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Vivere sul serio: Eduardo De Filippo and the Art of Life

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This thesis offers the first English translation of Eduardo De Filippo’s last play, *Gli esami non finiscono mai* (1973). It analyzes the play in the context of the dramatist’s career and describes the philosophical shift that took place in Eduardo’s dialectic as he progressed from a post-war, neorealist drama like *Napoli milionaria!* toward the existential reflections present in his last play. Unlike previous studies, this work concentrates on Eduardo’s philosophical journey from neorealism to existential query and identifies the factors that influenced his thinking process. To this end, I have evaluated the plays most relevant to the development of his philosophy and the socio-political context in which they were written. The influence of the Neapolitan traditional dialect theater, along with that of Luigi Pirandello, his American contemporaries, Arthur Miller and Eugene O’Neill, and William Shakespeare, is also examined. Important social issues that directly affected the author, such as the struggle in Italy for the legalization of divorce and the plight of children born out of wedlock, are highlighted to illustrate how they contributed to the disillusionment and pessimism present in Eduardo’s last play. From the rather hopeful ending of *Napoli milionaria!* Eduardo was reduced at the end of his life to sheer desperation in *Gli esami non finiscono mai*. Italy had changed but it had not moved on.

By focusing on the playwright’s final play, this thesis offers a new perspective on a twentieth century dramatist who is much more complex than is commonly acknowledged. De Filippo is revealed as a dramatist who transcended the Neapolitan comic theatrical traditions he sprang from and created a theater of political and social engagement that endures today.
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