

Emma Dante. mPalermu, Dancers, and Other Plays. Translated and with an introduction by Francesca Spedalieri

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Emma Dante. *mPalermu, Dancers, and Other Plays*. Translated and with an introduction by Francesca Spedalieri. Chicago: Swan Isle Press, 2020. Pp. 320. ISBN 9780997228755.

mPalermu, Dancers, and Other Plays is a collection of seven plays by Emma Dante, contemporary Italian playwright, director, producer of theatrical and cinematic works, and founder and artistic director of the award-winning, Palermo-based theatre company Compagnia Sud Costa Occidentale. The volume consists of an introduction to Dante's work as well as the first English translations of Dante's plays by Francesca Spedalieri, scholar, translator, theater maker, and assistant professor of English and women's gender and sexuality studies at Stony Brook University. Included in the anthology are three *pièces*, which comprise the Trilogy of the Sicilian Family (first published in 2007): *mPalermu (In Palermo)*, *The Butchery*, and *Life of Mine*; *Market Dogs* (2007); and the three plays of the Eyeglasses Trilogy (2011): *Holywater*, *The Zisa Castle*, and *Dancers*. Each play is preceded by a literary passage selected by the playwright and her explanatory commentary on the play's title, themes, context, or characters and staging.

In the introduction, Spedalieri outlines her motivations for compiling a volume of Dante's theatrical pieces: the notable "exclusion of women and southern Italian theatre from the contemporary national and international discourse" (xvi), which, instead, forefronts pre-twenty-first-century male voices, namely playwrights of *la commedia dell'arte*, Goldoni, Pirandello, the Italian futurists, and Dario Fo, among others. Moreover, Spedalieri highlights the politically and socially engaged nature of Dante's *opus*, which she frames as "civic theatre" in that the works "challenge stereotypes [...] and stage acts of resistance against the social, political, and economic conditions of Sicily," making manifest "a reality dominated by corruption, organized crime, poverty, and indolence" (xvi). Difficult themes confronted by Dante's plays include the Southern Question—that is, the economic and cultural disparity between the North and South of Italy; misogyny; policing of women's sexuality; incest and gendered violence; poverty and homelessness; organized crime in Sicily and the codes, institutional complicity, and resignation surrounding it; religion-based oppression and hypocrisy; disability and caregiver burnout; loneliness; and gendered ageism. Spedalieri contends that Dante's theatre serves as a "site for listening to those who are not given a voice anywhere else; for witnessing object bodies and their stories while staring them in the eyes" with the aspiration that performers and the public are engaged in "a dialogue for change" (xvi).

In approaching the translation of Dante's plays from Sicilian, Neapolitan, and Italian into English, Spedalieri roots her methodology in post-colonial translation theory, citing inspiration from Ana Elena Puga, Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Kwame Anthony Appiah. Importantly, Spedalieri situates Sicily in the Global South, as a "post-colonial region in terms of its political, economic, and cultural development" and its centuries-long history of "recurrent subjugations to foreign nations and other Italian kingdoms" (xix–xx). In her translations, Spedalieri aims for a delicate balance between respecting the cultural, linguistic, and socio-political context of the works and rendering the scripts accessible to an English-speaking audience. Moreover, she avoids "homogenizing the minority cultures present in Dante's plays into a unified, indistinct field of Otherness" for a hegemonically positioned anglophone audience (xxi). These theoretical considerations manifest concretely in the translations in a multitude of ways. First, the protagonists' Sicilian names are maintained and not anglicized, including their diminutive forms (e.g., 'Ninuzza) and abbreviated names and nicknames (e.g., Uccio and Chicco). Second, the plays' settings are preserved in Sicily instead of generically set "in Italy" or relocated to a more familiar US context. Employment of stereotypical Italian-American locutions are avoided, and some untranslatable terms are retained in the scripts: for instance, the Neapolitan *ppocundria* in the play *Holywater*, referring to a "lethargic, apathetic helplessness, and longing" (287), as well as entire phrases, such as *Chi duluri!* in *mPalermu*. To explain untranslated terminology and to furnish information on unfamiliar cultural references, such as the palatal click and movement of the head backwards to indicate "no" or references to particular songs, theatre makers and readers are provided with translator's notes. Lastly, syntax in the original language is respected to reflect the cadence of southern Italian speech. Spedalieri encapsulates her approach to translating Emma Dante's scripts as "a way to destabilize the power–language relationships that necessarily emerge when the works of minority cultures are translated into another (often colonialist or neo-colonialist) language" (xxiii), which can result in cultural appropriation or monolithic Othering. Instead, she aspires to devise a "foreignizing language," as posited by Lawrence Venuti, in which readers, scholars, and theatre-goers are reminded that they are encountering a text "written in another language and for another audience" (xxi).

Francesca Spedalieri's critical introduction to and English translations of Emma Dante's theatrical pieces will be of interest to scholars of contemporary theatre, particularly those who focus on women playwrights from the Global

South; directors and producers seeking current-day, civically engaged theatrical pieces from international contexts; and instructors of modern Italian literature and theatre in translation who wish to include women's voices from southern Italy in their courses. Via her careful translations rooted in post-colonial translation theory, as well as her own experience in staging Dante's works in English-speaking contexts, Spedalieri renders Emma Dante's theatre visible and accessible to scholars, theatre makers, and audiences outside the Italian context. In this way, Spedalieri champions the playwright's aim to give voice to the disenfranchised and to cast the audience's gaze on the uncomfortable truth of those living on the fringes of Italian society and thereby present a more nuanced, complicated image of Italy—or rather, Italies.

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