

MARIO B. MIGNONE
EDUARDO DE FILIPPO

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In this first book in English on the Italian playwright Eduardo De Filippo, Prof. Mignone carefully and in detail analyzes all of his plays. As he states in his Preface, "the purpose [of my book is] to introduce the Italian playwright to an English-speaking audience and to present a more global view of his art by evaluating all his works in the light of his formative experience in Naples and tradition of the Neapolitan dialect theater." This statement appears modest. In fact, in addition to treating De Filippo's ties to Naples and the traditional Neapolitan theater, Prof. Mignone also wants to deal with De Filippo as a world author.

Some of the analyses of some of the plays may seem perhaps too particularized, but if one considers that this is the first English book on De Filippo and that only five of his plays have heretofore been translated into English, this approach is very useful; it gives the English-speaker the opportunity of an easy first contact with De Filippo's work.

The first chapter, "Eduardo De Filippo, Naples, and the Neapolitan Popular Theater," presents the background of that theater at the turn of the century and the artist's beginnings in it as an actor, director, and finally author.

The second chapter, "De Filippo's Inspiration and Creative Process," depicts the city of Naples and the life of the Neapolitans in their pursuit of survival, well-being, wealth, happiness, and spiritual values; De Filippo's relationship with Pirandello; the main themes of the plays; the use of Neapolitan dialect, which is imbued with a powerful expressivity, and it resembles — in the words of Eric Bentley — the use of dialect in "Synge and O'Casey rather than Pinero and Galsworthy"; the author also explains how this expressivity is re-enforced by an almost Oriental "gesturology," typically Neapolitan but which is not difficult to understand or for any audience to share.

In the remaining chapters, Prof. Mignone analyzes the plays socio-politically and historically. He succeeds in immersing his readers into the intricacies of the life depicted in the works and even in forcing them to face the dark belly of Leviathan-Naples. This approach befits De Filippo since he has always been interested in the wrongs of society, but, we believe, it doesn't exhaust him, especially those plays like *Those Ghosts*, *The Big Magic*, and *The*

Voices Within, where surrealistic elements endow them with a depth other than and beyond social meaning and values. Another aspect which social criticism alone can not exhaust is De Filippo's obsessive interest in unwed mothers, their illegitimate children, and orphans in general, an interest which clearly derives from and mirrors the artist's biography and which should be studied also from a psychological or psychoanalytical angle. These *lacunae*, though, do not detract from the overall worth of Prof. Mignone's book which is a clear presentation of the great Neapolitan playwright for the English reader.

EMANUELE LICASTRO

State University of New York at Buffalo