



# Review of Tra Napoli e New York: le macchiette italo-americane di Eduardo Migliaccio. Testi con introduzione e glossario

## Citation

di Fabio, Elvira G. 2009. Review of Tra Napoli e New York: le macchiette italo-americane di Eduardo Migliaccio. Testi con introduzione e glossario, by Hermann W. Haller. Italian Americana 27(2): 232-234.

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*Tra Napoli e New York: le macchiette italo-americane di Eduardo Migliaccio. Testi con introduzione e glossario* by Hermann W. Haller. Rome: Bulzoni Editore (Biblioteca di cultura/674), 2006. 271pp.

Eduardo Migliaccio (1882-1946), known by his stage name of Farfariello, was perhaps the most original artist of the Italian-American theater of the early 1900s. His repertoire of over 500 characters, based on the reality he observed in the bustling streets of New York, defined the *macchietta coloniale* or the comic character sketch that he imported from his native Naples and adapted for his new home in the “colonies.” With the blithe movements of a “little butterfly,” Farfariello mesmerized packed audiences with a rapid succession of impersonations that satirized nearly every type of character found about town: from Enrico Caruso and the opera diva to the schoolgirl and soldier boy, along with tradesmen, housewives, and public figures of even the least kind, all contained within the collage that was the Italian-American community of early twentieth-century New York.

Echoing within the halls of the Italian-American theater houses, Migliaccio’s art belongs to the annals of an oral tradition recited in a language unique to that immigrant population. Luckily, he wrote out many of these sketches, including the musical scores that were frequently part of the routine. This patrimony is archived in the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota and now, with the permission of the Migliaccio family, Hermann Haller has gathered a representative sampling of Farfariello’s whimsical transformations, replete with narrative, poetic, and musical episodes of ludic and linguistic tour-de-force.

In his introduction, Haller underscores the unique contribution that this body of work makes to the preservation of a socio-linguistic phenomenon, that is, the empirical evidence of the particular language of the immigrant community. Through his parody, Migliaccio, an educated observer, combined the mother tongues of his audience--dialects of the many regions of Italy--with standard Italian and English equivalents, and brought to the stage a hybrid that was the immigrant’s everyday language. According to Haller, Migliaccio’s intent was to encourage his audience “not to abandon their mother tongue as constituted by the dialects, and not to deny their Italophony” (*a non abbandonare la lingua materna costituita dai dialetti, e non rinnegare la loro italofoonia*) (36). Migliaccio celebrates the gradual

integration that the immigrant makes to his new homeland, along with the adoption of the dominant language, all the while retaining and enhancing his native identity. According to Haller, Migliaccio had an underlying didactic goal of “Italianizing” the Neapolitans, the Calabrese, the Sicilians, etc., who were living far from their regional homeland, educating them in a new “standard” language and identity that would make for more effective communication and a possible nostalgic return (37).

This important study and preservation of an ephemeral patrimony are consistent with Haller’s excellent seminal works on the language of the Italian-American immigrant and on dialect poetry and literature. His introduction is written in Italian, while Migliaccio’s masterpieces are in the very hybrid language that Haller hails for its staunch defense of identity and natural expressivity.

Thanks to RAI, the Italian national broadcasting company, we have access to over 60 original recordings of Migliaccio’s creative genius and Farfariello’s captivating recitation. Search “Migliaccio” in the “Players” field. [http://www.radio.rai.it/canzonenapoletana\\_eng/search.cfm](http://www.radio.rai.it/canzonenapoletana_eng/search.cfm)

**ELVIRA G. DI FABIO**  
*Harvard University*