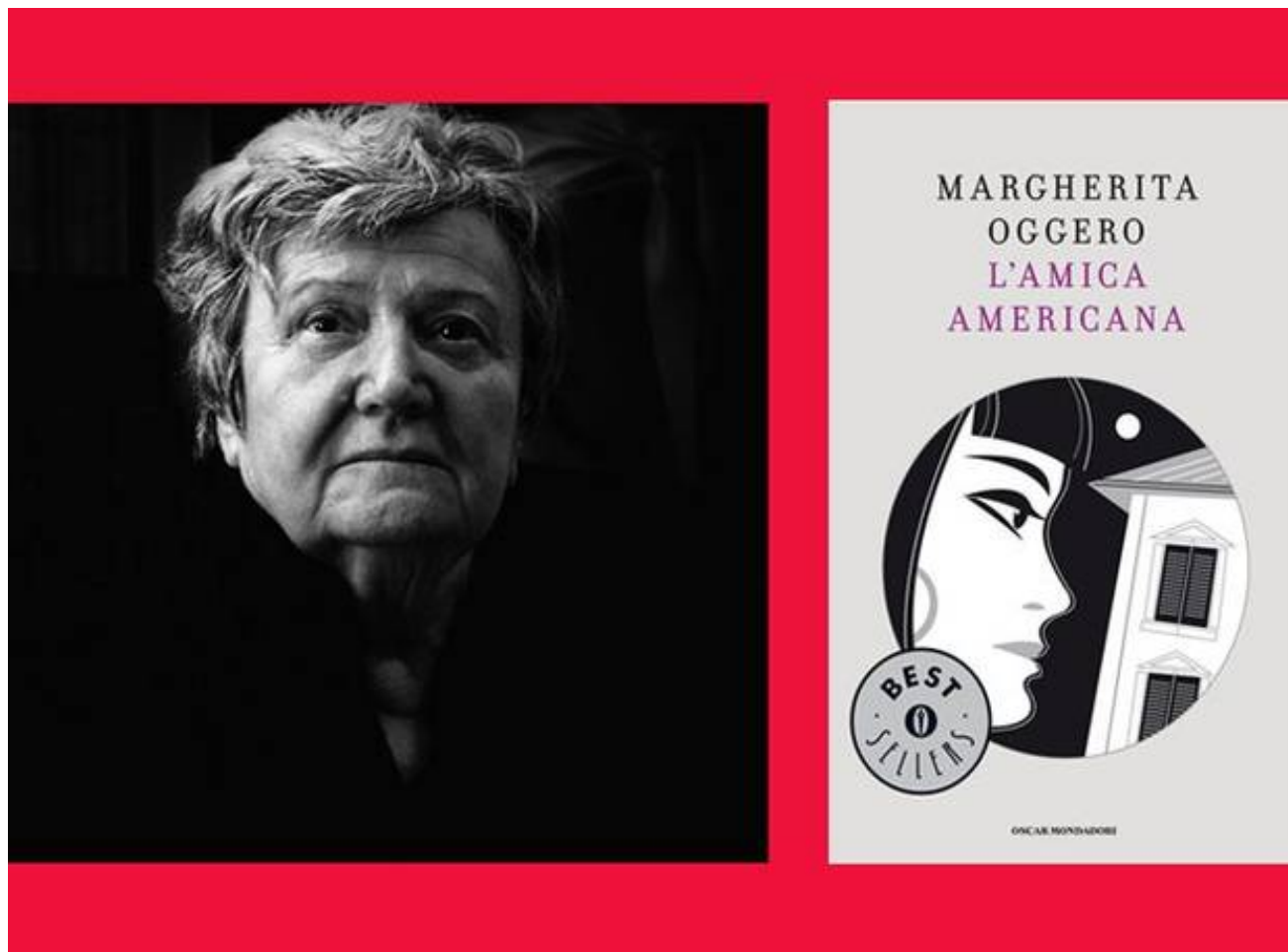


Margherita Oggero's L'amica americana

Traci Andrighetti (May 01, 2014)



An Italian-American intrigue, Piedmontese-style. Because *L'amica americana* is set in Turin, the language of the novel contains dialect and regional Italian specific to Piedmont as well as terms from other regions, including Lombardy, Veneto and Campania.

Margherita Oggero (b. 1950, Torino) is a retired teacher, a journalist for *La Stampa* and an author. Oggero has written a number of novels, but she is perhaps best known for her gialli



regionali (regional mysteries) featuring Camilla Baudino, a high school teacher in Turin. The first novel in the series, [La collega tatuata](#) [2] (The Tattooed Colleague) (Mondadori, 2003) was made into the acclaimed film [Se devo essere sincera](#) [3] (If I Have to Be Sincere) (2004). The series also inspired the long-running television show *Provaci ancora Prof!* (Try Again, Teach!) for which Oggero writes the episodes.

In [L'amica americana](#) [4] (The American Friend) (Mondadori, 2006), the third of six novels in the Camilla Baudino mysteries, Camilla discovers that the small abandoned villa she has admired for years is for sale. Although she knows she could never afford it, she makes an appointment with the owner, an Italian widow from the United States, and an unexpected friendship blossoms. Then one day while they're out shopping the unthinkable happens, and Camilla finds herself the main suspect in a murder. Once again, the handsome Inspector Gaetano Berardi comes to her rescue. But the case is complicated, and he has more than Camilla's freedom on his mind.

Because L'amica americana is set in Turin, the language of the novel contains dialect and regional Italian specific to Piedmont as well as terms from other regions, including Lombardy, Veneto and Campania. Additionally, the text features numerous lexical items from neostandard Italian, including neologisms and colloquialisms.

DIALECT

s-ciopón (The name of a boat used for bird-hunting that literally means Ital. **fucilone**; Eng. **big gun**. In this context, however, the term means Ital. **colpo**; Eng. **stroke**) (Venetian)

Alla "riunione ad alto livello" mister Cantino arriva "stravolto", tanto stravolto che subito dopo gli viene uno s-ciopón, sempre che l'infarto fulminante sia stato davvero tale e non la versione plausibile di un omicidio.

(At the "high-level meeting," Mr. Cantino arrived "agitated," so agitated in fact that immediately afterward he had a stroke, provided of course that the sudden heart attack was really that and not the plausible version of a homicide.)

ciula (Ital. **cretino**; Eng. **fool**) (Piedmontese)

Sarà, però se uno a quarant'anni è ancora timido, oltre che timido è anche un po' ciula, come dite voi.

(That may be, but if someone is still shy at forty years of age, besides being shy he's also a bit of a ciula, as you people say.)

REGIONALISMS

smammare (Eng. **scram**) (Neapolitan)

Solo quando ebbe finito si decisero a smammare come si augurava la barista.

(Only when she had finished did they decide to scram like the barista was wanting.)

profia (Eng. **prof**; but for the American high school context, **teach**) (Piedmontese)

Non mi aveva detto tutto, la profia, chissà perché.

(She hadn't told me everything, the teach. Who knows why.)



far vedere i sorci verdi (A phrase derived from the three green mice painted on the fuselage of the 205th bombardment squadron of the Italian airforce. Ital. **far vedere i topi verdi**; Eng. literally, **to make** [someone] **see green mice**, i.e., **to make** [someone] **see red**) (Romanesco)

Se riusciamo a dimostrarlo gli facciamo vedere i sorci verdi.

(If we can prove it, we'll make them see red.)

UNIVERBATION

mioddio (Eng. **myGod**)

diosacosa (Eng. **Godknowswhat**, i.e., **Godknowswhatelse**)

O mioddio, mi sfinirà di recriminazioni e rimproveri e rimostranze e raccomandazioni e rinfacci e diosacosa.

(OhmyGod, she'll wear me out with recriminations and reproaches and remonstrances and recommendations and rebukes and Godknowswhatelse.)

AUGMENTATIVE

capelloni (Ital. **capelli** + **-one**; Eng. **hairs** + **big**; literally, **big hairs**, but used to mean **longhairs**, i.e., **hippies**)

Amalia, chi l'avrebbe mai detto, di un hippy—a quel tempo da noi si chiamavano capelloni—e ha mollato tutto e tutti.

(Amalia, who would have ever thought it, [fell in love] with a hippy—back then we called them longhairs here—and she dropped everyone and everything.)

OATH

giurin-giuretta (An oath between children in which they cross their forefingers and sway their hands back and forth. Eng. (in the American context) cross your heart [and hope to die])

Francesca per la prima volta sorride, fa giurin-giuretta ed esce.

(Francesca smiles for the first time, crosses her heart and leaves.)

COLLOQUIALISM

non essere uno stinco di santo (Eng. literally, **not to be a saint's shin**, i.e., **to be far from a saint**)

Invece non se l'è cercata, anche se non era uno stinco di santo.

(But he didn't go looking for it [trouble], even though he was far from a saint.)

NEOLOGISM

tigi (A word formed from the the pronunciation of the letters **tg**, which is an abbreviation of Ital. **telegiornale**; Eng. literally, **telenewspaper**, i.e., **news**)

Non ancora, te li ho solo portati, ma ho visto il tigi delle sei e mezzo. Poveri noi.

(Not yet, I just brought them to you [the newspapers], but I saw the six-thirty news. Poor us.)

TIME EXPRESSIONS



l'altro ieri (Eng. literally, the other yesterday, i.e., the day before yesterday)

Non c'è più venuto nessuno, a vederla, e lei l'altro ieri ha tolto il cartello.

(No one else came, from the look of it, and she took down the sign the day before yesterday.)

oggiogiorno (Eng. literally, todayday, i.e., nowadays)

Siamo tutti nervosi, oggiogiorno.

(We're all irritable, nowadays.)

Concluding Remarks:

L'amica americana is not a typical mystery. While it certainly has the intrigue one would expect from the genre, mainly because it's impossible to anticipate the author's next move, it's also a thought-provoking read. Oggero has a special talent for putting her audience directly into the minds—and hearts—of her characters through internal monologues. And those of Camilla and the widow Dora Vernetti about the difficulties of relationships and aging are particularly moving. As a result, Oggero's characters seem like family and old friends, ones from whom readers have much to learn.

In Translation:

Given the tremendous popularity of the Camilla Baudino mysteries, it's unfortunate that there is no English translation of L'amica americana. The novel is available in French translation, however, under the title L'amie américaine.

On the Internet:

You can find Margherita Oggero on [Facebook](#) [5]. While you're online, check out an episode of [Provaci ancora prof!](#) [6] on Italy's RAI network. This is a terrific show.

Source URL: <http://www.iitaly.org/magazine/focus/life-people/article/margherita-oggeros-lamica-americana>

Links

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[2] http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/8804512814/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=8804512814&linkCode=as2&tag=italicissima-20

[3] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0435359/>

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