (Di Cave 2016, p. 89). The Roman Inquisition, Di Cave points out, used to charge Jews, Marranos, and Waldenses, among the other accusations, or pyromantic rituals. Concerning the semantic shift of *piromante/peromante* from 'pyromancer' to 'peddler', Di Cave proposes (2016, p. 97):

Possiamo immaginare che la risemantizzazione del termine avvenisse per uno dei tanti giochi linguistici legati al fraintendimento di termini nelle *ridicolose* e nelle *giudiate*, oppure supporre che gli ebrei stessi, che dallo spazio chiuso del ghetto interagivano con il mondo esterno, correggessero lo stereotipo con il nuovo significato di mercante girovago, seguito dalla chiosa "perché va per Roma".

At teatro delle *commedie ridicolose* che fissava i ruoli e educava il pubblico al pregiudizio, gli ebrei rispondevano nel ghetto, definito da K. Stow "the Theater of Acculturation", facendo proprio il ruolo dell'ambulante e rigettando quello dell'esperto di magie e divinazione.

[We can figure out that the semantic shift of the term happened by one of the many forms of wordplay related to misunderstanding words in use in the *commedie ridicolose* and in the *giudiate* [i.e., anti-Jewish farces], or then we may suppose that the Jews themselves, who from the secluded space of the ghetto interacted with the outer world, corrected the stereotype by means of the new sense of peddler, followed with the gloss "because he goes around Rome (*per Roma*)".

To the theatre of the *commedie ridicolose* that established the roles and educated the audience to prejudice, the Jews used to reply inside the ghetto, defined by Kenneth Stow (2001) "the Theater of Acculturation", by appropriating the role of the peddler and rejecting the role of the expert in magic and divination.]

The folk-etymology *pe' Roma* occurs in the sonnet *A giornata d' 'oo peromante* (*The Peddler's Day*) by Crescenzo Del Monte (Rome, 1868 – Rome, 1935), in the Judaeo-Roman dialect, which Di Cave reproduces on the opening page of her article: "allora che revengko [sic] stracco rotto / da pe' Roma a' matina [...]" ("when I come back, dead tired, from [going] around Rome in the morning [...]") — the peddler has gone home to eat something and rest a little, before going out again: — "Poi, 'nbonora, da capo, 'o sacco addosso, / fi' a notte me strascino! e più o meno, / m'arancio [= mi arrangio], e m'approfitto come posso" ("Then, soon, again, carrying the sack, till night I drag myself! And more or less, I cope, and I earn as much as I can").

Crescenzo Del Monte was born in Rome in 1868, and died in that same city in 1935. He is considered the foremost author in the Judaeo-Roman dialect (*giudaico-romanesco*).⁹ The dominant form of poetry in the Roman (*romanesco*) dialect is the sonnet, and this because of the huge influence of Giuseppe Gioachino Belli (1791–1863) is the author of 2269 sonnets in the Roman dialect (*Sonetti romaneschi*) that were published posthumously (1886–1891).

⁹ In older times, Judaeo-Roman was written in Hebrew characters, but by Del Monte's time, he was using the usual roman spelling in use for the general Roman dialect.



The Judaeo-Roman poet Crescenzo Dal Monte.¹⁰

Actually, in her very first footnote in her article, Di Cave (2016) points out that Del Monte's sonnet *A giornata d' 'oo peromante* (*The Peddler's Day*) resembles Belli's sonnet *La bona famija* (*The Good Family*), in that both sonnets describe a simple yet appreciated meal, as well the good habits before falling asleep.

In the introduction to the 1927 edition of Crescenzo Del Monte's collected sonnets, an introduction he wrote in 1908 as an essay about the Judaeo-Roman dialect, Del Monte stated

¹⁰ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crescenzo_Del_Monte.JPG#/media/File:Crescenzo_Del_Monte.JPG

explicitly his purpose of documenting the dialect spoken by Roman Jews,¹¹ as well as the purpose of supplementing Belli's *opus* with a depiction of the Jewish community in Belli's times, when the genuine type of the Roman Jew still (supposedly) existed.¹²

The setting of Crescenzo Del Monte's poems was either the current generations — the age of emancipation of the Jews of Rome following 1870 — or the difficult past of the Jews in Rome under the temporal rule of the Pope. His poetry was published in two books while he was alive, and another volume of posthumous published poems (*Sonetti Giudaico-Romaneschi, Nuovi Sonetti Giudaico-Romaneschi e Sonetti Giudaico-Romaneschi Postumi*).¹³

4. Learning from Gossip During Food Preparation

Giacoma Limentani's "Un'identità ebraica romana" continues as follows (2008, p. 200):

Il senso più profondo del ghetto mi arrivò come una graduale presa di coscienza o, meglio, di divertente approfondimento che faceva coincidere le sue date con l'arrivo della tramontana, quando in ogni casa ebraica degna di questo nome, si facevano i salami kasher. Allora la mamma, con le zie e le nonne trafficavano in cucina, mentre per noi bambini venivano sistemati nel corridoio dei panchetti, con tutto il necessario per fare anche noi dei salamini. Le zie parlavano liberamente fra loro pensando che noi non sentissimo o almeno che non le stessimo a sentire.

Facendo i miei brutti salamini io però tenevo le orecchie tese, e così, insieme a molti pettegolezzi che non sempre capivo, ma di cui lo stesso ridevo, cominciai ad assumere i primi rudimenti del giudaico-romanesco.

[The deepest sense of the Ghetto reached me as a gradual realisation, or rather like entertaining advanced learning whose dates on the calendar were coincident with the arrival of the north wind, when in every Jewish home deserving of that name, kosher salami were prepared. At such times, Mum, with my aunts and grandmothers, were busy in the kitchen, while for us children, little benches were placed in the corridor, with everything necessary so we, too, could prepare little salamis. My aunts used to speak freely among themselves, thinking we wouldn't hear, or at any rate that we were not intent on overhearing them.

And yet, while I was making my ungainly little salamis, my ears were attentive, and that way, along with much gossip I didn't always understand, but which made me laugh nonetheless, I stated to acquire the basics of the Judaeo-Roman dialect.]

Giacoma Limentani turns to reflect about the Judaeo-Roman dialect:

¹¹ Debenedetti Stow (1998a, p. 33). She remarks (*ibid.*, p. 34) that the documentary intent of social conditions and spoken expression was shared in Italian literature by naturalistic authors such as Giovanni Verga for Sicily and Matilde Serao for Naples, but it must be said that these did not write in the respective dialect. Debenedetti Stow acknowledges (*ibid.*) that in the dialectal literature in late 19th-century Italy, the influence of naturalism was not as strong as the model of Belli's poems from Rome, and Carlo Porta in Milan (who was writing in the Napoleonic period)

¹² Debenedetti Stow (1998a, p. 35). She also points out that in his preface to Del Monte's posthumous sonnets, in 1955, the linguist Benvenuto Terracini referred to Del Monte as an "amabile filologo", a "lovable philologist". In that same preface, Terracini stated that while recreating scenes, Del Monte was treating his dialect, which he knew intimately, as one of the characters, and that his characters are products of the spirit of the vernacular, which is one with Del Monte's poetical language (Debenedetti Stow 1998a, p. 36).

¹³ See Del Monte (1955, 2007). An anthology of Crescenzo Del Monte's Judaeo-Roman sonnets was edited by Micaela Procaccia (Del Monte 1976). Studies about Del Monte's sonnets include Mazzocchi Alemanni (1993) and Debenedetti Stow (1998a, 1998b), in which she considered Del Monte's theatricality, the types he constructed, and his modalities of reconstruction of custom. Her approach in that paper is admittedly folkloric, more than linguistic as in other papers of hers on Judaeo-Roman.

Questo idioma che sembrava dover cadere in disuso e invece sta trovando nuova fortuna grazie a neonate e quasi miracolose compagnie teatrali, coniuga espressioni ebraiche con desinenze romanesche, in una struttura grammaticale e sintattica conservata dal romano volgare.

La chiusura del ghetto cristallizzò al suo interno il volgare che nel resto di Roma si andava modificando e, con lievi modifiche, ha fatto giungere fino a me, tramite le zie che lo parlavano benissimo, questa strana e caldissima parlata che maschilizza tutto, al punto di dire "i femmini" e arriva a stroppiare "Kadosh Baruch hu" il Santo e Benedetto Signore dell'Universo dell'insegnamento rabbinico, in "Kadosh Baracù", di errata pronuncia, ma di estremamente più facile e calda convivenza, specie in un piccolo mondo che bisogno di invocarlo e sentirselo accanto ne ha sempre avuto molto.

Un mondo talmente abituato a vivere rinchiuso, da non concepire sconfinamenti di sorta. Da temerli, anzi, come li temeva Liviella la Roscia.

[This vernacular that seemed to be on the point of falling from use, and which is having a comeback instead because of newly born and almost miraculous stage companies, inflects Hebrew expressions with ending from the Roman dialect, in a grammar and syntax structure preserved in vernacular Roman.¹⁴

The seclusion of the Ghetto [established in 1555, and where the Jews were forced to live] crystallised inside it the vernacular — that elsewhere in Rome was undergoing change — and, with minor modifications, let the Jewish vernacular reach me, through the intermediary of my aunts who used to speak it quite well, this awkward and so warm dialect that turns everything into the masculine, so much so that one says "i femmini" ["the females" with a masculine ending and determinative article], and even distorts the Hebrew epithet *Kadosh baruch hu*, of the Holy One, Blessed be He, the Lord of the Universe as in rabbinic parlance, into *Kadosh Baracù*, erroneously pronounced, yet much easier and warmer for us to live side by side with it, all the more so in a little world which has always had much need to invoke Him and feeling Him on one's side.

A world so used to live in seclusion, that it would not contemplate any forays. These were feared. Liviella la Roscia (Red Little Livia)¹⁵ feared them indeed.

Limentani then turns to relating about that terrible woman of an older generation.

5. Limentani's Portrait of Liviella la Roscia

One of the most lively parts of Limentani's "Un'identità ebraica romana" is her portrait of Liviella la Roscia, whose hair, red like flames, befits her fiery temperament, or, the way Limentani puts it, an incendiary temperament. Liviella is a counterexample to the Jewish mother (*Yidische mame*) stereotype made generally known by American Jewish comedians.

The passage begins as follows (2008, p. 200):

¹⁴ The Judaeo-Roman (i.e., Rome's Judaeo-Italian) dialect inherited from Greek some syntactic and morphological features. While discussing this, Lea Scazzocchio Sestieri (1970, p. 116) pointed out that already David Simon Blondheim — whose books on Judaeo-Romance include *Blondheim* (1925, 1927, 1929–1937) — had taken notice of that Greek influence, which he ascribed to the ancient use of Greek translations of the Bible. In particular, Scazzocchio Sestieri provides an illustration, from Judaeo-Roman, of the derivational phenomenon of admissibility of tmesis, i.e., a word derived by means of a prepositional prefix may appear with the constitutive elements separated by some inserted word. In order to say, in standard Italian, 'it restarts badly', one says *ricomincia male*. In Judaeo-Roman, *remal comienza*. That is to say, the prefix of the verb is applied instead to the adverb that precedes it (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ Limentani first writes *Liviella*, and next, *Livella*.

Un mondo talmente abituato a vivere rinchiuso, da non concepire sconfinamenti di sorta. Da temerli, anzi, come li temeva Liviella la Roscia.

Livella, detta la rossa per via di una ribelle chioma fiammeggiante, incendiaria come il suo carattere, pare abitasse sopra la bottega del dolciere e che le capitasse di scendere in strada e lì, con le mani sui fianchi gridasse: "Io sto qua. E mo' chi vo' battajà?"

Probabilmente ce l'aveva con i non pochi che alla veglia funebre per il marito le avevano offerto ironiche condoglianze dicendo che era passato a miglior vita.

Vita travagliatissima pare che invece vivesse suo figlio, tanto schiacciato dalle battaglie materne, da meritare il nomignolo di "Spappetta".

Ma ecco che con la vera apertura del ghetto psicologico di Roma, dopo il '70, mentre tanti continuavano a fare i peromanti e solo alcuni osavano lanciarsi in piccole imprese sempre in aree adiacenti al ghetto, che consentissero loro di rientrare prima di notte in modo da evitare brutti incontri, non si sa per quale colpo di fortuna Spappetta riuscì in poco tempo ad aprire, pare in Galleria Colonna, un negozio di moda maschile che divenne subito rinomato.

[A world so used to live in seclusion, that it would not contemplate any forays. These were feared. Liviella la Roscia (Red Little Livia) feared them indeed.]

Livella, nicknamed Red because of her indomitable flaming red hair, fiery/incendiary like her character, apparently dwelt on top of the confectioner's shop [thus, in Piazza Giudia] and that he would sometimes come down into the street and standing there, her hands akimbo, she would shout: "I stand here. And now, who wants a fight?"

She probably resented the more than a few who during the wake for her deceased husband, had offered her ironic condolences telling her that he had passed on to a better life.

In contract, her son apparently lived quite a troubled life. So crushed he was by his mother's battles, that he earned the nickname "Spappetta" (Little Pap / Little Mush).

But then, with the real opening of the psychological ghetto of Rome, after [Italy's annexation of Rome and the end of papal temporal rule in] 1870 — while many continued to work as peddlers (*peromanti*), and only a few dared to engage in small enterprises which were invariably in areas contiguous to the Ghetto, so that they could go home before night so they would avoid unpleasant encounters — by some lucky strike whose details are unknown, Spappetta managed within a short time to open, apparently in the Colonna Gallery, a shop of gents wear that immediately acquired fame.]

At first, even Liviella concedes that her son has made good. He is rich, he is elegant. How could she not be proud of him? And yet, before too long Liviella reverts to her oppressive attitude, and she does so in a public outburst, which Limentani relates as follows (2008, p. 201):

Il fatto era strabiliante al punto di ammutolire perfino Liviella che dovette riconoscersi fiera del figlio, della sua improvvisa eleganza, del suo nuovo modo di camminare, sciolto e autorevole come quello di un giovanotto della buona società.

[The fact was so amazing, that it left even Liviella dumb, even she, who had to concede she was proud of her son, of his sudden elegance, of his new gait, fluent and authoritative like that of a young man belonging to the elite.]

E che Spappetta cominciasse anche ad arricchire era provato da un via-vai di facchini che nella cassa sopra al negozio di dolci portavano sempre più misteriose casse e balle di roba.

[And that Spappetta was also turning rich was proven by the bustle of streetporters who, into the house [*casa*, but there is a typo: *cassa*] on top the confectioner's shop where carrying more and more mysterious crates (*casse*) and bundles of stuff.]

Finchè un giorno la finestra di Liviella si spalancò, e la voce che per tanto tempo non si era sentita, gridò: "Jodei! fijemo Spappetta s'è impaz-zuto! S'è fatto o salotto!"

E giù dalla finestra vennero lanciati un divanetto, due poltroncine e un tavolinetto destinato a sorreggere ninnoli, che insieme al resto andarono a sbriciolarsi sul selciato di Piazza Giudia.

Cosa fosse successo è presto detto. Non contento del nuovo benessere e dell'acquisita eleganza, Spappetta voleva convalidarli invitando dei nuovi amici a prendere il tè. E questo desiderio, per la prima volta non proprio a torto, aveva fatto infuriare la sua focosa madre.

[Until one day, Liviella's window burst open, and her voice, which for such a long time had not been heard, shouted: "Jews! My son (*fijyemo*), Spappetta, has gone crazy! He has set up a living room!"

Then, out from that window, came thrown down a little sofa, two chairs, and a coffee table meant to support baubles, which along with the rest came crashing down on the pavement of Piazza Giudia.

What happened is soon told. Unsatisfied with his newly acquired affluence and elegance, Spappetta wanted to validate them by inviting new friends to have a tea at his place. And this wish, for the first time not entirely for a wrong reason, had turned into a fury his fiery mother.]

Per vecchie storie, amare esperienze e ricordi di conversioni forzate, Liviella sapeva che non ha senso fare bella la propria casa per amici di nuovo stampo, forse incapaci di comprendere che le lacrime di umidità stillanti dai muri fatiscenti delle case del ghetto, così tenuti da voluta incuria, tanto chi ci viveva non meritava di meglio, non erano molto diverse dalle lagrime salate che gli occhi sanno piangere.

[Because of old stories, bitter experience, and memories of forced conversions, Liviella was aware that it made no sense to embellish one's home for friends of a new brand, perhaps incapable of understanding that the tears of dampness oozing from the dilapidated walls of the houses of the Ghetto, kept that way by deliberate neglect, as those dwelling inside did not deserve better, were not so different from the salted tears that eyes know how to pour.]

6. The Roman Ghetto's Culture-Bound Folk-Taxonomy of Human Temperaments

While still dealing with Liviella la Roscia, Giacoma Limentani then explain how dwellers in the Roman Ghetto used to make sense of Liviella's fiery temperament. They used to conceptualise human types as though in the Ghetto there were a number of "races", corresponding to different temperaments. Such human types each had their respective proper names.

Anche in quel caso le intemperanze di Liviella erano però dovute pure al fatto che Liviella era una Baccajella, mentre solo nella prima gioventù suo figlio era stato uno Spappetta.

Spappetta è un nomignolo che non ha bisogno di spiegazioni e che comunque rimase unico, non lasciò eredi.

Baccajella invece è il nome di una razza. Liviella è anche de razza Baccajella, anche detta la razza delle Potenti, vedi una schiatta di donne fumatine e decise ad avere sempre ragione.

Non so chi fu e a quando risalga la capostipite di questa razza, mentre il termine razza ha in ghetto un senso preciso.

Nasce un giorno un individuo con caratteristiche spiccate che suscitano un soprannome.

Esempio: Spappetta che non ha bisogno di spiegazioni.

Se le sue caratteristiche si comunicano ai suoi discendenti, il soprannome diventa il titolo di una razza, definita razza per sottolineare la conaturazione.

[In that case too, Liviella's rowdy outburst were caused however also by the fact that Liviella was a Baccajella, whereas it was only in his early youth that her son had been a Spappetta.

Spappetta is a nickname (Mush, Pap) that requires no explanation, and that at any rate remained one of a kind, leaving no heirs.

Baccajella (*Bakkayella*) instead is the name of a race. Liviella, too, belongs to the Baccajella race, also called the race of Powerful Women, to wit, a line of women from whom, billowing smoke comes out (*donne fumatine*), ones determined to always have it their way.

I don't know who it was, and in which period to temporally situate, the ancestor of that race, but the term *race* (*razza* ['ratsa]) has a precise sense in the Ghetto.

Some day, an individual is born that has showy features that elicit a nickname.

For example: *Spappetta*, that requires no explanation.

If his features are transmitted to his offspring, the nickname becomes the label of a race, defined as a race in order to underscore it is conaturated.]

Spappetta farà poi strada e strada facendo si scuoterà di dosso il sopran-

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nome. Forse anche, a detta almeno delle mie zie, glielo scosse di dosso la morte della madre, perché i baccajamenti di una Baccajella spappolavano il cervello, fanno perdere la testa come, ma in un altro modo, la fa perdere la bellezza delle donne di una schiatta tanto splendida da essere chiamata la razza delle brillantate.

[Spappetta then became quite successful, and during that journey, he got rid of the nickname. Perhaps in part — at any rate this is what my aunts used to say — what freed him of it was his mother's death, because the tantrums (*baccajamenti*) of a Baccajella would reduce the brain into a pap (*spappolavano il cervello*), they make one lose one's head somewhat how, but in a different way, it is lost because of the beauty of the women of a race so splendid that it was called the race of the Shiny-like-a-Diamond (passive participle *brillantate* < *brillante* [as opposed to the participial adjective *imbrillantinato* 'brilliantine-coated' < *brillantina* 'brilliantine']).]

Giacoma Limentani then refers to a better behaved "race" of the Pigeons, and then she claims about herself that she has features of his mother's "race", as well as of her father's "race":

Va ricordata anche la dolcezza degli appartenenti alla razza Piccione, con gli occhi un po' sporgenti e la tendenza a tubare con chiunque mostri loro simpatia.

Io, per esempio, che tendo a camminare col didietro, già di per sé sporgente, in fuori, sono una degna figlia della razza Culareto, che sarebbe il lato materno della mia famiglia. Per lo stesso motivo sdirazzo dalla parte paterna, detta di razza Scarnicchia.

[Also deserving mention is the sweetness of those belonging to the Pigeon race (*razza Piccione*), whose eyes protrude a little and who have the tendency to coo with anybody who would show them some sympathy.

For example I, who have the tendency, while I walk, to move backwards my behind, which is already protruding of its own, am a deserving daughter of the Culareto (Bummy) race, which is the maternal side of my family. For that same reason, I do not as much partake [*sdirazzo*: I degenerate] of racial features of my paternal side, of the so-called race Scarnicchia (Rip-the-Flesh) race.]

Limentani reports a folk-aetiology, in relation to a story told about an ancestor of hers:

Il perché merita una storia, anche tramandata dalle zie, che non so quanto sia storicamente attendibile, ma che la tradizione farebbe risalire a molto tempo fa, quando il ghetto era chiuso e le tasse per farvi entrare frutta e verdura molto alte.

Per sbarcare il lunario facendo i peromanti occorreva una buona dose di fantasia, e un mio avo diede via libera alla sua, andando non solo per Roma, ma, a proprio rischio e pericolo, anche fuori Roma.

A Roma raccoglieva stracci, abiti vecchi, libri squinternati e altre cianfrusaglie di varie specie, pagandole al caso con i rammendi delle rammendatrici ebreo, famose quanto le ricamatrici ebreo, e altri servizietti. Portava questa roba fuori Roma, ai contadini che la pagavano con frutta, verdura e uova che faceva entrare in ghetto in barba al dazio pontificio. Portava poi anche un'altra strana merce: orci e ampolle e otri di terracotta magari sbreccati, ma che riempiva con una certa acqua diuretica della fonte di Cave, un paesino dopo Palestrina.

Acqua molto simile a quella di Fiuggi, che facendo finire nella càntera brufoli e renella, a Roma si vendeva con guadagno netto.

Così il mio avo diventò Scarnicchia, perché siccome all'interno del ghetto la faccenda dell'acqua non si sapeva, la gente pensò che per fare soldi tanto in fretta, doveva scarnire i clienti.

[The reason for that deserves a story, which was traded down by my aunts indeed, and which I don't know how credible it is, but that tradition has it that it dates back to much time ago, when the Ghetto was secluded and the taxes for introducing there fruits and vegetables were very high.

For peddlers (*peromanti*) to earn their living, a good amount of imagination was needed, and an ancestor of mine gave free rein to his own imagination, going not only around Rome, but also, taking a considerable risk, also outside Rome.

In Rome, he used to collect rags, old garments, books that lost their binding, and other disparate things, and he used to pay them with the mending of the Jewish lady menders, who were as famous as the Jewish lady embroiderers, and other little forms of service. He used to take such stuff out of Rome, to the peasants who would pay for it with fruits, vegetables, and eggs, which he then brought into the Ghetto eluding the papal customs. He also used to carry another, awkward

kind of merchandise: pitchers, and cruets, and jars of clay that may have been fissured, but which he used to fill with diuretic water from the fountain in Cave, a hamlet beyond Palestrina.

This is water quite similar to Fiuggi mineral water, and as it would eliminate skin spots and kidney stones, was selling in Rome for a handsome profit.

This is how that ancestor of mine became Scarnicchia (Rip-the-Flesh), because as inside the Ghetto they were unaware of his mineral water trade, people thought that in order to earn money quickly, he must have been ripping off (literally: unflensing) his customers.]

The story about that ancestor also relates that eventually, it was his own flesh he ripped off, or rather, subtracted from his body — by neglecting to eat:

Finì invece per scarnire se stesso. Rimasto vedovo di una moglie amatissima, si dedicò tutto a sistemare i figli, e quando li ebbe sistemati, smise di mangiare. Aveva lavorato tanto e voleva pensare. Mangiare lo distraeva.

Sempre la leggenda familiare vuole che morì scarnito, ma felice perché convinto di andare a raggiungere la moglie.

Il loro era stato un matrimonio di grande amore, non combinato come si usava in ghetto da tempi immemorabili, per sistemare i profughi soli ed evitare che ragazze meno avvenenti restassero zitelle.

[In the end however it was his own flesh that he unflensed. Once he was widowed of a wife he had been much in love with, he devoted all his energies to marrying off his children, and having married them off, he stopped eating. He had worked a lot, so now he wanted to think. Eating was a distraction.

The same family legend has it that he died unflensed, but happy because he was convinced he was about to reach his wife.

Their had been a marriage of great love, not an arranged marriage as usual in the Ghetto since memorable times in order to take care of lonely refugees and in order to avoid that not so comely girls would remain a spinster.]

Giacoma Limentani continues on p. 203:

E poi bisognava far sposare tutti, al più presto: scapoli e nubili erano più soggetti alle conversioni forzate, in quanto convincerne due è più difficile che convincere uno solo, e il matrimonio è considerato sacro da tutte le religioni.

Per combinare perfino fra bambini dei matrimoni che rendano poi felici degli adulti, occorre una vera arte. Non era questione di dote, ed erano doti miserissime, ve l'assicuro, ma di caratteri.

Le sensali di matrimonio erano perciò personaggi importanti nel ghetto, perché nessuna sensale col cervello a posto avrebbe proposto un ragazzo di razza Piccione a una figlia di razza Baccajella.

Per uno di razza Piccione ci voleva quanto meno una di razza Giulebbe, mentre una Baccajella era fatta apposta per un esemplare de li Bestioni o di razza Scocciadiavoli.

Il perché è ovvio.

[Besides, it was necessary to marry off everybody, as soon as possible: unmarried men and women were more at risk of being forcibly converted, because persuading two is more difficult than persuading just one person, and marriage is considered sacred by all religions.

In order to arrange even between children such marriages that would then make them happy once grown into adults, it really requires an art. It wasn't about dowry, and dowries were quite miserable, I assure you. It was about personalities.

Therefore, ladies who were matchmakers were important in the Ghetto, because no matchmaker in her right mind would have proposed a boy of the Piccione (Pigeon) race to a daughter of the Baccajella race.

For a male of the Piccione (Pigeon) race, at the very least a female of the Giulebbe (Sugar Syrup) race was needed, whereas a female Baccajella was suitable for an individual belonging to the Bestioni (Animals, Beasts), or of the Scocciadiavoli (Harass-the-Devils) race.

The reason why is obvious.]

This clarifies that the social function of the folk-taxonomy was primarily for the purpose of matchmaking, rather than for merely the purpose of leisurely gossip. Bear in mind that in traditional societies, and in particular in Jewish neighbourhoods in other countries as well, be it Poland or Iraq, society allowed families little privacy.

The following passage hints at the Holocaust: of a given couple, it is unknown (or at any rate, Limentani does not know) "whether they had the time to found a race".

Uno degli ultimi matrimoni di cui mi parlarono le zie verso gli anni '30, fu combinato fra un giovanottone maniaco delle gite in comitiva e che perciò era stato chiamato *Torpedone*, e una ragazza piccolissima e di carattere solitario, subito detta *Limousine*.

Non so se *Torpedone* e *Limousine* ebbero il tempo di fondare una razza. So che alle loro nozze ci fu molto vociare. Molto ho detto, ma non poi tanto più del solito vociare del ghetto, dove sembrava che nessuno sapesse moderare il tono della voce e, almeno quando io ero piccola, qualunque fatto, anche il più privato, veniva discusso in strada, come se sempre e comunque dovesse riguardare l'intera comunità.

[One of the last few weddings about which my aunts told me around the 1930s was arranged between a young man who was an enthusiast of coach tours¹⁶ and who was therefore nicknamed *Torpedone* (Tour Bus), and quite a short girl who had a lonely temperament, and who was immediately nicknamed *Limousine*.

I don't know whether *Torpedone* and *Limousine* had the time to found a race. I know that at their wedding there were lots of rumours. I have said much, but not so much more than usual rumours/(sound of loud voices) of the Ghetto, where it seemed that nobody knew how to lower the volume of their voices, and, at any rate when I was a little girl, anything, even the most private, was discussed in the street, as though it always and with no exceptions had to be of concern to the wneitre community.]

The nickname *Limousine* was coined in response to *Torpedone* 'tour bus'. Both personal names are derived by metaphor from common names for kinds of motor vehicles. There is opposition motivating *Limousine*, owing to the penchant of the bride to stay one her own (as when one travels being chauffeured by limousine), as opposed to the gregarious penchant of the bridegroom on the evidence of how he liked to do his sightseeing. This onomastic situation in Limentani's account reminds me of a short story by Sholem Aleichem about a mismatched couple whose respective surnames he gave as *Purim* and *Kippur*. Thus, he respectively named them after a merry festival and a solemn festival typified by apprehension and gravitas. Arguably the formation of *Limousine* in response to *Torpedone* is an instance of opposition of the kind I have called elsewhere by the neologism *misantonymy* (Nissan 1999, 2013). Misantonyms are false opposites. See **Appendix B**. In the case at hand, the notation I introduced would be applied as follows to the two nicknames:

Torpedone ◀“▶” *Limousine*

¹⁶ Bust tours (coach tours) are called *gite in torpedone* in Italian.

7. A Child Wonders at the Synagogue, and a Lesson Given by Another Child

At the bottom of p. 203 in Limentani (2008), and then on top of p. 204, we read the following passage, which begins by referring to "Un vociare", the sound of voices from the crowd, which continues "del solito vociare del ghetto" ("of the usual *vociare* of the Ghetto") as found in the previous paragraph.

Un vociare di cui mi colpì la mancanza quando arrivai in ghetto il giorno in cui le truppe alleate liberarono Roma dai nazisti.

Gli ebrei superstiti erano accorsi tutti lì. Si guardavano, si riconoscevano, si toccavano, ma non parlavano perché solo il silenzio si addice al lutto. Sono passati tanti anni ma non riesco a togliermelo dalle orecchie quel silenzio.

Vibrava per intere razze di Baccajella che non avrebbero più baccajato, di Piccione che non avrebbero più tubato.

Suonava ed echeggiava nelle lacerazioni aperte in un tessuto umile, semplice, fatto di piccole cose, perché troppo spesso la storia gli aveva strappato le ali riducendo ogni suo volo a qualche passo fra casa e bottega.

Almeno così pensava un bambino irrequieto, al quale si disse che in sinagoga doveva stare tranquillo, perché quella è la casa di Dio.

"Davvero è la casa di Dio? – chiese – E allora la bottega dove ce l'ha?"

Sembrirebbe legittimo rispondergli che Dio ha la sua bottega dovunque agli uomini sia concesso di muoversi, incontrarsi, conoscersi e scambiarsi

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conoscenze, al fine di meglio poter vivere ognuno la propria specifica-identità.

Sembra però anche che, per aprire la propria bottega, proprio Dio abbia bisogno di una collaborazione umana che troppo spesso fa difetto.

[It was a sound of voices [gossiping] whose absence I found striking when I arrived into the Ghetto on the day when Allied troops freed Rome from the Nazis.

The surviving Jews had all flocked there. They stared at each other, they recognised and touched each other, but they did not speak, because silence alone befits mourning. Many years have elapsed since, but I don't manage to get that silence off my ears.

That silence was vibrating for entire races of Baccajella who would no longer throw tantrums (*che non avrebbero più baccajato*), of Piccione (Pigeon) who would no longer coo.

That silence was sounding and echoing in the lacerations opened in a simple, humble texture, made of little things, because all too often history tore its wings by reducing each of its flights to a few steps between home and the shop.

That was at any rate what a restless little boy was thinking. He was told that at the synagogue, he had to behave himself, because of was God's house.

"Is it really God's house?" he asked. "But then, where is His shop?"

It would be legitimate to reply to him by telling him that God has His shop wherever humans are let to move, encounter each other, know each other, and exchange knowledge, so they could each better live their specific identity.

It seems as well, however, that in order to open His shop, God Himself needs a human collaboration that is all too often lacking.



Giacoma Limentani.

Questa lezione mi viene da un altro ragazzino che conobbi molti anni fa al Collegio Rabbinico.

Era figlio di peromanti e abitava in pieno ghetto, a Via della Reginella. La mattina attraversava Ponte Garibaldi per andare alla scuola ebraica, sul Lungotevere opposto. Riattraversava il ponte all'una, per andare a mangiare il pranzo che la madre gli lasciava in cucina. Tornava ad attraversarlo il pomeriggio per frequentare i corsi del Collegio Rabbinico e, sempre attraversando lo stesso ponte, tornava a casa la sera.

Un giorno Rav Augusto Segre, con cui stava studiando la Teofania del Sinai, gli chiese di raccontarla come la sentiva lui, e quel ragazzino, la cui esistenza si snodava tutta negli attraversamenti solitari di un ponte molto trafficato, così scrisse in giudaico-romanesco, la lingua di un ghetto che per la sua famiglia era casa piena di ricordi: Li tramvi se fermorno, la gente s'aristette e Kadosh Baracù disse: "Io so' solo".

[I learned this lesson from another little boy, one with whom I became acquainted many years ago at the Collegio Rabbinico (the Rabbinic College in Rome).

He was the son of peddlers (*peromanti*), and dwelt quite inside the Ghetto, in Via della Reginella. In the morning, he used to cross Garibaldi Bridge in order to attend Jewish day school, on the opposite Lungotevere [i.e., riverside road]. At 1 pm, he used to cross that bridge again on his way back, in order to go and eat the lunch his mother left for him in the kitchen. Then he returned and crossed the bridge once again in order to attend the courses at the Collegio Rabbinico,¹⁷ and then crossing that bridge yet another time, he went home in the evening.

One day, Rabbi Augusto Segre, who was teaching him about the Theophany on Mt Sinai, asked him to relate it the way he felt it, and that little boy, whose whole life was unfolding by crossing on his own a bridge with heavy traffic, wrote as follows in Judaeo-Roman, the language of a ghetto that for his family was home full with memories:

¹⁷ Evidently, that was the case because he was from a devout family, and his parents wanted him to supplement the general and specifically Jewish subjects he was taught at Jewish day school, with a Jewish syllabus only available at him in classes for children taught at the Collegio Rabbinico, which is primarily a schools that forms young adults for the profession of rabbi.

The trams stopped, the people stood in place, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, said:
"I am alone".

Note the nuance; rather than understanding "I am the only God", the child mainly understood: "I am lonely". And as Giacoma Limentani announced beforehand, this is because all too often, humans fail to do their part. Limentani (2008) then concluded:

Ecco. Quando rivivo la mattina della liberazione di Roma dai Nazisti, in quel ghetto immerso nel silenzio del lutto, non mi chiedo, come altri hanno fatto, dove fosse andato a nascondersi Dio nei giorni della mattanza concentrazionaria, bensì perché Dio venga tanto spesso lasciato solo da esseri ai quali, insieme alla vita, ha donato il libero arbitrio, e quindi la facoltà di scegliere fra decenza e indecenza.

Ricordo che uscendo dal ghetto, di colpo immersa nel frastuono della libertà ritrovata, fui colpita in special modo da una jeep sulla quale un soldatino evidentemente stanchissimo e forse anche un po' brillo, cantava piangendo:

"I'll be seeing you in all the old familiar places that this heart of mine embraces all day through..."

E mi venne fatto di pensare che chiunque abbia conosciuto cosa davvero può essere un ghetto, deve chiudersi quella conoscenza nel cuore come un ritornello da ricantare costantemente a se stesso e agli altri.

[That is it. When I relive the morning of the liberation of Rome from the Nazis, in that ghetto submerged by the silence of the mourning, I do not ask myself, the way others have done, where ever had God hidden Himself during the days of butchering in the *Lagers*, but rather why on earth God is left so often alone by beings whom, along with life, He has endowed with free will, and therefore with the ability to choose between decency and indecency.

I remember than upon leaving the Ghetto, as I was suddenly submerged in the loud noise of freedom found again, I found it especially striking that there was a jeep on which a soldier, clearly very tired and perhaps a little bit tipsy as well, was singing [in English] while weeping:

"I'll be seeing you in all the old familiar places that this heart of mine embraces all day through..."¹⁸

And it occurred to me to think that anybody who has ever known what a ghetto really is, ought to enclose that knowledge in their heart as a refrain in order to constantly sing it again to themselves and for the benefit of others.]

Other contributors to that thematic section of *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* in 2008 contributed essays. Giacoma Limentani instead contributed a poignant literary text, an artful piece of prose that managed to articulate the modern Jewish Roman identity much better than an academic or semi-academic text would have achieved.

8. Concluding Remarks

This article begins with a quick overview of Giacoma Limentani's career as a writer and translator. We then provided a translation, passage by passage, with sporadic comments (and with two references to appendices), a text by Limentani which has appeared in 2008, the

¹⁸ The lyrics are by Irving Kahal; the music, by Sammy Fain. *I'll Be seeing You* is a song of 1938. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27ll_Be_Seeing_You_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27ll_Be_Seeing_You_(song)) Much loved, indeed a soldiers' anthem, during World War II, as sung by Vera Lynn and Bert Ambrose.

context being a journal section, edited by the academic educationist Clotilde Pontecorvo, about Jewish identities.

Limentani (2008) is an essay and at the same time, a text with literary qualities. It begins with memories of an encounter she and her father had in Venice in her childhood. In St Mark Square, they saw a Roman Jewish peddler who was former classmate of her father. Limentani then explained the Judaeo-Roman term *peromante* for 'peddler', as usually understood by speakers of the vernacular: one who walks around Rome, peddling his merchandise.¹⁹

We have summarised Claudia Di Cave's hypothesis (2016) concerning the origin of the term *peromante*, which apparently was when pyromancy was one of the charges the Roman Inquisition would level against Jews and Waldenses, and when pyromants and other vagrant diviners, marginalised like the Jews and the Gypsies, were stock characters in characters fulfilling the Counter Reformation aim of ridiculing and further marginalising those categories, sometimes conflating pairs of such categories in the portrayal of a character. We also quoted a few lines from a sonnet about a peddler which Di Cave reproduced in full, and which was authored by the Judaeo-Roman poet Crescenzo Del Monte. We said something about him.

We then turned to Limentani's passage about how she became conversant with the Judaeo-Roman vernacular and with Ghetto lore while overhearing adult relatives preparing salami in the kitchen and gossiping. Limentani conjures a vivid portrait of Liviella la Roscia, a terrible woman and bilious mother. Limentani shows how Liviella's attitude and behaviour were deeply rooted in realities from the Roman Ghetto. The character of Liviella is quite important, as a counterexample to the stereotype of the Yiddish mother as popularised by American Jewish comedians. Limentani's Liviella is evidence of a much more complex picture, even when stereotypes are involved.

And in fact, Giacomina Limentani further shows how a comic vision shapes the very categorisation as well as the nicknames associated with human types or "races" within the Roman Ghetto, a culture-bound folk-taxonomy of human temperaments. Limentani then shows that such folk-taxonomy had a major function for the workings of matchmaking, itself necessary because of the Ghetto's conditions.

Next, Limentani shows how the making of nicknames for bridegroom and bride was still productive during the 1930s, which leads to catastrophe, the Holocaust. She turns to the days of Rome's liberation by Allied troops, and how the surviving Jews responded. An episode she relates is a little boy wondering comically at the synagogue. Limentani finds a sense for the child's misunderstanding, which makes it remarkably sensible instead. She then turns to another little boy, and how he peculiarly understood God's statement, during the Theophany on Mt Sinai's, of His uniqueness. The child imagines the setting being the bridge he crosses four times during weekdays: the trams have stops, passers-by have stopped, and God disclosed that He is lonely. Limentani derives a lesson from this. That loneliness is because humans are not doing their part. They have free will, and choose badly. Even a song an Allied soldier, tired and probably tipsy, sings in English, enables Limentani to derive from this a lesson, with which she concludes her text.

¹⁹ By the way, Raniero Speelman (2004) discussed the occurrence of specifically Jewish terminology in the writings of several Italian Jewish literary writers, and how they coped with the need to define such terms. One of the authors Speelman discussed is Giacomina Limentani indeed.



Giacoma Limentani.



Giacoma Limentani.

Appendix A: The *pizza di Beridde*, the *pizzarelle*, and *pizza*

Giacoma Limentani's mention of *pizza* as a typically Jewish sweet baked food calls for explanation. Had she just referred to "a quarter of pizza", one would assume that she had to buy it in the square of the Ghetto in order to be satisfied that the pizza she was buying was kosher. She states explicitly however that she is referring to sweet bakery which is typically Jewish (of the Jews of Rome). One can buy a quarter of it, even though this is not a pizza as usually meant (with cheese and all). Limentani was stating that it was necessary to buy that kind of *pizza* (actually, not a member of the category one normally refers to as *pizza*, internationally), because it is considered a specifically Roman Jewish kind of cake: it is the most typical Roman Jewish cake, indeed. This is why it had to be bought inside the Ghetto.

After I inquired with her, Prof. Clotilde Pontecorvo in Rome (email of 23 May 2017) kindly supplied me with this explanation:

la pizza è un dolce fatto di farina, zucchero, ma soprattutto canditi, mandorle, pinoli e uva passa, diviso in rombi standard che si chiamano quarti di dimensioni di circa 10-12 cm e cotti al forno. La pizza si mangia soprattutto nelle occasioni liete (nascite, Circoncisioni, Bar Mitzva, Fidanzamenti, Matrimoni).

[Pizza [as being a Jewish Roman pastry] is a cake made with flour, sugar, but especially candied fruits, almonds, pine nuts, and raisin, divided into standard lozenges called "quarters" and sized nearly 10–12 cm, and baked in the oven. Such a "pizza" is especially eaten on family celebrations (births, circumcisions, bar mitzvah, betrothals, weddings).]

At Labna.it, the Italian-language blog of Jewish cuisine of Benedetta Jasmine Guetta and Manuel Kanah, in a post of 2 May 2014 Guetta gives the recipe (she reconstructed) of, along with some text about, what she calls (this is the title of the post) "Pizza di Beridde o pizza romana ebraica dolce".²⁰ She describes it as a kind of cookie. Guetta begins by stating:²¹

Ogni volta che amici e parenti vanno a Roma, chiedo loro di portarmi a casa alcuni speciali dolcetti che si trovano solo lì, per la precisione solo al forno del Ghetto, la pasticceria kasher Boccione: i ginetti — dei biscottoni enormi preparati con una frolla all'olio molto spessa e ruvida — e la "pizza di Beridde", che a dispetto del nome è ancora semplicemente un tipo di biscotto, arricchito di frutta secca e candita.

[Each time friends or relatives of mine go to Rome, I ask them to bring to me at home some special little cookies (*dolcetti*) one only finds there, more precisely only at the Ghetto's oven, the Boccione kosher bakery: the *ginetti* — these are huge cookies prepared with very thick, rough shortbread with oil — and the "Pizza di Beridde", which notwithstanding that name is, again, just a kind of cookie, enriched with candied fruits.]

Usefully, Guetta supplies photographs of the slices of "pizza di Beridde". One of those photographs is a close-up of such slices, which are crisp outside but soft inside:

Ma torniamo alla pizza ebraica dolce, o pizza di Beridde: in questa seconda foto vedete l'originale del Boccione, una torta divisa in tante fette, che sembra bruciata fino a non essere commestibile — ma è invece assolutamente deliziosa.

[But let us go back to the sweet Jewish pizza (*pizza ebraica dolce*), or pizza di Beridde: in this second photo you see the original [baked product] of the Boccione [bakery], a cake divided into many slices, which looks as though it is burnt so much it's inedible, whereas it's absolutely delicious instead.]

²⁰ I.e., "Pizza for circumcision [*beridde* < Hebrew /brit/, 'pact', /brit-mila/, 'circumcision', 'Abraham's pact'], or sweet Roman Jewish pizza". Cf. the Roman Jewish good wish: *Nozze* [wedding], *scompri* [births], *beridde*.

²¹ <http://www.labna.it/pizza-di-beridde-pizza-romana-ebraica-dolce-boccione.html>

Guetta mixes 00 wheat flour with some almond flour, oil, sugar, white wine, baked pine nuts, baked almonds, mollified raisin, and e.g. little cubes of candied citron (or other fruits).



Slices of Pizza di Beridde in a detail from a photograph of the Boccione bakery at the Labna.it webpage for the "Pizza di Beridde".



Guetta's photograph which shows a close-up of the slices of pizza di Beridde from the Boccione bakery.²²

²² <http://www.labna.it/pizza-di-beridde-pizza-romana-ebraica-dolce-boccione.html>



Guetta’s photograph of the pizza di Beridde she made herself, using the recipe she reconstructed.

The kosher bakery, Boccione, is a small corner shop at Via del Portico d’Ottavia, 1. In a comment, dated 27 February 2015, to the Labna.it post²³ of 2 May 2014 at the Labna.it blog, “Dgsquare” claimed that “la Pizza Romana (io la conoscevo solo con questo nome) ha degli enormi tocchi di frutta candita e uvetta e mandorle e poca ‘pasta frolla’ per tenerli assieme” [“the Pizza Romana [Roman Pizza] (I only knew it by that name) has huge slices of candied fruits and raisin and almonds, and just a little pastry (shortbread) to bind them together”].

Another comment to the same post at Labna.it refers to the same baked product as “la pizza ebraica” (“the Jewish pizza”). Yet another comment explains that the name *Boccioni* was the nickname of the current owners, from *boccione* ‘large glass vessel’ in the Roman dialect, and this from *boccia* ‘glass vessel’ in that dialect. See a fuller lexicological discussion of the acceptations (even sweet pastry) of *pizza/pitta* derivatives, in Nissan (2017).

²³ Cf. <http://fashionfooddesign.com/2014/01/pizza-di-beridde-o-pizza-dolce-ebraica-un-dolce-per-un-lieto-evento/>

And finally, considering that Giacoma Limentani's text about Rome mentions buying a quarter of pizza inside the Ghetto, it is worthwhile mentioning that at present in the United States, one comes across the phrase *ghetto pizza*. It apparently has more than one acceptance. The following is quoted from a webpage entitled "Urban Dictionary: ghetto pizza"²⁴ and dated 25 February 2008: "Chillax Tyrone, we just cook ourselves up some of the ghetto pizza! [...] a pizza made of saltine crackers, ketchup packets and grated Parmesan".



"Ghetto Pizza" from *Bloglander*, where this mock-warning is given: "You may want to look away if you're adverse to main meal recipes with only three ingredients".

Another sense of Ghetto Pizza occurs at a webpage entitled "Ghetto Pizza: Cheap Eats - Bloglander" (dated 13 March 2006),²⁵ and denotes an easy made next thing to a pizza, that here in London or elsewhere I have often eaten at home (only, it contained tomato rather than sauce, and was toasted in the oven rather than in aluminium foil inside a toaster), without it occurring to me that it should have a name; if pressed to describe it, I would have referred to it as "a toast topped with melted cheese". In fact, the blogger stated that the name *Ghetto Pizza* is their own coinage.²⁶ The blogger gives a recipe, using one slice of white bread, one slice of cheese ("mozzarella, swiss, etc."), and two tablespoons of spaghetti sauce.²⁷ Most definitely, this is not what Giacoma Limentani meant when referring to pizza from the Ghetto.

²⁴ <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ghetto%20pizza>

²⁵ <http://www.bloglander.com/cheapeats/2006/03/13/making-ghetto-pizzas/>

²⁶ "If you were ever a hungry latch-key kid coming home from school, chances are you've made an afternoon snack like this before. I call it **Ghetto Pizza**, although maybe it should be called 'Starving College Kid Pizza'. I happen to think this is quite good for lunchtime meals as well (as long as you eat other stuff with it, veggies would be nice!). ¶ I actually wasn't a latch-key kid until high school, but I still found occasion to make these every so often. The recipe is stupidly simple, has endless modifications, generally tastes 'good' and can be fairly cheap as long as you don't go putting any gourmet toppings on top".

²⁷ "If you can't figure out how to make this, then I don't know what to say. ¶ Varying the type of bread can do wonders. I particularly like to use **English Muffins** as the base, because they are round like a mini-pizza, they have nooks and crannies where sauce can get into and because they have that extra crunch that normal toast doesn't have. Another favorite is the **Ghetto Pizza Bagels**. ¶ By the way, I know they have all these 'mini-pizza' things you can buy in the frozen food section. I try and avoid those, because these are so easy to make".

Appendix B: Misantonyms

Let $w_1 \blacktriangleleft \blacktriangleright w_2$ [D_0] stand for a pair of opposites in a given domain. For example, we may notate 'red' $\blacktriangleleft \blacktriangleright$ 'green' [{"traffic-lights", "physical optics"}], but it is not the case that red and green are opposites in politics. Nevertheless, after Kaddafi's revolution in Libya, a place in Tripoli was called the Green Square, after the Red Square in Moscow, and Kaddafi authored *The Green Book*, whose title was patterned after Mao's *Red Book*.

We notate $w_1 \blacktriangleleft \blacktriangleright w_2$ in order to mean that w_2 is a misantonym derived from w_1 . For example, in Turkish *kara* means 'black', *ak* means 'white', and *deniz* means 'sea'. By opposition to *Karadeniz*, i.e., 'Black Sea', the Turkish name for the Mediterranean Sea is *Akdeniz*. The latter is a misantonym, and it is formed by compounding.

But word-formation is by derivation, instead, in the following example:

- (1) "My three-year-old daughter was outraged at being unfairly blamed for her brother's noisy games. 'It's not me being boisterous', she complained furiously, 'I'm girlsterous!'" This text is a reader's letter ('Girl's talk', by R. Darlington) in *Woman* magazine (24 April 1982, p. 7). The discrepancy between the linguistic competence which is standard for adult speakers of English, and the imperfect lexical and derivation-morphology knowledge of toddlers, is the key to pinpointing where the humour stems from, in the reception of that toddler's utterance as reported by the magazine.
- (2) Another example is, in English, *blackout* $\blacktriangleleft \blacktriangleright$ *brownout* for a lesser disruption of power supply. Here, the kind of opposition is a matter of degree. This also the case of this other example (from p. 34 in *Woman* magazine of April 9, 1966): "Doris [Day] herself says: 'I wear a minimum of make-up — in fact, I'd call it a make-down! [...]'".
- (3) 'Clockwork Kumquat' was the title of R.Z. Sheppard's review (*Time*, Feb. 14, 1972, p. 56) of an Anthony Burgess's allegedly minor novel, *One Hand Clapping*, vis-à-vis *A Clockwork Orange*.
- (4) Here is an example in which the misantonymous coinage expresses a reinforced degree, rather than a lessened degree. Henderson (1988) is concerned with the poetics and rhetorics of the Latin poet Lucan, Nero's admiring friend turned into foe and victim. In one of the sections in my paper "Anticipatory Narrative Construal" (2001), I analysed the temporal structure in a passage by Lucan and in a misunderstood medieval reading of it. As for Henderson's essay, a reviewer, Dehon (1992, p. 244), points out Henderson's attention to Lucan's wordplays. Lucan formed sort of a superlative out of the compound for 'civil war', by expressing the superlative (in the very opening of the *Bellum Civile*, at I, 1) with this wording: "Bella [...] plus quam civilia". Literally, this means: "Wars [...] more than civil". Dehon explains that this was Lucan's way to convey the concept that "la guerre civile opposant Pompée à César est excessive" (i.e., "the civil war opposing Pompey to Caesar is excessive"). If a civil war especially atrocious is "a war more than civil", one may apply an Italian idiom "Piú ... di cosí si muore" — derived from an improvised gag by the Roman comedian Ettore Petrolini (1886–1936) — and say that "more civil that that, one dies".
- (5) This other example is about an ethnic name, in relation to the name of a country. Maurizio De Lullo, born in 1941 in his native Rome, is a painter, as well as a satirical poet in the Roman dialect. One of his poems (De Lullo 1991, p. 72) is set on the motorway from Rome to Fiumicino airport. Two cars have stopped at some station, and while the VIP they were each carrying is away inside, one of the two drivers explains that he is carrying the president of Armenia, that they are late for his plane, so would the other driver please let him bypass him once they resume their trip. The other driver, who

was carrying the Pope, is indignant: "M'hai detto 'n prospero! Er presidente Armeno! / M'avessi detto «Arpiù»! Ma quello è «Arméno»!!!". That is to say: "It's quite stupid, what you told me! The president *armeno!* / Had you told me *ar più* (the one who is more, the most)! But that one is *ar meno* (the lesser one)!!!"

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to David Jacobini, a librarian of the Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane in Rome; to Paolo Della Corte in Venice for permission to reproduce his photographs; and to Profs. Clotilde Pontecorvo in Rome and Alberto Cavaglion in Turin for their kind advice.



Giacoma Limentani.

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Dr. Ephraim Nissan has worked in academia in three different countries. His doctoral project was in computational linguistics (Ph.D., 1989, project prized). In 2017, he has nearly 500 academic publications (of which nearly 170 are journal articles). A guest editor for journals about 20 times, he co-founded and held editorial roles in four journals (in computer science in 1985–1991, in Jewish studies in 1999–2010, and two in humour studies from 2011). He is the editor-in-chief of the book series *Topics in Humor Research*, of Benjamins in Amsterdam. He has published or has had papers accepted in, e.g., *Semiotica*, *The American Journal of Semiotics*, *Quaderni di Semantica, Pragmatics & Cognition*, *Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia*, *Hebrew Linguistics*, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, *Philology* (Basel), *Fabula*, *La Ricerca Folklorica*, *Ludica*, *Israeli Journal of Humor Research* (which he founded), *Humor Mekuvvan*, *European Review of History*, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, *Revue européenne des études hébraïques*, *Shofar*, *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, *Aula Orientalis*, *Orientalia Parthenopea*, *Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei*, *Bibbia e Oriente*, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, *Studies in Rabbinic Logic*, *Jewish Law Annual*, *Rivista di storia della medicina*, *MHNH [μηνη]: revista internacional de investigación sobre magia y astrología antiguas*, *Journal of Sociocybernetics*, *DSH: Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, and the *Revue Informatique et statistique dans les sciences humaines*. He has also published, for example, in several artificial intelligence or computer science journals, including on applications to engineering. Within humour studies, along with such projects that fit at the interface of folklore studies and literary studies, he has been researching computational models, as well as humorous aetiologies and the generation of narratives that contextualise puns, in relation to devices detected in literary humorous texts.

Address correspondence to Ephraim Nissan, at ephraim.nissan@hotmail.co.uk