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Abstract: Vitaliano Brancati’s *Il bell’Antonio* (1949), a novel of erectile and social disfunction in fascist Catania, has been translated three times into English, the most translated postwar Italian novel. Arguing that proliferation of *Bell’Antonio*’s in translation actually reinforces an Anglo-American perception of the Italian “inetto” (bungler), this article looks at the intercultural encounter produced in translation alongside an intercultural encounter in one of the novel’s many epigraphs, where “curious” phenomenon emerges in a conversation between a Sicilian and an Italian: in Sicilian dialect, the grammatical gender of the nouns for the biological sex organs contradict their meanings insofar as the male sex organ, *la minchia*, is gendered female and the female sex organ, *il pacchio* or *lo sticchio*, is gendered male. I argue that the contradiction of the feminine “minchia” offers a key to the novel’s critique—but ultimate reinscription—of the gender politics of fascist Catania, as the emblem of masculinity, Antonio, is revealed to be impotent and is preyed upon by virile women. However, even as these “curious” nouns point to the possibility for the sexes to swap the traditional heteronormative gender roles, they are in tension with the internalized and institutionalized misogyny that seeks to repress them.

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Censoring The ‘Curious’ *Minchia* in Vitaliano Brancati’s *Il Bell’Antonio*: Intercultural Encounters and the Politics of Grammatical Gender

MARISA ESCOLAR

Introduction

In *Il bell’Antonio* (1949), Vitaliano Brancati’s satirical novel of erectile and social dysfunction in fascist Catania, to be a man means to brag about having sex with as many women as possible, as often as possible. This hypersexual, heteronormative Sicilian masculinity—*gallismo* in Brancati’s coinage—reciprocally reinforces and is reinforced by the fascist preoccupation with virility, making sexual prowess synonymous with political strength.¹ The titular Antonio, whose beauty eclipses the monuments of Rome where he spends his bachelor years, has women falling at his feet. Although he waits in vain for his own government appointment, his reputation as a Don Giovanni allows him to help the careers of his friends. Only after returning to Catania and marrying the beautiful Barbara Puglisi does his façade crack when their apparent bliss is cut short by the stunning revelation that after three years of marriage, Barbara is still a virgin.² The marriage annulled, Antonio removes himself from public life while his friends and family struggle to rebound from the scandal. Set in the late 1930s, the novel ends by jumping four years ahead to the Allied invasion of Catania, August 5, 1943, as both city and man lie in ruins. In the dilapidated shell of his family home, Antonio drifts off to sleep and dreams of raping his maid. Upon waking, his disappointment turns to jealousy when his cousin, Edoardo, calls and confesses that he has just raped his doorman’s daughter. The novel ends with Antonio sobbing into the phone as his cousin hangs up after remarking, “it’s quite curious!”³ Reduced to unintelligible despair, Antonio is neither a fascist nor a man. As virility and political strength provide reciprocal alibis, the novel’s animating principle is that both are illusions.

No doubt aided by its 1960 film adaptation, directed by Mauro Bolognini and starring Marcello Mastroianni and Claudia Cardinale, *Il bell’Antonio* holds a solid position in the Italian postwar cultural scene, yet its truly remarkable achievement is—surprisingly—born of its translation into English.⁴ Although Brancati himself has no space in the narrow slot Anglo-American culture affords to Italian writers, *Il bell’Antonio* is the most translated postwar Italian novel, with three completely different retranslations: Vladimir Kean’s *Antonio the Great Lover* (1952), Stanley Hochman’s *Bell’Antonio* (1978), and Patrick Creagh’s *Beautiful Antonio* (1991).⁵ From a linguistic level,

¹ In a 1946 essay, Brancati defines *gallismo*, from *gallo* (rooster or cock), emphasizing the importance not necessarily of possessing sexual power but bragging about it. “Piaceri del gallismo,” in *Il borghese e l’immensità: Scritti 1930–1954* (Milan: Bompiani, 1973), 148–51.

² Vitaliano Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo* (Milan: Bompiani, 1961), 110.

³ Translation mine. “È proprio curioso!” Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 327. I will discuss the significance of the word ‘curioso’ subsequently.

⁴ On the relationship between novel and film, see Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Lino Micciché, ed., *Il bell’Antonio di Mauro Bolognini: dal romanzo al film* (Turin: Lindau, 1996).

⁵ To be translated into English is a distinction reserved for a fraction of contemporary Italian novels—about seven hundred in total, according to Robin Healey, *Twentieth-Century Italian Literature in English Translation: An Annotated Bibliography 1929–1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), xvii. Healey’s bibliography includes only three other Italian novels that have been translated three times: Ignazio Silone’s *Font’amara* (1933), Luigi Pirandello’s *Il fu Mattia pascal* (1904), and Giovanni Verga’s *I Malavoglia* (1881). Although no personal biographical information on Kean is available, he appears to have been a polyglot, translating from the French and Chinese in addition to Italian. About the first translation, see Vitaliano Brancati, *Antonio, the Great Lover*, trans. Vladimir Kean (London: D. Dobson, 1952). *Antonio the Great Lover* was published simultaneously in the US by Roy Publishing and in the UK by Dobson press, who re-issued it in 1959 as a Panther Book. A British poet, Creagh translated prolifically from Italian, including authors such

the retranslations of *Bell'Antonio* are warranted by the complexity of the registers it employs to affect its satirical critique of Sicilian and Italian society. At a purely commercial level, however, it does not explain the repeated interest of famously translation-adverse Anglo-American publishers, when just three other texts by Brancati have been translated into English, and English-language literary criticism on Brancati remains limited.⁶ The striking disparity between *Bell'Antonio's* superlative distinction in translation and Brancati's negligible position in the Anglo-American imaginary requires a justification that can only be found in its singular premise: *the Italian lover is impotent!* In a crowded field of postwar Italian fiction that launched “a particularly heavy attack [on] the myth of ‘fascist virility’” through political allegories of love, it is no coincidence that this “Sicilian Joke” has achieved the most widespread editorial presence.⁷

The opportunity to trace an evolution of literary mores through this proliferation of *Bell'Antonio's* is unique but yields a predictable arc, as each successive translation becomes increasingly explicit. I use this threefold Anglo-Italian cultural encounter in translation instead to forge a dialog with an intercultural encounter represented within the novel, drawn from one of the thirty epigraphs that frame each of the twelve chapters. A feature of the novel that has gone largely unremarked, most of the epigraphs come from canonical literary texts, but one—preceding the watershed revelation of Antonio's “condition” in Chapter V—is a dialog between a Sicilian and an Italian, attributed only to author “x,” about an unusual linguistic phenomenon.⁸ In Sicilian dialect, the noun for the female genitalia is grammatically masculine (*lo sticchio* or *il pacchio*) and the noun for the male genitalia is grammatically feminine (*la minchia*):

“Ma come, della donna?...”
 “...maschile.”
 “E dell'uomo?...”
 “...femminile.”
 “Com'è curioso questo vostro dialetto!”

as Antonio Tabucchi, Anna Maria Ortese, Giacomo Leopardi and Giuseppe Ungaretti. Hochman was primarily a literary editor and translator of French, whose major Italian translation was *Bell'Antonio* (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1978). About the third translation, see Brancati, *Beautiful Antonio*, trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Harper Collins, 2007). Reprinted by Harper Collins in 1993, *Beautiful Antonio* was re-edited by Penguin books in 2007.

⁶ On the limited presence of translation in Anglo-American publishing, see Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 2003). *Don Giovanni in Sicilia* (1941) has been translated as *Don Giovanni in Sicily*, trans. Corrada Biazzo Curry (Leicester, UK: Troubador Storia, 2009); *Gli anni perduti* (1941), as *The Lost Years*, trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Harvill, 1992); the play, *La governante: commedia* (1952), as *The Governess*, ed. Jane House and Jack Street, trans. Jane House (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2015). English-language scholarship on *Il bell'Antonio* includes Isaac Rosler, “‘Gallismo,’ Ambiguity, and the Fascism of Desire in *Il bell'Antonio* by Vitaliano Brancati,” *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 34, no. 2 (September 1, 2000): 483–500; Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, chapter 1; Martina Salvante, “‘Less than a Boot-Rag’: Procreation, Paternity, and the Masculine Ideal in Fascist Italy,” in *Masculinities and the Nation in the Modern World: Between Hegemony and Marginalization*, ed. Simon Wendt and Pablo Dominguez Andersen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 95. For an English-language biography, see Corrada Biazzo Curry, “Introduction,” in *Don Giovanni in Sicily* by Vitaliano Brancati, trans. Corrada Biazzo Curry (Leicester, UK: Troubador Storia, 2009), ix–xxxii.

⁷ Alberto Traldi, *Fascism and Fiction: A Survey of Italian Fiction on Fascism (and Its Reception in Britain and the United States)* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987), 181. The second quotation refers to George Painter, “Review of Antonio the Great Lover by Vitaliano Brancati,” *The New Statesman and Nation*, May 24, 1952, 625.

⁸ For a notable exception, see Massimo Schilirò, “Tempo del privato e tempo della storia. Il XII capitolo del *Bell'Antonio*,” in *La letteratura, la storia, il romanzo*, ed. Mario Tropea (Catania: Edizioni Lussografica, 1998), 243–68. In addition to the anonymous dialog, and an unattributed Sicilian song and saying, there are two epigraphs by Giacomo Leopardi, Shakespeare, Dante and Tirso de Molina. The remaining epigraphs are by: Henri de Saint-Simon, Stendhal, Benjamin Constant, Luc de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues, Vincenzo Cardarelli, Goethe, Giuseppe Parini, Paolo Rolli, Francesco Lanza, Giovanni Verga, Torquato Tasso, Michel de Montaigne, André Gide, Harold Monro, Voltaire, Aldo Palazzeschi, and Arcangelo Blandini.

–X.”⁹

Here, in the contact between languages and cultures, the normalized feature of grammatical gender becomes “curious,” creating a chiasmus with biological sex that is lost in the Italian nouns for penis and vagina (*il pene* and *la vagina*), where they align or, indeed, in English which lacks grammatical gendered nouns all together.¹⁰ In this reading, then, I argue for the *minchia-sticchio* as an emblem of the novel’s critique of fascist Catania’s hypersexual, heteronormative society: as Antonio’s crisis allows for the exploration of ‘other’ masculinities, marginalized by “Italian fascism’s obsessive preoccupation with virility and procreation,” the novel lays bare the violence that the desiring subject inflicts on the desired object, evincing the signifying power of grammatical gender over biological sex.¹¹ Nonetheless, societal institutions and narrative conventions limit that power, ultimately repressing the “curious” nouns that would exchange sex and gender.

My examination of the novel’s gender politics that stem from the epigraph’s intercultural encounter will inform and be informed by the intercultural encounter represented by the three English translations. At a linguistic level, the paradox of *la minchia* is inevitably lost in the translation into English which, moreover, is paralleled by a symbolic loss in the translation to the Anglo-American cultural context that propagates Antonio as an emblem of beautiful, false Italian masculinity.¹² Indeed, even if the three translations seem progressively more explicit, I argue that *collectively* they bespeak not transformation but stasis, a testament to the *continued* power of the fraudulent Latin lover within the Anglo-American imaginary: popularized in postwar films, in particular through the roles of Mastroianni, Antonio is the *inetto* (bungler) beneath a beautiful façade.¹³ *Bell’Antonio* belongs to a postwar literary and cinematic trend that questions the structuring myth of Italian society, yet it stands alone in the marketability of its premise. Thus, the novel’s proliferation in translation is at once a testament to its complexity and its resonance with a monolithic image of the feminized Italian.¹⁴ The exclusion of the *minchia-sticchio*, then, gestures towards a subtler, more pernicious censorship produced by the translations’ depoliticizing critical apparatus which obscures the ambivalent gender dynamics these “curious” nouns emblemize.

As I identify this intercultural censorship, I do not cling to the adage of lost in translation but instead point back to a loss always already present in the original. The topic of censorship in the

⁹ Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 105. ‘But how, the *woman’s...?*’ / ‘...masculine.’ / ‘And the *man’s...?*’ / ‘...feminine.’ / ‘How curious is this dialect of yours!’ Translation mine. As I discuss subsequently, such an elusive dialog is difficult to translate into a language where grammatical gender does not exist. My own version takes advantage of punctuation and italics to convey the intimation.

¹⁰ On the challenges posed by grammatical gender in translation, see Susan Bassnett, *Translation* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 59–61.

¹¹ Salvante, “Less than a Boot-Rag: Procreation, Paternity, and the Masculine Ideal in Fascist Italy,” 94.

¹² The best-contextualized, transhistorical overview on the feminization of Italy and Italians that considers the internal and external iterations and intersections is Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹³ On the formulation of the Italian Latin lover in a broader Mediterranean context, see Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, chapter 1. On the dismissive treatment of the Italian “bungler” in American wartime film, see Andrew Buchanan, “‘Good Morning, Pup!’ American Representations of Italianness and the Occupation of Italy, 1943-1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 2 (2008): 225.

¹⁴ For a contemporary, popular iteration of American formulations of Italian’s national character as the “spiritually gay[est]” country, see Frank Bruni, “Penne and Prejudice - The New York Times,” June 1, 2016, accessed June 16, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/01/opinion/penne-and-prejudice.html?_r=0. Bruni writes: “It’s shaped like high-heeled footwear. It’s a mecca of high-priced men’s wear. Its signature hunk of marble, the David, looks less like he’s girding for Goliath than like he’s posing between squats at the local Equinox. And have you seen those Venetian glass chandeliers, with their wild colors and wacky tentacles? They could be gay octopi on their way to an underwater Cher concert.”

context of Brancati necessarily implicates his complex political biography that shows him at times actively complicit with, at times actively resistant towards, institutional censorship.¹⁵ Here, then, my reading of grammatical gender in/and translation will be informed by the heterogeneous notion of censorship developed in contemporary theoretical debates that move away from a restrictive, isolatable process to consider its constitutive role in forming individual subjects and shaping societal dynamics.¹⁶ Brancati's murky relationship with institutional censorship makes him a productive figure with whom to engage such redefinitions, built on theoretical contributions from Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. Based on the implicit, ambivalent productive/repressive function of censorship in governing societal norms, this understanding of censorship at once speaks the novel's production and is thematized within its pages. At the same time, the novel's interest in Antonio's inner workings suggests a Freudian, psychoanalytic understanding of censorship as repression that implies the simultaneous presence of the putatively censored rather than wholesale exclusion. As I will show, Brancati's writing bears traces of what Michael Levine identifies as a "dynamic notion of self-censorship" internalized by those who have experienced repressive conditions—indeed, the experience of Brancati's characters as much as Brancati, himself.¹⁷ This paradox is visible in the treatment of the central-but-absent *minchia*, referred to only with euphemism: the novel itself relegates an explication of its logic to the paratextual epigraph without ever naming it directly. Ultimately, even as these "curious" nouns point to the possibility for sexes to swap gender roles, they are in tension with the internalized and institutionalized misogyny that seeks to repress them.

The first target of *Il bell'Antonio's* satirical gaze are the Sicilian men who spend their bachelor years in Rome chasing women, a pastime that leaves them blind to the unparalleled artistic patrimony.¹⁸ Antonio's friends are distracted, too, by *il bell'Antonio*, whose physical superiority makes him a most worthy sight to see.¹⁹ This selective vision is the premise of Antonio's tragedy insofar as his mythic beauty obstructs any deeper investigation—what is *really* going on behind closed doors? This thematic interest in the capacity for individuals to collectively self-censor what is directly beneath their nose may also serve as a meta-critical comment: *Il bell'Antonio* is laden with literary 'monuments,' the epigraphs that generally have been overlooked by readers distracted by the larger meaning of Antonio's unmasking. While a systematic reading of all thirty belongs to a much larger project, I focus here primarily on one epigraph from Chapter V where Antonio's father-in-law breaks the news to Antonio's hyper-virile father, Alfio, that their children's marriage remains unconsummated.

The three epigraphs framing Chapter V increasingly hint at Antonio's "unbelievable" condition. In the first, from Dante's *Inferno* XIII.20-1, Virgil promises to lend credence to the talking tree that he has represented in the *Aeneid* by showing one to Dante: "...and you will see things that

¹⁵ On Brancati's ambivalent involvement with censorship during the Regime, see Guido Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 84–6. Brancati writes of his own postwar struggle with censorship of his play *La governante* in *Ritorno alla censura; in appendice: La governante: commedia in tre atti* (Bari: Laterza, 1952).

¹⁶ Helen Freshwater provides an insightful critique of the contemporary redefinition of censorship by scholars such as Sue Jansen, Judith Butler, Michael Holquist and Michael Levine. "Towards a Redefinition of Censorship," in *Censorship & Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, ed. Beate Müller (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 225–46. Two edited volumes make use of these developments in the context of literary translation: Francesca Billiani, *Modes of Censorship and Translation: National Contexts and Diverse Media* (Manchester, UK: St. Jerome Pub., 2007); Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, *Translation and Censorship: Patterns of Communication and Interference* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Levine builds on Derrida's reading of Freud in *Writing and Difference*. Michael G. Levine, *Writing through Repression: Literature, Censorship, Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 3; Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

¹⁸ Brancati, *Il bell'Antonio. Romanzo*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

will add faith to my discourse.”²⁰ The second epigraph is more overtly connected to the plot than Dante’s canto of the suicides, but both stress that seeing is believing—a major thematic concern as Alfio tries to put to rest the accusation by offering to have Barbara’s dad watch Antonio engage in intercourse with a prostitute. In the first epigraph a literary father promises to prove himself to his son, while in the second, “Stop the music the bird has flown,” from Francesco Lanza’s *Mimi Siciliani* (1928), a prospective son-in-law acquits himself with his future father-in-law.²¹ When local gossip suggests that “the youth is good, but he’s missing the bird,” the groom shows him that it is untrue, thus enabling the wedding to go forth.²² Lanza uses *la cucca*—Sicilian for owl—as a euphemism for penis which makes for a grammatically unusual sentence when *it* is revealed, as the feminine noun is replaced by the feminine direct object pronoun: “He showed him it” (“gliela fece vedere”).²³

Although according to the traditional linguistic view, “grammatical gender is a formal property and has nothing to do with meaning,” the grammatically feminine penis and the masculine vagina were of concern to Roman writers.²⁴ They wrestled with the explanation for the fact that, in Latin, “the commonest term for the female genitalia, *cunus*, is masculine, while that for the penis, *mentula*, is feminine.”²⁵ Indeed, feminists have challenged the supposed arbitrary nature of grammatical gender as they “detect a hierarchy of power operating in languages, such as the Romance languages, with grammatical gender that gives priority to the masculine.”²⁶ From this perspective, the use of a feminine noun as a euphemism for the male genitals has multiple implications in light of Antonio’s soon-to-be-revealed “condition.”²⁷ In the context of his struggle to control his own penis, its feminization may evoke conventional associations between women and irrationality.²⁸ Moreover, if the “virility” often trumpeted in *Il bell’Antonio* an act of love for one’s own penis, a *feminine* penis heteronormalizes masturbation as well as the latent homosexual desire critics have identified in the novel.²⁹

The third epigraph, cited above, refers to the most unbelievable of truths: *the* emblem of masculinity is feminine. From this dialog, I take three main points: first, by foregrounding the disjunction between grammatical gender and meaning, it insists that the feminine noun for penis is not arbitrary. Second, the grammatically feminine penis produces a chiasmus with the grammatically

²⁰ Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 73. “...e [sic] sí vedrai / cose che torrien fede al mio sermone,” Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 105.

²¹ As cited in Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 73. “Basta la musica, che la cucca non c’è,” as cited in Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 105.

²² “Il giovane è buono, ma gli manca la cucca,” Francesco Lanza, *Mimi e altre cose*. (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1946), 58. Translation mine.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 17.

²⁵ Anthony Corbeil, *Sexing the World: Grammatical Gender and Biological Sex in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 16. On the “the occasional disjunction of sex and grammatical gender in French” around the “organs of sexual difference,” see Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 213.

²⁶ Barbara Goddard, “Gender and Gender Politics in Literary Translation,” in *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation Into English: A-L*, ed. O. Classe (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 503.

²⁷ The significance of the choice of euphemism for male genitals has been explored by Deborah Cameron in a famous experiment with two groups of college students, male and female, *On Language and Sexual Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 162.

²⁸ This theory, in regards to *Il bell’Antonio*, has been advanced by Alessandro Mauro, “Elapsus - Ipotesi filologica su un’epigrafe di Brancati,” March 25, 2014, accessed June 16, 2016, <http://www.elapsus.it/home1/index.php/letteratura/scrittori/891-ipotesi-filologica-su-un-epigrafe-di-brancati>.

²⁹ “Spesso non è altro che un atto di prolungato amore per il proprio pene,” Liliana Caruso-Bibi Tomasi, *I padri della fallocultura* (Milan: SugarCo, 1974), 125. See Rosler, “‘Gallismo,’ Ambiguity, and the Fascism of Desire in *Il bell’Antonio* by Vitaliano Brancati,” 485–86; Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, 58; Tullio Kezich, “Dalla pagina allo schermo,” in *Il bell’Antonio di Mauro Bolognini: dal romanzo al film*, ed. Lino Micciché (Turin: Lindau, 1996), 75.

masculine vagina, which is central to the novel's gender politics. Although Antonio's impotence seems to cast him outside of his "gallistic" society, "he remains an object of beauty, and therefore, an object of desire."³⁰ As a feminized man, Antonio is not shunned but ruthlessly pursued by women who rush to fill the vacuum of virility. Third, it underscores the function of intercultural encounters in making visible the hierarchy naturalized by grammatical gender: in its development out of Latin, the Italian nouns erase the contradiction that the Sicilian nouns preserve. However, were grammatical gender truly arbitrary, this dialog would be superfluous. Instead, feminist theorists' assertions about the significance of grammatical gender are supported by the outsider's incredulity upon learning that in Sicilian dialect *the woman's is masculine and the man's is feminine*. As Luce Irigaray has argued, the conventional belief in the arbitrary nature of grammatical gender is a product of a cultural blind spot that obscures "the cultural injustices of language and its generalized sexism."³¹ Here, then, the intercultural encounter imbues such naturalized grammatical elements with curiosity—a phenomenon I will now explore in the context of the interlingual, intercultural encounters offered by the three Antonio's in English translation.³²

Antonio in Translation: "A Very Italian Joke"

Here, then, I turn to these English translations to argue for their continuous emblematic treatment of Antonio as the feminized Italian male, regardless of their progressively explicit language. In translating erotic fantasies, failed seductions and successful rapes, the 1952 version by Vladimir Kean resorts to chaste euphemisms, bowdlerization and outright censorship, for instance in Antonio's dream of raping his housekeeper that Hochman's 1978 version renders dutifully as such:

Terrified lest the heat that had possessed him suddenly vanish, and feeling his face flame and his blood pound through every artery, Antonio threw himself on top of her; with the fury of a dog using his paws to rip away the wrappings around a piece of meat, he stripped off her clothes, squeezed her to him, and bit into her flesh; he kept turning her this way and that, breathing heavily through clenched teeth, squeezing and biting her until he felt the double voluptuousness of a man simultaneously giving way to a long repressed hate and experiencing an intolerable guilt for the evil he was doing. Just then his breast, his entrails, his throat contracted, and he let out a great cry...³³

Domesticating the metaphorical hungry dog and downplaying the physicality of the violence and the pleasure, Kean also censors Antonio's feeling of moral contradiction: "Antonio, desperately afraid that the heat which filled him would suddenly leave him, threw himself at the woman, with the concentrated fury of a dog digging for a bone, till a marvelous feeling of delight seemed to lift him

³⁰ Rosler, "'Gallismo,' Ambiguity, and the Fascism of Desire in *Il Bell'Antonio* by Vitaliano Brancati," 492.

³¹ Luce Irigaray, "Linguistic Sexes and Genders," in *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*, ed. Deborah Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1998), 119-20.

³² The way in which translation emphasizes grammatical gender has been noted by Bassnett, *Translation*, 59–61; Goddard, "Encyclopedia of Literary Translation Into English"; Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*, 16–21.

³³ Brancati, *Bell'Antonio*, 236. "Antonio, temendo sempre di essere abbandonato da quel calore che lo possedeva, e sentendosi invece sempre più scoppiare il viso e picchiare il sangue in tutte le arterie del corpo, si buttò sopra la donna, e con la furia del cane che strappa via con le zampe l'involto in cui è legato un pezzo di carne, la svestì, poi la strizzò, la morse; la sbatté a destra e a manca, la voltò e rivoltò, soffiando sempre fra i denti serrati, sempre mordendola e strizzandola, finché non provò una sensazione voluttuosissima e doppia, come di chi sfoghi un odio lungamente represso e riceva, nello stesso tempo, un'offesa che, ripagandolo di un male compiuto, lo sgravi da un rimorso intollerabile. Allora contrasse il petto, le viscere, la gola, e gettò fuori un urlo..." Brancati, *Il bell'Antonio. Romanzo*, 320.

right up...His throat and all his viscera seemed to contract and he gave a shout of triumph.”³⁴ Nonetheless, despite such efforts—and this example is but one of many—a reviewer describes Kean’s language “as molten as lava, as harsh, heady and vulgar as wine drunk jetting from a goatskin.”³⁵ Reviewed as “very readable and relatively precise,” Hochman’s version—that he bills as the first “complete English translation of a Brancati novel”—follows Brancati’s prose most closely, at times sacrificing the force of the satire.³⁶ Creagh’s 1991 translation falls at the opposite end of the spectrum with respect to Kean’s, using slang and colloquialisms in an effort to convey the energy of Brancati’s prose, often *adding* bodily functions into the text: as Antonio’s neighbor rails against his one-time friends who have made a career at his expense, he laments, “mi hanno lasciato qui come una scopa vecchia,” which Hochman translates with dictionary precision, “here I am left behind like an old broom!”³⁷ Creagh, instead, captures the character’s verbal flatulence with a fart joke, rendering the complaint, “leaving me here behind them like a fart in the dark”,³⁸ when Edoardo scolds Antonio for his rape dream, he says, “è proprio questo il momento di fare sogni da collegiale!” which Hochman translates as “a fine time to start dreaming like an adolescent school boy!” Creagh, instead, states the ejaculatory subtext, “D’you really think this is the time and place to have wet dreams?”³⁹

Creagh goes farthest in rendering the bawdiness of Brancati’s language, but at the same time he commits the significant omission of eliminating the epigraphs, no doubt in an effort to make the texts less ungainly for an Anglo-American audience who would likely know few of the references. Hochman and Kean include them, but the difficulty of the *minchia-sticchio* dialog is clear. Rendering the dialog in one sentence, Kean shifts from genitals to genders and makes the dialect simply a reverse image of the outsider’s language, in tension with *it*, not within itself: “But if you call woman, man and man, woman, yours must be a curious dialect.”⁴⁰ Hochman downplays the outsider’s incredulity and weakens the reference to the genitals:

“Things belonging to a woman?”
 “...masculine.”
 “And to a man?”
 “...feminine.”
 “Yours is a curious dialect.”⁴¹

Here, the difficulty presented by the formal linguistic differences is compounded by the challenge of conveying the significance of dialect in an Anglo-American context that does not have a comparable tradition. Moreover, maintaining the crucial distinction between Sicilian and Italian presents its own challenge insofar as Anglo-Americans tend to conflate Italy with its South.⁴² This linguistic and cultural incompatibility is further compounded by the loss of the intratextual reference between the “curious” phenomenon of the inverted grammatical gender of the genitals, and Edoardo’s

³⁴ Brancati, *Antonio, the Great Lover*, 272, ellipses in original.

³⁵ George Painter, “Review of Antonio the Great Lover by Vitaliano Brancati,” 625.

³⁶ Robert S. Dombroski, review of *Review of Bell’Antonio* by Vitaliano Brancati, *The Modern Language Journal* 63, no. 8 (1979): 462. Robert S. Dombroski, review of *Review of Bell’Antonio* by Vitaliano Brancati, *The Modern Language Journal* 63, no. 8 (1979): 462. Stanley Hochman, “Introduction,” in *Bell’Antonio* by Vitaliano Brancati, trans. Stanley Hochman (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1978), ix.

³⁷ Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 30. Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 19.

³⁸ Brancati, *Beautiful Antonio*, 22.

³⁹ Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 321. Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 236. Brancati, *Beautiful Antonio*, 274.

⁴⁰ Brancati, *Antonio, the Great Lover*, 73.

⁴¹ Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 73.

⁴² See Patriarca, *Italian Vices*, 9.

conclusory exclamation, “it’s quite curious!”: while Creagh deletes the epigraphs and Kean deletes Edoardo’s final remark, Hochman translates the epigraph’s “curioso” as “curious” and Edoardo’s as “strange.”⁴³ With the erasure of this resonance, the connection is lost between Antonio’s “curious” sobbing and the “curious” *minchia-sticchio* dialog, making it easier to consume Antonio as an Italian product that feels familiar to the Anglo-American public, part of a rhetorical tradition whereby the effeminacy of the Italian people stands for “an unredeemed state of moral and political decline.”⁴⁴

The political significance of the novel has, of course, been recognized by Anglo-American readers.⁴⁵ Each of the three introductions attests, however, that publishers did not expect a general audience to be knowledgeable about Italian culture and politics.⁴⁶ In the preface to the 2007 re-edition of Creagh’s translation, fellow translator Timothy Parks starts with a “very Italian joke” whose punch line is that impotence is worse than death, and downplays the local political context by echoing Hochman’s assertion that “Brancati’s true stage is the world.”⁴⁷ Kean, on the contrary, seeks to help readers “to appreciate the full savour of Brancati’s brilliant and moving social satire” by rattling off such stereotypes as: “The Sicilian is engrossed by mundane, earthy affairs: his family, his food and wine, his enjoyment of the sun and any colorful sight or parade, music and singing, and, above all, women and making love.”⁴⁸ He warns about the “racy” language, justifying it insofar as Sicilian society is “passing through an early adolescent stage of the evolution of societies towards mechanization, standardization, improved social and political organization,” a warning that seems more of an enticement insofar as the cover of the 1959 “Panther” edition showcases drawings of two women in swimwear and brags that the novel is “outspoken.”⁴⁹ Here, then, while readers are expected to be ignorant about the details of Sicilian culture necessary to understand the “social satire,” they are also expected to be aware about their sexual habits: the blurb on the back cover exclaims, “for, *as is well known*, Sicilians believe it is necessary to be well practiced in the art of love.”⁵⁰ My comments here by no means seek to point a finger at the Anglo-American readers, nor insist on a uniform response amongst them, but rather to suggest the ways in which the proliferation of *Bell’Antonio* in translation reinforces and is reinforced by a stereotype of the politically apathetic, superficially virile Latin lover.

(Self-)Censoring “La Minchia”

The intercultural textual encounter embodied by the three Anglo-American *Bell’Antonio*’s does not solely register a *loss* but instead points to a narrative tension within the Italian text: as we will see, if

⁴³ Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 241.

⁴⁴ Patriarca, *Italian Vices*, 30.

⁴⁵ Dombroski, “Review of Bell’Antonio”; Robert Knittel, “The Great Heartbeat. Review of Antonio the Great Lover, by Vitaliano Brancati. Translated from the Italian by Vladimir Kean,” *New York Times*, September 28, 1952; Traldi, *Fascism and Fiction*, 184.

⁴⁶ Scholars of Anglo-American perceptions of Italy generally agree that in spite (or perhaps *because*) of Italy’s importance, it is “inadequately known,” Henry Stuart Hughes, *The United States and Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 3. Hughes’ comment on Americans is echoed by Sharon Oudit’s perception of British travel writers who treat Southern Italy in particular as “a vibrant curiosity, unknown but within reach,” *Impressions of Southern Italy: British Travel Writing from Henry Swinburne to Norman Douglas* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

⁴⁷ Timothy Parks, “Introduction,” in *Beautiful Antonio* by Vitaliano Brancati, trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Harper Collins, 2007), vii. Hochman, “Introduction,” vii.

⁴⁸ Vladimir Kean, “Introduction,” in *Antonio, the Great Lover* by Vitaliano Brancati, trans. Vladimir Kean (London: D. Dobson, 1952), 7. For similar stereotypes in America in the lead-up to World War II and the early postwar period, see Buchanan, “‘Good Morning, Pup!’ American Representations of Italianness and the Occupation of Italy, 1943-1945.”

⁴⁹ Kean, “Introduction,” 7.

⁵⁰ Emphasis mine.

translators have the power to “domesticate” a text, so too may they evince a violent dynamic within the translated culture’s own norms.⁵¹ Here, then, I suggest a parallel between contemporary translation and censorship studies: if the external, institutional censor or translator may work to obscure a more insidious, ineluctable censorship network of societal norms spelled out by Foucault, Bourdieu and their disciples, so too may they point to a contradictory textual dynamic that suggests an internalization of those norms, here, the gender conventions challenged by the *minchia-sticchio* which cannot be named or, ultimately, maintained. Thus, as I move from *la minchia* in translation, I consider the way in which its paradox is (self-)censored in the original, in an ambivalent productive/repressive manner that results in “writing that is at once crippling and enabling.”⁵²

My reading of Antonio in translation finds a parallel in the domestic context insofar as the dismissal of the novel’s politics in favor of its ribald sexual antics is not the unique purview of an Anglo-American audience but represents a widespread critical trend.⁵³ What such depoliticizing readings obscure, regardless of the cultural context in which they are rooted, is that the unmasking of Antonio is only the *premise*. The shattering of the performative illusion is what allows the novel’s gender politics to emerge, as the revelation of Antonio’s impotence does not expel him from the social order but reverses his position within it, as he himself reflects:

He felt that his very existence provoked an abnormal, unnatural, and slightly monstrous desire in women: a so-called spiritual love which, he was convinced, hid an aggressive masculinity beneath the appearance of pity and candor. Women were behaving with him exactly the way men behaved with women; they all felt free to write to him, to speak to him, to sugar the bitter pill, to hide the truth under skillful euphemisms, to behave so as not to arouse fear, so that he would willingly put himself into their hands. Weren’t these the very techniques of a consummate Don Juan? He had become the prey of pure hearts, of noble souls, of beings apparently weak and soft but actually frightening.⁵⁴

Antonio’s tragedy is his realization that in his impotence, he becomes the desired, feminized object, and the women, the desiring, masculinized subject.⁵⁵ Antonio suffers as a feminized man, but despite feeling that he is victim of an unnatural phenomenon, I agree that his impotence “does not represent the deviance of a sexual pathology” but instead “becomes...a highly significant symbol of a complex cultural system.”⁵⁶ In other words, although Antonio self-identifies with the marginalized masculinity embodied by the paradoxical *minchia*, it is reflective of broader societal gender dynamics the novel critiques but ultimately reinforces.

⁵¹ On the repressive power of domestication wielded by the Anglo-American translator and the subversive power of foreignization, see Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility*.

⁵² Levine, *Writing through Repression: Literature, Censorship, Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 2.

⁵³ Paola Sipala, *Vitaliano Brancati: introduzione e guida allo studio dell’opera brancatiana : storia e antologia della critica* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1978), 1. In an early Italian review, Gino Pampaloni finds but one single, anomalous page with political significance, “Review of *Il bell’Antonio* by Vitaliano Brancati,” *Belfagor*, January 1, 1949, 729.

⁵⁴ Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 189. “Egli sospettò di provocare nelle donne una voluttà anormale, innaturale, leggermente mostruosa: il cosiddetto amore esclusivamente spirituale che celava, secondo lui, sotto la pietà e il candore, una feroce aggressività maschile. Le donne si comportavano con lui come gli uomini con le donne; tutte si ritenevano in diritto di scrivergli, di rivolgergli la parola, d’indorargli la pillola, di nascondergli la verità sotto abili eufemismi, di fare in modo da non spaventarlo, e infine di convincerlo a mettersi fiducioso nelle loro mani. Non erano questi i mezzi del più consumato dongiovannismo? Egli era diventato Poggetto di una caccia di cuori puri, di animi nobili, di esseri apparentemente deboli e fiochi, ma in realtà spaventevoli,” Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 258.

⁵⁵ Salvatore Zarcone, *La carne e la noia* (Palermo: Novecento, 1991), 104.

⁵⁶ Translation mine. “Non rappresenta le devianze di una patologia sessuale,” but instead, “diviene...simbolo altamente significativo di un sistema culturale complesso,” *Ibid.* 97.

The “curious” chiasmus of the *minchia-sticchio* reflects the possibility for the biological sexes to exchange gender roles while at the same time pointing back to the asymmetries hidden in the “natural” formulation: in the plight of the feminized Antonio, we can see a mirror of scenes in which women are the object of a monstrous male desire. In helping orient his readers to “the southern part of Italy,” Kean explains, “Every woman behaves as if and frankly admits that the essential purpose of her life is to be attractive to men,” but the book openly contradicts that claim, representing essentially every heterosexual encounter as a form of violence.⁵⁷ Clients throw prostitutes to the floor, fathers pawn off daughters onto advantageous husbands, and men rape their employees in dream and reality.⁵⁸ Thus, as the *minchia* and the *sticchio* reflect the possibility for either sex to occupy either gender position, the critique the novel offers is that while the masculine hunter derives pleasure, the feminine prey suffers—a testament to the significance of grammatical gender. However, although Antonio’s suffering is mirrored by the women’s, *meaning* ultimately trumps *form* as this reciprocity finds its limits: the strictures of prostitution, religion and marriage all work to realign biological sex and gender on a daily basis. To this end, as a capstone to a novel that predominantly represents prostitution and marriage, the insistence on rape in the final chapter underscores the institutionalization of violence against women—not as a result of the war taking place but an everyday occurrence. The chapter begins with the announcement of the arrival of the Allies—the horrific sight of colonial troops riding into Catania on horseback which immediately strikes fear in the heart of Antonio’s mother who, voicing a commonly held belief spread by fascist propaganda, reads them as rapists.⁵⁹ Antonio’s dismissive response—“nothing but crazy stories! Blacks are no different from whites”—is meant to reassure her.⁶⁰ However, his analogy is no superb acquittal: it is not the spectacular arrival of outsiders that inaugurates the threat of sexual violence but rather, it is always already an institutionalized part of social interactions. The savage cannibal raises the threat, but the educated Edoardo realizes it.⁶¹ Rape is not exclusive to war. Sexual violence is not exclusive to rape.

Here, then, as the outsider *threatens* something that is always already an internal structuring feature, I draw a parallel with my reading of Antonio in translation. The intercultural encounter commits violence against *Bell’Antonio*, certainly, censoring overtly and implicitly, in its language and paratextual elements that flatten the Italian into a marketable joke. But at the same time, these multiple translations do not simply register a loss but also signal a violent asymmetry: for as much as

⁵⁷ Kean, “Introduction,” 8.

⁵⁸ Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio, Romanzo*, 42. In addition to Barbara’s use as an economic pawn by her parents in her marriage to Antonio and then the Duca di Bronte, Antonio’s earlier love-interest, Ingeborg, is also restricted in her choice of fiancé by her parents, *ibid.* 186. In addition to the two rapes in the final chapter, Antonio tells his uncle of a “prank” his friends play on the wife of a hypnotist, having sex with her while she was hypnotized, arousing Antonio and leading to his failed attempt at masturbating to completion in a forest that night, *ibid.* 198-9.

⁵⁹ On the link between the demonization of Franco-Moroccan colonial troops and the racism of imperialist, fascist propaganda, see Sergio Lambiase and Gian Battista Nazzaro, *L’odore della guerra: Napoli 1940-1945* (Cava de’ Tirreni: Avagliano, 2002), 115.

⁶⁰ Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 226. “Tutte storie!... I negri sono come i bianchi!” *Ibid.*, 307-8.

⁶¹ This is a deviation from traditional representations that cast the Franco-Moroccan colonial soldier as rapist, the most emblematic of which is Alberto Moravia, *La Ciociara* (Milan: Bompiani, 1957) and its film adaptation by Vittorio De Sica, *La Ciociara*, 1960. See Millicent Joy Marcus, *Filmmaking by the Book: Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation* (JHU Press, 1993); Ellen Nerenberg, “La Ciociara / Two Women,” in *The Cinema of Italy*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (New York: Wallflower, 2004), 83–90. On the colonial soldier as rapist in contemporary Italian narrative see Keala Jewell, “Gothic Negotiations of History and Power in Landolfi’s *Racconto d’autunno*,” *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 2 (January 1, 2010), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/496986cm>, accessed June 16, 2016; Marisa Escolar, “Sleights of Hand: Black Skin and Curzio Malaparte’s *La pelle*,” *California Italian Studies* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 2012), accessed June 16, 2016, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0xr9d2gm>.

the novel acknowledges a potential sex-gender reversal, it is clearly more interested in the paradox of the feminine male. Thus, the social limits, which make the sex-gender chiasmus appear “curious” at best and “monstrous” at worst, are buttressed by another form of repression: the narrative conventions that privilege the male story. Antonio’s inner experience, which he narrates at length to his uncle over two chapters, shows him to be engaged in an unfamiliar struggle that leaves him without a point of reference. His story of his failed seduction of Ingeborg that marked his permanent loss of virility, “climaxes” in total disorientation: “I got out of the bed without seeing it, without even remembering its shape and size, and went from the room, leaving behind a woman whose form I could also hardly remember.”⁶² Reinforced by the tenets of fascist virility, Antonio’s superlative masculinity blinds those around him. Its destruction, in turn, erases his memory of the very things that are right in front of him, the space he inhabits and the object that he can only desire to desire. It is this exploration that is negated to the novel’s biological females: Ingeborg lies silent and immobile on the bed, Edoardo’s rape victim is granted the briefest of screams, and although the female Don Giovanni’s can write tomes, they are addressed *to* Antonio about their desire for *him*.⁶³ These masculine females are given the power of the pen: “tutte si ritenevano in diritto di scrivergli, di rivolgergli la parola, d’indorargli la pillola, di nascondergli la verità sotto abili eufemismi.”⁶⁴ However, the asymmetry between the violence against the respective sexes is clear when contrasted with his fantasy of rape. While the women victimize Antonio with their authorial agency in a sentence punctuated by “gli” (him), the masculine, indirect object pronoun, Antonio dreams of submitting them physically to his will, which starts by putting the *feminine* back in its position of object: “*la* svestí, poi *la* strizzò, *la* morse; *la* sbatté a destra e a manca, *la* voltò e rivoltò, soffiando sempre fra i denti serrati, sempre mordendola e strizzandola.”⁶⁵ Here, then, we would do well to return to the contemporary redefinition of censorship that depicts a spectrum of repression including bodily and textual harm, while guarding carefully against their conflation.⁶⁶

The female Don Giovanni’s power to deceive is potent. It is precisely what Antonio loses when he is unmasked, forcing him into a confession of the truth that all but relegates him to silence: wallowing almost wordlessly for two hundred pages, Antonio’s own self-censoring sobs are reinforced as Edoardo disconnects the phone-call. With Edoardo’s last word, “curioso,” the text circles back to the Chapter V epigraph where the limit of the sex-gender chiasmus is already inscribed insofar as it never explicitly names the words themselves.⁶⁷ For all the centrality of the *minchia*, it remains unspoken in the novel: in explaining his impotence to his uncle, Antonio describes it as a corpse, while Ermenegildo replies with a euphemism of his own, “that animal God has inflicted on us for our torment.”⁶⁸ These euphemisms are symptoms of the characters’ internalization of institutional authority, as theorized by Bourdieu in his famous dictum, “censorship is never quite as perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorized to say.”⁶⁹ At the same time, Antonio’s internal struggle to repudiate *la minchia* bears traces of Freudian repression. After his confession, Antonio accompanies Ermenegildo to

⁶² Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 137. “Mi alzai da quel letto che non vedevo piú, e di cui avevo dimenticato la forma e la grandezza e uscii dalla camera, lasciandovi una donna che anche lei avevo dimenticato come fosse fatta,” Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 189.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 188–9. *Ibid.*, 324.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 258, emphasis mine. The English translation is cited on page 10 above.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 320, emphasis mine. The English translation is cited on page 7 above.

⁶⁶ Michael Holquist, “Introduction: Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship,” *PMLA* 109, no. 1 (1994): 23n.2; Freshwater, “Towards a Redefinition of Censorship,” 242.

⁶⁷ Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 327.

⁶⁸ Brancati, *Bell’Antonio*, 145. “Quell’animale che Dio ci diede per nostro tormento,” Brancati, *Il bell’Antonio. Romanzo*, 200.

⁶⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 138.

church and listens to him rant about his wish that Jesus had had a physical body and, with it, empathy for the struggles of man. As Ermenegildo rattles off the parts of Christ's body, Antonio's mind centers on one specific part—a scene that, ironically, Kean censors:⁷⁰

Antonio felt his brain whirling toward a word that [here] would have sounded obscene; he fought against it with all his strength, but the best he could do was approach it as if it were some dead thing, [seeing 'her' in every one of 'her' letters, without being able to read 'her'] nor even hear the sound in his memory.

"...glands, kidneys, brain matter, a spinal column..." continued his uncle.

And for a second time Antonio saw that word.⁷¹

Antonio visualizes the act of censorship by turning *la minchia* into a *dead thing*—an echo of his earlier euphemism for his impotent penis that, here, superimposes murder, castration and censorship. Reducing *la minchia* to a string of letters, it nonetheless comes back. For Antonio *that word* is not an arbitrary sign, nor is its grammatical gender a foreign curiosity—in its paradoxical combination of biological sex and grammatical gender the word, itself, is his identity. However, as Freud would have it, repression is never complete—pushing it away, it only comes closer. Indeed, even as the passage refuses to state the word in question, it comes through in the feminine direct object pronoun, an explicit reference to "*parola*" ("word") but easily interchangeable with *minchia*: *vedendola in ogni sua lettera, senza leggerla* ("seeing 'her' in every one of 'her' letters, without being able to read 'her'"). We, too, can see *her*, even if we cannot read *her*. Through these parallel refusals to name the oxymoronic genitals, in Antonio's mind, in the characters' euphemisms and in the epigraph, the novel suggests an ambivalence within a culture that makes *la minchia* its emblem but must disavow its monstrous sex-gender inversion. Nonetheless, in spite of the repeated repression of the *minchia*—echoed and compounded by the censorship of many of these passages in English translation—the intercultural encounter between Sicilian, Italian and English makes visible its "curiosity," providing insight into the terms and limits of *Bell'Antonio's* critique of heteronormativity, where a penis may be feminine—but the story is still hers.

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⁷⁰ Brancati, *Antonio, the Great Lover*, 253.

⁷¹ Brancati, *Bell'Antonio*, 211. Bracketed modifications mine. "Antonio si sentì risucchiare il cervello verso una parola che qui sarebbe suonata oscenamente; cercò di rifiutarsi con tutte le sue forze, e ottenne soltanto di avvicinarsi a quella parola come a una cosa morta, vedendola in ogni sua lettera, senza leggerla però né sentirne il suono nella memoria. /'Le ghiandole, i reni, la materia cerebrale, il midollo spinale...' continuò lo zio. /E Antonio, per una seconda volta, vide quella parola," Brancati, *Il bell'Antonio. Romanzo*, 287–8.

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