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Thesis

Translating Venice Back into Italian: A Translation Proposal for Donna Leon's Death at La Fenice

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Abstract

This thesis presents an English-to-Italian translation of Chapters 9 and 11 of Donna Leon's Death at La Fenice and a commentary on selected translation decisions. After an overview of the novel and the reasons for choosing the two chapters, the translated text is presented alongside the English source. The commentary examines Venetian cultural references, changes in explicitness and perspective, forms of address, and the interaction of dialogue with Brunetti's narrative viewpoint. Because the novel is written in English but set in Italy, translating it for Italian readers changes the status of some cultural references. The analysis also considers where the Italian version gains clarity or naturalness at the cost of an effect in the source. The discussion is based on specific passages in the translated chapters and assesses each choice in its immediate narrative context.

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Introduction

This thesis examines the translation into Italian of Chapters 9 and 11 of Donna Leon's Death at La Fenice. The novel offers a distinctive problem for translation: its English prose depicts Italian institutions, places and social interactions, and the Italian translation addresses readers who may already know much of that setting. The selected chapters also contain exchanges in which rank, politeness and irony affect how a reader understands the characters.

Chapter 1 introduces the novel and explains the selection of the two chapters. Chapter 2 presents the English passages and the corresponding Italian translation. Chapter 3 discusses representative choices concerning cultural references, explicitation, modulation, pragmatic meaning and narrative voice. The commentary describes both the effects retained and the differences introduced by translation.

Chapter 1: Overview of Death at La Fenice and Translation Project

Death at La Fenice is a crime novel by American author Donna Leon, first published in 1992. It represents Leon's literary debut and is the first novel in the series featuring Commissario Guido Brunetti, the Venetian police investigator who would subsequently become the central character of the author's best-known series. The novel belongs to the tradition of crime and detective fiction, combining the investigation of a murder with a detailed portrayal of Venice and its social environment.

The novel opens at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice during a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*. As the audience waits for the opera to resume after the interval, the conductor, Maestro Helmut Wellauer, fails to return to the stage. He is subsequently found dead in his dressing room. Wellauer, a highly renowned German conductor, has been poisoned with cyanide, and his death is therefore immediately treated as a murder. The circumstances surrounding his death provide the starting point for Brunetti's first investigation.

Following the discovery of the body, Commissario Guido Brunetti is assigned to investigate the case. His task is complicated by the fact that Wellauer had established a successful career but had also accumulated a considerable number of enemies throughout his professional and personal life. Brunetti consequently begins to examine the victim's relationships and past, questioning the people who had been in contact with him and gradually uncovering information that may provide a motive for the murder. The investigation therefore extends beyond the immediate circumstances of Wellauer's death and becomes an exploration of the different aspects of his life.

Brunetti's investigation combines professional reasoning with close observation of the people he meets. His attention to social behaviour, including what characters say and leave unsaid, is particularly relevant to the two chapters translated here.

The setting of the murder is equally significant. The Teatro La Fenice, one of Venice's most important opera houses, is not simply the location in which the crime takes place but constitutes a central element of the novel's atmosphere and narrative framework. The murder occurs within a highly prestigious cultural environment, bringing together opera, artistic reputation, wealth, professional rivalries, and personal relationships. The contrast

between the elegance and cultural prestige associated with the opera house and the violence of the murder creates the circumstances in which the investigation begins. The official description of the novel similarly presents La Fenice as the setting of Wellauer's death and places the investigation within the wider context of Venice.

The importance of La Fenice also extends beyond its function as a physical setting. From the beginning of the novel, the opera house establishes a connection between the crime and the cultural identity of Venice. The opening scene takes place during a performance of *La Traviata*, meaning that the murder is embedded within a specifically Italian and Venetian cultural context. The theatre therefore provides both the immediate location of the crime and an important element of the novel's representation of Venice

1.1 The setting in Venice and its characteristics

An important and distinctive feature of *Death at La Fenice* is the central role played by Venice. The city is not merely the geographical setting in which the events of the novel take place, but an essential component of the narrative itself. From the opening scenes at the Teatro La Fenice to Brunetti's movements through the city's streets, Venice is constantly present in the novel and contributes significantly to its atmosphere and identity. The first novel of the Brunetti series thus establishes a close relationship between the detective story and the city in which it is set.

Leon's representation of Venice is particularly interesting because the city is presented from the perspective of a character who knows it intimately. Brunetti is not portrayed as an outsider discovering Venice for the first time, but as someone who has lived in the city for many years and is deeply familiar with its geography, history, and social environment. His movements through Venice therefore become an integral part of the narrative. Streets, squares, canals, bridges, and buildings are not simply mentioned to indicate where an event occurs; they contribute to the reader's understanding of Brunetti's relationship with his city.

This perspective is particularly evident in the descriptions of Venice that accompany Brunetti's movements. The city is represented through contrasting images. On the one hand, Venice is associated with its artistic and historical heritage, its architecture, music, churches, palaces, and canals. On the other hand, Leon also presents a less idealised image of the city,

characterised by decay, darkness, tourism, and the problems of contemporary urban life. In the novel, Venice can consequently appear both beautiful and deteriorated, both celebrated for its historical past and affected by the changes brought about by modern tourism. This contrast contributes to the complex image of the city developed throughout the novel.

In one passage, for example, the narrator describes how Venice appears to Brunetti during the night, when the absence of tourists allows him to perceive the city differently. The city becomes quieter and its historical character more visible, encouraging Brunetti to reflect on its past and present. Such moments demonstrate that the investigation is repeatedly intertwined with Brunetti's personal perception of Venice. The detective's experience of the city is therefore not separate from the development of the plot, but forms part of his characterisation.

Another important characteristic of Leon's representation of Venice is the presence of specifically Italian and Venetian elements within the English-language narrative. The novel frequently incorporates Italian terms referring to places, institutions, food, and aspects of everyday life. Expressions such as *Questura*, *calle*, and *campo*, for example, are integrated into the English text rather than systematically replaced with English equivalents. This linguistic feature contributes to the sense that the reader is being introduced to a specific cultural and geographical environment rather than to a generic European city. It also becomes particularly relevant from a translation perspective, since the target text is Italian while the source text already contains elements of the Italian language and culture.

Venice therefore supplies more than a backdrop to the investigation. Its streets, institutions and cultural references shape the locations Brunetti visits and the terms used to describe them.

For the purposes of the present translation project, the centrality of Venice is particularly relevant. Translating a novel in which the city is so closely connected to the plot and to the protagonist's identity requires attention not only to the events being narrated, but also to the linguistic and cultural elements through which Venice is represented.

1.2 The Linguistic and Stylistic Characteristics of the Novel

Leon alternates relatively restrained narration with investigative dialogue and passages filtered through Brunetti's perceptions. This combination makes shifts in tone and point of view relevant to translation, even where the syntax appears straightforward.

This connection is reinforced by the novel's use of a third-person narrative perspective that frequently remains close to Brunetti's consciousness. Although the narration is formally conducted in the third person, events and characters are often perceived through Brunetti's perspective. The reader is given access to his observations, judgements, reactions, and reflections, creating a close relationship between the narrative voice and the protagonist's internal point of view. His interpretation of other characters and of the city around him therefore becomes an important part of the novel's narrative structure.

Another important stylistic characteristic is Leon's use of irony and understatement. Rather than being consistently explicit, irony often emerges from the contrast between what a character says and what the surrounding narrative allows the reader to understand. This is especially relevant in interactions involving Brunetti, whose reactions to colleagues and superiors are not always expressed openly. Institutional relationships can therefore be represented through restrained comments, carefully selected forms of address, or apparently neutral statements whose significance becomes evident only when interpreted within the broader context of the exchange. Understatement allows criticism, irritation, humour, or scepticism to be communicated without necessarily being stated directly.

1.3 Why *Death at La Fenice* Was Chosen for Translation

Death at La Fenice was chosen because it offers an interesting literary translation project. As the first novel featuring Guido Brunetti, it introduces the investigator and his world without requiring the reader to know the rest of the series. Its crime narrative also gives the selected passages a clear dramatic context: conversations and observations matter because they contribute to an ongoing investigation.

A further reason for the choice is the novel’s position between two languages and cultures. Leon writes in English about characters who live and work in Italy. Translating the text into

Italian therefore raises a question specific to this project: how should the translator render an English-language portrayal of a setting that many Italian readers already recognise? This question made the novel especially suitable for a translation accompanied by critical commentary.

1.3.1 The Selection of Chapters 9 and 11

Chapters 9 and 11 were selected because they provide a representative sample of the linguistic, stylistic, and cultural features that characterise *Death at La Fenice*. Although they belong to the same narrative sequence, the two chapters present different communicative situations and therefore offer a sufficiently varied corpus for translation analysis.

Chapter 9 is particularly relevant for the interaction between Brunetti and Frau Wellauer. Their conversation involves differences in linguistic competence, formality, politeness, and interpersonal distance, while the surrounding narration provides access to Brunetti's perceptions and observations. The chapter therefore allows the translation to address both dialogue and narrative voice, as well as the multilingual dimension created by the interaction between English and Italian.

Chapter 11, by contrast, places greater emphasis on Brunetti's professional environment and his relationships with colleagues and superiors. The exchanges involving Patta and other members of the police force make social and institutional hierarchy particularly visible through forms of address, register, politeness, and irony. At the same time, the chapter contains several references to Venetian places and institutions, reinforcing the connection between language and cultural setting.

Taken together, the two chapters offer complementary perspectives on Leon's style. They combine dialogue, narration, characterisation, pragmatic meaning, cultural references, and different interpersonal relationships, making them particularly suitable for illustrating the main translation issues discussed in the following chapters.

1.4 Objectives of the Translation

The aim of this translation is to produce an Italian text that conveys the events and relationships of the source while reading naturally as literary prose. This requires attention to

meaning at the level of the passage, as well as to individual sentences: a formulation may be accurate in isolation but sound unnatural or suggest a different attitude when read within an exchange.

Some of the criteria used to revise the translation became clearer during the work itself. In dialogue, I checked whether forms of address and levels of formality remained consistent with the relationships between characters. In narrative passages, I considered whether changes in wording altered what Brunetti observes or how his reactions are presented. I also reviewed expressions that closely followed the English syntax when a more idiomatic Italian formulation could convey the same meaning.

The final stage of revision involved comparing the Italian text with the English again, particularly where a choice affected characterisation or was discussed in the commentary. The commentary in Chapter 3 examines selected decisions and, where relevant, acknowledges differences between the effects of the source and target texts.

Chapter 2: The Translation

2.1 Chapter 9

Back at the Questura, he learned that officers Alvise and Riverre had gone to the Maestro's apartment and looked through his personal effects, coming away with documents and papers, which were now being translated into Italian. He called down to the lab, but they still had no results on fingerprints, though they had confirmed the self-evident, that the poison was in the coffee. Miotti was nowhere to be found; presumably he was still at the theatre.	Tornato in Questura, venne a sapere che gli agenti Alvise e Riverre erano andati all'appartamento del Maestro e avevano esaminato i suoi effetti personali, portando via documenti e carte, che in quel momento venivano tradotti in italiano. Telefonò al laboratorio, ma non avevano ancora risultati sulle impronte digitali, anche se avevano confermato ciò che era già evidente: il veleno era nel caffè. Di Miotti non c'era traccia; probabilmente era ancora a teatro.
At a loss for what to do, knowing that he would have to speak to her soon, Brunetti called the Maestro's widow and asked if it would be possible for her to receive him that afternoon. After an initial and entirely understandable reluctance, she asked him to come at four.	Non sapendo bene cosa fare, ma consapevole che avrebbe dovuto parlarle presto, Brunetti telefonò alla vedova del Maestro e le chiese se fosse possibile riceverlo quel pomeriggio. Dopo un'iniziale e del tutto comprensibile riluttanza, lei gli chiese di passare alle quattro.
He rooted around in the top drawer of his desk and found half a package of bussolai, the salty Venetian pretzels he loved so much. He ate them while he looked through the notes he had taken on the German police report.	Frugò nel cassetto superiore della scrivania e trovò mezzo pacchetto di bussolai, i salatini veneziani a forma di pretzel che amava tanto. Li mangiò mentre rileggeva gli appunti che aveva preso sul rapporto della polizia tedesca.
A half hour before his appointment with	Mezz'ora prima dell'appuntamento con la

Signora Wellauer, he left his office and walked slowly up towards Piazza San Marco. Along the way, he paused to look into shop windows, shocked, as he always was when in the centre of the city, by how quickly their composition was changing. It seemed to him that all the shops that served the native population - pharmacies, shoemakers, groceries - were slowly and inexorably disappearing, replaced by slick boutiques and souvenir shops that catered to the tourists, filled with luminescent plastic gondolas from Taiwan and papier-mâché masks from Hong Kong.	Signora Wellauer, lasciò l'ufficio e si incamminò lentamente verso Piazza San Marco. Lungo la strada si fermò a guardare le vetrine dei negozi, colpito, come sempre accadeva quando si trovava nel centro della città, dalla rapidità con cui stavano cambiando. Gli sembrava che tutti i negozi utili alla popolazione locale - farmacie, calzolai, alimentari - stessero lentamente e inesorabilmente scomparendo, sostituiti da boutique eleganti e negozi di souvenir destinati ai turisti, pieni di gondole di plastica luminose provenienti da Taiwan e maschere di cartapesta di Hong Kong.
It was the desires of the transients, not the needs of the residents, that the city's merchants answered. He wondered how long it would take before the entire city became a sort of living museum, a place fit only for visiting and not for inhabiting. As if to exacerbate his reflections, a group of off-season tourists wandered by, led by a raised umbrella. Water on his left, he passed through the piazza, amazed by the people who seemed to find the pigeons more interesting than the basilica. He crossed the bridge after Campo San Moisè, turned right, then right again, and into a narrow calle that ended in a huge wooden door.	I commercianti della città rispondevano ai desideri dei visitatori di passaggio, non ai bisogni dei residenti. Si chiese quanto tempo sarebbe passato prima che l'intera città diventasse una sorta di museo vivente, un luogo adatto soltanto a essere visitato e non abitato. Come a rendere ancora più amari quei pensieri, un gruppo di turisti fuori stagione passò lì accanto, preceduti da un ombrello alzato in aria. Con il canale sulla sinistra, attraversò la piazza, stupito dalle persone che sembravano trovare i piccioni più interessanti della basilica. Attraversò il ponte dopo Campo San Moisè, svoltò a destra, poi ancora a destra, entrando in una stretta calle che terminava davanti a un
He rang and heard a disembodied,	

mechanical voice ask who he was. He gave his name and, seconds later, heard the snap that released the lock on the door. He stepped into a newly restored hall, its ceiling beams stripped to their original wood and varnished to a high gloss. The floor, he noticed with a Venetian eye, was made of inlaid marble tiles set in a geometric pattern of waves and swirls. From the gentle undulance of it, he guessed that it was original to the building, perhaps early fifteenth century. He began to climb the broad, space-wasting steps. At each landing there was a single metal door; the singleness spoke of wealth and the metal of the desire to protect it. Engraved nameplates told him to keep ascending. The steps ended, five flights up, at another metal door. He rang the bell and a few moments later was greeted by the woman he had spoken to in the theatre the night before, the Maestro's widow. He took her extended hand, muttered, 'Permesso,' and crossed into the apartment. If she had slept the night before, there was no sign of it in her face. She wore no makeup, so the intense pallor of her face was accented, as were the dark smudges beneath her eyes. But even under the fatigue, the structure of great beauty was	enorme portone di legno. Suonò il campanello e sentì una voce meccanica e incorporea chiedergli chi fosse. Disse il suo nome e, pochi secondi dopo, udì lo scatto che liberava la serratura della porta. Entrò in un atrio restaurato da poco, con le travi del soffitto riportate al legno originale e verniciate fino a ottenere una lucentezza intensa. Il pavimento, notò con occhio veneziano, era fatto di piastrelle di marmo intarsiate, disposte in un motivo geometrico di onde e spirali. Dalla lieve ondulazione della superficie intuì che fosse originale dell'edificio, forse risalente ai primi del Quattrocento. Cominciò a salire gli ampi gradini che occupavano inutilmente tanto spazio. A ogni pianerottolo c'era una sola porta di metallo: la presenza di una sola porta era segno di ricchezza; il metallo del desiderio di proteggerla. Le targhette incise gli dicevano di continuare a salire. Le scale terminavano, cinque piani più su, davanti a un'altra porta di metallo. Suonò il campanello e, pochi istanti dopo, fu accolto dalla donna con cui aveva parlato a teatro la sera prima, la vedova del Maestro. Le prese la mano che lei gli tendeva, mormorò: «Permesso», ed entrò

visible. The bones of her cheeks would carry her into great age safely, and the line of her nose would always create a profile that people would turn to see again. 'I'm Commissario Brunetti. We spoke last night.' 'Yes, I remember,' she replied. 'Please come this way.' She led him down a corridor to a large study. In one corner, there was a fireplace with a small open fire. Two chairs separated by a table stood in front of the fire. She waved him to one of the chairs and sat in the other. On the table, a burning cigarette rested in a full ashtray. Behind her was a large window through which he could see the ochre rooftops of the city. On the walls hung what his children insisted on calling 'real' paintings. 'Would you like a drink, Dottor Brunetti? Or perhaps tea?' She repeated the Italian phrases as though she had learned them by rote from a grammar book, but he found it interesting that she would know his proper title. 'Please don't go to any trouble, Signora,' he said, responding in kind. 'Two of your policemen were here this morning. They took some things away with	nell'appartamento. Se aveva dormito la notte precedente, sul suo volto non ve n'era traccia. Non portava trucco, così l'intenso pallore del viso risultava ancora più evidente, come pure le ombre scure sotto gli occhi. Eppure, anche sotto la stanchezza, si intravedeva la struttura di una grande bellezza. La struttura degli zigomi avrebbe retto bene al passare degli anni, e il profilo del naso avrebbe continuato a far voltare chi la incontrava. «Sono il commissario Brunetti. Abbiamo parlato ieri sera.» «Sì, mi ricordo», rispose lei. «Prego, venga da questa parte.» Lo accompagnò lungo un corridoio fino a un ampio studio. In un angolo c'era un camino con un piccolo fuoco acceso. Due sedie, separate da un tavolino, stavano davanti al fuoco. Lei gli indicò una delle sedie e si sedette nell'altra. Sul tavolo, una sigaretta accesa si trovava in un posacenere pieno. Dietro di lei si apriva una grande finestra dalla quale si vedevano i tetti color ocra della città. Alle pareti erano appesi quelli che i suoi figli insistevano a chiamare "veri" quadri. «Gradirebbe qualcosa da bere, dottor

them.' It was evident that her Italian wasn't adequate to name the things that had been removed. 'Would it help if we spoke English?' he asked in that language. 'Oh, yes,' she said, smiling for the first time and giving him a hint of what her full beauty would be. 'That would be much easier for me.' Her face softened, and some of the signs of stress disappeared. Even her body seemed to relax as the language difficulty was removed. 'I've just been here a few times, to Venice, and I'm embarrassed by how badly I speak Italian.' In other circumstances, the situation would have demanded that he deny this and praise her ability with the language. Instead he said, 'I realize, Signora, how difficult this is for you, and I want to express my condolences to you and your family.' Why was it that the words with which we confronted death always sounded so inadequate, so blatantly false? 'He was a great musician, and the loss to the world of music is enormous. But I'm sure yours must be far worse.' Stilted and artificial, it was the best he could do. He noticed a number of telegrams sitting next to the ashtray, some open, some not.	Brunetti? O magari del tè?» Ripeteva le frasi italiane come se le avesse imparate a memoria da un libro di grammatica, ma Brunetti trovò interessante che conoscesse il suo titolo corretto. «Non si disturbi, signora», disse lui, rispondendo con lo stesso tono formale. «Due dei suoi poliziotti sono stati qui questa mattina. Hanno portato via alcune cose.» Era evidente che il suo italiano non fosse sufficiente per nominare gli oggetti che erano stati rimossi. «Le sarebbe più comodo se parlassimo in inglese?» chiese lui in quella lingua. «Oh, sì», disse lei, sorridendo per la prima volta e lasciando intravedere tutta la sua bellezza. «Per me sarebbe molto più facile.» Il volto le si addolcì e alcuni segni della tensione scomparvero. Perfino il corpo sembrò rilassarsi, liberato dall'ostacolo linguistico. «Sono stata qui solo poche volte, a Venezia, e mi vergogno di parlare così male l'italiano.» In altre circostanze, avrebbe dovuto contraddirla e complimentarsi con lei per il suo italiano. Invece disse: «Capisco, signora,

She must have been hearing much the same thing all day long, but she gave no indication of that and, instead, said simply, 'Thank you.' She reached into the pocket of her sweater and pulled out a package of cigarettes. She took one of them from the pack and raised it to her lips, but then she saw the cigarette still smoking in the ashtray. She tossed the fresh cigarette and the package on the table and pulled the lighted cigarette from the ashtray. She took a deep breath of smoke, held it for a long time, then expelled it with obvious reluctance. 'Yes, he will be missed by the world of music,' she said. Before she could reflect on the strangeness of this, she added, 'And here as well.' Though there was only a millimeter of ash on the end of it, she flicked her cigarette at the ashtray, then bent forward and scraped the sides, as though it were a pencil she wanted to sharpen. He reached into his pocket and took out his notebook, opened it to a page on which he kept a scribbled list of new books he wanted to read. He had noticed the night before that she was almost beautiful, would become unquestionably so from certain angles and in certain lights. Under the weariness that veiled her face today, that beauty was still evident. She had wide-	quanto tutto questo sia difficile per lei, e desidero porgere le mie condoglianze a lei e alla sua famiglia.» Perché mai le parole con cui affrontiamo la morte suonano sempre tanto inadeguate, così apertamente false? «Era un grande musicista, e la perdita per il mondo della musica è enorme. Ma immagino che la vostra sia ancora peggiore.» Rigido e artificiale, era il meglio che riuscisse a fare. Notò un certo numero di telegrammi accanto al posacenere, alcuni aperti, altri no. Doveva aver sentito più o meno le stesse cose per tutta la giornata, ma non lo lasciò trasparire e si limitò invece a dire semplicemente: «Grazie.» Infilò una mano nella tasca del maglione e ne tirò fuori un pacchetto di sigarette. Ne prese una e la portò alle labbra, ma poi vide quella che ancora fumava nel posacenere. Gettò sul tavolo la sigaretta nuova e il pacchetto, quindi prese quella accesa dal posacenere. Aspirò profondamente il fumo, lo trattenne a lungo e poi lo espulse con evidente riluttanza. «Sì, sentiranno la sua mancanza nel mondo della musica», disse. Prima ancora di poter riflettere sulla stranezza di quelle parole, aggiunse: «E anche qui.» Sebbene sulla

spaced blue eyes and naturally blonde hair, which today she wore pulled back and knotted simply at her neck. 'Do you know what killed him?' she asked. 'I spoke to the pathologist this morning. It was potassium cyanide. It was in the coffee he drank.' 'So it was fast. There is at least that.' 'Yes,' he agreed. 'It would have been almost instantaneous.' He jotted something in his notebook, then asked, 'Are you familiar with the poison?' She shot him a quick glance before she answered, 'No more than any other doctor would be.' He flipped a page. 'The pathologist suggested that it's not easily come by, cyanide,' he lied. She said nothing, so he asked, 'How did your husband seem to you last night, Signora? Was there anything strange or in any way peculiar about his behaviour?' Continuing to wipe her cigarette against the edge of the ashtray, she answered, 'No; I thought he was quite the same as always.' 'And how was that, if I might ask?' 'A bit tense, withdrawn. He didn't like to	punta della sigaretta ci fosse appena un millimetro di cenere, la scosse nel posacenere, poi si chinò in avanti e sfregò i lati della sigaretta sul bordo del posacenere, come se volesse appuntirla. Lui infilò una mano in tasca e tirò fuori il taccuino, aprendolo a una pagina su cui teneva una lista scarabocchiata di nuovi libri che voleva leggere. La sera prima aveva notato che era quasi bella; da certe angolazioni e sotto certe luci sarebbe diventata indiscutibilmente tale. Sotto la stanchezza che oggi le velava il volto, quella bellezza era ancora evidente. Aveva degli occhi azzurri distanti tra loro e capelli biondi naturali, che oggi portava legati dietro la testa all'altezza del collo. «Sa che cosa l'ha ucciso?» chiese. «Ho parlato con il patologo questa mattina. È stato il cianuro di potassio. Era nel caffè che ha bevuto.» «Allora è stato rapido. Almeno questo.» «Sì», convenne lui. «Sarebbe stato quasi istantaneo.» Annotò qualcosa nel taccuino, poi domandò: «Ha familiarità con questo veleno?» Lei gli lanciò una rapida occhiata prima di

speak to anyone before a performance, or during intermissions. He didn't like to be distracted by anything.' That seemed normal enough to him. 'Did he appear any more nervous than usual last night?' She considered this for a moment. 'No, I can't say that he was. We walked to the theatre at about seven. It's very close.' He nodded. 'I went to my seat, even though it was early. The ushers were used to seeing me at rehearsals, so they let me in. Helmut went backstage to change and take a look at the score.' 'Excuse me, Signora, but I think I read in one of the papers that your husband was famous for conducting without a score.' She smiled at this. 'Oh, he did, he did. But he always kept one in the dressing room, and he'd look over it before the performance and during the intervals.' 'Is that why he didn't want to be interrupted during the intervals?' 'Yes.' 'You said you went backstage to speak to him last night.' She said nothing, so he asked, 'Was that normal?'	rispondere: «Non più di qualsiasi altro medico.» Lui girò pagina. «Il patologo sostiene che il cianuro non sia facile da procurarsi», mentì. Lei non disse nulla, così lui chiese: «Come le è sembrato suo marito ieri sera, signora? C'era qualcosa di strano o in qualche modo insolito nel suo comportamento?» Continuando a strofinare la sigaretta contro il bordo del posacenere, rispose: «No. Mi è sembrato quello di sempre.» «E com'era, se posso chiedere?» «Un po' teso, chiuso in sé stesso. Non gli piaceva parlare con nessuno prima di uno spettacolo o durante gli intervalli. Non voleva che nulla lo distraesse.» La cosa gli sembrò abbastanza normale. «Ieri sera sembrava più nervoso del solito?» Lei rifletté per un momento. «No, non direi. Siamo andati a teatro verso le sette. È molto vicino.» Lui annuì. «Sono andata al mio posto, anche se era presto. Gli uscieri erano abituati a vedermi alle prove e mi hanno lasciata entrare. Helmut è andato dietro le quinte per

'No; as I told you, he didn't like anyone to talk to him during a performance. He said it destroyed his concentration. But last night, he asked me to go back after the second act.'	cambiarsi e dare un'occhiata alla partitura.»
	«Mi scusi, signora, ma credo di aver letto su uno dei giornali che suo marito era famoso per dirigere senza partitura.»
'Was anyone with you when he asked you?'	Lei sorrise. «Oh sì, certo. Ma ne teneva sempre una nel camerino e la consultava prima dello spettacolo e durante gli intervalli.»
Her voice took on a sharp edge. 'Do you mean, do I have a witness that he asked me?' Brunetti nodded. 'No, Dottor Brunetti, I don't have a witness. But I was surprised.'	«È per questo che non voleva essere disturbato durante gli intervalli?»
'Why?'	«Sì.»
'Because Helmut seldom did things that were … I'm not sure of the words to use … out of the ordinary. He seldom did things that were not part of his routine. So it surprised me that he asked me to go and see him during a performance.'	«Ha detto che ieri sera è andata dietro le quinte per parlargli.» Lei non rispose, così lui domandò:
	«Era una cosa abituale?»
'But you went?'	«No. Come le ho detto, non gli piaceva che qualcuno gli parlasse durante uno spettacolo. Diceva che gli faceva perdere la concentrazione. Ma ieri sera mi ha chiesto di tornare da lui dopo il secondo atto.»
'Yes, I went.'	
'Why did he want to see you?'	«C'era qualcuno con lei quando glielo ha chiesto?»
'I don't know. I met friends in the foyer, and I stopped to talk to them for a few minutes. I'd forgotten that during a performance, you can't get backstage from the orchestra, that you have to go upstairs to the boxes. So by the time I finally got backstage and to his dressing room, the second bell was already	La sua voce assunse una sfumatura tagliente. «Vuole dire: ho un testimone che possa confermare che me lo ha chiesto?» Brunetti annuì.

ringing for the end of the interval.' 'Did you speak to him?' She hesitated a long time before she answered. 'Yes, but not more than to say hello and ask him what he wanted to tell me. But then we heard -' She paused here and stabbed out her cigarette. She took a long time doing this, moving the dead stump around and around in the ashtray. Finally, she dropped it and continued, though something had changed in her voice. 'We heard the second bell. There was no time to speak. I said I'd see him after the performance, and I went back to my seat. I got there just as the lights were going down. I waited for the curtain to go up, for the performance to continue, but you know … you know what happened.' 'Was that the first time you thought that anything was wrong?' She reached for the package and pulled another cigarette from it. Brunetti took the lighter from the table and lit it for her. 'Thank you,' she said, blowing the smoke away from him. 'And was that the first time you realized that something was wrong?' he repeated.	«No, dottor Brunetti, non ho un testimone. Però ne sono rimasta sorpresa.» «Perché?» «Perché Helmut faceva raramente cose che fossero… non sono sicura delle parole da usare… fuori dall'ordinario. Faceva raramente qualcosa che non facesse parte della sua routine. Perciò mi ha sorpreso che mi chiedesse di andare a trovarlo durante uno spettacolo.» «Ma ci è andata?» «Sì, ci sono andata.» «Perché voleva vederla?» «Non lo so. Ho incontrato degli amici nel foyer e mi sono fermata a parlare con loro per qualche minuto. Avevo dimenticato che durante uno spettacolo non si può raggiungere il dietro le quinte dalla platea e che bisogna salire ai palchi. Così, quando finalmente sono arrivata dietro le quinte e ho raggiunto il suo camerino, il secondo campanello per la fine dell'intervallo stava già suonando.» «Ha parlato con lui?» Lei esitò a lungo prima di rispondere. «Sì, ma appena il tempo di salutarlo e chiedergli che cosa volesse dirmi. Poi

'Yes.'	sentimmo…»
'In the last few weeks, had your husband's behaviour been different in any way?' When she didn't answer, he prompted: 'Nervous, irritable in any way?'	Si interruppe e schiacciò con forza la sigaretta nel posacenere. Impiegò molto tempo a farlo, muovendo il mozzicone spento in cerchio nel posacenere. Alla fine, lo lasciò cadere e proseguì, ma qualcosa nella sua voce era cambiato.
'I understood the question,' she said shortly, then looked at him nervously and said, 'I'm sorry.' He decided it was better to remain silent than to acknowledge her apology. She paused for a moment and then answered. 'No, he seemed much the same as ever. He always loved Traviata, and he loved this city.'	«Sentimmo il secondo campanello. Non c'era tempo per parlare. Gli dissi che ci saremmo visti dopo lo spettacolo e tornai al mio posto. Arrivai proprio mentre le luci si stavano abbassando. Aspettai che il sipario si alzasse, che lo spettacolo riprendesse, ma lei sa… sa che cosa accadde.»
'And the rehearsals went well? Peacefully?'	«Fu quello il primo momento in cui pensò che ci fosse qualcosa che non andava?» Lei prese il pacchetto e ne estrasse un'altra sigaretta. Brunetti prese l'accendino dal tavolo e gliela accese.
'I'm not sure I understand that question.'	«Grazie», disse lei, soffiando il fumo lontano da lui.
'Did your husband have any difficulty with the other people engaged in the production?'	«E fu allora che si rese conto per la prima volta che qualcosa non andava?» ripeté lui. «Sì.»
'No, not that I know of,' she answered after a short pause. Brunetti decided it was time to bring his questions to a more personal level. He flipped a few pages in his notebook, glanced down at it, and asked, 'Who is it that lives here, Signora?'	«Nelle ultime settimane, il comportamento di suo marito era cambiato in qualche modo?» Quando lei non rispose, lui la
If she was surprised by the sudden change of subject, she gave no sign of it. 'My husband and I and a maid who sleeps in.'	

‘How long has she worked for you, this maid?’ ‘She has worked for Helmut for about twenty years, I think. I met her only when we came to Venice for the first time.’ ‘And when was that?’ ‘Two years ago.’ ‘Yes?’ he prodded. ‘She lives here in the apartment year round, while we’re away.’ Immediately she corrected herself: ‘While we were away.’ ‘Her name?’ ‘Hilda Breddes.’ ‘She’s not Italian?’ ‘No; Belgian.’ He made a note of this. ‘How long were you and the Maestro married?’ ‘Two years. We met in Berlin, where I was working.’ ‘Under what circumstances?’ ‘He was conducting Tristan. I went backstage with friends of mine who were also friends of his. We all went to dinner after the performance.’	incalzò: «Era nervoso, irritabile, in qualche modo?» «Ho capito la domanda», disse seccamente, poi lo guardò con nervosismo e aggiunse: «Mi scusi.» Brunetti decise che fosse meglio restare in silenzio senza accettare le sue scuse. Lei esitò per un momento e poi rispose. «No, mi sembrava più o meno lo stesso di sempre. Ha sempre amato la Traviata e amava questa città.» «E le prove sono andate bene? In modo tranquillo?» «Non sono sicura di capire la domanda.» «Suo marito ha avuto qualche difficoltà con le altre persone coinvolte nella produzione?» «No, non che io sappia», rispose dopo una breve pausa. Brunetti decise che era il momento di portare le sue domande su un piano più personale. Sfogliò alcune pagine del taccuino, gli diede un'occhiata e chiese: «Chi vive qui, signora?» Se fu sorpresa da quel brusco cambio di argomento, non lo diede a vedere. «Mio marito, io e una domestica che vive

‘How long did you know each other before you were married?’ ‘About six months.’ She busied herself with sharpening her cigarette. ‘You said that you were working in Berlin, yet you are Hungarian.’ When she didn’t comment, he asked, ‘Isn’t this true?’ ‘Yes; by birth I am. But I am now a German citizen. My first husband, as I’m sure you’ve been informed, was German, and I took his nationality when we moved to Germany after our marriage.’ She stubbed out her cigarette and looked at Brunetti, as if declaring that she would now devote all her attention to his questions. He wondered that it was these factual issues on which she had decided to focus, for all of them were matters of public record. All her answers about her marriages had been true; he knew because Paola, hopelessly addicted to the gutter press, had filled him in on the details that morning. ‘Isn’t that unusual?’ he asked. ‘Isn’t what unusual?’ ‘Your being permitted to move to Germany and take German citizenship.’ She smiled at that, but not, he thought, in	con noi.» «Da quanto tempo lavora per voi questa domestica?» «Lavora per Helmut da circa vent'anni, credo. Io l'ho conosciuta soltanto quando siamo venuti a Venezia per la prima volta.» «E quando è stato?» «Due anni fa.» «Sì?» la spronò lui. «Lei vive qui nell'appartamento tutto l'anno, mentre noi siamo via.» Subito si corresse: «Mentre noi eravamo via.» «Come si chiama?» «Hilda Breddes.» «Non è italiana?» «No, è belga.» Brunetti se lo annotò. «Da quanto tempo era sposata con il Maestro?» «Due anni. Ci siamo conosciuti a Berlino, dove lavoravo.» «In quali circostanze?» «Lui dirigeva il Tristan. Io andai dietro le quinte con alcuni amici miei che erano anche suoi amici. Dopo lo spettacolo andammo

amusement. 'Not so unusual as you here in the West seem to think.' Was it scorn? 'I was a married woman, married to a German. His work in Hungary was finished, and he went back to his own country. I applied for permission to go with my husband, and it was granted. Even under the old government, we were not savages. The family is very important to Hungarians.' From the way she said it, Brunetti suspected she believed it to be of only minimal importance to Italians.	tutti a cena.»
'Is he the father of your child?'	«Per quanto tempo vi siete frequentati prima di sposarvi?»
The question clearly startled her. 'Who?'	«Circa sei mesi.» Si mise a sfregare la sigaretta contro il bordo del posacenere, come per appuntirla.
'Your first husband.'	«Ha detto che lavorava a Berlino, eppure lei è ungherese.» Quando lei non fece commenti, lui chiese:
'Yes, he is.' She reached for another cigarette.	«Non è così?»
'Does he still live in Germany?' Brunetti asked as he lit her cigarette, though he knew that the man taught at the University of Heidelberg.	«Sì, di nascita sono ungherese. Ma ora sono cittadina tedesca. Il mio primo marito, come sono certa che le sia stato riferito, era tedesco, e io presi la cittadinanza tedesca quando ci trasferimmo in Germania dopo il matrimonio.» Spense la sigaretta nel posacenere e guardò Brunetti, come per dichiarare che da quel momento avrebbe dedicato tutta la sua attenzione alle sue domande. Brunetti trovò curioso che avesse deciso di concentrarsi proprio su quelle questioni puramente fattuali, poiché erano tutte informazioni di dominio pubblico. Tutte le sue risposte riguardo ai suoi matrimoni erano vere; lo sapeva perché Paola, irrimediabilmente dipendente dai giornaletti scandalistici, quella mattina lo aveva messo al corrente di tutti i dettagli.
'Yes, he does.'	
'Is it true that, before marrying the Maestro, you were a doctor?'	
'Commissario,' she began, voice tight with an anger she did little to contain or disguise, 'I am still a doctor, and I shall always be a	

doctor. At the moment, I don't have a practice, but believe me, I am still a doctor.'	«Non è insolito?» chiese lui.
'I apologize, Doctor,' he said, meaning it and regretting his stupidity. He quickly changed the subject. 'Your daughter, does she live here with you?'	«Che cosa non è insolito?»
He saw the impulsive motion towards the cigarette package, watched as she glided her hand towards the burning cigarette and picked that up instead. 'No, she lives with her grandparents in Munich. It would be too difficult for her to go to a foreign-language school while we were here, so we decided it would be best for her to go to study in Munich.'	«Che le sia stato permesso di trasferirsi in Germania e di ottenere la cittadinanza tedesca.» Lei sorrise a quelle parole, ma Brunetti pensò che non fosse un sorriso divertito. «Non è così insolito come voi qui in Occidente sembrate credere.» Era disprezzo quello che percepiva?
'With your former husband's parents?' 'Yes.'	«Ero una donna sposata, sposata con un tedesco. Il suo lavoro in Ungheria era terminato e lui tornò nel suo Paese. Io chiesi il permesso di seguirlo e mi fu concesso. Persino sotto il vecchio governo non eravamo dei selvaggi. La famiglia è molto importante per gli ungheresi.»
'How old is she, your daughter?' 'Thirteen.' His own daughter, Chiara, was the same age, and he realized how unkind it would be to force her to attend school in a foreign country.	Dal modo in cui lo disse, Brunetti sospettò che ritenesse la famiglia di ben poca importanza per gli italiani. «È lui il padre di sua figlia?» La domanda sembrò coglierla di sorpresa.
'Will you resume your medical practice now?'	«Chi?»
She thought awhile before she answered this. 'I don't know. Perhaps. I would like to heal people. But it's too early to think about	«Il suo primo marito.» «Sì, è lui.» Allungò la mano verso un'altra sigaretta.

that.' Brunetti bowed his head in silent agreement. 'If you will permit me, Signora, and perhaps forgive me in advance for the question, could you tell me if you have any idea of the sort of financial arrangements your husband made?' 'You mean what happens to the money?' Remarkably direct. 'Yes.' She answered quickly. 'I know only what Helmut told me. We didn't have a formal agreement, nothing written, the way people do today when they marry.' Her tone dismissed such thinking. 'It is my understanding that five people will inherit his estate.' 'And they are?' 'His children by his previous marriages. He had one by the first and three by the second. And myself.' 'And your daughter?' 'No,' she said immediately. 'Only his natural children.' It seemed normal enough to Brunetti that a man would want to leave his money to children of his own blood. 'Have you any idea of the amount involved?'	«Vive ancora in Germania?» chiese Brunetti mentre le accendeva la sigaretta, nonostante sapesse che l'uomo insegnava all'Università di Heidelberg. «Sì.» «È vero che, prima di sposare il Maestro, lei era un medico?» «Commissario», cominciò lei con una voce tesa da un'ira che faceva ben poco per contenere o nascondere, «io sono ancora un medico e sarò sempre un medico. Al momento non esercito la professione, ma mi creda, sono ancora un medico.» «Mi scuso, dottoressa», disse lui sinceramente, pentendosi della propria stupidità. Cambiò rapidamente argomento. «Sua figlia vive qui con voi?» Vide il movimento istintivo della mano verso il pacchetto di sigarette; poi osservò come la mano scivolasse invece verso la sigaretta già accesa e la raccogliesse. «No, vive con i suoi nonni a Monaco. Sarebbe stato troppo difficile per lei frequentare una scuola in una lingua straniera mentre noi eravamo qui, così abbiamo deciso che fosse meglio per lei

Widows usually did and just as usually said they did not. 'I think it is a great deal of money. But his agent or his lawyer would be able to tell you more about that than I can.' Strangely enough, it sounded to him as if she really didn't know. Stranger still, it sounded as if she didn't care. The signs of fatigue he had seen in her when he entered had grown more pronounced during their conversation. The line of her shoulders was less straight; twin lines ran down from her nose to the corners of her mouth. 'I have only a few more questions,' he said. 'Would you like something to drink?' It was clear that she was being no more than formally polite. 'Thank you, but no. I'll ask these questions and then leave you.' She nodded tiredly, almost as if she knew that these were the questions he had come to ask. 'Signora, I would like to know something about your relationship with your husband.' He watched her grow visibly more distant and self-protective. 'The difference in age between you was considerable.' 'Yes, it was.' He remained silent, waiting. She finally said,	studiare a Monaco.» «Con i genitori del suo ex marito?» «Sì.» «Quanti anni ha sua figlia?» «Tredici.» Anche sua figlia Chiara aveva la stessa età e Brunetti si rese conto di quanto sarebbe stato crudele costringerla a frequentare la scuola in un Paese straniero. «Riprenderà a esercitare la professione medica?» Lei rifletté un momento prima di rispondere. «Non lo so. Forse. Mi piacerebbe guarire le persone. Ma è troppo presto per pensarci.» Brunetti chinò il capo in un silenzioso segno di comprensione. «Se me lo permette, signora, e mi perdoni in anticipo per la domanda, potrebbe dirmi quali accordi economici avesse preso suo marito?» «Intende dire cosa succederà al denaro?» Una franchezza sorprendente. «Sì.» «So soltanto quello che Helmut mi ha detto. Non avevamo un accordo formale, niente di scritto, come fanno oggi le persone quando si sposano.» Il tono della sua voce liquidò

stating, not admitting, and he liked her for that, 'Helmut was thirty-seven years older than I.' That would make her a few years older than he had judged her to be, just Paola's age. Wellauer was just eight years younger than Brunetti's grandfather. As strange as he found that thought, Brunetti tried to give no sign of it. What was it like for this woman, with a husband almost two generations older than she? He saw that she was shifting uncomfortably under the intensity of his gaze, and he glanced away for a moment, as if thinking about how to phrase his next question. 'Did the difference in your ages create any difficulties in your marriage?' How transparent was the cloud of euphemism that always surrounded such a union. Though polite, the question was still a voyeur's leer, and he was embarrassed by it. Her silence stretched out for so long that he didn't know if it spoke of her disgust with his curiosity or her annoyance at the artificiality with which he expressed it. Suddenly sounding very tired, she said, 'Because of the differences in our ages, in our generations, we saw the world differently, but I married him because I was in love with him.' Brunetti's instinct told him that he had just heard the truth, but the	quell'idea con evidente disapprovazione. «Da quanto ho capito, saranno cinque le persone a ereditare il suo patrimonio.» «E chi sono?» «I suoi figli avuti dai precedenti matrimoni. Ne aveva uno dal primo matrimonio e tre dal secondo. E poi ci sono io.» «E sua figlia?» «No», rispose immediatamente. «Soltanto i suoi figli biologici.» A Brunetti sembrò del tutto normale che un uomo volesse lasciare il proprio denaro ai figli del suo stesso sangue. «Ha idea dell'entità della somma in questione?» Le vedove di solito lo sapevano e, altrettanto di solito, sostenevano di non saperlo. «Credo che si tratti di una somma considerevole. Ma il suo agente o il suo avvocato saprebbero dirle molto più di quanto possa fare io.» Stranamente, a Brunetti sembrò che lei non lo sapesse davvero. Più strano ancora, sembrava che non le importasse. I segni di stanchezza che aveva notato quando era entrato si erano accentuati durante la conversazione. Le sue spalle si erano incurvate; due profonde

same instinct also told him that he had heard only part of the truth. His humanity prevented him from asking about the omission. As a sign that he was finished, he closed the notebook and slipped it back into his pocket.	pieghe scendevano dal naso agli angoli della bocca.
'Thank you, Signora. It was very kind of you to see me at this time.' He trailed off, unwilling to lapse again into euphemism or platitude.	«Ho soltanto poche altre domande», disse.
'Have you made arrangements for the funeral?'	«Gradirebbe qualcosa da bere?» Era chiaro che non stava facendo altro che mostrare una cortesia formale.
'Tomorrow. At ten. At San Moisè. Helmut loved the city and always hoped that he would have the privilege of being buried here.' The little that Brunetti had heard and read about the conductor made him doubt that the dead man would have viewed privilege as anything other than what he could bestow, but perhaps Venice had sufficient grandeur to be an exception.	«La ringrazio, ma no. Le farò queste domande e poi la lascerò in pace.» Lei annuì stancamente, quasi come se sapesse già che quelle erano le domande che lui era venuto a porle.
'I hope you have no objection if I attend.'	«Signora, vorrei sapere qualcosa del suo rapporto con suo marito.» La vide diventare visibilmente più distante e sulla difensiva. Annuì.
'No, of course not.'	«La differenza d'età tra voi era considerevole.» «Sì, lo era.» Lui rimase in silenzio, aspettando. Alla fine, lei disse, affermandolo senza ammetterlo, e per questo Brunetti la rispettò:
'I have one more question, also a painful one. Do you know of anyone who might have wanted to harm your husband? Is there anyone with whom he recently argued, anyone he might have had reason to	«Helmut aveva trentasette anni più di me.» Questo la rendeva di qualche anno più anziana di quanto lui avesse immaginato, più o meno dell'età di Paola. Wellauer era soltanto otto anni più giovane del nonno di Brunetti. Per quanto quel pensiero gli sembrasse strano, Brunetti cercò di non darne segno. Com'era stato, per questa

fear?' Her smile was small, but it was a smile. 'Does that mean,' she asked, 'can I think of anyone who might have wanted to kill him?' Brunetti nodded. 'His career was very long, and I'm sure he offended many people during it. Some people disliked him, surely. But I can't think of anyone who would do this.' Absently, she ran her finger along the arm of her chair. 'And no one who loved music could do this.' He rose to his feet and extended his hand. 'Thank you, Signora, for your time and your patience.' She stood and took his hand. 'Please don't bother,' he said, meaning that he would see himself out of the apartment. She dismissed his suggestion with a shake of her head and led him down the hall. At the door, they shook hands again, neither speaking. He left the apartment troubled by the interview, not quite sure if the reason was only the platitudes and excessive courtesies on his part or something he had been too dull to catch.	donna, vivere con un marito di quasi due generazioni più anziano di lei? Si accorse che si muoveva a disagio sotto il suo sguardo intenso e distolse gli occhi per un momento, come se stesse riflettendo su come formulare la domanda successiva. «La differenza d'età ha creato delle difficoltà nel vostro matrimonio?» Quanto era trasparente il velo di eufemismi che circondava sempre un'unione del genere. Per quanto educata, la domanda tradiva comunque una curiosità indiscreta, e lui se ne vergognò. Il silenzio di lei si protrasse così a lungo che non riuscì a capire se esprimesse disgusto per la sua curiosità o irritazione per l'artificiosità con cui l'aveva formulata. Infine, con voce improvvisamente molto stanca, disse: «A causa della differenza d'età, della differenza tra le nostre generazioni, vedevamo il mondo in modo diverso, ma l'ho sposato perché ero innamorata di lui.» L'istinto di Brunetti gli disse che aveva appena sentito la verità, ma lo stesso istinto gli suggerì anche che aveva sentito soltanto una parte della verità. La sua umanità gli impedì di chiedere conto di ciò che era stato taciuto. Come segno che aveva finito, chiuse il taccuino e lo rimise in tasca. «Grazie,

	Signora. È stata molto gentile a ricevermi in un momento come questo.» Lasciò la frase in sospeso, riluttante a ricadere negli eufemismi o nelle banalità. «Ha già preso accordi per il funerale?» «Domani. Alle dieci. A San Moisè. Helmut amava questa città e aveva sempre sperato di avere il privilegio di esservi sepolto.» Quel poco che Brunetti aveva sentito e letto sul direttore d'orchestra lo induceva a dubitare che l'uomo considerasse il privilegio come qualcosa di diverso da ciò che lui stesso poteva concedere agli altri; ma forse Venezia possedeva una grandezza sufficiente da costituire un'eccezione. «Spero che non abbia obiezioni se partecipo.» «No, certo che no.» «Ho un'ultima domanda, anche questa dolorosa. Le viene in mente qualcuno che potesse voler fare del male a suo marito? Qualcuno con cui suo marito avesse litigato di recente, qualcuno che suo marito potesse avere motivo di temere?» Il suo sorriso era lieve, ma pur sempre un sorriso. «Vuol dire», chiese, «se riesco a pensare a qualcuno che avrebbe potuto volerlo uccidere?» Brunetti annuì. «La sua carriera è stata molto lunga e sono

	sicura che, nel corso di essa, abbia offeso molte persone. Alcuni certamente non lo sopportavano. Ma non riesco a pensare a nessuno che sarebbe arrivato a tanto.» Distrattamente, fece scorrere un dito lungo il bracciolo della poltrona. «E nessuno che ami la musica potrebbe fare una cosa simile.» Lui si alzò e le porse la mano. «Grazie, Signora, per il suo tempo e la sua pazienza.» Lei si alzò e gli strinse la mano. «La prego, non si disturbi», disse lui, intendendo che avrebbe trovato da solo l'uscita dall'appartamento. Lei liquidò il suggerimento con un lieve movimento della testa e lo accompagnò lungo il corridoio. Giunti alla porta, si strinsero nuovamente la mano, senza dire una parola. Brunetti lasciò l'appartamento turbato dal colloquio, senza riuscire a capire se la causa fosse soltanto il ricorso alle banalità e alle eccessive cortesie da parte sua, oppure qualcosa che, per ottusità, non era stato capace di cogliere.

2.2 Chapter 11

The following morning, he arrived at the Questura at eight, carrying with him the	La mattina seguente arrivò in Questura alle otto, portando con sé i quotidiani, che

day's newspapers, which he read through quickly. There was little new information; most of it had been said the day before. The summaries of Wellauer's career were longer, the cries that the killer be brought to justice more strident, but there was nothing that Brunetti didn't already know.	sfogliò rapidamente. C'erano poche informazioni nuove; la maggior parte era già stata riportata il giorno prima. I resoconti della carriera di Wellauer erano più lunghi, gli appelli affinché l'assassino fosse assicurato alla giustizia si erano fatti più veementi, ma non c'era nulla che Brunetti già non sapesse.
The lab report was on his desk. The only fingerprints on the cup, in which traces of potassium cyanide were found, were Wellauer's. In the dressing room, there were scores of other prints, far too many to be checked. He decided against having prints taken. Since the only ones on the cup were Wellauer's, there seemed little sense in identifying all those found in the room.	Il rapporto del laboratorio era sulla sua scrivania. Le uniche impronte digitali trovate sulla tazza, nella quale erano state rinvenute tracce di cianuro di potassio, erano quelle di Wellauer. Nel camerino c'erano decine di altre impronte, troppe per essere controllate. Decise di non far rilevare altre impronte. Poiché sulla tazza c'erano soltanto quelle di Wellauer, non sembrava avere molto senso identificare tutte quelle trovate nella stanza.
Along with the fingerprint report was a list of articles found in the dressing room. He remembered having seen most of them: the score of Traviata, each page crowded with notations in the angular Gothic script of the conductor; a comb, a wallet, change; the clothes he had been wearing and those in the closet; a handkerchief and a package of mints. There had also been a Rolex Oyster, a pen, and a small address book.	Insieme al rapporto sulle impronte c'era un elenco degli oggetti rinvenuti nel camerino. Ricordava di averne visti la maggior parte: la partitura della Traviata, ogni pagina fitta di annotazioni nella grafia gotica e spigolosa del direttore d'orchestra; un pettine, un portafoglio, degli spiccioli; gli abiti che aveva indossato e quelli nell'armadio; un fazzoletto e una confezione di mentine. C'erano anche un Rolex Oyster, una penna e una piccola rubrica.
The officers who had gone to take a look at the conductor's home - one could hardly call it a search - had written a report, but since they had no idea of what they were	

supposed to be looking for, Brunetti had little hope that their report would reveal anything of interest or importance. Nevertheless, he picked it up and read through it carefully. The Maestro had had a remarkably complete wardrobe of a man who spent only a few weeks in the city each year. He marvelled at the precision of the notes made about the clothing: 'Black double-vent cashmere jacket (Duca D'Aosta); cobalt and muted-umber sweater, size 52 (Missoni).' For a moment, he wondered if he had lost his bearings and found himself in the Valentino boutique rather than in police headquarters. He flipped to the end and found, as he had feared, the signatures of Alvise and Riverre, the two officers who had written, a year ago, about a body that had been pulled out of the sea at the Lido: 'Appears to have died of suffocation.' He turned back to the report. The signora, it appeared, did not share her late husband's interest in clothing. Nor, from what he read, did it seem that Alvise and Riverre thought highly of her taste. 'Varese boots, only one pair. Black woolen	Gli agenti che erano andati a dare un'occhiata alla casa del direttore d'orchestra - difficilmente si sarebbe potuto parlare di una vera perquisizione - avevano redatto un rapporto, ma dato che non avevano idea di cosa dovessero cercare, Brunetti nutriva poche speranze che contenesse qualcosa di interessante o importante. Tuttavia, lo prese e lo lesse attentamente. Il Maestro possedeva un guardaroba sorprendentemente completo per un uomo che trascorreva in città soltanto poche settimane all'anno. Brunetti si meravigliò della precisione delle annotazioni sugli abiti: «Giacca di cashmere nera con doppio spacco posteriore (Duca D'Aosta); maglione color cobalto e terra d'ombra tenue, taglia 52 (Missoni)». Per un attimo si domandò se non avesse perso l'orientamento e fosse finito nella boutique Valentino invece che alla Questura. Sfogliò fino all'ultima pagina e vi trovò, come temeva, le firme di Alvise e Riverre, i due agenti che un anno prima avevano scritto, a proposito di un cadavere ripescato dal mare al Lido: «Sembra essere morto per soffocamento.» Tornò indietro nel rapporto. A quanto pareva, la signora non condivideva

coat, no label.' They had, however, apparently been impressed by the library, which they described as 'extensive, in three languages and what appears to be Hungarian'.	l'interesse del defunto marito per l'abbigliamento. Né, da quanto leggeva, sembrava che Alvise e Riverre apprezzassero particolarmente il suo gusto. «Stivali di Varese, un solo paio. Cappotto nero di lana, senza etichetta». Apparentemente, però, erano rimasti impressionati dalla biblioteca, che descrivevano come «vasta, in tre lingue e in quella che sembra essere ungherese.»
He turned another page. There were two guest rooms in the apartment, each with a separate bath. Fresh towels, empty closets, Christian Dior soap. There was no evidence of Signora Wellauer's daughter; nothing in the report suggested the presence in the house of the third member of the family. Neither of the two extra rooms held a teenager's clothes or books or possessions of any kind. Knowing how he was forever finding proof of his own daughter's existence under foot, Brunetti found this strange. Her mother had explained that she was going to school in Munich. But it was a remarkable child who managed to take all of her clutter along with her.	Voltò un'altra pagina. Nell'appartamento c'erano due camere per gli ospiti, ciascuna con bagno privato. Asciugamani puliti, armadi vuoti, sapone di Christian Dior. Non c'era alcuna traccia della figlia della signora Wellauer; nulla nel rapporto suggeriva la presenza in casa del terzo membro della famiglia. Nessuna delle due camere aggiuntive conteneva vestiti, libri o effetti personali che facessero pensare a un'adolescente. Sapendo quanto spesso trovasse per casa segni della presenza di sua figlia, Brunetti trovò la cosa strana. La madre della ragazza aveva spiegato che frequentava la scuola a Monaco, ma doveva essere una ragazza davvero fuori dal comune per riuscire a portarsi via tutte le sue cianfrusaglie.
There was a description of the Belgian maid's room, which the two officers appeared to have found too simply furnished, and of the maid, whom they had found subdued but helpful. The last room described was the Maestro's office, where they had found 'documents'. Some, it seems, had been brought back and looked over by the German translator, who	Seguiva una descrizione della stanza della domestica belga, che i due agenti sembravano aver trovato troppo

explained, in a page added to the report, that the bulk of them pertained to business and contracts. A datebook had been inspected and judged unimportant.	modestamente arredata, e della domestica stessa, che avevano giudicato dimessa ma collaborativa. L'ultima stanza descritta era l'ufficio del Maestro, dove avevano trovato dei documenti. Alcuni, a quanto pareva, erano stati riportati in Questura ed esaminati dal traduttore di tedesco, il quale spiegava, in una pagina aggiunta al rapporto, che la maggior parte riguardava affari e contratti. Era stata controllata anche un'agenda, ma era stata giudicata priva di importanza.
Brunetti decided to seek out the two authors of this document and thus spare himself the irritation of having to wait for them to respond to his request that they come up to his office. Since it was almost nine, he knew that he would find them down the street at the bar on the other side of the Ponte dei Greci. It was not the precise hour but the fact that it was before noon that made this conclusion inescapable.	Brunetti decise di andare a cercare i due autori di quel documento e risparmiarsi così il fastidio di dover aspettare che rispondessero alla richiesta di salire nel suo ufficio. Poiché erano quasi le nove, sapeva che li avrebbe trovati nel bar dall'altra parte del Ponte dei Greci. Non era tanto l'ora precisa quanto il fatto che fosse ancora di prima mattina a suggerirgli dove trovarli.
Though Brunetti dreaded the assignment of the two men to any case he was working on, he couldn’t help liking them. Alvise was a squat man in his late forties, almost a caricature of the dark-skinned Sicilian, save that he came from Tarvisio, on the border with Austria. He was accepted as the resident expert on popular music, this because he had once, fifteen years ago, actually had a programme autographed by Mina, the mythic queen of Italian popular singing. Over the years, this event had swelled and expanded - as had Mina - by repeated retelling, until Alvise now suggested, eyes bright with the glitter of satisfied desire, that far more had gone on	Sebbene Brunetti temesse sempre l'assegnazione di quei due uomini a qualsiasi caso su cui stesse lavorando, non poteva fare a meno di trovarli simpatici. Alvise era un uomo tarchiato sulla quarantina avanzata, quasi una caricatura del siciliano dalla pelle scura, se non fosse che proveniva da Tarvisio, al confine con l'Austria. Era considerato l'esperto ufficiale di musica

between them. The retelling seemed not at all affected by the fact that the singer was a head taller than Alvise and was now almost twice his girth. Riverre, his partner, was a red-haired Palermitano, whose only interests in life appeared to be soccer and women, in that order. The high point in his life to date was having survived the riot in the Brussels soccer stadium. He augmented his account of what he had done there, before the Belgian police arrived, with tales of his triumphs with women, usually foreigners, who, he claimed, fell like wheat before the sickle of his charms. Brunetti found them, as he had expected, standing at the counter in the bar. Riverre was reading the sports newspaper, and Alvise was talking with Arianna, the woman who owned the bar. Neither noticed Brunetti's arrival until he came up to the bar and ordered a coffee. At that, Alvise smiled in greeting and Riverre pulled his attention away from the paper long enough to greet his superior. 'Two more coffees, Arianna,' Alvise said,'all three on my bill'. Brunetti recognized the manoeuvre, aimed at putting him in the other's debt. By the	leggera, e questo perché una volta, quindici anni prima, era riuscito a farsi autografare il programma di uno spettacolo da Mina, la mitica regina della canzone italiana. Nel corso degli anni quell'episodio si era ingigantito e dilatato - proprio come Mina - a forza di essere raccontato, finché Alvise ormai lasciava intendere, con gli occhi accesi dal compiacimento, che tra loro fosse accaduto ben altro. Il racconto sembrava non risentire affatto del fatto che la cantante fosse più alta di una testa rispetto ad Alvise e avesse ormai quasi il doppio della sua circonferenza. Riverre, il suo compagno, era un palermitano dai capelli rossi, i cui unici interessi nella vita sembravano essere il calcio e le donne, in quest'ordine. Il momento più importante della sua esistenza fino ad allora era stato essere sopravvissuto agli scontri nello stadio di Bruxelles. Al racconto di ciò che aveva fatto laggiù, prima dell'arrivo della polizia belga, aggiungeva storie delle sue conquiste femminili, generalmente straniere, che, sosteneva lui, venivano falciate dal suo fascino come spighe di grano. Brunetti li trovò dove si aspettava: in piedi al bancone del bar. Riverre stava leggendo il giornale sportivo e Alvise chiacchierava con Arianna, la proprietaria del locale. Nessuno

time the three coffees arrived, Riverre stood with them, and the newspaper had somehow been transformed into a blue-covered case file, which now lay open on the counter. Brunetti spooned in two sugars and swirled his spoon around. 'Is it you two who went to the Maestro's house?' 'Yes, sir,' brightly, from Alvise. 'And what a house it is!' chimed in Riverre. 'I've just been looking at your report.' 'Arianna, bring us some brioches.' 'I read it with great interest.' 'Thank you, sir'. 'Particularly your comments about his wardrobe. I take it you didn't like those English suits.' 'No, sir,' replied Riverre, as usual not getting it. 'I think they're cut too loose in the leg.' Alvise, reaching along the counter to open the file, accidentally nudged his partner in the arm, perhaps a bit harder than was necessary. 'Anything else, sir?' he asked.	dei due si accorse dell'arrivo di Brunetti finché lui non si avvicinò al bancone e ordinò un caffè. A quel punto Alvise sorrise per salutarlo e Riverre distolse l'attenzione dal giornale quel tanto che bastava per rivolgere un saluto al suo superiore. «Altri due caffè, Arianna», disse Alvise. «Tutti e tre sul mio conto.» Brunetti riconobbe subito la manovra, volta a metterlo in debito nei suoi confronti. Quando arrivarono i tre caffè, Riverre si era unito a loro e il giornale sportivo si era misteriosamente trasformato in un fascicolo d'indagine dalla copertina blu, ora aperto sul bancone. Brunetti versò due cucchiaini di zucchero e mescolò lentamente. «Siete stati voi due ad andare a casa del Maestro?» «Sì, commissario», rispose prontamente Alvise. «E che casa!» aggiunse Riverre. «Ho appena letto il vostro rapporto.» Si rivolse ad Arianna: «Portaci anche delle brioche.» Poi riprese: «L'ho letto con grande interesse.»

‘Yes. While you were there, did you notice any sign of the signora’s daughter?’	«Grazie, commissario.»
‘Is there a daughter, sir?’ This, predictably, from Riverre.	«Soprattutto i vostri commenti sul guardaroba. Deduco che non vi piacessero quei completi inglesi.»
‘That’s why I’m asking you. Was there any sign of a child? Books? Clothes?’	«No, commissario», rispose Riverre, come al solito senza cogliere l'ironia. «Credo che siano troppo larghi sulle gambe.»
Both showed signs of deep thought. Riverre stared off into space, which he seemed to find closer than most people did, and Alvise looked down at the floor, hands thrust into his uniform pockets. The requisite minute passed before they both answered,	Alvise, allungandosi sul bancone per aprire il fascicolo, urtò accidentalmente il braccio del collega, forse con un po’ più di forza del necessario.
‘No, sir,’ at the same time, almost as if they had practised it.	«Altro, commissario?» chiese Alvise.
‘Nothing at all?’	«Sì. Mentre eravate là, avete notato qualche traccia della presenza della figlia della signora?»
Again their separate displays, then the simultaneous response:	«C’è una figlia, commissario?» domandò Riverre, prevedibilmente.
‘No, sir.’	«È proprio per questo che lo chiedo. C’era qualche traccia di una ragazza? Libri? Vestiti?»
‘Did you speak to the maid, the Belgian?’	Entrambi mostrarono segni di profonda riflessione. Riverre fissò il vuoto, che sembrava trovare più vicino della maggior parte delle persone, mentre Alvise guardò il pavimento con le mani infilate nelle tasche della divisa. Trascorse il minuto regolamentare prima che rispondessero
Riverre rolled his eyes at the memory of the maid, suggesting that any time spent with such a stick of a woman was time wasted, even if she was a foreigner. Alvise contented himself with	
‘Yes, sir.’	

‘And did she tell you anything that might be important?’ Riverre drew in a breath, preparing himself to answer, but before he could begin, his partner said: ‘Nothing she actually said, sir. But I got the impression she didn’t like the signora.’ Riverre couldn’t let this pass and asked, with a lurid smile ‘What’s not to like there?’ putting heavy emphasis on the last word. Brunetti gave him a cool glance and asked his partner ‘Why?’ ‘It was nothing I could put my finger on,’ he began. Riverre snorted. So much for the effectiveness of his cool glance. ‘As I was saying, sir, it was nothing definite, but she seemed much more formal when the signora was there. Be hard for her to be more formal than she was with us, but it just seemed that way. She seemed to, I don’t know, get cooler when the signora was there, especially when she had to speak to her.’ ‘And when was that?’	insieme: «No, commissario.» Quasi come se avessero studiato la risposta. «Niente di niente?» Di nuovo le loro diverse manifestazioni di concentrazione, seguite dalla risposta simultanea: «No, commissario.» «Avete parlato con la domestica, la belga?» Riverre alzò gli occhi al cielo al ricordo della donna, come a suggerire che qualsiasi minuto trascorso con una persona tanto rigida e algida fosse tempo sprecato, anche se straniera. Alvise si limitò a dire: «Sì, commissario.» «E vi ha detto qualcosa che potrebbe essere importante?» Riverre inspirò, preparandosi a rispondere, ma prima che potesse farlo il collega disse: «Niente che abbia detto esplicitamente, commissario. Però ho avuto l’impressione che non le piacesse la signora.» Riverre non poté lasciar correre. «E cosa ci sarebbe da non apprezzare?» chiese con un sorriso lascivo, calcando pesantemente sull’ultima parola. Brunetti gli lanciò un’occhiata gelida e si rivolse ad Alvise. «Perché?»

‘When we first went in. We asked her if it would be all right if we had a look around the apartment, at his things. From the way she answered us, I mean the signora, sir, it looked like she didn’t like the idea very much. But she told us to go ahead, and then she called the maid and told her to show us where his things were. It was then, when they were talking to each other, that the maid seemed, well, cold. Later, when she was talking to us, she seemed better. Didn’t warm up or anything - after all, she is Belgian - but she was better with us, more friendly, than she was with the other one.’	«Non saprei dire esattamente», cominciò. Riverre sbuffò. Non era servita a molto, quell’occhiata gelida. «Come stavo dicendo, commissario, non c’era nulla di concreto, ma sembrava molto più formale quando la signora era presente. Sarebbe difficile essere più formale di quanto lo fosse con noi, ma mi dava proprio quell’impressione. Mi sembrava che diventasse, non so, più fredda quando la signora era lì, soprattutto quando doveva parlarle.»
‘Did you speak to the signora again?’	«E quando è successo?»
‘Just before we were leaving, sir. We had the papers with us. She didn’t like it that we were taking them with us. It was just a look, but it’s the way she made us feel. We asked her if we could take the papers. We had to; it’s the regulation.’	«Quando siamo entrati. Le abbiamo chiesto se potessimo dare un’occhiata all’appartamento, alle sue cose. Dal modo in cui ci ha risposto, la signora, sembrava che l’idea non le piacesse molto. Però ci ha detto di procedere e poi ha chiamato la domestica, ordinandole di mostrarci dove si trovavano gli effetti personali del marito. È stato allora, mentre parlavano tra loro, che la domestica è sembrata... be’, fredda. Più tardi, quando parlava con noi, era diversa. Non che si sia sciolta o altro - dopotutto è belga - ma era meglio con noi, più cordiale di quanto fosse con l’altra.»
‘Yes, I know,’ Brunetti answered.	
‘Anything else?’	
‘Yes,’ chimed in Riverre.	
‘What?’	
‘She didn’t mind it when we looked through his clothing and closets. She sent the maid	«Avete parlato di nuovo con la signora?»

with us, didn't even bother to come herself. But when we went into the other room, where the papers were, then she came along and told the maid to wait outside. She didn't like us looking at that stuff, sir, papers and things.'	«Poco prima di andarcene, commissario. Avevamo con noi i documenti. Non le è piaciuto che li portassimo via. È stato solo uno sguardo, ma ci ha dato quell'impressione. Le abbiamo chiesto il permesso di prenderli. Dovevamo farlo, è il regolamento.»
'And what were they?'	«Sì, lo so», rispose Brunetti. «Altro?»
'They looked official, sir. It was all in German, and we brought it back here to be translated.'	«Sì», intervenne Riverre.
'Yes, I've seen the report. What happened to the papers, after they were translated?'	«Cosa?»
'I don't know, sir,' answered Alvise.	«Non le dava fastidio che controllassimo i vestiti e gli armadi del marito. Ha mandato la domestica con noi e non si è nemmeno presa il disturbo di venire personalmente. Ma quando siamo entrati nell'altra stanza, quella dove c'erano i documenti, allora ci ha accompagnati e ha detto alla domestica di aspettare fuori. Non le piaceva che guardassimo quella roba, commissario. Carte e cose del genere.»
'Either they're still down with the translator or they were sent back to her.'	«E di che cosa si trattava?»
'Riverre, could you go and find out for me?'	«Sembravano documenti ufficiali, commissario. Era tutto in tedesco e li abbiamo portati qui per farli tradurre.»
'Now, sir?'	«Sì, ho visto il rapporto. Che fine hanno fatto i documenti dopo la traduzione?»
'Yes, sir.'	«Non lo so, commissario», rispose Alvise. «O
'Yes, sir.' He sketched out something that resembled a salute and moved away from the bar with deliberate slowness.	
'And, Riverre,' he called out after him. Riverre turned, hoping to be called back and spared the walk to the Questura and the two flights of stairs.	

‘If the papers are there, have them sent up to my office.’ Brunetti picked up one of the brioches that lay on a plate in front of them and took a bite. He signalled to Arianna to make him another coffee. ‘While you were there,’ he asked Alvise, ‘did you notice anything else?’ ‘What kind of things, sir?’ As though they were meant to see only those things they were sent to look for. ‘Anything. You mentioned the tension between the two women. Did either of them seem to act strangely?’ Alvise thought for a moment, took a bite from one of the brioches, and answered, ‘No, sir.’ Seeing that Brunetti was disappointed with this answer, he added, ‘Only when we took the papers.’ ‘Do you have any idea why that might be?’ ‘No, sir. Only she was so different from how she was when we looked at his personal things, as if that didn’t matter at all. I’d sort of think that people wouldn’t like that, poking around in someone’s clothing. But papers are just papers.’ Seeing that this last remark had clearly garnered Brunetti’s interest, he grew more expansive.	sono ancora dal traduttore oppure sono stati restituiti alla signora.» «Riverre, puoi andare a scoprirlo?» «Adesso, commissario?» «Sì.» «Sissignore!» Accennò qualcosa che somigliava a un saluto militare e si allontanò dal bancone con deliberata lentezza. «E, Riverre», lo richiamò Brunetti. Riverre si voltò, sperando che lo richiamasse e gli risparmiasse la camminata fino alla Questura e le due rampe di scale. «Se i documenti sono lì, falli mandare nel mio ufficio.» Brunetti prese una delle brioche sul piatto davanti a loro e ne addentò un pezzo. Fece segno ad Arianna di portargli un altro caffè. «Mentre eravate là», chiese ad Alvise, «avete notato qualcos’altro?» «Che genere di cose, commissario?» Come se dovessero notare soltanto ciò che era stato ordinato loro di cercare. «Qualsiasi cosa. Hai parlato della tensione tra le due donne. Ti è sembrato che una delle

‘But maybe it’s because he was a genius. Of course, I wouldn’t know about that sort of music.’ Brunetti braced himself for the inevitable. ‘The only singer I know personally is Mina, and she never sang with him. But as I was saying, if he was famous, then maybe the papers might be important. There might be things in them about, you know, music.’ At that moment, Riverre came back. ‘Sorry, sir, but the papers have been sent back.’ ‘How? Mailed?’ ‘No, sir, the translator took them himself. He said that the widow would probably need some of them.’ Brunetti stepped back from the bar and reached for his wallet. He put ten thousand lire on the counter before either of the two uniformed men could object. ‘Thank you, sir.’ They both said. ‘It’s nothing.’ When he turned to leave, neither of them made a move to accompany him, though both did salute. The porter at the Questura’s door told him that Vice-Questore Patta	due si comportasse in modo strano?» Alvise rifletté un momento, addentò una brioche e rispose: «No, commissario.» Vedendo che Brunetti non sembrava soddisfatto della risposta, aggiunse: «Solo quando abbiamo preso i documenti.» «Hai qualche idea del perché?» «No, commissario. È solo che era così diversa da come si comportava quando guardavamo le sue cose personali, come se quelle non contassero affatto. Io avrei pensato che alla gente non piacesse vedere qualcuno frugare tra i vestiti di una persona. Ma in fondo sono solo documenti.» Notando che quell’ultima osservazione aveva chiaramente attirato l’attenzione di Brunetti, si lasciò andare a qualche considerazione in più. «Però forse è perché lui era un genio. Naturalmente io non me ne intendo di quel genere di musica.» Brunetti si preparò all’inevitabile. «L’unica cantante che conosco personalmente è Mina e non ha mai cantato con lui. Ma, come stavo dicendo, se fosse stato famoso, allora forse quei documenti avrebbero potuto essere importanti. Magari

wanted to see him immediately in his office. 'Gesù Bambino,' Brunetti exclaimed under his breath, an expression he had learned from his mother, who, like him, used it only when pressed beyond the limits of human patience. At the door to his commander's office, he knocked and was careful to wait for the shouted 'Avanti!' before entering. As he had expected, he found Patta posed behind his desk, a stack of files fanned out in front of him. He ignored Brunetti for a moment, continuing to read the paper he had in his hand. Brunetti contented himself with examining the faint traces of a fresco that had once been painted on the ceiling. Patta looked up suddenly, feigned surprise at seeing Brunetti, and asked, 'Where are you?' Brunetti mirrored Patta's apparent confusion, as though he found the question peculiar but didn't want to call attention to it. 'In your office, sir.' 'No, no, where are you on the case?' Waving Brunetti to one of the low ormolu chairs in	contenevano qualcosa sulla musica, sa.» In quel momento Riverre tornò. «Mi dispiace, commissario, ma i documenti sono stati restituiti.» «Come? Per posta?» «No, commissario. Il traduttore li ha portati personalmente. Ha detto che probabilmente la vedova avrebbe avuto bisogno di alcuni di quei documenti.» Brunetti si allontanò dal bancone e tirò fuori il portafoglio. Posò diecimila lire sul banco prima che uno dei due agenti in uniforme potesse protestare. «Grazie, commissario», dissero entrambi. «Non è nulla.» Quando si voltò per andarsene, nessuno dei due fece un gesto per accompagnarlo, anche se entrambi lo salutarono militarmente. Il portiere all'ingresso della Questura gli disse che il vicequestore Patta desiderava vederlo immediatamente nel suo ufficio. «Gesù Bambino», esclamò Brunetti sottovoce, un'espressione che aveva imparato da sua madre che, come lui, la usava soltanto quando veniva spinta oltre i limiti della pazienza umana. Giunto alla porta dell'ufficio del suo superiore, bussò e si premurò di attendere il

front of his desk, he picked up his pen and began to tap it on the desk top. 'I've interviewed the widow and two of the people who were in the dressing room. I've spoken to the doctor, and I know the cause of death.' 'I know all that,' Patta said, increasing the rhythm of the pen and making no attempt to hide his irritation. 'In other words, you've learned nothing important?' 'Yes, sir, I suppose you could put it that way.' 'You know, Brunetti, I've given a lot of thought to this investigation, and I think it might be wise to take you off the case.' Patta's voice was heavy with menace, as though he'd spent the previous night paging through his copy of Machiavelli. 'Yes, sir.' 'I could, I suppose, give it to someone else to investigate. Perhaps then we'd have some real progress.' 'I don't think Mariani's working on anything at the moment.' It was only with the exercise of great self-restraint that Patta kept himself from	grido di «Avanti!» prima di entrare. Come si aspettava, trovò Patta in posa dietro la scrivania, con una pila di fascicoli aperti a ventaglio davanti a sé. Patta lo ignorò per un momento, continuando a leggere il foglio che teneva in mano. Brunetti si limitò a osservare le deboli tracce di un affresco che un tempo decorava il soffitto. Patta alzò improvvisamente lo sguardo, finse di sorprenderlo lì e chiese: «Dove sei?» Brunetti finse a sua volta di non capire, come se trovasse la domanda strana ma non volesse farlo notare. «Nel suo ufficio, signor vicequestore.» «No, no. A che punto sei con il caso?» Facendogli cenno di accomodarsi su una delle basse poltroncine con rifiniture dorate davanti alla scrivania, prese la penna e cominciò a tamburellarla sul piano. «Ho interrogato la vedova e due delle persone che si trovavano nel camerino. Ho parlato con il medico e conosco la causa della morte.» «Questo lo so già», disse Patta, aumentando il ritmo dei colpi della penna e senza fare alcuno sforzo per nascondere la propria irritazione. «In altre parole, non hai scoperto nulla di

wincing at the mention of the name of the younger of the two other commissarios of police, a man of unimpeachable character and impenetrable stupidity who was known to have gotten his job as part of his wife's dowry, she being the niece of the former mayor. His other colleague, Brunetti knew, was currently involved in the investigation of the drug traffic at the port of Marghera. 'Or perhaps you could take it over yourself,' he suggested, and then added with tantalizing lateness, 'sir'. 'Yes, that's always a possibility,' Patta said, either not registering the rudeness or deciding to ignore it. He took a package of dark-papered Russian cigarettes from his desk and fitted one into his onyx holder. Very nice, Brunetti thought; colour coordinated. 'I've called you in because I've had some phone calls from the press and from People in High Places,' he said, carefully emphasizing all the capitals. 'And they're very concerned that you've done nothing.' This time, the enunciation fell very heavily upon the singular. He puffed delicately at the cigarette and stared across at Brunetti.	importante?» «Sì, signore. Suppongo che si possa dire così.» «Sai, Brunetti, ho riflettuto molto su questa indagine e credo che potrebbe essere opportuno toglierti il caso.» La voce di Patta era carica di minaccia, come se avesse trascorso la notte precedente a sfogliare il suo libro di Machiavelli. «Sì, signore.» «Potrei, suppongo, affidarlo a qualcun altro. Forse allora faremmo qualche progresso concreto.» «Non credo che Mariani stia lavorando a qualcosa in questo momento.» Solo grazie a un notevole autocontrollo Patta riuscì a non trasalire alla menzione del nome del più giovane degli altri due commissari di polizia: un uomo di irreprensibile integrità e di impenetrabile stupidità, noto per aver ottenuto il posto come parte della dote della moglie, nipote dell'ex sindaco. L'altro collega, sapeva Brunetti, era invece impegnato nell'indagine sul traffico di droga nel porto di Marghera. «Oppure potrebbe occuparsene lei stesso», suggerì, aggiungendo, con irritante ritardo:

‘Did you hear me? They’re not pleased.’	«signore».
‘I can see how that would be, sir. I’ve got a dead genius and no one to blame for it.’	«Sì, è sempre una possibilità», rispose Patta, senza accorgersi della scortesia o decidendo di ignorarla. Prese dalla scrivania un pacchetto di sigarette russe avvolto in carta scura e ne inserì una in un bocchino d’onice. Niente male, pensò Brunetti: tutto perfettamente in tinta.
Was he wrong, or did he see Patta mouth that last one silently to himself, perhaps preparing to toss it off himself at lunch today?	
‘Yes, exactly,’ Patta said. His lips moved again.	«Ti ho fatto chiamare perché ho ricevuto alcune telefonate dalla stampa e da Persone Che Contano», disse, sottolineando con cura ogni maiuscola.
‘And no one to blame for it.’ Patta deepened his voice.	
‘I want that to change. I want someone to blame for it.’ Brunetti had never before heard the man so clearly express his idea of justice. Perhaps Brunetti would toss that off at lunch today.	«E sono molto preoccupate dal fatto che tu non abbia fatto nulla.»
	Questa volta calcò pesantemente sul pronome «tu».
‘From now on, Brunetti, I want a written report on my desk each morning by’ - he paused, trying to remember when the office opened - ‘by eight,’ he said, getting it right.	Diede una delicata boccata alla sigaretta e fissò Brunetti dall’altra parte della scrivania.
	«Mi hai sentito? Non sono affatto contenti.»
‘Yes, sir. Will that be all?’ It made little difference to Brunetti whether the report had to be spoken or written; he would still have nothing to report until he had a clearer idea of the man who had been killed. Genius or not, the answer always lay there.	«Posso capire il motivo, signore. Ho un genio morto e nessuno a cui dare la colpa.»
	Brunetti si sbagliava, oppure aveva davvero visto Patta mormorare tra sé e sé quell’ultima frase, forse preparandosi a sfoderarla lui stesso a pranzo?
‘No, that’s not all. What do you plan to do	«Sì, esatto», disse Patta. Le sue labbra si

with yourself today?' 'I'm going to go to the funeral. That's in about twenty minutes. And I want to have a look through his papers myself.' 'Is that all?' 'Yes, sir.' Patta snorted. 'No wonder we're getting nowhere.' That seemed to signal the end of the interview, so Brunetti got to his feet and went towards the door, wondering how close he would get before Patta would remind him of the written report. He estimated he was still three steps from the door when he heard: 'Remember, eight o'clock.' His meeting with Patta kept Brunetti from getting to the church of San Moisè until just a few minutes before ten. The black boat carrying the flower-covered casket was already moored to the side of the canal, and three blue-suited men were busy placing the wooden casket on the wheeled metal platform they would use to take it to the door of the church. In the host of people who crowded around the front of the church, Brunetti recognized a few familiar	mossero di nuovo. «E nessuno a cui dare la colpa.» Patta assunse un tono più grave. «Voglio che questo cambi. Voglio qualcuno a cui dare la colpa.» Brunetti non aveva mai sentito l'uomo esprimere con tanta chiarezza la sua idea di giustizia. Forse sarebbe stato lui a sfoderare quella frase a pranzo. «Da ora in poi, Brunetti, voglio un rapporto scritto sulla mia scrivania ogni mattina entro...» Si fermò, cercando di ricordare a che ora aprisse l'ufficio. «Entro le otto», disse, questa volta azzeccando l'orario. «Sì, signore. È tutto?» Per Brunetti cambiava poco che il rapporto dovesse essere orale o scritto: non avrebbe comunque avuto niente da riferire finché non avesse avuto un'idea più chiara dell'uomo che era stato ucciso. Genio o no, la risposta si trovava sempre lì. «No, non è tutto. Che cosa pensi di fare oggi?» «Andrò al funerale. Inizia tra circa venti minuti. E voglio dare personalmente un'occhiata ai suoi documenti.» «È tutto?»

Venetian faces, the usual reporters and photographers from the papers, but he didn't see the widow; she must already have entered the church. As the three men reached the doors, a fourth man joined them, and they lifted the coffin, placed it with practised ease on their shoulders, and ascended the two low steps of the church. Brunetti was among the people who followed them inside. He watched the men carry the casket up the centre aisle and place it on a low stand before the main altar. Brunetti took a seat at the end of a pew at the rear of the crowded church. With difficulty, he could see between the heads of the people in front of him to the first row, where the widow, in black, sat between a man and a woman, both grey-haired, probably the people he had seen with her in the theatre. Behind her, alone in a pew, sat another woman in black, whom Brunetti assumed to be the maid. Though he'd had no expectations regarding the mass, Brunetti was surprised by the starkness of the ceremony. The most remarkable thing about it was the complete absence of music, even an organ. The familiar words floated over the heads of the crowd, the ageless sprinklings and blessings were performed. Because of its simplicity, the mass was quickly over.	«Sissignore.» Patta sbuffò. «Non c'è da stupirsi se non stiamo andando da nessuna parte.» Quello sembrò segnare la fine del colloquio, così Brunetti si alzò e si avviò verso la porta, chiedendosi fino a dove sarebbe arrivato prima che Patta gli ricordasse del rapporto scritto. Calcolò di essere ancora a tre passi dalla porta quando sentì: «Ricordati: alle otto.» Per via dell'incontro con Patta Brunetti arrivò alla chiesa di San Moisè solo pochi minuti prima delle dieci. La barca nera che trasportava la bara ricoperta di fiori era già ormeggiata lungo il canale, e tre uomini in abito blu stavano sistemando la bara di legno sulla piattaforma metallica con ruote che avrebbero usato per portarla fino alla porta della chiesa. Tra la folla che si accalcava davanti alla chiesa, Brunetti riconobbe alcuni volti veneziani familiari, i soliti giornalisti e fotografi dei quotidiani, ma non vide la vedova; doveva essere già entrata nella chiesa. Quando i tre uomini raggiunsero le porte, un quarto si unì a loro e sollevarono la bara, posandola con gesti esperti sulle spalle, poi

Brunetti waited at the end of the pew as the casket was carried past, waited until the chief mourners left the church. Outside, cameras flashed and reporters surrounded the widow, who cringed back against the elderly man who accompanied her. Without thinking, Brunetti pushed his way through the crowd and took her other arm. He recognized a few of the photographers, saw that they knew who he was, and ordered them to move away. The men who had surrounded the widow backed off, leaving a path open towards the boats that stood at the side of the campo. Supporting her, he led the widow towards the boat, helped her as she stepped down onto the deck, and then followed her into the passenger cabin. The couple who had been with her in the theatre joined her there; the grey-haired woman put her arm around the shoulder of the younger, and the man contented himself with sitting beside her and taking her hand. Brunetti placed himself at the cabin door and watched as the boat carrying the casket cast off and began moving slowly up the narrow canal. When they were safely away from the church and the crowds, he ducked his head and went back into the cabin. 'Thank you,' Signora Wellauer said, making no attempt to hide her tears. There was	salirono i due bassi gradini della chiesa. Brunetti fu tra quelli che li seguirono all'interno. Li osservò portare la bara lungo la navata centrale e collocarla su un basso supporto davanti all'altare maggiore. Brunetti prese posto all'estremità di una panca, nella parte posteriore della chiesa gremita. Con difficoltà riusciva a vedere, tra le teste delle persone davanti a lui, la prima fila, dove la vedova, vestita di nero, sedeva tra un uomo e una donna entrambi dai capelli grigi, probabilmente le stesse persone che aveva visto con lei a teatro. Dietro di lei, sola su una panca, sedeva un'altra donna in nero, che Brunetti immaginò fosse la domestica. Anche se non aveva particolari aspettative riguardo alla messa, Brunetti rimase sorpreso dall'austerità della cerimonia. L'aspetto più notevole era la totale assenza di musica, persino dell'organo. Le parole familiari fluttuavano sopra le teste della folla, si compivano le consuete aspersioni e benedizioni. Proprio per la sua semplicità, la messa terminò rapidamente. Brunetti aspettò in fondo alla panca che la bara venisse portata via, aspettò che le persone più vicine al defunto uscissero dalla chiesa. Fuori, i flash delle macchine fotografiche lampeggiavano e i giornalisti

nothing he could say. The boat moved out into the Grand Canal and turned left, towards San Marco, which they would have to pass in order to get to the cemetery. Brunetti went back to the cabin door and looked forward, taking his intrusive gaze away from the grief within. The campanile floated by them, then the chequered rectangle of the Ducal Palace, and then those happy, carefree domes. When they were approaching the Arsenale canal, Brunetti went up on deck and asked the boatman if he could stop at the embarcadero of the Palasport. He went back into the cabin and heard the three people there conversing in low voices. 'Dottor Brunetti,' the widow said. He turned from the cabin door and looked back at her. 'Thank you. That would have been too much, back there.' He nodded in agreement. The boat began the broad left turn that would take them into the canal of the Arsenale. 'I'd like to speak to you again,' he said, 'whenever it would be convenient for you.' 'Is it necessary?' 'Yes, I believe it is.' The motor hummed a	circondavano la vedova, che indietreggiava appoggiandosi all'uomo anziano che l'accompagnava. Senza pensarci, Brunetti si fece largo tra la folla e le prese l'altro braccio. Riconobbe alcuni fotografi, vide che lo avevano identificato, e ordinò loro di allontanarsi. Gli uomini che circondavano la vedova indietreggiarono, lasciando libero il passaggio verso le barche ormeggiate accanto al campo. Sostenendola, la accompagnò fino alla barca, l'aiutò a scendere sul ponte e poi la seguì nella cabina passeggeri. La coppia che era stata con lei a teatro li raggiunse; la donna dai capelli grigi mise un braccio attorno alle spalle della più giovane, mentre l'uomo si limitò a sedersi accanto a lei prendendole la mano. Brunetti si sistemò presso la porta della cabina e osservò la barca che trasportava la bara staccarsi dall'ormeggio e procedere lentamente lungo lo stretto canale. Quando si furono allontanati dalla chiesa e dalla folla, chinò il capo e rientrò nella cabina. «Grazie», disse la signora Wellauer, senza cercare di nascondere le lacrime.

deeper note as the boat pulled towards the landing platform that stood on the right side of the canal. 'When?' 'Tomorrow?' If she was surprised or the others were offended, they gave no sign. 'All right,' she said. 'In the afternoon.' 'Thank you,' he said as the boat hovered at the wooden landing. No one answered him, so he left the cabin, jumped from the boat onto the platform, and stood there as the boat pulled back into line, following the casket out into the deeper waters of the laguna.	Non c'era nulla che lui potesse dire. La barca sbucò nel Canal Grande e svoltò a sinistra, verso San Marco, che avrebbero dovuto oltrepassare per raggiungere il cimitero. Brunetti tornò alla porta della cabina e guardò davanti a sé, per non invadere con lo sguardo il dolore che si trovava raccolto all'interno della cabina. Il campanile scivolò accanto a loro, poi la facciata a losanghe del Palazzo Ducale e infine quelle cupole allegre e spensierate. Quando si avvicinarono al canale dell'Arsenale, Brunetti salì sul ponte e chiese al barcaiolo se potesse fermarsi all'imbarcadero del Palasport. Tornò nella cabina e sentì le tre persone parlare a bassa voce. «Dottor Brunetti», disse la vedova. Dalla porta della cabina, si voltò a guardarla. «Grazie. Sarebbe stato troppo, là fuori.» Brunetti annuì in segno di accordo. La barca iniziò l'ampia curva a sinistra che li avrebbe condotti nel canale dell'Arsenale. «Vorrei parlarle di nuovo», disse, «quando le sarà più comodo.» «È necessario?»

	«Sì, credo di sì.» Il motore emise un suono più profondo mentre la barca si avvicinava al pontile sulla destra del canale. «Quando?» «Domani?» Se lei era sorpresa o gli altri erano offesi, non lo mostrarono. «Va bene», disse. «Nel pomeriggio.» «Grazie», disse lui mentre la barca ondeggiava accanto all'approdo di legno. Nessuno gli rispose, così uscì dalla cabina, saltò dalla barca sulla piattaforma e rimase lì a guardare la barca riallinearsi, seguendo la bara verso le acque più profonde della laguna.

Chapter 3: Translation Commentary

This chapter presents a translation commentary on the translated versions of Chapters 9 and 11 of *Death at La Fenice*. The aim of the commentary is to analyse the main translation challenges encountered during the translation process and to justify the strategies adopted to produce a target text that is both accurate and natural for an Italian readership.

Rather than providing a sentence-by-sentence comparison between the source text and the target text, the analysis focuses on a selection of significant examples that illustrate the most relevant linguistic, stylistic, and cultural issues. Particular attention is paid to the translation of culture-specific items, register, dialogue, narrative style, and pragmatic aspects of communication. These elements were selected because they required conscious translation decisions and had a direct impact on the overall readability and coherence of the target text.

The discussion is informed by established theories in Translation Studies, including the concepts of domestication and foreignization, translation procedures and the notion of explicitation, and the treatment of culture-specific items. These theoretical frameworks provide the basis for analysing the translator's choices and evaluating how they contribute to preserving both the semantic content and the stylistic features of the original text.

The purpose of this commentary is not to identify a single “correct” translation, but rather to demonstrate the reasoning behind the translation choices and to reflect critically on the compromises that literary translation inevitably entails. As literary translation involves the negotiation between linguistic accuracy, stylistic fidelity, and cultural accessibility, the commentary seeks to highlight how these competing demands were balanced throughout the translation process.

3.1 The Paradox of Translating an Already Italianised Setting

The translation of *Death at La Fenice* involves a particular paradox that distinguishes this text from many conventional English-to-Italian translation projects. Although English is the language of the source text, Italy, and Venice in particular, constitutes the cultural environment in which the story unfolds. The reader encounters an English-language narrative whose characters, institutions, geographical spaces, customs, and everyday life are

predominantly Italian. The translator is therefore faced with a situation in which the linguistic source culture and the represented cultural setting do not completely coincide.

This distinction is important because translation normally involves the transfer of a text from one linguistic and cultural context into another. In the case of *Death at La Fenice*, however, the cultural distance between source and target is considerably reduced at the level of the represented world. An Italian reader is already familiar with many of the institutions, places, customs, and cultural references that are introduced as part of the fictional environment. What changes most significantly is therefore not the cultural world represented by the novel, but the linguistic medium through which that world is presented.

This creates a form of asymmetry between the source and target texts. For the English-speaking reader, Venice is represented as an Italian cultural environment through an English narrative that occasionally incorporates Italian words and expressions. These elements can therefore acquire a marked status within the source text. For the Italian reader, the same elements may be considerably less marked because they belong to the target reader's own linguistic and cultural environment. A translation that reproduces them literally may consequently preserve their referential meaning while changing their textual function.

The translator must therefore distinguish between the meaning of a cultural element and the effect produced by its presence in the source text. An Italian term used in an English narrative may function as a marker of place, authenticity, foreignness, character identity, or cultural specificity. When the same term is transferred into Italian, its foreignness disappears, but its geographical or cultural precision can remain. The translation problem is consequently not simply whether an element should be translated, but whether its original function can be preserved despite the change in linguistic context.

The paradox can therefore be summarised as follows: the translator is translating an English text into Italian while simultaneously dealing with a cultural world that is already Italian. This means that the target text must be natural for an Italian reader without making the Venetian setting less specific or less distinctive. The task is thus one of reconstruction rather than simple cultural transfer. The translator must recreate in Italian the particular way in which an English-speaking author constructs and represents Venice for a non-Italian readership.

3.1.1 Cultural Proximity and the Problem of Markedness

The situation described above leads to a second important issue: cultural proximity. The Italian reader approaches *Death at La Fenice* from a cultural position that differs significantly from that of the original English-speaking reader. References to Venetian geography, Italian institutions, food, architecture, and social practices may be immediately recognisable to the target audience, whereas they can function as markers of cultural difference for the source audience. This difference affects the degree of markedness of individual expressions and consequently influences translation decisions.

Markedness is particularly relevant when an author deliberately inserts a culturally specific word into a text written in another language. In Leon's novel, Italian terms are not isolated linguistic accidents but contribute to the representation of Venice. Their presence reminds the English-speaking reader that the narrative takes place within a cultural and linguistic environment different from their own.

For example, *calle* may be perceived by an English-speaking reader as a distinctly Venetian term whose meaning can be inferred from context. For an Italian reader, particularly one familiar with Venice, the word is not foreign. Nevertheless, replacing it with a generic term such as *strada* would remove the specifically Venetian designation. The translation would consequently become linguistically more general even though it remained perfectly understandable. Retaining *calle*, by contrast, preserves the geographical precision of the source text even though its degree of foreignness is inevitably reduced.

The same distinction applies to proper names and institutional references. Names such as *Campo San Moisè* or *Piazza San Marco* do not require translation into Italian because they already belong to the target culture. Yet their preservation remains significant because these expressions contribute to the spatial and cultural identity of the novel. Their function in the target text is therefore not necessarily to reproduce foreignness, but to preserve specificity.

This distinction between foreignness and specificity is central to the present translation. A translation does not necessarily have to reproduce every formal effect of the source text in exactly the same way. Some effects may become impossible because of the linguistic

relationship between source and target. What can instead be preserved is the function of the relevant element within the narrative. In the case of Venetian terminology, this means maintaining the precision and cultural identity of the setting even when the original sense of linguistic foreignness cannot be reproduced.

Cultural proximity therefore does not make the translation easier in every respect. On the contrary, it can make certain decisions more complex because the translator must determine what is actually being transferred. The closer the target reader is to the represented culture, the more carefully the translator must distinguish between information that needs to be communicated and effects that need to be recreated.

3.1.2 Italian and Venetian Realia in an English Source Text

One of the clearest manifestations of the relationship between language and setting is the presence of Italian and Venetian realia in the English source text. Realia can be treated as culture-specific items (CSIs): elements referring to objects, institutions, places, practices, or concepts whose translation becomes problematic because of their cultural specificity. Aixelá (1996) emphasises that such items acquire their status through the relationship between the source expression, the target culture, and the target reader. Their treatment therefore depends not only on their referential meaning, but also on their function and degree of familiarity within the receiving culture. In *Death at La Fenice*, this issue is especially complex because the source text is English while many of its culturally marked elements are already Italian or specifically Venetian.

The source text contains geographical references such as *Piazza San Marco*, *Campo San Moisè*, and *calle*, institutional terms such as *Questura*, and references connected with food and everyday life, such as *bussolai*. These elements contribute both factual information and cultural texture: they locate the characters within a recognisably Venetian environment and help construct the novel's geographical and social identity.

Their translation into Italian presents an unusual situation. In a conventional English-to-Italian translation, a source-cultural item may require substitution, adaptation, or explanation because it has no immediately recognisable target-language equivalent. Here, however, many

of the relevant items already belong to the target culture. Translation may consequently involve preservation rather than replacement. In Aixelá's (1996) terminology, conservation procedures retain the cultural reference, whereas substitution procedures move it towards a more familiar or general target-culture formulation. The choices made in these chapters favour conservation whenever the Venetian specificity contributes to the setting and remains intelligible to the Italian reader.

These terms retain the geographical or institutional precision of the setting. For an Italian reader, their use does not in itself constitute foreignization: their position in the target language differs from their marked status in the English source text.

The case of *bussolai* requires a different solution because the term may be unfamiliar even to Italian readers outside Venice. The target text retains the Venetian name while adding the phrase *i salatini veneziani a forma di pretzel*, which reproduces the explanatory gloss supplied by Leon's source text. This solution corresponds to Aixelá's (1996) category of intratextual gloss: the culture-specific item remains visible, but its interpretation is supported by a concise explanation incorporated into the sentence. The strategy combines cultural preservation with accessibility without presenting the gloss as an independent gastronomic definition.

Other realia require no such explanation because their meaning is sufficiently accessible within the Italian cultural context. The contrast shows why culture-specific items cannot be treated as a homogeneous category. The appropriate procedure depends on the reader's presumed familiarity with the item, its narrative importance, the information supplied by the context, and the risk that either excessive explanation or excessive generalisation might weaken the target text.

The translation of Italian and Venetian realia in *Death at La Fenice* is therefore governed by selective intervention. Preservation is preferred where a term contributes to the identity of Venice and remains understandable, while clarification is introduced where comprehension may otherwise be hindered. The translator is not transferring Italian culture into Italian, but reconstructing the cultural texture of Leon's English-language representation of Venice for a readership that is culturally closer to the fictional world but not necessarily familiar with every local reference.

3.1.3 Institutional, Geographical and Cultural Terminology

The representation of Venice in *Death at La Fenice* depends heavily on terminology associated with the city's institutions, geography, and cultural heritage. Such terminology does more than provide factual information: it contributes to the construction of a recognisable and coherent fictional world. The translation must therefore consider the relationship between lexical choice and the representation of place.

Institutional terminology is particularly relevant to the detective dimension of the novel. The repeated reference to the *Questura*, for example, establishes the Italian context of Brunetti's professional environment. In the English source text, the term is retained as an Italian lexical item, making the Italian institutional context visible within the English narrative. In Italian, *Questura* is already the conventional term and therefore requires no lexical translation. Its preservation nevertheless remains important because replacing it with a more generic expression would reduce the institutional specificity present in the source.

Geographical terminology operates in a similar way. References to calle, campo, and specific Venetian locations allow the reader to follow Brunetti through a highly distinctive urban environment. The use of precise Venetian terminology contributes to the impression that the city is being represented from the perspective of someone who knows it from within. Translating these terms into generic alternatives such as strada or piazza in the target text would weaken this effect; similarly, replacing their established Italian forms in the target text would risk reducing the specificity of the setting.

The translation of proper names introduces a slightly different issue. Names such as Piazza San Marco and Campo San Moisè already possess established forms in Italian. Their preservation is therefore not an act of adaptation in the conventional sense, but a way of maintaining the geographical network through which the novel constructs Venice. Their presence also contributes to continuity between the source and target representations of the city.

The treatment of institutional, geographical, and cultural terminology therefore follows a common principle: specificity should be preserved whenever it contributes to the

construction of the fictional world, while clarification should be introduced only when necessary to ensure comprehension. The target text should remain recognisably Venetian without becoming overloaded with explanations that would be unnecessary for an Italian readership.

3.1.4 Foreignization, Domestication and the Target Reader

The particular relationship between language and setting in *Death at La Fenice* also complicates Venuti's (1995) distinction between foreignization and domestication. In a conventional English-to-Italian translation, domestication may involve adapting source-cultural references to make them more familiar to Italian readers, while foreignization may involve preserving elements that signal the cultural difference of the source. In the present case, however, the represented culture is already largely familiar to the Italian readership.

This means that the concept of foreignness cannot be applied exclusively at the level of cultural content. Italian references in the English source text may be foreign linguistically but familiar culturally to the Italian reader. Retaining them in the target text therefore does not necessarily reproduce foreignness in the conventional sense. Instead, it preserves the cultural and stylistic configuration through which the English-language source represents Venice.

The target reader consequently becomes an important factor in the translation process. An English-speaking reader may need contextual information to understand an Italian term such as *bussolai*, whereas an Italian reader may recognise the term immediately or infer its meaning from the context. A translation strategy that adds extensive explanations would therefore risk producing an unnatural target text. At the same time, assuming complete familiarity with every Venetian reference could create difficulties for Italian readers who are not from Venice or who are unfamiliar with local terminology.

The translator must therefore consider the target readership in a differentiated manner. "Italian reader" does not necessarily mean "Venetian reader", and cultural familiarity exists on a continuum. A term may be broadly familiar throughout Italy, recognisable mainly in Veneto, or specific to Venice itself. The appropriate translation procedure must take these different degrees of familiarity into account.

Foreignization and domestication can consequently coexist within the same translation. Cultural references can be preserved in order to maintain the specificity of Venice, while syntactic structures, collocations, idiomatic expressions, and discourse patterns can be adapted to produce natural Italian. The target text may therefore be domesticated at the linguistic level while remaining strongly oriented towards the preservation of cultural specificity.

This approach is particularly appropriate for *Death at La Fenice* because the objective is not to make Venice appear foreign to an Italian reader. Rather, the objective is to reproduce the way in which Leon constructs Venice as a culturally distinctive environment within an English-language narrative. The translator therefore preserves the features that contribute to this construction while adapting those elements whose direct transfer would result in unnatural Italian.

The target reader thus plays a central role in determining the degree of intervention required. Translation choices must be evaluated according to the knowledge, expectations, and linguistic conventions of the intended readership while remaining faithful to the cultural and narrative identity of the source text.

3.1.5 Evaluating Cultural References in Context

The issues discussed in the preceding sections suggest that the translation of Death at La Fenice involves more than the transfer of linguistic and cultural elements. The question is not always whether a source-language expression has a formally corresponding Italian expression, but what role it plays in the passage and how that role can be conveyed in the target text.

This perspective is particularly important when dealing with features that cannot be preserved in the same form. The multilingual exchanges involving Italian and English provide one example: the contrast between the two languages changes when Italian becomes the language of the target text. Similarly, forms of address may require modification because English and Italian use different resources to express social relationships. In both cases, the translation can be assessed by examining what the reader learns about the characters and their interactions, as well as by comparing the wording of individual expressions.

The same consideration applies to narrative voice and characterisation. Brunetti's controlled speech, Patta's authoritative language, and the deferential responses of other characters help establish their relationships and identities. Conveying these distinctions naturally in Italian may require changes in lexical choice, syntax, forms of address, or register. Such changes should be evaluated in context, including any difference they introduce in tone or characterisation.

This provides a practical criterion for the present analysis: each choice should be considered in relation to the specific passage in which it occurs. A formally close rendering may preserve an expression's wording while changing its effect in Italian; a reformulation may convey its meaning more naturally while altering a stylistic detail. Neither outcome can be assumed in advance, and both require comparison with the source text.

In this sense, translating Death at La Fenice into Italian does not mean translating Venice itself. The task is to render Leon's particular representation of the city, originally written in English, for readers whose familiarity with its places and institutions may differ from that of the source readership. This involves preserving cultural specificity where it matters to the passage and adapting linguistic structures where a close rendering would sound unnatural in Italian.

The following sections examine these questions through specific choices in Chapters 9 and 11. They consider what each solution conveys and, where relevant, what changes between the English and Italian versions.

3.2 Explicitation

Explicitation is generally understood as a translation procedure through which information that is implicit, inferable or less specifically expressed in the source text is made more explicit in the target text. The concept has occupied an important position in Translation Studies since Blum-Kulka's (1986) discussion of the so-called *explicitation hypothesis*, according to which translations may display a tendency towards increased explicitness independently of differences between the source and target languages. Later studies have considerably problematised this hypothesis. Klaudy (1998), for example, distinguishes between different forms and motivations of explicitation, while Pym (2005) questions the usefulness of treating all increases in explicitness as manifestations of a universal translational tendency.

This distinction is particularly relevant to the present translation. A target-text expression should not automatically be classified as explicitation simply because it is lexically longer or more specific than its source-text counterpart. The crucial question is whether the Italian version verbalises information that the English text leaves implicit or dependent on contextual inference. Applying this narrower definition prevents the category from becoming excessively broad and makes it possible to distinguish genuine cases of explicitation from ordinary lexical equivalence, modulation and other forms of reformulation.

3.2.1 Contextual explicitation

One of the clearest examples occurs in Chapter 11, during Brunetti's conversation with Riverre and Alvise. After Brunetti sends Riverre back to the Questura, the narrator describes his reaction:

"He sketched out something that resembled a salute and moved away from the bar with deliberate slowness."

The passage was translated as:

"Accennò qualcosa che somigliava a un saluto militare e si allontanò dal bancone con deliberata lentezza."

The addition of *militare* represents a genuine case of contextual explicitation. The English noun *salute* does not formally contain the adjective *military*, although the intended gesture can easily be inferred from the situation. Riverre is a uniformed police officer addressing his superior, and the gesture follows his "Yes, sir." The Italian translation therefore does not introduce information unrelated to the source text; rather, it lexicalises a feature already activated by the narrative context.

The choice is also significant from the point of view of characterisation. The gesture is not described as a precise or respectful salute: Riverre merely "sketched out something that resembled" one. This deliberate vagueness contributes to the comic presentation of the officer, whose behaviour repeatedly contrasts with the seriousness expected of his institutional role. The translation preserves this uncertainty through *qualcosa che somigliava*, while *militare* identifies the type of gesture being approximated. The explicitation therefore

operates locally, clarifying the referent without eliminating the narrator's ironic distance.

A more literal version such as *"Accennò qualcosa che somigliava a un saluto"* would be semantically possible, but *saluto* in Italian has a wider and less immediately physical range of meanings and could simply indicate an ordinary greeting. The addition of *militare* restricts the interpretation to the gesture required by the context. In this case, explicitation contributes to pragmatic clarity while preserving the humorous characterisation of Riverre.

3.2.2 Explicitation and cultural mediation: bussolai

A more complex example occurs in Chapter 9, when Brunetti finds something to eat in his desk:

"He rooted around in the top drawer of his desk and found half a package of bussolai, the salty Venetian pretzels he loved so much."

The Italian version reads:

"Frugò nel cassetto superiore della scrivania e trovò mezzo pacchetto di bussolai, i salatini veneziani a forma di pretzel che amava tanto."

This example requires greater caution because the source text already provides an explanation of *bussolai*. The phrase *the salty Venetian pretzels* performs an explanatory function for the English-language reader, meaning that the Italian translation does not create the explanation itself. Consequently, the entire expression cannot simply be classified as an instance of explicitation.

The relevant shift occurs instead in the relationship established between bussolai and pretzels. In the source text, Leon directly glosses bussolai as "the salty Venetian pretzels". The Italian translation follows this authorial description rather than replacing it with an external culinary definition: *salatini veneziani* provides the general category, while a *forma di pretzel* recasts pretzel as a specification of form. The target text thus decomposes the compact English formulation into two pieces of information while remaining faithful to the way the item is presented in the novel.

The procedure consequently combines explicitation with cultural mediation. The culture-

specific term *bussolai* is preserved rather than replaced, maintaining the Venetian setting of the novel, while the surrounding formulation provides the reader with sufficient information to interpret it. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to describe the entire target phrase as information made explicit for the first time, since the explanatory material is already present in the source. What changes is primarily the organisation and degree of semantic specification of that information.

This example therefore demonstrates one of the methodological difficulties involved in identifying explicitation. Increased formal explicitness in the target text does not necessarily correspond to a straightforward addition of information. Translation procedures may overlap, and in this case explicitation is better understood as one component of a broader strategy of cultural mediation.

3.2.3 Cases that should not be classified as explicitation

The distinction becomes clearer when apparently explicit target formulations are compared with examples in which no genuinely implicit information has been verbalised. Chapter 11 describes the absence of any evidence that Signora Wellauer's daughter lives in the apartment:

“There was no evidence of Signora Wellauer's daughter; nothing in the report suggested the presence in the house of the third member of the family.”

The Italian translation reads:

“Non c'era alcuna traccia della figlia della signora Wellauer; nulla nel rapporto suggeriva la presenza in casa del terzo membro della famiglia.”

Despite slight lexical differences such as *evidence* → *traccia*, the informational structure of the source text is essentially reproduced. Nothing that is merely inferable in English is made linguistically explicit in Italian. The example should therefore not be classified as explicitation. Its usefulness for the present analysis lies precisely in establishing the limits of the category: lexical reformulation alone is insufficient evidence of explicitation.

A more ambiguous case occurs shortly afterwards. Brunetti knows where to find Alvise and Riverre because:

“It was not the precise hour but the fact that it was before noon that made this conclusion inescapable.”

The Italian translation reads:

“Non era tanto l'ora precisa quanto il fatto che fosse ancora di prima mattina a suggerirgli dove trovarli.”

At first sight, *ancora di prima mattina* may appear more specific than *before noon*, since the English expression identifies a relatively broad temporal interval whereas the Italian version places the event more clearly in the morning. However, this is not a straightforward case in which implicit source information has simply been verbalised. The surrounding narrative has already established that it is almost nine o'clock, so the temporal information is available explicitly in the context. More importantly, the translation changes the conceptual framing of the time reference: *before noon* defines the moment in relation to a future boundary, whereas *prima mattina* categorises it positively as a part of the morning.

For these reasons, the example is better regarded as a borderline case between increased specification and modulation rather than as a clear instance of explicitation. The distinction is important because it demonstrates that translation procedures should describe the actual linguistic shift rather than function as rigid labels imposed on individual sentences.

3.2.4 The function and limits of explicitation in the translation

Explicitation can help the Italian reader identify a meaning that the English text leaves to context, but it also changes how that meaning is encountered. An inference made while reading becomes information supplied directly by the narrator or a character. The question is therefore not only whether the added detail is correct, but whether stating it changes the emphasis of the passage.

This matters particularly in a detective novel, where observations do not always come with an explanation. If the translation specifies the reason for a character’s behaviour before Brunetti has established it, a possible interpretation may begin to sound like a fact. Similarly, explaining an ironic remark can remove the gap between what is said and what the reader

understands. In such cases, leaving information implicit is part of preserving the narrative effect, even when a more explicit formulation would be easy to understand.

The appropriate degree of explicitness also depends on whose perspective shapes the passage. Clarifying a reference may be useful when it prevents a misunderstanding; adding an explanation that Brunetti himself would have no reason to give can make the narration sound less closely connected to his viewpoint. For this translation, explicitation is therefore most useful when it resolves a genuine obstacle to comprehension without supplying an interpretation that the source leaves to the reader.

3.3 Modulation

Modulation is a translation procedure involving a change in perspective, point of view or conceptual category while preserving the underlying meaning of the source text. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) describe modulation as a variation in the form of the message obtained through a change in viewpoint, while Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002) similarly define it as a change in point of view, focus or cognitive category in relation to the source text. Modulation therefore allows the translator to represent the same situation through a different conceptual organisation, adapting the way in which meaning is expressed without substantially altering its semantic content.

In the translation of *Death at La Fenice*, modulation is particularly useful when the conceptual structure of the English expression would not produce the same degree of naturalness or stylistic effectiveness if reproduced directly in Italian. Rather than preserving the precise linguistic perspective of the source text, the translation can shift the focus towards another aspect of the same situation. This may involve changing the relationship between an action and the participant affected by it, reorganising the internal structure of a metaphor, or moving from a figurative representation to the attitude or meaning underlying it.

The examples discussed below show how these changes of perspective operate at different levels of the text. In each case, the central meaning of the source passage remains recognisable, but the target text reorganises the way in which that meaning is presented.

Modulation thus becomes a means of balancing semantic continuity with the idiomatic and stylistic requirements of Italian, while also demonstrating how apparently equivalent passages may construct the same situation from different viewpoints.

3.3.1 From an abstract difficulty to a physical obstacle

A particularly clear example occurs in Chapter 9 when Brunetti switches from Italian to English while speaking to Frau Wellauer. The narrator describes the effect of this change on her:

“Even her body seemed to relax as the language difficulty was removed.”

The Italian version reads:

“Perfino il corpo sembrò rilassarsi, liberato dall’ostacolo linguistico.”

The source text conceptualises the situation primarily in terms of the disappearance of a difficulty: the language difficulty was removed. The Italian translation shifts the focus from the difficulty itself to the person affected by it. Rather than describing an abstract problem as being removed, Signora Wellauer's body is presented as being *liberato dall'ostacolo*.

This represents a genuine change in perspective. The semantic relationship remains essentially the same - the linguistic barrier ceases to cause tension - but the event is conceptualised differently. English foregrounds the removal of an external difficulty, whereas Italian foregrounds the resulting liberation of the person experiencing it. The change is particularly effective because it connects directly with the preceding description of her physical reaction: her face softens, signs of stress disappear and even her body relaxes. In the target text, *liberato* makes this relationship more immediate by presenting the linguistic problem metaphorically as an obstacle from which the body is released.

The modulation therefore has both semantic and stylistic consequences. It preserves the causal relationship present in the source text but strengthens the connection between the abstract linguistic problem and its physical manifestation. A more structurally close translation such as *“quando la difficoltà linguistica fu eliminata”* would reproduce the original conceptual organisation more directly, but would sound considerably less natural in Italian and would weaken the link with the physical relaxation described immediately before it. The chosen solution instead reproduces the effect of the passage through a different conceptual

perspective.

3.3.2 Modulation through the restructuring of a metaphor

A stronger example of modulation can be found in Chapter 11, in the narrator's ironic description of Riverre's supposed success with women. Riverre frequently tells stories about his romantic conquests, particularly with foreign women, who:

“he claimed, fell like wheat before the sickle of his charms.”

The Italian version reads:

“che, sosteneva lui, venivano falciate dal suo fascino come spighe di grano.”

The target text preserves the agricultural imagery of the source passage but reorganises the conceptual relationships within the metaphor. In English, the women themselves are the grammatical agents of the verb *fell*: they “fall like wheat”, while Riverre's charms are metaphorically represented as the *sickle* before which they fall. The image is therefore constructed around the women's reaction to Riverre's supposed attractiveness.

The Italian translation approaches the same event from a different perspective. The women no longer simply fall before Riverre's charms but venivano falciate dal suo fascino. Riverre's fascino consequently becomes the direct cause of the action, while the women occupy the passive role of the entities affected by it. The comparison with wheat is retained through come spighe di grano, but the relationship between the principal elements of the metaphor has been reorganised.

This shift is particularly relevant to modulation because it involves more than a lexical replacement of *fall* with *falciare*. The source and target texts conceptualise the same humorous situation through different event structures: the women fall before Riverre's charms in the source, whereas Riverre's charm cuts the women down in the target. The underlying meaning remains unchanged - Riverre boasts that women are supposedly unable to resist him - but the perspective from which this idea is represented changes substantially.

The modulation also preserves an important aspect of Leon's characterisation. The metaphor is deliberately exaggerated and contributes to the comic portrayal of Riverre as a man with

an inflated perception of his own attractiveness. A neutral reformulation such as *"le donne non riuscivano a resistere al suo fascino"* would communicate the propositional meaning but eliminate the hyperbolic agricultural image on which much of the humour depends. The chosen Italian version instead reconstructs the metaphor through a different grammatical and conceptual organisation, allowing its exaggerated and ironic quality to remain visible in the target text.

The example therefore illustrates modulation particularly clearly: rather than replacing the source metaphor with its literal meaning, the translation retains its central imagery while changing the viewpoint and the relationship between agent and affected participant.

3.3.3 From figurative representation to underlying attitude

Another example occurs shortly afterwards, when Brunetti becomes uncomfortable with his own questioning about the considerable age difference between Frau Wellauer and her late husband. After asking whether the difference had caused difficulties in their marriage, the narrator comments:

"Though polite, the question was still a voyeur's leer, and he was embarrassed by it."

The final Italian version reads:

"Per quanto educata, la domanda tradiva comunque una curiosità indiscreta, e lui se ne vergognò."

The source text presents Brunetti's question through the strongly visual metaphor *a voyeur's leer*. The question itself is metaphorically transformed into the intrusive look of a voyeur. The expression therefore characterises Brunetti's behaviour indirectly: despite the formal politeness of his wording, he recognises that his interest in the couple's private life is intrusive.

The Italian version approaches the same situation from a different perspective. Rather than identifying the question with the voyeuristic gaze itself, it describes what the question reveals about Brunetti's attitude: *tradiva comunque una curiosità indiscreta*. The shift is therefore not simply *leer* → *curiosità*. The grammatical and conceptual relationship also changes. In the source text, the question is metaphorically a voyeuristic look; in the target text, the question reveals the intrusive curiosity motivating it.

The modulation moves from an external and figurative representation of Brunetti's behaviour to an internal interpretation of the attitude underlying that behaviour. This allows the Italian text to preserve the central pragmatic effect of the passage - Brunetti's awareness that he has crossed the boundary between legitimate investigation and inappropriate curiosity - without reproducing the English metaphor literally. The surrounding context supports this interpretation: Brunetti himself describes the euphemistic nature of his question and subsequently refrains from pursuing another sensitive issue because of his sense of humanity.

There is nevertheless a stylistic consequence to this modulation. The target text is less metaphorically striking than the source: *a voyeur's leer* creates a deliberately uncomfortable visual image, whereas *curiosità indiscreta* states the psychological implication more directly. The translation therefore preserves the negative evaluation and Brunetti's self-conscious embarrassment, but reduces the figurative intensity through which that evaluation is conveyed. Acknowledging this difference is important because modulation does not imply that every stylistic component of the source expression remains unchanged; rather, the same communicative meaning is reconstructed through a different conceptual perspective.

3.3.4 The role of modulation in the translation

The examples in this section show that modulation is useful when a change of perspective produces a natural Italian formulation. Naturalness alone, however, is not sufficient grounds for the choice. A reformulation can alter what receives emphasis, or how strongly the narrator evaluates a situation. These consequences need to be considered alongside the meaning the translation succeeds in conveying.

Modulation is therefore a way of describing a specific shift, not an objective to pursue throughout the text. Where an Italian expression can retain the source perspective without sounding forced, there is no reason to change it. Where a shift is needed, the resulting passage should be assessed for both its clarity and its stylistic effect. This is particularly important in Leon’s prose, where a brief image or change of focus can shape the reader’s view of a character without an explicit explanation.

3.4 Pragmatic Equivalence and Politeness Strategies

The translation of dialogue represents a particularly significant challenge in the two chapters under analysis, as the meaning conveyed by an utterance frequently extends beyond its propositional content. In interpersonal exchanges, lexical and grammatical choices contribute to the construction of social relationships, the negotiation of distance and authority, and the expression or mitigation of potentially threatening acts. For this reason, the translation of dialogue requires attention not only to semantic equivalence but also to pragmatic equivalence, namely the preservation of the communicative function and interpersonal effect of an utterance in the target text.

This aspect is particularly relevant to Chapters 9 and 11, in which Brunetti interacts with characters occupying different positions in relation to him. His conversation with Frau Wellauer in Chapter 9 is characterised by formality, deference, and considerable emotional restraint, whereas his exchanges with Patta and the two police officers in Chapter 11 are shaped by institutional hierarchy, irony, and varying degrees of interpersonal distance. The translator therefore has to reproduce a complex system of relationships through linguistic choices that may not have a direct one-to-one correspondence between English and Italian.

The analysis can be framed through Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, originally formulated in 1978 and substantially developed in *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (1987). Their model is based on the concept of “face”, understood as the public self-image that individuals seek to maintain during interaction. Brown and Levinson distinguish between positive face, associated with the desire to be appreciated and approved of, and negative face, associated with the desire to preserve one's freedom of action and to avoid unwanted imposition.

From this perspective, many communicative acts can constitute face-threatening acts (FTAs), since requests, questions, criticism, disagreement, and other forms of imposition may interfere with the interlocutor's positive or negative face. Brown and Levinson therefore identify different strategies for performing FTAs, ranging from bald-on-record strategies, in which the act is performed directly, to positive and negative politeness, off-record strategies, and, at the most extreme end, avoiding the FTA altogether.

The distinction between positive and negative politeness is especially useful for the present analysis. Positive politeness is oriented towards the hearer's positive face and seeks to establish or reinforce solidarity, whereas negative politeness is primarily concerned with respecting the hearer's autonomy and minimising the imposition represented by the speech act. The latter is particularly relevant to interactions involving social distance or unequal power relations, as speakers can employ indirectness, hedging, apologies, deference, and other mitigating devices to reduce the force of an FTA.

3.4.1 Politeness and Social Distance in Brunetti's Conversation with Frau Wellauer

The conversation between Brunetti and Frau Wellauer in Chapter 9 provides the clearest example of negative politeness in the source text. Brunetti is conducting a police investigation while simultaneously speaking to a recently widowed woman, whose emotional condition makes the interaction particularly delicate. The questions he asks are potentially intrusive, especially when he moves from the circumstances surrounding the death to the family's financial arrangements and eventually to the relationship between Frau Wellauer and her husband.

One particularly significant example is Brunetti's question concerning the inheritance:

“If you will permit me, Signora, and perhaps forgive me in advance for the question, could you tell me if you have any idea of the sort of financial arrangements your husband made?”

The utterance contains several forms of mitigation. *“If you will permit me”* explicitly acknowledges that Brunetti is asking for permission to enter an area that may be considered private. This is followed by *“perhaps forgive me in advance for the question”*, which anticipates the possibility that the question may be perceived as inappropriate. Only after these mitigating elements does Brunetti formulate the actual question.

From the perspective of Brown and Levinson's model, this is a prototypical instance of negative politeness. The question constitutes a potential threat to Frau Wellauer's negative face because it imposes upon her by requesting information concerning her private financial circumstances. Rather than asking directly *“What financial arrangements did your husband make?”*, Brunetti explicitly acknowledges the imposition and attempts to minimise it through

deference and indirectness.

The Italian translation preserves this pragmatic structure:

“Se me lo permette, signora, e mi perdoni in anticipo per la domanda, potrebbe dirmi quali accordi economici avesse preso suo marito?”

The translation is significant because it does not simply reproduce the propositional content of the question. It retains the sequence of mitigating devices, thereby preserving the interpersonal relationship established in the source text. In particular, “Se me lo permette” maintains the deferential nature of “If you will permit me”, while “mi perdoni in anticipo per la domanda” reproduces the anticipatory apology contained in the English.

The choice is particularly appropriate because a more direct Italian formulation could have altered Brunetti's characterisation. A version such as *“Signora, sa quali accordi economici aveva preso suo marito?”* would convey essentially the same information but would significantly reduce the degree of mitigation. The target text would therefore represent Brunetti as more direct and potentially more intrusive than he is in the source text. In this case, pragmatic equivalence requires the translator to preserve the degree of interpersonal caution rather than merely the semantic content of the question.

The same pattern occurs when Brunetti asks about the age difference between Frau Wellauer and her husband:

“Did the difference in your ages create any difficulties in your marriage?”

The question concerns an intimate aspect of the widow's private life and is consequently another potential FTA. The source text itself explicitly comments on the pragmatic dimension of the question. Brunetti is aware of the “cloud of euphemism” surrounding such a relationship and recognises that, despite its polite formulation, the question is intrusive. The narrative therefore makes the pragmatic tension explicit: politeness does not eliminate the threat to the interlocutor's face but merely mitigates it.

This is an important point for the translation. The target text needs to preserve precisely this contradiction between formal politeness and underlying intrusiveness. If the translator were

to intensify the euphemistic quality of the Italian formulation, the question could become excessively indirect; if, conversely, it were rendered too directly, Brunetti's self-awareness and restraint would be weakened. The translation therefore has to maintain the same pragmatic equilibrium between social courtesy and investigative intrusion.

3.4.2 “Please Don't Go to Any Trouble”: Negative Politeness

A more concise but equally revealing example occurs earlier in the conversation. When Frau Wellauer offers Brunetti a drink, she asks:

“Would you like a drink, Dottor Brunetti? Or perhaps tea?”

and Brunetti replies:

“Please don't go to any trouble, Signora,”

The expression *“Please don't go to any trouble”* does not simply communicate refusal. Pragmatically, it acknowledges the social value of the offer while simultaneously minimising the burden that accepting it would impose on the hostess. It therefore performs two functions at once: Brunetti declines the offer, but he does so in a way that recognises and protects Frau Wellauer's positive social intentions.

The Italian version, *“Non si disturbi, Signora,”* reproduces this function through a conventional Italian politeness formula. The translation is not literal, but literal correspondence would be less important here than pragmatic equivalence. An expression such as *“Per favore, non faccia alcuna fatica”* would be semantically understandable but pragmatically marked and unnatural. *“Non si disturbi”*, by contrast, is an established Italian formula for minimising the imposition associated with another person's offer or action.

This example illustrates an important principle in translating politeness: conventional expressions often require functional rather than formal equivalence. The translator must identify the social action performed by the utterance and find a target-language expression capable of performing the same action. In this case, the pragmatic meaning of the source utterance is more important than its lexical structure.

3.4.3 Familiarity, Social Distance and the Construction of Solidarity

Although negative politeness is the dominant pattern in Brunetti's conversation with Frau Wellauer, the chapters also contain instances in which interpersonal relations are constructed through solidarity and familiarity. Brown and Levinson associate positive politeness with strategies that attend to the hearer's positive face by signalling approval, common ground, familiarity, or shared interests.

An interesting example can be found in Brunetti's relationship with Alvise and Riverre. Although they occupy a lower position in the institutional hierarchy, Brunetti's interactions with them are not characterised exclusively by formal distance. His questioning is often concise, and the dialogue gradually develops a degree of familiarity that contrasts with the more ceremonious interaction with Frau Wellauer.

The Italian version preserves this distinction by allowing different levels of formality to coexist within the same chapter. Brunetti uses the informal second-person form when addressing the officers, as in:

“Riverre, puoi andare a scoprirlo?”

The choice of *puoi* rather than the formal *può* is significant because Italian encodes interpersonal distance grammatically in a way that English generally does not. Consequently, the translation cannot simply reproduce the English wording; it must reconstruct the social relationship through the Italian system of address.

This represents one of the clearest examples of pragmatic asymmetry between the source and target languages. English *you* does not specify whether the relationship between two interlocutors is formal or informal, whereas Italian requires the translator to make that relationship explicit through *tu* or *Lei*. The translation therefore involves an interpretative decision: the translator must infer the social distance established by the narrative and encode it in the target language.

3.4.4 Directness, Power and Bald-on-Record Strategies

Chapter 11 offers a particularly useful contrast in the interaction between Brunetti and Patta.

Unlike the conversation with Frau Wellauer, this exchange is characterised by institutional conflict, irony, and an overt power struggle. Patta repeatedly issues instructions and expresses dissatisfaction with Brunetti's performance:

“From now on, Brunetti, I want a written report on my desk each morning by - […] - by eight.”

The utterance is highly direct. There is no attempt to frame the request as a question or to minimise the imposition through conventional politeness markers. In Brown and Levinson's terms, this can be associated with a bald-on-record strategy, whereby the speaker performs the FTA directly and without substantial redressive action. Bald-on-record strategies are particularly compatible with situations involving urgency, efficiency, or a marked power differential.

The institutional hierarchy is therefore encoded pragmatically through directness. Patta does not need to ask Brunetti whether he would be willing to provide the report; he simply states that he wants it. The target text preserves this force:

“Da ora in poi, Brunetti, voglio un rapporto scritto sulla mia scrivania ogni mattina entro -[…]- Entro le otto”.

The directness of *“voglio”* is particularly important. A more mitigated formulation such as *“vorrei che mi facesse trovare”* would have been grammatically possible but would have altered Patta's interpersonal stance. It would make him appear less authoritative and consequently undermine the power dynamics that are central to the scene.

The same principle applies to Brunetti's replies. His apparently respectful *“Yes, sir”* does not necessarily indicate genuine deference. In the context of the exchange, it functions partly as a conventional acknowledgement of Patta's authority while the surrounding narration suggests that Brunetti remains critical of his superior. The contrast between external politeness and internal irony is one of the characteristic features of the passage.

3.4.5 Irony and Pragmatic Meaning

Irony in the exchange between Brunetti and Patta depends on the order in which their words are spoken. When Patta complains that the investigation has produced nothing important, Brunetti replies:

“I’ve got a dead genius and no one to blame for it.”

Brunetti’s remark reduces Patta’s concern to the need to identify someone to blame. Patta then takes up the phrase - “And no one to blame for it” - before declaring, “I want someone to blame for it.” The repetition reveals a difference between their priorities: Brunetti is concerned with understanding the murder, while Patta focuses on producing a culprit.

The surrounding narration sharpens the irony. Brunetti wonders whether Patta is silently rehearsing his phrase for later use, and then observes that he has never heard his superior express his idea of justice so clearly. Neither judgement is spoken aloud. Brunetti remains outwardly respectful, while the narration allows the reader to recognise his criticism.

The Italian translation preserves this sequence through the repeated phrase “nessuno a cui dare la colpa” and Patta’s response, “Voglio qualcuno a cui dare la colpa.” Keeping the repetition matters because Patta’s appropriation of Brunetti’s words exposes his priorities more effectively than an explicit explanation would.

3.4.6 Pragmatic Equivalence as a Translation Priority

The analysis of politeness in these exchanges also shows a limit of treating individual forms as fixed signals of respect or authority. A title or a deferential reply acquires its force from the sequence in which it appears: it may acknowledge a superior’s rank while the speaker’s timing or the surrounding narration invites an ironic reading. Its meaning cannot therefore be determined from the form alone.

For this reason, pragmatic equivalence is assessed here across the exchange rather than one utterance at a time. The Italian translation must make the institutional relationship intelligible, but it must also leave room for a character’s words to work against their apparent

politeness. Where those two effects cannot be reproduced through the same linguistic form, the choice needs to be evaluated in relation to the dialogue and its narrative framing.

3.5 The Translation of Dialogue and Narrative Voice

The translation of literary fiction involves not only the transfer of propositional meaning but also the reconstruction of the different voices through which that meaning is presented. In *Death at La Fenice*, dialogue and narrative voice contribute substantially to characterisation: the characters differ in vocabulary, syntactic complexity, degree of elaboration and manner of interacting, while the third-person narration remains closely associated with Brunetti's perceptions and evaluations.

Brunetti's controlled and observant voice contrasts with the simpler speech of Alvise and Riverre and with Patta's more authoritative and self-important manner. At the same time, the narrator frequently intervenes around stretches of direct speech to guide the reader's interpretation of the characters. Dialogue and narration therefore operate as complementary mechanisms of characterisation rather than as independent components of the text.

Assis Rosa (2000) emphasises the importance of the pragmatic and interpersonal dimension of fictional dialogue in translation, while Hatim and Mason (1990) approach translation as communication situated within a wider discourse context. These perspectives are particularly relevant here because preserving character voice requires attention not only to what an utterance communicates, but also to what its linguistic form reveals about the speaker. Similarly, the translation of the narrative passages must preserve the relationship between the narrator and Brunetti's subjective perspective. The following examples illustrate how these different voices are reconstructed in the Italian text.

3.5.1 Dialogue as a Means of Characterisation

One of the clearest examples of dialogue functioning as characterisation occurs in Chapter 11, during Brunetti's conversation with Alvise and Riverre. After the two officers have searched Wellauer's apartment, Brunetti asks whether they noticed anything unusual. Alvise responds:

“What kind of things, sir?”

The narrator immediately comments:

“As though they were meant to see only those things they were sent to look for.”

The Italian version reads:

“Che genere di cose, commissario?”

followed by:

“Come se dovessero notare soltanto ciò che era stato ordinato loro di cercare.”

The question itself is linguistically unremarkable, but this simplicity is precisely what gives it its characterising function. Alvise does not immediately understand that Brunetti is asking him to move beyond the specific purpose of the search and observe the general behaviour of the people in the apartment. His request for clarification therefore reveals a literal and narrowly procedural understanding of his role. The narrator's comment then supplies the interpretation that the reader is expected to attach to the utterance.

The Italian translation preserves this relationship. *Che genere di cose, commissario?* remains a short and straightforward question, while the following narrative comment retains the contrast between Alvise's limited interpretation of the task and Brunetti's more perceptive approach to investigation. The characterisation is therefore produced not by an unusual lexical feature, but by the interaction between the simplicity of the question and the narrator's ironic interpretation of it.

This characteristic becomes still clearer later in the same conversation. Alvise attempts to explain why Frau Wellauer appeared more disturbed by the officers examining her husband's papers than by their examination of his clothes:

“But papers are just papers.”

The Italian translation reads:

“Ma in fondo sono solo documenti.”

Alvise's remark reduces the documents to an apparently ordinary category. The Italian formulation, Ma in fondo sono solo documenti, retains his dismissive reasoning while sounding natural in conversation.

Its simplicity can contribute to the characterisation without reproducing the source tautology word for word. The choice still allows the reader to see that Alvise has missed why the papers might matter.

This becomes especially evident when Alvise continues:

“But maybe it's because he was a genius. Of course, I wouldn't know about that sort of music.”

translated as:

“Però forse è perché lui era un genio. Naturalmente io non me ne intendo di quel genere di musica.”

The sequence reproduces his associative reasoning: he moves from the possible importance of the papers to Wellauer's status as a genius and then to his own lack of knowledge about classical music. The dialogue is not highly structured, and this relative lack of sophistication distinguishes Alvise's voice from Brunetti's more analytical perspective. Preserving character voice therefore means resisting the temptation to improve or regularise precisely those linguistic features through which the character is constructed.

3.5.2 Narrative Voice, Focalisation and Brunetti's Perspective

While dialogue differentiates the characters from one another, the narrative voice establishes the perspective through which much of the novel is interpreted. Although *Death at La Fenice* employs third-person narration, the narrative is frequently focalised through Brunetti. The descriptions consequently incorporate his perceptions, evaluations and cultural attitudes without necessarily shifting into direct internal monologue.

For example, in Chapter 9, as Brunetti walks towards Piazza San Marco:

“It seemed to him that all the shops that served the native population – pharmacies, shoemakers, groceries – were slowly and inexorably disappearing, replaced by slick boutiques and souvenir shops that catered to the tourists.”

The Italian version reads:

“Gli sembrava che tutti i negozi utili alla popolazione locale – farmacie, calzolai, alimentari – stessero lentamente e inesorabilmente scomparendo, sostituiti da boutique eleganti e negozi di souvenir destinati ai turisti.”

The opening expression *It seemed to him / Gli sembrava* is fundamental to the focalisation of the passage. The transformation of Venice is not presented as an entirely neutral statement by an external narrator; it is explicitly filtered through Brunetti's perception. This distinction becomes even more evident in the following reflection, where the opposition between the desires of temporary visitors and the needs of residents leads Brunetti to imagine Venice becoming “a sort of living museum”.

Preserving *Gli sembrava* therefore maintains the boundary between external narration and subjective evaluation. The reader is invited to perceive Venice through Brunetti's perspective without the narrator completely merging with the character. This is particularly significant for his characterisation because his attachment to Venice is repeatedly expressed through observations of apparently ordinary details: shops, architecture, tourists and changes in the urban environment. His identity as a Venetian is thus constructed not only through what he says but also through what he notices.

The translation also preserves the evaluative structure of the description. The adverbs *lentamente e inesorabilmente* reproduce the sense that Brunetti regards the transformation as both gradual and unavoidable, while the contrast between *popolazione locale* and *turisti* maintains the opposition around which his reflection is organised. The target text consequently reproduces not simply a description of Venice but a description already shaped by Brunetti's emotional and cultural relationship with the city.

A more concentrated example of the same closeness between narration and character perspective appears in Chapter 11 during Brunetti's conversation with Patta. After observing

Patta's dark Russian cigarettes and onyx cigarette holder, Brunetti thinks:

“Very nice, Brunetti thought; colour coordinated.”

The Italian version reads:

“Niente male, pensò Brunetti: tutto perfettamente in tinta.”

Here the lexical meaning of the description is less important than its tone. Brunetti is ostensibly commenting on the visual coordination of Patta's accessories, but the remark functions as an ironic evaluation of his superior's carefully cultivated appearance. The brevity of the sentence is central to this effect: Brunetti does not explain his judgement, and the narrator does not clarify that the thought is ironic. The reader is expected to infer the attitude from the context and from the established relationship between the two characters.

The Italian version preserves this restraint. *Niente male* and *tutto perfettamente in tinta* maintain the compact evaluative structure without adding an explanation of Brunetti's attitude. Explicating the irony - for instance by specifying that Brunetti finds Patta's attention to appearance ridiculous - would alter the narrative voice by replacing an implicit evaluation with an explicit authorial judgement. The translation instead allows the irony to remain embedded in Brunetti's perspective.

These examples demonstrate that focalisation is not simply a question of identifying who perceives an event. It also determines the degree to which evaluation is made explicit. Preserving Brunetti's narrative perspective consequently requires maintaining the restrained manner in which his judgements enter the third-person narration.

3.5.3 The Interaction between Dialogue and Narrative Commentary

The distinction between character voice and narrative voice does not imply that the two operate independently. On the contrary, several passages in Chapter 11 derive their effect precisely from the interaction between what a character says and the narrative information that immediately surrounds the utterance.

The exchange with Alvise discussed above already provides one example: *“What kind of*

things, sir?" acquires much of its comic and characterising value from the narrator's subsequent *"As though they were meant to see only those things they were sent to look for."* Without this narrative intervention, the question could be interpreted simply as a neutral request for clarification. The narrator directs the reader towards another interpretation, presenting the utterance as evidence of Alvise's literal-minded approach to police work.

A similar mechanism operates in the representation of Riverre. When Brunetti asks him to return to the Questura and check whether Wellauer's documents are still there, the English passage reads:

"'Yes, sir.' He sketched out something that resembled a salute and moved away from the bar with deliberate slowness."

The final Italian version renders the exchange as:

"«Sissignore!» Accennò qualcosa che somigliava a un saluto militare e si allontanò dal bancone con deliberata lentezza."

In this case, the Italian dialogue is more marked than a neutral *sì, commissario*. *Sissignore!* has a strongly emphatic and almost military quality, which establishes an immediate connection with the gesture described in the following sentence. The narrative comment then develops this effect through *saluto militare* and *deliberata lentezza*.

The combination produces a comic contradiction. Riverre verbally performs exaggerated obedience, reinforced by the salute, while physically carrying out Brunetti's instruction with deliberate reluctance. The reader therefore receives two partially conflicting signals: the spoken response suggests enthusiastic compliance, whereas the description of his movement reveals that he would prefer not to perform the task at all.

This is an important example because the communicative effect cannot be located exclusively in either the dialogue or the narration. Translating *Yes, sir* in isolation would not be sufficient to reproduce the scene. The significance of the response emerges from its relationship with the salute, Riverre's slowness and the preceding narrative explanation that he hopes to avoid walking back to the Questura. In the Italian version, *Sissignore!* works particularly effectively

within this wider sequence because its exaggerated readiness intensifies the contrast with *deliberata lentezza*.

Narrative commentary therefore performs an interpretative function. It may confirm the attitude expressed in dialogue, undermine the literal meaning of an utterance, or reveal a discrepancy between what a character says and how the character behaves. For translation, this means that stretches of dialogue cannot always be treated as autonomous units. Their function must be evaluated in relation to the narrative material that frames them.

The same principle applies more broadly to Leon's use of irony. Rather than explaining the comic qualities of Alvise and Riverre directly, the narration frequently allows them to emerge through small discrepancies between speech, behaviour and Brunetti's perception of both. Preserving these relationships is consequently more important than reproducing every isolated linguistic form as closely as possible.

3.5.4 Preserving the Network of Voices in Translation

A character’s voice should not be reduced to a single, unchanging register. Brunetti speaks differently to Frau Wellauer, to the officers and to Patta because each relationship places different demands on him. The translation must allow for these changes without making him sound like a different character in each scene. The same applies to Alvise and Riverre: their speech can reveal limited understanding or comic self-confidence without every line having to sound awkward or exaggerated.

Consistency therefore depends on the range of speech available to each character, rather than on repeating one recognisable verbal trait. In revising the Italian dialogue, the question is whether a choice fits both the immediate situation and the speaker’s portrayal across the two chapters. This offers a more useful test of characterisation than judging an isolated line solely by how closely it follows the English wording.

Conclusions

This thesis has presented an Italian translation of Chapters 9 and 11 of Donna Leon's *Death at La Fenice* and examined a selection of the decisions made during its revision. Working on these passages showed that an accurate translation cannot be assessed solely by comparing individual words or sentences. A choice may convey the immediate meaning of an expression while changing the way a character speaks, the degree of certainty in an observation, or the attitude conveyed by the narration. For this reason, the translation and the commentary needed to be considered together.

The novel's English-language representation of Venice posed a particular challenge. Italian names for places and institutions appear within the English source text, but their status changes when they become part of an Italian translation. Retaining them can preserve the precision of the setting without producing the same contrast between languages that an English reader encounters. The analysis therefore made it necessary to distinguish what a reference identifies from the effect its linguistic form may have on a particular readership. It also showed why the presumed familiarity of Italian readers cannot be treated as uniform, especially in the case of local Venetian terms.

The examination of explicitation and modulation led to a related finding: a translation technique is useful as a description of a choice, but it does not justify that choice on its own. Making an inference explicit may help comprehension, yet it may also give the reader information that the source leaves open. Changing the perspective of an expression may produce more natural Italian, yet it can reduce the force of an image or shift the emphasis of a sentence. The commentary has therefore considered the consequences of these choices as well as the reasons for making them. In some cases, recognising a difference between source and target texts gives a more precise account of the translation than claiming that their effects are identical.

Revision was especially important in the dialogue. Forms of address had to reflect the characters' institutional roles and remain consistent across an exchange. At the same time, consistency did not mean assigning each character a fixed register: Brunetti's manner changes according to the person he addresses, and the speech of Alvise and Riverre must sound natural even when it reveals their limited understanding of a situation. These passages also

showed that the meaning of a line often depends on the narration around it. A respectful form of address can acquire an ironic force through its timing, just as a character's behaviour can qualify what their words appear to express.

The conclusions of this study are limited to the selected passages from Chapters 9 and 11. They do not establish a single solution for translating Leon's style throughout the novel. Within that scope, however, the project shows the value of moving repeatedly between the English source, the Italian text and the analysis of both. The final aim is an Italian version that reads naturally while preserving the details of the investigation, the relationships between characters and the perspective through which the reader encounters them. Where those aims pull in different directions, the translator's task is to make a considered choice and describe its effects accurately.

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