

THE VALUE OF WORTHLESS LIVES:
ITALIAN IMMIGRANT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES
BY "ORDINARY PEOPLE"

ILARIA SERRA

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Anthony Tamburri, Department of Comparative Studies, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Anthony Tamburri
Director of Dissertation
William Covino
Fred L. Goodenough Jr.

Anthony Tamburri
Chairman, Department of Comparative Studies
William Covino
Dean, the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts & Letters
Larry Remark
Vice-President for Research and Graduate Studies

22 March 2004
Date

ABSTRACT

Author: Ilaria Serra
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Institution: Florida Atlantic University
Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Anthony Tamburri
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“Immigrants left tears and sweat, but no memories.” This dissertation tries to prove this assertion by the Italian critic Giuseppe Prezzolini wrong. Italian immigrants have sweated and cried, but many of them also left a trace of their “heroic” voyage between two continents, and two worlds, that took place in waves during the entire XX Century. With an oxymoron, I will speak about *the value of worthless lives*. These authors are no conquerors, saints or celebrities, but they believe that their life stories are worth being written and remembered.

There are many direct ties between the experience of migration and the need to write an autobiography. Autobiography is a response to the trauma of immigration and provides a kind of *sutura* for a wounded subject. Besides, immigration creates the

"individual." Immigration is a kind of Copernican revolution which destabilizes the sense of human self; the immigrant feels the ground shifting under his feet and loses the center of his life, his home. Autobiography thus becomes the tool to build his/her own centrality, his/her own identity as a particle of this chaotic universe. Furthermore, by migrating, the Italian *contadino* (the majority of them came from the countryside) leaves a land that kept his family tied down for centuries, but most of all leaves the soil of the amorphous "mass" of suffering farmers, and creates a new individual. But the individuality of Italian immigrant autobiographies is somehow different from the individuality of American autobiographies. Our "unorthodox" authors demand a new critical terminology inviting concepts such as "Quiet Individualism" and "Ethos of the Survivor."

The dissertation presents a gallery of immigrant self-portraits: nine immigrant workers; five the immigrant workers with a political conscience; ten immigrant workers with a poet's soul (including a farmer and a stonecutter who wrote two remarkable chivalric poems); five immigrants with religious interests; seven immigrant artists; nine immigrant women; eight graduated immigrants; and finally five successful immigrants, perfectly integrated into American society. In all, fifty-eight portraits that tell life stories and provide us with a lived slice of immigration history.

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Gli emigrati lasciarono lacrime e sudore, ma non memorie.
Giuseppe Prezzolini, *I Trapiantati*¹

INTRODUCTION

In response to Prezzolini's statement, the topic of my dissertation is a phenomenon mostly observed in the recent years: the proliferation of autobiographies written by non-professional writers about their immigrant experience. This material is largely unknown in Italy and in the United States. I have tried to bring to light obscure texts that are considered neither literature nor history, that are buried in archives and in the drawers of private houses. An immense amount of material waits to be analyzed and appreciated. A spontaneous outgrowth of real life is found there where no one would look: among illiterates, farmers, manual workers, and professionals who do not look for fame, but to be remembered.

The waves of Italian immigration to the United States (from the end of 1800 to the second after war) were not intellectual migrations. Therefore they did not produce many books on the personal experience of the "people." To look for the voice of the real protagonists of such historical phenomenon, we have look for a material commonly considered as second rate. The low education of these authors makes them slip outside of what is generally considered literature or history. Their autobiographies come from "unexpected places" by unexpected authors, humble Italian workers who have long been

¹ "Immigrants left tears and sweat, but not memories" (409).

unheard:² "Historically the authority of working class writers has often been erased by the generic byline 'Anonymous'" (ix) writes Anne Goldman. By enlarging the autobiographical field, she asserts - including works by "illiterate" or "unliterary" authors - "we describe a wider spectrum of the ways and means by which people in the 20th century speak themselves into textual existence" (xvii).

These erased testimonies give another face of history, or as Gramsci asserts, they show "life in action and not just as written laws or dominant moral principles say it should be" (1718). Instead, the study of autobiography has been relegated to a slippery middle ground, neither history nor literature. The latest monumental study on Italian immigration, the two volumes *Partenze* and *Arrivi* of *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* (Bevilacqua, De Clementi, Franzina, 2001 and 2002), does not include a chapter on the autobiographies of immigration. This is a pity, because they could have given a personal lived insight into this historical phenomenon. "Only the autobiography can tell us what that experience felt like and seemed to be at a given point in the life history" writes Jill Conway (viii).

The first part of this dissertation will be dedicated to a justification of my use of autobiography in this historical context. Before clarifying key-concepts such as the relationship between autobiography and history, truth and language, I will provide a literary review to define the term "autobiography," panning on the different definitions - from the widest to the narrowest. I will then focus on the topic of my research, "humble autobiography," passing through "'Other's' Autobiography," "Ethnic Autobiography,"

² I am borrowing the expression "autobiographies from unexpected places" from Martha Ward, *A Sounding of Women. Autobiographies from Unexpected Places* (1998), where she collects pieces of autobiographies from women.

"Italian-American Autobiography," and "Lives of Ordinary People." The topic of this research is in fact the autobiography of ordinary people, and I will mostly describe the works of those authors that are not "supposed" to write, nor are used to it. With an oxymoron, I will speak about *the value of worthless lives*. These authors are no conquerors, saints or celebrities, but they believe that their life stories are worth being written and remembered. The experience of migration seems to trigger in them an inner need, the need to pin down their volatile days past on a piece of paper. To do this, folks who have never taken a pen in hand or who took it only to write their shopping list, their monthly expenses, or sporadic letters to their family, suddenly decide to entrust it with the story of their life. I believe there is a direct tie between the experience of migration and the need to write an autobiography. It is the process of individualization. By migrating, the Italian *contadino* (the majority of them came from the countryside) leaves a land that kept his family tied down for centuries. He leaves the land of his ancestors, but most of all he leaves the land of the "mass". The very act of leaving detaches the immigrant from the amorphous mass of suffering farmers. Nevertheless, this individual is somehow different from the individual of American autobiographies. I will thus dedicate the second part to the description of these "unorthodox" authors, and to the explanation of new terms that describe them such as "Quiet Individualism" and the "Ethos of the Survivor".

The third part is the bulk of the research. I will here mount an exhibit, a gallery of immigrant self-portraits through various corridors: the immigrant worker (9 portraits); the immigrant worker with a political conscience (5 portraits); the immigrant worker with a poetical soul (10 portraits) including two amazing chivalry poems written by a farmer

and a stonecutter; the immigrant worker with a spiritual interest, as a religious figure (5 portraits); the immigrant artist (7 portraits); the immigrant woman (9 portraits); the graduate immigrant (8 portraits); and finally the successful immigrant, perfectly integrated into American society (5 portraits). In all, 58 portraits of immigrants who tell their own stories and give us a lived slice of immigration.

The fourth part will be a stylistic critique of these works. Many of them are *in limina*, between orality and literacy. Rhetorically, these autobiographies are masterpieces of communication. They are the first sign of a will to speak out, to create a voice of one's own for voiceless people. When did the farmer, the construction worker, the miner have the possibility of making his voice heard? His rhetorical act would fall in the void, unheard. Not even in his daily toil this was possible, not even as a collective effort. The political power of laborers was "discovered" only in 1912, in the Lawrence textile strike lead by Italian workers. This strike took the entrepreneurs by surprise because never before Italian immigrants had reacted in an organized manner: their ignorance of the language, their misery, their slavery to the *padrone*, and their regional disunity made them safe laborers, often used to replace strikers. The effort of writing, an unfamiliar action to most of them, is therefore a further attempt to proclaim their individuality and speak with their own voice. These autobiographies are "performative acts" in as much as by writing these authors put an end to their *being-written*, to their being passive objects of someone else's description. History is written about the masses, but the mass never had a chance to speak for itself. Soldiers lost their names together with their lives in battle (their diaries and letters are marvelous rare documents). Illiterate farmers and workers were dispossessed of their names together with their rights and "x" was their signature.

These works thus shed new light on the experience of migration. They turn the page to a history of migration written as destructive, uprooting, and deadly. They instead demonstrate the strength of creativity during time of devastation. Emigration becomes a creative act, a graft not an uprooting. The emigrant is not the passive fugitive from misery, but the forger of a new identity or a form of written art (even poetry in some cases). Many authors stress the creative aspect of emigration: Luigi Olari in music with his compositions, Giovanni Vescovi with his marvelous hand-made violins,² Luigi Triarsi with the house of his dreams, Raffaello Lugnani and Antonio Andreoni with a book of verses, Giuseppe Previtali simply with "il libro" (the book)...

The immigrant doctor Previtali writes on his deathbed, "il libro," as his last word to his son. These authors are all strongly geared, almost obsessed, by creating what must appear to them as an "object of intellect:" the "book". I have personally encountered immigrants who wanted to see their writings become books. And I have found copies of such books published at the writer's expenses, in "vanity press" or cheap and provincial typographies, perhaps read only by their relatives and some close friends. Especially in more recent years, now that the financial and technological means have become available, it is impossible not to notice the determination of these writers to have their lives contained in a book. It seems that immigrants who come from a "productive", "material" background absolutely need the objective, material consistence of paper and cardboard covers. Only the shape of the book matters, not the quality of the publication,

² The story of the late Giovanni "John" Vescovi was told me by his wife, Maria Rigoni Stern Vescovi, in Asiago (2002). The couple moved to Chicago after the Second World War, and returned in old age to their home on the plateau of Asiago (Vicenza) leaving two sons and various grandchildren in America. Maria Vescovi's house is still full of her husband's hand-made violins, paintings and poems.

not the colors on the cover. It is life itself, packaged between two *cheap* covers, which calls for recognition.

I have looked for these books in unexpected places, private houses, libraries, and in three archives: the Immigration History Research Center in Saint Paul (Minnesota), the Center for Migration Studies of Staten Island (New York), and the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale of Pieve Santo Stefano (Italy). I have extracted the best passages from all these books and translated their Italian words into English (the translations from Italian and French are mine; when the Italian version is incorrect I translate into an awkward English).

PART I

CHAPTER 1- FOR A DEFINITION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Introduction

Before approaching the analysis of autobiographies by “ordinary” Italian-American immigrants,¹ I will here quickly encompass the landscape of criticism on the autobiographical genre to set up a frame for my study. I will give an overview of different takes on autobiography, eventually focusing on the analysis of ethnic autobiography, Italian-American autobiography, and autobiography by “ordinary people.”

Autobiography is a wide genre. As it is easy to make any work fall into the category of autobiography, the debate over its limits has been and still is contentious.²

1 After Daniel Aaron's "The Hyphenate Writer and American Letters," and Anthony Tamburri's *To Hyphenate or not to Hyphenate* it has become impossible not to feel self-conscious about the use of hyphen. Speaking mainly of first generation Italian-Americans in this dissertation, I agree on charging the hyphen with all its "hyphen's length" (Aaron 213), its load of meanings such as distance, alienation, and net refusal of the ethnic group by the mainstream culture. For these first generation writers ethnical conflict and the separation of self are raw and burning. The hyphen is not ready to be tilted into a slash.

2 One of the latest contributions that try to give some order to the field is Linda Anderson's 2001 *Autobiography: New Critical Idiom*. The book is a summary of the criticism on autobiography which opens with these words: "Autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it," Candace Lang wrote in 1982, thus acknowledging a major problem for anyone who studies this topic: if the writer is always, in the broadest sense, implicated in the work, any writing may be judged to be autobiographical, depending on how one reads it (Lang 1982: 6)."

This tendency to include everything as autobiography brings critics, such as Donald M. Murray, to the following statements: "We are autobiographical in the way we write; my autobiography exists in the examples of writing I use in this piece and in the text I weave around them. I have my particular way of looking at the world and my own way of using language to communicate what I see. My voice is the product of a Scottish genes and a Yankee environment, of Baptist sermons and the newspaper city room, of

Etymologically the word is a sum of three concepts: it is “the description (*graphia*) of an individual human life (*bios*) by the individual himself (*auto-*)” (Misch 5). In reference to the topic of this dissertation, I will mainly refer to autobiography as in the much-quoted definition by the French critic Philippe Lejeune: “A retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (4). In his *On Autobiography*, Lejeune chooses a grammatical standpoint to explain the boundaries of the genre. He might be considered by some as simplistic, naïve and still “modern” (as opposed to post-modern) in his faith in author and reader, and the “pact” he sees established between them. Nevertheless, for my study, as we shall see later, his clarifications are more useful than anything else, not least because his naivete is shared by our autobiographers.

Autobiography has been studied from different vantage points. A first distinction is between those critics who approach autobiography from a philosophical point of view and those who approach it from a historical one. Among the former, Roy Pascal, James Olney, and Georges Gusdorf analyze autobiography in an existential light, through its ties with philosophy and the study of *man*. Among the latter, Diane Bjorklund, Robert Elbaz and William Spengeman adopt a historicist point of view, basing each autobiography on its own time and place. They are accompanied by a cohort of critics who study “other’s” autobiography, “others” being women, homosexuals, immigrants, and minorities, for whom concepts such as “placement” and “specificity” are tools of resistance against mainstream narratives. This ethnical approach to autobiography has

all the languages I have heard and spoken” (67). But he also adds: “I suspect that when you read my poem, you wrote your own autobiography. That is the terrible, wonderful power of reading: the texts we create in our own minds while we read – or just after we read – become part of the life we believe we lived. Another thesis: all reading is autobiographical” (74). Really, anything can become autobiography.

been only recently fueled by some critics such as Steven Hunsaker, Paul John Eakin, James Payne, and James Holte. Italian-American autobiography in particular has been studied by Holte, Michael La Sorte, who concentrates only in the “greenhorn years” of immigrants, Fred Gardaphe’, and William Boelhower, who uses structuralist tools to undertake a literary criticism of ethnic autobiographies.

A Philosophy of Autobiography: Georges Gusdorf, Roy Pascal, and James Olney

Two works signaled the rediscovery of autobiography in the 1950s: the 1951 English translation of *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* written in 1907 by the German Georg Misch, and the translation of “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” by the French Georges Gusdorf (1956). Both Misch and Gusdorf insert autobiography in the specific history of the West, in its correlation with the discovery of individuality typical of the Renaissance. Misch describes that period as when “the inmost soul burst forth out of an eternity of unrealized immanence and found itself awake to the world” (67),³ when he sees the realization of Jacob Burckhardt’s “Discovery of Man” (the *lifting of the veil* from the Middle Ages’ human consciousness, a veil woven by faith and illusion).

In the same way, according to Gusdorf’s existential essay, Western *individuality* is the particular metaphysical condition that makes autobiography possible. Individuality, this particular condition of the mind, was shaped since the Copernican revolution forced man to become a “responsible agent,” opposed to others, independent from the

³ Misch individuates this discovery of Individuality in other two moments of history: in the “free Hellenic spirit” that followed the age of Homer, and at about the same time in Israel “through the spirit of the prophets” (67).

community, and engaged in an “autonomous adventure.” As the product of a major shift in human consciousness, individuality rises from the ashes of an old sense of unity among men and generations, exemplified for example in the custom of giving the new born the name of the deceased grandfather so that “the community maintains a continuous self-identity in spite of the constant renewal of individuals” (30).

Individuality and her sister autobiography are daughters of the Copernican revolution, characterized by the consciousness that man is not the center of the Universe, but only a minimal part of it: man’s loneliness and his responsibility in life go together.⁴ We will see how immigration can be considered a kind of Copernican revolution in the next part.

According to Gusdorf, autobiography springs from a will of “revenge on history” that touches any human being to compensate for the essential failure of life: the deepest intention of autobiography is an “apologetics or theodocity of the individual being” (36). Gusdorf does not refer to a specific economic failure or a business flop, but to an existential failure: the imperfection of life is not being eternal. Autobiography becomes therefore

the final chance to win back what has been lost [. . .] the task of autobiography is first of all a task of personal salvation.[. . .]The mature man or the man already old who projects his life into narrative would thus provide witness that he has not existed in vain; he chooses not revolution but reconciliation, and he brings it about in the very act of reassembling the scattered elements of a destiny that seems to him to have been worth the trouble of living. (39)

⁴ Some critics have refused this idea, as Susan Stanford Friedman writes: "Gusdorf associates this curiosity with the Copernican revolution - an odd connection, as the impact of Copernican astronomy was to diminish man's centrality in the cosmos, not enhance it" ("Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," 35).

Indeed, we may easily see in this portrait the features of our immigrant writers whose works are not agonizing acts of revolution, but pacts of reconciliation with their own life. Their pen is in fact the pacific weapon against the suspicion of having lived “in vain,” having lost family, friends, and land in name of a personal research, and having scattered their life in crazy shreds.

The seminal book for the critical discovery of autobiography in the United States is Roy Pascal’s *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960). Referring to a Modern obsession for a ladder of values in literature, Pascal figures as an *elitist* analyst of autobiographies who descends from the tradition that sees autobiography as the genre for “uomini illustri” (illustrious men), “first generals and ‘governors’ of the earthly kingdom, and then since the beginning of the Christian era, those of the celestial kingdom (the saints)” (Scarlini 10). The large influence of Pascal’s book explains why our *autobiographies of little people* (like our authors) are relegated to the shadow. Pascal considers only few autobiographies as literary worthy (Cellini’s, Rousseau’s, Saint Theresa’s, Wordsworth’s and Goethe’s): those who speak of “the whole man” (which is tantamount to a sculpture by Michelangelo, even if the finest, as representative of “art” or an opera by Verdi as representative of “music”). For Pascal, the only true autobiography is that which is “a search for one’s inner standing” (182) striving for self-knowledge (since there is a “cone of darkness” at the center of every autobiography). It cannot therefore be a mere collection of events, but must rise to a symbolic level for the formation of the author’s personality, by a skillful sewing of inner and outer worlds.

Pascal narrows down the field of true autobiographies to “those by men or women of outstanding achievement in life” (10), and those of higher spirit: “the value of

an autobiography depends ultimately on the quality of spirit of the writer” (19). The rest is unworthy. Looking with diffidence down at the multitude of normal people’s autobiography he counts their deficiencies: “Autobiographies fail if the authors lack insight or seriousness, wholeness of character. But they frequently fail too because they do not create that significant meeting-place between the individual and the outré world, that illuminates them both” (186). He thus agrees with V.S. Pritchett when, in the article “All About Ourselves,” he asserts: “modern autobiography fails when it has no attitude, when it has no special subject which rescues the self from the cliché of having lived. There is no credit in living [. . .] Not every bucketful of our lives in the conveyor belt from cradle to grave is valuable” (601-602). Second, according to Pascal, the quality of modern autobiography suffers from today’s insecurity of the self, from a certain “self-distrust” (caused also but not only by the influence of Freud and Marx) that leads “to an almost cynical estimation of the core of the self, [and] suggests a malaise that is due to the nature of modern living altogether” (161). Third, this preoccupation with the self “may, and often does, deteriorate into vanity, complacency, self-indulgence” (180).

As we can guess, with such great expectations, Pascal comes to a dead end. He is forced to admit that by excluding all the works that do not respond to his high standards, one is forced to attain a meager harvest, since the greatest number of autobiography simply present either “an inadequacy in the person writing” or “a lack of moral responsibility toward their task” or “a lack of awareness and insight.” Many autobiographies, especially those lacking high literary quality, even if dense in content, are thus left out. Not to speak of “our” autobiographies, those of simple immigrants who could never even dream of having their work included with the masterpieces. These are

in fact what he sees as mere retelling of facts, simply because “they were lovable,” not filtered through the significance they have for the individual, not weaving between the external and internal world of man as Pascal would like. These works allegedly hurt their authors if we listen to Pascal’s half-joke that “most of us love ourselves too dearly to be autobiographers” (187). Notwithstanding its elitism, Roy Pascal’s work remains an influential precedent for anyone who approaches the theme of autobiography.

If Pascal narrows down “true” autobiographies to those who are able to present a harmonious coincidence of man and events, James Olney gives new air to this stuffy autobiographical domain by attempting a philosophy of autobiography in his *Metaphors of Self* (1972). His merit is to endeavor to write a grand history of autobiography, by adopting a wide point of view to explain why we write autobiography and what we find in it (man himself). He calls upon psychology, literature, history, and even cosmology to create a philosophy of autobiography in which autobiography is the expression of man. According to Olney, there is a double tie between the way we know ourselves and the way we know the world. On the one hand studying the self is the way we study the world; and thus, describing the self we make philosophy (he notices that almost every one of the early philosophers was a doctor: the study of the self is our metaphysics and our physics). On the other hand, every thought of man is autobiographical: since we cannot exit our skin, our eyes and our minds, the way we see the world is affected by who we are. Olney here quotes Heraclitus who was the first to say that “as the cosmologer is so will be his cosmology.” Therefore, every explanation of the world is not mere theory, every history is not a collection of facts, every cosmology is not a description of the universe, but they are all descriptions of the self. In this sense

everything is autobiography; for which Olney's theory does not limit, but instead (dangerously) expands the realm of autobiography.

For Olney living and philosophizing are the same thing. He uses a suggestive word play, the verb 'to self' (used in one of G.M. Hopkins's poems: "each mortal thing [. . .]selves – goes itself") that means to create each one's own unique self by living and making sense of life: "Each is selving in its unique way an inclusive 'Self' of all things" (24). By living our life, we are building our self, and we are therefore writing our philosophy. Seen in this light, the story of a life is a philosophy on its own, realized as a "metaphor of self." Since, according to Olney, it is impossible to know the world in its entirety, we can try at best to come close to it by creating metaphors that are "something known and of our making, or at least of our choosing, that we put to stand for, and so to help to understand, something unknown and not of our making" (30). Autobiographies, in the end, are the metaphors of self.

Olney's Philosophy and Our Immigrant Autobiography

Autobiography is the way we know the world, according to Olney. It is not difficult to find this valid for most of our immigrant writers. Even if we know that the authors were certainly not thinking of writing their own philosophy when they sat down to write about their life, we cannot fail to notice that many a part of their work is dedicated to some kind of moral lesson. They probably feel entitled to do this by their old age, as well as by the authority coming from the eventful experience of their life. When they do not have a specific part dedicated to the moral lesson, their entire text transpires it. Out of their collected lives surfaces a sense of optimism against all odds, a sense of

trust in man who struggles with history through his hard work in a hostile world.

Perhaps, following Olney, we could call this the “immigrant’s philosophy.”

Besides, Olney’s concept of metaphors of self can be applied with success to our immigrant writings. Not knowing how to grasp the world, our autobiographers do turn to their lives, their small lives, to try to construct an explanation that can make sense. The life of an immigrant is one of the most “senseless,” broken as it is and scattered in pieces, waving in the wind, centerless and restless. When the old immigrant looks back at his life and sets forth to pin it down, he is making a life-saving act of interpretation, he is ordering his existence and giving it a meaning, or as Olney puts it, he is unifying it through a metaphor and making it “thereby fit into an organized, patterned body of experiential knowledge” (31). It is particularly telling to discover which are the metaphors of self used by the immigrant *I* to represent his life. They could be as concentrated as the building of the perfect *house* or finding a *place* in the world, or as loose as “*making oneself*” or “*surviving*.” In sum, as Olney says, “life – their lives and works and symbols seem to say - has no explanation but it may have a meaning. And that meaning will be discovered by us, if at all, as it was discovered by these men, if at all, as the correlative to one’s own being, a metaphor of one’s own self” (332).

Immigrant autobiography presents an ulterior dimension of the act of “selving” while living life. For these immigrants, selving means living a particular experience, the experience of immigration that they call “fare l’ America,” “making America.” There is not only a transitive sense in this “fare”: America is not only the object “made,” literally “built” by the Italian immigrant. There is also an intransitive sense of the verb, where “fare” refers back to the subject, and “l’ America” becomes the attribute of the subject: it

defines the successful immigrant who has been able to own part of America, and has in turn become part of its prosperity. Robert Viscusi notes that “fare l’America” has always had two meanings: make Italy in America (in the Little Italies) and ‘make oneself’: “‘fare l’America’ also means to endow oneself with the status that only comes from making oneself through this particular route, which passes through America. To make America means to construct oneself” (61). This double meaning inherent in “fare l’America” is clarified in one of our autobiographies, when the terrace-maker Pietro Toffolo builds a parallelism between America that grows through his work and the immigrant growing with it: in Long Island he sees “tanto spazio aperto con i segni che qualcosa stava crescendo e poi crebbe davvero ed io con essa” (38).⁵ The autobiography of the immigrant therefore not only refers to a universal “selving” through life, but to a particular one, a “selving through America.”

A Welcomed Definition: Philippe Lejeune

Between the narrowness of Roy Pascal (real autobiography is made by the life stories of great men) and the width of James Olney (fiction and poetry can be autobiographical as long as they give a metaphor of self), a middle way is paved by the French historian Philippe Lejeune whose *On Autobiography* was translated into English in 1982 by Paul John Eakin. Lejeune gives a reasonable definition of autobiography, more as a tentative conclusion that helps keep some clarity of mind than a definitive one. Autobiography, for him, must respond to these simple requirements: it should be a

⁵ "So much open space with the signs that something was growing, and then really grew, and I grew with it."

retrospective narrative, written in prose, written by a real person about his existence and about the development of his personality.

In particular, Lejeune has the merit of reintroducing a lost element in literary criticism, the notion of *trust*: trust in the existence of the author, in the apparent intentions of the author, and trust in the language used by the author. The possibility of a trustworthy autobiography was mined when, in 1979, the French Paul de Man published his radical essay entitled “Autobiography as De-Facement” in which he questioned the veraciousness of its linguistic medium (I will discuss this article in the next chapter). After De Man, statements such as that of Edward Stuart Bates - “an autobiography is a book which believes itself to be one” (2) - have become impossible. Lejeune instead re-values the relationship in “buonafede” between reader and writer, naming it in legal terms as the “autobiographical pact.” Simply put, an autobiography is what the writer and the reader agree to consider an autobiography. It depends on the expressed (not guessed) intention of the writer and on the presence of the contractual unquestionable identity between author, narrator, and protagonist. The pact is sealed by the signature of the proper name, “the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person. [. . .] Exceptions and breaches of trust only emphasize the general credence on the type of social contract” (11). In fact, autobiographies are generally not interested in playing Pirandellian games of ambiguity. And, for certain, I must add, our immigrant autobiographies are “not a guessing game” (13). They “naively” speak of the real, as the banker Angelo Massari states: “I do not know if calling it a history, a biography, or a confession, but in all truth it is my life” (1) and then, even more clearly, he adds: “I can however assure the reader that I have written the truth, and the

truth only” (24). Through the “referential pact,” our authors claim to provide information about a “reality” exterior to the text not through verisimilitude (as “*effect du reel*”) but through a resemblance to the truth, as being the very image of reality, “*l’image du reel*.” This truth does not exist in itself for the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, but it is found by men and women themselves. For Dilthey, life has no meaning, no invariable pattern, it follows no divine plan nor design of nature, but “human beings themselves find in, or attribute to, their lives pattern and meaning” in the privileged *locus* of biography and autobiography (Rickman 220).

A History of the Metaphors of Self:

Diane Bjorklund, William Spengeman, Robert Elbaz

The second main trend of the study of autobiography chooses a historically based point of view by inserting the development of self in the time of its production and following thus its change through the ages.

In *The Forms Of Autobiography: Episodes In The History Of The Literary Genre* (1980), William Spengeman looks at the history of autobiography from a Marxist point of view in order to establish the historical root of the discourse on the self, and to “understand the conditions that have led different autobiographers at different times to write about themselves in different ways” (xiii). He proposes four categories of autobiography: *historical* autobiography that goes from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, from Dante to Franklin; *philosophical* autobiography that reflects the changes in climate around the turn of nineteenth century (here he includes Rousseau, and De Quincey, the opium eater); *poetic* autobiography that expresses the radically altered

conditions resulting from the ideological upheavals of the 19th century (including here autobiographical fiction such as Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter*, and Dickens's *David Copperfield*)⁶; and *post-modern* autobiography. In this fourth type, typical of post-modernity, "the self is seen to depend for its existence upon the verbal action, which therefore describes its own poetic creation," in contrast with the preceding three categories, where "the self is seen to exist independent of whatever the writer says on its behalf, and the verbal action seeks either to describe that self historically, or analyze it philosophically, or express in poetically" (xvi).

The same historical perspective is chosen by Robert Elbaz in his version of the history of self-hood. In *The Changing Nature of Self* (1987) Elbaz inserts autobiographies in the continuous fight between freedom and determinism, human agency and transcendental power. He departs from a Marxist view that society is responsible for the various shifts in the ideas of self-hood: changes are "dictated by particular historical situations and as such contribute to shape the receptive consciousness which grapples with them daily" (vii). He thus starts his survey with Augustine as the first author to establish the importance of self in Medieval time, an era when men were hierarchically ordered, and did not have any weight for themselves but for their position in society. Augustine's idea of self is nevertheless still subordinated to a transcendental meaning: man is image and semblance of God, and his life-story is the story of a conversion that ends there. The second step toward a liberation of man from the transcendent is taken, for Elbaz, by Abelard, the suffering man, who constructs his self in a distinguished, unique way, as a marginal man, marked in the flesh. The third

⁶ Spengeman sees in Saint Augustine's *Confession* a synthesis of all three of types of autobiography: historical, philosophical and poetic.

mark in this history is Rene' Descartes for whom reason becomes the principle of the individual self with his motto, *cogito ergo sum*. With Descartes every man is an individual, different but similar to others so that knowledge is not only an internal, private process, but it can, in fact, be communicated.

While William Spengeman and Robert Elbaz linger on a few milestone autobiographies as those of Augustine, Abelard, Descartes, and Rousseau, Diane Bjorklund analyzes a multitude of works in order to distill a history of self through time in her *Interpreting the Self*. If Olney's metaphors of self do exist, then Bjorklund follows their trajectory and their fluctuations through time, and sketches out a chronology of the thinkers of the self.

According to Bjorklund's chronology, in 1800 religious autobiography is the prevalent genre in the United States. These works depart from the agreement that human nature is innately corrupt, and therefore "their tales were to stand as examples of religious conversions" (15). In this view of human nature, the components of self become passion ("emotions that impel us to action"), reason, and will, plus "a notion of change occurring in the self only through God's grace; and a lack of concern about the relationship between self and society" (46). In the nineteenth century a competing model of the self appears, which relates to evolutionary theory, and promotes the optimistic idea of self-development. This model of self, "highlights character, willpower, and the importance of taking control of one's own fate" (15). This is where the concept of the self-made man, a key-concept in our autobiographies, starts to emerge:

although it might appear that the concept of the self-made man has been the prototypical American story since the birth of the nation, this idea did not

crystallize in the United States until the middle third of the nineteenth century. [. . .] it was during this same period that some American autobiographers (both businessmen and others) began to use this story of an individual who achieves success by his own efforts as the basis for telling about their own lives (66).

It follows that the idea of will became the forefront element of self. Like our autobiographers, these writers place no great value on schooling, rather on work; they neglect the childhood phase of their story to emphasize their working experience; they shorten the story of their family to emphasize the importance of the self. Significantly, in this category Bjorklund locates the only Italian-American in her book, Lee Iacocca, a typical self-made man.⁷

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, another model of the self starts appearing, one related to the development of psychology that offers autobiographers additional concepts and theories to explain their actions. Such a model focuses on motivation and the role of emotions, instincts, and drives in explaining human action” (15), as Bjorklund tells us. She calls this metaphor of self, the “uncertain self,” which lives a battle within, not with passions but with “instincts and drives.” We can see some of these characteristics in some of our Italian-American writers, such as Elisabeth Evans who speaks of the importance of the decentering effect of emotions, of her inner force, and especially treats the long-termed struggle with her mother’s influence in Freudian terms rather than in the usual sentimental terms.

⁷ Even if Iacocca is not directly useful for my research because he was born in the United States, he writes an interesting reflection that explains the self-made immigrant condition, according to the Italian mode. Through his ghostwriter William Novak, he remembers: “People say to me: ‘You’re a roaring success. How did you do it?’ I go back to what my parents taught me. Apply yourself. Get all the education you can, but then, by God, *do* something! Don’t just stand there, make something happen. It isn’t easy, but if you keep your nose to the grindstone and work at it, it’s amazing how in a free society you can become as great as you want to be” (340).

Bjorklund signals that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, autobiographies start to resent the stress that sociologists and others theorists put on the effects of society on the self, by emphasizing not the “essential human nature,” but “a pliant human nature molded by social forces and social interaction,” resulting in the metaphor of the “beleaguered self.” This adds ulterior considerations to the previous model: “From this perspective, a division of the self into an inner, private self and an outer, social self becomes more appropriate than a partitioning of it into the ‘internal’ faculties of reason, will and emotions” (130). Bjorklund inserts the appearance of ethnic autobiography in this last period, with their stress on the struggle between consent and descent, choice or heritage, with their sense of a shared group history (see Maxine Kingston, Gloria Anzaldua).

Where do our autobiographers fit? I would guess that, even if writing in the 20th century, most of our authors live by the 19th-century metaphor of the “self-made man.” They are immigrants, and their immigration is what has made them what they are. Only the most educated writers (like Joseph Tusiani) slip into the typical ethnic autobiography of the “beleaguered self.” They are the ones who are most aware of the tensions between the Italian self and the American society that will become the main topic for many Italian/American writers of second generation.

“Other’s” Autobiography

From this historicist vein of criticism springs a literature of the “other,” a generation of critics that values the autobiography of repressed, silenced people, of women, homosexuals, minorities, and ordinary people. Choosing to speak for the

oppressed of society in her *The Uses of Autobiography* (1995), Julia Swindells gives the angriest attack to an a-historical position *à la* James Olney who, according to her,

is insistent that autobiography transcends history in marking man's attempt to produce order, constructing homology between 'the formal organization of the human mind and the formal organization of nature.' This is a dangerous proposition not only in its asocial aspect, whereby the individual appears to bypass society in his relationship with nature, but also because the issue of transcendence [. . .] raises questions of displacement, or usurpation. (3)

According to Swindells, ahistoricism is an advantage of "Western European educated men" who can speak of their ideological environment and be seen to represent it. But for women, blacks, and working-class people who speak from what Sidonie Smith refers to as "a negative position in culture," there can be no claims of universal or representative status. In the same way, Judy Long attacks the canon that includes only Great Lives by Great Men, accusing Olney and Pascal of their "claim to universality by suppressing difference" (21): they function as gatekeepers, filters for inclusion and exclusion - that brings to the conclusion that women's autobiography does not exist. For Swindells the autobiography of "others" has deep subversive powers:

autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the cultural displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness - women, black people, working-class people - have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography. (7)

Agreeing with Ann Fabian that marginal autobiography has the highest performative power for underprivileged writers, Swindells states:

as bell hooks writes, “for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited”, the movement from silence to speech is not merely an attempt to insert a selfhood into history. It is part of a political strategy of liberation, and therefore must break beyond the subject of individual speech and individual authorship, must do more than add another “self” to the autobiographical tradition’s necrophiliac collection. (6)

Women autobiography is a field of inquiry fueled by oppositional determination:⁸

“Autobiography has been one of the most important sites of feminist debate precisely because it demonstrates that there are many different ways of writing the subject,” writes Linda Anderson (87). Women autobiographies can therefore give a strong challenge, as Barbara Rodriguez’s book on the marginal of the marginal, women writers of color, shows: “I illustrate [. . .]the ways in which the shifting presumed marginalities recorded in these narratives illuminate issues of subject construction that have a very challenging centrality to the structures and conventions of the genre” (11). Ultimately, women autobiography has a revolutionary existential value: they not only record their life through autobiographies, but they “write themselves into existence” (Watson 1).

In this vein, one year later, Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi edit *Names We Call Home. Autobiography on Racial Identity* (1996), a collection of writings by people of mixed racial origins speaking about their life stories that become flags for their identity. They include a lesbian woman, a gay man, a Japanese-American, an Asian-American, a “fat” Italian-American for which “fat” is part of her name/home. The life

⁸ The major change in women autobiography takes place after the 1920s, according to Elizabeth Winston. Before 1920, in fact, women writers like Margaret Olifant, Lady Sydney Morgan, and Mary Milford (all writing between 1890 and 1920) still felt the necessity to apologize in some ways for writing through disclaimers and words of self-deprecation: “these autobiographers express their desire to interest and entertain their readers, defend past actions, or leave a record for their children - intentions directed mainly toward satisfying others” (94). Instead, “women who published autobiographies after the 1920s . . . no longer apologized for their careers and successes, though a few still showed signs of uneasiness at having violated cultural expectations for women” (93).

story becomes the way people discover their “names,” their racial identity through the eyes of the others, until such names become physical, political, and spiritual homes. The inspiration of books like this is a strong resistance to the dominant discourse on autobiography of white-famous-old-men: “Autobiography illustrates why racial identity formation occurs at the intersection of a person’s subjective memory of trauma and collective remembrance of histories of domination” (xii).

I would remark that while this rediscovery is perfectly useful for my research as a precedent, I do not necessarily see in “resistance” the main reason for writing of immigrant autobiographers. It is noteworthy the little amount of reference to prejudice and racial discrimination in our writers. Some of them surely mention it, especially when speaking about the hard “greenhorn” years (Iamurri, for example). But this is far from being their main concern. Why? We might ask. It hurts, this is surely one reason. It is hypocritically removed, perhaps. But it is also possible that they have brushed this past pain aside, not counting it, forgetting it, because in the protected space of their autobiography they feel secure, immune from outside looks, safe in their own self. Their writings in fact concentrate on individual achievements or adventures that become *enough for themselves*. Their life stories are self-contained, complete versions of their self. The autobiographical form wraps them all, bundles them as a separate units that do not need to recall the painful sting of prejudice and the scorn of others.

One of the most influential essays is Estelle Jelinek’s contribution in *Women’s Autobiography* (1980), where she claims that “different criteria are needed to evaluate women’s autobiographies, which may constitute if not a subgenre, then an autobiographical tradition different from the male tradition” (1). She is quite Manichean

in her listing of differences between male and female autobiographies, but has the foresight to underscore important biases. She indicates that critics use different terms to describe them: what is alienation for a man is heartbreak for a woman; what is identity crisis for a man is confusion for a woman; while for a man the final goal is manhood, for a woman it is self-abnegation; while a man makes a symbolic journey, a woman understands motherhood; while a man undergoes transformation, a woman learns humility. Jelinek notes that men write “history” while women write “story;” men’s autobiography usually center on public lives while women privilege their private lives; men tell events, women write about people and family. The center of man’s autobiography is the idealized life, while for women it is self-consciousness and self-analysis. Even stylistically, the use of chronological time is a masculine structure, in contrast to the use of fragmentary time by women.

Today the influence of Jelinek is still important if we read Judy Long’s *Telling Women’s Lives* (1999) where she repeats with subdued but clear tones the same binary distinction: men portray themselves as separate, women as connected; men’s stories are set in the public eye, women chronicle private scenes; men’s lives are pruned to a terse outline, women’s remain messy; men claim a destination, women record process; men universalize their experience, women remain contextualized. However, this rigidity of distinction between genders and styles shown by Jelinek and Long has also been criticized. An example is Germaine Bree, who asserts that women scholars “tend merely to reverse the criteria in use: if male autobiographical writing is seen as teleological and linear, female is described as fragmented and circular; if male is defined as using a rhetoric of assertion, female is defined as using a rhetoric of seduction, and so on” (171).

Ethnic autobiography

Ethnicity has a special link to autobiography, as Werner Sollors indicates: “Many ethnic writers have sketched the divided interiors of ethnic rooms. But what interior is more fascinating than the inside of a divided self?” (168). Nevertheless, ethnic autobiography becomes a genre only recently.

William Boelhower considers 1911 (the year after the peak of the new migration from Europe) the birth date of the genre of ethnic autobiography. Before this date black ethnic autobiography existed but was not recognized as a genre. After this date, instead, there is a proliferation of immigrant works sharing certain characteristics that Boelhower underlines. First of all, they all refer to the model of Americanization in a dialectical way: “the specialty of ethnic autobiographical signification, its unique semiotic *jeu*, largely consists in consciously re-elaborating or simply re-writing the received behavioral scripts of the rhetorically well-defined American self” (“The Making of Ethnic Autobiography,” 125). For Boelhower, the model is defined by some immigrant or ethnic autobiographies that treat Americanization, such as *An American in the Making* by Marcus Ravage (1917), *The Americanization of Edward Bok* by Bok (1920), and *The Making of an American* by Jacob Riis (1924). These books are the precedent and the measure of immigrant autobiography. They all present a shedding of the skin: the “old self” has to be stripped to leave space for the new American self (indeed, Constantine Panunzio claims that he discarded his old self to allow for “the unfolding of the American in me”).

Sometimes, Boelhower notes, this Americanization is a required step to “pass” in the American world: “ethnic autobiographers often feel the need to dress up in a uniform of Americanism in order to leave their local enclaves of cultural difference and mimetically enter the homotopic territory of national circulation” (128). But other times, the speaker’s position of outsider gives the possibility for a critique, switching on deconstructive dynamics that often express “political and cultural dissent through a rhetoric of ethnic descent.” Ethnic and immigrant autobiographies can and do criticize the American establishment, “by constantly introducing new heterotopic spaces within mainstream culture” (138). This is the case of Louis Adamic’s *Laughing in the Jungle* (1932), perhaps Boelhower’s most quoted piece. According to Adamic, the American stock is “emotionally, spiritually and intellectually flat [. . .] pickled in the sour juices of Puritanism, or dried over the sacrificial fires of the altars dedicated to the great god Work;” the wished-for “wakening [. . .] probably would begin with the immigrant and their children” (Adamic, 325).⁹

In general, the literature on immigrant and ethnic autobiography refers to the concepts of ethnicity by “descent” (decided by the involuntary order of nature and blood) and by “consent” (decided through volition, choice, and the order of law). It is Werner Sollors who introduces these terms in his *Beyond Ethnicity*. He starts by attacking the swollen importance of “descent” given by critics who favor a kind of “biological insiderism” according to which a critic’s field of competence is limited to his ethnic

⁹ Ethnic autobiography is also treated by two collections of essays by Paul John Eakin and James Payne. In 1991, Eakin sharply divides his book on *American Autobiography* into two parts: the first dedicated to the traditional “four centuries of American autobiography,” and the second to the new appearances, the “varieties of American autobiography,” here including immigrants, Indians, and women. James Payne’s *Multicultural Autobiography*, in turn, attempts a survey on ethnic autobiographies, including Fred Gardaphé’s essay on Jerre Mangione (“My House is not your House: Jerre Mangione and Italian-American Autobiography”).

background.¹⁰ He speaks after the resurface of ethnicity in the 1960s and stresses the evils of such a limitation based on descent. To this concept, he therefore opposes the importance of “consent” that indicates the similarities in all ethnic people when they accept to be Americans.¹¹ He in fact notices that American ethnics are more similar among themselves than to the same ethnic that remained in the old country. After Sollors, “descent” and “consent” become normal vocabulary in ethnic criticism:

Descent relations are those defined by anthropologists as relations of ‘substance’ (by blood or nature); consent relations describe those of ‘law’ or ‘marriage’. Descent language emphasizes our positions as heirs, our hereditary qualities, liabilities, and entitlements; consent language stresses our abilities as mature free agents and ‘architects of our fate’ to choose our spouses, our destinies, and our political systems. (*Beyond*, 6)

Immigrant autobiography also takes part in a larger discourse on national identity – where descent and consent are key terms. As Steven Hunsaker underlines in his *Autobiography and National Identity in the Americas*, all autobiography is a way of negotiating the concept of nation. Departing from Benedict Anderson’s concept of nation as “imagined community,”¹² Hunsaker argues that people create their own concept of nation: “These texts claim implicitly the power that Julia Kristeva claims explicitly: the

¹⁰ On the quarrel between the local and the universal, see also Aijad Ahmad's article "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" (1987). Ahmad questions a simplistic worldview that divides the globe into three Worlds (First, Second and Third), and underlines a more complicate and rich landscape. He challenges a simple definition of the critic (Jameson, in this case) departing from his ethnic origin: "Where do I, who do not believe in the Three Worlds Theory, in which *world* should I place his [Jameson's] text: the first world of his origin, the second world of his ideology and politics, or the third world of his filiation and sympathy?" (24).

¹¹ The struggle between descent and consent has been described, albeit in other terms, by Rose Basile Green in her 1974 book, *The Italian-American Novel*. She is perhaps the first one to consider immigrant writers according to a four-fold model of assimilation-revulsion-counterrevulsion-rooting. Her distinctions have been used by several other critics, but few openly refer to her book.

¹² Anderson’s definition of imagined community is as follows: "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion" (6).

right and the power to identify oneself by selecting, discarding, altering, and preserving models of religious, gender, political, ethnic, and national identity” (5). Hunsaker in fact refuses the faith in the “natural” concept of nation that Anderson sees in the “vocabulary of kinship” (motherland, patria, *vaterland*) or home (*heimat*...). For Anderson in fact, “in everything ‘natural’ there is always something unchosen. In this way, nation-ness is assimilated to color, gender, parentage, and birth-era - all those things one can not help” (143). Hunsaker observes how Anderson overlooks the dialogue between consent and descent, for example in this passage:

If I am a Lett, my daughter may be an Australian. The son of an Italian immigrant to New York will find ancestors in the Pilgrim Fathers. [. . .] it shows from the start that nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and that one can be ‘invited into’ the imagined community. Thus today, even the most insular nations accept the principle of *naturalization* (wonderful word!), no matter how difficult in practice they may make it. (145)

Hunsaker thus proposes a more complicated and less “natural” way of thinking the nation, and shows how “ties based on consent - are a function of a newly acquired language and culture, but those ties come at the price of individuals in conflict with parents - the source of traditional identities through descent” (85). Autobiographies therefore becomes the places where drives of descent and consent conflict and connect, where “the migrant and the migrant’s child must negotiate some kind of peace between the demands of ethnicity and the possibilities of new national identities” (86).

All ethnic autobiography has been considered as marginal. Sidonie Smith notices how “decentering” are “twentieth century autobiographies of the margins” (18). Let us take a look at a few examples from other ethnic life-writings. Treating Chinese-American

autobiography, like Maxine Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, LeiLani Nishime denounces: "‘ethnic histories’ almost always threaten the boundaries between genres [history or literature/autobiography], because the term is traditionally seen as an oxymoron" (68). Treating Native American women autobiography, Sarah Turner stresses the importance for these women who live in a multiple marginalization to write their lives, being otherwise non-existent. Speaking of African-American slave autobiographies, Robin Riley Fast notices how often these subjects were stripped of the ownership of their words, through additional supportive material – "letters from wellwishers, for example, or copies of relevant documents – with the effect that the story's subject, while her or his case might be strengthened, might not have the final word" (9). Lorne Shirinian speaks of Armenian-American autobiographies such as that of David Kherdian, and asserts that they suffer from the same "shame" of the writer who "did not want to align myself with a dying culture and a forlorn race of people" (273).¹³ Also, Japanese-American autobiographies of internment are written mostly by women out of a situation of humiliation, as AnnRayson affirms, because "they were better able to accept the loss of self-esteem which, as women, they never had to the same degree as did Japanese American men" (45).

Italian-American Autobiographies

In the literature about autobiography, Italian-Americans are definitely left out of the picture. As we have seen, only Diane Bjorklund includes one Italian-American in her wide survey of autobiography, Lee Iacocca. As Francesco Loriggio notices in fact, "there

¹³ She quotes "David Kerdian", *Contemporary Author Series*, vol. 2, 1985, 261-277.

is no Italian immigrant 'eloquence' to fall back on critically. The silence of the critic's immigrant parents or grandparents is complete" (19). Were it only for their silence... The problem is not only the lack of immigrant testimonies, but also the devaluation of those few existing ones. The disparaging look at the Italian-American production was present since the beginning, coming not only from the American observer but also from the Italian one. Our autobiographies share the long-time contempt destined to Italian-American literature, testified by Giuseppe Prezzolini's condescension about the library of Italian immigrants in the Casa Italiana of Columbia University. This is how he scorns the production of Italian immigrant poets in his *I trapiantati*: "quando ha tentato di dire quel che forse provava, ma non sapeva dire, non ha fatto che ripeter quel che aveva letto" (255).¹⁴ For these tens and tens of slim poetry volumes, every one of them Privately Printed for the Author, Prezzolini speaks of "la poesia, o meglio la versificazione ("poetry, the versification rather") of the Italian immigrants: "sono una tragedia letteraria quasi piu' dolente di quella sociale" (255).¹⁵ We cannot deny that we are dealing with some "poor" aesthetic works. William Boelhower also alludes to this "poverty" but does not dwell on it, because he sees another important value in this

text-type which has traditionally been written off as aesthetically poor. Evidently, our set of autobiographers did not know how to play with, let alone, interpret, their lives. But it must not be forgotten that immigrant and ethnic types were active participants in the modernist condition; they could not shake off cultural complexity any more than other inhabitants of the new century. ("The Making," 132)

¹⁴ "When the poor fellow tried to express things he may have been feeling, but certainly did not know how to express, then he could but repeat things that he had been reading" (trans. Robert Viscusi, "Making Italy Little," 70).

¹⁵ "The literary tragedy stings nearly more than the social one" (trans. Viscusi, 70).

William Boelhower's *Immigrant Autobiographies* is indeed the only book completely dedicated to Italian-American works. He here treats four texts (by Constantine Panunzio, Pascal D'Angelo, Emanuel Carnevali, and Jerre Mangione) as the representative examples of a fourfold structuralist model (that resonates with Rose Basile Green's four stages): in the first, the narration is a confirmation of the codes of the dominant culture; in the second, it is a variation of these codes; in the third it is a negation of the dominant codes; and in the fourth it is a substitution of the dominant culture with a counter-cultural alternative. In immigrant autobiographies, Boelhower recognizes the birth of the "modern self and condition, the American condition *par excellence*" (17) that is represented in the "composite self" of these autobiographies. He is the first to establish the immigrant autobiography as a genre, by stapling the two rules of the genre: there must be an organization of a double self or "*two* cultural systems, a culture of the memory and future and a culture of memory, into a single model" (29); and there must be a reflection of "the three fabula moments of anticipation, contact, and contrast" (40), that is Old-World reality vs New-World ideal (utopia), New-World Ideal vs New-World reality (antithesis or unification), and New-World Reality vs Old-World Reality (comparison).

As fascinating and self-standing as it certainly is, Boelhower's structure is perhaps too schematic in its binary opposition of old world vs new world, and ideal vs reality. When one looks closer at the authors of autobiographies, it becomes obvious that there are multiple oppositions. Second generation or children immigrant, for example, have three, not two, systems of reference: they are confronted with the Real Old World as they can see it when they sometimes visit Italy; they deal with the Real New World

that comes from their first-hand experience; but they are also presented with an Ideal Old World given to them by their parents (that often does not correspond to the old world reality).

Another of Boelhower's limitations in this particular study is that he predominantly writes from a literary criticism standpoint and a structuralist framework, not attentive enough to sociological or historical reality. His four-fold model does not take into consideration the multiple positioning of the *I* in historical contexts. Since I will not be dealing with four selected *Is*, but with a multiplicity of *Is*, this research will encounter multiple subjectivities: the *I* of the immigrant and the *I* of the wanderer or the *I* of the returned immigrant; the *I* of the immigrant of 1900 and that of 1950s immigrant; the *I* of the rich and that of the poor; the *I* of the educated and that of the uneducated; the *I* of the immigrant woman; the *I* of the fugitive from Fascism, of the Anarchist and of the Italian Jew; the *I* of the southerner and that of the northerner; and so on, with many crossings among them.

Fred Gardaphé study on Italian-American autobiographies includes his *Italian Signs, American Streets* where he gathers recent texts and bases his reading on a suggestive interpretation of Giambattista Vico's concept of the cycles of history. According to Vico's *The New Science* human history passes through a cycle in three stages. The first is the Poetic Mode (the Age of Gods), when poets "make" sense of human history through a strong belief in the divine and through the oral tradition of "real facts"; three Italian-American autobiographers exemplify this stage, Constantine Panunzio, Rosa Cavalleri, and Pascal D'Angelo. The second stage is the Mythic Mode (the Age of Heroes), when common people gain more control on their life in a struggle

against the gods, and create mythic figures that give strength to human identity. Here Gardaphé inserts the creators of Italian-American heroic symbols of ethnicity (all born in America): John Fante and his immigrant who dreams assimilation and success while struggling in the “dust;” Pietro di Donato and his sacrificial Christ, a man who must “become his own god” to be saved from a capitalist society; Jerre Mangione and his Italian-American *faber* of his own destiny; Mario Puzo and Gay Talese with their mythical family and father; and women writers with their invention of the mythical grandmother (Helen Barolini, Tina De Rosa and Carole Maso). The third stage is the Philosophical Mode of the Age of Man when, according to Vico, men destroy their myths and replace them with narratives based on their own superiority. This is the stage of degradation that brings back the cycle to its beginning, and Gardaphe’ inserts here the philosophical narratives of Gilbert Sorrentino and Don De Lillo, Italian-Americans assimilated into the mainstream.

For the purpose of this study, I will need to slightly modify Gardaphé’s analysis (that encompasses more than autobiographies). According to him, Pascal D’Angelo, Constantine Panunzio, and Rosa Cavalleri’s oral history are located in the “Poetic Mode” (the Age of Gods) of immigrant autobiography, being characterized by the large presence of *vera narratio*, a strong consciousness of the divine, and a direct affiliation with the Italian oral tradition. In reality, this description fits them only partially. If they do come from the Poetic tradition (found in its genuine form in the oral culture of peasant Italy), they eventually leave this tradition when they start writing (or telling) stories about themselves. They keep the formal structure of the Poetic Mode, especially in their preference for the realism of style that shies away from the figurative and symbolic

language, but their contents are already Heroic. In fact, D'Angelo, Cavalleri, and Panunzio, along with the other writers of my research, live the shift from the cosmic consciousness of the age of Gods to the self-consciousness of the age of Heroes. They are individuals who detach themselves from the folk culture of origin, from the “gods” of Resignation, Trust in God, Fortune, Providence or Malocchio, and from all those transcendental forces that may govern people's lives. They become the heroes of their own lives, they make up their own personal tale, and not the tale of their people. I would therefore consider them “heroes” more than “poets.” Gardaphe's explanation of the Heroic Age in fact better describes these autobiographers:

In *The New Science*, Vico identifies the mythic stage of history as developing after families and social institutions were established. During this stage an aristocracy would develop against which the common people would revolt as they attempted to gain greater control of their lives. Out of this struggle would rise heroic figures who, as culture heroes, replaced the divinity of the poetic age as models for human behavior during the mythic age. (55)

Interestingly, our writers also live a geographical shift between two eras: from Italy, a predominantly agricultural society, feudally organized, to the urban centers of America where they mostly settled, and where they learned to fight for their rights (the anarchist and socialist writers are more aware of this passage). This also fits Vico's interpretation of the age of Heroes: “Vico” writes Gardaphe, “notes that this shift occurred along with the shift away from agrarian culture and into urban culture, away from a theology based on fear of the gods to one in which men and women began to struggle with the gods” (55-56).

Lives of ordinary people: Bjorklund, Fabian, Vincent, and Lejeune

Not only are our writers “ethnic,” Italian-Americans, but they are also for the most part “ordinary people.” In what follows, I shall describe the few and most important precedents for my research on these “ordinary people.” The studies on these writings have been flourishing only in recent years, especially in Europe where the autobiographies of *little people* have been elected as reliable source the *other* history. I can mention here the efforts of the Italian Archivio di Scrittura Popolare that gathers autobiographical material of peasants and housewives, the British Mass-Observation Archive of the University of Sussex that preserves the lives of twentieth-century workers of industrial towns, or the “almost maniacal” work of Philippe Lejeune in France with his *Association pour l’Autobiographie*.

In the United States, some autobiographies of the “Poor Folk” are regrouped in *Inside Out* by Edward Stuart Bates (1937). Written after the Depression years in a country that was then discovering its myth of the Common Man, the book covers the lives of “Soldier, Sailor”, “Tinker, Tailor”, “Beggerman, Thief” and “Womenfolk,” besides those of Business Men and Professional. The aim of the book is simply to introduce writers whom the author likes to readers who may be interested in them, and significantly needs an apology for the foulness of his subject matter (we are very far from Pascal’s lives of outstanding men!):

But, whereas these qualities spring from the rankness of living matter, as an iris from the mud, that rankness cannot be ruled out, even from the limits of a single volume; since it comes to be no more unsuitable for consideration than lacking in interest; and greatness, in particular, does not exist without it. (1)

More recently, Diane Bjorklund takes into account the presence of ordinary people's works, starting from those 19th century autobiographies published at a writer's expense, a number so large that "it became a matter of concern that too many ordinary persons were publishing their autobiographies. In 1826, for example, a critic in the *Quarterly Review* complained that 'England expects every driveller to do his Memorabilia'" (10). Bjorklund explains:

today, those who can't interest a publisher in their life stories can turn to vanity presses if they have the means to fund their publication. Hence, those who have published their life stories over the years include miners, school superintendents, nurses, salesmen, auctioneers, church elders, beekeepers, insurance underwriters, waiters, bus drivers, and cub scout leaders, among many others. Many of these narratives however, have not been included in any canon of autobiographical literature or even preserved in public libraries. (10)

"Plebeian narratives" are the very topic of *The Unvarnished Truth* by Ann Fabian who considers the production of "both the noble and ignoble" (2) in American literature. Fabian dates the origin of this thirst for writing one's own life story already in 1700, when "converts, captives, soldiers, sailors, beggars, murderers, slaves, sinners and even wounded workers" became writers in the United States. By the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, "the growth of evangelical religion, the development of democratic politics, the rise of nationalism, the spread of print culture, and the expansion of the commercial relations of a capitalist society, all fostered individual impulses toward personal narrative in printed form" (2). According to Fabian, these writers grow out of the oral culture of the American tradition of unfortunates who peddled their stories in the marketplace, even inviting questions about their stories. "Some displayed for audiences their scarred, mutilated bodies, living proof if you will, of the truth of the story being

told. [. . .]. The poor beggar with a story to tell carries into the commercial markets of 19th century America the experiences and forms of marketplaces more nearly medieval” (3).

Let us now take a look at some of the predecessors of our ordinary writers. Fabian’s examples range from beggars to soldiers. Moses Smith wrote *History of the Adventures and Sufferings of Moses Smith during Five Years of His Life* (1912), a story of adventures that gained him food, shelter, and a passage home, and that he wrote and used to recover his good name. He proposed that his unvarnished truth be read in a political context, as an episode in the history of the young nation. Michael Smith published *A Geographical View of the Province of Upper Canada* (1813): his “experience among the British in Canada gave him something to say; suffering gave him the moral authority to say it; and Baptist friends and sympathetic printers gave him the wherewithal to publish it” (20). Criminals used to turn their stories into commodities for themselves, the last ones they could afford; an example is the 1837 *The Life and Confession of John Washburn*, the great robber and murderer, partner of Lovett and Jones, who was executed for thirty murders in Cincinnati. Slaves, in turn, had to work harder to be accepted as tellers of truth because they fought against the commonly held image of blacks as liars and untrustworthy. They needed proof (their scarred skin was their first proof) or a white translator who could guarantee the truth. Frederick Douglass had to face exactly this problem when he was advised to speak more like a slave, without showing his culture and his refined manners (“‘tis not best that you seem too learned,” 1077). Conversely, prisoners of the civil war wrote their stories as monuments of suffering and sacrifice on the page. An interesting example of a “word monument” is in

Robert Kellogg's *Life and Death in Rebel Prison* (1865), where he graphically builds an obelisk on the page entitled "Sacred to memory" with these words: "It is true that a great part of the suffering in this present war, as in all wars, must remain forever with the secrets of unwritten history..." (389). Even perfectly "normal" people, Midwestern wives and the working-class, wrote their sensational stories of their love affairs or the strangest events of their life. They answered the call of a magazine that Bernarr Macfadden founded exactly with the purpose of gathering people's life stories. As Hamilton Holt's *The Independent* at the beginning of 1900, *True Stories* asked for stories to publish unvarnished from ordinary lives. What counted, it was said, was the true story, not its form. For Fabian, these eccentric stories of ordinary people become chapters of a larger story, "for the cooper, the minister, and the sailor, this had been the story of the nation; for convicts, it had been the story of sin and evil; for slaves and soldiers, it had been the story of freedom" (172).

The works that perhaps best reflect my kind of research are by the British David Vincent and the French Philippe Lejeune. David Vincent gathers an incredibly large number of autobiographies written by working-class writers in the nineteenth century. In his 1981 *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom. A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography*, he organizes the one-hundred-forty-two autobiographies thematically, touching upon their sense of history, their love and family relationships, their childhood, and their schooling and pursuit of a "useful knowledge". In his 1984 bibliography *The Autobiography of the Working Class*, written with John Burnett and David Mayall, Vincent regroups 783 previously scattered working-class autobiographies. The authors' aim is to understand the great shift of the Industrial Revolution from the words of the

very humble protagonists, an aim comparable to mine that is understanding Italian immigration to the United States from inside and below. These authors admit of having met my same problems in cataloguing the huge material, when the autobiographies were not written by people who remained in the working class all their life, or by higher educated authors, or sometimes by ghost writers and editors. An important difference between British autobiographies and our immigrant ones, is that those authors treat writing autobiographies as the most natural thing in the world, unlike ours who are aware of the firstness and novelty of their work. British writers seem to know that little people make history: the “authors were secure in the knowledge that in different ways and in different contexts the common people had always been historians of their own lives” (xiii). They can look back at the spiritual autobiographies and the oral tradition, but also at the Methodist philosophy - something that almost all our authors have never heard: they “were building upon puritan assumptions about the significance of the inner lives of ordinary men and women, and about the necessity of understanding human identity in the dimension of time” (xiii). A similarity between our autobiographies and the British ones is instead that they both spring from a kind of earthquake: immigration or, for British autobiographers, displacement, “oral history was now under threat. It was partly a result of the disruption of communities as the population moved into and around the expanding towns” (xiv). The lack of a center, triggers the need to build a new, look-alike center made of words and stories

Philippe Lejeune’s “Autobiography and Social History in the Nineteenth Century” opens with the question “is autobiography a ‘bourgeois’ genre?”, which is a tempting but risky generalization, according to him, since it does not take into account all

those autobiographies that have not survived in mainstream culture, those by proletarian writers. In this article he gives a census of twenty-three French autobiographies of craftsmen and workers, that he discovered lying under years of dust in a forgotten room of the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. He observes that many autobiographies were written not only by deviant personalities (stories of crime or madness) or successful people, but also by “honest people:” “I propose a new space, at the center of the target (if I may dare say), that of honest people” (167). Honest, and “normal” people: “some very average people, clinging to their life” (167), exactly like our immigrant autobiographers.

Lejeune is exploring a virgin land. He knows he is disappointing literary critics (“people who are interested in literature will be disappointed to see that I take no account of the ‘quality’ of the book,” 165), but also traditional historians. He takes some distance from “social history,” because he claims to be doing something different: “I look at these autobiographical texts not as *documents* containing information about the author (information that could, if necessary, be obtained elsewhere), but as *social facts* in themselves, in their reality as texts” (165). His (and my) study are not limited to history, because our texts do not only speak about a social reality. They do so, but they also speak as “object books,” as a new phenomenon that has a deep social significance. They are “signs” in themselves- “these texts must therefore be considered not as causes, but as signs. We should not be misled by their small number or their meager distribution; what appears here in autobiographical form is an omnipresent discourse on the social life of the nineteenth century,” writes Lejeune (171). They are signs of a change of consciousness in peasant society for Lejeune. For us, in a similar fashion, the act of

writing an autobiography and having it neatly bound in book form signals a change in the immigrant consciousness that accompanies the trip across the ocean.

CHAPTER 2- SOME THEORETICAL POINTS

Before tackling the core of my topic, I shall clarify some important themes that engrossed critics of the autobiographic genre. Here I approach the Gordian knot between history and autobiography, truth and fiction, and the problem of language.

Autobiography and History

Suspicion has marred autobiography in the last century, and the desiccating winds of post-modernism have scarred it so that treating it as a constitutive part of historical research has become harder and harder. Wilhelm Dilthey's conviction that autobiography extends into history is now seen as too naïve. Dilthey, in fact, "thought of man as a historical being, a creature profoundly shaped by history. [. . .] Individuals mattered because *they* make history" (Rickman 225), and therefore dedicated himself to the writing of biographies. Today critics look at life-writing in a different way. In *American Autobiography*, Paul John Eakin sees the ambiguity of autobiography, difficultly balanced between literature (imagination, fiction) and history (facts), as the main embarrassment that refrained critics from the study of these works. Autobiographies in fact appear not trustable enough to read them as fact, but not literary enough to consider them as fiction:

critics and literary historians [. . .] have been intent in demonstrating the literariness of such texts, validating their status as imaginative art. Hence it is inevitable that study of the autobiography of writers should dominate the field. Meanwhile historians remain largely skeptical of Wilhelm Dilthey's claim for autobiography as 'the germinal cell of history' [. . .] Facts *in* texts are one thing; texts *as facts* are quite another (5).

Instead of lingering on the problem, I will indicate the solutions that have been invoked mainly by James Olney, Robert Elbaz, and Philippe Lejeune. Figuratively speaking, these critics solve the dilemma by raising their hands with a sigh and saying that pure objectivity is utopia anyway. If autobiographies cannot guarantee a high degree of objectivity, it is fine, says James Olney, since a real objectivity cannot actually exist: subjective is the way we see reality. Saying "there is a God," or saying "such is the world" or "history is this" is always a matter of consciousness and self-consciousness no less than saying "I exist". To those who might address him with the accusation of excessive subjectivity, Olney biblically answers: "it is men of little faith who will not ask and who refuse to knock simply because the way is all subjective: to them shall not be given nor the door opened" (12-13). Robert Elbaz agrees with Olney by saying that, in any event, even what we think as the most objective history is nothing other than a creation of man:

history, science, or for that matter any meaningful statement, in no way duplicate reality: they construct it. For language is functional to the ideological position of the speaking subject, and 'reality' is the creation of this same subject. One does not report, duplicate or verify the truth: one makes it. (8-9)

Besides, after all, "the fact that a source is not objective [. . .] does not mean that it is useless" (xvii), says the Italian Carlo Ginzburg, a historian who relies on non-

objective sources to make a history of mentality. He is one of those European historians who have accepted the value of autobiographies as dignified elements of historical research, based on the appearance of the trend of “microstoria” (micro-history) in the 1970s, and the appreciation for methods of oral history. This large scale phenomenon “has signaled the reacquisition of all that memorial writings of ‘non professional’ writers, that often have their own specific quality in rendering a period and its atmosphere” (Scarlini, 83). In England, David Vincent shares this same faith in the value of autobiographies as source of history: “more than any other source material, autobiography has the potential to tell us not merely what happened but the impact of an event or situation upon an actor in the past” (6). Using working-class autobiographies to speak about the Industrial Revolution, Vincent believes that “autobiographies can be seen as projecting a pencil of light into the darkness of the unspoken memories of men and women whose lives were conditioned by the same social experience” (7).

These critical precedents are relevant for my research, since I will use autobiographies as sources of history. But what kind of history? If we cannot completely erase the doubts about the faithfulness of these personal versions of life, we can still maintain that they have a particular relationship with history.

First, autobiographies do not tell us how history really took place, but they offer the internal view on history, not the landscape but the “inscape” of history, to use James Olney’s beautiful word. They tell us how history, in this case immigration, has been lived “inside” its protagonists. More than fidelity to outside facts, thus, we find in autobiographies the *scent of an era*. More than historically reliable information about the pay scale, the living conditions, the *padrone* systems or crime, we find in them a way of

seeing the world. As Olney says in his philosophy of autobiography, “what one seeks in reading autobiography is not a date, a name, or a place, but a characteristic way of perceiving, of organizing, and of understanding, an individual way of feeling and expressing that one can somehow relate to oneself” (37). What we find in our autobiographies is the immigrant’s philosophy, a philosophy made of hard work, a melancholic optimism, homesickness, and will.

Second, autobiographies are historical facts in themselves. As Philippe Lejeune maintains for his research, autobiographies matter “as *social facts* in themselves, in their reality as texts” (165). The same fact of finding autobiographies where no one would expect them, in the homes of “ignorant” workers, tells us something new about Italian immigration. It tells that immigrants were concerned with their self-image in an active sense that propelled them to take the initiative and portray themselves, rather than only passively accepting outer representations or at most, whining and complaining about them. It says that first generation Italian-Americans did not only work, work and work, but also found the time and the motivation to dedicate themselves to literary pursuits, as small as they might be. Finally, it provides us with the proof of the deep “humanity” of first-generation immigrants, often seen as mere working beasts, through insulting nicknames and deviant stereotypes.¹⁶

Third, autobiographies speak about their time. They reflect the historical conditions that made them possible. Diane Bjorklund builds her entire book on the

¹⁶ For an effective anthology of stereotypes and beastly figurations of Italian-Americans, see Salvatore LaGumina's *Wop! A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States*, where he states: "students of Italian-American life find that now, nearly one hundred years after the beginning of the great Italian migration, many Italian-Americans experience social, cultural, and economic problems" (10) because they "bear the sting of ostracism, ridicule and stereotyping" (4).

conviction that history informs the shape of self, and is thus strictly related to autobiography. “Historical location,” she writes, “shapes the stories persons tell about themselves and the ways in which they think about themselves” (x). Autobiographers do not write in a vacuum, but they must confront the world in which they live because they want their rhetorical act to be effective (even if they speak to their immediate family as many of ours do):

because they expose their personal lives to criticism, they attempt to give not only meaning to their lives but also value. We can see how they use rhetoric (sometimes adeptly, sometimes awkwardly) to persuade their readers that they have admirable reasons. What traits they claim to possess and how they justify the choices they have made can tell us about extant values and ideas during the eras in which they wrote. (xi)

Concerning our autobiographies, they testify to a shift having taken place in the Italian immigrant’s consciousness, a self-realization, an individualization. It is not only a question of a higher level of education reached by these immigrants, because many of them are still formally uneducated. It is a sign of something else: they experience a change in mentality that accompanies the trip on the ocean. Sifting through their words we find specific values belonging to their age and their existence as Italians and Americans. These “values” fall in our hands like golden nuggets: one is the value of the self-made man that locates these works in the American land of the optimistic 1900; then, the value of experience that refers to the popular ethos of our writers who, even if not schooled, learned by living and are now authorized to talk to others; then the value of work, self-abnegating work; the value of family; the value of patriotism; etc.

Finally, for the topic of Italian immigration, autobiographies do more than just recover history, they recover a presence. The immigrant is seldom heard, seldom asked to tell, and he/she seldom speaks. According to Emile Benveniste, he/she therefore does not exist, because he/she never utters *I* (ego), that is the (linguistic) foundation of subjectivity: “C’est dans et par le langage que l’homme se constitue comme *sujet*; parce que le langage seul fonde en realite’, dans *sa* realite’ qui est celle de l’etre, le concept d’ego” (259).¹⁷ Benveniste is quite radical when seeing in language the only objective proof of the existence of the subject: “Si l’on veut bien y reflechir, on verra qu’il ny a pas d’autre temoignage objectif de l’identite’ du sujet que celui qu’il donne ainsi lui-meme sur lui-meme” (262).¹⁸ By studying the autobiographical immigrant, we are thus claiming a presence. If it is true, as the French linguist says, “that there is not such a concept as the ‘I’. The ‘I’ refers each time to the person who is speaking and whom we identify by the very fact that he is speaking” (Lejeune 8-9), then speaking in first person, as in the enunciation of our autobiographies, is a fundamental act. If, as Loriggio claims, Italian immigrants fade in a deep silence, the recovery of their autobiographies becomes an existentially important act. We are reclaiming their existence in history.¹⁹

¹⁷ “It is inside and through language that man is constituted as *subject*; because only language creates in reality, in *its* reality that is the reality of being, the concept of ‘ego’.”

¹⁸ “If we think about it well, we will see that there is no other objective proof of the identity of the subject than the proof that itself gives on itself”. Benveniste also writes in 1956 “Il faut donc souligner ce point: *je* ne peut etre identifie’ che par l’instance de discourse qui le continent et par la’ seulement.” “it is necessary to underline this point: *I* cannot be identified in any other way other than inside the discourse that contains it and only there” (252).

¹⁹ As Judy Long maintains, “first person accounts are essential for understanding the subjectivity of a muted social group” (7) such as Italian common immigrants.

Truth in Autobiography

The historical “truth” of autobiography is a special “truth.” Describing autobiographical truth, Roy Pascal leans toward a flexible use of the word: “it will not be an objective truth, but the truth in the confines of a limited purpose, a purpose that grows out of the author’s life and imposes itself on him as his specific quality, and thus determines his choice of events and the manner of his treatment and expression” (83). Pascal understands that the autobiographical graph encompassing life’s episodes has only memory as the main standard of truth, with all its unreliability. But the “elusiveness of truth” “injures autobiographies less seriously than might be thought, and often not at all” (61), he says, “a person’s life-illusion ought to be sacred as his skin.”²⁰

Georges Gusdorf defines the specific truth of autobiography as the “truth of man”. It does not matter if the vine clinging to Lamartine’s house never existed (and his mother planted it to make it respond to the description of his autobiography!). “In autobiography the truth of facts is subordinated to the truth of the man, for it is first of all the man who is in question. The narrative offers us the testimony of a man about himself [. . .] seeking its innermost fidelity” (43).²¹

My own conclusion is that in the end it is not so fundamental to distinguish between fiction and reality in autobiography, because what is true is true in so far as what one wishes to be true is true. What comes forth is the immigrant as he/she existed in life and in imagination - one is not less real than the other.²² Our wishes, our projections,

²⁰ Pascal quotes J.C. Pozys's letter to Schiller written on August 17, 1797.

²¹ Georg Misch shares the same confidence towards the truth of autobiography: “in general, the spirit brooding over the recollected material is the truest and most real element in an autobiography” (11).

²² Besides, autobiography participates in the privilege of old age that makes everything true, especially if useful and meaningful for family lore. As Regina O'Tool Soklas says in her testimony in *A Celebration of*

self-presentations, facades, our desired self or pretended, constructed self are as true to ourselves as the “truth”. And this truth – along with the dose of fiction and imagination necessary to write an autobiography – is part of history. I would maintain that in our case it does not really matter to know the exact measure of truth and fiction in each autobiography. As long as they do present themselves as autobiographies (and not as fictionalized autobiography from the start), we can trust them to have the goal of presenting the immigrant man in his entirety, including some measure of fiction (what he remembers and what he forgets, what he desires to be and how he wants to appear) and of “truth” (the facts as he remembers them). Self-censorship is a normal price for this kind of first hand accounts, as the tailor Pio Federico admits: “Ricordo tante e tante altre cose del mio passato, ma non posso descriverle tutte. Talune insignificanti, e altre non lecito a descrivere” 94).²³ As long as their stories present themselves as autobiographical we can be sure that this is the will of the author: *to be remembered as such*. After all, we are swimming in the density of *imaginaria*.

The Problem of Language

The most gruesome attack on the historical truth of autobiography comes from the distrust in its very means of expression, language. For post-modernists, language is a double-edged tool: it is not created by the self, but the other way around. Language is the creator of self. And since it is a necessarily faulty creator, we are forever doomed to

American Family Folklore, "that's one of the privileges of age. You get that old and you get to have all your stories true. You could have been a liar all your life, but when you get old enough, all your stories become true. My grandfather lived by that privilege as he got older" (10)

²³ "I remember many and many more things of my past, but I can't describe them all. Some insignificant, and others not licit to describe."

imperfection. William Spengeman, Paul De Man, James Cox, Louis Renza, among others, all refer to the contemporary crisis of the self caused by the non-reliability of language:

more recent critical theory has exposed the self as fiction of language - a cumulative creation written by language. Language is thus the signifier presumptively making the self it signifies increasingly so absent that it can only be traced like a ghost between the long sequence of lines and text that make up a convention or a tradition (Cox, 3).

The strongest blow to autobiography as genre from a linguistic perspective is Paul De Man's "Autobiography as De-facement" (1979). De Man is extremely critical of autobiography. He questions the possibility of considering it as a genre for different reasons: for his personal taste (it is "slightly disreputable and self-indulgent" in comparison to other genres as tragedy, epic, or lyric poetry), for its variety and indefiniteness that makes each work seem an exception to the norm ("just as we seem to assert that all texts are autobiographical, we should say that, by the same token, none of them is or can be," 922), and, finally, for its difficult relationship with fiction. In sum, he maintains that autobiography is fiction, because it is the act of giving a face to an absence (what he calls *prosopopoeia*) but this face is necessarily faulty because it is made of language, a maimed, insufficient tool. Therefore what we think is the face of an absence is instead a de-face of an absence, an inadequacy.

I would argue with De Man on two points. First, he says that autobiography is *prosopopoeia* that he defines as "the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility for the latter's reply and confers upon it the

power of speech" (926). But he is confusing tropes. *Prosopopoeia*²⁴ (giving a voice to a deceased or inanimate other, as in the *Anthology of Spoon River*) is not an *apostrophe* (appealing to a mute other as in Giacomo Leopardi's verse "che fai tu, luna, in ciel? / dimmi, che fai, / silenziosa luna?").²⁵ Autobiography is neither, and most of all it is not a *prosopopoeia* because it does not give a voice to a dead other, but it is the voice of a self, an alive and kicking self.²⁶ As Pietro Toffolo, one of our autobiographers, writes: "Il passato e' morto per i morti e i non nati ma per coloro che sono qui, sulla terra, il passato e' vita, dal momento della loro nascita. Diversamente dalle pietre che c'erano ma non possono ricordare ne' dire ne' vedere, l'uomo puo'! Finche' madre natura mi lascerà in possesso delle mie faculta' umane io tratterro' le mie memorie, tutte, buone e cattive e cerchero' di impedire al mio subconscio di mandarle via a forza, perche' sono la mia vita" (51).²⁷ If *prosopopoeia* is definitively fiction, autobiography is not. It is the closest we can get to the "true" self, no matter how insufficient its tools are.

²⁴ The definition of "prosopopoeia" is a rhetorical figure conferring speech to a deceased or absent person or to an inanimate object. In *Autobiography: New Critical Idiom*, Linda Anderson defines it as "to represent an absent or imaginary person as speaking and/or acting through a rhetorical figure, or an inanimate object as embodying personal qualities (personification)" (140). The definition of *apostrophe* comes from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: "a figure which expresses grief or indignation by means of an address to some man or city or place or object" (Bizzell-Herzberg, 255).

²⁵ "Moon, moon of silence, what are you doing / Tell me what you're doing in the sky?" (Trans. Eamon Grennan, 57).

²⁶ Jacques Derrida is the first who says autobiography is in reality as "thanatography" (*thanatos* Gk. – death), a writing not of a living but a dead author. For Derrida the question of the proper name or signature quickly takes on overtones of death since the name with which one signs will always outlive the bearer of that name" (Anderson, 81. She refers to Derrida's *The Ear of the Other: Autobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*). The critic Andrea Battistini buys into it when saying that autobiographers write their death: "L'autobiografo crede di ridarsi la vita che il tempo aveva cancellato, invece si dà la morte, componendo anticipatamente il proprio necrologio" ("The autobiographer believes to be reclaiming the life that time had cancelled, instead he kills himself by writing his early necrology," 7).

²⁷ The past is dead for the deads and the not-yet-born, but for those who are here on this earth, the past is life since the moment of their birth. Differently from stones that were there but cannot remember nor see, man can! Until mother nature leaves me with my human faculties I will retain all my memories, all, good and bad, and I will not let my subconscious remove them by force, because they are my life."

Second, for De Man, autobiography gives a voice to a mute face through the inauthentic tool of language. For its insufficiency, language, instead of restoring life, deprives it: “language, as trope, is always privative,” and its product is “eternally deprived of voice and condemned to muteness” (930). For him all language is “evil” because it is like garments to the body, veiling it, rather than like the body to the soul, incarnating it. He is misusing here a phrase by Wordsworth on the “the *right* kind of language” as being “not what the garb is to the body but what the body is to the soul” (929).²⁸ I would answer that language as “garb to the body” is that of *prosopopoeia*: external, imposed, fictive, unrelated, speaking for a dead other. But Wordsworth conceives another kind of language, that for De Man is impossible: the “right” language – as the “body to the soul” – and this is that of autobiography: internal, connected, as linked and true to the soul as we can humanly get. Perhaps imperfect, but the only one we have, as the body is the only way our soul can visibly appear on earth. It is a matter of making the best of our imperfection. In this sense autobiography becomes not the garment of our soul, but the incarnation of it because it is the closest-to-the-self literary genre that we have. What can we say more than, *Reader, I’m writing this honestly. I am the author, the narrator and the protagonist. And this is my life as I best remember it?*

My conclusion is therefore similar to that of those critics who not only accept the fiction element of autobiography but indeed value it.²⁹ With Lejeune, I would say:

we indeed know all this; we are not so dumb, but, once this precaution has been taken, we go on as if we did not know. Telling the truth about the self,

²⁸ De Man is quoting Wordsworth’s *Essays upon Epitaphs* (154).

²⁹ Steven Hunsaker for example asserts: “I believe that despite the slippages, lacunae, and aporias of language, we can communicate the story of the self - fragmented, contingent and constructed though it may be” (10).

constituting the self as complete subject - it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing. (132)

By the same token, Louis Renza understands autobiography as “an endless prelude,” “a purely fragmentary, incomplete literary project, unable to be more than an arbitrary document,” but an arbitrary document that is the only way we can know ourselves: “an arbitrary document like the one Wordsworth, in Book VII of his autobiographical poem, recalls having seen appended to the person of a blind beggar, signifying for all its verbal brevity and plainness ... *the utmost we can know / both of ourselves and of the universe...*” (22, emphasis mine).

Even if it is important to untie this important “linguistic” knot that strangles the genre of autobiography, it is only relatively important for my specific research. In fact our autobiographers *do* trust language. In their naïve faith they are as far from post-modernism as ever. Even if William Boelhower maintains that the immigrant subject in autobiographies participate in the shattered condition of post-modernity in his “Autobiographical Transactions in Modernist America,” I would argue that it is only partial. Our immigrant autobiographers all believe in the unity of the self, and all believe in the possibility of the self to use language effectively. In this sense, they provide a break from the postmodern condition, as James Cox underlines. He specifically sees in autobiography written by minorities the safe harbor where the crisis of language is not felt. He argues that for minorities autobiography is still the venue for the self to be expressed without psychological complex: “Holding to the belief that the self does indeed exist, they see autobiography as the avenue by which underprivileged selves gain entry into the established culture of writing” (3). His point is even more sharply marked

when he distinguishes between established authors and those “average people” – our authors: “the privileged writer, secure in culture, can afford to doubt the self; the underprivileged individual cannot. For the one, autobiography exposes the tyranny of language; for the other, the language of the self exposes the tyranny of society” (4).

PART II

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF IMMIGRATION

CHAPTER 3- THE LITERARY *GENRE* OF IMMIGRATION

Why autobiographies?

I will here explain why I chose to concentrate on autobiography to speak about immigration. Why not use novels, poetry, and letters? First of all, autobiography is rich in reality value. If a novel gives us the "imagined" immigration, and poetry gives us the distilled and rarified immigration, autobiographies should be the most real and the most sincere account, however slippery, that we have at hand. Second, autobiography has a unique time value. Letters give us the immediate voice of immigration addressed to relatives and friends, in the heated immediacy of his experience, while autobiographies speak of the entire protagonist, of the wholeness of his experience. In autobiography we find the image of the entire person already shaped, metabolized, pondered.

Autobiography is a "shaping of the past. It imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of it a coherent story" (Pascal 9). Third, autobiography possesses an essential value.

Autobiographies deal with the highest stake for the immigrant, himself. What is there more important to any person than himself or herself? In these writings we find a delicate material on the topic of immigration, because it touches the person of the immigrant self, his/her very flesh. In looking at the event of immigration through the filter of its very

protagonist, we see that the immigrant not only has lived it in first person, but s/he also has reworked it into a coherent image of self.

We can debate for pages on the intricacies of fiction and truth, or the weight of self-esteem and vanity in the creation of such images. All this is important, but it does not lessen the value of autobiographies. It only reinforces their importance as acts of rhetoric where the history of immigration speaks through the people that made it. Antonio Gramsci, asserts that autobiographies are dignified sources of history: "E' certo che l'autobiografia ha un grande valore storico, in quanto mostra la vita in atto e non solo come dovrebbe essere secondo le leggi scritte o i principii morali dominanti"¹ (1718). For him, in particular, autobiography has the value of directness. It is the unfiltered product of the "people who act," which he uses in his own critique of Italian intellectuals who are detached from the people: "L'importanza dei particolari e' tanto piu' grande quanto piu' in un paese la realta' effettuale e' diversa dalle apparenze, i fatti dalle parole, il popolo che fa dagli intellettuali che interpretano questi fatti"² (1723).

Last but not least, autobiographies attract us through the pure and simple curiosity for the stories of another person. Angelica Fortis-Lewis calls this a "mania autobiografica" that attracts for a deep reason: "la lettura di autobiografie ci rassicura in profondita' sul senso fondamentale della nostra vita stessa" (15).³ The appeal to our understanding, the call for an intimate communion between the writer and the reader is

¹ "Autobiography certainly has a great historical value in that it shows life in action and not just as written laws or dominant moral principles say it should be" (Forgacs 132).

² "The importance of details is that much greater the more actual reality in a country differs from appearances, deeds from words, the people who act from the intellectuals who interpret these actions" (Forgacs 132).

³ "Reading autobiographies reassures us in depth on the fundamental sense of our own life."

hard to resist, for as Roy Pascal says, “we are won over simply by being admitted to his intimacy” (1).

Immigration and Autobiography

Immigration and autobiography have several links: immigration triggers the individuality of *man* that is the staple of autobiography, separates the immigrant subject from the mass, and enriches him/her with cultural capital if not with economic capital; at the same time autobiography provides a healing effect to the immigration trauma. In his recent book, *La double absence*, Abdelmalek Sayad, writes that *individuation* is the process that invests the immigrant:

Queste situazioni di crisi hanno in comune il fatto di rompere qui e là i cordoni ombelicali che uniscono la popolazione rurale (e gli strati più poveri di questa popolazione) alla sua terra, al suo territorio, e fondamentalmente a tutto il modo di vivere, al modo di essere, di pensare, di agire e di percepire il mondo, che rappresentano l'intero *ethos* contadino. Esse hanno in comune anche il fatto di contribuire *all'individuazione* degli uomini che restano, o che sono rimasti per lungo tempo, intimamente, degli uomini 'comunitari', che esistono (idealmente) solo in quanto membri di un gruppo. (388)⁴

Autobiography appears in such times of crisis, when an "earthquake" of any sort gives birth to a new man, an individual, a fragment severed out of a whole. We have seen that Georges Gusdorf individuates the birth of autobiography in the age of the Copernican revolution. Also James Cox underlines it:

⁴ "These situations of crisis have in common the fact of breaking here and there the umbilical cords that join the rural population (and the poorest strata of this population) to their land, their territory, and fundamentally to the way of living, being, thinking, acting and perceiving the world that represents the entire farmer's *ethos*. They have in common the fact of contributing to the individuation of the men who

it may be helpful to note its appearance just after the age of revolution, when the modern self was being liberated as well as defined. For the American and French revolutions, whatever else they did, were the convulsive acts that released the individual as a potent political entity and gave us what we are pleased to call modern man. (14)

Immigration works as a kind of Copernican revolution. This revolution destabilizes the sense of self of man: he is severed out from the rest of the universe, he is only one particle in it and not its center. The effect is a new sense of loneliness and responsibility. Pushed to the limit of the universe with its rotating planet, man is called to act with a stronger sense of responsibility, but also with a growing sense of individualism. This discovery of individualism links immigration to the Copernican revolution. It is a natural reaction to "keep the balance," an instinctive act, like crouching down or retreating in ourselves when we open our eyes on the edge of a slope. As a Renaissance man, the immigrant feels the ground shifting under his feet, and autobiography becomes the tool to build his/her own centrality, his/her own identity as a particle of this chaotic universe.

Autobiographies of immigration are a response to a specific type of trauma, the trauma of leaving a place and a family, and losing a life, a peculiar "wound to the soul." Some of our autobiographies pointedly work in this sense, trying to therapeutically put order or clarify the confused thoughts of the immigrant split in two (I think of Elisabeth Evans, Elvezia Marcucci, Pietro Toffolo). In her study of limit-cases of trauma, Leigh Gilmore asserts that "language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma" (6), but at the same time she warns us on a problematic point: trauma often

remain or who remained for a long time, intimately, "community" men who (ideally) exist only because

works as an erasure of memory. An autobiography about trauma is therefore a forceful paradox: "for the survivor of trauma such an ambivalence can amount to an impossible injunction to tell what cannot, in this view, be spoken" (7). In our autobiographies, the trauma of immigration is sometimes sublimated in metaphors such as name changing. The first name is extremely important for the autobiographers (as underlined by Lejeune and Boelhower),⁵ and its change is always annotated in writings. It takes the form of a surgical removal in Oreste Fabrizi's words: this stone carver from Sandonato (Frosinone) explains the cut in his name (Fabrizio) as an "amputation," the result of immigration: "Il cambio all'attuale Fabrizi e' avvenuto, non richiesto, quando nel 1932 mi fu concessa la cittadinanza americana. Per uno sbaglio di trascrizione nel certificato di cittadinanza il mio nome risulato' amputato della vocale 'o'" (125).⁶ In the same way, Michael Lamont finds his name changed "despite himself" by immigration, and sarcastically ends his autobiography with a lapidary: "Michelangelo Lomanto now known as Michael Lamont due to circumstances beyond my control. Thank you" (54).⁷

The autobiography becomes therefore a *sutura* for a split-identity. Pietro Riccobaldi for example finds two words to indicate this painful cut in his being: "straniero indesiderabile" (undesirable foreigner). This is the title of his memories that distinctively frames the immigrant as a "foreigner" terrified of being discovered. Thus

members of a group."

⁵ "According to ethnic semiotics, in the beginning was the name. In order to discover who he is, in order to begin, the subject must interrogate the beginning of his name. Ethnic discourse is a discourse of foundations" (*Through a Glass Darkly*, 81).

⁶ "The change to the actual Fabrizi happened, non requested, when they gave me my American citizenship in 1934. For a mistake of transcription in the certificate my name resulted amputated of its 'o' vowel." Fabrizi does not really care too much about this change, but he is instead incredibly attached to his past in the town of Sandonato and his whole book is a description of how it was then, from the priest to the last midwife. His memory is amazing, and the time freezes in his words.

Riccobaldi is extremely sensitive to the scrutiny of other people's eyes: "Avevamo paura di tutto. Non avevamo alcun documento (...) gli uomini in divisa ci spaventavano; magari erano soltanto postini, pompieri o spazzini; per noi erano sempre tutti poliziotti in caccia di 'stranieri indesiderabili'" (117-118).⁸ The essence of this being extraneous – the sensation of *straniamento* is felt by any immigrant that is a foreigner *per se*, as Emilio Franzina stresses: "Seen with the eyes of those who watch them arriving, in fact, the immigrants are immigrants even before they really become so, and therefore are all potential or actual enemies. They are, in a word, foreigners with all that follows" (*Immaginario*, XI). Moreover, immigrants are doubly foreigners: not only in the emigration land but also in their homeland. The repeated crossing of the ocean in fact fragments the identity of the immigrants that becomes at least double. They are *The Italian* for Americans, and *l'americano* for the Italians. Writing their autobiography is thus an attempt to glue together the various pieces of their identities. Joseph Tusiani translates this loss of identity into nihilism when he writes: "You see my friend, you come back to your own land after almost forty years and how do they treat you? Like a dog. They almost tell you you're not Italian anymore. And over there they tell you you're not American. So you're nothing. Believe me, if you leave your country for more than five years, you're lost, you don't belong anywhere" (*Envoy*, 174). Also a "lowly" writer as Antonio Margariti simply explains the vexation of his split-identity through an anecdote: a woman in Italy "si siede affianco mio e midice voi siete uno americano, io

⁷ Born in West Virginia, Lamont is a simple man who worked as a shoemaker and 41 years as a Postal worker. His biography is a succession of endings (many failures, and many attempts).

⁸ "We were scared of everything. We didn't have any document . . . men in uniform frightened us; maybe they were only postmen, firemen or road sweepers; for us they were all policemen looking for 'undesirable foreigners.'"

sono nato in questi paesi in America mi chiamano Italiano qui mi chiamano Americano” (129).⁹

Autobiographies also work as a *sutura* of the familial tissue. The earthquake of immigration not only shakes the individual but breaks the family apart. Autobiography reconstructs the Pangea, it mends the broken ties of a family divided in two different continents, and draws together generations that speak different languages. "Tutto quello che innanzi e' scritto e una cosa sommaria dei miei ricordi, lo fatto come ricordo ai miei figli perche' alloro interessa di sapere quale e la loro discendenza" (21) writes Giovanni Musci in his short autobiography.¹⁰ The immigrant writer that perhaps is the most conscious of the importance of autobiography as a new way of keeping together the past and present generation, who also speak two languages, is Humbert Federico Tosi. Born in Ramazzo (Bologna) in 1878, Tosi works as a recording representative in Boston and founds the Tosi Music Company. From 1911 he works for the Edison Company and meets Thomas Alva Edison.¹¹ At 90, he typescripts the few pages of his autobiography with a double title: *My Memoir. Le mie memorie*. If his identity is double, if he is a

⁹ She "sat by my side and told me you are American, I was born in these towns in America they call me Italian here they call me American."

¹⁰ "All I have written, a sum up of my memories, is written as a remembrance for my children because they are interested in knowing which is their descendance." This 93 years old man writes his life story in the Bronx on an American composition notebook in a telegraphic style. It is his spiritual testament to his children and grandchildren. He is a returned immigrant who portrays himself as a victim of the events, while his son tells us in an after-text that he was an active communist and escaped Italy for Fascism, after he was beaten up by the Ovrà police that left him invalid all his life. Born in 1862 in Santeramo (Bari), he just recounts the economical difficulty of his family after the death of his father, his marriage with Rosa Tangora who gives him 16 children. She makes him leave for Ohio in 1911 to reach his five older sons, and she makes him come back after a few years because she missed Italy. They return and in 1939 during a trip back he is taken for an American spy and controlled, until he decides to return to America.

¹¹ Tosi is an upper class immigrant who leaves for a sense of adventure and not for need of money: "I decided to go to America. Again, I must say I was fortunate. Unlike many poverty-stricken Italians of the South who were going to America at the time, I was going because I wanted to and had the means to travel, rather than because I had to in order to earn bread for a family. . . . I wanted to strike out immediately, so . . . I started out alone" (11).

border-crosser, he then chooses English as his language of choice because his goal is to provide a bridge between himself, the past, and the future, his family in America. His autobiography also includes a family genealogical tree: Tosi is fully aware of his saving task in keeping the memory alive and the family together after the earthquake-like experience of immigration: "The family genealogy offers information that should be appreciated by relatives. To-day with more families scattered than ever before since informations (sic) should help preserve sacred family ties" (n.p.).

Immigration and autobiography even share the same *narrative discourse*. They are both travels in time or space in the constant research for a place. An autobiography travels in time to trace a map of the *I* and give it a unique place. Immigration is a physical travel through space in a specific quest for a place (Barolini calls this it the immigrant's *quaquaversal* identity in *Umbertina*). The autobiographical question is basically the quest of an immigrant of the soul. One of our autobiographers, doctor Michele Daniele, asks himself autobiographical questions that are also the immigrant's questions: "I wondered what all these months and years, since that cold, gray December day [when he arrived to New York City], what have they really added up to in the great ledge of life? To success? To failure? To happiness? To lasting, meaningful accomplishment? Had I moved forward? Backward? Or merely stood still?" (136).

Finally, autobiographies relate to immigration in that they add individual relief to the flat immigrant mass described in history books. As Michael La Sorte states, since the very beginning of the exodus, immigrants were treated as animals, as a mass, as lacking individuality. The way they were named is exemplary:

An Italian was not an Italian. He was a wop, dago, duke, gin, tally, ghini, macaroni or spaghetti bender, He was also Hey Boy or Hey Youse, or he was given some generic name: Joe, Pete, Tony, Carlo, Dino, Gumba. 'Do you know why most Italians are called Tony?' 'No'. 'Because when they land in New York they have cards on their caps that say: To NY'. Most of the terms were obviously meant to dehumanize and to degrade. Others were simply ways of addressing a worker by someone who felt no need to indicate individual identity. (138)

Autobiographies give specific first and last name to individuals of the undistinguished mass. Reading autobiographies is a remedy from the dehumanization and degradation that all too often seems to accompany the immigrant experience. Through their autobiographies, the immigrants "would become subjects seen from within instead of objects glimpsed from a distance, real types instead of stereotypes, protagonists rather than exotics or victims" (13), as William Boelhower writes in *Autobiographical Transactions*. Only through their own voice, the immigrants can tell us their lived life, and Joseph Tusiani underlines it when describing his picture: "Il primo a sinistra e' un giovane serio serio di cui io solo conosco i pensieri" (290).¹² Only they can tell "how it really is" as Michael Lamont says of his friends who do not write down their life: "it's too bad because the tales they will tell will die with them, it's a shame because they really tell it how it is" (54).

Sometimes, we even discover a new truth hidden behind numbers and records, or official stories. For example, the miner Antenore Quartaroli who does not even know how to spell correctly, writes his own version of history, and denies the "high" version written by a priest when he polemically notes:

¹²The first on the left is a young serious man whose thoughts only I know."

Così il lettore se avesse letto il libro del Cherry Mine Disaster scritto del F. P. Buck che alla pagina 124 Father Hanney, St. Mary Chiesa, dice che il prete cattolico di Mondota fu lui che cammina ben 3,000 piedi dal pozzo all'uscita per venire in nostro soccorso e che invece questo non è vero siamo stati noi che siamo venuti fino a 50 metri da questo benedetto pozzo e che nessuno d'altri si è sacrificati per noi" (29).¹³

Constantine Panunzio also announces to the reader that American history will always be awry on his account. When he is unjustly arrested in Vermont he uses his new American name (easier to pronounce), and thus leaves a distorted trace of himself in history. His autobiographies now clarify the mistake:

I presume however, that somewhere in the records of the state of Vermont, my name, alias 'Frank Nardi,' is to be found; along with thousands of other unfortunates, some of them doubtless as innocent as I. Doubtless also, somewhere the careful student of criminal tendencies of the foreign-born people of this country has counted my name along with the thousands of others in his impersonal statistics of the criminality of the immigrant group in the United States. (118)

In reading their autobiographies, in giving a name and even a nickname to each immigrant, in listening to their personal story, in perceiving the tone of their language and the vibrations of the words they strike, we are therefore filling with flesh the sterile

¹³ So the reader if he had read the book about the Cherry Mine Disaster written by F. P. Buck that on page 124 Father Hanney, St. Mary Church, tells that the catholic priest of Mondota was the one who walked 3,000 feet from the well to the exit to come to help us and instead this is not true we walked until 50 meters before this blessed well and nobody else sacrificed for us." Quartaroli writes *Grande Disastro della Mina di Cherry, Ills. 13 Novembre 1909 scritto da Quartaroli Antenore, Uno dei Superstiti, Otto giorni Sepolto vivo nella Mina*, 36 pages with no date, printed at his own expenses. It is a little booklet that takes the reader's breath away while following the eight days in which Quartaroli fights against death buried in the mine. He tells of his friends dying and writing to their wives, waiting for death hugging each other, searching for water and for food and for air. The rhythm becomes tiring while we suffer with him: "La mia penna non è abbastanza forte per descrivere la fatica che feci per passare il 7 Nord. Ero così' debole, fame sete, stanco che a stento potevo alzare le gambe e diceva tra me'. Ma come mai un uomo della mia età' essere ridotto in questo stato; no non potevo credere a me' stesso" ("My pen is not strong enough to write the hardship I had to live to pass the 7 North. I was so weak, hungry, thirsty, tired that I hardly could lift my legs and I would tell to myself, 'how can a man my age be reduced to this state, I could not believe in

lists of Ellis Island, we are gazing inside the eyes of those mute black and white pictures, and we are giving a face to the blurring immigrant mass that silently moves about in history books. Giuseppe Prezzolini lamented exactly this lack of *flesh* from the arid statistics of migration when he wrote:

L'enorme maggioranza degli emigrati italiani negli Stati Uniti non ha avuto il tempo di scrivere le proprie autobiografie, E di loro non resta traccia, in massima parte, che in aride statistiche: quanti vennero, quanti proliferarono, quanti morirono, quanti andarono in prigione, quanti popolarono i manicomi, quanti ritornarono sconfitti, quanti conquistarono un certo benessere; ma la realta' delle loro miserie e dei loro trionfi resta senza storia. [. . .] Sono veramente generazioni perdute. (392)¹⁴

myself," 6). He only tells a separating event, not his autobiography, but the most important episode of his life that causes his rebirth.

¹⁴ "The huge majority of Italian immigrants in the United States did not have the time to write their autobiographies. And we do not have a trace of them if not in arid statistics: how many came, how many children they had, how many died, how many went to prison, how many filled the asylums, how many returned won, how many conquered a certain well-being; but the reality of their miseries and their triumphs remains without story. [. . .] They are really lost generations."

CHAPTER 4- UNORTHODOX AUTHORS

Common Men and Women

In his severe survey of autobiographies, V.S. Pritchett cuts out a specific category for all those books that do not excavate into the hidden self. He calls them "normal autobiography." They are the majority of works that people, people just like us, would write: "We have had a life, but what has happened to the selves that have inhabited it? They have gone like old love-affairs" (601).¹⁵ We are not Rousseaus, able to revive that old self to dissect it. Thus, he says, "we produce normal autobiography: the life, the busy record of family, friends, career and events, without a self to support its tacit self-importance. Too indolent to create an immortal soul, we settle for the small property of an epitaph and a cheerful plot in the graveyard of history and anecdote" (601).

"Normal autobiographies" can anyway be valuable. If, as Olney asserts, an autobiography gives sense to a life that would otherwise be "random chaos," a "tabula being covered entirely but meaninglessly, with marks," then any life can be insightful, even if common. It is the *instress* of the individual, the force from within that gives it value: the "sufficiency of the creation depends not upon external and dead objects out there, but upon the intensity of the instress, or the energy, that we bring to beholding

¹⁵ Our autobiographers are perfectly conscious of the 'inconsequentiality' of their life, as David Iona asserts from the opening: "My dear grandchildren: I decided to write this story of my life not because I, at any time or under any circumstance, had any part in the development of what happened in the world or because my actions had any influence on the life of any important segment of humanity. On the contrary my life was

and forging them” (32). Therefore even a “common” life gains importance when the beholder decides to write it: what makes it grand is not the way it was lived, but the will to record it and reorder it, giving it a meaning, electing it as the metaphor of self. Moreover, for Olney, “plain” lives have a charm of their own. He says: “the most beautiful lives, to my mind, are those that conform to the common human pattern, with order, but without miracles and without eccentricity” (329).

First Generation Immigrants

There are different reasons why I chose to concentrate on first-generation immigrants. First of all, for a matter of taste and closeness that I personally feel toward people who changed homes, shifted place and followed a nonlinear path in life as I am somehow doing. I also had to limit my scope for a more practical reason, for the breadth of the material found that called for some choice. Third, and most important, I find that first generation immigrants are the most interesting to interrogate. As “border crossers,” they are endowed with a “multidimensional perception,” “literally the ability to see not just from one side of a border, but from the other side as well,” says Emily Hicks (xxiii). Their narration, that brings us from one world to another, is thus most compelling, enticing the readers, quenching their thirst for adventure and exoticism, and awarding them with the gift of double vision coming from their living “in a bilingual, bicultural, biconceptual reality” (xxv).

Besides, their voices scream for recognition. These writers are the beginners of Italian-American culture, but they have a relatively small weight in society, and their

quite common, and only my family could in any way feel that my actions and attitudes had any bearing on

testimony is often forgotten. They are the revered images that crowd so many third-generation Italian American writing and film production.¹⁶ But they almost never speak directly, and if they do they are not understood. Their children speak another language (Constantine Panunzio reports the anguish of one of these mothers: "as soon as they learn English they will not be my children anymore," 254). Reading their autobiographies is thus like giving a voice to the mute grandmother of Helen Barolini's memories:

my grandmother stayed regally under her tree like a tribal queen, and mounds of food were placed around her like offerings. . . . When I asked my mother why Gramma looked so strange and never spoke to us, I was told, she came from the old country... she doesn't speak our language. She might as well have been from Mars (5).¹⁷

First generations immigrant are on the verge of falling into oblivion: "The immigrant parents would be more or less a 'lost generation'" (38), writes Bruna Pieracci, the daughter of a miner who died of too much work to give his children the possibility of a better life. The first generation is often lost because sacrificed to the second. Lawrence Ferlinghetti salutes this generation, the *old Italians dying*, in his beautiful poem that resounds with the tolling of bells and describes them in a striking verse: "waiting . . . for their glorious sentence on earth / to be finished." This graphically broken, graphically unfinished verse, as the long sentence of life waiting for the final full stop, seems to refer to the act of writing the long sentence of autobiography. Our

my closest surroundings" (1).

¹⁶ I am thinking of the production by Martin Scorsese (the grandfather's portrait or the lost first generation of *Italianamerican*), Nancy Savoca (the legendary first generation of *Household Saints*), Francis Ford Coppola (the generational gaps of *The Godfathers*), Helen De Michel (the puppets or the recovered first generation of *Tarantella*). For the written production I am thinking of the overwhelming presence of *nonni* (grandparents) in Italian-American fiction and non-fiction.

¹⁷ Joseph Tusiani describes a similar scene between his mother and her American grandchildren. When they ask "Tell us a story about Italy!," she tells them a story of misery from another planet that - even with

autobiographies are the last freeze frame of immigrant life. Not death speaking, but life saying its last words.¹⁸

Finally, I found that there has been some confusion on the treatment of Italian-American autobiography, by grouping together any generation of writers. Every generation has distinctive characteristics and should possibly be treated separately. Saul-Ling Cynthia Wong refers to this confusion when she criticizes Boelhower's schematization and his undistinguished treatment of first-generation and second-generation immigrant autobiography in *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States*¹⁹ (he): "It would seem reasonable to expect immigrant autobiography to be written by immigrants" (147), she writes. Then she specifies "that *autobiography of Americanization* - autobiography in which the Americanization process is explicitly in the foreground - may be a more appropriate description of Boelhower's subject matter, and I propose reserving immigrant autobiography for autobiographies written by immigrants" (152).

In fact, William Boelhower writes of both immigrant and second-generation as sharing the same feeling of doubleness, the same divided self over two different worlds. This is true: they do share the sensation of doubleness, but it is of a different nature. The son born in America from Italian parents does not share the same experience as the father who physically traveled between the two worlds. The self divided between two worlds is not enough to make them alike: for the father the two are living worlds, part of his blood, while for the son the old world is second-hand, even if vivid and familiar. Besides, while

translation - they do not understand: "tradussi, ma inutilmente. Fra nonna e nipoti c'era un abisso. Piu' che la lingua, li separava una civilita' diversa" (*Antica*, 98).

¹⁸ As I said, I disagree with Paul De Man's opinion that autobiographies hide a "latent threat", a "sinister connotation . . . our own actual entry into the frozen world of the dead" (928).

the father has an undeletable active role to fulfill, a heroic story to recount, that of the traveler, the son has a different story to tell, one of redemption, of liberation perhaps, that does not include a "separating" experience such as the crossing of the ocean. While the immigrant lives a horizontal split that cuts his life in two temporal slices that will never meet (the Italian and the American), the son experiences a vertical line that splits his life in two parallel parts coexisting at the same time (the family and the outside world).

Their different experiences spawn different narratives. This is why Rose Basile Green divides into two different categories her Italian American authors: on one side the first generation characterized by a narrative of "explanatory reports or autobiographies" (31) or sometimes by the "revulsion" caused by the desire to assimilate, and on the other side the younger generation characterized by an act of "counter-revulsion," "a return to the old sources, reiterating the Italian American theme from a more highly developed integration with the native culture" (91). The same differentiation is underlined by Daniel Aaron and Anthony Tamburri, with the warning that generations and stages of hyphenation do not always coincide: Aaron divides the three generations into "local colorists," "militant protester," and "American;"²⁰ Tamburri into "expressive," "comparative," and "synthetic."²¹ First-generation immigrants are therefore a very special class of writers that cannot be confused with second and third generations. First-generation autobiographies are the most self-justifying: as "local colorists," these writers often use their narrative

¹⁹ In *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States*, Boelhower is more interested in a formal, structural analysis of the works, and he gathers first-generation writers Panunzio and D'Angelo together with the second-generation Mangione.

²⁰ See Aaron, Daniel. "The Hyphenate Writer and American Letters." He later slightly revised this article in "The Hyphenate American Writer" in *Rivista di Studi Angloamericani* in 1984.

not only for the purpose of winning the sympathies of the unhyphenated but also in the hope of humanizing the stereotyped minority and dissipating prejudice. It was as if he were saying to his suspicious and opinionated audience: 'Look, we have customs and manners that may seem bizarre and uncouth, but we are respectable people nevertheless and our presence adds flavor and variety to American life.' (Aaron 214)

A further distinction could be made between the writers who write in Italy, having come back to their roots, and the writers who write in America, land that they have chosen as their home. The standpoint from which the autobiography is written is important: being an encompassing look over a life and certain events, its point of view becomes fundamental. It is the present position of the writer that enables him/her to see this life into a unity: "the beginning is in the end," says a sibylline Roy Pascal (12), who explains: "the standpoint may be the actual social position of the writer, his acknowledged achievement in any field . . . in every case it is his present position that enables him to see his life as something of a unity, something that may be reduced to order" (9). The main difference between immigrants who returned and immigrants who remained (*rooted* immigrant) is that the first are more likely to write a travel book where the experience of immigration closes with the end of their immigrant period, and can be recalled as an event among many, even if the most important one. Instead, for the rooted immigrant the act of permanent immigration is the "totality" of the life experience, the "quintessence" of life, the "metaphor" of life. Always, the type of writer influences the type of autobiography: the successful immigrant is different from the returned immigrant,

²¹ See Tamburri, Anthony. "Lo scrittore italo-americano. Nuove definizioni per una vecchia tradizione" in *Esilio Migrazione, Sogno Italo-Americano*.

as the famous person is different from the "average" person, who has a lower pedestal from which to look back.

A Reflection on Class

The immigrant autobiographies on which I will focus are most unorthodox because they are produced by a class of people who are not supposed to write. For centuries cultural capital coincided with economic capital: rich people had leisure time and education, and therefore were most likely to write, while poor people were equally deprived of money and education. For centuries, then, there has been a clear division between rich and poor, between those who learned to write and read, and those who could not; those who wrote books and those who did not. This brought about a *élitist* idea of culture: one culture for the few privileged, which is written, official, and documented, and one for the lower classes, which is oral, unofficial, and undocumented. Our autobiographical material takes us to the "borderland," on the boundaries between cultural classes. By writing, our authors take a step toward another class; even if using faltering words they cross over the line. Many of them are aware of this leap.

Not only are our authors non-professional writers, they are also non-writers. Most of them are not novelists, poets, and/or journalists – nor people who normally write in their everyday jobs. Our authors are not accustomed to find self-expression in writing. It is not part of their cultural capital. When they do take a pen in their hands, and plot out

their life as something that is worth telling they are crossing boundaries of classes.²² They become "bourgeois of the mind."

If we look at our authors through Pierre Bourdieu's ideological screen, we find that they are even more unorthodox. For Bourdieu, art and cultural consumption are "predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences" (7). Writing is also predisposed to distinguish between classes. It is always Bourdieu who signals the trap of exclusion and self-exclusion, according to which those who feel incompetent, un-entitled, and impotent are also indifferent to art, culture, writing.²³ Our authors are not supposed to have a pure *aesthetic* enjoyment, which necessitates high taste and detachment from the necessities of life. This relegates them to a social class that is poorer in cultural capital, and they are not supposed to exit from it. Also, for Bourdieu, "personal opinion" is a bourgeois invention: the probability of producing an opinion goes together with some elements, such as being men (as opposed to women), young (as opposed to old), city-dweller (as opposed to country or small town), having more educational capital and more economic capital. Our authors do cross all these lines when they feel entitled to produce a "personal opinion," perhaps the most personal of all opinions: their own version of their life.

²² In a way, their class determines their choice to write an autobiography. Their being a working class of self-made men makes them able to write only when they gather the fruits of their sweat, once retired. Particular conditions of life in fact transform these people into authors: being a leisure activity, writing is only possible for them when they stop their daily toil. All our authors find a time to write only when sick and unable to work, when retired and lonely. The time of writing coincides, for them, with the time of autobiography: the last hours when a man or woman can finally take a breath and look back at things past.

²³ Paulo Freire develops this idea in his political concept of "selective democracy," a tricky democratic system shunned first of all by those who refuse what they are refused. In this system the impoverished ones who are not supposed to vote also refuse to get involved and interested in politics (*Education to Critical Consciousness*).

These authors are thus giving pick-axe blows to the determinism embedded in Bourdieu's analysis. His determinism is clear when he draws "distinctions" that allow little space for subversion, and when he individuates the reason of domination not in the rich and powerful part of society, but in society itself, in its structure. Our authors (even if not representative of the entire lower class) show the turmoil in such distinction of classes that makes its boundaries look more like a willow fence than a stone wall.

Unorthodox is also the act of appropriating literacy in the most productive sense, as writing. In so doing, these immigrants are reversing concepts of magical comprehension practiced by their class for centuries. Italian peasants and lower classes often suffered from what Paulo Freire calls a "magic consciousness" that "simply apprehends facts and attributes them to a superior power," that "is characterized by fatalism, which leads men to fold their arms, resigned to the impossibility of resisting the power of facts" (44). They are powerless because they live and accept a world-view constructed from above. For Freire, who speaks of illiterate South-American peasants, literacy can gain them back the possibility of their agency. But there is a passive literacy, which enables people to read while it keeps them in the same subservient position, and an active literacy. William Covino highlights the first type of literacy calling it "false magic" that, with formulaic incantation, attempts to suspend or control the possibilities of human action. For Covino then, true magic is the real rhetoric, "action that creates action, words that create words" (92). Borrowing from Kenneth Burke, he asserts that "true-correct magic is *generative*, practiced as constitutive inquiry or the coercive expansion of the possibilities of human action" (93). This true magic is proper of our writers' autobiographies: by taking writing in their own hands, by daring to dream to produce a

“book” (the insignia and accessory of a superior cultural class), by becoming subject and not object of a productive rhetoric, our authors again cross cultural boundaries through their generative rhetoric.

There is another type of class unorthodoxy that is most pertinent to our Italian-American authors (those who are living in America when writing). While Italian authors only cross class boundaries, the Italian-Americans must instead jump over a double hurdle: class and ethnicity. They not only belong to the working class, but also to an ethnic group that has long been despised and disparaged. Italian-Americans still struggle for representation. For them therefore writing their own story is an act of generative rhetoric that counteracts outsider's visions. As Edvige Giunta affirms: “Appropriating memory is a crucial step for those who have been marginalized and denied access to public forums because of their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, sexuality or class” (120).

The Need for a New Terminology

Treating "unorthodox" authors, I am in need of a new terminology to critically comment their works. The terms of "autobiographies of conversion," "success stories" and "autobiographies of Americanization" do not satisfyingly describe our authors. Too easily the critics of immigrant autobiography have seen in it stories of conversion. For Boelhower, immigrant autobiographers in one way or another have to comply or to confront themselves with the model of the immigrant in the process of Americanization. The model that he describes though satisfies only the few "autobiographies of Americanization" (such as Panunzio, Orlando, Massari) but not the bulk of our authors.

According to him, the immigrant writer must only follow the behavioral model already provided and "re-elaborate" or simply "re-write" it.²⁴ The writer only has to take the "blueprint" of the official version, and make it his own, by adapting himself to the American model of self-made man, that in "the United States is already framed, being already inscribed by a master-plot[:]" the immigrant autobiographical narrator must simply position himself/herself in it as citizen" ("Autobiographical Transactions," 99).

In the same way, James Holte (*The Representative Voice*) joins together three ethnic autobiographies and underlines that they are three stories of conversion. The African-American Malcolm X, the Italian Constantine Panunzio, and the Puerto Rican Piri Thomas write their conversions from immigrant to ethnic, from the old to new world, and from atheism to religion. They are therefore linked to the American tradition of puritan moral autobiographies, in particular Panunzio's *The Soul of an Immigrant* that clearly refers to Benjamin Franklyn's *Autobiography*.

I am not satisfied with this criticism. Our autobiographies are not merely repetitions of the "success story" or the "passage to Americanization" of the immigrants. They are only marginally narratives of conversion. These elements are present in a more or less important way, but they are not the principal characteristics. While some do, many of them care little for the American model of Americanization. They are instead completely self-absorbed in their own immigrant model, their own particular story of immigration, their own ethos of the *quiet individual who survived History*.

²⁴ See it "Autobiographical Transactions," 57. Boelhower is fond of models, and in his article on "Immigrant Novel as a Genre" he compiles another model for the immigrant novel: "an immigrant

Quiet Individualism

Our authors open up a wholly different perspective on the history of individualism. As we have seen, all critics agree that autobiography intersects with individuality: autobiography is the product of a society that believes in the individual, where the individual is thought to be separated from and opposed to others.²⁵ This explanation does not entirely satisfy our writers who are not exceptional. They are only common people with nothing to boast, but their decency, and they have "inconsequential lives." As Pietro Riccobaldi expresses: "tornavo dopo vent'anni. Non avevo fatto grandi fortune, ma sentivo di essermi comportato bene, di aver tenuto fede alle origini e agli insegnamenti della mia famiglia. C'era in me un senso d'orgoglio" (132).²⁶

Besides, Italian individualism is not historically famous: the sociologist Edward Banfield defines the almost perverted sense of unity of the Italian family as "amoral familism." According to his study of a Southern Italian community, the nuclear family is the dominant social unity that absorb all "material short run advantages" (83) to the disadvantage of the individual or the enlarged community.²⁷ The novelist Giovanni Verga gives a literary description of this kind of familiar philosophy in his simile of the fingers of the hand, and dramatizes the individual's helplessness in his *The House by the Medlar Tree*. Joseph Lopreato finds this lack of individualism also in Italian-American families:

protagonist(s) representing an ethnic world view, comes to America with great expectations, and through a series of trials is led to reconsider them in terms of his final status" (4).

²⁵ The problem with this kind of reading is denounced by some critics by saying that it is mainly a Western ideal created by white male critics (those who have the luxury of forgetting about sex and race). But what about women (Susan Friedman asks in her article "Women's Autobiographical Selves")? And what about oppressed minorities, or *wops*, we might ask.

²⁶ "I returned after twenty years. I did not gather big fortunes, but I felt I had behaved well, I had kept faith to my origins and my family's teaching. I felt a certain sense of pride."

"closely knit together and disciplined to the idea that the major decision of the individual's life ought to be made in accordance with the aims and the good of the group as a whole as defined by the oldest active member of the family" (59). Patrick Gallo's psychological research on the political alienation of Italian Americans also remarks the closeness of the Italian-American subgroup: thanks to the persistence of a tight family structure ("father dominated but mother centered," 78), they are "structurally unassimilated" and this "structural separation of the Italians result in the retention and solidification of an Italian identity. It also causes the Italian subsociety to persist" (114). Even Italian stories very rarely chose the individual as the center of narration: Fred Gardaphe' maintains that if there was a strong storytelling tradition in Southern Italy, the center of these stories was almost never the self, but some more or less cautionary story. "In the Italian storytelling tradition," he writes, "the self is suppressed and is not used as a subject in storytelling. . . . Traditional stories served both to entertain and inform the young, while reminding the old of traditions that have endured over the years. Personal information was expected to be kept to one's self" (*Evolution* 290).

In our autobiographies there are many examples of this attachment of the writer to his people, "la gente, or common folks, to which we belonged," writes Constantine Panunzio, while Pascal D'Angelo always uses the pronoun "we" to describe his immigrant adventures. Pietro Toffolo speaks of "la mia gente" in Italy ("la mia gente non era cambiata, lottava e lavorava soltanto per essere povera. Il mondo allora era povero e triste, ma la mia gente non era triste; ci voleva cosi' poco per renderla felice! Aveva la

²⁷ Far from being a surpassed concept, "amoral familism" is used by the historian Allen Ginsborg to explain the roots of the Mafia and the failing of the Italian State (*A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988*).

capacita' di accettare," 18),²⁸ and Gregorio Scaia never really separates his figure from the crowd of Trentini that conquered foreign lands. When there is a stress on individualism, it is always an American discovery: Panunzio describes the "mental awakening" to individuality of the immigrant in America; Previtali remembers his first return and his American transformation: "I believed it was American to be more assertive and bold" (217); and Toffolo asserts that in America, "the identity of a man consists in his individuality . . . and he doesn't have to shine while he walks to be noticed" (48).

In sum, Italian Americans find their ethos in the group, more than in the individual.

We therefore need to articulate a different mode of individualism to fit autobiographers who are neither exceptional nor individual heroes. I would call it *quiet individualism*, a narrative about the self told *sottovoce* rather than shouted in triumph. Rather than a sharp tale of adolescence (typically American according to Sollors), a soft tale of mature years. Rather than the individualism of the fighter, that of the fought, the tamed by life. Looking at their past story, our authors do not flaunt it, but they protect it, they bury it under a sheet of earth as the servant of the parable with his Master's talents: exactly like people who are accustomed to protect and defend themselves from the blows of fortune, rather than to attack and offend. An allegory of this mode of writing is the autobiography of a woman, Elisabeth Evans, handwritten in pencil: a weak pencil, not an assertive pen, as if whispering her individuality, as if apologizing to exist.

Quiet individualism is a middle-way conception of individualism, valid for most of the immigrants who are not entirely successful, even if they 'made it'; who are decent,

²⁸ "My people hadn't changed, they fought and worked only to remain poor. The world was poor and sad

but not admired in the American society (and more often scorned for their accent and ethnicity). These immigrants have yes, learned the meaning of individualism because they have *detached* themselves from the mass that remained at home. Nevertheless, being "common men", they do not put themselves on a pedestal, they cannot say 'look at me and do as I did because I have been the best' (like Lee Iacocca or Jerre Mangione or Constantine Panunzio). Writing for their family and not for the general public, they cannot say 'Listen to me all of you people because I have an interesting life to tell you' (like Henry Adams or Benvenuto Cellini). Being geared to the past and not to the future, they cannot say 'look at my life and use it as a model' (like Benjamin Franklin). To the exceptionality of the individual they substitute the normality of experience, to the representative life they substitute a common life, to the listening audience they substitute the few interested ones. Thus, they seem to say: *here is my life, I've made through it, I have endured many storms but I'm still here, I worked hard and I made it well... listen to me, you my children, and the few who can be interested in my small life... keep it in your memory, enclosed in a book, I'm not asking you to use it as a gospel or a manual for action, but to treasure it on your shelf.*

The particular mode of individualism is clarified by the comparison between common Italian immigrants and *Americanized* autobiographers that tell stories of self-made men against all odds. Successful immigrants such as Mangione, Covello, Iacocca, Pellegrini, Corsi, and Capra are *Americanized* in this sense: as Holte indicates, they adopt Franklin's individualism that makes them say: 'I have been successful because I exercised the virtues of laboriousness, frugality, strong will, and tenacity.' Americanized authors do

then, but my people were not sad; it took little to make them happy! They had the ability to accept."

share the American sense of history where the self, not history, prevails: events do not happen to them, but they make them happen, as the successful Guido Orlando: "Nobody gives you ideas, Guido, you just reach out and get them" (132). Theirs are "histories of the self."²⁹ On the contrary, common immigrants are filled by a sense of self, where history, not the self, prevails. Theirs are stories of the "self in history."³⁰ While successful immigrants tell the adventures of the self as rising against the background of history, common immigrants tell of the misadventures of a self constantly wrestling with history.³¹ Luigi Barzini stresses the importance of history in shaping the Italian behavior: "[The Italian] is powerless to deflect the tides of history. He can only try to defend himself from their blind violence, keep his mouth shut and mind his own business" (157). Even a journalist like Beppe Severgnini notices this profound difference between American individualism and Italian historicism, when observing today "una nazione di autodidatti ottimisti, convinta che la felicità sia, prima di tutto, un atto di buona volontà". Dimostra come gli americani rifiutino l'idea che il successo possa arrivare senza

²⁹ Virginia Yans-McLaughlin and Victor Gioscia introduce the terms "history of self" and "self in history" in "Metaphors of Self in History: Subjectivity, Oral Narrative, and Immigration Studies." Drawing a comparison between the oral stories told by Jewish and Italian laborers in New York, she notices a different sense of self and a different sense of history in Italian and Jewish immigrants. She maintains that Italians hold an "atomistic" sense of history that "does not perceive the self or society as an unbroken, linear development" (274); for them fate, not will, dominates, and resignation, not fight, is their remedy. This "atomistic" sense of history can be found in many of our autobiographies: they are a succession of facts, and these facts push the person to act and decide his/her actions, not the opposite.

³⁰ Gallo notices this persistence of powerlessness and alienation from the outer political world in Italian Americans, that is greatest in the second generation, and declines, but it is not eliminated, in the third. "Moreover, the individual feels that he cannot influence the government in any meaningful way" (135).

³¹ Angelo Pellegrini, a successful immigrant, notices this shift in mode between Italy and America: "Had I remained in Italy, my childhood experience would have prepared me to accept frustration with patience and humility; in America they have matured as habits of work, thrift, and self-reliance as are necessary in the achievement of a certain measure of self-realization" (28).

spiegazioni, e tutto insieme (grazie al caso, a un santo o a un parente)" (221).³² Chance, saints and relatives are instead daily companions of Italian lives.

I would even hint that such a different sense of self is rooted in the different history, and different space, of America and Italy.³³ Angelo Pellegrini notices the spatial dimension of this difference:

it was the vastness and the freedom and the impersonality of what we saw that seduced and bewildered and troubled us. [. . .] The fields we had known were but garden plots in comparison. Diminutive areas hedged in by grapevines supported on willows. And stone houses and teeming humanity everywhere. [. . .] And a visible end to everything. [. . .] Is it any wonder that we were seduced and bewildered and troubled by what we saw, and that we felt that we ourselves had been released from narrow prison walls, into a freedom the immensity of which frightened us a little? (39-40)³⁴

³² "A nation of optimist self-learned people, convinced that happiness is first of all an act of good will. It demonstrates that Americans refuse the idea that success can arrive without explanations and all at once (thanks to chance, a saint, or a relative)."

³³ An interesting description of the different spaces is drawn by the immigrant-journalist Adolfo Rossi when he returns to Italy: "l'Italia pare un bel cimitero. Con le scarse vetture, rari trams, con la mancanza di ferrovie all'interno, le nostre maggiori città mi sembravano silenziose e come addormentate. Le strade poi apparivano strette in modo straordinario. [. . .] Il Po, l'Adige, il Tevere erano diventati per me fiumiciattoli. Trovavo tutto piccolo, gretto, meschino" ("Italy looks like a nice cemetery. With a few cars, rare tramways, lack of railways inland, our major cities seemed silent and almost sleeping. The streets appeared extraordinarily narrow. [. . .] The river Po, Adige and Tevere had become small brooks for me. I found all small, petty and belittled," 167). Rossi is an interesting figure. He was born in 1857 in Lendinara, a quite provincial town in the Po estuary (Rovigo), but he is a rebel, "malcontento, stizzoso, come un uccello in gabbia" ("unhappy, nervous like a caged bird," 1). He becomes a post office clerk but is lured by the idea of migrating to the United States. In 1879 he arrives to New York. His wallet is stolen on the ship and he arrives as a poor man who adapts himself to any job. He moves to Colorado, then returns to New York where he works in *L'Eco d'Italia* in 1880 for a few weeks, and in the daily *Il Progresso Italo-americano* until 1884. He has found his way as a journalist and after his three years in America, goes back to Italy where he works as a skilled journalist for *La Tribuna* of Rome and for *Corriere della Sera* (since 1894). In 1901 he researches a big scoop on the Italian immigrants swindled in Brazil, he covers up as one of them and sees the exploitation and the cheating in the *fazendas*. His work has a concrete result, and it brings to the 1902 law that forbids workers to leave with tickets already paid or anticipated from Brazil (because then the debt reduced them to slaves). In 1903 he is in Capetown and Mozambique to check on the living conditions of Italian workers in the mines. In 1904 he is made inspector of Immigration for the United States and travels to New York and San Francisco. His two books on the United States, *Un Italiano in America* (1891) and *Nel paese dei dollari* (1893) are not real autobiographies but interesting and lively journalistic sketches of immigrant life, including some character descriptions and an interesting piece on "Itanglish."

³⁴ He later observes that man does not have to bend the American landscape, like the Italian: "Nowhere we could see evidence that human hands had worked to subdue the environment to human needs" (45).

The past of the United States is ideologically drawn by a man who constructs himself out of victories against history, out of conquering the "empty" space, destroying pre-existing populations, wiping out enemies and domesticating the environment to his will. On the contrary, the Italian man has grown to live in a "dense" milieu, elbow-to-elbow with other people, in a tight social structure, fettered by centuries-old hierarchy of classes and foreign governments.³⁵ Therefore, the "history of self" cannot be true anywhere else than in the United States, where the mainstream American, white, male, successful, "uncommon" man is born. It is in America that the self cuts through the flow of history, pushes against the limit of things, like a battering ram against the walls of reality; while the Italian, ethnic, marginal, "common" man slips "in history", through its cracks, balancing on its ruins, jumping over its ditches or harsh edges. This is the *self in history* we find in most of our autobiographies.

The Immigrant Writer as Survivor

The *ethos of the survivor* is another key-word in this research. It is shared by all social classes in my research, especially the poor ones, and refers to the sensation nourished by the "man in history", the sensation of having escaped from destruction, having survived through the stampede of History. Immigrants normally feel it because they have escaped the bites of hunger and misery, but often also specific events, like earthquakes, wars, Fascism, laws (the Quota), or accidental deaths. They all feel it. The

³⁵ William Boelhower attempts a similar reading of American vs Indian allegory by saying that the space of the American is that of the town or the road, whilst the space of the Indian is the forest. This difference in

ethos of the *survivor* is perhaps particularly true for unskilled laborers, those who made it or not, but who surely had to struggle against Destiny or a social structure that already framed them as lower class. They have survived America itself and a deterministic social structure for the purpose of making themselves. John Podestio notices this characteristic of the humble immigrant writer in his introduction to Giovanni Veltri's autobiography:

Veltri was a simple man, uneducated and uncultured. His recollections are those of a pragmatist, free of ideology, who looked at the world as he found it. He used all his resources to survive. Part of the value of the *Memories* lies in its being a very simple record of the achievements and failures of an immigrant, a marginal man who had to cope with an inimical, if potentially rewarding New World. (17)

These characteristics - pragmatism, survival, marginality and simplicity - are shared by almost all our writers, even in the upper classes. From the poor worker who survives the explosion of the coal mine of Cherry, Antenore Quartaroli, whose struggling *ethos* is obviously the high point of his *memoire* ("Ma eppure bisognava lottare fino all'ultimo momento anche sicuri di morire," 16);³⁶ to the doctor, Michele Daniele, M.D., who also adopts the *ethos* of the struggling immigrant: "The truth of the matter is that I shall be quite content to be able to say about the years to come what I have been able to say about those that are past: *I lived through them*" (237). The educated engineer David Yona, who escapes misery and death as a Jew in Fascist Italy, strengthens the feeling of "having made it through history" with his Jewish identity: "My life covers a period of very deep social and political turmoil, with so varied and in many cases horrifying

places of *habitare* creates a larger difference in modes of understanding, that brings to the destruction of the Indian as a body and as a discourse (*Through a Glass Darkly*).

³⁶ "Yet we had to fight until the last moment even if sure to die."

experiences . . . I was an exceptionally lucky man" (1). In Yona, the immigrant's survival complex is superimposed to that of the Jewish survivor:

I slipped through all those crushing events, it is true: more than that I was never involved in any of the experiences that crushed millions and millions other men. But why am I a witness of those events, instead of being their victim? I cannot even thank a superhuman entity for my deliverance: how could I do that, knowing that many other men, more intelligent than me, more worthy than me were drowned in a blood bath? (2-3).

It is not surprising to find a flourishing of personal narratives after a "separating" event. Natalia Ginzburg describes in these terms the "crave for telling" that assailed people after the Liberation in Italy, after two decades of repression, after the shock of the War, and the experience of having survived death: "La rinata liberta' di parlare fu per la gente al principio smania di raccontare" (7).³⁷ The survivor of immigration is gripped in the same way by this craving for telling his/her story.

"Material People"

As they are factual more than formalist, these humble writers are also "materialistic." Without loading this word of negative connotation, I would use it to indicate the concrete, even monetary, approach they show towards their lives. Often being manual workers, they identify with objects such as the beautiful house to build. Always looking for an economic adjustment, they do not refrain from giving the exact price or the exact prize of their migration, in monetary terms. Many of them carefully disclose their earning and their many losses.

³⁷ "The reborn liberty to speak was for the people at the beginning a craving for telling."

This characteristic is reminiscent of the writers of autobiographies in Medieval Florence who were merchants, and together with the salient moments of their life mingled their financial calculations. Medieval autobiographies are little known, because they do not belong to artists, but to "little people." They contain the seeds of the bourgeois individual, proving that autobiography comes from a bourgeois state of mind: these merchants need to write because of their monetary interests, because they need to establish their property, calculate their earning, and pin down their individual life achievements. They are also a surprising presence in an age that supposedly suffocates the individual. (These seeds of individualism are visually represented in the "society of towers" in Florence with the stone towers that seem architectonic *individuals* sticking out in the landscape of the city, connected with bridges made of wood, ready to be burned in self-defense). There are thousands of these documents in the Archives, titled "Le ricordanze" or *Il libro di famiglia*, "Ricordanze di Donato Velluti" or "I ricordi di Giovanni Pagolo Morelli" (1371-1444). Authors such as Lapo di Giovanni Niccolini (1379) and Bonaccorto Pitti (1354-1432) intersecate their financial adventures with their personal life events, such as deaths and trips (cf. Chistian Bec). In his *Libro degli affari proprii di casa*, Lapo Niccolini, records his life events in a way that is clearly echoing our autobiographies, for the dryness of its style and the factuality of its tone.³⁸ When his son dies for example, he writes: "intendente, virtuoso e d'assai era, ma troppo grande gittatore del suo e dell'altrui, che' poco si curava di nulla se non seguire i suoi apetiti e volonta', e a

³⁸ Medieval autobiographies rely on facts more than on the inner life, because they see facts as models for teaching or finding a moral, according to motto "multorum disce exemplo, quae facta sequeris, quae fugies; vita est nobis aliena magistra:" "il Medio Evo cerco' nella Vita qualcosa che poteva assomigliare ad un modello di comportamento," Walter Berschin writes (3).

me diede assai fatiche, mentre visse in questo misero mondo" (569).³⁹ Inheritances and bad luck in business are also recorded by many of our authors, like Lapo who writes: "E di poi la detta monna Antonia mi mosse lite e quistione sopra d'una casa ch'io avevo comperata dal detto ser Francesco" (568).⁴⁰

Among our autobiographies, the clearest example of a descendant from those Florentine merchant autobiographers is Giovanni Viarengo. He was born probably in 1839 in the province of Alessandria in Liguria, and is the immigrant author of the hand-written *Memoriale di Giovanni Viarengo*. This is hardly an autobiography, but it is a true immigrant version of the "libro dei conti." It gathers some events, especially of his migration in Europe and his call to the Army, but when he gets to his American immigration, the autobiography becomes a mere bookkeeping. With each event, he gives its monetary value: "mi misi a lavorare da un fabbricante di macaroni a 9 scudi alla settimana e tavola e alloggia" (3);⁴¹ he buys a "stendio" in Market Streets; he rents a room and "mi misi a lavorare da falegname per conto mio" (4).⁴² He especially annotates the exchange of money, advancements and debts of his associates, and the profits and expenses for his *grosseria* in Saint Louis in the 1860-1870s. For example, his net profit for the year 1874 is 735 dollars. In 1877 he opens a society for the "Groceria," and buys a villa with meadows and vineyards in Annone through his father.

³⁹ "Acute, virtuous and generous he was, but too much a waster of his and other's money, who cared about nothing if not following his desires and wills, and he gave me many hardships while he lived in this poor world."

⁴⁰ "And then this said lady Antonia started a litigation about a house that I had bough from the said Messer Francesco."

⁴¹ "I started to work with a macaroni producer for nine dollars a week plus room and board."

⁴² "I started to work as a carpenter on my own."

PART III
A GALLERY OF IMMIGRANT PORTRAITS

Seguite me nel mondo senza gente:
Dire, anche morti, giovera': Vi fui!

G. Pascoli, *Inno degli emigranti italiani a Dante* (1911)

I would like here to present a Gallery of Portraits of the Immigrant,¹ according to the primary characteristic of each immigrant. These categories are straw baskets: they roughly contain the batches of autobiographies, but do not contain them airtight. Many sit uncomfortable in them because of the many individual differences and the natural exceptionality of each life.

Most of these autobiographies, or all of them, are characterized by the importance of "work." The ethos of the working man is shared by all - perhaps because the ethos of the immigrant coincides with his work: the choice to migrate had to do with working conditions or no work at all. Besides, in most American autobiographies personality alone is not enough to produce a book, like in the case of Cellini or Casanova - work, the job done, the accomplished task, the grand opera are the reasons to write one, including also the advice on how to reach the same goals, like in the case of Franklin. Work and

¹ I borrow the title from a book by Margaret Bottrall, *Personal Records. A Gallery of Self Portraits* (1961). In this book she regroups an anthology of autobiographical writing with only some themes in common, such as early years, love, self-scrutiny. The book lacks an historical grounding, and these pieces are completely left out of context taken from the most disparate locations, times, and social extraction.

man are identified for the immigrant in America, as the poet Joseph Tusiani observes in his autobiography: "La giobba, cioè l'impiego, io non l'avevo e non ero, dunque, nessuno in questa terra ove si è qualcuno solo se si lavora"² (*Difficile*, 38). Not only, the identification of the immigrant with his job is necessity in the autobiographies as Tusiani clarifies:

Per l'immigrato l'America è sinonimo di lavoro (la famosa "giobba" di Coco!). Se finisce il lavoro, finisce l'America; e che cosa rimane? Rimane l'illusione di parlottare una lingua straniera, il ricordo, cioè, di tutti quei suoni, più o meno corretti che sono serviti a rendere possibile la "giobba" e il suo prolungamento per anni, fino al giorno della pensione; rimane l'acquisizione di usi e abitudini, meccanicamente ripetuti di anno in anno ma senza alcuna radice di fede nell'anima. [. . .] e resta, infine, la dolorosa sensazione che, ora che l'America non ha più bisogno di te, non ti vuole più neppure la tua Italia, dove, se ti decidi a tornare dopo tanti anni, non ti riconosce più nessuno: e che ci vai a fare dopo una vita? soltanto a morire? (*Antica* 54)³

The ethos of the working man was often planted into the minds of the young immigrant children, as **Peter Mattia** demonstrates in his autobiography, *The Recollections of Peter B. Mattia* (typescript).⁴ He recounts a telling episode of his youth

² "I did not have *la giobba*, the job, and therefore I was nothing in this land where only those who work are somebody."

³ "For the immigrant America is a synonym of work (the famous 'giobba' of Coco!). If the work ends, America ends; and what does it remain? The illusion remains, to babble a foreign language, that is the memory of all those sounds, more or less correct that helped to make the 'giobba' possible and its continuation in the years, until the day of retirement; the acquisition of mores and costumes remains, mechanically repeated year after year but without a root of faith in the soul [. . .] and last, a painful sensation remains, the sensation that America does not need you anymore, your Italy does not want you either, where if you decide to return after many years nobody recognizes you: and what do you do there after a lifetime? Only to die?"

⁴ Born with the name of Petrino, "in a small mountain town of Calabritto, province of Avellino, on April 22, 1869, of humble parents" (3), Mattia immigrates to Newark in 1874 with his family to reach his father, a woodchopper. After the episode of the pick and shovel, Petrino works as a bootblack ("and a poor one for I never liked it"), as a barber for six years, and then as an inspector of the tenement houses for thirty years. He shows he loves his job and finds it socially useful: "the law must be obeyed by both the tenant and the owner, but an inspector can show the cheapest way as the good way to do it" (11). He dies in 1953. He never gives up his artistic penchant though and, while keeping his jobs, also works as a photographer, as a

when his father prohibited him from thinking about sculpture and drawings and drew him toward manual work:

One time he gave me a piece of paper and said. 'Can you draw a picture of a pick and shovel?' 'I'll try.' 'Do it!' I did, and he looked at it. 'Very, very good. That's what you use to make a living. Now go and learn what you like, but remember that I am not spending any money on crazy ideas. You have a home, but as far as buying clothes or paying for anything else, no!' (5)

An observer of Italian emigration at the turn of the century, the journalist Giuseppe Gaja, points his finger exactly to that ethos of work that is the main feature of our immigrants. In an anti-heroic fashion he writes: "Tutti coloro che emigrano col baldo ardire degli antichi avventurieri spagnoli - degni figli di Cristoforo Colombo - sognando attraverso l'oceano l'Eldorado non devono vergognarsi di dire che - pur di sbattacchiarsi onoratamente la vitaccia - hanno fatto di tutto" (460).⁵ Our autobiographers are not ashamed of admitting it, beyond all rhetoric.

painter for theater scenarios and a theater producer in his local community: "I think there are more people with talent out of the show business than in, who never got a real chance. I was lucky" (8).

⁵ "All those who migrate with the courage of ancient Spanish adventurers - real sons of Cristoforo Colombo - dreaming the Golden Land across the ocean should not be ashamed to say that - in order to honestly make a life - they have done anything."

CHAPTER 5: THE WORKING CLASS WRITER

The Sense of Self of the Working Man

Michele Pantatello, Giovanni Veltri, Emanuele Triarsi, Aldobrando Piacenza, Pio Federico, Giovanni Arru, Rocco Corresca, Tommaso Bordonaro, Calogero Di Leo

This first hallway in our gallery of portraits regroups the immigrants who define themselves mainly by their work. The opening picture should be a studio of a couple of immigrant's hands. Hands become the metaphor for the immigrant worker, like in the oral history of immigration by Adria Bernardi, *These Hands Have Done a Lot*.⁶ Immigrant hands cannot hold the pen after hours of work, like those of Camillo Cianfarra: "Ma la mano non poteva essere pronta a scrivere quando per dieci ore al giorno s'erano attaccate etichette e mossi barili" (113).⁷ The callous hands of **Michele Pantatello** are the characteristic life metaphor of these working-class autobiographies. When Pantatello is able to leave his office job and go back to being a blacksmith he looks at his reddened and blistered hands and rejoices: "fra una settimana le mie mani riprenderanno la vecchia gloria del mio artigianato" ([74]; for him this art is "l'arte tramandata di padre in figlio per tre generazioni" [94]).⁸ Pantatello is a 70-year-old blacksmith when he writes *Diario-biografico, l'ultimo immigrante della Quota, 25 nov. 1922* (self-published, 1967). His ethos is the ethos of work as he admits when he regrets having played in the Stock

⁶ She writes an original book gathering photographs of sculptures of hands and eight oral portraits of immigrants.

⁷ "But my hand could not be ready to write when it had glued labels and moved barrels for ten hours."

⁸ "In one week my hands would regain the old glory of my craftsmanship." "The art handed down from father to son for three generations."

Exchange instead of simply earning his money through the sweat of his forehead: "la tentazione e' una brutta cosa e chi vuol far fortuna, sappia che la migliore via e' quella del lavoro; l'ozio e' il padre di tutti i vizi" (84).⁹

Born in Oppido Mamertina (Calabria) on the 13th of November 1894, Pantatello survives the earthquake that destroys his city three days after his birth. His first emigration is an internal shift from Calabria to the Northern region of Friuli where he serves in the Army during the First World War and meets his future wife. At the wedding he experiences an exasperated *campanilismo* in the prejudice of his uncle's family against his wife who "era dell'alta Italia!" ("was from high-Italy!" 61). During the dawn of Fascism he works in an office as a clerk but, looking at his famous hands, he feels that he is betraying his working-class *ethos*: "guardavo le mie mani e pensavo, quale metamorfosi a causa della guerra. Per tre generazioni, provetti artigiani da padre in figlio ed io con le mani pulite. 'Non va'. Il giorno dopo davo le mie dimissioni" (65).¹⁰ The only way is to emigrate overseas, and in 1922 he arrives in Ellis Island. His arrival among his *paesani* is typical: "ognuno voleva sapere notizie del paese e come stavano le cose, i pettegolezzi e le curiosita'. [. . .] E' stata una bella riunione " (72).¹¹ In New York he works as a mechanic in a factory that makes soda fountains, but struggles against hard times, the strikes on the job and the sufferance of his wife who returns to Udine; he also is a recipient of the Home Relief program during the Depression: "incominciavo a perdere la pazienza, ero disgustato dall'America, bisognava lavorare come cavalli per

⁹ "Temptation is a bad thing and those who look for luck should know that the best way is work; idleness is the father of vices."

¹⁰ "I looked at my hands and thought, what a metamorphosis for the war. For three generations, skilled artisans from father to son, and now me with clean hands. 'It is not good.' The day after I gave my resignation."

guadagnarsi da vivere. Ma il destino voleva così'. In (sic) fascismo si era consolidato ed io non potevo tornare in patria, ammeno (sic) che piegare la testa, la qualcosa non l'avrei mai fatto" (81-2).¹²

"Il destino voleva così':" these autobiographers show a limited power against destiny. Not the "self-made" immigrant, but the "self-preserved" immigrant is the main character of these autobiographies, such as Pantatello's. They slip through the obstacles of fate like eels in the crevices. "*L'ultimo immigrante della Quota*" is the epithet he gives himself: he slipped through the immigrant regulations and was lucky to be the last one entering before the Quota restrictions for Italian immigrants. He delineates his *ethos of survivor* of Fate from his very birth:

Il 13 Novembre 1894 e' la data della mia nascita. Per alcuni il numero 13 e' considerato porta fortuna e contro il mal'occhio, altri lo considerano catastrofico. Per me che a distanza di tre giorni, il 16 novembre 1894, quando un forte terremoto si abbatté sulla nostra Città' e paesi vicini, con danni incalcolabili, se ho potuto sopravvivere, posso chiamarmi fortunato. [. . .] Ho raggiunto l'età' di 72 anni ed ho scongiurato il mal'occhio. 'Stupidaggine, superstizione,' diceva Benedetto Croce, 'ma e' sempre bene guardarsi.' (5)¹³

In the hardest moments of his life Pantatello does not praise his own courage and initiative, but the help coming from above: "Un vecchio detto dice: 'Dio affligge ma non

¹¹ "Everyone wanted to have news of the village and how things were, and gossips and curiosities. [. . .] It's been a nice reunion."

¹² "I was starting to lose my patience, I was disgusted by America, we had to work like horses to earn a living. But destiny wanted so. Fascism was stronger and I could not return home, unless I accepted to bow my head, something that I would never have done."

¹³ "November 13th 1894 is the date of my birth. For someone the number 13 brings good luck and works against the evil eye, others think it is catastrophic. For me, after three days, November 16th when a strong earthquake shook our city and villages around it with incalculable damages, I could survive, and I can call myself lucky. [. . .] I reached the age of 72 and I won the evil eye. 'Foolishness, superstition' said Benedetto Croce, but it is always good to be aware."

abbandona'" (57)¹⁴ and in fact, "nei momenti di tristezza e di angoscia causati da parenti ed amici, una mano suprema mi e' sempre giunta a propizio, incredibile!" (59).¹⁵ Even when he succeeds he does not present himself as a hero but as a head-down ram: "in questo paese, chi non sa farsi strada a forza di gomiti, rimane sempre indietro' (86).¹⁶ It is with hands and elbows that Pantatello builds his life, failure after failure: for example, he organizes a society for soda fountains machines only to discover that soda fountains were disappearing in the wake of the new vending machines. Nevertheless, he resurfaces every time: "l'America e' la terra delle opportunita', oggi sei povero, domani e' tutt'altro, per una strana combinazione si puo' diventare ricco, senza andare in cerca, si e' verificato migliaia di volte" (119).¹⁷ He is finally able to build a house for his wife ("il sogno di mia moglie che ha sempre agognato di avere una casetta, stava per realizzarsi," 95)¹⁸ and is proud that his daughters married "intellectuals." This is his final satisfaction as autobiographer, more important than his lack of education:

ho creduto presentare ai lettori di queste pagine scritte in tutta modestia, la mia adorata famiglia. Non so di meglio, non sono un intellettuale, sono un modesto artigiano e la mia preparazione e' stata limitata. Ho potuto ottenere soltanto il certificato di compimento della sesta elementare, all'eta' di 14 anni! Sono pero' orgoglioso delle mie tre figlie, sposarono intellettuali e di cio' mi reputo fortunato. Ora che tutti sono a posto, e' giunta l'ora di una vacanza, il viaggio in Italia (102).¹⁹

¹⁴ "An old saying says God trials but does not abandon you."

¹⁵ "In the moments of sadness and anguish a higher hand arrived in my help at the right moment, incredible!"

¹⁶ "In this country whoever is not able to make way with his elbows always remains in the back."

¹⁷ "America is the land of opportunity, today you're poor, tomorrow the opposite, a strange combination can make you rich, without going to look for it, it happened many times."

¹⁸ "My wife's dream that always desired to have a little house was becoming reality."

¹⁹ "I thought of presenting to the readers of these modest pages, my adored family. I don't know better, I am not an intellectual, I am a modest artisan and my preparation has been limited. I obtained the certificate of

Sadness creeps into Pantatello's description of his triumphal return to Italy. Even if economically satisfied, these immigrants know the price of their success. His 1960 trip back to his hometown is done with a special purpose, visiting the cemetery and honoring the disappearance of his entire family: "per rinnovare una lapide al Cimitero del mio paese dove riposano le ossa del mio Genitore, che era sbiadita e, questa volta venne fatta in marmo con lettere di bronzo per ricordare ai posteri, per sempre il nome di una famiglia scomparsa dal Paese, per le circostanze della vita" (124).²⁰ In this final paragraph we find the main characteristics of the immigrant autobiographer: the sheltering gesture against the adverse "circumstances of life" that wiped out a whole family, and the act of writing a name on a tombstone, or the story of a life, not accompanied by trumpet sounds but by the soft whisper of death.

The same idea is present in **Giovanni Veltri**'s last words that are marred by the idea that his Italian name will be lost: his two grandsons in Canada have inherited the anglicized name of Welch: "Finally I built a decent chapel in the cemetery where I hope my bones will be laid to rest. However my soul is tormented by the thought that my name will end with me because there is no one who will pass it on" (76). Called John Welch in America and Giovanni Veltri in Italy, this immigrant lives his identity as a worker with intense pride. Not only he works for himself, but through his railroad company, the Welch Company (founded with his brother Vincenzo), he starts a chain migration from his hometown of Grimaldi in Calabria: "a ghenga e Veltri" is the

sixth grade when I was 14! I am proud anyway of my three daughters, they married intellectuals, and I think I'm lucky. Now that everyone is fine it's time for a vacation, the trip to Italy."

²⁰ "To renew a stone at the cemetery of my town where the bones of my Father rest, it was faded, and this time it was made in marble with bronze letters to remind the future generations, always, the name of a family disappeared from the Village, for the circumstances of life."

common name for these laborers. Vincenzo and Giovanni leave in 1880s directed to the American Northwest. Giovanni, the storyteller, is ninety years old when he dictates his memories to his niece in Italian.

Giovanni's *Memories* cover the years 1867-1954, and with the memory typical of an oral teller, he remembers hundreds of names. Born in 1867 "into an excellent family with honest parents" (21) he remains orphan at 13 and immediately starts his immigration: "at fifteen I decided to immigrate to Africa" (21). In Algeria, working on the construction of railroads, he loses contacts with his cousins and friends, and his first immigrant all-male community thus crumbles. He dryly says: "We worked together for a few days, then we left the job because it was not suited for us. From that day we never saw each other again" (21). The community spirit is clear in an immigrant like Giovanni that is welcomed by Grimaldesi in every town he works, until he decides to go to Montana to build the Montana railway from Helena. The tragedy of solitude for him is clear in one dry sentence: "no one knew us there" (23). After 6 years in Italy for military service, his marriage and the birth of his first child, Giovanni returns to America in 1895. He works as a miner and witnesses a great explosion that leaves dead workers in his arms: "more than 2,000 people came to view the explosion site, but the tragedy saddened everyone, us more than the others" (35). He goes to Spokane, Grand Forks, and sees how a gold mine is discovered by an angry blacksmith who hurls a hammer towards the mountain and produces bright sparkles. He goes back to Italy for two years, and 1905 he is again in Winnipeg with his brother and even his first born son, Raffaele: "I was anxious to set to work immediately" (38). Giovanni is a pioneer and he experiences the harsh face of immigration in the cold of Canada living in tents that leave him frost bitten,

fighting with the slush, the snow, the black bears, the drunkenness of men. He sees tempests with "trees of various sizes being hurled through the air like twigs" and leave him "trembling with fear in a cave" (48). Even if he returns regularly to Italy for short periods, in 1910 he is back again ready to work, and passes from contract to contract with his brothers and other townsmen. His *ethos* as a worker is always intense:

We bought more horses and soon started working. It was wonderful to see how well we worked in that sand with the horses and equipment we had. As I have already mentioned, the work was started in the first weeks of July 1912 and completed the last week of November. Everyone was amazed. No one could believe that we could have completed seventeen mines of work in such a short time. But it was true. (58)

In 1913, his brother dies of peritonitis, and for Giovanni it is a tragedy: "my grief was overwhelming, but I had to resign myself to the will of the Lord. This was my poor brother's destiny" (59). He salutes him for the last time, and then loses no time to reach his work: "I wanted to see his face for the last time, he was still intact. I left him forever and returned to work" (60). When Giovanni's wife and daughters reach him in 1924, they do not adapt to the life in North America. He is thus forced to go back with them and leave the company to his sons. This is another tragedy for Giovanni who has lived all his life for his job and for moving about in the world. He gained a position as a worker there ("respected and well-liked by everyone. For my part, I always did my best," 72) and when he leaves it, it feels like an exile: "My final voyage to Italy, but it would be more appropriate to say my voluntary exile to my homeland" (73). He is bitter:

Accustomed as I was for nearly 40 years to journeying the North American continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific, to scouring the immense prairies and to ploughing the length and breadth of the Great Lakes system, it was not pleasant to be confined in my primitive native

village, Grimaldi, a town which has only a few thousands people. It had been my desire to be buried next to my brother in Canada, but I let destiny prevail and went to end my days away from the land where I had spent the best years of my life. (73)

A carefully chosen tomb and an autobiography are also the last gifts of the construction worker **Emanuele Triarsi** to his wife: "Io, Nino e Antonietta siamo andati a comprarti l'ultimo regalo, cioè' la casa eterna. Dove andammo non rimasi soddisfatto; andammo in un altro posto e trovammo quello che volevo per te, e così' comprai l'ultimo palazzo per te e per me" (102).²¹ Triarsi's goal in life had been to build the perfect house for himself and his wife, and this becomes the metaphor of his life as an immigrant. When his wife reaches him in New York he sees a silent disappointment on her face, and describes his resolution with curious words: "Io avrei voluto darci un castello ma non avevo altro che questo nido di cacarocchie. E guardando questa situazione, in silenzio o promesso a me stesso che se Iddio mi aiuta io fabbricherò la casa del suo sogno. Col tempo così o fatto. O fabbricato con l'aiuto di Dio, la nostra abitazione (la casa del sogno)" (60).²²

The tallest in his family pictures, Emanuele Triarsi was born in New York in 1922. Brought back to Sicily when he was only one month old, Triarsi comes back to the United States in 1949, and is joined by his wife and son in 1950. Today, Emanuele is a "snow-bird" who migrates from New York to South Florida every winter. His autobiography, *La solitudine mi spinge a scrivere* (typescript, 1986), is written in Italian and spans from his birth to the death of Marianna. When she dies, his narration also

²¹ "Nino, Antonietta and I went to buy your last gift, your eternal home. Where we went we did not like anything, so we went somewhere else and we found what we wanted for you, and so I bought the last palace for you and for me."

comes to an end. Like Pantatello, he also feels the pride of being a working man: his entire family was "famiglia di lavoratori e hanno lasciato nome in quel paese di Ribera. Per queste, doti di lavoratori" (1).²³ No job is too humble for him who works as an apprentice tailor and on the fields: "lavorare la terra mi dava tanta soddisfazione e gioia" (7).²⁴ Triarsi's immigration is signed by work, work all his life: "L'america e buona se si lavora. Ma se non si lavora sono guai e anche brutte" (sic, 57); "come vedete, la vita in America non e coronata solo di rose, ma ci sono pure le spine" (61).²⁵ He accepts all kinds of jobs with light heart: working in a sewer, "non vi posso dire che sporczia, ma intanto si lavorava e si stava bene anche in mezzo alla 'merda'" (75).²⁶

The authority of our "humble" authors comes not from their education but from the sincerity and the value of first-hand experience they can boast. So, Triarsi sighs at the end of his booklet: "A - se fossi uno scrittore!," but makes up for the lack of education with his sincerity by testifying that this book is written with his heart. "Non ho istruzione e di conseguenza non penso di scrivere un romanzo, ma solo una piccola storia, il meglio che posso."²⁷ The effectiveness of his prose is not marred by his roughness. He also gives a testimony of Sicilian culture, a culture made of cactus figs, old customs, recommendations, friendship ties and favors ("un paniere di frutta," 20) to obtain what was needed. He remembers Littoriali, a Fascist contest on the subject of Agriculture that

²² "I would have like to give her a castle but I had nothing else than this finch's nest. And looking at this situation I silently promised myself that if God helps me I will build the house of her dream. With the time, I did so. With the help of god I built our home (the house of dream)."

²³ "A family of workers and they left their name in that town of Ribera for these gifts of workers."

²⁴ "Working the land gave me a lot of satisfaction and joy."

²⁵ "America is good if you work, but if you don't work it's troubles and bad ones," "as you see, life in America is full of roses, but there are also thorns."

²⁶ "I can't tell you the dirt, but anyway we were working and we felt well even in the 'shit.'"

²⁷ "Ah, if I were a writer!;" "I do not have instruction and so I cannot write a novel, but only a little story, the best I can."

he fails in Fascist Culture. He annotates the economical transactions until the last lira, also because large part of his youth is spent to pay a debt of 36.000 lira for a lot of land. He remembers the "fame e anche nera,"²⁸ and the meeting with his wife. His descriptions portray the love dreams of a young Sicilian shaped on novels and movies, but crushed under the stiffening Sicilian tradition, that prevent the lovers to meet alone, to talk about love openly and to sleep together the night of the wedding. The migration to America is not necessary ("in Italia a dire il vero non mi potevo lamentare" 55)²⁹ but motivated by "ambition." His physical appearance changes in New York, and he cuts his Sicilian moustaches when he hears that they make him look like a thug. He shares the beliefs of the "immigrant philosophy": its resistance ("passando tutti questi episodi sempre uscendo a galla di ogni difficolt , mi sono convinto che ce' Iddio dietro a me che mi aiuta," 81);³⁰ and its resilience in building the house of dreams against the difficulties of life ("ma io anche con quello scoraggiamento che ho ricevuto o continuato," 77).³¹ At the end, he measures his happiness in material terms and carefully describes the hand-made details of the famous house he is able to build for his wife in Yorktown Heights, especially the floor.

If the perfect house is the metaphor of Triarsi's immigration, a clay reproduction of his village is the allegory of nostalgia for **Aldobrando Piacenza**. When he shapes the block of clay to create a miniature version of Sant'Anna in his yard, he finds a visible allegory for his identity and his Italian roots: "ma vedendo che non potevo andare in

²⁸ "Hunger, and black hunger."

²⁹ "To tell the truth, I could not complain in Italy."

³⁰ "Passing through all these episodes and always raising to the surface in each difficulty, I am convinced that God is behind me and helps me."

³¹ "But even in that discouraging situation I nevertheless went on."

Italia tanto presto pensai di portare l'Italia ad Highwood. [. . .] informa Piccola piccole edeficai la Chiesa ed il Campanile del mio Paese di Sant' Anna di piu' affianco gli eressi Casa a Capanna di Casa del Colle. Feci fotografare cartoline delle quali che ne vendevo a migliaia che ancora ne vendo sempre" (35).³² Piacenza is a retired tobacconist and school janitor (he had too many jobs to be easily defined) who at 68 spends his time in the company of an old typewriter in the suburbs of Chicago writing his *Memories* (typescript, 1956), and looks back at his life and at his 6 trips to the United States from the Appennino Tosco-Emiliano. The difficult uprooting of his first departure as a boy of 15, in 1903, is still aching in his pages where the hortographical mistakes take nothing out of the intensity of his writing (nourished by the books he loves to read):

Avicinandosi pero la partenza dopo di aver provato il piacere di sentirni apagato per Emigrare che gli era stato il mio piu' grande desiderio, e poi di ritornare un giorno col bel vestito e l'Orologio d'oro, pure non potevo pensare allo strazio di distaccarmi dalle persone da me amate e del mio Paesello che benche povero pure vi erano le mie piu' sacre memorie, Non dovevo piu' sente il melodioso suono delle sua Campane e le sacre funzioni, il mormorio dei suoi Rii ed il Gaieggiare gli Augelli, mi sentivo turbare da una profonda amarezza. [. . .] [His parents'] sacrifici che avevano fatto per me [. . .] crearono una determinazione che avrei fatto ogni possibile per rendere alla mia cara mamma e mio caro Padre quella consolazione che tanto si meritavano. [. . .] Partivo con la sidetta Compagnia, col piu' amaro strazio che io possi ricordare da mio caro Padre e mamma e sorelle alla volta del America. [. . .] Tante e ben tante volte anche nella lontana America quando pensavo al distacco di questa mia prima partenza piangevo amaramente, e delle volte quando venivo sorpreso nel mio pianto, dicevo non e niente. (8)³³

³² "Seeing that I could not go to Italy so soon, I thought of bringing Italy to Highwood [. . .] in small shapes I built the Church and the Campanile of my town of Sant' Anna and by them I built the house and the hut of Casa del Colle. I had it photographed and I sold a lot of postcards and I still do."

³³ "Approaching the departure, after I felt the pleasure of being satisfied to Emigrate that was my biggest desire, and then one day return with a nice suit and the golden Watch, also I could not think to the pain of departing from the people I loved and from my Village that even if poor still conserved my most precious memories. I was not to hear the melodious sound of its Bells and the sacred functions, the murmur of its Rivers and the Singing of Birds, I felt a deep bitterness. [My parent's] sacrifices that they made for me [. . .] created a strong determination in me that I would do anything possible to give the deserved consolation to

Piacenza vividly remembers his first impressions of America ("misto fra i Vapori scorgevo i Grattacieli ed il Grandioso Ponte di Brooklyn, con le enormi costruzioni di ferro, non posso negare che mi empirono di Stupore," 10),³⁴ the different sense of space in the American vastness between New York and Chicago ("interminabili Praterie Boschi ed immensa incoltivata terra Riviere immensi Laghi che sembravano Oceani. Si viaggiava per ore senza traccia di Abitazione. [. . .] Tutto ben diverso che di quello che avevo veduto in Italia" 10).³⁵ He loves both countries but his writing suggests that he maintain his heart in Italy while America has his gratitude. His love for Italy pushes him to sell Italian newspapers and books in his shop and this costs him the infamous accusation of being a Fascist spy. The police even interpret the clay reproduction of the church of his town in his yard as a reproduction of a Fascist palazzo (he defends himself in a less than honorable way by giving the name of a drunkard who was not even Italian).

Piacenza is another example of the *ethos* of the working man: "con onesto lavoro mi sono edeficato un discreto ricovero qui in America" (55).³⁶ He makes himself out of his won hands and with some unexpected help from *paesanos*. He changes a variety of jobs before settling with a tobacco and newspaper shop in Highwood (Chicago): "senza

my dear mother and dear father. [. . .] I departed with that Company, with the bitterest pain I can remember from my dear Father and mother and sisters toward America. [. . .] Many times even in the far America when I thought about that departure I would bitterly cry, and when sometimes people surprised me while crying I would say it's nothing."

³⁴ "Mixed through the Vapors I saw the Skyscrapers and the Grand Brooklyn Bridge, with the huge iron constructions, I can't deny I was filled with wonder."

³⁵ "Infinite Prairies, Woods and immense agricultural land immense Rivers Lakes that seemed like Oceans. We traveled for hours without seeing the trace of a House [. . .] All very different from what I had seen in Italy."

³⁶ "With honest work I built my decent refuge here in America."

lingua poca scuole e senza nessuno innizio di un mestiere,"³⁷ he works in a factory of *biscotti*, a pastry shop, selling strawberries in the street... He chooses his wife in Italy based on her strength as a worker "senza tanto romanzare" (32), and in fact Rosina never complains ("senza un minimo mormoro") and works with him "assiduamente senza mai una vacanza."³⁸ His entire migratory effort is dedicated to rebuilding and owning Casa del Colle, his family house on the hills of Modena. He goes back many times hoping to restart his life, but the economical situation always strangles him and forces him to leave. He gives up his family for the desire of owning that house, and quarrels with his sisters, suggesting the bitter comment: "se tutti questi anni d'America che o speso per liberare Casa del Colle e per riedificarla, e poi ultimamente non posso godere, e sentirmi oltragiato era pure meglio che non fossi io stato il Padrone" (55).³⁹ As an economical man, he includes many financial details and the whole dispute over that house. Money matters define his life, and in the 1959 post-scriptum to his autobiography he asserts that he wrote it to deny the myth of his richness: "tutta la gente tanto sia Italiani che Americani dicevano quanti soldi a Aldo Piacenza. Ma il vero fatto e che se io adesso dovessi fare un Viaggio in Italia Bisognerebbe che io andassi di nuovo imprestito dalla Banca".⁴⁰ He then ends his work with the ritual *excusatio*:

vedendo quanto io sia distante dalla celebrita lo tagliato assai corto... e forse sera anche troppo lungo. Ma voi che leggete perdonerete i numerosi errori che o fatto scrivendo queste mie memorie. Queste 56 pagine le a compilate in meno di due mesi tempo perche per rintracciare le date e gli

³⁷ "Without a language, little school and no apprenticeship."

³⁸ "Without much romancing;" "without the least murmur;" "assiduously never with a vacation."

³⁹ "If all these years that I spent in America to free Casa del Colle and rebuild it, and then lastly I cannot enjoy it, and I feel offended, perhaps it was even better if I were not the Owner."

⁴⁰ "All the people in Italy and in America would say how much money has Aldobrando Piacenza. But the true fact is that if I wanted to go to Italy now I would need to borrow from the Bank."

anni del mio andare e venire mi e toccato di pensare e perdere molto tempo. Aldo Piacenza 24 ottobre 1956. (56)⁴¹

This quiet modesty, feigned or not, is a topos of these autobiographies. The tailor

Pio Federico pours his in the apology at the beginning of his *An Autobiography*

(typewritten, 1960):

In questa storia, cerchero' di descrivere, nel miglio (sic) modo possibile, tutto cio' che ricordo del mio passato, dall'infanzia fino ad oggi. Se qualunque venisse a contatto, non si aspettasse di leggere "Le mie Prigioni" di Silvio Pellico; e' una semplice storia, scritto da un 'uomo (sic) all'eta' di sessantanove anni, di professione sarto, con la minima istruzione (sic) della quinta classe elementare, percio'. Ve ne sono grato, se non sbeffeggiato. Pio Federico Los Angeles 1960. (2)⁴²

Pio Federico was born in San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore in 1891 (he died in 1976) and came to America as a moustached youth in 1909. In 1960, at 69, he sits down in his house in Los Angeles and starts to write his life story. In 1966 he resumes writing and covers the other 6 years of life. He is then 75. Helen Federico translated his memories into a self-printed book that maintains the Italian text and is now preserved in the Archive of Staten Island. Pio describes his life in his little town where he is ashamed of having his father jailed for debts and, at 12, learns the crafts of carpenter, dyer and tailor in a jealous environment. In the tailor shop Pio makes his first encounter with the

⁴¹ "Seeing how far I am from celebrity I cut it short... and perhaps it's already too long. But you who read forgive my numerous mistakes that I made writing my memories. These 56 pages I have written in less than two months time because to retrace the dates and the years of my coming and going I had to think and lose a lot of time. Aldo Piacenza October 24th, 1956."

⁴² "In this story I will try to describe in the best way possible all I remember of my past, from childhood till now. If anyone came into contact [with this papers], do not expect to read "My Prisons" by Silvio Pellico; this is a simple story written by a man who is sixty-nine, a tailor, with minimum instruction of fifth grade, therefore. I will be grateful if not teased. Pio Federico Los Angeles 1960." Silvio Pellico's book *Le mie prigioni* was probably known to boys like Pio who went to school right after the Italian "Risorgimento,"

dream of America, through the owner whose name is a funny tautology, Tranquillo Placido, and who will be Pio's passport to emigration. Pio states it matter-of-factly: America seems to be the natural option in Abruzzo for him and Traquillo, "visto che non poteva andare avanti come lui desiderava, penso' di emigrare in America, e' (sic) cosi' fu. Prima di partire mi promise che appena sarebbe in condizione, mi avrebbe richiamato. In pochi mesi la moglie e figlio lo raggiunsero. Nel 1909 mantenne la promessa; mandandomi il biglietto l'imbarco (sic)" (18).⁴³

When Placido sends for him, Pio cannot find a loan for the famous *cento lire*: "Per cento lire, non potevo andare in America" (24).⁴⁴ This bill holds such an importance that it even decides his future relationship with his family and friend. When only the mayor of the town lends him the money, he writes: "Cosi' lui fu cosi' buono, di aiutarmi. Appena arrivato spedii le cento lire, con tanti ringraziamenti Ai miei parenti e amici non ho mai scritto" (24).⁴⁵ Pio's journey to America is a passage on the river Acheron, through the kingdom of Death: "Ero quasi sempre disteso come un morto" ("I was always laying down like dead," 24). His arrival to America is a drama that he describes by almost transforming himself, young, inexperienced and abandoned on the dock waiting for someone, into a piece of luggage: "Uscito, non sapevo dove andare con quella valigia e quel sacco, che pensavano [sic, probably *pesavano*] quasi piu' di me" (26).⁴⁶ In New York's Bleeker Street where a whole community of *Abruzzesi* lives, he finally meets

when the will "to make Italians" (*fare gli Italiani*) surely had included heroes like Pellico in the teaching curriculum.

⁴³ "Since he could not go on as he wished, he thought of migrating to America and so he did. Before leaving he promised he would call me as soon as he reached the right condition. In 1909 he maintained his promise sending me the ticket for the ship."

⁴⁴ "For a hundred liras I could not go to America."

⁴⁵ "So he was so good to help me. When I arrived I sent him back the one hundred liras with many thanks. To my relatives and friends I never wrote."

Tranquillo's wife he is literally resuscitated: "così torno' il sangue nelle mie vene" ("so blood returned in my veins" [26]).

Pio's life in New York is marked by hard work in the "fattoria" (factory) from morning until eleven at night: "ero disgustato" he briefly says ("I was disgusted" [28]). He does not take time off work even for his honeymoon: "facemmo un giro in detta carrozza, sotto l'arco di Washington. E a casa, dove passammo l'undici e il dodici, giorno dedicato a Colombo. Il giorno dopo a lavoro" (40).⁴⁷ His hops from job to job, but this does not bring him to a better life: the factory closes, "Ed'ecco mi trovai peggio di prima" ("And so I was worse than before" [28]). Nevertheless, he endures and eventually opens a little shop on his own with two friends. His entrepreneurial spirit is not boasted but simply declared: "presi una macchina da cucire da Tranquillo, che aveva a casa, andai ad un posto dove vendevano macchine di seconda mano, acquistai una macchina per pressare, tavole, sedie, e ferri per stirare, c'erano nel posto. Così preparai, la mia prima fattoria, di sei persone" (34).⁴⁸ His failures never end, even when he moves to California supposedly to recover from too much work: after not sleeping for five days to finish 287 sport blazers, "vendemmo la merce la fattoria, con una perdita di seimila dollari, tutto il lavoro e tempo speso senza percepire un soldo" (84).⁴⁹ "A life of high pressure" ("una vita di alta pressione" 80) is the life of the Italian immigrant, always pushed to do more and better, since the first day he left his land. This is Pio's pride and thorn. His health is

⁴⁶ "At the exit, I did not know where to go with that suitcase and that bag that weighed more than me."

⁴⁷ "We went around with said carriage, under the arch of Washington. And then home, where we spent the eleventh and twelfth, the day dedicated to Columbus. The day after to work."

⁴⁸ "I took a sewing machine from Tranquillo that he had in his house, I went to a place where they sold second hand machines, I bought an ironing machine, tables, chairs and irons we had in the place. So I prepared my first factory, with six people."

⁴⁹ "We sold the goods, the factory, with a loss of six thousand dollars, all work and time spent without earning a cent."

unstable for the high stress of his life that even makes him handicapped, and gives him a stuttering problem.

With this long list of failures and some successes, Pio is the perfect example of the "quiet individualism" of the Italian immigrant autobiographer. Destiny and the hand of God are as important as his own initiative. In Pio's case fate decides the way to be preserved for the sake of immobility: notwithstanding the quarrels with his associates he sticks to his word: "Abbiamo cominciato in tre e cosi' rimarremo" ("we started with three and so we have to remain" [62])... "\$80,000 che sarebbe stati nelle mie tasche, se fossi stato solo. E questo e' quello che mi costo' per mantenere la promessa fatta" (82).⁵⁰ Even Pio's marriage is somehow decided by Fate. In 1913 he meets Lillian, an embroiderer: "Lei [Lillian's mother] aveva perso la prima figlia della mia eta', e con il mio nome, si chiamava Pia, e diceva che il Signore le aveva mandato un'altro per rimbiazzare (sic) la perdita. Mi voleva proprio bene come un proprio figlio" (38).⁵¹ Life appears to him as a mount of obstacles in "questo mondo scombussolato" ("this discombobulated world" [112]) but his ethos as a *self-preserved* man still shines, as we see:

Ringrazio il buon Dio che mi ha dato forza e volonta', nel cammino della mia vita, che quantunque un po' turbolente, non mi dispiacerebbe affatto percorlerla di nuovo, cominciando dall'undici marzo 1891. Ho sempre fatto da me con le mie braccia e il mio cervello, senza aiuto di nessuno, soltanto una persona sono grato: Tranquillo Placido, questo era il suo nome. Il quale mi aiuto' a venire in America, mandandomi il biglietto d'imbarco. Pace e ripose alla sua anima (94).⁵²

⁵⁰ "\$80,000 would be in my pocket I had been alone, that's hoe it cost me to maintain the promise I made."

⁵¹ "Lillian's mother had lost her first daughter of my age, and with my name, her name was Pia, and she said that the Lord had sent her another one to replace the loss. She loved me like a son."

⁵² "I thank the good Lord that have me will and strength in the path of my life, that even if a little turbulent, I wouldn't mind walking again started from March 11 1891. I always did everything by myself with my arms and my brain, without anyone's help, only to one person I am grateful: Tranquillo Placido, this was his name. He helped me to come to America, sending me the ticket for the ship. May his soul rest in peace."

If in the immigrant philosophy work and material success are the measure of life, inactive old age is a defeat for the working man who is reduced to be "un bamboccio rivestito" (a rag puppet) as Pio describes himself in these bitterly poetic words:

A che vale pretendere di essere vivi, quando si e' gia' morti da lungo tempo? Quando si e' piu' in condizioni di creare una famiglia, di iniziare una nuova azienda, di speculare nell'acquistare e vendere, nel recarsi al mare o in montagna, e nel godersi i piaceri della vita, come si puo' dire di essere vivi? A che vale vivere a lungo se tutto questo e' nel passato? [. . .] quel che rimane e un bamboccio rivestito. (118)⁵³

Pio's last words are therefore words of resignation ("mi rassegno e ringrazio Dio e sua volonta'" [112]) which is reminiscent of the proverbial saying "questa e' la vita" in the conclusion of Leonilde Frueri's autobiography: "Ma cosa fare, sono questi i doni della vita, gioie e dolori. Quel che sara', sara'" ("But what can you do, these are gifts of life, joys and pains. What will be, will be" [122]).

Resignation is daily bread for **Giovanni Arru** since he is a young boy and a disgrace strikes his home. The Sardinian Arru writes *Ricordo della mia infanzia*, and speaks of his entire life. Born in 1890 and writing at 80, he remembers the rigid social structure of the town of Pozzomaggiore at the time of his birth: "Per chiarire l'agiatezza della mia famiglia di allora, il paese era diviso in tre categorie: Signori, Messeri e plebei. La mia famiglia quindi considerata Messeri, era una delle famiglie considerate ben

⁵³ What is worth to pretend to be alive when one has been already dead for a long time? When you are not in condition to create a family, a new factory, to speculate in the buying and selling, to go the sea or the mountain, to enjoy the pleasures of life, how can you say you are alive? What is worth living long if this is all in the past? [. . .] all that remains is a dressed doll."

estante" (1).⁵⁴ Arru remembers his father as a hard worker who sustained the family: because of a big accident that leaves him invalid, his entire family is disgraced and his Odyssey starts. The accident is told as a mythical beginning: "Ma ecco il disgraziato anno 1895, l'anno che avviene la disgrazia di mio padre e quindi la miseria di tutta la famiglia" (1).⁵⁵ His father sees the figs of a fig tree reflected in the water of the fountain: "e vide attraverso l'acqua quello per lui e per tutta la famiglia quell maledetto frutto e il demonio lo attiro' a salirci su e appena arrivati si spezzo' il ramo che aveva sotto i piedi" (1).⁵⁶ He remains invalid and the family spends all the money in search for a cure, but "lu vanu" (in vain). His mother starts working as "sartina e richamatrice" (tailor and embroiderer), his sister goes to "spighare" (harvest the wheat) and harvest "cecci" (chickpeas), while he brings home the bundles of wood. He defends his family from the accusation of "barbarity" in letting a child work like a mule: "Cari miei, vi dico che non e' cosi, vi era la necessita' e bisognava fare cosi' o morire di freddo. [. . .] io nonostante tutto il peso e la fatica non ho niente da rimproverare a mio padre. Ma non basta questo e' il principio della mia vita" (3).⁵⁷ His sentences of resignation are frequent: "Non si poteva fare diversamente, o raccogliere le pietre sui campi per il pane o morire di fame [. . .]. Bisognava fare coraggio e affrontare la situazione che era quella del pane" (3).⁵⁸ Giovanni bears also the whip of his uncle who treats him like an ox ("questi sono episodi

⁵⁴ "To clarify the well-being of my family then, the town was divided in three categories: Signori, Messeri, and plebeians. My family was considered Messeri, it was family considered as well-off."

⁵⁵ "But here is the disgraced year 1895, the year that the tragedy of my father happened and so misery for all my family."

⁵⁶ "He saw that cursed fruit in the water for himself and his family, and the devil attracted him on the tree and there the branch under his feet broke."

⁵⁷ "My dear, I tell you it is not so, it was necessity to do this or die of cold. [. . .] Notwithstanding the weigh and sweat I have nothing to reproach to my father. But this is enough, it's the beginning of my life."

⁵⁸ "It wasn't possible to do differently, either gather stones in the fields or die of hunger. [. . .] it was necessary to be brave and face the situation that was the one of bread."

che mi mi rattrista il cuore a distanza di 70 anni" [4]),⁵⁹ and starts his emigration young going to France to work as a concrete mixer. The concrete powder makes him almost blind, but young Giovanni already has a strong worker's *ethos*, "con le mie povere forse ma pieno di grande volonta' e attaccato al lavoro " ("with my poor strength but full of good will and attached to work" [5]). After going to the war in Libia for eight years, Giovanni leaves to America to look for work, and his first job is shoveling snow from the streets of New York: "L'arrivo in America fu colaudato come primo lavoro a pulire le strade di Neorca dalla neve" (6). He then goes to break the ice on the lakes and works as a road builder. He abandons his bed in the cabin of his gang of Pozzomaggiorese because they stink too much and finds board in a house of Italians "who hardly understood and spoke Italian" ("che a stento comprendevano e parlavano l'italiano" [7]). Giovanni remains in the United States for two years and then returns to Italy when called to war in 1915. He immediately regrets his decision because he is sent to the first line on the Isonzo without even greeting his relatives. When the war finishes, "visto che in Sardegna non vien niente da fare solo che scavare pietre, pensai di ritornare in America anche perche' avevo diritto a viaggio gratuito. Arrivato in America era d'inverno e non vi era niente altro da fare che andare a spalare la neve per pulire le strade" (11).⁶⁰ His situation improves when he starts selling bananas on the street for two Sardinian grocers. Working for five years, from 18 to 24 hours a day, he is nevertheless successful because he arranges them better and even has a way of making them appear more yellow than the

⁵⁹ "These episodes sadden my heart even now at a distance of 70- years."

⁶⁰ "Seen that in Sardinia there was nothing to do, only dig stones, I thought to return to America since I had a free trip. In America it was winter and there was nothing to do than go to shovel snow on the streets."

others. He does not complain because that hard work pays, and allows him to become somebody:

il ramo del lavoro richiede di far cosi' se si vuole che il lavoro vada bene e sia profiquo come e' statto per me che in 5 anni mi ha permesso di farmi un bel gruzuletto e ritornarmene nella mia Patria, ero giovane e sano lo potevo fare e mene sono trovato bene, altri anno fatto diversamente, ma erano zero e zero sono rimasti sempre. (11)⁶¹

When the "mala vitta" starts spreading in his streets and he is almost killed by a flying bullet, he decides to return to Sardinia and triumphally invest his money in building a house. The envious Signori of his town try to stop him, jealous of his fortune, "avevano invidia perche' un povero diavolo come me riusciva a farsi la casa" (12). He finally builds it, "direi signorile," and opens a bar, portraying himself as the "civilizer" of his little town: "senza darmi una parola di vanto, devo dire che il mio arriva d'America a Pozzomaggiore ha portato un po' di civilta', non solo perche' ho fatto il caffe' e il trattamento su detto [. . .] anche la prima vetturetta, la prima radio e la prima TV" (12).⁶²

The same triumphant return is recorded by Daniele Sodano, an immigrant who returns after "having made" America. He is the 84-year-old author of the hand-written *Ricordi di una lunga vita* (1914-1992). Born in 1909 in Connecticut in a Neapolitan family, he returns to Italy hating his father for taking him in the misery of Italy: "non gli perdonavo quella sua inspiegabile nostalgia e anche il fatto che non facesse nulla per

⁶¹ "The branch of the job wants so if you want that the job go well and be proficuous as it was for me who in 5 years I gathered a little fortune and go back to my Country, I was young and healthy, I could do it and I was happy, other did differently but they were zero and zero they remained."

⁶² "Without showing off, I have to say that my arrival in Pozzomaggiore from America brought a little civility, not only because I opened the coffee shop and the rest I said [. . .] but also the first car, the first radio, and the first TV."

diventare ricco come il nonno"(7).⁶³ He thus keeps on living the American dream until he departs again to reach his sister in Canada. In the United States, he works as a barber in a hotel where he meets many celebrities, and only when America (itself!) destroys it ("Purtroppo, come spesso accade in America, si ritiene opportuno demolire il palazzo dell'Hotel per far posto a moderni grattacieli ritenuti piu' adeguati" [49]),⁶⁴ he leaves for his final welcomed return: "Il beneficio e la gioia piu' grande della mia vita non fu il vile ed ingannevole denaro, ma la gioia di ritornare a mea alla bell'eta' di 82 anni, e oggi, gia' da due anni, vivo insieme con mia sorella rimasta vedova" (50).⁶⁵

The working immigrant is the symbolical category under which **Rocco Corresca** is catalogued in the American magazine, *The Independent*, that publishes his story under the title of "The Biography of a Bootblack" (1902).⁶⁶ Being a worker and performing a useful job was the key to acceptance in that time that saw assimilation as the deserved award for all the immigrants who could contribute to the building of America. At the turn of the century, when public opinion was split between advocating restrictions for loafers and criminals (many of whom were Italians) and calling for assimilation, the *ethos* of the honest worker is the winning card. This is the reason why the story of the bootblack is published, and works as a *tessera* in the mosaic of immigrant voices recorded by the

⁶³ "I never forgave him that his inexplicable nostalgia and the fact that he did nothing to become rich as grandfather." Sodano's family is forced to return when the Prohibition shuts down his grandfather's liquor factory and his grandfather refuses the gangster's proposal to keep on a secret production. Sodano always remembers "the happiest years of his my life" in the house with a swing in the garden, while is incapable of forgiving his father for taking him back. His father's return to Italy, with seven children and no money, is a disaster.

⁶⁴ "As it often happens in America, they think it right to demolish the Hotel building to make space for modern skyscrapers that are believed to be more adequate."

⁶⁵ "The biggest benefit and joy of my life was not the vile and false money, but the joy to return home at the nice age of 82, and today, it's already two years that I live with my widowed sister."

⁶⁶ *Independent* 54 (December 4, 1902): 2863-67. Reprinted in Holt Hamilton, *The Life Stories of {Undistinguished} Americans. As Told by Themselves*. New York: Routledge, 1990; 29-38.

Independent in those years. The general ideology suggested by the mosaic is the same that inspired the welcoming inscription carved under the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Each story is a fresh and interesting description of the poverty of the Old Country as opposed to the opportunities of the New, while education and assimilation are highly stressed by the writers. This is the Progressive Era, and the "reformist concerns" of the journalists are audible (Sollors, xvii). While many of these stories were told and rewritten by editors, Corresca's story does not seem to be one of them. Seen the bootblack's stress on learning and education, we can assume the story was written by himself and probably edited before publication.

Corresca writes a "crude" story on the theme of rags-to-riches, and shows the bookkeeping urge that reminds of Franklin's autobiography, but also of Italian Medieval autobiographies of merchants. He starts with the description of his horrifying childhood as an orphan reclaimed by an old man, who presented himself as his grandfather and made him work as a beggar in the streets of Naples. He lives a life of Dickensian abjection, putting up little scenes with his accomplices to get money from foreign tourists, sleeping on the floor, eating little because "fat beggars" do not gain money, and regularly beaten by the old man: "I don't believe that he was my grandfather, though he must have known something about me because he had those papers" (31). He escapes from the hands of this man the day that he hears him speaking about crippling the boys to gain more money. From then on he lives the adventures of a vagabond boy with his friend Francesco who never leaves him and now works with him in America. They find a job with the good fisherman Ciguciano on the coast and Rocco almost falls in love with

his daughter Teresa. But the lure of America is stronger: "I had heard things about America - that it was a far-off country where everybody was rich and that Italians went there and made plenty of money. [. . .] One day I met a young man who pulled out a handful of gold and told me he had made that in America in a few years" (33). Francesco and Rocco pay their way across the ocean by carrying and shoveling coal in the fires, a hard job that makes him comment: "we wished we stayed in Italy no matter how much gold there was in America" (33). Only later he finds out that he should have been paid for that work and the young man who sent them had kept that money. After the first swindle, they are again exploited by the padrone Bartolo who makes them work for him in New York as garbage scavengers, looking rags and bottles. One day, they discover that they could gain more and especially that "Bartolo had no right on us" (35) and run away. The discovery of independence changes Rocco and Francesco who now become *padrone* of their destiny: they learn English from Irishmen and in exchange teach them to read and write; they go into business and open a shoeshine station in a basement. Rocco describes it as his personal life-realization, annotating all expenses as a good *homo economicus* and understanding the ways of the market:

We got a basement on Hamilton Avenue, near the Ferry, and put four chairs in it. We paid \$75 for the chairs and all the other things. We had tables and looking glasses there and curtains. We took the papers that have the pictures in and made the place high toned. Outside we had a big sign that said: THE BEST SHINE FOR TEN CENTS. Men who did not want to pay 10c could get a good shine for 5c but it was not an oil shine. We had two boys helping us and paid each of them 50c a day. the rent of the place was \$20 a month, so the expenses were great, but we made money from the beginning. We slept in the basement, but had our meals at the saloon until we could put a stove in our place, and then Francesco cooked for us all. That would not do, though, because some of our customers said

they did not like to smell garlic and onions and red herrings. I thought it was strange but we had to do what the customers said. (34)

Corresca writes his story as a succession of facts without dates or comments. His "cumulative" style of telling his accomplishments is typical of the humble immigrant's autobiography. He writes as a young man of 19, in the prime of his strength and dreams. Rocco has become "Joe" for his clients: his Americanization is in full progress. He often repeats the lesson of assimilation, "we learned": "we were very ignorant when we came here, but now we have learned much" (37). He has now \$700 dollars saved, Francesco is twenty-one and has \$900: "some people call us 'swells.' Ciguciano said we should be great men" (38).

One of the best known working-class autobiographers is **Tommaso Bordonaro** whose three notebooks have been published by Einaudi with the title *La Spartenza*. His working ethos is reflected in his style, a "wild writing" ("scrittura selvaggia" as Natalia Ginzburg writes in her *Preface*, v): the pure succession of facts with little description is the stylistic effect of a life spent working, quickly passing from one disgrace to another, and never resting to brood or look at the landscape. Bordonaro was born in Bolognetta (Palermo) in 1909, first of eight male children. He starts school in first grade before the school closes for the First War, and he works as a shepherd with his uncle, his father's substitute. Tommaso's father ("inalfabeto" (sic) but "furbacchione" and "scaltro bastante" [9]) has in fact emigrated in America, and is the big absence in his early life. It is interesting to notice that Tommaso traces back his family history to the Greeks, thus honoring the memory of an ancient glory, now completely evaporated: "La mia origine e' proveniente dalla Grecia di famiglia nobile dei primi tempi della venuta di Cristo che si

sono stabiliti in Sicilia nei tempi di Dionisie che governava la Sicilia. Ma nei tempi che io son nato la mia famiglia erava di bassa contizione povera quasi nella miseria" (5).⁶⁷ After his military service in Liguria he tries to leave Sicily for the first time, but his mother's tears stop him: "la mia mamma dal pianto le lagrime le regavano le guance, i miei fratelli piu' piccoli di me non avevano nessun coraggio. [. . .] Io per la mia mamma ero disposto a dare la vita" (11).⁶⁸ Tommaso marries a poor girl, his first love that makes his blood freeze in his veins ("il mio corpo e mio sangue mi sono congelato," 15), notwithstanding her economical conditions ("ho preferito piu' all'amore propio e al rispetto, e alla sincerita' piu' che ai bene stare," 9).⁶⁹ He starts working "as a horse" (this is the formula he often repeats, until he says: "questo e' stato il mio fine di vecchiaia fino adesso, lavorando da cavallo sia in Italia che in America" [125]),⁷⁰ and is able to build a little house, but when his young wife dies he is left desperate: "mi e' venuta un'oscurita' negli occhi, e' mollata tutta la mia vita" (33).⁷¹ He remarries an older woman who had been dishonored by her lover, and since she was born in America, starts thinking of emigration: "ho deciso assoluto andare in America non per il mio avvenire, perche' io sapevo che dovevo trovare del peggio, ma per i figli poter fare tutte le scuole e potere

⁶⁷ "My origin comes from Greece from a noble family of the first period after Christ who settled in Sicily in the time when Dyonisus was the governor of Sicily. But when I was born my family lived in a low condition, poor and almost miserable."

⁶⁸ "My mother had tears lining her cheeks, my smaller children did not have any courage. [. . .] For my mom I was ready to give my life."

⁶⁹ "My body and my blood froze;" "I preferred love to self-love and respect, and sincerity to well-being."

⁷⁰ "This has been my old age until now, working as a horse in Italy and in America."

⁷¹ "Obscurity came into my eyes, all my life crumbled."

imparare qualche professione e qualche mestiere e non essere schiavo al lavoro e alla miseria. Così ho deciso di lasciare la mia terra nativa ed emigrare in America" (45-46).⁷²

In 1947, at 38, with five children and his wife, Tommaso starts his series of "spartenze." He describes the first trip and the weather day by day, storm by dead calm, and his wake on the night of arrival: "Alle ore una di notte del 27 abbiamo arrivati quasi alla statua, e che si vedi una bellezza! Una illuminazione bellissima" (51).⁷³ His years in America are marked by jobs, in a Macaroni factory, in the public works and in a cemetery, a place that he had always avoided with fear: "mi faceva impressione dei miei defunti famigliari, mentre il mio primo lavoro in America ho dovuto fare il becchino per guadagnare un tozzo di pane duro e nutrire la mia famiglia, scavare fosse e seppellire morte" (54).⁷⁴ More than the hard job, prejudice and incomprehension sting him: "tante volte subire la mortificazione delle persone piucchemai ignoranti nell'offendervi: -Perche' vi piace affare figli?" (55).⁷⁵ Hoping for a girl, they in fact have another baby-boy, but do not have the money for a proper baptism with wine and almonds like in Sicily: "questo che mi e' nato in America non ha avuto niente, neanche questo, solo una tazza di caffè bollito e un pacchetto di biscotti e anici" (57).⁷⁶

Tommaso greatest blow is the death of his 21-year-old son who dies in a "faia incendi" (fire) when he is volunteer in the Army, the son who always suffered for the lack

⁷² "I absolutely decided to go to America for my future because I knew that could find worse, but for my sons to go to school and learn a job or a craft and not be slaves of work and misery. So I decided to leave my native land and migrate to America."

⁷³ "At one o'clock on the night of the 27th we arrived to the statue, and it looked a beauty! A wonderful illumination."

⁷⁴ "It deeply impressed me with all my deads while my first job in America was burying deads to earn a piece of hard bread and nourish my family, dig holes and bury deads."

⁷⁵ "Many times I had to suffer the mortification of incredibly ignorant people who offended me: 'Why do you like making children?'"

of his real mother. Tommaso receives ten thousand dollars as indemnity and spends it until the last cent in the funeral and in building a chapel in his garden, with a Venetian mosaic in it: "fino a spendere tutti i diecimila dollare che mi aspettavano per mio figlio e per far conoscere al popolo ignoto che non avevo bisogno di perdere un figlio per vivere" (73).⁷⁷ Tommaso is obsessed by the "popolo," the people that watch him and judge him. At the time of his first marriage, he is ashamed to be seen by the people walking with his wife two days after the wedding, and goes out at night. He often underlines his tie and fear of "il popolo" ("il popolo che conosceva me e la mia famiglia se ne faceva una risata ma quelle che non mi conoscessero non so come l'avranno pensato" he says when he throws out his jealous brother-in-law who tried to poison him).⁷⁸

Bordonaro never becomes really American like his children and grandchildren with such hybrid names as Renne Suzanne Bordonaro, Kristin Bordonaro. He knows that America is his "ultima patria" (108), but can't ever forget Sicily. He always remains "double." He undertakes numerous trips back to see his parents, and after sending for his parents, his brothers. He never can really depart from his family (at his second "spartenza," "la mamma mia fino a quando mi vedeva con la vista vedevo le lagrime che gli solcavano la faccia mentre io avevo il cuore che mi piangeva" [65]).⁷⁹ He also cannot part from his town for too long: he clearly says that "in venti anni della assenza del mio paese natale Bolognetta Sicilia Italia io sentivo una nostalgia di rivederla" (97), and each time he goes back he finds happiness in the reconnection with his "earth" and its fruits:

⁷⁶ "this one who was born in America had nothing, not even this, only a cup of hot coffee and a small package of cookies and anisette."

⁷⁷ "To show the unknown people that I did not need to lose a son to live."

⁷⁸ "The people that knew me and my family laughed at it but those who did not know me I don't know what they thought."

"provavo tanto piacere e gusto a cogliere tutta la frutta con le mie mani e mangiarla" (104); "io ho provato tanto piacere arraccogliere tutta qualita' di frutta speciale, arraccogliere dei mandorli degli alberi che io avevo piantato 30 anni prima, che adesso eravano mandorli vecchi" (130).⁸⁰

His story is far from a success story, as Tommaso quietly admits: "Io sono stato in tutta la mia vita sempre sfortunato nei miei affare, nel mio lavoro, fino ad essere anche nell'amore. Sono stato sfortunato: forse e' stato il nome, che in tutta la mia vita che ho passato mai ho avuto fortuna" (100-101).⁸¹ In Tommaso we also find the ethos of the *survivor* who, even if without luck, has made it through life: "E fino adesso, all'eta' di 73 anni, non posso notare di godere. Pero' sento il dovere di ringraziare il buon Dio che mi e' data la salute e la forza di lavorare senza nessuno male che mi contrasta. Sono arrivato a 73 anni senza avere subito mai un taglio nella mia vita" (121).⁸²

An untranslatable uniqueness of language characterizes the autobiography of the last working man in this section, **Calogero Di Leo**, who writes *Vita di un emigrante turista milionario* in 2000. This is a fresh piece of writing, written by a 63-year-old author who looks back at his accomplishments and defeats with an ironic smile. His same title is a half-joke: the "Life of a Millionaire Immigrant Tourist" is actually the life of a man who is an immigrant, but is not a tourist even if he lives in Fort Lauderdale (FL), and

⁷⁹ "I saw the tears on my mother's face until she could see me and I had a crying heart."

⁸⁰ "In twenty years of absence from my native town of Bolognetta Sicily Italy I felt the nostalgia to see it;" "I felt so much pleasure and joy in picking the fruit with my hand and eating it;" "I had so much pleasure eating the special fruit, and gather the almonds from the trees I had planted 30 years before and that were now old."

⁸¹ "I always been unlucky in my life, in my business, in my work, even in love. I have been unlucky: perhaps it is for my name, in all my life I never had luck."

⁸² "And until now, at the age of 73, I cannot note I am enjoying it. But I feel the need to thank the good God that gave me health and strength of working without any disease making it difficult. I arrived to 73 without even a cut in my life."

certainly not a millionaire having lost the money of his failed restaurants. This is a bright example of the bitter-sweet irony of the "normal immigrant." Another occasion for irony is when Calogero describes the disillusion of America through a funny story, the story of "la giostra of zio Michele." When zio Michele comes back to his home town showing off his riches as an "American," Calogero daydreams about "una giostra una L'una park" (88) that makes his uncle rich. Years later in New York, Calogero discovers the reality of his Michele's Luna Park fair:

Un giorno camminavo nei dintorni in una strada vedo un camiuncino piccolo di quelli antichi col muso lungo con un seggiolino sopra tre bambini seduti e zio Michele che le cullava a mano, mi fermo lo saluto dico che e' questa zio Michele questa e la giostra, a a a questa e la famosa giostra, mi dice che cifa' pagare 20 peni 20 centesimi di Dollaro per ogni bambino, le culla per quattro minuti e fuori faceva piu' di nove Dollari all'ora, quello che guadagnavo io in otto ore una giornata di lavoro per un dollaro e venticinque all'ora, cosi che faceva i soldi zio Michele Marinaro con la famosa giostra a mano. (153)⁸³

Calogero's prose vividly spans from a long reconstruction of his youth in Lucca Siculo (Agrigento) to his work in England, in New York (1965) and in Florida (1982). His dreams about America starting at a very young age thanks to the packages sent by his immigrant relatives. They were opened by the entire family with a reverent enthusiasm that Calogero recreates in the free indirect speech of his memories:

Come di solito tutti attorno al pacco per aprirlo, come se si dovesse aprire un tesoro, si apre il pacco si va uscento piano piano, un paio di lenzuola

⁸³ "One day I walked in the vicinity in a street I see a small truck of those old one with a long muzzle with a little chair on it and three children sitting on it and zio Michele who rocked it by hand, I stop I greet him, I say is it this zio Michele is it this the merry-go-round, a a a this is the famous merry-go-round, he says that he makes them pay 20 pennies 20 cents of a Dollar for each baby, he rocks them for four minutes and out he made more than nine Dollars an hour, what I gained in eight hours one day of work for a dollar twenty-five an hour, so zio Michele Marinaro was making money with his famous hand-run merry-go-round." Not a typo, that "a a a" echoes with the sarcastic laughter of Calogero dazed by the true America.

mama' esclama o che sono belli nuovi di zecca, Quattro camicie o che sono belli perte Giuseppe, tre pacchetti di spagnoletti: filo laghi e spille, o che sono belli, Quattro abiti per donna questi perme e perte a mia sorella, un coppo di zucchero in quatretti questo per il caffè', un vestito piccolo che dice in un pezzetto di carta attaccato al vestito questo per mio nipote Calogero salto in'aria e grido grazie S Antonino, un bel vestito di lana colore latte e caffè chiaro, nuovo di zecca la taglia era perfetta come se Don fifi mi avrebbe perso la misura quanto me lo metteva somigliavo a un figurino mai avevo avuto un vestito intero, sempre spezzato camicia e pantalone di fanella e piu' crescevo piu' corto si faceva il pantalone. E proprio un Santo quell'uomo viva America viva zio Antonino viva li spaghetti e viva le porpette, io incomincio come poter antare in America.
(77)⁸⁴

In Calogero's words is shaped the "immigrant philosophy" made of a thousand new departures, defeats, and renunciations. He has to close both his bars because he is not as strong as the corporations: "A tutti le altre negozi che sono grande catene come tacco viva Sbarro pizza, Japponese, Cinese ecc... noncera problema che sono pesci grande, io che sono una sardina e con una famiglia da mantenere e malato e paganto da sempre in tempo laffitto e responsabile in tutto [. . .] devo antare fuori" (167).⁸⁵ His sense of loss is counted to the last dollar, including even "un cannolo e un'espresso" (171).⁸⁶ The immigrant philosophy is founded on this conscience of the weakness of the unarmed immigrant who does not have a voice in any matter and must only absorb the blows:

⁸⁴" As usual all around the package to open it, as if we had to open a treasure, we open the packages we take out little by little a pair of linen mom exclaims o they are beautiful brand new, Four shirts o how beautiful for you Giuseppe, three packages of spools: thread needles and pins o how beautiful, Four women dresses these for me and for you to my sister, a piece of sugar in little cubes this for the coffee, a little suit that says in a piece of paper attached to the suit this is for my nephew Calogero I jump in the air and I shout thank you Saint Antonino, a beautiful suit of wool color pale milk and coffee, brand new the size was perfect as if Don fifi had been taking the measurements when I wore it I looked like a model I had never seen a complete suit, always two pieces shirt and flannel pants and the more I grew the shorter the pants. It is really a Saint that man long live America long live zio Antonino long live spaghetti and long live meat balls, I start [to think] how to go to America."

⁸⁵ "All the other shops that are big chains like tacco (Taco Bell) viva Sbarro pizza, Japanese, Chinese, etc... there was no problem they are big fishes," Calogero writes, "I am a sardine and with a family to maintain and sick and paying always the rent on time and responsible in everything . . . I have to leave."

⁸⁶ "It cost me a cannolo and an espresso."

"Quello che va per il mezzo e il povero emigrante" (117), and "l'emigrante passa tante ingiustizie e umiliazione e delle volte non si puo' difendere" (148) Calogero writes.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, this sense of resignation is softened by an undying optimism that seeps the narrative: "Tutto e parte della vita serve per imparare come Noe che aveva novecento anni ancora imparava" (167).⁸⁸ The immigrant cannot stop to lick his wounds because there are no other alternatives: "o ritornare intietro diretto in Italia anche mi tocca morire di fame. Dico no Calogero coraggio che chi la dura la vince" (118).⁸⁹

The physical departure of the immigrant becomes in this light the model for many other symbolic departures that are the will to start again after each difficulty. The immigrant fluidity in changing roles and shaping himself after each situation is clearly described by Calogero: "Quanti mestieri facciamo in'america al fin dopo tredici anni lascio la fabrica. Nonce problema subito imparo a fare la pizza, della canna alla pizza, mio fratello da telegrafista a calzolaio da calzolaio cambiare olio alle machine Mercedes in una concessionaria a Toronto, e a pizzaiolo" (159).⁹⁰ If solidarity plays an important role among immigrants ("Siamo tutti emigranti che veniamo tutti dalla cavetta e ci dobbiamo aiutare uno a l'altro e non farci del male specie tra noi paesani" [161]),⁹¹ the main character nevertheless remains the individual, the immigrant himself, a ragged and patched hero. The "discovery of the individual" typical of the autobiographical genre is

⁸⁷ "The one that suffers is always the poor immigrant." "The immigrant bears many injustices and humiliations and sometimes he cannot defend himself."

⁸⁸ "Everything is part of life is necessary to learn like Noah who was nine hundred and still learned."

⁸⁹ "Either going directly back to Italy I have to die of hunger. I say no Calogero be brave because who endures wins."

⁹⁰ "How many jobs we do in America at the end after thirteen years I leave the factory. There is no problem immediately I learn to make pizzas, from wicker to pizza, my brother from telegrapher to shoe maker he changes the car oil in a Mercedes dealership in Toronto to pizza man."

⁹¹ "We are all immigrants who all raised from the ranks and we have to help one another and not harm each other especially us paesanos."

thus triggered by immigration that is the courage to oar alone in the sea, as Calogero asserts: "Il mio dono che mi a dato Dio e quello di non scoraggiarmi mai e sempre avanti contra vento e marea dicono le Spagnoli e affrontare tutte le dificolta che si presentano nella vita" (114).⁹² Nostalgia and satisfaction are intertwined in the immigrant philosophy, since the immigrant is used to counterbalance the price of the distance from home with the weight of his success. On one side Calogero regrets not having been able to say a last goodbye to his father: "Non posso vedere nemmeno morto per l'ultima volta a una persona che piu' si ama nella vita il padre o la madre, anche lui non puo' conoscere i suoi nipotini per la lontananza, anche questa brutta esperienza e parte dell'emigrazione" (154).⁹³ On the other side, summing up the facts, he cannot fail to see the advantages of immigration and sigh with relief: "menomale che non sono a Lucca altrimenti sono grande problema tre figlie femmine, a fare puntina sedute fuori al fresco, e io lavorando come un ciuccio per mantenerli nonsisa' per quanto tempo" (156).⁹⁴

In comparison with Italy, America always comes out triumphant as land of abundance, in Calogero's as in many other testimonies of immigration. In the case of Calogero this test is measured in number of grapes and gallons of milk. During his visit to the California vineyards he does not fail to notice the enormous quantity of grapes that remain on the branches: "con quella che rimane alla vite si possono caricare camion e camion di uva se non si vede non si crede. Ricordo quando facevamo la grande vedemmia dei duecento vite che aveva nonno Calogero Bacino nella vite non rimaneva

⁹² "My gift that God gave me is that of never be discouraged and always go on against the wind and the tide the Spanish say and face all the difficulties that life gives me."

⁹³ "I cannot even see my father dead one last time the person that we most love in our life the father and the mother, he cannot even know his grandchildren for the distance, this bad experience is also part of immigration."

nemmeno un chicco di uva che differenza" (163).⁹⁵ In the same vein of awe, describing his cousin Vincenzo he compares his American success with a still of Sicilian life: "e ricordare quando era piccolo pascolare le pecore e muncire il latte e fare il formaggio nel caldaio come era sacrificato adesso senza vedere una pecora il latte arriva a migliaia di litri al giorno, e vestito tutto di bianco come un dottore dirige gli operai a fare la ricotta e la mozzarella Auguri Cugino Vincenzo te lo meriti" (163).⁹⁶

⁹⁴ "Luckily I am not in Lucca Sicula otherwise it is a real problem three daughters who stictch outside in the shadow, and I working as a mule to maintain them who knows for how long."

⁹⁵ "With all that remains on the vine you can load trucks and trucks of grape seeing is believing. I remember when we made the big vintage on the two hundred vines that grandfather Calogero Bacino had in his vineyard not even a single grape remained on it what a difference."

⁹⁶ "Remember when he was young pasturing the goats and milking them and making cheese in the caldron how he was sacrificed now without seeing a goat the milk arrives in thousand of liters per day, and dressed all in white like a doctor he directs the workers to make ricotta and mozzarella Best Wishes Cousin Vincenzo you deserve it".

The Politics of the Working Man

***Antonio Margariti, Gregorio Scaia, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Pietro Riccobaldi,
Carlo Tresca***

While in the next sub-group I will gather the "poets" of the working class, in this sub-group I will include the authors who to the bare telling of their working lives add a clearer consciousness of their selves as working men in a *political* sense. They have a clear sense of the dignity of the worker in the society, his rights and the quality of his living conditions. The political consciousness helps them to define the immigrant as a self-conscious subject who acts in order to gain acceptance in History for a sense of social justice. The following two groups are the real "philosophers" of the working class.¹

The working man springs forth in all his rage from **Antonio Margariti's** autobiography, *America! America!* (1983). Margariti was born in Ferruzzano (Reggio Calabria) in 1891. He departs for America in 1914 when he is 22 and works in Rochester, New York, as a stone cutter for the construction of canals. He goes back to Italy for a short time and then moves to America where he settles down in Willow Grove near Philadelphia, working in an automobile plant for all his life. After the last member of his family dies, the need to defy oblivion pushes him to write a masterpiece of literature of the impoverished. His broken Italian is a powerful yet rough tool to express his pointed

¹ A monumental autobiography that becomes more a philosophical and political treaty is written by Carlo Marzani, *The Education of a Reluctant Radical*. Here he retraces his life as an educated immigrant who fights for freedom and democracy in America, and not only.

ideas and clear conceptions of history as "seen from below." Margariti is an anarchist who openly defends the two Italian martyrs Sacco and Vanzetti. His tone is witty and sharp, ironic and cutting. Margariti is one of the few autobiographers (with Riccobaldi, Tresca, and Vanzetti) with a mature political conscience that we could define as leftist. He is an activist, and denies the typical Italian immigrant common approach to politics, an approach of disinterest as Patrick Gallo describes in his *Ethnic Alienation*, or of passive acceptance of the roles of pawns as in Corresca's experience: "A man came and said that he would get us made Americans for 50c, and the we could get \$2 for our votes. I talked to some of our people and they told me that we should have to put a paper in a box telling who we wanted to govern us" (37). We can instead easily imagine Margariti yelling in public meetings as a vociferous member of community or labor organizations.² The reasons for his writing are to be found in the strong will to cross the border of silent peasantry and become heard among the Big ones. His fascinating world is clearly divided between "Thepowerful" (*Ipossente*) and "thepoors" (*ipoverette*): "i giovanotti del paese erano divisi in due gruppi Ipossente e ipoverette e io senza dirlo era coi ipoverelle" (103).³ The same division remains in America, where he describes his anger toward injustices in terms of "land," terms that the immigrant understands: "La patria E' dei padroni, La patria dei poveri sideve fare ancora" (12).⁴

The immigrant of Margariti's autobiography is therefore a traveler in eternal search for well-being, liberty, equality, and dignity. He has to leave unwillingly ("Ai

² For a study in the relationship between immigrants and workers, see Gabaccia, D., *Militants and Migrants. Rural Sicilians Become American Workers*, London: Rutgers University Press, 1988.

³ "The youth of the village they were divided in two groups Thepowerful and thepoor and it goes without saying I was with thepoor."

⁴ "The homeland is for the rich ones, the homeland of the poor is still to be made."

nostri tempe nessuno voleva lasciare la madre sua famiglia e il natio paesello gli amici d'infanzia e andare a un mondo lontano e sconosciuto," 130⁵), forced by the hopeless situation: "All'età di 19 anni e per me non c'era nessuna via d'uscita nessuna porta era aperta per me per immigrare qui negli State Unite" (102)⁶... "ed E' stato proprio quella la causa che che ci porto in questa lontana America e qui fatta la nostra residenza non perché il clima è più bello dei nostri nati paese ma perché il pane è un po' meno duro..." (103).⁷ He imprecates against Italy, a futureless nation: "In Calabria si viveva nelle catapecchie sudici e nella miseria nera e la Legge era feroce . . . La povera gente lì viveva d'aria e un pezzo di pane senza sale" (Prefazio),⁸ and regrets that his brother Peppino is swallowed by this land of oblivion: "PEPPINO si perse nella America e non solo non mandare monete ma si è dimenticato della mamma e tutti e neppure i soldi del suo viaggio ammandato" (92).⁹

Margariti's America is not the shiny land of successful autobiographies, but it is a place that retains its dose of injustice. Margariti's trained eye and his social dissatisfaction make him state the naked truth: "Io son venuto in questa lontana terra nel 1914 all'età di 22 anni e qui ho trovata la vita tutta diversa e anche qui esiste l'INGIUSTIZIA anche qui chi lavora e non ha tanto onore e chi non fa niente e hanno tutto e sono i padroni"

⁵ "In our time nobody wanted to leave his mother his family and the village of his birth his childhood friends and go to a far and unknown world."

⁶ "I was 19 and there was no exit way for me no door was open for me than migrating here in the Unites States."

⁷ "And that is the cause that brought us to this far America and established us here not because the climate is better than in our native land but because the bread is less hard."

⁸ "In Calabria we lived in filthy huts and in black poverty and the Law was ferocious . . . The poor people lived of air and a piece of bread without salt."

⁹ "PEPPINO was lost in America and not only never sent money but also forgot mamma and all of us and never sent the money of his trip even."

(Prefazio).¹⁰ The description of a titanic America where the Statue of Liberty dominates with majesty is given by Margariti with a different twist that, with stinging irony, strips bare the illusions of the American image. Behind the torch of liberty Margariti sees the hidden despise against Italians and their suffering, but leaves the burden of criticism to a simple question mark: "Ed'a li imbarcate su Lagrande Nave holinpic della compagnia inglese white star line che dopo 5 giorni di traversata siscaricò A new york il 5 maggio del 1914, difronte alla Statua della LIBERTA' eddella Fratellanza umana?" (111).¹¹ If the capital letters hint to the American myth, that laconic question mark works to deconstruct it as a suffocated warning. However, at the end, Margariti pays his debt of gratitude towards America underlining that his affection is all with the American workers:

Io ho amato e amo il popolo americano perché ha gran cuore. Gli americani sono assai diversi da noi, meno smaliziati e più generosi. Sono lavoratori tenaci, pazienti, instancabili, capaci di sacrifici sovrumani; degni continuatori della tradizione e dei valori morali dei pionieri loro antenati. . . . E' questa la Malamerica di Wall Street che, con le mie modestissime armi, ho sempre combattuto (264).¹²

One of the strengths of Margariti's writing is his political consciousness. The main reason to write is his sense of injustice. Margariti writes to make things right: to gain a space in History. Knowing to be only "a grain fallen from the space," Antonio Margariti uses his only weapons – a cutting tongue and a shrewd brain – to make his story known

¹⁰ "I came to this far land in 1924 when I was 22, and here I found a completely different life and also here INJUSTICE exists also here there is who works and has not much or nothing and other who do nothing and have everything and they are the padroni."

¹¹ "From there we embarked on The big Ship olympic of the English company white star line that after 5 days crossing left us In new york on may 5 1914, in front of the Statue of LIBERTY and of human Brotherhood?"

¹² "I loved and love the American people because it has a big heart. Americans are very different from us, less astute and more generous. They are tenacious workers, patient, restless, capable of inhuman sacrifices, true followers of the pioneers' traditions and moral values . . . the Malamerica [Badamerica] of Wall Street I have always fought with my modest weapons."

beyond the fence of his garden: “e fuore del mio vicinato nessuno sa che io Esisto”

("outside my block nobody knows I Exists"). In the very beginning of his autobiography

he claims his place in History with these effective words:

Io no scrivo per L'arti O' per La gloria / scrivo per quello che bolle nel mio
ciriviello / scrivo e miribello al vecchio mondo. (...) ricordo la mia lunga
esistenza poca felice o' vita se vita sipuo chiamare cioe il mio duro
passato, la vita dei grandi viene scritta dai grandi storici e remane nella
Storia, ma per me che sono come un granello cascato nello spazzio e fuore
del mio vicinato nessuno sa che io Esisto e forse sipuo anche pensare che
io scrivo per Imbizione senza Imbizione non si fa niente. (87)¹³

Like Margariti, **Gregorio Scaia** is conscious of cutting out a space in history, not only for himself, but for his entire immigrant group. Scaia grabs the working man ethos as a flag that he plants on the territories colonized by the Italian immigrants. His whole autobiography is a song to the Italian workers who move from place to place.

Immigration is in the genes of Scaia who is a native of the mountains of Trentino, a region that loses its workers with seasonal regularity. He is the author of "questa piccola storia scritta a tempo perso sela costa del Pacifico" ("this little story written in the free time on the Pacific coast"), a little typewritten booklet full of mistakes preserved in the Archive of Trento, and published in the magazine *Judicaria* with the title *Un pezo di pane dale sete cruste. Il diario di Gregorio Scaia (1881-1971)*.¹⁴ For this working writer, the rhythm of life is given by the calendar of the occupations in the fields as the tale of his birth suggests: “nato nel tempo del estate quando si tagliava il furmento, la sera di

¹³ "I don't write for the art and neither for the glory / I write what boils in my brain / I write and I revolt against the old world . . . I remember my long existence not very happy, or life if life it can be called that is my hard past, the life of the big people is written by the great historians and remains in History, but for me who am nothing else than a little grain fallen from the space and outside my neighborhood nobody knows I Exist and perhaps one can think I write for Ambition without Ambition one can't do anything."

sant Giacomo il giorno 25 luglio 1881, nel comune di Prezzo val Giudicaria Tirolo."¹⁵

Gregorio migrates to Australia, Alaska, and California, before settling in Seattle, Washington, in 1909. Here on the pacific coast he writes his memories in 1953, when he is 72. In his "Prefazio" we find a rhetoric appeal to the good will of his readers, but also the consciousness that the worth of his little booklet lies in saving his companions' lives from oblivion:

Mi e somamente grato d'incominciare questa mia storia col volgere un saluto et un auguro a voi tuti letori e lettrice, e spero che aceterete con benevolenza questo mio scritto, e saprete conpatire se troverete in eso qualche erori e cosa da sbiasemare, , in questo libro si scrive la storia e la vita, viaggi e aventure di Gregorio Scaia, e l'origine dele vechie colonie e nuove colonie dei nostri paesani Trentini dela vale Giudicarie che hano stabilito in Australia e nele Americhe, Alaska e sula costa del pacifico, verso la meta del secolo pasato

Credo che questo sia l'unico libro che sia mai stato scritto al giorno d'oggi in riguardo ale nostre colonie cominciate al estero, l'unico e sol motivo di scrivere questo mio libro, e di narare et informare e conservare nel cuore e nela mente, dei nostri popoli e dele nostre future generazioni, i lavori ostacoli e lote che hano dovuto combattere nei viaggi di mare e di tera, e sacrefici che hano dovuto affrontare e soportare i nostri Trentini, in qualunque parte del mondo, in paesi sconosciuti cosi lontani dai paesi nativi, tuto per guadagnare un pezo di pane dale sete cruste, cosi dicevano i nostri poveri avi da una volta.¹⁶

¹⁴ G. Poletti (ed.), *Un pezo di pane dale sete cruste. Diario di Gregorio Scaia (1881-1971)* in "Judicaria", May-August, 1991; 1-71. The page numbers refer to the original in the Archive of Trento.

¹⁵ "Born in the summer time when the wheat was being cut, the night of Saint James on July 25 1881, in the town of Prezzo in Giudicaria Valley, Tirolo."

¹⁶ I am very happy to start this story of mine with greeting and best wishes to all of you ladies and gentlemen readers, and I hope you'll accept my writing with benevolence, and you'll be patient if you find mistakes in it or things to complain about,, in this book I write the story and the life, travels and adventures of Gregorio Scaia, and the origin of the old colonies of our fellows from the Giudicaria Valley of Trentino that have settled down in Australia and in the Americas, Alaska and on the pacific coast, around the half of the past century.

I believe this is the only book to this day written about our foreign colonies, the only and unique reason of writing this book is telling and informing and conserve in the heart and in the mind of our people and future generations, the works and obstacles and struggles that our Trentini had to fight in their trips on land and sea, and the sacrifices they had to endure, in any part of the world, in unknown countries so far from home, all to gain a piece of bread with seven crusts, so our poor ancestors used to say once upon a time

This autobiography becomes a real collective exaltation of the entire group of immigrants traveling with him, all of whom “merita di essere ricordati” (“deserving to be remembered”). Scaia specifies names and last names of his history-less friends: “Fra di questi che merita di essere ricordati in questa storia sarebe Simone Bugna di Bertone, i due fratelli Eugenio e Giacomo Balduzzi...”, or “fra dei quali che merita l'onore di essere ricordati in questa storia, che sono stati i primi a dar principio ala nostra colonia del pacifico, sarebe i due fratelli e Gemeli Luigi e Adamo Scaia...”¹⁷ All coming from Trentino, these men are born travelers and founders of cities. The stress he gives to the “colonies” is almost humorous, because he reverses the common situation: he is not a poor immigrant looking for work, but one of the glorious founders of Italian colonies around the world. Scaia sees the world as centered around Val Giudicaria and honors the imperialist impulse sprouting from this unknown valley of the Alps. In his introduction, Scaia narrates the adventures of his fellow villagers with an epic tone, almost if telling the story of many Ulysseses:

I nostri paesani Trentini e senpre stata una qualita di gente che bramavano et amavano il lavoro, e che non voltavano mai le spale al pericolo, tuto per darsi al estero a guadagnare quatrini, onde mantenere e soportare i doveri dele loro famiglie, i nostri Trentini piu o meno, hano senpre avuto il suo oso da pelare, e sono sempre stati i martiri dele fatiche piu grose, e li eroi dei lavori di questo mondo, tuto il motivo perche noi siamo nati in quelle povere valate deli Alpi del Tirolo senpre ornate di neve dieci mesi al anno,, e cosi poveri siamo nati e poveri dovremo morire, diceva un vechio proverbio dei nostri poveri antenati, I tirolesi dela nostra valata,, e senpre stata gente avesì e soerfati ai lavori duri, ancora al tempo prima dela nascita dele ferrovie, andavano a piedi in Lonbardia, piemonte, e Svisera, a fare il segantino, e facevano tuti questi viaggi a piedi potando a spale tuti i

¹⁷ “Among those that deserve to be nominated in this story there is Simone Bugna of Bertone, the two brothers Eugenio and Giacomo Balduzzi . . .” “Among those who deserve the honor to be remembered in this story, the first ones to start our colony on the pacific, there are the two brothers and Twins Luigi and Adamo Scaia.”

suoi utensili e ordegni come tanti muli, e lavoravano lunghe ore da stele e stele, e poi in primavera ritornavano a casa sua a lavorare le loro campagne, tuto per caciare da vivere onde mantenere le loro famiglie.¹⁸

One of these heroic people, Scaia decides to leave Italy, feeling "pieno di forza come un orso (17). He describes his trip on the ocean with apocalyptic tones as a "Purgatory". The description of a sea storm clearly recreates a Dantean ring with its wriggling damned souls:

Teribile burasca per la durata di quatro giorni, che il quale aveva fato venire tuti i passegieri tuti amalati dal mal di mare, dove si vedeva in ogni cantone del Bastimento gente sdraiati al suolo dela nave e tuti amalati, le done specialmente pareva tante anime che sortiva fuori dal purgatorio coi capelli tuti sfasiati che fava misericordia a tuti chi li guardava, pareva un vero distrazio in ogni cantone del Bastimento, . . . il mare che una volta inprima di Cristoforo Colonbo era considerato un inmenso abiso senza nesuna fine (60).¹⁹

In his American life, Scaia demonstrates the resourcefulness of the immigrant, those thousands departures that are part of the immigrant's philosophy:

Sula costa del pacifico avevo fato e provato un poco di tuto per fare la vita, aveva lavorato nele miniere del carbone, nei Boschi, nele segherie dal legname, una stagione al Alaska, e sula ferovia e così via, tuto per caciare

¹⁸ "Our paesani from Trentino have always been a quality of people that searched and loved work, and never turned their back to danger, all to go abroad and gain some money, to maintain and support their family duties, our Trentini have always more or less had their bone to bite, and always have been martyrs of the hardest chores, and the heroes of this world, all for the reason that we were born in those poor valleys in the Alps of Tirolo always ornate with snow ten months of the year,, and so we were born poor and poor we had to die, as an old proverb of our poor ancestors said, The Tirolesi of our valley,, have always been people used and versed in hard works, at the time before the coming of trains, we walked to Lombardy, piedmont, and Switzerland, to cut wood, and we always walked in these trips loaded with all our tools and things like many mules, and we worked long hours from stars to stars, and then in spring we came back home to work in the fields, all to hunt for a living for our families."

¹⁹ "Terrible storm for four days, that nauseated all the passengers with seasickness, in all corners of the ship you saw people laying on the floor and all sick, the women especially seemed souls coming out of purgatory with disheveled hair that were pitiful to see, it looked like a torture in every corner of the Ship, . . . the sea that before Cristoforo Colombo was considered an immense abyss without end."

da vivere e guadagnare il pane dale sete croste, cosi dicevano i nostri poveri Avi neli anni pasati. (88)²⁰

Caught in the mortal net of politics, **Bartolomeo Vanzetti** is a humble fishmonger from Piedmont who gained his fame in history for his tragic death on the electric chair. Nicola Sacco's and Bartolomeo Vanzetti's predicament is the most famous trial of the United States of America versus anarchy, work subversion and immigration. It was held in 1921. Vanzetti belonged to the anarchist group of Boston, Massachussetts where the industrial towns and the harsh working conditions were fertile ground for a rebellious movement. He was arrested with Nicola Sacco, a shoemaker from Puglia, with the accusation of having taken part in two robberies, one in Bridgewater and one in South Braintree that also included a brutal double murder. Four "foreigners" in the first case and five "foreigners" in the second were described as the authors of the robberies, among them Sacco and Vanzetti. The two were found with anarchist material and leaflets in their car, while preparing a protest for the killing of the anarchic editor, Andrea Salsedo, who had been thrown down the window by the police. The other three suspects - anarchist Ricardo Oriciani, Ferruccio Coaccio and "Mike" Boda - were able to escape trial. Sacco was indicted because a bullet in the body of one of the victims matched his Colt. 32. Vanzetti was instead recognized by eyewitnesses even though he did not resemble any of the men originally described.²¹ The case of Sacco and Vanzetti is the most famous and an example of a trial guided by prejudice against Italian aliens who were seen as subversive. The fairness of the trial is still questioned, first of all because the Jury overlooked the

²⁰ "On the pacific coast I tried and made a little bit of everything to make a life, I worked in the coal mines, in the Woods, in the sawing factories, a season in Alaska, working on the trains and so on, all to hunt for life and gain the bread of seven crusts as our poor ancestors said in the past."

testimony of many Italian eyewitnesses who remembered well than on 1919 Christmas Eve, the night of the Bridgewater attempted robbery, Vanzetti was delivering the traditional dinner eels to the house of friends. "I am suffering because I am a radical, and indeed I am a radical. I have suffered because am I an Italian, and indeed I am an Italian," Vanzetti said in his very short defense at the trial (Amfitheatrof, 233). The effect of the death sentence remained sharp and burning in the hearts of many Italian Americans, both ignorant and knowledgeable of politics. The historian Emilio Franzina writes that this death was "un rito di rifiuto sacrificale e contraddittorio" ("a sacrificing and contradictory ritual of refusal," *Arcadia*, 153). Even the humble immigrant remained shocked by it: Wallace Sillanpoa remembers his grandmother spitting on the floor of the car every time she drove in front of the white mansion where Judge Thayer, who condemned Sacco and Vanzetti, lived. This woman's "lack of gentility" was a "political act" (298) of an ordinary woman thus reacting to History.

While in prison in Charlestown, Vanzetti who mastered only mangled English, wrote a short autobiography in 1921, "A Proletarian Story Life." This "*apologia pro vita sua*" did not concentrate on his self-defense, but interestingly appealed to his ethos as a working man and as an immigrant to find justification for his life. He paints himself as a good willing young man who suffered much in his life, first as a young man who suffered the pain of the early death of his mother, and then as an immigrant. Work appears as the main dimension of his life: he was born, in 1888, to a life of toil. When young, he loves his studies and imagines a lawyer's career, but then his father "read on the *Gazzetta del Popolo* of Turin that forty-two lawyers were all running in competition for a job paying

²¹ For these information, cf. Amfitheatrof, Erik, *The Children of Columbus*.

45 liras a month. He decided. In the year 1901 he brought me to Cuneo in the pastry shop of Mr. Comino" (21). This is how his hard life starts, by working 15 hours a day. He falls sick and is forced to live with his family in bed for a short period of time, the best of his life, until he leaves for America: " Quel periodo di tempo fu uno dei piu' felici della mia vita. Contavo vent'anni: l'eta' delle speranze e dei sogni, anche per chi, come me, sfoglio' precocemente il libro della vita" (22).²²

After the pain of his mother's death ("Sentii che qualcosa di me era sceso nella fossa con mia madre," 23),²³ he leaves for the United States on June 9, 1908.²⁴ He describes himself as an immigrant "without a country": "Mentre la macchina sbuffante voltava il tergo all'Italia, mi portava verso i confini, qualche silenziosa lacrima cadde dai miei occhi, cosi' poco usi al pianto. Cosi' abbandonava la terra natia questo 'senza patria" (24).²⁵ After passing, like sheep ("a mo' d'armento" 24) through the Battery ("sad surprise for those who arrive" [24]), he finds employment as a dish washer in two restaurants in New York. The work conditions he describes are inhuman, and they inspire him with political anger. At night, he prefers to sleep under the trees instead than in the filthy attic. During the day he is forced to work in a kitchen without windows, with steam from the pots falling down in oily drops on the workers, unbearable heat and stink of decay from the garbage bins, sinks without pipes so that the water ran through the floor inside a hole in the center: "Ogni sera quel buco si otturava, e l'acqua saliva fin sopra gli appositi telai

²² "That period was one of the happiest of my life. I was 20: the age of hopes and dreams, also for those, who like me, run quickly through the pages of life."

²³ "I felt something of me was buried with my mother".

²⁴ "Era tale la piena del dolore in me che li baciai e strinsi loro le mani, senza poter pronunciare una sillaba" (23).

²⁵ "While the train was taking me to the borders, giving its shoulders to Italy, I shed a few silent tears, I so unfamiliar with crying. Thus, this man 'without a country' lefts his native land."

di legno posti sul pavimento per salvaguardarci dall'umidita'. Allora si pattinava nel brago" (25).²⁶

His American experience is a long string of unsteady, underpaid and unhealthy jobs. When he meets a young boy "poorer than me," they decide to leave the hell of New York and look for a job in the countryside. Suffering from hunger, they find temporary jobs as farmers, brick makers and stone cutters in Connecticut. He goes back to New York working in a pastry shop, then travels again to Massachusetts where he works as an unskilled laborer and a bricklayer. Eight months before his arrest, he finds buys a boat and works as a fishmonger, hoping to raise the money to go back to Italy where his father and his sister claim him.

Vanzetti's telling of his life is a real defense of the humble worker. He finds nobility in the proletariat, and he calls a friend in Piedmont "nobile popolana" (24), "noble proletarian." In the United States he finds solidarity and generosity among the humble people, "human rags," who were often poorer than him, but would feed him with their nothing: "Grandi cuori fra la marmaglia, non e' vero, o farisei?" (29).²⁷ His ethos is also that of a simple worker. He is an Italian immigrant worker who finds in work not only his ethos, but also the proof of his innocence. He does not spend too many words on his clean conscience in fact ("I was condemned for a crime I didn't commit," 32), but he largely speaks about "la mia assiduita' al lavoro, la modestia del mio vivere" (29),²⁸ about his "love for independence" (30) and is *normal* life - "La mia vita non puo' assurgere a valore di esempio, comunque considerata. Anonima nella folla anonima, essa trae luce

²⁶ "Every evening that hole would clog and the water would raise over the wooden frame that should have protected our feet. Then we would skate on the dirt " (25).

²⁷ "Large hearts among the plebeians, isn't it, o Pharisees?"

dal pensiero, dall'ideale che sospinge l'umanit' verso migliori destini" (21).²⁹ His political conscience illuminates his life. His informal education has an important place in his growth: schooled until he was 13, he then reads by himself and finds inspiration in Socialism that he finds in Turin among his co-workers:

Gia allora comprendevo che le piaghe che piu' straziano l'umanita' sono l'ignoranza e la degenerazione dei sentimenti naturali. La mia religione non aveva bisogno di templi, altari e preghiere. Dio era per me un Essere spirituale perfetto, spoglio da ogni attributo umano. . . . In questo stato d'animo varcai l'oceano. Arrivato qui trovai tutte le sofferenze, le disillusioni e gli affanni inevitabili per chi sbarca ventenne, ignaro della vita; tutte le ingiustizie, la corruzione, il traviamiento in cui si agita tragicamente l'umanita'. (33)³⁰

The originality of Vanzetti's life is the blend of the worker's ethos with the shocking encounter with the horrible reality of America seen by an immigrant ("qua e' bravo chi fa quattrini non importa se ruba o avvelena. [. . .] In questa babilonia io mi sono conservato l'antico originale e la vilta' non mi ha mai fatto gola" he write to his sister in 1911).³¹ His autobiography centers on this. To the explanation of his political belief in Socialism, fraternity and universal love, he dedicates only one fervid page and the Post Scriptum, while the story of a worker's life becomes his only defense. That

²⁸ "The assiduity of my work, and the modesty of my life."

²⁹ "My life cannot become an example, however you look at it, anonymous in the anonymous crowd, it takes light from the thought, the ideal that pushes humanity towards a better destiny."

³⁰ "I understood that the plagues of humanity are ignorance and the degeneration of natural sentiments. My religion did not need temples, altars and formal prayers. God was a perfect spiritual Being, without human attributes. . . . In this state of mind I crosses the ocean. Here, I found all the suffering, the disillusion and the agonies of a 20 years old immigrant boy, a dreamer, ignorant of life. Here I saw the ugly face of life; all the injustices, the corruption, the depravity that tragically shake humanity."

³¹ Quoted in Franzina, *Dall'Artcadia in America*, 129.

nevertheless leads him towards destruction: "Ora? A trentatre, anni, sono candidato alla galera e alla morte" (35), he writes in his last page.³²

A fervent admirer of Vanzetti and Sacco is the communist miner **Pietro Riccobaldi**, an immigrant who returns to Italy and never goes back to America where he spent his "strongest years." He migrates to America to escape Fascism and never really integrates in the United States. As a member of American Communist Party, he participates to the marches to Washington to save the Rosenbergs. His political leftism and his being a clandestine for the first years of his immigration make him a "*straniero indesiderabile*," an undesirable foreigner - the qualification he chooses as the title of his autobiography that won the Pieve Santo Stefano Prize in 1987. Riccobaldi was born in Manarola in the beautiful but poor Cinque Terre of Liguria, on June 29, 1901. He emigrates as a clandestine in 1925 on an old ship, *Fert*. His autobiography, written when he is seventy-three, covers the years between 1912 and 1973, and tells the adventures of an immigrant who strengthens his communist belief while working in the mines of the United States. He has studied a few years, and his style is quite polished. For example, when he leaves Liguria, he quotes Alessandro Manzoni: "Vedevo i monti della mia Liguria allontanarsi; mi venne in mente il brano dei *Promessi Sposi* e mentalmente lo recitavo: 'Addio monti sorgenti dalle acque ed elevati al cielo" (71).³³ In his pages it is also easy to find echoes and references to different newspapers like *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* and the *Daily Worker*.

³² "Now? At thirty-three I am a candidate to jail and to death."

³³ "I saw the mountains of my Liguria getting far; I thought about the piece of the *Betrothed* and mentally recited it."

Like another writer that we will meet in the next sub-group, Antonio De Piero, Riccobaldi sees Italy as a battlefield where life is at stake. He remembers the gruesome details of this strife: the “tug-of-war” between hungry creatures; the woman who died after being brought to the horror of eating a goat, dead and buried some days ahead; his own psychological fight against the gnaws of hunger: “Mi sforzavo quasi a procurarmi un senso di indigestione; ingoiavo senza masticare così da poter dire una buona volta: - Basta, sono sazio, ne ho abbastanza -; non vi riuscii mai. Ingoiavo tutto e digerivo tutto, avrei digerito anche i sassi, come le galline” (14).³⁴ When Fascism (“black plague” as he calls it) spreads through Italy, Riccobaldi is forced to leave threatened by the sticks of Manarola's Fascists, “la vita mi sta diventando insopportabile” (68).³⁵ He decides to emigrate, even if this is the final “shame” among his people who considered migration as a defeat, the last capitulation before death: “Emigrare, cercare lavoro fuori era considerato una dichiarazione di resa. Perciò quasi tutti rimanevano aggrappati ai loro vigneti, orgogliosi di esser proprietari, di lavorare in proprio”.³⁶ The wish to change his life, becoming independent from the stingy land, is instead deep in his soul: “Mi rivedevo a lottare, a portare letame.. il mio domani era buio” (51); “Occorreva levarsi la soma di dosso” (53); “Affrancarmi dalla fame, dal letame e dal bosco dell'estate, dalla soma; andarmene era sempre stata la mia idea fissa, fin da ragazzo” (69).³⁷

³⁴ “I swallowed without chewing so that I could say: - Enough, I am full, I’ve had enough -; I never succeeded. I swallowed everything and digested everything, I would have digested rocks too, like the hens.”

³⁵ “My life was becoming impossible.”

³⁶ “Migrate, looking for a job outside was considered a declaration of surrender. So almost everyone remained snatched to their own vineyard, proud to be the owners, and to work on his own.”

³⁷ “I saw myself fighting, carrying the manure... and my tomorrow was dark;” “I needed to take the yoke away from my back;” “freeing myself from hunger, from manure, from the woods in the summer, from the yoke, leaving was always my fixed idea since I was a boy.”

Being anti-Fascist he cannot have a passport, but with five thousand liras he embarks as a clandestine on the old ship, *Fert*, where he works in the boiler room. His trip is woven with reality and imagination. The boiler room becomes an initiation through the flames of Hell (“Se l'inferno esiste, la 'tubiera' lo è!” 75)³⁸ⁱ: “Avevo sempre sete, una sete infernale; ero sempre attaccato al bidone dell'acqua: bere, bere, bere e più bevevo e più sete mi veniva. Sudavo e bevevo e mi sentivo sempre più debole [. . .] Tutta quella craccia incandescente che era stata attaccata dalle griglie con la pinza mi cadeva ai piedi. Altro che inferno!” (72-73).³⁹ Entering the Mississippi river is the beginning of a new life (“divenni così allegro che non sapevo più quello che facevo. Mi lavai, mi feci la barba e mi preparai anche nell'animo per il salto nella nuova vita”).⁴⁰ On the train towards Scranton, he feels reborn, and as a 24-year-old boy, he leaves the past behind: “La *Fert*, l'Italia dunque con tutti i tormenti erano rimasti laggiù a New Orleans. le vaste pianure, i fiumi e le città che attraversavamo stavano inghiottendo il Pietro clandestino; ero rilassato in un caldo torpore” (76).⁴¹

A miner in the mines of Scranton, Pennsylvania, a bar tender in a *speakeasy* during the Prohibition, a salesman of apple and detergent during the Depression, a dishwasher and waiter in the restaurants of New York, Riccobaldi also defines his life in terms of his work. Through the hard work condition he discovers the truth of socialism and the rights of workers, and in the same time his own self-respect. The black desolation

³⁸ “If Hell exists, the ‘pipe room’ was it!”

³⁹ “I was always thirsty, hellishly thirsty, I was always attached to the water barrel: drink, drink, drink and the more I drank the thirstier I was. I sweated and drank and felt always weaker . . . all those burning grease drops sticking to the grids were falling at my feet. That was Hell!”

⁴⁰ “I became so happy I did not know what I was doing. I washed myself, I shaved and I prepared my soul for this jump into a new life.”

⁴¹ “The *Fert*, Italy with all its torments had been left over there in New Orleans. the vast planes, rivers and the cities that we passed through were swallowing the clandestine Pietro; I was relaxed in a warm torpor.”

of Scranton is vividly seen in the hate women had for their men whom they followed hoping to find the "paradiso terrestre": "Il nero aveva ucciso le loro anime. Nere le strade, le montagne, le pietre; nere le facce, le schiene, le pance dei loro uomini; nera l'aria, nero il cielo. Nera e spenta l'anima" (81).⁴² Riccobaldi's sensitive political conscience makes him notice the injustice that follows the poor workers in the "Malamerica di Wall Street che, con le mie modestissime forze, ho sempre combattuto" (154)⁴³ where they are exploited and nobody defends them ("Cominciavo a vedere i limiti della libert  americana" 91):⁴⁴

'Rubbing pillars' - fregare i pilastri - si diceva. Accadeva cos  che la montagna cadeva e sprofondava e si lesionavano le case che i minatori con grandi sacrifici avevano costruito. Solo le chiese, le banche, i grandi alberghi, i palazzi delle compagnie minerarie e di assicurazione erano sempre fuori dai cedimenti. Ci pensavano i padroni delle miniere che poi erano i padroni delle banche, delle societ  di assicurazione, dei grandi alberghi ed anche un po' delle chiese a stabilire dove si potevano fregare i pilastri e dove no. I padroni avevano comprato il suolo e il sottosuolo nelle sue profondit  fino all'inferno. I *pillars* sotto le loro propriet  non si potevano fregare: erano gi  stati fregati!" (83)⁴⁵

The work of the miners is not the harshest, Riccobaldi discovers. During one of the useless strikes against the mine owners, he finds a temporary job in the construction of an artificial lake: "Eravamo in tanti e lavoravamo nel fango; trincee profonde un paio di metri col fondo pieno d'acqua. Non avevamo pale meccaniche, il fango lo tiravamo su noi

⁴² "Black had killed their souls. Black the streets, the mountains, the stones; black the faces, the backs, the bellies of these men; black the air, black the sky. Black and smothered their soul."

⁴³ "the Badamerica that I always fought with my little modest strengths"

⁴⁴ "I started to see the limits of American liberty."

⁴⁵ 'Rubbing pillars' they said. It happened that the mountain gave in and collapsed and the houses that the miners had built with big sacrifices were destroyed. Only the churches, the banks, the big hotels, the buildings of the mining and insurance companies were always safe from sinking. The owners of the mines, who were also the owners of the banks, the insurance companies, the big hotels and also a little of the churches, chose the places where to rub the pillars or not. The owners had bought the soil and its

stando dentro la trincea, lo lanciavamo in alto con la pala e parte ci ricadeva addosso. Era ottobre e cominciava a far freddo" (85).⁴⁶ Riccobaldi is eventually fired for insubordination when he shovels the mud against "Pelo-rosso", the tyrant boss – "I was fired but my soul laughed" ("ero licenziato, ma l'anima mia rideva" 85) – and goes to New York to wash the dishes in an Italian restaurant in an icy Brooklyn. His condition does not improve: he lives on the seventh floor with no heating, no blanket, no windows. He works from seven in the morning till eleven at night, and his "hands seemed hard-boiled" ("le mie mani sembravano lesse" 85).

A hard-worker first of all, "Pietro the miner" proudly situates his integration in the guts of the American land, in the dark of the mines where he learned the self-respect with the sweat on his forehead: "Mi piaceva il lavoro, mi sentivo libero, indipendente" (82).⁴⁷ This hard but honest work is preferable to him to the lies of the salesman: "Non sentivo piu' la fierezza del Pietro minatore e mi pareva di aver perso la forza delle cose chiare" (107). The memory of the Ligurian sun scorches his days in the dark mines, but he remains coherent: "Tornare sarebbe stata la sconfitta: una vita inutile. Scendevo in miniera con questa carica e mi sentivo uomo pieno e libero" (93).⁴⁸

Until the end, he remains attached to this *foreign* identity that migration bestows upon him. When he is allowed citizenship because he married an American, Elba, he remembers: "Quelli furono i giorni più felici della mia vita. [. . .]. Non ero più

underground till the depth of hell. The *pillars* under their property could not be rubbed: they had already been robbed!

⁴⁶ "We were many and worked in the muck; trenches 6 feet deep with water in the bottom. We didn't have mechanic shovels, and we had to shovel the mud out from the trenches, we threw it outside and some would fall back on us. It was October and it was starting to be cold."

⁴⁷ "I liked the work, I felt free, independent"

⁴⁸ "Going back would have been a defeat: a useless life. I went down the mine with this motivation and felt like a full man, free."

"indesiderabile", ma soltanto straniero" (102).⁴⁹ He is foreigner even to himself, he lives separated between the sensation of having spent the best years of his life in America – “Non pensavo davvero che avrei vissuto all'estero gli anni più forti della mia vita”⁵⁰ – and the nostalgia for his Italian identity – “Erano passati 20 anni esatti. La nostalgia della famiglia, del paese e degli amici non mi aveva mai lasciato”.⁵¹ When he finally settles down in Italy for the sake of his father-in-law's health, he continues to remain an undesirable foreigner, as he says in his last words:

“Sono passati altri anni ancora, molti e in America non ci sono più tornato. Alcuni anni fa, ne avevo ormai 73, mi venne il gusto di un viaggio come turista. A New York avevo lasciato tanti compagni e un po' della mia vita; speravo che le leggi fossero cambiate e ora la mia età potesse essere vista come una garanzia, ma i moduli per ottenere il visto, così pieni di domande... Troppe inquisizioni, troppe vessazioni morali; avrei dovuto dire troppe bugie, mi scoraggiai, lasciai perdere; E da qualche anno ero tornato ad essere cittadino italiano e dunque più che mai 'straniero indesiderabile.' (160)⁵²

A defender of the working class on a theoretical and activist level, the anarchist **Carlo Tresca** is involved in the major episodes of working class protest, like the strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912, the textile strike of Paterson, New Jersey, 1913, and the strike of the Minnesota minerary district in 1916. His unfinished autobiography is still unpublished and is kept in the New York Public Library. It is the autobiography of a

⁴⁹ " Those were the happiest days of my life. I could not believe that it was true until I hugged Elba [. . .] I wasn't 'undesirable' anymore, but only foreigner".

⁵⁰ "I never thought that I would end up spending the strongest years of my life abroad."

⁵¹ "exactly 20 years had passed. The nostalgia for my family, my town and my friends had never left me".

⁵² "Many years have passed, many and I have never gone back to America. Some years ago, I was already 73, I felt like taking a trip there as a tourist. I had left some friends in New York and a piece of my life; I hoped that the laws had changed and that my age could be seen as a warranty, but the forms to obtain the visa, so full of questions... Too many inquisitions, too many moral vexations; I would have had to tell too many lies, I lost courage, I gave up. Since a few years I had come back to be an Italian citizen and therefore more than ever 'undesirable foreigner'."

protester, of a dissident, a radical, or as he says, "a fighting spirit" (94). It is an "atypical" story of immigration, as Sergio Bugiardini asserts. His persona is clearly written out and finds justification in his writing. It lists the steps of his *autocoscienza*, his becoming a fighter for freedom, against Fascism. He skips most of his personal life (his marriage and divorce, his many women) to speak about his political action and credo.

Born in 1879 in Sulmona, Abruzzi, in a rich agricultural family ruined by the wine war with France, Tresca immediately show his face as a rebel, "I was stiffened in my feelings of revolt against all, against the world I was in" (27). He is educated in high school for 2 years and then in a technical school. He did not like school and he did not like the idea of being a clerk. Revolt is in his mind since he was young: it is his father who "sewed the seed of revolt in my head. I could not arise against him. So I turned my unconscious feeling of revolt against anyone who exercised authority" (7-8). Tresca is only 20 when he starts stirring the peasants for revolt, and becomes a public persona by giving talks in the park: "I was no more a buoyant, exuberant, impertinent boy. I was a man, a man of command, of action" (14). He edits the socialist newspaper *Il Germe*, and soon starts thinking of America. From the group of Italian American socialists, emigrants from Sulmona, he learns of the New World that appears to him not as the land of material riches of the poor peasants, but as a place of ideal liberty:

Strange name of cities, mysterious voices of a distant, unknown land came to me from America. The workers of the United States felt themselves free from that form of slavery and serfdom that was so detestable in the small town they had left, still in the crush of feudalism, and were glad to know that in their native town, someone was fighting for the liberty they thought they were enjoying in America. . . . It seemed to me, then, that I was corresponding with another world. I looked towards America as a wanderer in the desert looks for a drop of water when thirst grabs him by

the throat. America! America! America! I went on fighting in the small towns but dreamed of a better, a bigger field of action; looking forward... toward America, the land of the free. (56-57)

He is an exiled more than an immigrant: since he incurs into troubles with justice after organizing a manifestation with the peasants, he is arrested and condemned either to prison or exile. As a 25-year-old man he has quite an easy choice and he never regrets it in his autobiography:

there was nothing else for me to do: go to jail or into exile. I chose to leave the country. I was not pleasant. I loved Sulmona and its people; I was attached to my mother; I loved my father and knew that the long prison term would have affected them more than me. And the call of America, with the promise that comes to anyone who looks at America as the land of liberty and opportunity was too great to resist. (81-82)

On his way to America an ironic fate makes him cross way with the socialist Benito Mussolini who was then impetuously speaking of revolution. They embrace and they part. He will then become an antifascist and says: "the Mussolini of yesterday was dead. The new Mussolini militarist, imperialist, dictator, tyrant is at work instead." In 1904 he is on the ocean, in steerage class. Even his trip (only one page in 330) is told through his own key-word, freedom: they were "like a packed sardine, free neither to move nor to breathe" (85). His first encounter with America deceives him: "I was disappointed with America at first. I did not know then, I was a stranger to America, and America was a stranger to me. There was nothing alluring in my first impression of her" (90). He lives in New York, Mulberry Park, and he feels lost, an alienated stranger: he misses his stop and is dumped near a cemetery from the bus.

I had noticed before that New York had cemeteries in its most populated sections. I detested the idea of there having to be dead human beings

forever laughing at the living. So that night, lost in New York and unable to speak to anyone, face to face with a cemetery, I felt quite crashed.. . . I did not know the real America then. It took me a long, long time before I met and liked the real, live, powerful, young and striving America. (93)

Tresca starts feeling at home in America only when he finds his enemy. A revolutionary with nothing to protest is dead, and until he locates the American object of his protest he cannot feel at ease, and remains a stranger. Ironically, while the usual immigrants start feeling integrated when they find friends in the new society, Tresca the anarchist feels integrated when he finds his enemies. For a while his thoughts remain directed to Italy because he doesn't see a class structure to fight against in America: among the immigrants "workers the class of privileged citizens such as the industrialist that employed many people, the banker, the landlord, or for that matter the Union man even, had not developed in those days" (95). He thus starts investigating the exploitation of immigrants (white slavery, killing and robberies such as those found in the novel *The Mysteries of Mulberry Street*). He disguises himself as immigrant and sees the disgusting conditions of the men working on the railroad tracks of Hoboken.

The terrible odor of their bodies; their scornful approach on the question of love, their sexual perversion, their supine obedience to every command of the boss in the job, the beastly, arrogant attitude of the 'boss' toward the men, did produce in me a sense of hopelessness. I felt as if I had been submerged in the depth of the sea of human degradation. (98)

He has thus found the enemy. He begins his sharp attack on the employment agencies, on the white slave traffic and prostitution (he learns their stories by winning the women's confidence), against the *prominenti* involved in these affairs, the 'exploiters'. He lives with the miners in Pittsburgh, and there launches his accusations against the Church that helped coal companies and behaved as in a tale by Boccaccio (priests abandoning

pregnant immigrant girls). This gains him jail in Philadelphia for three months, charged with libel. When he is there he is revived by the news of the strike of Lawrence stirred by two of his friends (Ettor and Giovannitti): "to me Lawrence was the beginning of a new era; with Lawrence I joined the army of revolutionary American workers for a real and greater struggle" (140). Tresca organizes the "red train" to Boston gathering workers to protest against the unpunished death of Anna Lo Pizzo a striker, a protest Giovannitti and Ettor's arrest. Tresca is in his turf: he describes the singing the *Internazionale* in 21 languages, the civil and peaceful 60.000 who all paid the train tickets (counted: not one missing!). The manifestation succeeds in freeing Giovannetti and Ettor.

Tresca's autobiography does not have an ending, it is a large mass of unfinished notes. But Tresca's life does have a tragic ending: after receiving many death threats he is killed in New York in 1943. The assassin is Carmine Galante, a professional killer, but whoever gave the order was never found. It was perhaps a Mafioso who killed him for non-political reasons, or even a passion crime. Now almost forgotten, Tresca remained a symbol for many Italian Americans, like Efrem Bartoletti an immigrant poet of Scranton who dedicates him the poem "Ricordando Carlo Tresca:" "E meritavi quindi un'altra sorte / cioe' d'una vecchiaia veneranda / il placido tramonto e non la morte / violenta ed esecranda" ("And you deserved another destiny, / a honored old age / a quiet sunset and not a death / violent and undignified" [67]).

Poetics of the Working Immigrant

Pascal D'Angelo, Antonio De Piero, Carmine Iannace, Pietro Greco, Gabriel Iamurri, Pietro Toffolo, Carlo Dondero, Emanuel Carnevali

A few of our autobiographies give a poetical view of the Italian immigrant worker. With more or less ability but equally sincere poetical inspiration, these authors paint a portrait of the worker that sometimes reaches deep within his soul. The poetical view on the working man reveals him out as an intense figure, proud of his working-class ethos and his immigrant nerve.

Working in all-male gangs, **Pascal D'Angelo** is the poet of the immigrant "men:" "Our original gang was of the family type - all quiet, hard-working men. We had known one another more or less in Introdacqua. But by the time we were settled in Hillsdale we were like very close relatives" (63). Perhaps the most well-known and well-written autobiography of a first generation immigrant, *Son of Italy* (1924) is the *bildungsroman* of a boy who becomes a man in an all-male society of workers who "stick together like a swarm of bees from the same bee hive" (63). In America, and in what he sees as a "too-egoistic metropolis" (104), New York, the melting of the individual inside the group of worker is favored by the hirer who prefers to hire gangs of workers, often from the same town, "like one family" (65), "like a flock of sheep" (107). This unity is what makes it possible for the immigrant to survive as Rose Basile Green notes: "this moral support of one's group made tolerable the exigency of living in a cold, foul cabin, and empowered

him to work with enthusiasm" (44). William Boelhower linguistically notices that D'Angelo repeatedly uses the pronoun "we:" this "indicates that human life in this timeless world is far from being individual, separate and inner-directed. Instead, the real protagonist is this Old-World environment is a multiple character, a trans-individual subject which will even endure in the New World under the form of extended familial and extra-familial groupings" (*Immigrant Autobiography*, 104). These *quiet* working immigrants are Pascal's heroes. The first one he meets is the construction worker Mario Lancia on New York's Battery, "the marvelous foreman": "The marvelous foreman spoke some words in an unknown language to a uniformed man who received money. And the uniformed person looked sneeringly at the wonderful foreman" (61).

Born in Introdacqua (Sulmona) in the region of Abruzzi in 1894, Pascal D'Angelo describes his timeless land as a "peaceful" place and "my people" as "a people of seers and poets. We believe in dreams. . . . We have men who can tell the future and ageless hags who know the secrets of the mountain" (9). These descriptions justly gain him a place among the narrators of Gardaphe's "poetic mode," but the mythic tales and legends of his youth contrast sharply with the story of Pascal as a small-scale willful hero who leaves for America: "going into the unknown. Had our feet been carrying us we would have instinctively turned toward home" (55), and eventually deciding to stay when his father returns: "I was left alone" (115). "Boyishly angry against this America stealing my father from me," and "boyishly curious" (50), D'Angelo reached Ellis Island in 1910 at sixteen, finding a way to praise his hard bark: "I really did not find any of the bad treatment and manhandling that some tender-skinned immigrants complain about" (59). D'Angelo's arrival in America is one of the most quoted thanks to the humor contained in

his first bewildered impressions of New York City: the trip in a trolley ("a most unconceivable vision was flashing past the car window," 60) with his meeting a father and a son afflicted by a nervous disease ("for their mouths were in continuous motion, like cows chewing cud," 60); and his idea of a religious New York that prayed the Virgin on every street sign with "Ave! Ave! Ave!" (61).

D'Angelo becomes a man in America, among other men. We could symbolically read his descriptions of Italy and America as the mother and the father, the feminine and the masculine. Italy is the mother (he is a *son of Italy*), and the mountains of Maiella the "montagna-madre" of mythical dimension, as Luigi Fontanella notices (48). His mother occupies the Italian years because his father has left for America; the suffering mother who reads his soul, the understanding weeping mother, the mother in the countryside, her last embrace, the nourishing earth and its fruits, the unity of the village, and the interconnectedness of "our people" make Italy a feminine space. In opposition, individuality and loneliness are dimensions of the masculine America. This is where he goes to find the father and become a man. In the same way, if Italy is the kingdom of the hags and the female love of Madonna, America becomes the kingdom of the sufferance of Christ, where he gets his stigmata like another "Christ in concrete" when a rusty nail pierces his hand on a work accident ("Boy, [a fellow worker says], 'a stupid world drove nails through other hands- other hands' I did not know what he was talking about," 132).

D'Angelo's sense of the immigrant worker is enriched by his effort to get an education and raise his soul from the gutters. He never denies his ethos as a pick and shovel worker ("I always was and am a pick and shovel man," 145), but to it he adds that of the "pick-and-shovel poet." To this ideal of poetry we owe the lyrical portrayal of the

immigrant worker in his autobiography. D'Angelo's wish to be considered a poet is strong, as Di Leo's dream of seeing his work published. While Di Leo sees his value as only coming from his experience, D'Angelo polishes his ethos and shapes it through education. His desire to learn is strong from the beginning against his companions' derision as "that queer Italian laborer" (146). He starts by memorizing the Webster dictionary, reading poetry and magazines, and writing "jokes" that he then tells his friends. He becomes the topic of their discussion: will he remain always a laborer because he was born like one? Will he advance in the world? Can he even become a foreman? He instead aims high, to a literary career, and leaves his job to pursue it. He spends his days in the Public Library and the nights in a malodorous room that had been a chicken coop, that floods with each storm and is reachable through the toilet of ten families: "At least if my body was living in a world of horror I could build a world of beauty for my soul" (169). He succeeds in his literary pursuit when his poems are finally accepted and published by the editor of the *Nation*, Cal Van Doren (whom Gardaphe' calls his "literary *padrone*!" 36), who then awards him with the *Nation's* Poetry Prize.

Even if D'Angelo writes as a poet, he does not shy away from his laborer's roots, remembering all the derogatory epithets attached to them: "I was a poor laborer - a dago, a wop or some such creature" (138), "we were pigs in our sty" (110). His autobiography, *Son of Italy*, constructs his portrait through the *ethos of work*. He never denies his humble origin, he stresses his struggles and not his success. To his literary satisfaction he dedicates only one page (really one page!). At the end he praises his triumph, but this is again shown through the eyes of Italian working men:

But more sincere and dearer to my heart were the tributes of my fellow workers who recognized that at last one of them had risen from the ditches and quicksands of toil to speak his heart the upper world. And sweeter yet was the happiness of my parents who realized that after all I had not really gone astray, but had sought and attained a goal from the deep-worn groove of peasant drudgery. (185)

For D'Angelo, like for Margariti, writing his story is the last effort to symbolically uproot himself and step outside his assigned territory into "the upper world" ("History" for Margariti). D'Angelo does not make a monetary fortune out of his success, even if he is described as a model for Italian immigrants. The review "Il Carroccio" writes in 1922 about the man "che dalla vanga passa alla lira," "l'indice rivelatore qual e' delle forze meravigliose che si nascondono nella fibra nazionale," "il poeta del tugurio, non e' vinto dall'orgoglio, Pasquale D'Angelo vive in una umile stanzetta fittata al n. 113 Prospect Avenue, Brooklyn" (56).¹ Even if not bringing money, writing is what makes a man a man: "A dog is silent and slinks away when whipped, while I am filled with the urge to cry out" (137). Writing is the antidote to dispersion and oblivion; as D'Angelo, who will die young (at thirty-eight) without the money to have a proper burial, asserts in this powerful statement:

Who hears the thuds of the pick and the jingling of the shovel. All my works are lost, lost forever. But if I write a good line of poetry - then when the night comes, and I cease writing, my work is not lost. My line is still there. It can be read by you to-day and anyone else to-morrow. But my pick and shovel work cannot be read either by you to-day or by anyone else to-morrow. (74-75)

¹ The man "who passed to lyre from the shovel;" "revealing index of the extraordinary forces hidden in the national tissue;" "the poet of the shack is not won by pride, Pasquale D'Angelo lives in a humble rented room at 113 Prospect Avenue, Brooklyn."

Even if the best known, D'Angelo is not the only immigrant who hides the soul of a poet under pick and shovel rags. Almost all the writers we have touched so far show some sparkles of poetry in their writing - the poetry of the people, made of ancient wisdom like "the bread of seven crusts," or Margariti's angry figures of speech or Di Leo's simple images of memory. The following writers all resemble D'Angelo in one way or another: they sprinkle their pages with poetry, even unconscious poetry, and are interested in elevating their souls through education, even if their social condition does not really rise: Antonio De Piero and Carmine Biagio Iannace are able to construct powerful passages in their autobiographies, while Pietro Greco, Gabriel Iamurri, and Carlo Dondero actively participate to the intellectual life of their communities.

The bricklayer **Antonio De Piero** is conscious that he is writing to affirm himself as a man. Also for him writing is a productive, *performative* activity that makes man become agent and maker of history. His last words in justification of his work resonate in capital letters (in the manuscript), and pronounce his belief in man as a creator: "IO PURE HO COMPIUTO I DOVERI CARATERISTICI DELL'UOMO: I FILOSOFI NE CONTANO QUATRO: 1) FABRICARE UNA CASA 2) SCRIVERE UN LIBRO 3) E FARE UN FIGLIO 4) IMPIANTARE UN ALBERO" (72).² *Homo faber* with a philosophical interest and a consciousness on the "great desolation and misery" of the "popolo operaio" (49)³, De Piero was born in the small town of Cordenons (Pordenone) in Friuli (NorthEastern Italy) on September 29, 1875. He is son of an emigrant but remains an orphan very young. He follows his father's steps and migrates across the

² "I ALSO HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THE CHARACTERISTIC DUTIES OF A MAN: THE PHILOSOPHERS COUNT FOUR: 1) BUILD A HOUSE 2) WRITE A BOOK 3) HAVE A CHILD 4) PLANT A TREE."

Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany working as a ditch digger or errand boy in work camps. He then leaves for the mines of Canada and finally lands in the United States. He settles in Staten Island with his oldest son and here he dies in 1947. He writes his autobiography, *Le mie memorie scritte nell'isola della quarantina*,⁴ in 1922, in Hoffman Island where, forced to spend a quarantine period, he finds a steady job as a construction worker. There, looking at the waves of the Atlantic outside his window during his Christmas vacation, he writes his memories at 47 years of age. De Piero is self-taught and he fills his writing with orthographic and syntactic mistakes that enliven his already vivacious tone.

The poetry of his writing is at its highest when he describes himself as an immigrant. The decision to emigrate is told as an indomitable flux of thoughts that chains all the logical passages in a *stream of consciousness*: the reasons to leave, the Italian desperation, the hopes that he cradles in his heart. The freshness of his language is an ally for his content: it resembles the intimacy of a diary, enlivened by the folk wisdom of proverbs. Here he presents himself as a *contadino* standing at the door of his farm, looking at the rain on the fields and philosophizing about his destiny in life:

Non ramento precisamente la data stavo sulla porta della cucina e guardavo, i schersi del tempo, pioveva dirotamente, immerso nei miei tetri pensieri, che mi funestavano la mente e non potevo mai risolvere il grande problema che nella mia memoria machinava, e pasandomi per mente un vecchio proverbio mi si spalancava inanzi così lucente e chiaro. La via che ogni uomo deve percorrere nella vita gli presenterà sempre degli grandi ostacoli tali che anche all'occhio ignorante sembreranno insormontabili e alle volte lo faranno retrocedere, Ma chi vuole riuscire vitorioso nel

³ "Bringing to great desolation and misery especially the working people."

⁴ The original is in Ellis Island but a photocopy of it is also in the Archive of Pieve Santo Stefano. In 1993 it won the IX Edition of the Prize Pieve-Banca Toscana, and was thus published by Giunti Gruppo Editoriale (Florence) in 1994.

raggiungere la sua meta, bisogna che sappia trovare il mezzo di superare quelli ostacoli e se il fine è onesto non deve curarsi se dovrà torcere e prolungare il suo cammino e trovai giustissimo e subito risolvetti. (61-62)⁵

Once his decision is taken in his mind, he starts the litany of "senti Catina" to explain his emigration to his wife in practical terms, without shying away from poetic images such as the visualization of a dark black future where he is looking for a glimpse of hope, and the melting of dreams as snow in the sun. The discussion between Antonio who is now sure of his departure and Catina who tries to convince him to stay, gives an idea of the inner struggles that immigration causes in families and hearts:

finito appena questa meditazione, entro in casa mia moglie mi domandò la mia preoccupazione, che gli risposi subito. Senti Catina gli dissi; i nostri risparmi si sciolgono come la neve al sole i nostri sogni svaniscono, non casa, non campi, e stando così ancora un poco anche la poca moneta se ne va, ed in breve resteremo nella più nera miseria, Mi rispose essa non vi preoccupate tanto, così non può andare, a Torre i muratori presto anno compiuto i lavori; le macchine sono in viaggio per il Macò, presto andremo tutti al lavoro e si vivrà, ma cosa vi viene in testa, non state a pensare abbiamo la figlia grande, presto il figlio io vado pure in fabbrica appena l'aprone e si camperà parole buonissime e sagge. Ma io gli vedevo lungi più di essa, essendo stato attivo a tutte le fasi della guerra, e il dopo si presentava buio scuro che solo menti sanissime avrebbero risolto e averato l'avvenire; Senti Catina gli dissi: ho pensato di tornare in America voi siete matto mi rispose, e solo tre mesi che siete a casa e già volete ripartire? non vi preoccupate tanto presto si cambierà, non si cambia così facilmente. (62-63)⁶

⁵ "I do not remember precisely the date I was on the kitchen door and watched the jokes of the weather, it was raining hard, immersed in my lugubrious thoughts that disheartened my mind I could never resolve the big problem that my memory was grinding, and thinking about an old proverb it opened a clear and bright way in front of me. The way that every man must walk in life will always present him big obstacles that to the ignorant eye will seem insurmountable and will even make him go back, But whoever wants to come up successful in reaching his goal, must find the way to pass those obstacles and if his goal is honest he must not mind if he has to alter or prolong his way and I found it absolutely right and I immediately decided."

⁶ "I had just finished this meditation, I entered the house my wife asked me about my preoccupation, I answered her immediately. Listen Catina I said; our savings are melting like snow in the sun our dreams are disappearing, no house, no fields, and if nothing changes also the little money we have will go, and soon we will remain in the blackest misery, She answered don't worry too much, it won't be always like this, the bricklayers have almost finished the work in Torre, the machines are coming for Macò, soon we will all work and we will live! What are you thinking, don't worry we have a big daughter and soon the son and I too will go to work in the factory as soon as they open it and we will live good and wise words. But I was

De Piero's philosophy is nourished with old proverbs ("history is teacher of life") and with the notion that life is a battle, in the tradition of Giovanni Verga's "struggle for life," a notion that we have also seen in Calogero Di Leo's words. If life is a battlefield, the immigrant shines in self-praise, as a reluctant knight who is forced to enter the battle. His is a struggle to slip away from the strikes of destiny: "volere del destino," he often repeats (34); while he starts his autobiography as a war bulletin: "Avevo appena nove anni quando il mio buon babbo mi lasciava a *battagliare* con la vita" (17).⁷ De Piero paints here his thoughts almost visually: the tableau of fight and ambushes, of victory or defeat, and the immigrant's duty to "sharpen the weapons:"

Era verissimo La vita è una comedia una battaglia che devessere combatuta valorosamente per riportarne poi la vittoria. Il nemico m'insediava ed era vicino alla porta di casa, Non restava altro che affilar le armi, e lanciarsi a tutta forza di buona volontà e battaglia. (63)⁸

Antonio De Piero describes the moment of his first departure when he is still a young boy as a turning moment of life. His prose conserves the poetic flavor of Giovanni Pascoli's *Patria*, with the dogs barking unfriendly to the lonely man: "Dov'ero? Le campane/ mi dissero dov'ero/ piangendo, mentre un cane/ latrava al forestiero,/ che

looking far ahead of them, since I had been present in all the phases of the war, and the afterward was dark and black that only the healthiest minds could resolve and realize the future; Listen Catina I said: I thought about going to America you are crazy she answered, it's only three months that you are home and you already want to leave again? don't worry because we will soon change, it is not so easy to change>"

⁷ "I was just nine when my good dad left me alone to *fight* with life." My italic.

⁸ "It was really true. Life is a comedy a battle that should be valiantly fought to find victory. The enemy was threatening and was close to the door of the house. There was nothing else to do than sharpen the weapons, and jump with all the strength of good will and fight."

andava a capo chino.”⁹ The head of the De Piero is also bowed under the luggage, under the anguish of his soul and under the blows of an adverse destiny waiting for him:

Presi il sacco nelle spalle, sperdendomi nell'oscurità, le strade a quell'ora erano deserte solo quà e là si sentivano i latrati dei cani svegliati al rumore dei poveri viandanti. Rasegnato con passo cadenzato, a capo chino sotto il peso del fardello, Principiando a lottare col destino e la via principiava a spalancarsi verso...
L'ignoto. (25)¹⁰

Even more moving is Antonio's departure toward the United States. De Piero's personal style mixes inner and outer feelings: the weather is whimsical like this life that blows the immigrant here and there ("da circa due mesi che non cadeva goccia con gran d'anno ai raccolti, il tempo alle volte e più capriccioso degli uomini Bisognava lasciar fare a lui crucciarsi non valeva la penna lo stesso," 63)¹¹ ... the train knows its way and the immigrant can only resign to its will: "grosse lacrime mi scivolavano giù per le gote. Oh! come è crudele la partenza, duro doloroso insieme distacarsi dai suoi cari, provare per credere. Il destino vuole così, dunque la rassegnazione per il sollievo. Il treno marciava, a sua destinazione noi verso l'ignoto" (65).¹²

Antonio De Piero develops a praise for his spirit of initiative and sacrifice in accepting a job on the island of quarantine, when all his friends refused to remain. This is

⁹ "Where was I? The bells / told me where I was / crying, while a dog / howled at the stranger / who walked head down." G. Pascoli, *Patria* (1882) in *Myricae*; 31-32.

¹⁰ "The time of the departure I greeted and kissed mamma and one by one all my little brothers who had already gone to bed I took the sack on my shoulders, got lost in the darkness, the street were desert at that time only here and there the howls of dogs awaken by the noise of the poor travelers. Resigned with rhythmic steps, with bowed head under the weight of my bag, Starting to fight against destiny and the way was opening toward... The unknown." This is the graphics used by De Piero in his manuscript.

¹¹ "Since two months we hadn't had a rain drop with big damage to the harvest, the weather is sometimes more capricious then men It is necessary to let it decide worrying is not worthwhile anyway."

¹² "Large tears rolled down my cheeks. Oh! how cruel is the departure, hard painful together detaching from the dear ones, try it to believe it. Destiny wants so, therefore resignation is relief. The train marched on, toward his destination us toward the unknown."

his occasion to directly address the readers – “what do you think?” – asking a rhetorical confirmation of his immigrant heroism:

Erano lagrime ve lo giuro, tagliati dal mondo in un Recinto come prigioniero, di ospedale di malattie, infette tifo, vaiolo, scarlattina febbre gialla, tutti quà gli mandano questi e da paura che la malattia si slarghi in città e si propaghi la epidemia. Dunque voleva del coraggio che ne dite? Ma i cento dollari netti al mese mi fecero venire il coraggio. (68)¹³

De Piero reaches the apex of satisfaction in the last pages of his autobiography, where he looks back at his life and declares himself content. He exclaims his satisfaction in an unrestrained, rolling prose without punctuation. As a simple immigrant and a humble hero, De Piero asks for nothing more than a “nest” (“mettermi in serbo un po' di moneta per farmi il nido,” 70), and the wage of his “honest work:” “insieme mi rallegro che almeno non si tribola ne io ne la famiglia per vivere e mangiare un boccone del nostro ma onesto lavoro. Vuol dire che se il Buon Dio vorrà spero non sarà il giorno non tanto lontano di avvicinarsi e unirsi per sempre intanto speriamo” (69).¹⁴ (He will not reunite with his wife because she dies in Italy a year later). He rejoices at the testimony of his social acceptance when his boss calls him for Christmas greetings: “son cose nianche da non credere un Signorone di quella sorte pensarsi di chiamarmi al telefono per gli auguri. Mai più me la imaginavo, un graduato di quella sorte degnarsi a parlare con un umile operaio” (69).¹⁵

¹³ “It was tears I swear to you, cut out from the world inside a Fence like a prison, a hospital of diseases, infective typhus, smallpox, scarlet fever, yellow fever, they send them all here for the fear the disease can spread in the city and the epidemic widens. So it was necessary to be brave, what do you think? But the clean hundred dollars a month made me brave.”

¹⁴ “I am glad that at least my family and I are not suffering to live and eat a bite of our honest work. It means that if the Good Lord wants it I hope the day will be not too far when we’ll get closer and together in the meantime we hope.”

¹⁵ “It is really unbelievable that a Signorone of that level could call me for the Christmas greetings. I would never imagine, a graduate of that level who deigns to talk to a humble bricklayer.”

A hymn to "work" is sung by the unskilled laborer **Carmine Biagio Iannace** in such a poetic and "valedictorian"¹⁶ style that it does not seem to come from the pen of a man with third-grade education. This is another example that what these immigrant workers lack in education they make up with their spirit.

L'elemento piu' importante pero', che e' la pietra di paragone fra l'americano e il non-americano, e' il concetto di lavoro come dignitosa attivita'. Venendo in America si entra in una nuova dimensione se, consciamente o inconsciamente, si accetta il concetto di lavoro come possibilita' vitale di espressione, come un inno alla vita e alle possibilita' fisiche e psichiche di produrre, come mezzo di discorso con gli altri, con la societa' nuova. E' un cementare i propri sudori nel grande esperimento americano, e' sentirsi diversi e uguali, creati e creatori. (162)¹⁷

Such a praise to an activity that in Italy was considered "beastly" ("rende simili alle bestie", 162) is the signature of these immigrant workers' autobiographies, in front of a critic such as William Boelhower "can only stand in awe" (219). For Boelhower in fact, such a "standard foundational rhetoric" acquires a completely new flavor when spoken by an immigrant.

Carmine Iannace writes his *La scoperta dell'America* in 1966, at 75, two years before his death.¹⁸ He is a witty and unpretentious immigrant born in 1890 in San Leucio del Sannio (Benevento). He migrates to the United States as a boy of sixteen in 1906,

¹⁶ This word is used by William Boelhower to describe Iannace's prose in the "Afterword" to Iannace, Carmine Biagio, *The Discovery of America*, 193-231 (162).

¹⁷ "But the most important element, which is the touchstone between the American and the non-American, is the idea of work as a dignified activity. In coming to America, one enters a new dimension if, consciously or unconsciously, he accepts the idea of work as a vital opportunity to express himself, as a hymn to life and the physical and mental possibilities of being productive, as a means of communicating with others and with the new society. It is a fusing of one's own sweat with the great American experiment, it is feeling oneself different and equal, creature and creator" (68).

¹⁸ First published by Rebellato Editore (Cittadella) in 1971, the autobiography has been translated by William Boelhower and published in the United States as *La Scoperta dell'America. Un'autobiografia*, West Lafayette: Bordighera Press, 2000. The page numbers refer to this edition and to Boelhower's translation.

eager to discover his America. He finds a job with a gang of *paesani* in Meadville on the Erie Railroad and for all his life he works as an unskilled laborer, as a factory handyman, a yard-worker and a gardener. His narration starts with a salute to the immigrants who leave from his little town in large number waving their inseparable hats (necessary to pin their destination once in New York, writes Iannace who loses his during the trip). It spans through three chapters titled "America, fantasia e realta'," "America, croce e delizia," and "Fra due mondi." These titles all indicate the "doubleness" of the immigrant, his knowing both sides of the coin (dream and reality, cross and delight) and his living in two worlds at once. As Iannace poetically writes: "era come vivere una doppia vita; non due vite diverse o contrastanti, ma una di valore doppio" (178).¹⁹ Iannace's narration stops when he decides to leave for America a second time for good, when he chooses the American life over the Italian. At that point the rest of his life becomes less interesting, because the initiation of the immigrant boy has been accomplished, and the autobiography has exhausted its role of defining the immigrant subject. Iannace's immigrant is living in that double world, and is now enticed to America as an "uccello fuitizzo." Here is his metaphor of life, as his future wife explains it:

'Voi avete assaggiato l'aria dell'America e qui ci state e non ci state. Siete come un uccello 'fuitizzo'... Li avete mai osservati i vostri merli quando escono dalla 'caggiola'? Cantano piu' degli altri. Svolazzano piu' degli altri... Saltellano, si rivoltano nella polvere ma, non sanno allontanarsi. Sono liberi e non sono liberi.' . . . Agnesella aveva ragione. Se non avessi considerato quel tempo un'intermissione... tempo da ingannare... sarei morto di crepacuore. Dovevo ritornare in America. Era come se li', mi mancasse l'aria. (190)²⁰

¹⁹ "It was like living a double life; not two different or opposing lives, but one having double value" (87).

²⁰ "You have tasted the air of America and sometimes you are here and sometimes you are not. You're like a bird out of a cage. Have you ever observed your blackbirds when they are left out of the cage? They sing more than the others. They flirt about more than the others, they hop, they rub their wings in the dust, but

Like Gregorio Scaia and Pascal D'Angelo, Iannace writes a choral history of immigrant working men. His tendency to name names is comparable only to Scaia's. Like him, he gives first and last name and often nickname and also a short anecdote on each of them. William Boelhower calls it a "deployment of a poetics of lists of names" (221). The immigrants leave as a group from the hamlet of Cavuoto, and sustain each other, as Biagio's father says, "aiutatevi l'un l'altro. Siete in parecchi" (125). Large part of Iannace's story is eclipsed by the stories of each of his friends whom he considers like a family. He even gives many definitions of their own type of "familial lexicon" (Natalia Ginsburg's *lessico familiare*). He starts by explaining the meaning of the all-encompassing magical word, "azzorrait": "voleva dire sì, non fa niente, bene, molto bene, non c'è male, avete fatto un buon lavoro, abbiamo fatto bene?" (107).²¹ He then tells the origin of other group sayings such as "i cocci degli zingari e la secchia . . . che chiunque poi voleva riferirsi ad essi li chiamava così" (128),²² or "che vogliamo fare? La palata degli spalatori?" (137),²³ or "educato alla ripa delle zecche" (138).²⁴ All these sayings have value of glue for the immigrant group, they are their secret passwords, their proofs of belonging.

As for D'Angelo, America is a masculine place, while Italy is a feminine one. This is where his mother is: "era leggera come una piuma e fragile fragile mia madre"

they refuse to go away. They're free and they're not free' . . . Agnesella was right. Had I not considered that time an intermission, a period of wiling away the time, I would have died of a broken heart. I had to return to America. It was as if there I lacked air" (103-104).

²¹ "Atz-awright . . . it meant: yes, that's all right, good, very good, not bad, you did a good job, did we do all right?" (1).

²² "'The gypsies' pots and the bucket' . . . whenever somebody referred to them. He would use the same expression" (27).

²³ "What are we gonna do? Have a shovelers' parade?" (38).

(178);²⁵ here language softens and he tells his love for Agnesella in pretty words, "ogni parola era come un bacio" (183).²⁶ If America is the space of men and heroes, Italy is the land of women and poets, following Gardaphe's definition of the land of myth, where the devil, *malocchio* and *Lupo Mannaro* survive undisturbed: "Mamma volle scusarmi per il mio mancato rispetto: 'E' stato in America, Carmene', e la', non c'e' ne' uocchiu, ne' maluocchiu e ne' 'nvarcatura'. Carmenella di Mastro Paolo sbarro' gli occhi: 'Come pote esse?' E mamma, quasi con convinzione: 'Forse u maluocchiu nun pote passa' u mare" (184).²⁷ Iannace's Italy is a bucolic place where songs resonates in the air: peasants singing to each other, boys and girls flirting from the neighboring hills, serenading under the balconies, singing in the bars, at the patronal feasts and in church.

As much as he loves Italy, Iannace's decision to leave it is a matter of life and death. Since his youth he dreams of a freer life, of the America that his brother describes to him, an America made of infinite prairies of *cavoli cappucci* and *traversine*, white with apple trees and snow. He dreads the idea of old-world immobility that he sees as death: he is happy when his father does not buy a new farm, because "tutte le mie paure di impantanarmi li', di fossilizzarmi come tutti quei terrazzani che vedevo ingiallire come le messi, scomparvero" (119).²⁸ When the moment of departure arrives, Biagio tells it with his intense and symbolical prose that transforms luggage into the metaphor of immigrant life:

²⁴ "Educated from the bank of the ticks" (39).

²⁵ "She was as light as a feather, my mother, and fragile, very fragile" (88).

²⁶ "Every word was like a kiss" (93).

²⁷ "Seeking to apologize for my lack of respect, mama said, 'He's been in America, Carmene', and there they don't have the eye, the evil eye, or even the curse.' Carmenella di Mastro Paolo opened her eyes wide: 'How is it possible?' And mama, half-convincend: 'Maybe the evil eye couldn't cross the ocean'" (96).

²⁸ "All my fears of becoming bogged down there, of becoming a fossil like all those clodhoppers whom I saw turning yellow month after month [like the harvest], vanished" (16).

Mio padre . . . avendo raggiunto gli altri, mi carico' la valigia che portava lui sulla spalla e se ne ritorno'. Io rimasi cosi' sorpreso che mi venne un nodo in gola e non potei dirgli nemmeno 'arrivederci.' Si era allontanato gia' un bel po' quando mi venne la voce e lo chiamai. Lui si giro' e credendo che fosse per la valigia ch'era pesante disse, piu' che a me, a tutto il gruppo 'Aiutatevi l'un l'altro. Siete in parecchi.' Ma, venendo in America, ognuno porta il proprio peso. . . . Sabatino solo si accorse che io ero rimasto indietro a guardare mio padre che si allontanava. 'Compare,' mi sussurro' 'date a me una di quelle valigie.' Visto pero' che io lo guardavo come per dire 'Non e' la valigia che mi fa esser triste' lui continuo': 'Compare, con uno strappo netto, la piantina si sradica e non si scortica.' Io non capivo allora il concetto dello sradicamento e lui se ne accorse e aggiunse: 'Sei ormai un emigrante. Da oggi in poi tu vai per il mondo per libera scelta. Lui non puo' piu' aiutarti.' . . . Del resto era naturale che fosse cosi' e, accollandomi la valigia sulla spalla, mi girai, mi asciugai il naso e mi sentii meglio. Per la strada Sabatino quand'io restavo indietro, veniva a darmi una mano e mi diceva: 'Metti la valigia sull'altra spalla cosi' non ti addolori troppo. (126)²⁹

With the same livelihood of concrete images that become symbols Iannace tells his return home ("il cane mi venne incontro abbaiando," 177):³⁰ "la giara di cristallo" becomes a token of fabulous America and its "laughing glass" reflects group unity: "bevemmo nella giara di cristallo che avevo portato dall'America. . . . e si rispecchio' nelle mille faccette di vetro, il calore moltiplicato dei loro occhi. E il vino faceva ridere il vetro. . . . 'Questa e' l'America,' dicevano, passandosi la giara e fermanola appena

²⁹ "My father walked about three kilometers with me, till we caught up with the others. Then he loaded me down with the bag that he had been carrying on his sholder and left. I was so surprised that a lump rose in my throat and I could not even say 'Goodbye.' He had already gone a good distance before my voice returned and I could call out to him. He turned and thinking it was because of the bag which was heavy, said, not so much to me as to the whole group, 'Help each other out. There's quite a few of you.' But when coming to America everybody carries his own load. . . . Only Sabbatino realized that I had falled behind in order to watch my father as he withdrew in the distance. 'Compare,' he murmured, 'give me one of your bags.' I looked at him as if to say, 'It's not because of the bag that I'm sad.' Seeing how it was, he continued, 'Compare, the best way to uproot a plant without stripping it is to give it a sharp jerk.' At the time, I did not understand what it meant to be uprooted and having sensed this, he added, 'you're now an immigrant. From now on you will travel around the world as you choose. He can no longer help you.' . . . it was natural that things were so. Shouldering my bag, I turned, and after blowing my nose, I felt a little better. Along the road, whenever I fell behind, Sabatino would come and give me a hand and say, 'Put the bag on your other shoulder. That way it won't hurt too much'" (24-5).

all'altezza degli occhi" (177).³¹ He continues his images - that of wine and that of the uprooted plant - by saying, "ero ritornato ubriaco di vita. . . . mi sentivo come una gemma che rotta la crosta sente in se tutta la forza linfatica che tende il frutto e pur non e' ancora ne' foglia ne' fiore" (177).³² Iannace's second departure is even compared to a healing from disease:

mi torturavo notte e giorno. Una via d'uscita ci doveva essere. Non poteva finir cosi'. Zappare come tutti gli altri, fino all'esaurimento. Annullare nel lavoro tutti i desideri. Dormire esausto fino all'alba, per ricominciare di nuovo? No! Il solo pensiero mi faceva venire i brividi e le gambe mi incominciavano a tremare. Mi sentivo accasciato, debole, ammalato. . . . La partenza fu fissata per il 15 ottobre. Come la prima volta ch'ero partito ne' mio padre ne' mio fratello mi accompagnarono alla stazione. Questa volta pero', ne fui contento, quasi che l'America gia cominciasse li', da quel distacco violento dai miei. (192)³³

Like De Piero, Iannace does not shy away from making his own philosophy on "man," in a clear enumeration (he announces three things and then lists four): "ci sono tre cose che l'uomo desidera piu' di tutte le altre cose in vita e di cui poi immancabilmente poi si pente: sposarsi, assumere le responsabilita' del padre, quindi volerlo morto. Dare tutto ai figli per sentirsi piu' spensierato" (112).³⁴

³⁰ "the dog came barking to meet me" (86).

³¹ "We drank out of the crystal pitcher that I had brought from America. . . . and the warmth multiplied in their eyes was reflected in the thousand facets of the pitcher. And the wine made the picture laugh. . . . 'This is America,' they said, passing the pitcher and holding it just at eye level" (86).

³² "I had returned intoxicated with life. . . . I felt like a bud that, having broken through the crust, feels in itself all the lymphatic force that drives towards the fruit and yet is neither leaf nor flower" (87).

³³ "I tormented myself night and day. There had to be a way out. It could not end like this. To spend the rest of my life hoeing, like the others, until I no longer had any strength left. To annul all my desires in work. To sleep exhausted until dawn and then begin all over again? No! The very thought gave me the chills and my legs began to tremble. I felt crushed, weak, sick. . . . My departure was set for October 15. Like the first time I had left, neither my father nor my brother accompanied me to the station. This time, however, it made me happy, almost as if America began there, with that violent separation from my family" (103-104).

³⁴ "And there are three things that a man desires more than anything else in life and which he then unfailingly regrets: getting married, assuming his father's responsibilities, and then wishing him dead. Give everything to your children and you'll feel more carefree" (7).

The poetical tapestry of immigrant portraits brushed by Iannace is perhaps equal only to that of **Pietro Greco**. Greco's unpublished and apparently unfinished autobiography, *Ricordi d'un immigrato, Brooklyn, 3 Maggio 1965*,³⁵ gives as much importance to other immigrants as to the protagonist's life. The evil foreman Michele Carbone, the blacksmith Don Ciccio, his factory co-workers Antonio Sparacino, Giovanni Elia and Giuseppe Procopio, the socialist tailor Saverio Grandinetti, his beloved Elvira, the barber-poet Mastro Gaspare, and Mastro Bonacci who fought with Garibaldi and "s'inteneriva fino alle lacrime"³⁶ when speaking about Italy occupy as many chapters of his book. They are all a part of the "immigrant family:" "ricordero' cio' che vidi e annotai come membro d'una famiglia d'immigrati con la quale vissi, lavorai, gioii, soffrii, contrassi amicizie ed affetti negli anni piu' belli della vita, che ricordo sempre e non dimentichero', malgrado gli anni che si accumulano sulle mie spalle!" (51).³⁷ Greco is a self-taught immigrant who works all his life in Kenyon's military clothing factory of Brooklyn (with a gang of italians: "ero in casa propria!," 64), but, like Pascal D'Angelo, he is fascinated by the world of culture and strives to find his place in it. He tries to publish his poems in New York's Italian newspapers (*La Follia* publishes one) and organizes a theater group with his fellow immigrants. His friends are a continuous source of poetry for him, as Marina Cacioppo notes: "He refuses to associate working class people with ignorance and associate poverty with contempt. For him, artistic sensibilities and a sort of innate poetry cannot be divorced from their lives" (74).

³⁵ The manuscript is preserved in the Immigration History Research Center of Minnesota.

³⁶ "Softened till tears."

³⁷ "I will remember what I saw and wrote as a member of an immigrant family with which I lived, worked, enjoyed, suffered, made friends and affections in the best years of my life, that I will always remember and never forget despite the years on my shoulders!"

Born in 1889, in the little village of Sant'Andrea Apostolo sullo Ionio (Catanzaro), Greco emigrates at fifteen. As a boy he remembers the particular distinction of his inner life. Though he is only the son of a tailor with a third-grade education, he humbly individuates his strength, an invisible one, his sensibility that becomes a condemning shyness and makes it impossible to him even to bring the tailored suits to his clients: "circuivo il fabbricato almeno 3 volte. Quando riuscivo a vincere me stesso, e bussavo alla porta: alla presenza della prima persona che veniva ad aprire, mi facevo rosso come il cappello di un cardinale. La lingua pareva paralizzata" (22).³⁸ Greco's shyness costs him frustration and judgement from his own family: "mio fratello mi giudicava dalla timidezza! Non li salto' mai in mente che la mia timidezza era frutto d'eccessiva sensibilita', che nulla aveva in comune con l'imbecillita'" (23).³⁹ Greco's departure in 1904 is motivated by his will to "spolverarsi dalla miseria" (53)⁴⁰ and reach his brother Peppino who is already working in the uniform factory in New York: "mi salto' il ticchio di lasciare il paese" (47). The moment of departure follows the usual cliché of tears and heart breaking farewells, but like Biagio Iannace, Greco inserts a symbolical moment. Poetry in these writers is always very concrete, and the image of his broken shoes becomes a sign of his internal laceration. His beautiful new shoes, sewn for the trip in soft black leather remain irremediably damaged the very day of departure by a hole, "nella pelle morbida, proprio dove non occorreva, un forelino, che mise in pessime condizioni le mie belle scarpe. Mio nipote affascinato anche lui dalle mie scarpe, rimase

³⁸ "I would turn around the house three times at least. When I finally won myself, I knocked at the door and at the presence of the person who came to open, I became red as a cardinal's hat. My tongue seemed paralyzed."

³⁹ "My brother judged me from my shyness! He never thought it was fruit of an excessive sensibility and nothing it had to do with imbecility."

male! Non dimentico' mai quel curioso avvenimento" (50).⁴¹ Pompous in his tone, the 76-year-old Pietro Greco also provides us with his own philosophy of the immigrant. We find the *quiet* individualism that inspires a praise of poverty (poverty didn't humiliate those immigrants, but stimulated love and gave a clear heart)⁴² and resignation (they would bear misery without a complaint).⁴³ Greco's personal immigrant philosophy preaches resilience against adversities, even if it means to lower his head and gather the pieces. Surviving, no matter what, is the goal of the *quiet* hero: "e' d'uopo che l'uomo colpito si rassegni, se non vuole perire. Mantenga accesa la fiaccola della speranza e sorrida alla vita! Si crei una nuova esistenza! Raccolga i rottami. [. . .] Reagisca al dolore. [. . .] Vivere, anche se costretto ad adattarsi entro limiti modesti, ma vivere!" (36).⁴⁴

In New York, Greco finds his soulmates in his co-workers who share with him the love for poetry. One is the Giuseppe Procopio, his life-time friend, "intelligent speaker, defender of the working class." The other is Saverio Grandinetti ("Vivere per la poesia e nella poesia! Non avevamo ambizioni fuori dello studio e lavorare per pagare le spese giornaliere, comprare libri e andare a teatro," 101).⁴⁵ These factory workers take advantage of their free time in the factory to read poetry aloud on bunches of unfinished soldier's uniforms. Simple and poetical is the image of these war uniforms that become a

⁴⁰ "Dust misery off him".

⁴¹ "In the soft leather, right where it was not necessary, a little hole terribly ruined my new beautiful shoes. My nephew, also charmed by my shoes, felt bad! He never forgot that curious accident."

⁴² "La poverta' non e' uno stato di vita che umilia, anzi, stimola l'amore, raffina il sentimento e rende il cuore trasparente come la luce della verita'" (114).

⁴³ "La poverta' non li preoccupava. La sopportavano. Il cuore non era tormentato dall'ambizione!" (115).

⁴⁴ "The man who has been hit must resign, if he doesn't want to die. Let him keep the flame of hope lit and smile at life! Let him create a new existence! Let him gather the broken pieces [. . .], react to pain [. . .], live , even if forced to adapt into modest limits, but live!"

mattress for poetry, while "brute" immigrant workers are transformed into a bucolic brigade of poetry lovers:

io e l'amico Procopio ci sdraiavamo, dato che cio' era permesso, sopra enormi mucchi di giubbe e pastrani, gettati sul pavimento, come se si trattasse di cenci, senza alcun riguardo ai soldati che dovevano indossarli, e leggevamo ad alta voce, le poesie dello Stecchetti, allora in voga, attornati da una schiera d'allegre e bellissime ragazze, nel fiore degli anni, fresche e fragranti come le rose di maggio, che amavano la poesia, e il modo come io e Procopio la leggevamo. (93)⁴⁵

The American space of the factory is thus transformed by Pietro Greco's immigrants into "their space," a space of Italian life, in a kind of resistance to determination that Marina Cacioppo finds as a characteristic of some autobiographies, using De Certeau's theory on "space" and "place:" "the popular creativity of 'making do' with whatever limited resources are at hand extends into the art of making 'our space' out of 'their place,' as individuals attempt to form themselves in opposition to the shaping forces impinging upon them from above" (79). Greco's immigrants create a community of their own: "in nessuna fabbrica occupava un numero cosi' rilevante di italiani dove si parlava esclusivamente l'italiano. Mi trovavo bene! Forse fu questo il motivo che non mi fece ritornare in patria! [. . .] era come se mi fossi trovato in Italia" (94).⁴⁷ Greco gives a lively portrait of this factory that neatly contrasts to the American idea of alienated and uneducated immigrant workers. Different origin and different social class do not hinder this little community formed by people of "every social extraction" (Greco's list is

⁴⁵ "Live for poetry and with poetry! We had no other ambition outside studying and working to pay our daily expenses, buy books and go to the theater."

⁴⁶ "Since this was allowed, my friend Procopio and I would lay down on the huge stacks of jackets and coats lying on the floor like rags, without respect for those soldiers that would wear them, and we would read aloud Stecchetti's poems, trendy at the time, surrounded by a group of merry and beautiful girls, in their years' prime, fresh and fragrant like May roses who loved poetry and way Procopio and I read it."

accurate: the *contadino*, the shepherd, the shoe maker, the carpenter, the bricklayer, the photographer, the ex-student, the ex-teacher, the ex-seminar boy remained half way toward priesthood, the ex-politician): a “promiscuita’ di signori e signore che la democrazia sociale americana aveva pareggiati e che, giunti alla fabbrica di Kenyon, si adattarono a fare i sarti e le sarte” (96).⁴⁸

Greco's Little Italy is the picturesque hood transported from Naples or Palermo with typical colors and sounds, but also thirsty for culture, a Little Italy that is often overlooked by the external gaze. In this "place" he cuts out a cultural space distinguished by the language, Italian. Greco is among those immigrants who never really left Italy. He describes the crowded evenings in the little theater Regina Margherita where immigrants applaud Lina Caccigalupi and Rocco De Russo (whose autobiography is in the next chapter). He himself founds a group of young immigrant actors (*Filodrammatica Virginia Reiter*) that lasts five years until it is broken inside by the germ of "discordia" and ends up in a brawl between the fans and the detractors of the chief comedian Salvatore Parisi. He tries to publish a short-lived magazine in Italian. He organizes a successful evening of poetry and song, *Piedigrotta della Canzone Napoletana*. He meets Riccardo Cordiferro, editor of *La Follia*, "focoso bardo" (fiery bard [132]), and in a little scene describes the cultural scuffle that takes place in his office, a scene contrasting with the usual descriptions of Italian violent knives battles: "Era ne' l'ufficio con un ometto che litigava, voleva che pubblicasse il suo sonetto. Non sa chi sono io, sono il professor Alberico Torquato! – Un plagiatario, dice Cordiferro e tira fuori il poemetto del Foscolo da cui

⁴⁷ "No other factory hired a larger number of Italians who spoke only exclusively Italian in it. I felt well! This is perhaps the reason that did not make me return home! [. . .] It was as if I were in Italy."

aveva copiato." When the professor reads it he knock on his head and says: "ci siamo incontrati col Foscolo... non lo feci di proposito. Ci siamo incontrati, ecco tutto" (136).⁴⁹

Greco's cultural "Piccola Italia" finds the highest moment in his description of the Barberia di Mastro Gaspare, "locata al n.o 169 Quarta Venuta." This little shop becomes a pearl of poetry that is destined to disappear. Greco is conscious here of the saving power of his writing: "La poesia di Matro Gaspare non veniva posta sulla carta per essere conservata; aveva la durata di certe combinazioni panoramiche di nuvole che, nell'immesita' azzurra della spazio, appaiono belle e suggestive, ma che subito il vento scompagina e dissolve, e possono rimanere solo nella memoria di chi le vede" (141).⁵⁰ Gaspare was illiterate, "era poeta senza saperlo o lo sapeva a modo suo" (141), with silver hair and "un carattere rettilineo," even his steps are rhythmic ("erano cadenzati") and his hands light as snow ("leggere come la neve"). His shop is the unexpected kingdom of poetry: "In quel piccolo salone di barbiere tutto era poetico e musicale!" (142)⁵¹ and Pietro recognizes the poet in a barber that others see as "an bald old

⁴⁸ "a promiscuity of ladies and gentlemen whom American social democracy made equal, and who adapted themselves to work as tailors at the Kenyon factory."

⁴⁹ "In the office there was a little man who was fighting and wanting Cordiferro to publish his sonnet. You don't know who I am, I am Professor Alberico Torquato! - A plagiarist, says Cordiferro, and he picks up a poem by Foscolo from which he had copied. [The professor reads it and remains surprised, he knocks on his head:] oh, 'we met with Foscolo... I didn't do it on purpose. We just met, that's all.'"

⁵⁰ "Mastro Gaspare's poetry was not put on paper to be preserved; it had the lifetime of some combinations of clouds that appear beautiful and suggestive in the blue immensity of space, but a sudden wind destroys and dissolves, and they only remain in the memory of those who saw them."

⁵¹ "Nella bottega di mastro Gaspare ogni cosa pareva avesse un legame con la poesia e fosse governata dal suo ritmo, tutto armonizzava: dal lento stillicidio della piccola fontana con la bacinetta, a un angolo del salone, fino al monotono e lento battito dell'orologio, sospeso alla parte sinistra di chi entrava. " ("In the shop of Mastro Gaspare everything seemed to be tied to poetry and governed by its rhythm, all harmonized: from the slow dripping of the small water basin in a corner, to the monotonous slow ticketing of the clock on the left. In that small barber shop all was poetic and musical.")

donkey."⁵² Greco ends his autobiography on the tomb of Mastro Gaspare, and does not forget to leave an example of his poetry, a strong piece in Calabrian dialect that resembles the popular poetry of Carlo Porta and Gioacchino Belli:

O morte scellerata! Tu chi vieni
pemma simini lutti, all'odiu spingi;
'nu core de serpienti, certu, tieni,
pe chissu ammazzi e de sangu ti tingi.

Tu a mia non vue pecchi su vecchiarellu,
Ma vue li mie neputi e li mie amici,
pe li scannare cu lu tuo curtiellu!
Ed eruismu e' chiustu pua mi dici?

O guerra 'nfami, figghia a satanassu;
Tu vieni 'nterra cu nu nomu onestu;
Ma ti sbrigognu e gridu ca nu massu
De petra e' lo tuo cuore disonestu!

Ma io vecchiu, malatu e sfortunatu,
Ca ti canusciu e sacciu zo chi dico,
Ervu maligna de malignu pratu,
Anzu la manu e mo ti smaledicu!⁵³

An immigrant worker charged with rhetorical strength is **Gabriel Iamurri**, author of *The True Story of an Immigrant*. The autobiography, written when he is 63, covers his life as a pick and shovel worker in the American countryside and his literary success when he is finally able to publish and write in American magazines. Iamurri is also well

⁵² "Tu mi vedi in modo diverso dagli altri, loro mi guardano meccanicamente come si puo' guardare un povero asino vecchio e spelacchiato. . . . Che cosa vede in me chi mi guarda con li occhi e l'intelligenza che non sono tuoi? Niente piu' che un uomo alto 6 piedi!" (143).

⁵³ "O villainous death! You who come / to seed grief, you push to hate, / you certainly have a heart of a snake / thus you kill and blood tints you. / You do not want me because I am old / but you want my grandchildren and my friends / to kill them with your knife! / And you call this heroism? / O infamous war, daughter of Satan; / you come to earth with an honest name; / but I disgrace you and I scream that a boulder / of rock is your dishonest heart! / But I, old, sick and unfortunate, / I who know you and know what I say / evil grass of an evil field / I raise my hand and now I curse you!"

aware of the importance of his education and, as Pascal D'Angelo, struggles to learn English. He also succeeds: he studies two years in Seminary, studies at the Extension University of Chicago, La Salle, but works all his life as a road builder and, after his marriage and fighting in the First War, he runs a small confectionery store. Here he finds happiness because he is able to write "on almost anything that my imagination could have conceived; and painting between times for change." (84). Even if he has studied, his *ethos* remains that of a "material" man, a struggling immigrant.

Born in Carpinone (Campobasso) on March 14th 1880 (birthday of Umberto, King of Italy, he specifies), Gabriel starts his life with characteristic episodes of survival: "My parents used to tell me that when I was about two or three years of age they pronounced me dead twice, but after when I came into life again, after they thought I was surely dead" (sic, 10). Iamurri immigrates to America in 1895 as a boy, dreaming of American "fairy tales" (25) and thinking of Columbus' life, with "the desire of romance . . . to see what was in my destiny" (30). In New York ("that forest of human beings," 39) he feels lost: "I felt like one who is carried somewhere into the woods blindfolded knowing where he is but not knowing where he came from nor where to go to get out" (35). Even the Statue of Liberty, comfort for many, is silent for him, "she could not speak, she was mute, could not tell me where to go or what to do about it" (37). In Iamurri we not only find the *ethos* of the survivor, but also the concept of the immigrant as "man in history." Iamurri, in a un-American way, is sure that personal talent alone is never sufficient to attain realization, but that history and the outer conditions are instead determinant: "I said at the beginning of the introduction to my TRUE STORY OF AN IMMIGRANT when I

talked about my destiny that one in order to succeed not only has to have certain talents, but also the *soil* wherein they can develop, where they can grow to their full size, for if not they will die with him and *nothing will ever be known*" (21, my italic). He also describes this concept with a comparison between the different conditions of the American Pilgrims and the Italian immigrants. The first found an open land to conquer, the latter had to struggle against its obstacles:

The former didn't have to learn a new language, didn't have to adapt themselves to a new custom, didn't have to go through the trouble to understand new laws and a new way of living, besides, the Pilgrims, as soon as they set foot on this Continent, soon became the owners of it, if not of the whole land, at least, as much as they then needed. Their main struggle was mostly with the elements, the Indians were no match for them. . . . The same cannot be said of those who came later, their main struggle was with man-made elements. They landed not only on foreign soil but had besides to learn a new language, the worst stumbling block of one's success (37).

Iamurri's obstacles in America are many. First, the language; he tells many humorous episodes of misunderstanding that can be found in many other accounts (D'Angelo for example): he asked for *eggs* and got an *axe*, he asked for a *shirt* and offended the shop-owner, he wanted onions and got a pound of nails. Second, the harsh work conditions where a man's life counts less than his shovel: "they worked us like horses and treated us as slaves" (46), "there wasn't any way of escape for us. I would hardly believe it if I hadn't lived through it myself, or if I did not bear the brunt, but I did" (47); "no man can either paint it with the brush or describe it with the pen, for the human mind can never conceive or grasp how hard they worked us" (47). Iamurri tells of workers trying to commit suicide under a train to escape from that beastly work, and of

others who died and nobody paid, and nobody cried over them. Their lives were worthless: "A shovel, a pickaxe, any kind of tool had more value for them than one of us; for if a man lost his life for them he could soon be replaced without any cost to them, but if a shovel or a pick was broken, it was a different story, it cost them something" (48). These worthless lives would be forgotten, if it were not for Iamurri's writing: "Nothing is ever recorded of their suffering, their tears, of their hunger, and, especially of the injustice they suffered at the hands of their employers. They are indeed the forgotten man, the unknown soldier who gave much for the prosperity and greatness of the country but received very little in return" (49).

A working man with a poet soul, Iamurri stresses the importance of resilience in immigrant's life, "regardless of how small and insignificant it may be" (10). Again, simplicity is a gift of these worker-philosophers that transform a grasshopper into a teacher of life, as in the last chapter of Iamurri's autobiography. He is seated on a bench, "disheartened on account of an article I had written which the press did not accept," when he sees a grasshopper trying to get out a steep sandy hole where it had fallen.

He made thirty-six attempts but failed, the thirty-seventh he succeeded - got out of it. I clapped my hands several times in an expression of admiration for him, for his determination not to surrender. . . . And here I am, I said to myself, an old buck, exhausted, depressed, dejected. . . . The classic lesson imparted to me by the grasshopper was salutary, for it spurred me not to give up but keep on trying until I would succeed. (90)

A terrace maker with an excruciatingly divided soul is **Pietro Toffolo**, a returned immigrant who writes *Alla ricerca del nido. Pensieri e testimonianze di un emigrante* (trans. Fiorina Malacart. Pordenone: Ente Autonomo Fiera di Pordenone, 1990) right before his final return to his home in Friuli. Toffolo was born in Heidelberg (from

immigrant parents) in 1911, and died in Fanna in 1983. He writes his memories in broken English, Friulano and Italian in 1977 when he is 66. His sisters find his notebook after his death, and has it translated into Italian and published by a local press shop. Toffolo's writing is directed inside his soul, and aching, he describes his split identity after 50 years of immigration in New York (1927-1977) where he worked as a construction builder for terraces and mosaic decorator. His images in describing his immigration are extremely poetical. The love for his mountain (Val Fornat that his grandfather called Val Paradiso) and the search for his *nest* color his memories: "Quei boschi, quelle colline, erano un paradiso del quale ho sempre sentito la mancanza durante una vita trascorsa a New York sin dal 1927" (16).⁵⁴

In New York he describes himself as a mountain boy scared like a pursued deer: "Ma immaginate un ragazzo di 16 anni, che non aveva mai lasciato la sua casa, ne' il silenzio delle sue montagne, sbarcato a new York per incominciare la sua vita. Potete immaginare quel ragazzo che non osava attraversare la strada con tutto quel rumore sulla testa. Dovevo sembrare un cervo inseguito, fermo sull'orlo dell'abisso" (35).⁵⁵ Toffolo's New York is described with a mountain-boy mind, through familiar comparisons and the omnipresence of his grandfather (who left him this legacy on their last encounter: "il mondo ha la sua parte di sciocchi, non essere uno di loro" [33]):⁵⁶

New York non era come e' oggi nel 1927, ma a me sembrava cosi' nuova, cosi' grande, dalla metropolitana ai grattacieli simili alle Alpi, pero' questi fatti dall'uomo. Quei palazzi tante volte piu' alti del campanile della mia

⁵⁴ "Those woods, those hills were the paradise I always missed during my life in New York since 1927."

⁵⁵ "Imagine a 16-year-old boy who had never left his home or the silence of his mountains, disembarked in New York to start a new life. You can imagine that boy that didn't dare cross the road with all that noise on his head. I must have looked like a pursued deer, immobile on the edge of the abyss."

⁵⁶ "The world has its good part of fools, don't be one of them."

chiesa mi spaventavano e mi facevano sognare; sogni di ricchezze: tornare e portare il nonno attraverso l'Oceano e mostrargli tutta la meraviglia di questo nuovo mondo, come egli mi aveva mostrato il nostro piccolo mondo. (18)⁵⁷

Toffolo has a particular touch in describing the inner life of the immigrant. When he is detained in Ellis Island for a period he describes the familiar view: "ricordo bene che dopo le cene non mi stancai mai di guardare le scintillanti luci di New York; la fiamma tra le mani della statua della liberta', i riflessi argentei dell'acqua del porto, le luci del ferry-boat che scivolavano da e per Staten Island e tutto questo non era un sogno!" (35).⁵⁸ As a young immigrant, Toffolo describes his tumultuous emotions between nostalgia and a stronger dream that pushes him forward: "La vista della neve mi provoco' un momento di vera nostalgia, ma ricacciai le lacrime: c'era cosi' tanto da vedere!" (31).⁵⁹

All his life, Toffolo aches for his *nido* (like a bird, like an animal of his mountains where people lived temporary migrations like storks), but also regrets to leave America, the land of his dream and his life. Every time Toffolo goes back to America he feels the call to return home as a split man:

questo e' il tempo in cui l'altra meta' del mio cuore mi porterebbe lontano,
ad altre colline e immagino che la pianura fino a Venezia incominci qui a
RT22 e che Washington Valley sia la Val Paradiso di tanto tempo fa . . .
Quale meta' decidera' di unirsi all'altra? O ha il destino gia' deciso la mia

⁵⁷ "New York in 1927 wasn't like today, but to me it seemed so new, so big, from the subway to the skyscrapers similar to the Alps but man-made. Those buildings so much taller than the campanile of my church scared me and made me dream; dreams of riches, of being able to return and bring grandfather across the Ocean and show him all the wonder of this new world as he had shown me our small world."

⁵⁸ "I remember well that after dinners I would never tire to watch the lights of New York, the flame in the hand of the Statue of Liberty, the silver sparkles on the harbor's water, the ferry-boat lights sliding to and from Staten Island and all this wasn't a dream!"

⁵⁹ "The sight of the snow gave a moment of true nostalgia, but I repressed the tears: there was so much to see!"

fine e la fine dei miei due amori che soltanto nella morte possono essere dimenticati? (50)⁶⁰

Nonetheless, every time he returns home he already longs for another departure:

Nell'ottobre del '69 ero di nuovo a casa. Doveva essere per sempre quasta volta, ma il mio cuore era diviso in due, non soltanto segnato. Lasciare gli Stati Uniti per sempre sarebbe stato peggio che morire. Quarantadue dei miei 58 anni di vita li avevo vissuti laggiu', dov'ero arrivato quando avevo 16 anni, la' avevo imparato a vivere, un modo di vivere che vorrei per la mia gente e per tutta la gente di questo mondo. Perche' nonostante le sue deficienze e i suoi errori, e a considerare bene le cose, negli Stati Uniti qualunque uomo puo' vivere in liberta' e dignita' umana, purché lo voglia. La sua identita' consiste nella sua individualita', non in un numero, e non deve far scintille mentre cammina per essere notato. (48)⁶¹

Every return is for him source of emotions. His first return he is choked with passion: in val Paradiso "trovai ogni cosa intatta e piu' bella che mai. New York mi aveva affascinato e spaventato quando ero arrivato, ma in un modo completamente diverso. Li' ero straniero, questo mondo invece era parte di me" (18).⁶² When he recognizes the sounds of bells and of his mother calling him for lunch his feelings rise like a knot in his throat: "io voglio, ma non posso risponderle; sono cosi' emozionato che non riesco a proferire parola" (46).⁶³ His second return, after the Second War, is different: he sees his world irremediably changed (bomb craters in Val Paradiso, the antennas of the Aviano NATO base changing the landscape), and he clings to his memory, because there he

⁶⁰ "This is the time in which the other half of my heart would bring me away, to other hills, and I start imagining that the plain that takes to Venice starts herefrom RT22 and that Washington Valley is Val Paradiso of many years ago [. . .] Which half will decide to join the other? Or destiny has decided my end and the end of my two loves that only death can erase?"

⁶¹ "In the October of 1969 I was back home again. It should have been forever, but my heart was divided in two, not only marked. Leaving the United States would have been worse than death. I lived there forty-two of my 58 years of life, since I was 16, there I had learned to live, a way of life that I wish for my people and all the people of the world. Because to consider well, despite its deficiencies and mistakes, in the United States any man can live in liberty and human dignity, if he wants it. His identity consists in his individuality, not in a number, and he doesn't have to produce sparkles when walking to be noticed."

⁶² "I found everything the same and more beautiful than ever. New York had fascinated and scared me when I arrived, but in a completely different way. There I was a foreigner, this world was instead part of me."

keeps "le ceneri di un mondo destinato a vivere solo nella memoria" (40).⁶⁴ It gets always harder for him to stay in Italy because he sees the time has passed, familiar people have died and all is transformed: "CASA non e' piu':" "A casa in Italia, rimasi per due anni e tentai in tutti i modi di farcela [. . .] Non potevo accettare la fine della mia 'casa', che lentamente mi fece perdere il sapore del nido" (48).⁶⁵

At the end, the call is too strong for him to resist it, and he will die in his nest, in Fanna. We can imagine that his last years in Italy must have been spent with his mind in America, always "elsewhere." As he writes, his personal time is always directed toward the past: "Il mio tempo e' sempre stato volto al passato" (52). He includes a final balance of his working life in his lonely twilight: "Per me era un imperativo, guadagnare la mia paga e fare del mio meglio e questo e' cio' che ho fatto in tutta la mia vita. Non erano tutte rose, ma io sarei felice di ricominciare tutto di nuovo; l'unico cambiamento importante: mi sposerei per avere una mia famiglia, ma forse tutto sarebbe come e' stato" (39).⁶⁶

Toffolo's "obsession of the return" is shared by another returned immigrant, Bruno Oberdan Bongiovanni, the 75-year-old author of a short typewritten *Memoria autobiografica*.⁶⁷ Without speaking in length of immigration, he concentrates on the apology of his return to the Po valley that he describes as a sudden revelation:

⁶³ "I want but I can't answer her. I am so moved that I can't say a word."

⁶⁴ "The ashes of a world destined to live only in memory."

⁶⁵ "I stayed in Italy for two years and tried in all ways to make it. [. . .] I could not accept the end of my 'home,' that slowly made me lose the taste of the nest."

⁶⁶ "For me it was in imperative, earn my salary and do my best and this is what I have done all my life. They were not all roses, but I would be happy to start it all over; the only big change: I would get marry to have a family of mine, but then all would be like it was."

⁶⁷ Born in 1919, in San Possidonio (Modena) on the foggy river Po, he is a successful emigrant who works as a pilot and after having retired in the United States, decides to return. Bruno makes his papers and passport, and two days later he flies back to Italy where he choses a house in San Possidonio, his hometown. His autobiography is thus completed in five pages all centering around his return. His final words are: "grazie a Dio io ho una moglie da 53 anni. Il cielo per me e' ancora azzurro" (5).

in una notte insonne, credevo che le mie radici fossero salde negli USA, precisamente nei dintorni di Atlanta, Georgia. Avevamo la nostra casetta in riva ad un laghetto privato, barca e canne da pesca [. . .] ed un immenso parco intorno a noi. Il tutto concesso dall'ultima dita che mi ebbe alle dipendenze. Doveva durare fino alla fine dei nostri giorni. Una notte sento il richiamo della mia terra [. . .] della mia lingua e perche' no! della mia nebbia e delle mie zanzare. [Pensai] alla mia vita disordinata. I miei cari erano morti tutti [Mamma, Papa, tre Fratelli, una Sorella] morirono senza di me sempre lontano. Svegliai mia moglie (sic) e la misi al corrente di cosa mi frullava di dentro, adesso dormi sai bene che io ci sto'. (4)⁶⁸

A highlight of this Gallery is the portrait of a "Pioneer". **Carlo Dondero** is a man of Risorgimento, imbibed with 1800 Italian rhetoric even if still a humble immigrant. He is a fascinating figure who works as a stone cutter and then as a typesetter in San Francisco contributing to the local cultural life. His grandson helps him edit his papers written in the retirement years and publish his autobiography, *Go West! An Autobiography of Carlo Andrea Dondero, 1842-1939*, when he is more than 91 years old. Dondero plays an important yet silent part in the history of California, moving in the shadows of the stage of History, behind the curtains, unrecognized but necessary: he is the unknown typesetter who printed the first issue of the famous *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the stone cutter who provided the marble to build Stanford University. Dondero is the prototype of the Italian immigrant who, without being successful and remembered, is behind many great enterprises. If his name will be never immortalized on a plaque on the wall, he is nevertheless the one who provides the very substance of

⁶⁸ "In a sleepless night, I believed my roots were solid in the USA, and precisely by Atlanta, Georgia. We had our little house by a private lake, boat and fishing rods [. . .] and an immense park around us. All given my the last firm I worked for. It should have lasted until the end of our days. One night I feel the call of my land [. . .] of my language and why not! of my fog and my mosquitos. [I thought] of my disordered life. My dears were all dead [mother, father, three brothers and one sister] they all died without me who was always far away. I woke up my wife and told her what I was thinking, now sleep, you know that I agree with you."

History... its "marble." This awareness and the pride that Carlo pours in his construction work is evident when he notes that his marble survived the anger of Nature during the 1906 earthquake: "the museum came through being the only building that remained standing with all its marble walls still intact as they are today" (179).

Short of stature, with a typical nineteenth-century look given by the trimmed triangle of his beard and his strong moustache, Carlo Dondero is remembered by his grandson (in the Preface) as an old man sitting under the knotty grape arbor of his home in a typical Italian-American and patriarchal setting. Under the grapes he wrote his life: "In 1910 at the age of 68, I retired out of my printing business and spent the rest of my days at home pursuing my memoirs" (181). He appears in his autobiography as a Romantic man, full of patriotic ideals of political freedom. He was always in contact with intellectuals and journalists, he wrote some articles of his own like the one he includes in the book in defense of Italians. He was editor of *Rassegna Commerciale* of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in San Francisco where he worked as a secretary. In his late years he is pro-Italian-American but against the Italian American yes-men of the Church and the monarchic consul. His idol is naturally Giuseppe Garibaldi. He himself gives the interpretative key to his book:

a great moral and educational Italian-American narrative, of drama, of pure, immortal Washingtonism and Lincolnism, and tasting of sublime Italian sacrifices and love, written for the family, for the school, for the patriot, for the sincere churchmen of all creeds and for all the good souls of the world. . . . [where] the pioneers are not essentially admired for the shining pile of their luck, but for the nobility of their individual traits and the merits of their loftiness of heart and mind. Woman is honored as the supreme beauty of creation . . . I gave the best part of my life to a true and unselfish Americanism... (Introduction)

The book is dedicated to his mother, an "immigrant mother". His first image of her is in the act of leaving. She not only nurtures her sons but gives them a better possibility in life, not only bread but the intellectual nourishment, the alphabet. She is his talisman, like amulet that he looks at in times of hardship:

Her sweet and sad image appeared to me in all perils. And how very beautiful she seemed to me in her choking, streaming tears, kneeling to kiss for the last time, the beloved soil of her ancestors, of her love, of her beautiful home and possessions, and of all her friends of childhood. How beautiful she was, an angel of sacrifice, walking down the mountain to Rapallo, loaded with bundles, to wander beyond seas and continents, in a strange world among strangers, in search of a Samaritan to teach the alphabet to small fatherless children (Dedication).

The immigrant of Dondero's autobiography is a pioneer seen in a romantic light. He paints his portrait as an idealist who, refusing the lure of money, prefers ideals to coins: "I never knew a lust for gold nor greed and my glory was fulfilled with a host of friends and many wonderful children" (105); "to me, my life in California has been a great story, one of the opportunities offered people who want to prove themselves capable of doing many things" (181). His own migration has an epic beginning that is not uncommon among our autobiographers: "one fatal, dark evening, while feeding the livestock on his farm, my father was bitten by a viper hiding in the hay. He died a horrible, agonizing death within a few hours" (2). That is why he has to leave at the age of 12. His departure starts with the ritual of his mother's last farewell:

She prayed and then kissed a small crucifix she was carrying. She placed in on her bed where her life companion, her husband, had died. She then descended the long flight of stairs of our villa down to the street. She knelt once more and kissed the last step making sure that each of us did the same before we took our course to follow the setting sun (3).

Dondero's trip already signs his entrance among the men who made history: he meets "few worthy men" like Domenico Ghirardelli of the chocolate factories, Nicola Lorca of Yankee Clipper Ships of San Francisco, and the Ligurian banker Andrea Lastretto. "Little did the twelve-year old Carlo Dondero dream as he looked at these wealthy men, that he would some day printing and publishing, on San Francisco's famed Montgomery Street, the newspaper that would speak of these worthy men who helped build San Francisco in the 1850s" (5).

Carlo's initiation to American labor starts in the street of New York where chance takes him into a printing shop, like Benjamin Franklin. It is again the hand of destiny: a snow blizzard forces him to enter the first door he finds open in the street, a printing shop. There he is hired as a typesetter for *L'eco d'Italia*, as "a poor immigrant Italian boy" (11). Always by chance he learns the life lessons from great men: "Go west, boy. Go west'. . . I thank the day that Horace Greeley, this man, the great journalist, had set me on my way with his order to 'Go west'" (11). The poet William Cullen Bryant told him: "Never surrender the dignity of an honest free man, and God will always stay with you" (20). He follows these advises and goes West during the Gold Rush of 1859-1862 with his friend Jack De Martini, a bread maker: "Like myself, he too was young and able, yet lacking the capital to establish his own business. So we would venture off together to the gold fields seeking the means to establish our dreams" (70). As in a children tale, Carlo finds four diamonds on the ground which will be all stolen or badly given in payment in the "wild and wooly" towns of the West ("there was an epidemic of adultery, followed by shooting, followed by burial" 88). Young Carlo does not buy a gold mine, but a marble

quarry that he calls "Carrara." In San Francisco he opens his own printing shop, and works as a writer of love letters for Italian brides taking special pride in this giving a voice to voiceless men: "Many brides came to San Francisco as a result of the love letters I had written" (63). With his brother-in-law Andrea Sbarboro, founder of the Italian Swiss Colony Winery and banker, he prints the textbooks for the School for English for immigrants.

On the far side of the spectrum of the working man *ethos*, we must insert **Emanuele Carnevali** who understands that America means work, and hates it for this. Not a graduate, but a poet of some fame, Emanuele Carnevali writes his autobiography on his death bed, vexed by a sickness that made him tremble and shake, in Italy ("I am nothing but a pot full of lilies, a noise, a wind, nothing more," 24). He has returned to Italy as a "shipwreck - my sick body, / and this feeble candle-light - my soul" (197). He is a quite unusual immigrant who dies in secret during the second war without leaving any record of the place or time of his death. His friend, Kay Boyle, edits his autobiography, full of pain and dignity at the same time. Giuseppe Prezzolini judges him harshly as a working man who cannot resign to humbleness: he kept his odd jobs "con l'impazienza e l'insufficienza propria di chi deve far qualcosa per cui non si sente adatto e non e' abbastanza vigliacco o abbastanza grande per rassegnarsi" (289).⁶⁹ As a literary critic he describes him as too ignorant: his critical judgements "guadagnerebbero se fossero limati e posti sopra un piedistallo di cultura che mancava al Carnevali" (292). As a poet he seems to him too weak: his poems "hanno un esile ma certa vena lirica, quando non si

⁶⁹ "With the impatience and sufficiency of someone who feels not adapted to do those jobs and is not enough coward or enough great to resign."

soffermano in pure notazioni di fatto e di sensazione" (290).⁷⁰ As a man he appears difficult, "doveva essere un temperamento difficile per natura e di proposito" (291).⁷¹

Carnevali does not give the day of his birth, nor any other date, but brushes over his life in impressionistic sketches. He describes his youth full of illnesses spent in different cities (Biella, Pistoia, Bologna) where his crazy mother took him and his strict father sent him to boarding school as "a little lion unchained" (44). He is in Venice at the militaristic boarding school, Morosini, from where he is expelled for his growing hysteria and nervous attacks. Refused by his father who hates him, he decides to leave for America as a rebellious adolescent. His father agrees because "for the enemy in flight we build a golden bridge" (58). His departure is thus not caused by poverty but by a rebellious spirit and a cold family. He is not too sad of leaving Italy that is a step-mother for him: "she to whom I gave so little and from whom I received less. . . . No thanks go to Italy and no thanks shall I give her. (But I must at least be dutifully thankful for her being beautiful)" (61). When he returns though, he begs: "O Italy, O great shoe, do not / kick me away again!" (201). When he is far from it, he must nevertheless admit that he longs for it, as an abstract home if not as a motherland:

I remember that in America when I happened to sing an Italian song in the streets, I started to weep like a fool. One song does sometimes mean a whole nation. Besides it is possible to long even more for a country in which one has suffered much. The longing becomes a kind of compensation for the suffering (62).

When Carnevali arrives in New York he experiences "one of the great disillusionings of my entire unhappy life. These famous skyscrapers were nothing more than great boxes

⁷⁰ "They have a certain feeble lyric vein, when they do not stop as pure notations of facts and sensations."

standing upright or on one side, terrifically futile, frightfully irrelevant, so commonplace that one felt he had seen the same thing somewhere before" (73). He lives like a real poor immigrant here, begging for jobs, living in shabby places ("the typical American home: the Furnished Room," 160), and eating the city's free meals with "men like me who carried rage and hunger through the streets for New York, walking, walking, until human strength was practically extinguished" (76). It is work and the search for work that he finds particularly degrading. He explores the city in search for a job, in streets that "were like the highways of Paradise, and others that were the alleyways of Hell" (76): "I walked the streets often in a frenzy of hatred" (74-75). America makes him a quintessential working man even if he detests it:

the JOB, that damnable affair. THE JOB. Nightmare of the hunted, THE JOB. This misery, this anxiety, this kind of neurasthenia, this ungrateful, this blood-sucking thing. THE JOB, this piecemeal death, this fear that grips you in the stomach, this sovereign lady who leaks terror, who eats the very heart out of man (76).

Carnevali, who has never worked in his life, finds himself hired in grocery stores, restaurants and hotels as an errand boy, a waiter and a cleaner. He is fired each time, and always raises back: "America, great workhouse of the strong, you almost crushed me, but now and then I was able to rise to the surface and fight back. I was never strong enough to wound you" (84). He lives scraping bread crusts and cleaning them under the water, picking up cigarette-butts on the streets. He never once sees his identity reflected in his earning a living, like other working immigrants. His employment was a curse: "enough of the places where I worked! I curse them all! I never had a single hour of joyous labor, not

⁷¹ "He must have had a hard temperament for nature and for his own will."

one hour, unless I was drunk, as frequently happened" (149). He is diametrically opposite from Michele Pantatello and his revered working hands. Carnevali loathes his job, and at the same time needs it:

My job was my delirium, my loveless love. My companions were a bunch of unmitigated idiots, a lousy bunch of strikebreakers. They were lousy with the dirt a job is sure to produce. People have the nerve to say that work doesn't soil the hands! Nothing soils the hands so terribly as work and kills the conscience that cannot stand dirt. These idiots sometimes boasted to me of having kept a job for five, ten, twenty or more years! I shivered as I heard them: how beastly, how awful! They had even forbidden the Italian girl-workers to sing while at work. They had tried to stupefy that fine fire that was in the songs of the Italian girls. My job was my *via crucis*, my misery, my hatred, and yet, I lived in continuous fear of losing the bloody thing. (77)

Carnevali's poetry is never highly successful even if he enjoys many famous friendships. Wishing to a literary figure, he remains a worker in spite of himself. After leaving his "little wife," he works as an editor in a magazine in Chicago, but he remains unsatisfied. His last American job is carrying from one end of the city to the other, sacks of corks bigger than he is, "loaded as a mule" (162). His America remains a tough place: "America, you were a tremendous weight on my frail shoulders. It seemed to me at times that I bore you, all entire, on my back. I was never able to take you lightly, to joke with you" (89). He identifies America with the "urge to work:" "I had to live, but I had all of America against me, all this never ending urge to work" (149). He sees the immigrants in America ("we, the hungry," 199) as zombie-like, soulless, hardened workers: "have you seen them going home from work, loaded down with two jackets and a sweater and with immense mittens to fight the cold, the skin of their neck like a bark?" (161).

Two Immigrant Portraits in Verses

Raffaello Lugnani and Antonio Andreoni

Very special portraits of the immigrant worker are painted by two Tuscan farmer-poets, Raffaello Lugnani and Antonio Andreoni. They write their autobiographies in verse as a *poema cavalleresco*. Without knowing of each other these two farmers set up to write their stories of immigration once returned home. The verse form of *ottave* (8 lines stanzas) for Andreoni and *sestine* (six lines) for Lugnani descends from the literary form of *poemi cavallereschi* such as Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* and Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. These literary works were sold for "un soldo" in the fairs, read and memorized in the Tuscan countryside in the nineteenth century. A witness of those times, Giovanni Giannini, writes about the common knowledge of *Gerusalemme liberata* "che molti sanno a memoria," but also *Orlando innamorato* and *Orlando furioso*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: "ho trovato un pastore che leggeva ogni sera in mezzo a un crocchio di popolani la *Divina Commedia* aiutandosi a interpretarla col commento di Camerini."¹ Also the ancient knight romances of *I Reali di Francia* and *Guerino il meschino* "esercitano molta attrattiva sull'animo dei nostri campagnuoli che spesso e

¹ "I found a shepherd who every evening would read the Divine Comedy to a group of lowly people, helping himself to interpret it with the comment by Camerini."

volentieri essi ne traggono perfino i nomi da mettere ai propri figli" (ix);² in fact

Andreoni's family has names such as Solimano, Clorinda, Orlando and Achille.

For our two immigrant writers it is then only a matter of putting themselves in the hero's clothes, "calare le proprie esperienze nel calco delle imprese avventurose e straordinarie degli eroi dei modelli letterari di ascendenza cavalleresca" (Berdinelli 61).³ Sometimes, especially Andreoni's high sounding verses remind the readers of the folly of Don Quixote who transforms his quite unromantic adventures into knightly epics. The great enemy becomes Immigration itself. The form of the epic genre is perfectly congenial to these stories of immigration, for different reasons. One is that they offer the right mode of *individualism* needed by the immigrant who has strengthened his individuality mainly through emigration. As autobiography is the perfect form for life stories of immigration, these epics correspond to the writer's needs for different reasons that Maria Berdinelli describes: first of all,

nel genere epico cavalleresco rinascimentale si incarnavano valori che, progressivi nel momento in cui furono proposti, si sono poi vastamente diffusi fino a raggiungere gli strati subalterni della popolazione (individualismo, ricerca del proprio vantaggio, disposizione alla scoperta e all'avventura, prevalere di amore ragione e natura sulle costrizioni sociali e ideologiche). (61)⁴

Besides, the narrative form of these epics responds to the narrative dimension of the peasant culture: "la dimensione della narrativita' [. . .] e' rimasta essenziale in tutte le

² "They exercise a strong attraction for these country people that often take from them the names for their children."

³ "Move their experiences inside the model of the extraordinary adventures of the literary knightly heroes."

⁴ "In the Renaissance chivalry genre we could find values that, progressive in the moment they were conceived, become then vastly common until they reach the lower strata of the population (individualism, research of one's own advantage, disposition to discovery and adventure, prevalence of love reason and nature on social and ideological constrictions."

culture popolari, dove si manifesta in generi e forme diverse, nella misura in cui le condizioni di vita provvedono occasioni di spazio e tempo propizie" (62).⁵ Finally the presence of the narrating voice "e' perfettamente congeniale alla pratica narrativa quale si verifica in ambiente rurale" (62).⁶

A short moustache over a sarcastic little smile, a despitful raising of his eyebrow, and a hand that holds his traveler's sack: thus, ready to leave, **Raffaello Lugnani** appears in his picture portrait. He possesses a mandolin, a jolly nature, and an itch that just prevents him from being contented with what he has. He seems bitten by the tarantula, he cannot stop nor rest in his constant fight against misfortunes that end up crippling his own body. This is the author of an exceptional book, edited by his son Aquilio Lugnani, *Sulle orme di un pioniere*. Born in 1881 in the province of Pisa, he leaves for the United States when he is 22 years old. He undertakes three trips to the States: in 1902, in 1906 and in 1923. The trips last tree years, five years and twelve years. He travels from East to South to West, and as far as Alaska. He seems unable to stop, unable to find peace. Surely he escapes from a familiar situation that he does not like: he marries the daughter of a rich farmer who, after one week, started to say "l'ho presi a schifo" ("I loathed him"). She keeps on scolding him after his return to Massarosa (Lucca) by saying, "you left me a widow for many years and you came back without a penny".⁷ Not only did he come back penniless, he was also seriously sick with Parkinson disease perhaps due to

⁵ "The dimension of creativity has remained essential in all the popular cultures where it manifests in different genres and forms, in the measure in which the living conditions give good occasions of space and time."

⁶ "It's perfectly congenial to the narrative practice of a rural milieu."

⁷ The source for this information is Aquilio Lugnani. I met him in his house in Massarosa (Lucca) in the summer 2002. He showed me his father's leather booknote and an old piece of America, the record player that his father sent on a ship: "sa odor d'America."

the strong emotions he had lived in his trips. He started to write his memories during his third trip and finished after he came back in 1935. He silently died in 1952.

Lugnani's book is exceptional. Written on a plain book of days with a leather cover with a long and tilted handwriting, this is the story of thirty years of emigration. Its uniqueness is that this story, written by an uneducated miner, is written in verses. A total of 1091 stanzas of 6 sometimes irregular "endecasyllable" (11 syllables verses). The rhyme goes ABABCC and it is usually an easy rhyme often made with infinitives (-are, -ere, -ire). The drama of migration is thus lightened by the music of its verses. This harmony transforms his the experience into a legendary enterprise, epic and heroic, but enjoyably airy: "sara' un divertimento pei lettori, / che nella salza metteran gli odori" (17).⁸ He also ends his story with the moral of an oral tale: "quello e' vero, vi do la mia parola, / che' le lische ci ho ancora qui alla gola" (274).⁹

Lugnani's "immigrant I" is characterized by a strong optimism that permeates these verses. The poet feels to be a hero whose life has been a constant resistance against the blows of destiny. Having lost almost everything, he is still able to smile back. Lugnani is an ironist of failure ("di cambiare il destin abbiám tentato / soddisfatti saremo d'aver provato," 25),¹⁰ a cheerful storyteller of tragedy ("L'America mi ha preso i miglior anni, / pochi soldi m'ha dato, assai malanni," 17).¹¹ His first stanza immediately clarifies his ethos of *survival*: "Del buon Dio il volto ho a me presente, / che indicato mi fu dai genitori; / sempre gli sono riverente, / dai pericoli sempre venni fuori: / furono gravi,

⁸ "It will be fun for the readers, that will put the spices in the sauce."

⁹ "This is true, I give you my word, that I still have the fishbones in my throat."

¹⁰ "We tried to change destiny, we'll be satisfied with having tried."

¹¹ "America took my best years, little money it gave me, and many diseases."

cominciai da un fico¹² / ma della morte mai sono stato amico" (17).¹³ This farmer-poet does not refrain from echoing Dante's *Divine Comedy*: "quel monte strano" (26), "pareva un demonio / di quelli nati prima del Messia" (108), "vid'io tutte le stelle e il paradiso" (132), "fra gente strana in paesi lontani" (196).¹⁴ It is curiosity that moves this pilgrim, his thirst for novelty that is his way of being fully human. As Dante's Ulysses screams to his scared crew, moved by his arrogant curiosity, "fatti non foste a viver come bruti / ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza" ("you were not made your lives as brutes / but to be followers of worth and knowledge"), the immigrant Raffaello is moved by his understanding of what being men means: "Non si deve turbare il mio cammino: / uomini siamo e dobbiamo affrontare, / niente al mondo ci deve sgomentare" (24).¹⁵ Besides the echoes from Dante and Ariosto, the literary precedent of Lugnani's storytelling is perhaps the "epica maccheronica," an oral production since the Italian Middle Ages produced and played by the lower strata of the population. In response to the high epic of knights and kings, the epic of "macaroni" featured ragamuffins and chicken thieves. They are anti-heroes who nevertheless live big adventures between a throwing of cabbages and a battle with pots and pans. It was the epic for the poor people, the epic of those who did not have courtly poets to sing their dynasty. Lugnani's epic reflects this genre, mostly because his adventures often end in failure.

¹² He fell from a fig tree.

¹³ "I keep the face of good God present, as it was shown by my parents, I'm always reverent to him, from dangers I always survived: they were serious, starting from a fig tree, but I have never been friend with death."

¹⁴ "That strange mountain;" "it seemed a devil, of those born before the Messiah;" "I saw all the stars and Paradise;" "among strange people in far lands."

¹⁵ "My walking cannot be intimidated / we are men and we have to face, / nothing in the world can frighten us."

Lugnani's first departure when he is 21, is told poetically with the steps of the "mute horse," the "dear sun," and his heart, "il cuore palpitava a me nel petto, sembrava un fiorellin a capo chino, che soffrisse il calor in campo aperto" (24).¹⁶ His arrival in New York in front of the Statue of Liberty is anti-heroical, and she resembles the siren of the Odyssey: "Fa sognar quella donna a contemplarla: / sembra ti voglia toglier la paura, / la liberta' lei insegna a trovarla / ai miseri che vanno alla ventura, / ma s'illude chi tiene quel pensiero: / qui un libero diventa schiavo vero" (27).¹⁷ He crosses America directed to San Francisco, California, where he is part of a colony of Massarosa people. He works in restaurants and in the fields, where his poetry (sounding like Ariosto) touches the description of his work trimming the trees: "Il sole quel terren, che mai vedeva, / ora potea baciarlo pien d'amore; / anche l'erba, che l'ombra nascondeva, / riprendea la rugiada alle prim'ore / parte nasceva e l'altra si rialzava, / pieno d'ardore il sole la baciava" (39).¹⁸

Lugnani speaks in verses of both the hard and funny side of immigrant life. His difficulty with English are ironically explained: "L'inglese e' una bella lingua da ascoltare, / ma si puo' intender salacca per aringa" (42).¹⁹ He speaks of his jobs: spiking ("spaicare") the nails on the railroads, gardening and keeping the animals in various farm houses, and thus describes their nature: "Chi sta in Italia non puo' immaginare / di che natura sono qui i lavori; / e' meglio che non li venga a provare, che', chi li prova, non li

¹⁶ "The heart thumbed in my chest, it seemed like a small flower head down, suffering from the heat of the open field."

¹⁷ "That woman make you dream if you watch it: it seems she wants to erase your fear, she teaches to find freedom, to the poor ones that go to adventures, but those who think so, are deluded: here a free man becomes a real slave."

¹⁸ "The sun now kissed that land that he could never see, full of love; even the grass, previously hidden by the shadow, regained the prime morning dew, part was reborn, part was relieved, full of ardor the sun kissed it."

¹⁹ "English is a nice language to listen, but you can understand fish for flesh."

chiama amori: / sarebbero lavori per punire, per togliere la paura di morire" (55).²⁰ He also includes sad moments, like the death of the young immigrant with typhus, or his own nostalgia for home: "Potete immaginare che eta' fiorita / passai, cosi' lontan dai genitori; / cosi' presto sacrificar la vita, / come l'autunno il bel colore dei fiori, / ma era il mio destin quel da affrontare; / non potevo ormai indietro ritornare" (51).²¹ He does not refrain from saying "questa e' una terra senza compassione" ("this is a land without compassion" [52]). He touches the bottom when he is hired as a shepherd in a isolated cabin in the California, and is scared to death by its loneliness and the contact with Indians. It is an impossible life for an Italian peasant used to living elbow to elbow with other people - "tranquillo poi a letto riposavo / sapendomi in paese in mezzo a cento" (82).²² The wilderness is too inhuman for him: he is advised to kill anybody who comes close and leave him there. After a few weeks, he gives up this well-paid but impossible job and never regrets it: "e, se penso a quei tempi, anche affamato / son contento, com'avessi mangiato" (66).²³

Lugnani witnesses the 1906 earthquake in his second trip, and is a *survivor*: "e assieme agli altri anch'io morto sarei, / se guarito non fossi un po' piu' presto: / nel letto, come gli ero condannato / coi reumatismi, ci sarei bruciato" (102).²⁴ When he travels to Alaska to work in a mine, he also finds a horrifying reality of ice and sorrow. Inhumanity is his memory: "io sempre con coraggio andavo avanti, / trenta miglia di laghi sul

²⁰ "Who stays in Italy cannot imagine the nature of these jobs; it is better if he never tries them 'cause who tries them does not call them loves; they are like works to punish, to take away the fear of death."

²¹ "You can imagine what a flowery age I spent, so far from my parents, so soon sacrificing my life like the fall sacrifices the color of glowers, but it was my destiny to face, I could not go back."

²² "Tranquil in my bed I rested, knowing I was in town among a hundred people."

²³ "If I think of those times, even if I am hungry, I fell happy as I had eaten."

²⁴ "I would be dead with the others, if I hadn't recovered sooner: in the bed like others I was condemned, with my rheumatism I would have been burned."

ghiacciato, / in compagnia sol di tutti i Santi, / sempre attento a guardarmi da ogni lato. / Non si ricorda la' chi siamo stati: / la vita la' si fa da disperati" (138).²⁵ He sees a friend massacred by a white bear ("nel veder quel ragazzo maciullato / quasi divenni pietra e senza fiato," 154)²⁶ and he shoots an Indian. Lugnani describes his third trip, his job in various mines where he survives fires and explosions, his job in a restaurant and in a shoe-shop in Louisiana, his fights against being called "dego," and even a Boccaccio-like adventure in a convent where pretends to be castrated in order to work and escapes the day of the doctor's visit.

In sum, Lugnani speaks of emigration as both a blessing and a trap of destiny ("Il destino qual'e' si deve prendere" (147), "che lavorar dovevo era sentenza," 239).²⁷ Immigration is a constriction to change and to hope, and for him hope is the worst enemy of the poor because it makes him restless. Lugnani in fact loves change itself. Like Don Quixote, he is never contented with a quiet situation once he finds another one, craving for mutation: "Ma il povero, non se la dee pigliare, / che gia' punito assai e' ingiustamente: / grandi fatiche e sudori ha da affrontare / e tanto soffre che morir e' niente; / il peggio e' che il soffrire fa sperare / e il povero s'illude di cambiare" (180).²⁸ More than once, Lugnani refers to immigration as a "dream," not death, but worse than death: "Sembra un sogno, se ci si sta a pensare, / ve l'assicura un che dice il vero, / che' doversi da tutti allontanare, / a chi non sa, puo' sembrar un mistero; / pensa qualcun la

²⁵ "I always walked ahead with courage, thirty miles of iced lakes, only in the company of all the Saints, always careful to look in each direction. We do not remember who we were there; life there is desperate."

²⁶ "Seeing that boy chewed by the bear, I became stone and breathless."

²⁷ "Destiny is what we have to take;" "Having to work was my sentence."

²⁸ "But the poor does not have to get angry, he is already unjustly punished: difficult hardships and sweats he has to face, and much suffering that dying is nothing; the worse is that suffering makes you hope and the poor believes he can change."

morte sia uguale, / morendo, invece, termina ogni male" (191).²⁹ His ethos as a young immigrant is that of a man governed by winds and other people: "Nulla potevo dire e contentarmi / tutti di me a quel tempo eran padroni: / appena aveo ventisett'anni, / e per amici i soli pantaloni" (150).³⁰ When time passes and he is able to raise no money, his comments become bitter, such as this one against Italian rumors: "Molti in Italia fanno i lor commenti: / dicon facile e' qua trovar lavoro; / c'e' invece da passar certi momenti!... / Avrei piacer provassero anche loro / certamente potrebbero allor dire, / quanto quaggiu' ci abbiamo da soffrire" (209).³¹ Nevertheless he is proud of having worked and seen America, unlike other immigrants who are only work as brutes: "L'America l'han vista sol di fuora: / han vissuto in un sacco rinserrati, / han lavorarato come indemoniati" (215).³²

Antonio Andreoni is a farmer from the countryside of Lucca who was born in 1859 and migrates to the United States between 1903 and 1906. He travels between Chicago, Missouri and Montana where he works for the Northern Pacific Highway. He returns home with enough money to fix his farm for his seven children and is buried in the cemetery of Capannori in 1945. His work, *Passaggio di Andreoni Antonio nell'America del Nord*, was refused by the local school teacher as deserving publication, and remained in the attic of his farmhouse until his great-granddaughter, Maria Berdinelli Predelli, finds it and publishes it in 1997 with the title *Piccone e poesia: la cultura*

²⁹ "It seems like a dream, if you think about it, I who say the truth assure you, that having to leave from everyone, can seem a mystery to those who don't know; some think death is the same, but dying instead end all evils."

³⁰ "I could not say anything, only be contented, everyone was my owner at that time: I was only 27, and only my pants were my friends."

³¹ "Many in Italy make their comments: they say it is easy to work here, instead we have to pass certain moments!... I would like to see them trying, certainly they could then say how much we have to suffer here."

³² "They saw America only from outside, they have lived inside a sac, they only worked as possessed by the devil."

dell'ottava nel poema d'emigrazione di un contadino lucchese and the addition of a deep critical apparatus that shows its literary influences. Many of them jump right at the eye, like the *captatio benevolentiae*, the incipit addressed to the Muse, the appeals to the reader, and the many similes.

The epic is pinned on the truth of the facts at the very beginning and at the end of the narration. Like Lugnani, in his opening Andreoni recuperates the food metaphor comparing his narration to a lavish dish with "true" ingredients: "Amici tutti, se mi ascolterete / vi voglio un fatto vero raccontare / e son sicuro che ne resterete / contenti come a un grande desinare" (147).³³ At the end, he appeals to witnesses to prove the truth of his story: "E se credere a me voi non volete, / a tanti voi potete dimandarlo / a cui leggendo assai ne troverete / che tutti quanti possono accertarlo; / e specialmente ad un, se il conoscete / un mio cugino, certo Andrea del Carlo" (279-280).³⁴

The sadness of Andreoni's departure is rarefied by his verses: "Giunti alla stazione allegramente / un'eco rimbombo' con voci unite, / ma io, povero misero e dolente, / stavo pensando alle grosse ferite / che aveo nel cuor, mentre cola' piangente / tenea la moglie, i figli, e le partite / che faceo cogli amici e coi parenti, / e il cuor mi ritrovavo in gran tormenti" (150-151).³⁵ He describes the storm during the trip as a fight between Titans, like in a real knightly romance: "Veniva cert'onde a tanta altessa ch'elle / perdean la forma e le sembianse di onde; / or la nave salia sopra le stelle / e su le nubi alzar pareva le

³³ "My friends, if you'll listen to me, I want to tell you a real fact, and I am sure you'll remain satisfied as for a big dinner."

³⁴ "And if you don't want to believe me, you can ask many that I have mentioned here, all can prove it to you, and especially if you know him my cousin, Andrea Del Carlo."

³⁵ "Merrily arrived at the station, an echo of joined voices resounded, but I, poor and suffering, was thinking of the big wounds I had in my heart, since I left there a crying wife, sons and the games I played with friends and relatives, and my heart was in big torments."

sponde" (154).³⁶ As a man of survival Andreoni does not forget to thank his savior: "Io ne ringrazio il ciel di tutto cuore / che ormai quella burasca era passata" (156).³⁷ In the same way, when he remains miraculously alive in a mine accident, he says: "questa e' la seconda volta che la vita / mi salvo' certo la Bonta' infinita" (220).³⁸ In America the immigrant becomes a brute - "Si giunse la' sudati come i buoi / con certe facce come gli assassini" (159) -³⁹ and when Andreoni is forced to pay 60 liras to the boss to be hired at the railroad, he addresses his rage both to Italy and America:

Oh, Italia! Guarda come hai tu ridotti
i figli tuoi sol per voler mangiare:
donne, ragazzi, vecchi e giovinotti
se ne van fuor di stato a lavorare.
O tu, America, con i tuoi complotti!
Giammai io non l'ho udito rammentare,
in nessuna nazione moderna o antica,
di aver pagato per durare fatica. (170-171)⁴⁰

Andreoni describes some funny episodes of life among workers, jokes and friendships, but he stresses most of all the hard aspect of immigration. His work on the railroad is beast-like: "E' propio ver, se il gatto sta presente / il topo non puo' far quel che gli pare: / che quivi essendo i superiori, noi / tutti si lavorava come buoi" (270).⁴¹ His work becomes a prison because he is forced to work by his need. Thus, with his

³⁶ "Certain waves so tall came toward us and they lost their shape and their form of waves, now the ship raised to the stars and on the clouds it seemed to be raising its sides."

³⁷ "I thank Heaven with all my heart, that now that tempest has passed."

³⁸ "This is the second time that the infinite Goodness saved my life."

³⁹ "We arrived there sweating like oxen with certain faces like assassins."

⁴⁰ "Oh Italy! Look how you reduced your sons who only wanted to eat: women, boys, old and young, they leave their state to look for work. And you America, with your plots! Never I have heard it remembered in any nation modern or ancient, that you have to pay to give your sweat." When Andreoni loses his bag with his belongings, he addresses the United States with these words: "Oh, Stati Uniti, / ditemi cosa fare, o Uniti Stati, / che senza niente mi avete lasciato, / solo il vestitto che teneo indossato!" (251).

companions, he becomes a strike-breaker ("e mai nessuno si sente questionare / perche' la ghenga mia son tutta gente / che hanno bisogno soldi guadagnare" 274).⁴² Protesting against the boss who pays them the weakly fare also on Sundays, an outlaw practice, they can only strike one day:

Il giorno dopo, come peoroni,
quasi tutti si torna a lavorare,
come noialtri cornuti non siam buoni:
avendo i figli da dargli da mangiare
tutto s'ingolle, perche' le ragioni
del dego non si stanno ad ascoltare;
e ancora essendo di paese strano
vien fatto quel che vuol l'americano. (199)⁴³

Being a foreigner, a dego, and having seven children to feed ("ho da empire piu' di una scodella," 201) Andreoni must accept his life with the philosophy of the humble immigrant ("Ma in questo mondo ci vuol gran pazienza / e sempre ringraziar la provvidensa," 177):⁴⁴ "Quando uno si contenta del suo stato, / o bene o male ch'egli si ritrova, / il mondo a lui gli sembra bello e grato / quant'un che in mezzo alle ricchezze cova" (201).⁴⁵ When not receiving a letter from home, Andreoni explains his preoccupation ("a pensar mi addiaccia il core," 218): "par che il destino lo facci apposta / di farmi tribolar fin ch'io non mora" (218).⁴⁶ But he always accepts everything with the

⁴¹ "It is true, when the cat is present, the mouse can't do as he likes: and there being all our superiors, we had to work like oxen."

⁴² "And never we are heard complaining, because my gang is all made of people who need to earn their money."

⁴³ "The day after, like sheep, we all return to work, we poor people are not good, but we have children to feed, so we swallow everything because nobody listens to the dago's reasons; and moreover being in this strange country, we have to do as the American wants."

⁴⁴ "But in this world one needs patience / and always thank Providence."

⁴⁵ "When one is happy with his state, however good or bad, the world always seem beautiful, and he is grateful as someone who broods on his riches."

⁴⁶ "It seems that destiny does it on purpose, making me suffer until I die."

immigrant's resignation: "Io lascio fare Iddio che sempre bene, / accomoda le cose a suo piacere, / e con pazienza sopporto le pene, / che il sopportarle e' proprio mio dovere" (244).⁴⁷

These two autobiographies propose the same themes of immigration and immigrant's features as the other works, but their peculiar musical form transforms them into a lighter testimony of immigration, almost playful, almost carefree.

⁴⁷ "I always let the good God do what he wants, he always makes things right, and puts them at his will, and with patience I bear my sufferance because bearing them is my duty."

CHAPTER 6: THE IMMIGRANT "SOUL"

Self-Portraits of "Spiritual" Immigrants

Luigi Turco, Antonio Arrighi, Constantine Panunzio, Samuel Mazzuchelli, Giacomo Gambera

Three autobiographies of working men are grouped under the spiritual category, because through their life of toil a new man of God is born. Luigi Turco, Constantine Panunzio and Antonio Arrighi came to America as immigrant boys, and were not satisfied with the material enrichment that the land offered to its immigrants. They looked for something else, thus intertwining very strictly their immigration toward a better life with their continuous search for a higher spiritual life. Immigration is not enough for them to change their lives, as Turco writes to his son, Lewis Turco (a college professor, poet, and playwright): "I never was satisfied with the idea that life consisted in living three score and then and then end into oblivion. I never was satisfied to see that life consisted in a terrific struggle to make a living" (237). Education and Americanization are parallel to religious conversion for these working men who became pastors of the Protestant church, the "American" religion par excellence. They Americanize so deeply that they come to resemble the first pilgrims, and drop the Italian strong Catholic heritage. Their autobiographies spring from their renewed life, as Rose Basile Green writes: "Panunzio and Arrighi . . . are two Italian immigrants who accepted 'evangelical'

aid in their education and who were encouraged to write their autobiographies. Their religious experience, therefore, was atypical" (50). Panunzio's and Arrighi's autobiographies are the best known, both being compelling romances of immigration, more than spiritual accounts. The autobiography of the shoemaker-pastor Luigi Turco is instead primarily the spiritual autobiography of a man of God.

Luigi Turco's autobiography is the first part ("A Brief Story of my Life") of a bulky essay on his own religious theology.¹ It portrays his life though the screen of conversion, making it a direct descendant of the "confessions," the spiritual autobiographies of conversion that from Saint Augustine pass through the New England Puritans to arrive to this Italian American man. He is a shoemaker who thirsts for religious knowledge, but remains a humble man. He thus tells his harshest experiences, because, as his son remembers him saying: "I wouldn't anyone to think he was some dour Calvinist or pompous Parson Goodbody" (x). Born in Riesi, Sicily, in 1890, Turco immediately jumps into the religious theme: "I was born in Riesi a little rural town in Sicily, the 18th of May 1890. It goes without saying, being an Italian my faith was that of the Roman Catholic Church. . . . Until the age of 12 I never went to church, neither did any member of my family" (1). This ignorance of religion pushes him into an unholy life, as Saint Augustine before him. He thus lives in sin - even if living in Rome, the cradle of Christianity, while he is in the military service: "even there I did not learn much about the noble teaching of Jesus, the Christ; therefore my life was not ideal" (1).

Turco immigrates in 1913, following his sister whose husband called to America. He settles in the poor neighborhood of Boston and works in a shoe factory with his sister.

America does not show him her welcoming face, but instead presents him with the bottom of his sinful existence. He lives with his brother-in-law, a gambler and a drunkard, and in that moment is touched by the hand of God who makes him hunger for more:

By his time the hunger in me for a better moral and spiritual life was very deep. It had created in me a melancholy attitude; the spirit of despair! I tried to satisfy this hunger in me like the rest of the young people of my time, in drinking eating, smoking, gambling, and other pleasures of the flesh, not to no avail. The activity of the Spirit upon me, then not clearly known to me, was leading me to find a better way, the real way, to satisfy the thirst of my soul for a better living. (3)

The material betterment offered by immigration leaves him unsatisfied:

After a while I found a better job, one which gave me a better income to live a more comfortable life but which did not give me the satisfaction of soul for which I was longing . . . I was very lonesome! There was a void in me and I did not know how to fill it in spite of the fact that I was young and had money to go to places of amusements. (26-27)

One day, he enters the Baptist Church of Boston where the reverend Gaetano Lisi preached in Italian for the immigrants. His words were "like manna for my famished spirit; they were like the sweet and restful spirit coming from God to calm and lay my bitter and restless soul" (3). He thus converts and changes his whole life, by stopping smoking, drinking, and leading "illegal sexual relations. I became very enthusiastic in the work of the church" (4). As a good believer, he suffers a great "persecution" in his own family, but ends up converting his sister who saw that "I was a better man than when I was a Roman Catholic" (4).

¹ I found this autobiography at the Minneapolis' Immigration History Research Center. It is available in their microfilms.

It is a work accident that turns him into a minister. In the shoe factory he almost loses his right eye: "I was almost a blind man. Lord, what shall I do now? That was the question in my heart!" (5). The Minister Theodore De Luca tells him to study for ministry, an idea he had previously refused out of humbleness: "I wanted to work for God not as a minister, but as a layman" (5). He attends classes in the Colgate Theological Seminary in Brooklyn with five other Italian immigrants who had been converted to Protestantism, men over twenty with little education. Having gone to grammar school, he was the best student, and starts his career in the Italian Baptist mission of Passaic (NJ) on the weekends. In his last school year he is sent to the Waldensian Seminary in Rome, and for the occasion he returns to Riesi, twelve years after his departure, not as a returned immigrant with a golden watch but as a preacher. He preaches in the Waldensian Church of Riesi that normally counted no more than 14 people, and sees a gathering of almost 150: "even people of the neighborhood who knew me as a common young man going to America to make a fortune, and now back in Riesi after 12 years as a minister, came to see me reaching, just for the curiosity. The church was filled to its capacity . . . I preached the best I could" (6). He fills with tears his parents' and his brother's eyes, and after the whole summer spent with them succeeds in converting the family. When he leaves, in 1925, he leaves a lively Waldensian church.

Turco's religious career continues with his leading the second Italian Baptist church in Buffalo, and attending high school at 37. He feels unprepared and after high school, goes to college in the Seminary of Colgate and in Rochester Divinity School where he never finishes his BA. At 43 he marries an American religious worker, Miss May Putnam, and has two boys. In 1938 he is the pastor of the first Italian Baptist church

in Meriden, Connecticut, where he stays for 17 years. His religious quest is not over yet, and at 62 he starts looking for something more. He leaves his church at 64 (one of the reasons being his difficulty with English that hindered his preaching), and lives a spiritual crisis ("God was disintegrating me in order to integrate me, to give me a better understanding about Him and about life in general," 8). "Now what!? Something within me was telling me that the end of my church work had not come!" (9): he spends time in Riesi, and in the Bronx, until in 1956 he discovers the Movement of the New Thought that, based on the metaphysical interpretation of the Bible, healed minds and bodies of people. He starts studying again: Religious Science, Theosophy, Psychology, Spiritualism, Astrology, Hinduism... and finally understands his new mission: starting a new church.

Gladly, I would have taken another Baptist Church if it had been given to me, but so far no such offer has been given me. Thus it is clear to me that the Sprit wants me to start a new church, based in the New Thought, here in Meriden where I have lived for 20 years, 17 of which as pastor of the First Italian Baptist Church. I am conscious of the great meaning of the words of Jesus which are also meant for me, namely, "the son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do... for the father loveth the son and showeth him all things that himself doeth; and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel" (John, 2:20-21).

If Turco never forgets his identity as a preacher, the next two writers almost forget it to the advantage of their identity as immigrants who boast adventurous lives. Both books are striking stories. As the title suggests, **Antonio Arrighi's** book is a true "romance" of real life because it has the style of a romance. It reads almost as an XIX century educational novel, with a polished language reeking of rhetoric of the novels of the age. It comprises the praise of moral values, such as freedom, education, and love for

the motherland, sometimes with high pitches of rhetoric. Arrighi echoes the style of the popular novels of the Giolitti era in Italy or of Griffith movies in America: overfilled with good sentiments, affectionate fathers who give help thinking of their boys, heroic boys à la De Amicis, rotten villains and evil men softened by the power of a song, and galley guards moved by a speech on filial love. It is hard to separate fact from fiction, but again we must trust the author when he says it is a "romance of real life." However, true or false, Arrighi's work nuances the portrait of the immigrant with a romantic touch all too rare.

Born in 1833, Arrighi starts his recount by describing his childhood in the town of Barga, Abruzzi, as the son of the *notaro* with a strong passion for drumming. At 16, he is hired as a drummer boy for the Garibaldi army in 1849 revolution, but he is taken prisoner in Rome by the allied forces of French and Spaniards and Austrian and Papacy (who all dominated over Italy in those times). He is jailed in the galleys, inhuman underground cells where prisoners lived as beasts, and works chained two by two in a treading-mill of Civitavecchia for three and a half year. He escapes from the galleys tied to the bottom of a cart and in a rocambolesque way he is able to lose his traces in the maze of Rome.² He is helped by a group of men fighting for national unity and finds a job as a cabin-boy in a ship directed to America. He arrives in New York in 1855, and has a bitter welcome: he is directly taken into court because of resistance to a policeman who hits him while he is sleeping in the park. He is saved by a doctor, an eye-witness, who tells the true story, but before that he describes a tragically funny moment of his

² Basile Green speaks of the "forbidding antiquity" (32) of the Italian background in this autobiography, especially in the chapter titled Civita' Vecchia: the town "is so impregnated with sulfur that it gives its

greenhorn days when the only words he knows and uses are: "Hurry up. Get out. Fire."

He adds a note of criticism to his encounter with America:

My introduction to free America was peculiar, and entirely contrary to the expected spirit of freedom. I could not understand how a country which did not even allow men to sleep peacefully could be called Land of the Free. Not only that, but how can it be the Home of the Brave when a fellow-being is unjustly clubbed in a cowardly and brutal manner? (193)

Antonio leaves the city and starts working as a seller of ornaments made in plaster of Paris in the Mid-West: "some had an idea that the work of selling plaster-of-Paris toys was degrading; but my experience tells me that it was both honorable and useful" (195) because it helped beautify the homes of people "had but a faint idea of ornamentation" (192). In Ohio he converts to Methodism in 1858. He explains that Catholicism was like an empty shell for Italian people who remained untouched in their life and even cursed God daily. He describes a moment of cultural embarrassment when he goes to confession in a Protestant church, ready to change his life: thinking that he must speak to the invisible Jesus Christ as to the Catholic priests, he starts repeating all the bad words he said, aloud in church. He then undertakes his studies in Theology in the Iowa Wesleyan University at Mount Pleasant, he becomes a pastor, marries an American woman, and has three children. The day of his real Americanization, when he becomes a citizen, is described with epochal words.

I put on a new suit which I had bought on purpose, for I felt as though I were going to my own wedding. I did not rejoice because I was a son of Italy, or because I had been a drummer boy in Garibaldi's army, or because I had been unjustly sent to the Galera and escaped; but because I had been declared by the laws of the land *an American citizen*. I have two

inhabitants tan appearance of old age" (110), even the children look old, it is called "the city of old people" (110).

documents which I regard as sacred. The first and the most important is the one which authorizes me to preach the Gospel, which certifies that as a Christian minister I belong to Christ's kingdom. The other document is my naturalization paper. (228-229)

Arrighi travels back to Italy 12 years after his escape, and expresses the wish to Evangelize his land and see his parents again (who had already disinherited him at the news of his conversion, and now repudiate him following the advice of the evil priest of his town who, we are told, hated him since childhood). In 1881, he opens a church in Florence and widens its community, being able to count among the converted also his parents and relatives. He is saved from a mob lynching by two God-sent young men (spurred by the priest of San Marco). Upon his return to the United States he preaches for 14 years in Philadelphia, and after 1895 at 65 he writes his autobiography.

Arrighi's autobiography is surely another story of *survival*: his own immigration is told as a saving act from the Hell of the galleys from which he miraculously survived. It is also the story of a "man in history," a man "tossed hither and thither by various fate." Of course it is harder for a man like Arrighi to diminish the importance of his own will and strength, but as a man of God he does remember his humility, that makes him say "so be it:" "it was indeed sad to leave my native country without seeing my parents, or being able to write them a word. But so it was to be. I had been thoroughly trained by the sad experience to take things as God ordained them" (174). It is hard not to hear a soft screech in these words of apparent meekness. Antonio's individuality is in fact strong, stronger than the majority of our humble immigrants, and he is not afraid to assert it in one line: "This is not history of the city of New York, but the story of Tonio, Garibaldi's Drummer Boy, Tonio, the Galley-Slave, and Antonio the Preacher" (182). For this reason

it is harder to include Antonio's (and Panunzio's) autobiography among the autobiographies of *quiet individualism*. For them it is more forced than natural, more reasoned than spontaneous.

This is the reason that justly pushes William Boelhower to include Constantine Panunzio's book among his autobiographies of Americanization. It is exactly in this stress on the individual that I would see the particular lesson of America. Panunzio himself agrees when, in the chapter dedicated to his "American Philosophy of Life," he includes the discovery of the individual as one of the most important American gifts. However, even if his autobiography is somehow *in limina*, Panunzio remains a humble immigrant, an inconsequential man who did not reach the top layer of society, or as he puts it with rhetorical modesty, an "average immigrant:" "it recounts the struggles of an average immigrant. It is not the life story of a Jacob Riis, an Andre Carnegie or an Edward Bok, but that of an immigrant lad who has been neither too successful nor too unsuccessful" (xi). He is fully aware of the futility of his will, and often says "destiny however had decreed otherwise" (58). One of the youngest autobiographers, the 36 years old **Constantine Panunzio** tells a story of immigration that follows not destiny but a trail of adventures, like Antonio Arrighi. Born in Molfetta (Bari) in an influential family of doctors and patriots (his grandfather was poisoned in a Bourbon prison), he spends a happy childhood and leaves towards America for his thirst of novelty, irresistibly attracted to the sea and tired the strict Italian schools. It is the "call of the sea" that moves him, not poverty. He is only 13 years old when he sails away as a sailor boy on a costing schooner, the *Angelo*, in 1897. He brings with him all his belongings, a bag and the socks knitted by his grandmother, that will all be lost in America. Life on the boat is harder

than he had expected, and Constantine immediately meets with the harshness of life. His arrival to Boston in 1902 is a real fight against the elements. He does not arrive caged like third class passengers, but like a real hero on the wings of winds: he has to fight against the sea in a terrible storm right off the coast. In Boston he cannot stand the company of his rough fellow sailors and dreams of going back to Italy. When the captain refuses to pay him, he finds himself stuck in an unfriendly land. He looks for jobs but does not know the language. He associates with an ugly French boy, Louis. They are badly treated, and end up accepting a job of "peek and shuvle" in the heart of the mainland. They try to work there but the job is too hard. They are therefore hired as lumbermen in a camp and kept prisoners by the bosses who refuse to bring them back to the city. They escape, live in the woods, and suffer the injustice and the prejudice of Russians workers in a factory. Constantine is finally able to find a job in the mouth of Hell, Stacyville, a little town of the North East, a place of corruption, vices, and moral filth. He is employed by Mr. Carter and works his farm only to get involved in alcohol bootlegging, and ending up without a cent of pay from his boss. He thus tries to escape as a stow away clandestine on a train, without knowing he was doing something wrong. He is caught and put to jail, under the false name of Frank Nardi, the name his boss gave him since Constantine was too difficult. In jail he is scared as hell, but the judge is fair and he is sent back to the town.

This is where the hellish life of Constantine ends, and he finally meets the "real America" of good people. He is now hired by a good Christian family with beautiful daughters, and with them he discovers a new kind of life: he goes to school to learn English, reads the Bible and goes to church with them. According to him, this is his luck

because his process of Americanization passes through their good example - unlike many Italians who live in isolation and therefore never integrate. Americanization goes together with education and with his conversion: he is accepted in the Maine Wesleyan Seminary, and starts collecting literary prizes. But he still suffers from the prejudice of others who take his silver comb for a stiletto: "I venture to say, some of my schoolmates still remember the dreadful days when they went to school with an Italian who carried a stiletto with which he intended to carve out hearts, both men's and maidens'" (165). Once naturalized, Panunzio works with the immigrant communities in the Protestant Mission of Boston, where the people are resistant to any change, isolated in their enclaves, and never really knowing the "real America." He describes the Italian community, the brave mothers and the strict fathers who work with self-abnegation for their children. He also denounces the paradoxes of Americanization because he notices that the teachers of the classes to Americanize the foreigners never familiarize with them in first person.

Panunzio's conversion is interestingly skipped. He never speaks of his religious turning point, and neither of his ordination as a Methodist pastor. This is probably because his conversion to Protestantism is the natural outcome of Americanization, and this Americanization is what occupies the whole book. His becoming American is his main focus:

I had worked as janitor, tailor, woodsman, night watchman, mail clerk and respectable people thought no less of me for so doing. I even courteously but firmly declined to accept the aid of a lady who had become interested in helping me financially. . . . I was simply enjoying my independence to the full. The American in me was unconsciously growing. (179)

The interesting dimension of Panunzio's writing is the inward perspective of his description. While other autobiographies mainly speak of the events and exterior facts, Panunzio goes further. After a first part dedicated to the adventures and misadventures of his first years, he bends inward and looks inside himself, starting to philosophize. Boelhower sharply notes that this change in the narration is a shift to "antinarrative:" "the compositional shift is achieved at great price, for in becoming an American somebody, his protagonist becomes, physically, a nobody. He is simply rarefied out of existence" (69). From the very beginning Constantine asserts:

this tale depicts the inner, the soul struggles of the immigrant more than his outward success or failure. . . it traces the liberation of a mind from the conceptions it brought from the Old World and pictures its development into the American consciousness. Not outward poverty, degradation, misery; but inner conflict, soul-struggles are here primarily depicted. (xi-xii)

His perspective is often from the outside-in, as when he tells about his hand cut in the effort of escaping from a group of bullying men. The writer describes it from inside: "my bandaged hand hurt me but my heart hurt more. . . . often since that day I felt the cutting thrust of race prejudice" (82). The second part of his autobiography becomes a plain explanation of his thoughts and ideas that culminate in the most interesting chapter "My American Philosophy of Life." Here Constantine lucidly delineates the immigrant's changes from within: how is the immigrant before and after America? He already listed some of the losses he had suffered from his immigration, such as the loss of his trustful simplicity, the loss of his manners and the respect for law and order, the loss of grip upon his health, and the loss of thoroughness and exactitude of work sacrificed to quick results.

(This is commonplace. Francesco Ventresca writes: "the Italians would say this is not a bit artistic. But the American says: 'Never mind your art. We want efficiency,'" 28). Panunzio then enumerates some all-American characteristics such as its mobility, its freedom of changing the old ways for the new, its optimism and its practical idealism. All the other lessons Panunzio has learned in America rotate around the discovery of the individual. He has learned how to break free from the customary, from what other thinks it should be done. He has learned the importance of the individual's opinion and the disregard for that of others. He has learned to appreciate the worth of the individual character, and not the inherited worth of his ancestors. He has learned the value of independence that refuses to ask others for help.

The parallel Americanization-conversion is obviously absent from the autobiographies of priests who traveled to the United States already ordained in Italy, like father Samuel Mazzucchelli and father Giacomo Gambera. They are also immigrants but their ethos is defined through work done for a special cause, for their religious conviction. If our immigrant workers defined their lives through their working instruments, their bricks or their dishes, these immigrants define themselves as instruments for the glory of God.

A Dominican priest, father **Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli** writes his book in Italian for the first edition (Milan 1844) that bore a long title: *Memorie istoriche ed edificanti d'un missionario apostolico dell'Ordine dei Predicatori fra varie tribu' di*

selvaggi e fra i cattolici e protestanti negli Stati Uniti d'America.³ Translated by a sister of Charity, the order Mazzuchelli has founded, the work is published in 1915 in America with an introduction by John Ireland, archbishop of Saint Paul (Minnesota). In his introduction, the bishop describes Mazzuchelli as romantic, picturesque, and "signorile". Born in Milan at the beginning of 1800 in a good family, Mazzuchelli asked to be sent to America, after hearing the talk of the Edward Fenwick, a Dominican priest, about the New World missionary work. The speech fired young Mazzuchelli's imagination and he quickly was transformed into the interesting figure of a pioneer who evangelized the frontiers of the wild West, such as Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa. He primarily worked with the Indians and comes to love them as the "poor in spirit." He learns their language enough to translate a booklet of prayers and to alternate one verse of the Mass in Latin and the next in their language. He appeals to syncretism and tells them to pray to the Great Spirit, while maintaining some of their customs in the ritual of the mass. He is a vociferous defender of the Indians and denounces the injustices against them. In the disordered society of those frontier towns, he founds the Total Abstinence Society to discourage drinking, and the Order of the Sisters of Charity.

He writes his autobiography at 38, shortly before dying of pneumonia in his mission, and uses the third person pronoun. This does not transform him into the hero of an epic (an idea he shuns), but it humbles him by becoming merely the recorder and detaching the writer from the protagonist. This is his primary purpose and in fact he often he starts his chapters by speaking impersonally of the general historical conditions (the terrible life of Indians, the battles between Protestants and Catholics, the Mormons, the

³ "Historical and Edifying Memoirs of an Apostolic Missionary of the Order of Preachers among the

freedom of speech in the United states). Only secondarily he passes to talk about "our story" and "our priest" in the final paragraphs. He is in fact not full of himself, and the use of third person thus serves his purpose of inscribing himself as only a character in the landscape he describes. When he describes his immaculate behavior ("modest, unassuming, courteous," "among the virtues demanded of the priest in America disinterestedness is the most necessary," 303) he is not boasting, but evangelizing since only irreproachable lives and preaching can give the good example.

Mazzuchelli's interesting autobiography portrays the typical moments of the immigrant experience, but wraps them in a religious light. His immigrant ethos is first of all Catholic. Thus the narrator always gives supernatural answers to the basic moments of immigration. For example, the decision to leave is explained in terms of "mission: "Of all the duties of priesthood the most excellent and meritorious is the propagation of the faith among people who do not know it" (5). The fear of the long trip and the unknown is quickly consoled through faith: "the foolish fear of lacking the necessities of life would show a great want of faith in the Son of God who commanded: 'therefore do not be anxious saying 'what shall we eat?' 'What shall we drink?'" (6). Even in the most painful moment, the detachment from his family and from his adoring father who begs him not to leave and whom he was not to see again, is quieted with religious detachment: "on such occasion one needs not to dwell in the physical separation from dear ones and native land . . . To the flesh such a parting seems cruel and unjust, but to the spirit of the Christian it becomes sweet and gentle, for it is the yoke of Christ" (10). The memory of the homeland that never leaves the immigrant is interpreted by Mazzuchelli as a divine help to

accomplish his difficult mission by recalling the memory of Italian churches: "His imagination turned spontaneously to these scenes when he was obliged to offer the Holy Sacrifice in a log hut in the lodge of a savage . . . God even made use of the memory of his temples to arouse a keen desire to build them wherever the catholic faith was promulgated" (12). The blows of fortune that the immigrant must endure are also seen as gifts of God: "accidental events in our lives which seem unfortunate contribute to our welfare and prepare God's paths of which we are ignorant" (13-14). The immigrant's sufferance for lack of a stable home is consoled by Mazzuchelli by finding a church to sleep in: sharing the house with Christ was a "honor and privilege" (191). The immigrant luggage is substituted by the single box of the Eucharist tied to his neck: "the passengers, not being Catholic, did not know that they owed their lives to the presence of that omnipotent God who traveled with them under the humble appearance of the Eucharist" (193).

Mazzuchelli remains an Italian even in the wilderness of America, as when he says: "it was strange for the European to find himself regaled with the meat of a bear that he had seen alive and swimming not two hours before" (87). He makes a strong effort to bring not only religion but also the Italian way of life to the wild America. On one hand, he smiles upon the lack of Italian beauties in his improvised churches: "There was not need of Italian marble for a pavement: that was found ready-made of the green grass in summer and hard frozen earth in winter" (107). On the other hand, he brings the sound of church bells to give a rhythm to the days: "in this happy place of primitive fervor, everyone rose at the sound of Ave Maria... at the noon Ave Maria the poor Indians did not fail to direct their minds and hearts again to the mystery of man's redemption by

reciting the Angelus. They did so also at evening when the bell called them to church for Vespers" (59).

More concrete is the autobiography of another missionary, father **Giacomo Gambera**, *A Migrant Missionary Story*. Written with a stern tone, this is the life of a Scalabrinian priest who very much helped the Italian immigrants of various parts of the United States. Written in Italian and translated into English, its style is matter-of-fact, it does not sound like a confession, the story of a soul - even if having some chapters dedicated to "personal opinions" - but almost like a managerial, historical account.

Born in 1856 in Lumezzane Pieve (Brescia), Gambera started his religious education young, and was ordained in 1879. He joined the Scalabrinians in 1889, under the suggestion of bishop Scalabrini himself, and departed for the mission field for what he planned to be a 5 years period: "the apostolate for the emigrants was much more important and deserving than the limited work in a small parish" (62). Feeling guilty for leaving ("I felt as if I were perpetrating a culpable, almost cruel act" [62]), he looks at his trip with anguish and expectation: "my American clothes were ready, but my spirit was at once beautiful and anxious" (64). He was sent to New Orleans with a last minute change of program (he was initially directed to South America). The Italian element of that city has already a bad fame: it "seemed very different from the peaceful and good population of our villages, and I didn't hide my sinister impression and my fear from Bishop Scalabrini at going amongst these black people" (67). Willingly or not, Gambera stays in New Orleans where he works in a parish of stingy parishioners for 4 years, and even has the misfortune of witnessing the 1891 lynching of 11 Italian immigrants. He was close to

the prisoners because he had visited them in prison. He wants to run for help, but it is already too late ("I felt my blood rush cold with shame and horror" [80]).

His intention was to finish his 5-year mission in New York and then return to Italy but he was ordered otherwise: he was sent to Pittsburgh for 16 months. He is now tired and longs for home: "with five years and six months I thought that I had completed my modest mission. The Babel of our colonies had more embittered than satisfied me, and I wanted to leave that unpleasant environment" (100). Instead, obedience sends him to Boston, where he became the pastor of Sacred Heart parish for 6 years. He is now ready to return home, "but lo! Another interruption awaited me." He was asked to work for the Saint Raphael Society in Ellis Island for another 4 years, until 1905: "these orders were like a heavy weight falling on my shoulders and on my heart. A new parish and an assignment of grave responsibility! It frightened me!" (105). Anyway he obeys and oversees the arrival of immigrants by helping those who were detained: "those halls echoed with complaints and bitter weeping, which pierced not only one's ears but the heart as well, because they were terrified by the thought of being sent back to where they had come from" (138).

At 48, from 1905 to 1921, Gambera takes over the parish of Addolorata in Chicago (where he finds a people "annoyed with the priests" 147), and indirectly suffers from the death of Bishop Scalabrini that set the Order in chaos. In Chicago he distributes food to the unemployed and cures them in time of influenza. During the Great War his parish contributes to \$300,000 in subscriptions for the orphans and widows. He is a "material man" in this sense because he never misses to count the funds he is able to raise for his church: "in 114 years, I paid more than \$50,000 in extraordinary expenses alone,

almost double of paying off the debt" (191). Gambera's health gives him problems and at 64, he resigns from Addolorata to return to Italy. He thus returned to his homeland 32 years after his departure: his American experience had lasted 27 years longer than he had expected and hoped. He is a stranger now in his land: "the adults and the people that I knew had almost all disappeared. [. . .] This, too is the bitter disadvantage of a missionary. Due to his long absences he becomes a stranger to those of the family, to his friends, and to his hometown" (187). In Italy he undergoes an appendectomy and recovers slowly. He is back in the United States in 1925 and works for various hospitals in New York and Connecticut, and for Our Lady of Pompei in Greenwich Village. He dies in his sleep in 1934, after a whole life in service of Italian immigrants. He believes in his mission and considers the parish the center of Italianita':

I saw immediately that in the midst of our colonies the parish church was the focus of their most dear memories and most valuable comforts, of their closest union among our exiles, and that the missionary was the best and living representative of the most beautiful and sacred traditions of our fatherland, from the feast days to the songs, from the sacraments to the language, and that in the parish the migrant lived, breathed and tasted the true *italianita'*. (69-70)

This "immigrant" priest is tossed hither and thither not from destiny, but by his "vow of obedience." Gambera does not hide the difficulty of being a priest, he does not look for an hagiographic portrait of himself. He tells his triumphs but also many of his miseries (he even describes his drunkard colleagues or the unfaithful sisters he has met). He fills his memories with the bitterness, the solitude, and the harsh law of obedience that exasperate a priest, and praises his perseverance: "I worked, I suffered, I cried and I also enjoyed myself" (58). He remains a humble man as it is clear when he shuns away the

high ranks when he is elected Provincial Superior: "for my only-too-sensitive character, all this was becoming a torment, an intolerable burden. I am not made to be the superior" (167). He also turns down the invitation to be director of the new Apostolic See for the Missions Overseas in Rome: "that order terrified me. I felt neither the strength nor the ability to take such a serious responsibility upon myself" (171).

These authors give us a different nuance, the religious one, to the same theme of the humble immigrant man. Humbleness becomes obedience, the theme of Fate is intertwined with the theme of Providence, searching a place in the world is also searching for a mission, building the "house" is finding a place to serve others. The message is clear in these writers: either Americanization and conversion, or life at the service of others in exceptional circumstances, and immigration is part of this message.

Self-portraits of Immigrant Artists

Giovanni Zavatti, Luigi Olari, Luigi Lombardi, Pietro Montana, Alfred Crimi, Rocco De Russo, Emanuel Gatti

This gallery gathers portraits of Italian immigrants who arrived in America following an artistic dream, or who discovered art in the United States. Contrary to expectations, their autobiographies are not pretentious. They remain "immigrant workers" at heart. Their art is just another type of work. Success does not fill them with vanity, and they tell their stories in a *quiet* mode. One of them especially, who does not find success, Luigi Olari, strikes a very human note in his writing. Even Alfred Crimi, a frescoist and painter, Pietro Montana, a sculptor, and Luigi Lombardi, an orchestra director, never put on airs about the position they acquired but always highlight their struggles instead as being men of *survival*. Two of them, the actors Rocco De Russo and Emanuel Gatti, directly live the decline of theater in light of television, and their autobiographies become narratives of the ending of an era more than tales of personal triumph. All of them started at the bottom.

The self-portraits of these Italian immigrant artists show a very particular face: it is the image of an "artisan" that is shaped through their writing, more than that of the "artist." They do not flaunt their artistic theories, and do not try to raise themselves on a pedestal. They are strongly conscious of their lowly background (that also serves them as a platform to show the greatness of their achievements), and they seem really affectionate

to the poorest part of their life, when they lived off dreams. This is probably the artistic version of the immigrant's *quiet individualism*. Even in the field of art, where the individual is mostly exalted, our immigrant authors are not swept away by a self-conscious feeling of ostentation. They are not showy, but quiet and modest. They work primarily with their hands. They remain "men in history". They maintain the certainty that chance and destiny play a large part in man's life, and individual action is limited.

The tenor Zavatti came to America as a water-boy for the wood-cutters. **Giovanni Zavatti** starts his *Cantando per il mondo* not from his birth but from the grotesque beginning of his artistic career; in the harbor of Naples he is almost defrauded of his belongings and his money, and is recognized as a talented singer... by a horse. Typical of humble autobiographies is the modesty and self-irony that inform this writing; Zavatti is certainly sure of his talent, but does not refrain to tell the unromantic beginning of his career. First he used to sing serenades for his friend's girlfriends in the dark, too shy to sing in the daylight. When he sings in the daylight, on the carriage of an old Neapolitan the day of his departure for America, only the horse recognizes his talent:

il cocchiere mi prego' di cantare qualcosa ed io cominciai timidamente a canticchiare 'Silenzio cantatore', una canzone che cantavo spesso con mio fratello Antonio. Pian piano la mia timidezza scomparve; la mia voce era gradevole e a questo punto accadde qualcosa di strano. Il cavallo che tirava la carrozza di colpo si fermò apparentemente senza nessuna ragione. Il cocchiere si mise a ridere e si complimentò con me, dicendomi che il suo cavallo si fermava solamente quando ascoltava una voce che gli piaceva. (6)¹

¹ "The driver begged me to sing something and I timidly started to sing 'Silenzio cantatore,' a song I used to sing with my brother Antonio. Slowly my shyness disappeared, my voice was pleasant and suddenly something strange happened. The horse that pulled the carriage stopped without a reason. The driver started to laugh and complimented me by saying that his horse stopped only when he heard a voice he liked."

Zavatti's beginning is very humble. He was born in 1911 in Cansano, a small mountain in Maiella, in the province of L'Aquila. He is the son of an immigrant father, a miner, absent physically and also financially after the failure of his bank. Giovanni is the only hope for his mother and four brothers and sisters, "una delle famiglie piu' allegre del paese" (8).² He works as a mason, and in the forest of Southern Italy as a wood cutter and water boy for the workers. He is forced to migrate to the United States to reach his father and older brother when he is only fourteen: "Mio padre sfortunatamente non aveva la mia passione artistica, per cui impose la sua volonta' e mi forzo' a partire" (11).³ His mother sews double pockets on his pants and a double sole in his shoe to hide the money. The drama of departure is vivid in his memory. The night before,

nel mio cuore quella sera si affollavano tanti sentimenti, che poi mi accompagnarono sempre durante la mia vita. Arrivo' il giorno della partenza. Dentro di me avrei voluto ritardare, anche se per poche ore, quel momento cosi' triste. Ci incamminammo tutti verso la stazione ferroviaria di Cansano: io, la mia famiglia e molti altri parenti; anche dalle finestre e dai balconi delle case tutti mi salutavano calorosamente ed invece mi sentivo tanto afflitto. Con tutte le loro effusioni mi rendevano la partenza ancora piu' penosa, ogni tanto mi voltavo a dare gli ultimi sguardi al paese dove ero nato e cresciuto. . . . Mi sentii come morire nel rendermi conto che mi stavo allontanando da Cansano sempre di piu', senza nemmeno sapere quando sarei potuto tornare. Avrei voluto fermare quel treno. I passeggeri che viaggiavano con me non sapevano che questi sarebbe stato il viaggio piu' lungo della mia vita. . . . mi accorsi che la regione dove ero cresciuto era proprio molto bella. . . . nella mia testa avevo un solo pensiero: quando sarebbe svanita la grande pena che tenevo in fondo al cuore? Sembrava che aumentasse di piu' ad ogni chilometro. (13)⁴

² "One of the merriest families of the village."

³ "My father did not have my artistic passion so he imposed his will and made me leave."

⁴ "That night many feelings crowded my heart, feelings that never left me all my life. The day of departure arrived. Inside me I would have wanted to delay that sad moment, even if for a few hours. We all walked toward the station of Cansano: I, my family and many relatives; even from the windows the people greeted me warmly but I felt very afflicted. With all their effusions they were making my departure more painful, sometimes I turned to give last glances to the town where I was born and grown. [. . .] I felt like dying realizing that I was getting farther and farther from Cansano, without even knowing when I would be back. I wanted to stop that train. The other passengers did not know this would be the longest trip of my life [. . .

As the moment of his departure arrives he mingles with "la grande folla degli emigranti" in the harbor of Naples. Piazzetta Maculatella where the American consulate was located is called also "la piazzetta degli spasimanti", proprio perche' tutta quella gente in fila spasimava per ricevere il visto di emigrazione e non tutti erano cosi' fortunati da riceverlo" (7). Only seeing the great ship "Cristoforo Colombo" that has to take him to America, and hearing some immigrant singing "Santa Lucia luntana," Giovanni succumbs to sadness, and allows us a peek into the head of an immigrant in a dramatic moment:

improvvisamente mi feci triste e mille pensieri cominciarono ad affollare la mia mente: perche' lasciavo il mio paese nativo? Perche' lasciavo la mia famiglia? Perche' andavo cosi' lontano? Dove andavo? Perche' andavo? Sarebbe stata veramente migliore la vita lontana dalla mia bella Italia? Valeva la pena cominciare tutto da capo? Queste erano le domande che mi ponevo e non sapevo come rispondere; ad alcune di esse dopo tanti anni di vita, non ho ancora potuto rispondere. (8)⁵

The last sentence bears the weight of a lifetime, and the *spleen* of the immigrant's anxiety. In the belly of the ship, the boy breaks into tears: "l'attaccamento alla Patria e' il sentimento piu' forte e duraturo della nostra vita e l'unico in effetti che non possiamo controllare. Oggi, dopo tanti anni di lontananza, ho scoperto che esso non ci lascia mai"

] I realized the region was really beautiful [. . .] In my head I only had one thought: when would the pain disappear from the bottom of my heart? It seemed to increase every kilometer."

⁵ "Suddenly I became sad and a thousand thoughts came crowding my mind: why was I leaving my native town? Why was I leaving my family? Why was I going so far? Where was I going? Why was I going? Would it really be better my life far from my beautiful Italy? Was it worth starting all over again? These were the questions I posed myself and did not know how to answer; some of these I still have to answer after to many years of life."

(14).⁶ Twenty-eight days later, Giovanni arrives in New York, and is not impressed: "i palazzi erano di mattoni, privi di adornamenti artistici e balconi. Durante il cammino vidi una dozzina di persone in uniforme a striscie bianche e nere, incatenate ai piedi e ai polsi, che stavano aggiustando una strada" (16).⁷ His first experiences are typical of what La Sorte calls the "greenhorn years": he is frightened by a big black porter in the station, he is lost in Denver when he needs to change train to go to New Mexico, and he enters the women's bathroom because "a me sembro" che la parola 'women' rassomigliasse di piu' alla parola 'uomini'" (19). Zavatti does not shy away from telling the degrading works his powerful chest had to perform. He tells his hard experiences in Gallup where his father, brother and compare are miners in Camp Wilson, New Mexico. He works with them even if he never stops singing. He also recounts his jobs in Colorado and in Detroit (1928-31) as a mechanic and a factory worker. He tries boxing, but finally finds various jobs with theater companies until his debut in Los Angeles in *Carmen*. His lowly beginning is all here in his autobiography and its presence is telling, since he explains how all this had to remain a secret for the public not to ruin his public image. According to the producers, his experience as a miner must be forgotten: "la bugia e' necessaria: la vostra pubblicita' deve continuare ad essere quella di un tenore scritturato dall'Italia e che in tenera eta' ha cantato per la chiesa e per il papa. La vostra vita da minatore a Gallup deve essere dimenticata" (80).⁸ If this is his public image, by the time he writes his autobiography he has taken it back, reclaimed his real life, his truth, his persona. He now remembers and

⁶ "Our attachment to the Motherland is the strongest and most durable sentiment of our life and the only one that we cannot control. Today after many years of distance, I discovered that it never leaves us."

⁷ "The buildings were made of bricks without artistic ornaments or balconies. During the walk I saw a dozen people in black and white striped uniforms and chains on their hands and feet who were fixing a road."

even cherishes all the hard aspects of his life as an immigrant and as a miner. His identity is that of the immigrant who made it out of the mass. Again, immigration, individuality in hardship and autobiography are tied in a triple knot. Zavatti reaches success in Phoenix, Hollywood, Oklahoma. His success finally brings his family together, mother and brothers and sisters, in California. Writing at the age of sixty, Zavatti describes all his performances and his successes as a tenor. He never forgets to paint himself as a proud Italian, who does not betray his Italian roots, and never stops feeling love for his homeland: "ho vissuto tutta la mia vita in America e con orgoglio servo la mia patria adottiva, ma il mio sangue e' italiano e restera' tale fino all'ultimo respiro" (89).⁹ His Italian pride is poured also in his professional life: in Hollywood in the 1950s, he refuses to dub the movies where the Italian plays a negative role. Here is his recollection of his "big refusal" to dub a military film where he had to be the mayor of a little Italian town who pulls his donkey to meet an American commander and "gli si inginocchiava piangendo ai piedi, come uno scemo da manicomio":¹⁰

Rifiutando, commentai: 'Voi produttori, per l'amore del denaro dare l'anima al diavolo e clapestate tutto, senza pensare alla degradazione di un popolo orgoglioso che ha dato civilita', legge ed ordine ai vostri antenati. E' vero che l'Italia ha perso una guerra non desiderata, ma mai l'onore in millenni di storia. Per me sarebbe stata una vera vergogna, se avessi accettato di degradare la grandezza e l'orgoglio del mio popolo. (103)¹¹

⁸ "The lie is necessary: your publicity has to be that of a tenor scripted from Italy who sang for the Pope and the church when he was a child. You Gallup life as a miner must be forgotten."

⁹ "I lived my life in America and with pride I serve my adoptive Motherland, but my blood is Italian and so it will remain until my last breath."

¹⁰ "He kneeled on his feet crying like a fool of a asylum".

¹¹ "Refusing it, I commented: 'You producers, give your soul to the devil for love of money, and step on anything, without thinking to the degradation of a proud people that gave civility, law and order to your ancestors. It is true that Italy lost a war it did not wish, but it never lost its honor in thousands years of history. For me it would have been a real shame had I accepted to degrade the greatness and pride of my people.'"

A diametrically different story is that of another singer, **Luigi Olari**, an unlucky immigrant who writes *Avventure di un emigrante* when he is seventy-seven, and returned to Italy after having searched in vain for luck in America in vain. He has only a third-grade education, and studies singing with the worst *maestri* who ruin his voice (according to him). His autobiography has many weak and confused points, but also many striking images of a stubborn immigrant dreamer. Interestingly, he is the only case (besides father Mazzucchelli) in which the autobiography is written in third person. It is thus the exception to Lejeune's rule, even if it never denies the trust of the reader: the story is about himself. (Lejeune considers this particular case in his article "Autobiography in the Third Person" where he writes that "naturally, this takes place within the framework of a text controlled by an autobiographical pact," 27). The use of the third person signals the strength of Luigi's dream, his strong unfulfilled ambition that makes him invent his own biographer. He makes up his own biography, as a privilege reserved to successful artists - in the same way as he pays to publish his *romanze*. No one can deny the resources of this man, who *makes* himself, against all odds. Luigi has a desperate need for an audience, and his bitter autobiography is another attempt to find one, like when he sings to the birds of Central Park after working all day as a janitor.

The beginning of his story follows a history book style: "Olari Luigi, figlio di Olari Francesco e di Rustici Rosa, nacque a Pagazzano, piccolo paesello dell'Appennino Parmigiano il 16 febbraio 1894."¹² As other autobiographers, Luigi starts his life with an act of *survival*: he is called "il bambino miracolato" when miracled by the Madonna del

¹² "Olari Luigi, son of Olari Francesco and Rustici Rosa, was born in Pegazzano, a small village on the Parmesan Apennine on February 16, 1894."

Berceto who heals his paralysis. At seventeen Luigi starts his career as an immigrant in modest jobs: he goes to France (where his sister leaves) and he is employed in the construction of roads; in 1914 he travels to San Francisco, California where he has another sister and works "con pala e picco nella costruzione di strade, quindi come custode nelle agenzie d'automobili. Appena finito il rimborso della sorella delle spese di viaggio dall'Europa all'America, si compro' un paio di vestiti, un orologio con catena d'oro e s'affretto' a trovare un maestro di canto" (12).¹³ His American artistic adventure starts in difficult circumstances, he travels to New York in 1923 with 24 dollars in his pocket and finds odd jobs as waiter and dishwasher. He finds a part in the operetta "Mikado" but to work in it he has to quit washing floors - and starts going into debt for food, and must sleep in train stations: "non fu cosi' fortunato per l'alloggio. Dovette prendere la valigetta ed andare a dormire per due o tre notti nelle stazioni ferroviarie. . . . Si vergognava un poco dovendo denaro a tutti, circa cinquecento dollari" (13).¹⁴ In the Depression of 1929, Luigi cannot find music jobs and he starts cleaning floors again ("Luigi riprese la scopa e torno' a lavare pavimenti in un grande appartamento al numero 825 5th Avenue New York," [14]).¹⁵ His desperation for his sad living condition is deep: "il povero sventurato cadde nell'abisso piu' squallido della sua vita, una notte, mentre lavorava ando' nei piani inferiori con disperazione. Voleva sputare sangue, non gli importava cio' che succedeva. Incomincio' ad urlare e gridare a piena voce, restando

¹³ "With pick and shovel he worked in the construction of roads, than as janitor in car selling agencies. As soon as he finished to give back to his sister the money for the trip, he bought a pair of suits, a watch with golden chain and he ran to find a singing maestro."

¹⁴ "He was not so fortunate for the room. He had to take his suitcase and go to sleep in the station for two or three nights. [. . .] He was a little ashamed because he owed money to everyone, around 500 dollars."

¹⁵ "Luigi picked up the broom again and went back to washing floors in a large apartment at 825 V Avenue, New York."

esausto" (14).¹⁶ His search for an audience is difficult: not even in churches do they want him to sing for free, and he is forced to sing in the elevator when accompanying the rich inhabitants of his building. They promise to help him, but he only collects deceptions: "conosceva bene quella gente. Promettevano ma non mantenevano" (18).¹⁷

At fifty-seven, Luigi makes a last effort to find an audience and uses a good cause, a fund raising for the Asilo in his hometown, Berceto, to organize a concert, his debut, in Carnegie Hall. He earns just a little more than what he spent for the concert and is able to send 100 dollars to his town. This is the biggest attempt to *make* himself with his own strength, and he takes care of everything: "scrisse le lettere d'invito a giornali e riviste musicali. Fece i cartelloni di reclame, scrisse la sua biografia. Alla sera del concerto porto' sua moglie al botteghino, sua figlia per mettere a posto la gente, e lui stesso alla porta per ricevere i biglietti" (27).¹⁸ He prepares a show of twenty-four *romanze*, and has to bear the humiliation to make fun of himself for the sake of the audience, singing two songs dressed as a janitor with a broom in his hands. At the end of the show, he is left broken and also the promise of a millionaire - to buy him a new set of false teeth - is quickly forgotten.

Failure enbitters Luigi that addresses terrible words to his enemies: "capi' che si trovava soffocato tra l'ignoranza e la gelosia dei deboli e la viltà viziosa e putrida dei potenti" (25).¹⁹ At sixty he pathetically starts singing to the birds in the park: "dopo

¹⁶ "The poor wretched fell in the most squalid abyss of his life, one night, while working he went to the lower floors with desperation. He started to scream and yell in full voice, remaining exhausted."

¹⁷ "He knew those people well, they promised but never maintained."

¹⁸ "He wrote the invitation letters to newspapers and music magazines. He prepared the posters, wrote his biography. The night of the concert his wife stayed at the cashier, his daughter sat people and he himself stood at the door to collect the tickets."

¹⁹ "He understood that he was suffocating between the ignorance and weakness of the weak and the vicious and putrid cowardliness of the powerful."

questo Luigi decise di levarsi da quella marmaglia. Si compro' un diapason e tutte le mattine, appena finito di lavorare andava ai giardini pubblici, dove cantava per un'ora a suo piacere, senza essere disturbato" (27).²⁰ He thus reverses his desires towards Italy, where he has the "only" satisfaction of his life: when he sends a musical prayer to Berceto, they answer that they are singing it in church and teaching it to the children: "quella fu la piu' grande ed unica soddisfazione che ebbe in tutta la sua vita" (25).²¹ When he visits Italy for a short time he has other little triumphs such as concerts and the privilege of singing for the captain of the Achille Lauro and being upgraded to the first class ("questo fatto sollevò molto lo spirito di Luigi perché in alto mare cominciava già a sentire la forza della civiltà italiana. Cosa da lui mai dimenticata, ma allontanata da quasi mezzo secolo," [29]).²² Luigi thus reverts the myth, and sees Italy as his new promised land: "aveva trovato più soddisfazione dalla sua breve visita in Italia che dai 41 anni trascorsi in America, perché in Italia c'era ancora un po' di coscienza e un po' di considerazione per le persone oneste" (30).²³ As a returned immigrant, he nourishes now the opposite dream, that of arriving to the age of retirement, sixty-five, and returning home. When he leaves America, his attitude is sour:

Era molto felice di lasciare l'America perché per lui era stata un vero purgatorio, se non l'inferno addirittura. Era emigrato in America all'età di vent'anni, pieno di ambizione, di candore, di idealismo e anche di speranze. Ma invece si era trovato in un modo tutto diverso, dove veramente aveva sciupato i migliori 45 anni della sua vita. Luigi invece di

²⁰ "After this Luigi decided to leave that rabble. He bought two diapasons and every morning, after finishing his work, he would go to the public gardens where he sang for an hour to his pleasure without being disturbed."

²¹ "That was the biggest and unique satisfaction in his whole life."

²² "This fact relieved the spirit of Luigi because in the open sea he already started to feel the force of Italian civility. Thing he had never forgotten, but that he had left half a century before."

²³ "He had found more satisfaction in his brief visit to Italy than in the 41 years passed in America because in Italy there was still a little conscience and a little consideration for honest people."

divertirsi, giocando, saccheggiando l'umanita' come facevano gli altri giovanotti, si era dedicato allo studio del canto, alla musica classica, alle poesie. Andava alla scuola serale dopo giornate di faticoso e pesante lavoro. Voleva mantenere il suo candore, la sua serenita' di spirito e di coscienza ed invece si era visto strappare via il suo sogno, il suo giorno promesso, da questa inondazione di materialismo. (32)²⁴

If luckier than Luigi Olari, the musician **Luigi Lombardi** is similarly imaginative in his *Pages of My Life*. Instead of writing his biography, he prepares his eulogy, half seriously half jokingly, depicting himself as somebody who is satisfied with his life, even if this hasn't been the most brilliant: "O promenader promenading / Along these silent premises / Of the undeworld / Stop! / Bow your head (no more than you need to read these words) / Don't take off your hat (why should you) / And take home with you / An idea, oh, so mellow / Belonging to the fellow / On whose head you have your feet; / 'here rests / Lu-Lo in death / In life he did the same'" (103).

Lu-Lo is the nickname of a musician with a mane of white hair who spends only two pages on his real career, while dedicating the majority to his youth and his "golden dreams." For two pages he describes the orchestra he dreams ("how clear and true that long dream appeared to me, the sweetest of all my professional dreams," 68-9), and the girl with whom he shortly falls in love. The ideal in this book is heavier than the real. Luigi was born the last of seven children, in Lama, on the top of a rocky mountain of the Appennine: he "was born in the early hours of the day, so that I could enjoy it all. . . . in spite of any lack of welcome, I was born on that easter Sunday. It was a beautiful day!'

²⁴ "He was very happy to leave America because it had been for him a real Purgatory, if not even Hell. He had migrated to America at 20, full of ambition, candor, idealism and also hopes. But he had found a whole different way, where he had wasted the best 45 years of his life. Instead of having fun, playing, sacking humanity like other young men, Luigi dedicated himself to the study of singing, classical music and poetry. He went to evening school after hours of tiring and heavy work. He wanted to maintain his candor, his serenity of spirit and conscience, and instead he saw his dream being taken from him, his promised day, from this inundation of materialism."

(10). His first deed is winning against destiny in the shape of a fortune teller who tells his father that his next child will mean his death, and he won't live longer after his birth: but "the gypsy's prophecy did not materialize. . . my wise dad was a great man, and knew how to live long . . . He buried the fortune teller and other friends who had believed the story" (11).

When his family moves to Rome, Luigi is forced to study as a lawyer, but his real passion was music ("those who do not know me and persist following me through these pages, please take notice that music was my calling, and great music became my irresistible goal!" [24]). He endures the opposition of his father, and secretly plays the flute. At eighteen he finally starts studying with a maestro and goes to Conservatory while his parents give up: "they decided to allow me to travel my own cherished path, for better or for worse, in happiness or misery, alone or in company, for a long life or a short one, as God willed. They washed their hands and gave me all the green light I wanted" (28). His career is not as bright as he hopes: his first piano compositions are despised by his maestro, and at his final examination the professors humiliate him by talking and laughing during the performance. They eventually give him his diploma on the condition that he goes to America and takes young Ettore with him, a promising but poor boy. In the night of departure, "the most touching and sweetest remembrance of my own" (42), his father hands him a teaching he will never forget: "my boy, you are now going to follow the career dearest to your heart. Doubtless you will be a fine gentleman and a fine musician, always. Should it happen that you find it hard to do justice to both, choose to be a gentleman" (43).

The day of departure, in 1904, he is full of hopes, and paints his portrait as a young immigrant dreamer: "For the first time in 23 years I found myself absolutely by myself . . . there I was: young, brilliant, happy and healthy; somewhat handsome to the eyes of those not so particular; well dressed, with 500 lire [that he spends before leaving] and a third class steamer passage in my pockets. . . plenty of hair, a cute moustache, and an abundance of golden dreams" (46). His arrival to New York is triumphant in his own self-description: "on the deck of the big steamer, I felt like a king and poet, my soul absorbing all the spiritual sensations hitherto unknown to me" (50). His years in Philadelphia are not so easy instead, while he struggles to pay the rent of a small room for his "Verdi Conservatory." He marries an Italian girl, Ada dal Vago whom he meets in northern Italy while visiting his brother, and shares his dreams with her: "To become American citizens became our cherished aim in the New World. Nearly all our young ideals were fulfilled" (90). In fact, he finds jobs as a pianist in the hotels of Atlantic City, learns English, and finally becomes flautist and director of the "Lombardi Quintet"... but he is still dreaming of the big orchestra, so with the permission of the hotel owner he starts conducting a twenty-piece orchestra. It is a success, and in 1912 the Lombardi Symphony Orchestra is born. He moves to Minnesota where in 1921 he starts conducting the Iron Range Symphony Orchestra. In 1939 he moves to Wisconsin always working as a conductor. This makes him conclude the book with this satisfied comment: "and so... the dreams that were born in a young man's heart, have been realized. I humbly thank my God for allowing me to so happily fulfill my mission" (97).

Another immigrant dreamer is **Pietro Montana**, a sculptor with white hair and deep dark eyes, who comes to New York as a boy of fourteen all alone, ready to start any

kind of odd jobs. He was born in Alcamo, Sicily, in 1892, from an imaginative father (*lu padre*) who made barrels and wine containers, crystal chandeliers for the churches, and even flying balloons. Immigration is early known in the family because his older brother leaves for America as a tailor, and because his family starts a business knitting socks for the immigrants who were leaving in flocks. It is through his brother, Popo (Liborio) who sends him the money for the passage, that he first thinks about America: "He said I was wasting my time in a little town where there was no future for me" (30). He migrates in 1906 and finds himself all alone for the first time: "I felt lost with no one from my family to give me a sense of comfort and encouragement" (32). He starts dreaming about his future and his American life on the ship. The week after his arrival he is already employed "in a factory where they manufactured tin and zinc bathtubs and other receptacles and objects. I felt very important and secure earning six dollars a week, which was considered good wages in 1906" (32). This is the first of many odd jobs (as a construction worker and as a wall painter) he cannot keep due to his frail constitution.

Pietro's real rebirth is not immigration, as in the others, but his encounter with art that is an all-American discovery. It is in the Metropolitan Museum that he falls in love with the smell of the painter's turpentine:

It was a revelation to me, who had never been inside a museum, to see so many treasures and works of art. Here and there were artists sketching and copying pictures and paintings. There was an odor of turpentine that exhilarated my spirit reaching my nostrils and seeming like a perfume to me. I felt at home there, as if I really belonged. That was a great day in my life, and I returned home feeling enriched with the idea that another horizon was opening up for my future. (32-33)

Art is calling him in a supernatural way through the wind of New York that brings him a sign from Heaven:

It was a windy day when we were about walking. We had nearly reached our house, when a gust of wind blew a sheet of paper, toward me. It stuck to my leg. I picked up and noticed a beautiful design of three roses in it. I liked it so much that I took it with me. The next day, I went to the art store and bought drawing paper, pencils and charcoal and came home and began to draw the first drawing I had ever made. I copied the three roses, and that was the beginning of my artistic career. (33)

Even if he is now realizing his dream, Pietro remains a hard working immigrant who does not shy away from toil: "I was willing to do anything to earn an honest living. I had gone through so many hardships in my youth that they had tempered my life and made me appreciate what I had learned" (33). Although working at day jobs, at night he rushes to the studio to study art. He opens a photography studio, and starts winning prizes for art students. For his first big bas-relief he chooses the tragedy of immigration as its subject, after being struck by the destiny of Italian refugees in the 1914 war: "when I read about the tragedy of the people of Friuli, who were obliged to leave their homes and all their possessions to flee to safety in a neutral and peaceful region, I was saddened. . . . I had that tragic picture clear in my mind" (47). With his career taking off, Pietro can buy a house for his parents who had joined him in Brooklyn, "with a back yard where my father could cultivate a garden, something he loved to do. It was a wonderful feeling of independence for them to own their own home" (55). He marries the blond Alfrida, a lover of Italy, whose death will be one the worst moments of his life, and he later lives nine years in Rome, feeling nostalgic for New York. Italy was and remains for him a step-mother: "No income was derived from my stay in Italy, neither before or after

returned there. I never earned money from Italian sources. Nevertheless I love Italy just the same" (170).

Pietro's last words are the words of satisfaction of a self made man who raised from nothing to artistic glory: "I owe a great debt to this Land of Opportunity. As a young boy of fourteen, I came from Italy, and step by step, I made my way up to success. Anyone here in this country who has the will and the intelligence can create a future for himself and his family" (191). Pietro's book of memories is a way to immortalize his name, his obsession: "I am grateful that the name Montana will not die. It will still go on, engraved on my artworks in museum, universities, and public squares, in America and Europe" (183). We can understand his pain when he goes back to New York City and sees the public monument he had made abandoned in garbage heaps. His main regret is not having had children, but only a family of stone to hand down his name to the generations:

I wish I had created a human living child instead of many children who could not speak or laugh with me. These children do not live with me. They are in public squares and museums and private homes. I have learned that this is life. No man in this world can fulfill his every desire. But I do thank God for the many achievements He permitted me to accomplish. (184)

Montana is more an artisan than an artist whose life is a struggle "in history," and his personal strength is only one third of the game, as he writes: "a man's life is made up of three elements, chance, destiny, and character" (177). The same credo is held by another artist/artisan, **Alfred Crimi**, who in his old age, writes:

in reviewing my life I recognized that chance and circumstance played a major part in shaping my character as an individual and my career as an

artist. Any success or failure is the result of the choices I made of the opportunities that presented themselves. There were times when I felt I had reached a nadir, but experience has taught me that adversity is often a challenge - a test of strength we must face with faith and fortitude, and from which we must draw renewed vitality. It is the price one must pay for the privilege of life.

This is the credo of the *quiet* individual for whom strength of character and will in life-choices are important, but always "in" the context of History, of the chances given by life. Besides, the "cost" of life is always present in their mind, the "price" of certain choices and certain renunciations, such as not having children for Montana, or enduring times of hardship and struggle. Even in these artist autobiographers we find a different outlook on life that does not belong to the victorious hero, but more to the *survivor* of life. Or as Crimi puts it, to the shipwrecked who resurfaces from the abyss of history: "I consider myself very fortunate to have had the moral strength to bounce back and to retain my equilibrium and sense of humor. Mary has often said to me, 'You are like a cake of Lifebuoy - you always rise to the surface' (180).

Short, with light moustache and a smooth skin, Crimi is the Italian frescoist of American churches and public buildings, and he also works on oil paintings. His is a quiet personality, and does not seem the exuberant artist. He describes his theories of paintings, and he's surely proud of his work, but he's unassuming and not at all flamboyant. His tone is always humble. Even when he tells the story of a law-suit over his fresco in Rutger Church that was painted over, he explains it as a wound to his ethos as an artist (it is all in that signature on the wall, he says), and he fights for his pride. But he reiterates that he is fighting for what is right, more than for a personal offense. The fight is told in detail, but not in epic terms, more like one of the many obstacles that life

presents in front of men. Also, Crimi includes the trivial details of his human side in his autobiography (his bowel movements, the urinals in Rome, his vomit on the ship), not deeming them unbecoming for an artist.

Crimi was born the eighth of eleven children in 1900 in San Fratello (Messina), a town that, Crimi underlines, survived two massive landslides that he immortalizes in his paintings (*After the Landslide of 1922*). He arrived to the United States as a boy of ten, following the tragedy of his brother's death in a work explosion that shocks his father. He remembers the simple life and the idyllic memories of his childhood in Sicily where he works in a *bottega* to learn cabinet making. In front of him there was the shoemaker and the blacksmith, all hand crafters with immense love and ability for their work: "it was indeed a labor of love... love and pride these craftsmen gave to their work" (7). This is the environment of tradesmen in which he grows to "observe and absorb."

Crimi remembers his Americanization through school fights, "bloody nose or black eye." He studies art and travels to Rome to attend the academy. In 1933 he is employed by the government through the Federal Emergency Relief Act Relief. He is part of a team of artists that work on the public walls of the Aquarium of Key West where Crimi has to prove his ability as a frescoist by inventing a special procedure to work on sea-salted walls. It is as a frescoist in fact that Crimi's name is preserved through his works in public places such as hospitals (Harlem) or the Post Office in Washington, while the salty air had the best over his frescoes on the walls of Key West Aquarium, and nothing remains of them.

Two theater actors close our Gallery of Artists: Rocco De Russo and Emanuel Gatti. **Rocco De Russo** is an important figure in the Italian American world at the

beginning of the century, sharing the stage with the more famous Farfariello. At eighty-six, Rocco looks back at his life and traces a professional portrait of himself full of zesty Neapolitan spirit that helps his shaky memory ("O Napuletano dice: A Vecchiaia e' na carogna!! . . . Vivo come puo' vivere un uomo della mia eta' con tutti gli acciacchi della crudele vecchiaia, che giungono l'uno dopo l'altro, senza tregua, per tormentare la canuta umanita'!").²⁵ He writes in Italian, and Italian and Neapolitan dialect are the languages of his career, since he performs for immigrant audiences. He traces a portrait of himself in the style of a *macchietta*, without any preposterousness, and he heartily compliments all the actors he names, without a drop of bitterness. He describes in length his humble origin in Italy. Born in 1885 in Sant'Arsenio (Salerno), he loses his father and grows up with his mother and his little hand organ, joy for the child but a trial for the neighbors. The boy's whole world revolves around that little old organ that is given away by his hard working mother, and then bought again at the Fair of Saint Anna. When he is only six, he is invited to play at the gatherings of the *signori*, and starts to earn money for his mother. His picaresque migrant life starts early when a group of traveling musicians passing through Sant'Arsenio hears him and convinces his mother to let him go with them: he leaves in his Sunday suit, happy, "giolivo (sic) e contento come una Pasqua," with his organ tied with a rope inside a cardboard box. He becomes the mascot of the group, beloved by the audiences and by the old musician Domenico Boffa. One day, while the group is performing in Taranto, Rocco's sister goes to pick him up and takes him with her, despite his crying and begging. She is married to a theater actor, Salvatore Baccolini, who tours Italy. In Potenza, he lives with his sister, goes to school and starts working in

²⁵ "In Neapolitan you say: old age is a carrion!! [. . .] I live as a man of my age with all the problems of

his brother-in-law's company where he learns *canzonette*, *macchiette*, *canzoni* and duets, dramas and Pulcinella's farces. When he is still not even able to read, he memorizes his parts, the first being the part of the little boy in the drama, *Margherita Pusterla ovvero la terribile notte di San Giovanni*. He is publicized on the boards as *il piccolo grande artista*, touring the Puglie:

E cosi' fra musica e canzoni, macchiette e duetti, non che lo studio della scuola, non mi restava piu' un minuto di tempo per divagarmi con i miei coetanei! A dodici anni anche il pianoforte lo suonavo discretamente - la musica era la mia passione, come il palcoscenico, a cui ho dato la mia intera esistenza. Per essere quel che fui, ho studiato continuamente drammi, tragedie, commedie. (7)²⁶

As an adolescent he works in the little theaters on the coast (Porto d'Anzio) where the Roman ladies on vacation love him and take him under their protection. They sew the Pulcinella costume for him and pay for a mask of "suola" (shoesole or leather) because the cardboard one would fall into pieces under his sweat. It is "a stroke of luck" under the aspect of a Roman lady, and her husband that brings him to his debut at the theater Morfeo in Rome when he is 16. As he says, without them he would remain in the power of waves: "per questo colpo di fortuna inaspettato, non sapevo trovar parola adatta, per esprimere la mia viva riconoscenza, ai coniugi D'Ambrosio, perche' senza il loro aiuto sarei rimasto come una barca, in balia delle onde!" (12).²⁷ He then works in Naples and Torre Annunziata where he is flooded with compliments: "Rocchetie'. . . tu reciti come

cruel old age, that come one after the other, without truce, to torment the white-haired humanity!"

²⁶ "And so among music and songs, macchiette and duets, and the study of school, I had no time left to have fun with my friends! At twelve I played decently the piano - music was my passion, like the stage to which I dedicated my entire life. To be what I was, I studied hard dramas, tragedies, comedies."

²⁷ "For this unexpected stroke of luck, I could not find the right word to express my gratitude to Mr. And Mrs. D'Ambrosio, because without their help I would have remained like a boat at the will of waves."

un angelo, . . . si stato nu zuccaro"²⁸ and falls in love with the daughter of his impresario. He had found "come suol dirsi: pappa, ninna e nonna!" - success, salary and love, but for a joke of the "devil" (as he says), he has to join his sister again. After his brother-in-law's abuses, he leaves them and goes back to his mother. He forgets theater for a while and becomes a volunteer soldier, until the idea of America starts luring him.

In 1905, after his marriage with a local, he leaves for New York thanks to his cousin, and immediately goes to look for a job in the theater Villa Vittorio Emanuele III on Mulberry Street, replacing no one less than Farfariello himself, "il miglior macchiettista coloniale" (30), who left for Italy for stomach problems. De Russo's first performance is welcomed with enthusiasm by the Italian American public, and he even remains surprised by the frequency of the applauses. He generously remembers all the other immigrant actors, all of them coming "from the factory to the theater." When Eduardo Migliaccio ("bravo, nel vero senso della parola") comes back they work together dividing the parts: colonial characters for Farfariello, and imported Italian characters for him (*A festa 'o paese, O scugnizzo, Il nobile, O canta storie napoletano*). Because of his hot temper he is fired and subsequently hired in the Lucania Hall of New York and in Grand Street's Villa Penza with a good success that he ascribes to the goddess of Fortune: "la fortuna mi seguiva da per tutto" (37).²⁹ Family troubles with his jealous wife, and discrepancy with his singing partner Lina Baccicalupi bring him back to Italy where again, for the sake of his family, he tries to forget theater. Thanks to his fame, he is offered a job in Sant'Arsenio as municipal guard: "la presi con piacere, sperando

²⁸ "Little Rocco, you play like an angel, you were like sugar."

²⁹ "Good fortune followed me everywhere."

potermici abituare, e abbandonare, completamente il teatro" (40).³⁰ His career is thus lowered to the job of keeping hens and pigs out of the streets, and fining wives and servants when they throw garbage from the window. He opens a hotel where his wife and mother cook for the guests. He could settle down and forget theater, but is tearful and saddened every time he sings: "avrei potuto benissimo sguazzarmela in pace trionfale, ma non c'era verso di poter dimenticarme il teatro, che l'avevo nel sangue, nel cuore, nella mente! . . . una tarla che continuamente mi logorava il cervello!" (43).³¹ When a company of good actors stops in his town and lodges at his hotel he helps them with an emergency substitution, and hears them say: "ma che ci fate in questo piccolo paesello? . . . spogliatevi della vostra divisa, e rientrate in arte... il palcoscenico vi aspetta" (45).³²

It is too much for him, and he resigns from his job and throws himself in theater again. When the relationship with his wife falls apart, he leaves for New York and has a triumphal return in the city as well as in Utica. He becomes head of a company and meets an artist who becomes his second wife and with whom he forms the duet Fugero-De Russo in Chicago. She dies young, at twenty-four, and he moves to Detroit to escape sad memories. The Tuscan immigrants of Ontario love him, but "the devil" again breaks his happiness. For Rocco, it is Destiny that brings him bad luck, and even his own crazy gestures (such as shooting one of his actors, having false witnesses, attempting a bribe of 250 dollars to create a pact between lawyer and police) are by him ascribed to the force of destiny: "quell'atto poco signorile, quel gesto insano, che quel disgraziato mi spinse a

³⁰ "I took the job with pleasure, hoping to get used to it, and abandon theater for ever."

³¹ "I could have swum in triumphal peace, but there was no way of forgetting theater, I had it in my blood, in my heart and mind!! [. . .] like a worm that continuously eroded my brain!"

³² "But what do you do in this little town? [. . .] Take your uniform off and come back to art... the stage waits for you."

commettere, mi demoralizzo' a tal punto da farmi decidere di abbandonare tutto. . . . Non avevo piu' il coraggio di presentarmi davanti a quel pubblico, a quelle brave famiglie che mi veneravano" (59).³³ He thus is pushed to move his company to Pittsburg, PA, where an epidemic of Spanish fever breaks the group apart. Here he marries another actress who performs duets with him, and continues his wandering life in Chicago, Boston, New York. In 1931 with a twelve-artist company he starts his tour that lasts for twenty-six years through sixty-three locations in the United States: "(che bei tempi... che soldi!)". He knows his audience well and, besides *Lo zappatore*, *Parlami d'amore Mariu'* and *Acqua santa*, he writes his own *macchiette* for them, "per il loro comprendonio!" (67). The decline of Russo's life parallels the decline of theater to the power of television, "che scombussolo' l'intero mondo teatrale e cinematografico!" (67).³⁴ Seen that "gl'incassi non erano piu' quelli, sempre nei riguardi della benedetta televisione, che cagiono' gran danno nel campo teatrale",³⁵ he breaks up the company and bids a definitive farewell to art, moving to Providence, RI, in 1956.

The same swan's song for theater is sung in the autobiography of the actor **Guglielmo Emanuel Gatti** whose personal decline parallels the decline of the Age of Theater, this time under the blows of Cinema. A Fascist supporter of New York's Little Italy, Gatti prepares his book as a personal mausoleum, including letters and articles about him, against the last blow of Death: "ed io, gia' in cammino verso il mio quindicesimo lustro, sebbene forte e vigoroso, sento che la mia parabola ha descritto la

³³ "That act so little noble, that insane gesture that that man made me do, demoralized me so much that I decided to abandon everything [. . .] I did not have the courage to present myself in front of that public, those good families that adored me."

³⁴ "That discombobulated the entire theatrical and cinematographical world!"

sua traiettoria ed e' pressoché al punto in cui il Destino a scritto la gran parola: BASTA" (282).³⁶ His self-description includes the following statement: "ne' ricco, ne' panciuto borghese e non americano poiche', per quanto adori l'America ospitale, non ho mai barattata la mia cittadinanza" (250).³⁷

Gatti remembers the humble beginning of his career when he fell in love with theater through a quirk of fate. Born in 1867 in Stupinigi Villa Reale (Torino), he leaves home at sixteen, rebellious and impatient, to find his own way in life. He goes to Turin and spends many a hungry day sleeping in the station. It is there, in Torino Porta Nuova, that destiny finds him, and his theater career begins. He calls it "fate:" "la fatalita' che s'e' giovata della mia precaria posizione economica per pormi sulla strada preventivamente destinata. Non sarebbe spiegabile in modo diverso la mia grande passione pel teatro venuta a svilupparsi man mano, con un fascino quasi mistico" (16).³⁸ He had never thought of becoming an actor, but one day...

Ero, come dissi, seduto al mio solito tavolo (che molte volte era pure quello del pranzo e della cena) semisdraiato sulla sedia che qualche volta mi serviva anche da letto e da scrivania, quando un giovinetto, signorilmente vestito e con fare distinto, dall'età presapoco la mia, mi si avvicina e mi dice; 'Scusi Lei e' un comico?' non ebbi il tempo di dire 'no' che quel giovinetto proseguì: 'anche se e' un semplici (sic) dilettante non importa. Il grande maestro Giovanni Toselli penserà lui a farne un artista, e poi... si tratta di recitare in dialetto piemontese' . . . Colla rapidità che può avere il pensiero dell'amore ricordai che avevo recitato

³⁵ "Seeing that the money were not the same anymore, always because of that blessed TV that caused so much damage in the theater."

³⁶ "And I am already walking toward my 75th year, even if strong and vigorous, I felt my parable is ending its trajectory and it is almost to the point where Destiny has written the big word, BASTA."

³⁷ "I am neither rich, nor bellied bourgeois and not American because even if adore the hospitable America, I never exchanged my citizenship."

³⁸ "Fatality used my precarious economic condition to put me on the way of my destiny. It would not be otherwise explicable the big passion for theater that I developed with its almost mystical charm."

in collegio e sfacciatamente risposi: 'sì, so recitare.' Qualche volta l'audacia giova più' della coscienza! (15)³⁹

This is how his career veers to theater, "quest'Arte, oggi posso dirlo, altrettanto sublime quanto stracciona" (19).⁴⁰ Through other strokes of luck, such as meeting a Count who likes him and recommends him to the theater in Milan, Gatti starts his own theater company that resists the "bufere inevitabili" for thirty years. In 1915, forced by his ruined relationship with family and colleagues that his rebellious spirit has caused, Gatti leaves for the United States to join his son. New York does not dazzle him: "L'immensità dei famosi grattacieli non mi ha affatto commosso. Venendo da un paese ove le costruzioni sono eminentemente artistiche questi stili senza stile tutto al più possono stupire" (39).⁴¹ He even despises the Italian theater of New York: "dico teatro, così per mondo di dire. I teatri in cui recitavano gli attori italiani erano tutti confinati nella bassa città e cioè nella vecchia New York ed erano quasi tutti gestiti da ebrei russi e tedeschi" (39).⁴² He thus works in the Italian American theatre for the next twenty years, dealing with this "'cafonaglia' laboriosa di una smisurata percentuale dei compaesani emigrati" (41),⁴³ but is unable to fulfill his dreams.

³⁹ "As I said, I was sitting at my usual table (that of lunch and dinner too), half laying on the chair that sometimes was also my bed and my desk, when an elegant and distinguished boy almost my age, came to me and asked me: 'Excuse me, are you an actor?' I did not have the time to say 'no' that the young boy went on: 'Even if you are a simple beginner, it does not matter. The great maestro Giovanni Toselli will make an artist out of you, and then ... you will play in Piedmontese dialect. With the rapidity of a love thought I thought that I had played in boarding school and blatantly answered: 'yes, I can play.' Sometimes audacity is better than conscience!"

⁴⁰ "This Art, I can say it now, so sublime as ragged."

⁴¹ "The immensity of the famous skyscrapers did not move me. Coming from a place where buildings are artistic, those styles without style can only surprise me."

⁴² "I say theater tongue-in-cheek. The theaters in which Italian actors played were all in the low city, in the old New York and were all run by Russian and German Jews."

⁴³ "That working 'rabble,' a high percentage of our migrated countrymen."

His autobiography is darkened by dissatisfaction when he looks back at the failure of his projects, and registers his defeat:

Col danaro avrei potuto mettere una musaruola (sic) ai cani che mi abbaiano, e, al ritorno in Italia, avrei potuto istituire un teatro Stabile di Arte nella mia città natale. Infatti avevo cominciato assai bene; ma venne la grande guerra . . . e poi la legge restrittiva sulla emigrazione . . . ed il mio sogno è caduto come un edificio di cartone al passaggio di un turbine. (45)⁴⁴

The decline of Gatti's career is quickened by the advent of cinema, his foremost enemy. Even physically his theater, the Amsterdam Opera House, where he works with success for four years and attracts the "chosen public of our colony," shuts down to become a film studio. He thus addresses his enraged curse to cinema, "grande fucina fotografica il cui sole smagliante e cocente brucia le ali a tutti gli Icaro che malcauti s'avvicinano" (212),⁴⁵ and tries an unlucky forecast:

ma io, penso che il cinematografo, come teatro sia un fenomeno transitorio che se resterà, resterà soltanto come completamento agli spettacoli di prosa e d'opera. Un teatro dove non c'è calore, ove non parla l'anima dell'attore, ove la voce è mostruosamente alterata, ove l'uomo non ha colore né passione ed ove solo la tecnica impera non può avere lunga vita perché tutte le follie collettive sono passeggere. Ripeto, per me, il cinematografo resterà come una industria" (52-53).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "With money I could have put a muzzle to the dogs that were barking at me, and going back to Italy, I could have opened a Theater in my native city. In fact I started well, but the Big War came [. . .] and then the restriction laws on immigration [. . .] and my dream fell like a cardboard building under a whirlpool."

⁴⁵ "The big photographic factory where the hot sun burns the wings to those Icarus who imprudently try to get close to it."

⁴⁶ "But I think the cinema, like theater, is a transitory phenomenon that if it will remain, it will stay as a complement to theater and opera shows. A theater where there is not warmth, where the soul of the actor does not speak, where the voice is monstrously altered, where the man has no warmth nor passion and only the technique is important, cannot live long because all collective follies are transient. I repeat, for me the theater will remain as an industry."

He thus works as a theater teacher, and gives up the utopia of an acting career by philosophically stating (like the fox to the grape): "non mi e' mai girata per il cervello l'idea di far carriera – carriera la fanno i soldati, gli impiegati non gli artisti" (51).⁴⁷ In New York he becomes the president of Society Dante Alighieri in 1925, and is a member of the group of Fasci d'America, in which he strongly believes as an expression of pure patriotism: he "wore the black shirt," for the "piu' puro patriottismo, quel patriottismo che e' doveroso per ogni galantuomo quanto e' doveroso l'adorare la donna dal cui bacino uscimmo alla luce" (187).⁴⁸ He is sorry when Mussolini closes the Fasci: "obbedii' mantenendo la camicia nera sotto lo sparato di quella bianca; sul cuore" (187).⁴⁹

He eventually moves to the earthly paradise of California, ironically in Hollywood, home of cinema, where he writes his memoirs. His autobiography seems to be the last attempt of an "inconsequential" man to give a value to his life. He portrays it as a battle, as "la mia vita irrequieta ed insoddisfatta sempre, nelle cui battaglie ho sempre prodigato tutto me stesso" (50).⁵⁰ And all he is left with are volumes of scrapbooks destined for the recycling bin: "lascio dunque riposare in pace i miei tre volumi di 'scrap book' nei quali e' tutto il mio patrimonio artistico e patriottico che, un giorno non lontano, sara' confinato in qualche cantina o venduto a qualche rigattiere per carta straccia. 'Requiescat in pace'" (55).⁵¹

⁴⁷ "I never thought of having a career - career is for the soldiers and the clerks not the artists."

⁴⁸ "For pure patriotism, that patriotism that is a duty for each gentleman, like adoring the woman who gave us the light through her womb."

⁴⁹ "I obeyed maintaining the black shirt under the white one, on my heart."

⁵⁰ "My disordered and always unsatisfied life, in whose battles I gave all myself."

⁵¹ "Here I leave resting in peace my three volumes of scrap books in which all my artistic and patriotic patrimony is enclosed that, in a day not far, will be confined in an attic or sold to a ragpicker like recycling paper. Rest in peace."

CHAPTER 7: Self-Portraits of Immigrant Women

Rosa Cavalleri, Bruna Pieracci, Anna Yona, Giuseppina Liarda Macaluso, Leonilde Frieri Ruberto, Amalia Santacaterina, Elvezia Marcucci, Elisabeth Evans, Maria Bottiglieri

In this chapter I am gathering women's voices, so rare to find. These written self-portraits are therefore a challenge to the silent position women usually occupy, in the background of a society. A few of them belong to the older type of migration, such as Rosa Cavalleri and Bruna Pieracci, both peasant working immigrants. Anna Yona and Amalia Santacaterina are two political immigrants, a Jew and a Socialist wife, who migrate during Fascism. The rest, Giuseppina Liarda Macaluso, Leonilde Frieri Ruberto, Elvezia Marcucci, Elisabeth Evans, and Maria Bottiglieri belong to the wave of emigration after the second World War. Elisabeth and Maria married American soldiers. Even if belonging to different times and recounting different stories, these immigrant women touch similar themes. They provide an even more intricate version of immigrant concepts such as *quiet individualism* (generally women's individualism is a recent concept), the *ethos of work* (having a job is an American gift that bestows upon women a never felt independence), and the *ethos of survival* (women are twice crushed under History and under family).

If the concept of individualism is somehow softened in our Italian immigrant autobiographies as a version of *quiet individualism*, the situation is even more

problematic for Italian immigrant women. As Judy Long underscores, "women are surrounded by third-person definitions of who they are, cultural prescriptions that are transmitted in oral tradition and private writing as well as written and published work" (8). It is impossible to negate the strength of character these women demonstrated in leaving Italy and adjusting to America, but it is also clear that they seldom, really seldom, left a written trace of their courage.¹ As Mary Frances Pipino writes, women's individualism is not a natural condition because they are "naturally" subordinate:

The conflict between family and independence was particularly pronounced for Italian women [. . .] In Italian culture, to be a woman alone was to be a person without an identity or place in the world [. . .] The paradox of American individualism for Italian immigrant women and their female descendants, then, is that the opportunity of a new life in America applied only to men. The constancy of women's traditional roles and identities within the family were taken for granted, despite the 'New World' emphasis on freedom and individual achievement. (3-4)²

Drawing on Susan Friedman's arguments on the denial of the "illusion of individualism" to certain subjects (blacks and women especially), Pipino speaks of "women's autobiography" as being "oxymoronic," and she maintains that "a recognition of the communal nature of women's autobiographies is essential to critical and theoretical approaches to them" (23). We will see in fact that many of our women writers define themselves as background for other people's stories, as mothers and sisters or daughters with a limited scope of action. One of them, Anna Yona, starts writing as a way of

¹ Helen Barolini observed the same reality when she set forth to "break the silence" and collected stories for her *Dream Book*: she spoke of absent Italian women writers, silenced because three-times subjugated by America, Italian culture and sex.

² In reality, even if their role does not evolve too much, a sensible change is felt, as we will see.

completing of her husband's task. The realm of relationships, of family and friendships, is their main object of description.

The prototype of the woman's autobiographical novel in Italy is Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna* (1906). Some of our women authors reflect the tonality of her work, especially in the search for autonomy and independence. Aleramo's book is considered to be one of the first feminist Italian books with its deep cry for liberty of a young woman, a fervidly vivacious spirit tied down by social conventions and because of the lack of comprehension. It is the desire of her spirit not to succumb, while her body remains controlled by the men in her life (like Rosa, Elisabeth and Elvezia): her demise comes from her violation as a young girl. The example of the mother, alienated, silent and even suicidal, is the ghost of what she might become, but the attraction for a freer life prevails and she takes her unnamed protagonist to the extreme point of sacrificing even her son for her freedom. She decides to be a woman, rather than a mother; a happy woman, rather than a tired, negative, hateful mother ("perche' nella maternita' adoriamo il sacrificio? [. . .] di madre in figlia, da secoli, si tramanda il servaggio. E' una mostruosa catena" 193).³ In a less tragic but similar way, some of our writers - Amalia, Elvezia, Elisabeth, even Maria and Leonilde - start writing when their children are detached from them, when it is time for them to start a new life as autonomous women. As Sibilla writes, "la buona madre non deve'essere, come la mia, una semplice creatura di sacrificio: deve essere una *donna*, una persona amata" (114).⁴ This cry for autonomy and individuality is best heard

³ "Why do we love sacrifice in maternity? [. . .] From mother to daughter we transmit this serfdom."

⁴ "The good mother does not have to be, like mine, a creature of sacrifice: it has to be a *woman*, a loved person."

in these women's autobiographies that, as Aleramo stresses, are primarily written for the authors themselves: "Io non domando fama, domando ascolto" (219).⁵

The story of **Rosa Cavalleri** is the story of a life in continuous balance between individualism and communalism, that for Pipino is "a tension that is common to many works by Italian-American writers character": "though ... Rosa's narrative emphasizes the importance of community for her, her narrative is frequently characterized also by frequent assertions of her difference and special skills. These apparent contradictions may be read as a tension between Rosa's Italian and American identities" (22). Rosa Cavalleri's *Rosa. The Life of an Italian immigrant* (edited by Marie Hall Ets) is the as-told-to life-story of Rosa, a heavy cleaning lady of Chicago, a storyteller by vocation. Being primarily an oral history, this work hardly fits my research, but given also the scarcity of sources on immigrant women and since the work has indeed been considered an autobiography in several critical essays, I have decided to include it. We cannot, nevertheless, forget the external intervention of the "secondary narrator," Marie Ets. Fred Gardaphe', for example, assigns to her the unifying, heroic aspect of her autobiography: it is for the external intervention of Ets that Rosa's poetic account is made into a heroic one, of an individual life. Rosa was an oral storyteller, she told folk stories and not her life stories, until Ets asked her to do it. Thus, Rosa is an example of a "forced" hero.

Born in 1866 or 1867 in Lombardy, Rosa Cassettari (whose real name was Ines and whose last name is changed to Cavalleri in the narration) is raised by her foster mother Mamma Lena in Bugiarno (the real town of Cuggiono, according to Ernesto

⁵ "I do not ask to be famous, but to be listened."

Milani).⁶ Her life story is truly fascinating. Rosa is adopted by Mamma Lena after her real mother Diodata tries to take her back. (Even though Rosa claims that her real mother was a famous actress, Milani proves she was a "wretched and penniless needlewoman" who worked for the theater in Milan). Rosa is educated by strict nuns in the repressive environment of a religious school; she works in silk factories and in the *osteria* of Mamma Lena. When she is only fourteen she is forced to marry an older abusive man (truly forced: beaten and left without food until she capitulates). She arrives in the United States in 1887.⁷ It is deserving to use Rosa's words to describe her arrival to America, because she has the capability of giving the psychological atmosphere on the boat. When they see land, "everyone stood silent - like in prayer," then the liberating laughter arrives: "the other laughed - loud, not regular laughs. [. . .] When we came through that narrow place and into the real harbor everyone was holding their breath" (165). Rosa is unhappy when she sees her hated husband, and follows him to the mine region of Missouri, where she works as a cook for twelve men. Their relationship falls apart when she refuses to run a brothel for him. His brutal violence makes her fear for her and her children's safety, and she escapes. She divorces him and marries the sweet Gionin, a good Tuscan man who also worked in mines. She works as a cleaning woman in the Chicago Commons and there she dies in 1943. Her story spans from her birth to almost her death.

Pipino questions Rudolph Vecoli's assertion that Rosa is less of a success story and thus not a typical immigrant autobiography. Vecoli writes, "it bears more

⁶ On the real identity of Rosa (Ines Ignazia), the most complete research is authored by Ernesto Milani, an historian of Cuggiono who edited the Italian translation of *Rosa* and presented his research at the AIHA Conference of Boca Raton (November 6-8, 2003) with the title "The publication of the Translation of Rosa, the Life of an Italian immigrant."

⁷ 1887 according to Milani, while Ets writes 1884.

resemblance to the fictional accounts of immigrant life than to immigrant autobiographies" (vi). For Pipino, instead:

Rosa's story redefines the notion of a 'success' story, I think, as Vecoli seems to be using it and as it is commonly used. Too, I would argue that this redefinition is tied to the notion of 'making America,' the peasant expression that refers literally to the idea of achieving social and economic success in the New World (that is, the conventional notion of the 'success story' as applied to immigrant fiction). Rosa's sense of 'success' is based, not on financial success or social status, but on the dual notions of achieving autonomy ('I'm my own boss now', [253]) and of establishing herself within a new community. (35)

I agree with Pipino, and I will show in fact the ties that connect Rosa's to other immigrants' autobiographies. In Rosa, as in many others of these humble women, we find the immigrant philosophy of *survival*. Rosa starts her life with a miracle of survival: she is the last baby to be placed on the "torno" of Milan, where abandoned babies were put to preserve the mother's anonymity. Many children were hurt in the process, which convinced the government of Milan to prohibit such a practice soon after Rosa was left in there and survived uninjured. Her entire life is a struggle to outsmart her destiny. The straitjackets of 19th century Italian society that punishes womanhood, sexuality and individuality, also restrain her strong personality, but she resists as best she can. She resists, no matter what situation she is in. She resists her real mother's attempts to refine her and fashion her hair in the city style, in the same way as she resisted Mamma Lena's attempts to humble her by braiding her hair in the peasant way. She resists her wedding with all her might ("it was not the beating or the starving that made me stop saying no. It was the fear of God," 152), and when she sees that it is impossible she sticks to her conviction and does not pronounce her "yes" in front of the deaf priest.

As in male immigrants' autobiography, the struggle for life is a continuous starting over. In Rosa's case this starting over not only takes the aspect of changing a thousand jobs, but it is mainly a psychological renewal that she finds by recharging her inner life in prayer: "I know what I'm going to do to get happy again!" (208). Rosa's tale of womanhood and immigration are both a continuous zigzagging away through the obstacles of life. But Rosa has a powerful ally, a woman ally: the Madonna, and the many miraculous survivals she experiences are all motivated by her interventions. Rosa's faith is strong and never withers. Since she is a young girl, she is sure of the special protection from the Virgin Mary. She never parts from her little statue of Mary. When she is saved by a lightening bolt she exclaims, "the Madonna would take care of me always, just as She had today" (38). When her friend is helped in childbirth, she thanks the feminine wisdom of the Madonna: "The Madonna is wise. The Madonna knew all about such things" (179). The times she speaks about the help from the Madonna and her love and faith are innumerable: "The Madonna is the best friend I have!" (76); "The Madonna is the one to care for us poor women. She helps us all the time. In the old time there were more miracles than now, but I see lots of miracles - in Chicago too" (242).

Rosa's main theme in her memories is the struggle to overcome "fear." Fear is the normal condition for a woman of her kind, and she tells plenty of stories: it is fear of superstition ("what a pity the people of Bugiarro couldn't come to America and learn not to be afraid. They almost died when they saw the *fiammetta* in their fields," 176), fear of men's brutality, and fear of other women's obtuseness. Her only possibility is invisibility because, as Pipino writes, "assertion of difference [. . .] was to invite misfortune" (23). Rosa is raised with the law that "the woman is made to be the servant of the man" (81),

and is presented with many an example of chastised women who lose their inner light: her lively companion Beata becomes another person after two years of marriage; the nuns scold young Rosa for having big breasts (!); wives are beaten by their husbands; priests order wives to always obey their husband. Rosa's victory over fear is possible only in America. In Italy, she repeats "there was nothing I could do" (161) and knows that free will is a privilege of the rich: "the rich didn't have to be afraid like us poor" (164). In America, her liberation starts from the very trip on the ocean: "there was no one there to scold me and tell me what to do" (164). Rosa's individuation comes from her learning English fast and her courage in addressing Americans: "I wasn't afraid at all. In America the poor can talk to the anyone" (187). The final proof of her inner metamorphosis comes when Rosa goes back to Italy to reclaim her son Francesco: "I wasn't afraid now that I came from America. In America the poor people do get smart. We are not so stupid anymore" (191). She now is able to refuse to leave her son behind as she did with her first born: "Mamma Lena didn't say anything - she didn't even scold. Before I went to America I would have been afraid to say no" (191). Even her love life is measured by the protection that men can give her against fear: she shuns Remo her girlhood pursuer, because "Remo had been afraid" (195). She instead loves Gionin because "somehow I was not so afraid with Gionin beside me" (171), "Gionin was bigger, stronger, safer" (195).

If writing an autobiography is the last resort to fight the oppressed condition of the History-less immigrant men, as we have seen, for a woman writing gains a further meaning. Rosa not only tells her life, thus becoming a protagonist for once, but she also uses writing to *erase* her history of oppression. She uses her autobiography to *write out*

oppressive men. It is striking her repetition of "I can't stand it to tell about that marriage and about Santino! I have to leave them out of my story, that's all. I can't tell about them!" (155); "the things he did to me are too bad to tell! I leave him out, that's all!" (174); "that man, I have to leave him out of my story, that's all" (205). Interestingly, all these exclamations designate her as the subject erasing him. She is not "unable" to tell the story but she is the maker of the decision: "I will leave him out."

Two women write their life stories as "handmaid" for the life stories of the men of their families. Bruna Pieracci writes it for her father, and Anna Yona for her husband. I include **Bruna Pieracci's** written testimony, following Maria Parrino, who includes it in her dissertation about autobiographies of Italian American women. The author is the daughter of a miner from Frassinoro (Modena) who never forgets her identity as a *daughter* and sacrifices her own presentation to tell her father's life. She does not give her birth date and hints to herself in the story of her father's immigration as "there was a baby daughter" (34), and "it was two years before he could send for his wife and daughter" (35).

In her fifteen pages of down-to-earth language she offers a thick description of the life of a coal mine camp. It is significant and ironic that the daughter of a miner who lived underground, often stresses the importance of earth. She starts by underlining the peasant roots that ran deep in the earth Italy: "Originally, our family (paternal name of Pieracci, maternal name Piacentini) had their roots deep in the soil of a tiny Italian village, high in the northern Appenines. [. . .] The surrounding land was poor and rocky. Its people were peasants who managed to scratch only a part of their living from the unyielding soil" (33). And she finishes by telling the anecdote of her mother's burial, with

a fist of Italian soil in her hand: "she was laid to rest beside her husband and in her hand we placed a packet of soil from her native village" (47). Bruna's narration hints to the strength of the Italian roots, which does not correspond to the same rooting in America. The classical word used to describe migration, "up-rooting," is not accompanied by a re-rooting in American soil. While Italy constitutes earth -- from the village that grips the mountain top, to the peasants who *scratch out* a living, and even to the name of the village ("Frassinoro, meaning golden ash tree" 33) -- America constitutes a lack of roots. The miner's village of Des Moines, Iowa, is made of light and wobbly wood. Bruna explains her alienation in physical terms: "these immigrants had never seen wooden houses before, and they appeared flimsy indeed in comparison to the ancestral homes of stone with walls twenty inches thick. What was even more strange was the absence of trees and shrubbery for this mining camp had been built in the middle of what had been an Iowa cornfield" (35). Her landscape description comes from inside, and the distance from home is given not only in miles but in feelings: "it was so far from Italy and all so strange and different. There was a great nostalgia for the 'hills of home'"(35).

Bruna's story highlights the tragedy of her parents' life in Iowa: her father spent forty years in the mine "in which he saw little of either the seasons or his children" (35), her mother, a seamstress, goes crazy: "it was soon evident that emotionally she was troubled. Within a few years, the mind of the good wife and loving mother shut out reality until she was no longer able to function as a mother, she grieved constantly for her native land. Her nostalgia knew no reason. [. . .] She remained all her life a stranger in a strange land" (36). Bruna arrives in the camp when she is ten, but being the oldest child, she takes part in the life of the mine and runs the house, looking after her brothers and the

boarders, repairing their shoes, knitting their clothes. She studies, but she keeps describing herself as seen through her father's eyes: "he saw his children go to high school and graduate, some went to college and did not drop out" (45). The strength of destiny is strong in this piece of writing, which becomes another example of a man-in-history: Bruna twice repeats, "fate had decreed otherwise:" first when her father plans to return to re-migrate to Scotland ("prepared to leave again, planning to return to Scotland. *Fate, however, had decreed otherwise*" 34), and then when she hoped her father and her family could move from Iowa to a warmer climate, "but fate had decreed otherwise" (42).⁸

Almost forced to write, **Anna Yona** picks up the pen that her husband has left on the desk at the time of his death, after writing two-hundred and twenty-three pages of his life and covering only the first thirty years. Their *Memoires* are a manuscript in the Immigration History Research Center of Saint Paul, Minnesota, and they cover the period 1901-1971.⁹ She continues his task in a subordinate way, as is typical for the role of the supporting wife. Her role as a writer is ancillary, but we will soon discover that her wit is

⁸ Like Bruna, Adelia Rosasco-Soule is almost a second generation immigrant, brought from Genoa to wild Florida when she was only three years old, in the pioneer years of 1904. She is the first woman Poet Laureate in Florida and the author of an interesting book, *Panhandle Memoires*. She refers to herself as the "Italian born daughter." "I was Mamma's 'Italian child' and very close to her" (133). Her father owned a sawmill and always started his dinners with a Genoese soup, and her brave mother raised her children among snakes, alligators and hurricanes. "Never can I forget that May day aboard the Guiseppe (sic) Verdi when she bade goodbye to her aged father and mother in what she knew was an eternal farewell. Nor can I forget the greatness of her courage nor the tenderness of her compassion for those she was leaving behind because of her sacred marriage vows ad her children" (134). Adelia is young, but in America she is born again, and stops speaking for one month almost as if in "incubation:" her "world of sounds, people, rooms and furniture disappeared into the unknown void of total newness. The curtain rang down on memory, and that child began the silent struggle with her new world that was to last a full month" (2).

⁹ While the David's memoirs are type-written and then bound nicely, Anna's are typewritten and bound with plastic rings. Probably both have been typewritten by someone else (there are no mistakes, no corrections, and their English is perfect).

not secondary to her husband's even if her education is a lot less (she was home schooled and followed some courses at the University as a non-degree seeking student):

Your grandfather passed away with his memories still unfinished, he reached the year 1932 and was looking forward to describing the years from 1932 on as the most existing years of his life and my life. I do not think I will be able too relate those years with the same spirit, wisdom and knowledge he would have. However I feel that in my very humble style I would describe the life we had in Italy and subsequently in the USA. (1)

While her husband's writing centers entirely on Italian history, Anna concentrates on family history, and adds the smaller details of daily life. Like many Italian Jews, David and Anna were Jews less for religious convictions (David's parents married on a forbidden day, for example), and more for a vague sense of belonging. David explains how he was first of all Italian: his father was called Gioberti and his mother Itala. The Jewish identity of many Italian Jews was almost a Fascist discovery, as another woman, Carla Coen Pekelis, asserts: "Cosa significava essere una bambina ebrea in Italia al principio del secolo?' Che cosa significava? Proprio nulla, assolutamente nulla! Non c'era l'osservanza dei rituali, ne' la celebrazione delle festività nella casa dei miei genitori" (1).¹⁰ Anna Yona describes Italy under Fascism with the tone of a betrayed Italian woman, who believed in friendship and the help of others but is deceived: some friends do not want to have 'their name implicated with us. Little by little, we came to recognize who was our friend and who was not. [. . .] I was upset and sometimes angry for the

¹⁰ "What did it mean to be a Jewish girl in Italy at the beginning of the century?' What did it mean? Nothing, absolutely, nothing! There was no observance of rituals, nor celebration of festivities in the house of my parents." Carla marries a Russian exile, and in 1938 flees to France, Spain and Portugal. In 1941 Carla, with her husband and two children, moves to New York where she works as Italian Professor at Sarah Lawrence College.

sudden coolness of some of my closest friends” (4-5). Her husband ("Nonno") refuses to take the party's *tessera* and is cut out; some close Jewish friends turn to Fascism; there is a mock process for her father and brother, and the latter is confinement in isolation; the maids all turn informants; they are refused service at the Buitoni restaurant in Turin. Life becomes impossible: David loses his job, and she learns how to weave in order to gain a livelihood (she was taught to play piano...), she would take the wool out of mattresses, weave it and make coats to sell: “it gave us some financial return and a great moral satisfaction to earn something because of our work” (38). Her father "who was retired read Shakespeare all day long and was brooding about the situation in the world" (39). In 1938, with the creation of racial laws, "we lived from day to day fearing for the next one” (40): “the government took away our livelihood and the only thing was to emigrate” (34). Many went to Paris, but "nonno and I were not convinced that France was the right place to go" (34); they also eliminated all the countries which required a baptism in order to be accepted (Australia and Brasil). When they decide to leave for the United States, only David can get his passport ("it was one of the few times I saw David desperate. I wanted him to go immediately to the US, but he did not want to depart without me and the children," 41). Finally, they all are able to pay for passports in Zurich, and with the two small girls, Eva and Manuela, they prepare to depart. They pinned four large diamonds in the lapel of their coat which they will be given back after the war, and took what they thought would sell in America,

we packed many items useless for the American standard and we sold for next to nothing many valuable pieces. I remember a terrific coming and going in my parents home with decision to make of what and what not to take. The preparations are too painful to be described here. We wanted our

parents to come with us, but not knowing whether we would find work it was difficult for us to insist. We were fighting between the desire to have my parents with us and the inability to support them. On the other hand my parents did not want to come because of my brother and my heart was aching for the whole situation. (42-43)

On April 16 1939, they leave... barely escaping from an agent of the Ovra under cover who was trying to arrest them (again the *survival* theme). Even in the darkness of the moment, Anna remembers a funny moment, when her witty daughter Manuela says goodbye to her grandmother with "I hope I see you again," but to her great-grandmother she said, "not you, sei lili' (not you, you're about to die)" (47).

The departure was unreal, moving and unbelievable. We were not realizing they it was definite our roots were too deep and we were not ready for uprooting. Manuela leaned out of the boat and her little hat fell in the water, she started screaming 'beeto, beeto' and his was her farewell to her grandparents (43).

The impression of America is dreamy and harsh: the ship stops in Boston "I remember the thing that struck me most was the quantity of red hats the women were wearing at that time. Practically it seemed to me all had the same little red hat" (44), then in New York: "the view of the statue of liberty was a very deep shock to both of us. It is trite to say, but the view of the statue of liberty made me cry, but soon the harbor, the customs official, the noise and unfriendliness of people at the pier made me think and ask myself, 'why am I here?' (44). In New York, in fact, the atmosphere is still one of fear. When her daughter risks a fall from the 16th floor, a Polish friend comments: "'what's the difference, falling now or being thrown down by the Nazis in three months?' He was not joking. This was the atmosphere in July 1940 in Central Park" (50). David searches for a

job "frantically"; they sell their embroidered lingerie and furniture to Americans; she works making scarves and gloves for Countess Mara boutique, but is fired for making a scarf for her friend. Nevertheless, Anna knows they are privileged: "We were all there without jobs and without money, with a continuous worry for our dear ones in Italy but we were alive" (50). David finds a job for which he is overqualified as a metal sorter in Newark, while she works for Bonwit Teller at home with two children. When Italy declares war on the United States, she becomes an "enemy alien" and was fingerprinted: "I felt like a criminal". They also suffer the double prejudice of being Jews and Italians, and could not find a place to rent: "I was Jewish and Italian and I was proud of both" (69).

America changes Anna the woman. She starts liking her life there. It seems that through the hardship of her departure and through immigration, she is able to find a new dimension as a woman. While in Italy, she learned music and ordered her servants; now she becomes alive as an intellectual woman, and a working woman who helps the economy of the house: "Our life really started to be really full of excitement and fulfillment. Our thought for Italy and our dear ones were always with us, but we were able to do meaning about it (sic)" (75). She gives the details of her life as it changed in America with different customs:

we learned that one never airs the bedsheets outside the windows [. . .] and one throws everything which is not of immediate use. I was accustomed in Italy to gather old newspapers and containers in the cellar while here nothing we saved at least at that time in 1943. I learned to shop once or twice a week, while in Italy I shopped twice a day [. . .] to call by the first name people I barely knew, while in Italy I used to call people Mr. and Mrs. although I knew them for years and years. [. . .] to choose

my friends according to my opinions and ideas, and not according to what was good to have as friends. (70)

David finds a job in Cambridge (Boston) and their minds are in full activity. They belong to an anti-fascist group of intellectuals who would meet regularly, interpreting Dante's *Paradise* at night, learning how to be "alert and not to tell yourself go and have an attitude of *laisser-faire* as far as the civil rights and civil liberties are concerned" (68). They write articles in the review *Controcorrente*; she starts working at the radio learning how to type ("I was not discouraged. After all one can learn many things in life," 67), and she is also responsible for the Italian hour. She spends hours discussing philosophy and politics in those heated days: "can you imagine this activity today? I cannot. Certainly thinking back of those days I feel that we were naïve because we believed in many words that today are meaningless. We believed in honesty, peace, in duty [. . .] now all these words are without meaning, trite, and dead" (75). These seem to be most exciting years of her life, because when the war ends, her narration also stops, and she just hints at her trip back home in 1947. She has told what she deemed important. The big change of her life. At the end, she leaves a testament, a declaration of integrity for her American grandchildren, and justifies her life:

one thing I feel you should know, in all the turmoil of our emigration, of the search for work, of the anxiety and worry for our dear ones in Italy, and very scarce communication with them, of the lack of knowledge of the English language, of the pressure of the different groups to attracts us to their side, I had always the great advantage to have David near me, morally supporting the hard period of life we were going through. We did not have any slogans, however we felt that any abrogation to our principles would defeat our previous standing. Therefore we always refused any recommendation in the Italian meaning and any association with groups whose tactics were based in nepotism open or hidden or

compromised on issues we felt we should not compromise. [. . .] This also was different from today's philosophy: I was never in debt. (62-63)

Anna and Rosa both share the ethos of *work* typical of the immigrant. It even becomes more important in the case of women because, even if they were always used to working inside the house, by coming to America they work outside to become independent. This is the first time they are given such a chance. Anna never thought she was going to sustain her family through her work (she was supposed to play the piano for the family!). Rosa, through her jobs, finds her liberty. The same occurs for **Giuseppina Liarda Macaluso**, a Sicilian woman who dreams of a job as soon as she arrives in America, and holds on to it with all her strength: "When I arrived in Brooklyn, and I saw people coming and going from the local clothing factories, I felt a great desire and a strong hope that I too would be lucky enough to have, one day, a job as they did" (240). Speaking to her son at ninety-three years old, Giuseppina Macaluso resembles Rosa Cavalleri's unorthodox autobiography. Her destiny was pre-fixed since her birth; she was supposed to marry and live to serve a man: "My name is Giuseppina Liarda Macaluso. I am Sicilian. I was born in Polizzi Generosa, on the Madonie Mountains near Palermo, on April 11, 1906, in a small pretty house facing Piazza San Francesco. Growing up, I remember my mother always weaving. She was preparing the dowries for the future marriages of her three daughters" (1). Her marriage is not a happy story in fact, especially because of the unloving family of her husband: "chi brutta vita! Oh, chi brutta vita! What an awful life!" (sic, 123). It is in America, through her job, that she discovers her independence, starting her life anew at fifty-two years old: "I was fifty-two years old. I just had a great desire to get a job" (268). She thus becomes a factory seamstress, and this

is the happiness of her life: "I never missed a day. That job was the greatest gift to me. It was my way of being independent, and thank God, I have been no burden to my children, or their families until this very day" (68). She holds on to her job for twelve years, loving the company of American women, and resisting the envy of her *paesane* who want to have her fired. They would ascribe to her the work badly done, but she resists, because like Rosa, she is not afraid: "It was a deliberate evil act. Someone was doing poor quality work, attach my number 107 label, trying to discredit me, and have me fired. But I had no fear" (269).

For Giuseppina, immigration is a late experience, the conclusion of a hard Sicilian life that starts, according to her, when Fascism ends ("With him we all felt safe. [. . .] It was paradise with Mussolini. [. . .] But they killed him. Maybe because he wanted to rule by himself, all alone. [. . .] I don't know. As for me, Mussolini helped my family and me" [157]). In 1958 she joins her two sons who married Sicilian-American women, and her husband who left in 1956. She flies to the United States, one of the few of our autobiographers:

I don't remember much about my trip to America, the first and only one I have ever taken by plane. [. . .] I remember a funny incident that happened on that trip. Coming from a small town, and being simple people, we knew little about restaurants. As we sat, for the first time, around a table for breakfast - compliments of TWA to compensate us for the late departure - I ordered three eggs for the family, I didn't want to take advantage of the Airline. When the waiter came back, he placed three eggs in each of our plates. I showed my surprise and embarrassment (241).

Abundance is therefore the first gift of America, for she who had saved a piece of *panettone* from the airplane nicely wrapped in her luggage, but lost it once in the States

because perhaps "somebody probably thought it was a piece of stale bread" (243). The *ethos of survival* is present in Giuseppina's autobiography. Her life is a harsh one ("people think that life is easy, and the world is flat" 164): she fights with all her might and depends on heavenly forces for help: "I believe in miracles. Oh, yes! I believe in them, and I believe in God. Oh, yes! I know the power of God! I have experienced it several times in my life, and I have no doubts" (163). She tells one of these miracles that occurred in one of the poorest years of her life, when her husband was ill and there was nothing to eat for her children. She sowed a little seed and she got a miraculous harvest of wheat from that poor soil of clay and stones: "the Lord had given us an overly abundant harvest. That clayed soil, rejected by all, had produced threefold. The finger of God had been there all along" (167). It is always Heaven, that in this case is superimposed on America, that helps her out in another situation, when her husband is finally able to buy back his house with American dollars: "We bought the share which had unjustly been taken away from him, and your father became the sole owner of the property. Talk about destiny. *It was written in heaven*" (223, italic in text). A supernatural help is always close to these immigrants who have the clear conscience that they could have never succeeded without it. Immigrant women only give it the name of God more easily: "I had taken my whole family over 17 years to get together again, and by the will of God, here in America, and in the same neighborhood" (275). The ethos of the immigrant appears in its integrity, without great splendor, but with sufficient honor, as Giuseppina concludes after her 40 years in America, joining her own success to the success of her husband:

it took us a long time to get accustomed to a new way of life, but we did it, often economizing, *always proud of our honest work*, with self-esteem and

love for our family. With great determination, we rebuilt a new life in this country in spite of our age, language barrier and cultural differences. We *both* made little money. (277, italics mine)

Another seamstress is **Leonilde Frieri Ruberto**, the 70-years-old author of *Such is Life*. Leonilde's portrait is that of a good girl ("I remember that I was always good," 6) and a good mother, who reluctantly follows her husband to the United States in 1954, at forty-one. She is an undereducated, poor girl born in 1913 in the village of Cairano (Avellino). Her life is hard from the beginning: when she is young she works in the fields and looks after the babies: "I never complained about my situation. There were never toys or dolls to play with" (5). Work is her destiny since childhood, washing the laundry of rich families, toiling in the fields, preparing her trousseau in a hurry because her mother was sick, and learning to embroider by machine in the midst of the envy of her friends who would not teach her. She marries a man she barely knows through an arranged marriage, and becomes the servant of her new family: "I had to serve my in-laws because we lived with them. This is how it was done, the last son stayed with his parents, but I didn't like it" (24).

Immigration triggers women's individuality in another way when they are left behind: it makes them independent at home while their husbands are away ("now I was alone, and I had to do everything like when there had been the war," 49). When Leonilde's husband goes to war, is taken prisoner, and leaves for both South and then North America, she raises her four children by herself for almost ten years, counting on women's solidarity: "we women were left alone, but we continued to always be together. We went to work in the fields together, one day on each piece" (38). When her husband

calls her to the United States, Leonilde cannot refuse (as she had done when he had called her to Venezuela): "I wasn't too happy because I had to leave my family, especially my father and mother-in-law, who were old. [. . .] I had to do it, because in Italy with four children I couldn't give them a future" (52). Leonilde's years in Pittsburgh are not a triumph, but she does not complain: "People say that it's easy to pass from bad to good, but you don't get used to going from good to bad. Having come from the bad, we were much better off. But I thought often of my family that had remained in Italy" (55). She continues her life of work:

I continued to do everything my mother had taught me, cook, make bread, make pasta by hand, and sew some things for myself. I have never bought myself a dress, I make them for myself, I crocheted, I knitted, worked in the yard, cut the grass, grew flowers, and had a vegetable garden (61).

Leonilde is psychologically a child of resignation, as the last words of her piece show: "such is life" (*questa e' la vita!*). They could become the motto of these Italian women (Amalia Santacaterina ends her story with the same words) who resist the blows of life, and only react with an accepting sigh. Leonilde resigns to do all the work, she resigns to leave ("I wanted to leave for my children," 67), and she resigns herself to a destiny that leaves her alone: "I began to cry, my family was all gone, I no longer had anyone. [. . .] Within ten years my family had died. I no longer had the will to do anything. I always thought of them, and I would say that soon I would have to go. But, very slowly, I resigned myself to the situation" (62). Sadness and inevitability fill her memories, "all true" (68). Her autobiography is a sure example of *quiet individualism*: Leonilde is always subordinate to her family, she never praises her initiative and hard

work, she accepts what life offers her, and avoids any rhetoric of victory. Leonilde Ruberto becomes American because she is forced to by the death of all her Italian family. Even her village is emptied of her friends who all migrated overseas or to Turin.

Rosa, Anna, Giuseppina, and Bruna also are American without much regret for Italy. But some other women live the fracture of immigration in their severed identity. One of them is **Amalia Santacaterina** who writes a beautiful autobiography, full of poetry, *Il calicanto non cresce a Chicago* ("the calicantus does not grow in Chicago"). The arbor of calicantus, a sweet smelling tree that blooms in the heart of winter in the Venetian region, is the metaphor of Amalia's *ethos*: "In tutti i viaggi che ho fatto tra l'Italia e l'America, ho sempre tentato di portare a Chicago un rametto di calicanto, ma non sono mai riuscita a farlo crescere" (22).¹¹ It is the metaphor of her life that is split between Italy, that she cannot give up, and America, where her children live. It is the metaphor of her pain: "forse, io sono come il calicanto che non cresce a Chicago" (22).¹² It is also the *madeleine* that causes her autobiography to flow: "ho in mano un rametto di calicanto che emana un soave profumo, e ridesta in me un bel ricordo della mia gioventu'" (21).¹³ In Helen Barolini's *Umbertina* we find the same powerful image: the immigrant woman brings her branch of rosemary to America, to re-root it in her yard and thus start a new life with old roots, while turning an anonymous turf into home. It is in the garden that women's identity is shaped. The same metaphor is used as a self-description by another immigrant woman, Lucia Bedarida, an Italian-Jewish doctor, who

¹¹ "In all my trips between Italy and America, I always tried to bring to Chicago a branch of calicantus, but I have never been able to make it grow."

¹² "Perhaps I am like the calicantus that does not grow in Chicago."

¹³ "I have a branch of calicantus in my hand that smells sweet and awakens in me the beautiful memory of my youth."

follows her daughters to New York when she is eighty: "non posso dire di essermi integrata nell'ambiente. Gli alberi, se trapiantati da vecchi, attecchiscono con difficoltà" (12).¹⁴

Amalia was born in the village of Chiuppano (Vicenza) in 1905, and is raised in Venice by an aunt because her mother dies when she is three. She immediately feels the pain of the uprooting: "ero come un uccellino strappato dal nido e portato vicino ad una pozza d'acqua, sempre in pericolo d'annegare" (29).¹⁵ She spends all her summers helping her father in the "trattoria al Cappello," and emigration's lugubrious face comes knocking early at her door, when her sister Delfina decides to leave for America, in a "sad day" of November, "lasciandoci tutti in una grande disperazione, come se avessimo seguito un bara" (63).¹⁶ She marries Vincenzo Santacaterina who was born in Brasil during the first migratory waves of the 1870s. They move to Turin where Vincenzo works at FIAT, but Fascism grows strong and clashes with their socialist views. Immigration to the United States is thus caused by political reasons, not economical ones for Amalia and Vincenzo.

¹⁴ "I cannot say I am integrated in this environment. The trees, if transplanted old, grow with difficulty." Lucia is a strong, exceptional woman. Born in Ancona in 1900, she studies in Rome where she graduates in Medicine and marries a surgeon, Prof. Bedarida. They move to Turin and then to Vasto before emigrating to Tangeri in 1938, the infamous year: "qui comincia la vera dolorosa emigrazione, forzata dalle inique leggi razziali. Non abbiamo vissuto l'olocausto, ma all'improvviso ci siamo sentiti privati di tutto e di tutti, per il momento e per il futuro; ed abbiamo cercato di vivere noi e le nostre 3 figliuole desiderando preparare loro un futuro migliore." In Tangeri: "dal niente e con niente abbiamo rifatto la nostra vita con il nostro lavoro". Her daughters leave Tangeri and go to New York after the war, and when her husband dies in 1965, she remains "sola, ma circondata da uno stuolo di amici e pazienti che mi facevano sentire protetta, appoggiata, ed amata." An accident causes her a broken skull and days in a coma, so that her daughters call her to the United States: "Ed io, da brava bambina, a 80 anni, ho ubbidito e qui sono". She writes a skimpy *Curriculum Vitae* that she donated to the Archive of Pieve Santo Stefano: "Quando ho traslocato dal Marocco in USA insieme ai pezzi di più valore del mio mobilio, dei miei tappeti vecchi e consunti, della mia argenteria superstite, ho unito il mio curriculum. Qui non trovavo materialmente posto e lo pensavo destinato o alla bruciatura o alla distruzione da parte dei posteri". She appeared in Italian newspapers in various occasions, one being her flight on a hang glider at 97 years of age. In a letter written at 102, and addressed to me she wrote: "Lo so già quello che farò, se sono viva, per il mio 1003 compleanno [sic!]. Sarò a Chamors in Valdaosta all'Hotel Edelweis, respirerò dell'aria pura che mi aiuterà a difendermi dall'aria polluta ed infetta di qui, durante il prossimo inverno."

¹⁵ "I was like a little bird taken from its nest and brought by a pool of water, always in danger of drowning."

In fact, "l'idea di emigrare ci avvilita" ("the idea of migrating depressed us") says Amalia (81). The departure is shrouded in a cloud thanks to her mother-in-law who says: "vai, che Dio ti benedica e ti assista. Ma ricordati che i Santacaterina non hanno mai avuto fortuna" (83).¹⁷

The arrival to New York in 1928 is typical: "Il mattino seguente la nave passa sotto la statua della Liberta'; mio marito alza piu' che puo' il piccolo esclamando: 'Guarda, figlio mio, da qui non ci caccera' piu' nessuno.' Siamo tutti commossi" (85).¹⁸ They ride the train to Chicago and see the squalor of several parts of America. In Roseland, a suburb where many workers from Chiuppano had already settled, they immediately recognize the brick houses built by Italian immigrants ("i veneti, con qualche aiuto, si sono quasi tutti fabbricati la casa, spesso villette costruite con le proprie mani" 95).¹⁹ The house remains a symbol for the immigrant, as Amalia says: "una costruzione forte e bella, che quando ci si passa vicino fa venire le lagrime agli occhi, perche' li' ci sono tutti i suoi sudori" (128).²⁰ In these houses life goes on as in the mountains of Veneto: "come in tutte le famiglie venete si vende il vino e la grappa fatta in casa. Nello scantinato c'e' molto alcool pronto per essere venduto e l'alambicco per distillare" (89).²¹ The time is that of the Depression, Vincenzo works in a factory, as does Amalia, but she cannot resist the stench of the closed place. The *paesani* shun the area where black people settle, and barely tolerate the proximity with Calabrese that she judges with *campanilismo*:

¹⁶ "We were left in desperation as if we had followed a funeral."

¹⁷ "Go, and God bless you. But remember that the Santacaterinas never had luck."

¹⁸ "The following morning the statue passes in front of the State of Liberty' my husband rises the little one and says: look, my son, from here nobody will send us away."

¹⁹ "The Venetians, with some help, all built their houses, often little villas built with their own hands."

²⁰ "A strong and beautiful construction, that often makes tears come to my eyes when I pass by it, because there there is our our sweat."

"dobbiamo adattarci alle usanze dei calabresi, gente che magari si abbassa ad andare a raccogliere il carbone con le secchie [. . .] sono orgogliosi di avere tra essi della gente del nord Italia che li rispetta" (93).²² The group of *paesani*, "i nostri veneti" (98) as she calls them with a bonding spirit, struggle together:

come in tutte le disavventure, alla lunga subentra la rassegnazione; il cibo non manca, nemmeno il vino che il governo permette agli italiani di farsi e la grappa che si distilla clandestinamente. . . Ognuno ha un suo bel pezzo di orto dove semina le verdure. [. . .] Sono frequenti le cene a base di polenta ed uccelli, fagiani, lepri, funghi, si fa a gara a chi ne trova di piu' (97).²³

Amalia is involved with a radio station because she is one of the few who speaks good Italian and not a regional dialect. During the war, she meets with other women to make packages for the boys in battle. She has become a "rich American" who helps the reconstruction of Italy by sending packages, raising money through her radio program, and helping a poor family to migrate. She also learns to be active and independent, and at fifty-six, she opens her business: a gnocchi factory, Belgodere Food. It is her idea: "C'era il grosso problema di convincere mio marito a permettermi di andare a Milano a comperare una macchina per fare i gnocchi. [. . .] cosi' decisi di partire con i miei ingredienti e con lo scarso consenso di mio marito" (167).²⁴ Gnocchi, ravioli and *tortellini* are a huge success, and her children work for her. But she falls sick with a

²¹ "As in all Venetian families they sold wine and hand-made *grappa*. In the basement there is a lot of alcohol to be sold and the distilling instruments."

²² "We have to adapt to the uses of the people from Calabria, people that even lower themselves as to go to pick up coal with the buckets [. . .] they are proud to be among Northern people that respect them."

²³ "As in all misadventures, after a while resignation creeps in, the food is not missing, not even the wine that the government lets Italians produce and the grappa distilled outlaw. [. . .] Everyone has its own little piece of garden for the vegetables. [. . .] there are often dinners based on polenta and birds, wild hens, rabbits, mushrooms, and we compete for who finds more of them."

mysterious illness, and after fifty-one years of marriage she loses Vincenzo. Her family is also gone, and, like Leonilde, she remains the last one, "a questo punto di 7 fratelli rimango solo io!" (207).²⁵ At eighty-five, her life remains divided between the trips to Italy, Chicago, and the many *paesanos* in the United States (a real net); and her last words are "questa e' la vita!" (214).

Another woman who, like Amalia, learns to recognize her independence in America is **Elvezia Marcucci**, a rocky and an exceptional woman. She writes *Le memorie di una novantenne smemorata (che sarei io)* ("The memories of a forgetful ninety-year-old woman (that's me)"), an unpublished autobiography written in a neat and trembling handwriting when she is ninety-one years old (2001): "I wrote to remember and remembering is good for you" she told the newspaper.²⁶ She was born in 1910 in Grosseto, Tuscany, in "quel tempo quando gli uomini erano al comando nelle situazioni famigliari, non certo come adesso nel duemila" (5).²⁷ She loses her father, her protection, at sixteen: "se penso a tante cose che mi successero; con lui vicino le avrei evitate... forse... chissà'?" (12).²⁸ Men are the first reasons for her suffering, starting with the violent Silio whom she is forced to marry at seventeen. He tries to kill himself when she refuses him, and then rapes her: "con lui sentii, come se tutto quello che mi circondava, entrasse dentro di me, lacerandomi. Subito dopo, lo vidi alzarsi, andare verso la porta e gridarmi: 'Ora mi sposerai!' Nella mia ignoranza del sesso, istintivamente pensai che mi

²⁴ "There was the big problem of convincing my husband to let me go to Milan to buy the gnocchi machine. [. . .] So I decided to leave with my ingredients and with the scarce consensus from my husband."

²⁵ "of seven brothers, now I am the only one left!"

²⁶ She was interviewed by *La Repubblica* in September 2002.

²⁷ "At that time men were at the head of family situations, not like today in 2000."

²⁸ "If I think to all the things that happened to me; with him close by I would have avoided them, perhaps... who knows?"

avesse messo incinta, allora si che dovevo sposarlo!" (54).²⁹ All her pain is poured in the song she plays at the piano when her mother comes home: "Nel cor piu' non mi sento," of which she remembers the significant title but not the composer. She gives up her dreams of becoming a pianist, and submits to her husband: "cercavo di essere una brava moglie invece di una brava pianista" ("I tried to be a good wife, instead than a good pianist" [62]). In her marriage, resignation is her lot: "era come se stessi sopra ad una altalena, andando in su e giu' sempre con la paura di cadere e farmi del male, pero' dovevo rassegnarmi ora che avevo una figlia con lui" (79).³⁰

Silio is a mean Fascist and goes out with a stick every evening. Elvezia, who had known the ugly face of Fascism when her family bar is burned down by the *squadracce* in 1922, hates him: "dentro di me lo detestavo, conoscendo la sua innata violenza" (76).³¹ "Non c'erano vie di scampo per me" (There was no escape for me) - she says when he hits her. One day he hits her with his stick and sends her to the hospital with smashed kidneys. He then leaves as a volunteer for the war and dies soon after, in 1944, burnt in his car, at age thirty-four: "in mezzo al fuoco ti ci divertivi. Scherzavi con la morte, ma quel giorno Lei non scherzo' con te!" (100) comments Elvezia.³² Only the impression of all those painful memories remains today for the old Elvezia who is immersed in her memories: "Anche i grandi dolori il tempo li corrode e li trasforma in dolorosi ricordi in

²⁹ "With him I felt as if everything that surrounded me entered inside me, lacerating me. Then I saw him getting up, going toward the door and screaming: 'Now you'll have to marry me!' In my ignorance of sex, I immediately thought I was pregnant, then I should have married him!"

³⁰ "It was as if I was swinging on a swing, up and down, always fearing to fall and be hurt, but I had to resign now that I had a daughter with him."

³¹ "Inside me I detested him, knowing his innate violence."

³² "In the fire you had fun. You joked with death until She joked with you!"

principio, dopo il dolore lentamente scompare e rimane solamente il ricordo" (101).³³

With the death of her husband, she returns to her happy life with her two children in Grosseto: "ritrovai il piacere di essere ancora giovane e libera per godermi la vita" (111).³⁴

When her daughter Mirella gets married to a scientist, she leaves for America, and Elvezia follows her in 1947 at thirty-seven. She is still young and ready to start a new life. On the ship that takes her from Naples to New York she sees some interracial couples: Italian wives of American soldiers, and "mi stupì quella mistura di colori, e la definii la mia prima esperienza americana" (4b).³⁵ She remembers her first walk in America: "notai che le persone non parlavano a voce alta e smanettando come facevano in Italia" (4b),³⁶ and that nobody really took walks in the center of town like in Italy. She still laughs at her misunderstanding of the language, when she looks for "Solane Beach" and offends the man who thinks she told him "son of a bitch". It is in America that Elvezia savors the taste of independence; she finds a job in a garment factory because she needs to be autonomous: "e' bene che io mi trovi un lavoro [. . .] avro' molte spese per fare venire Enrico qua [. . .] e' ora che io pensi a guadagnarmi la mia indipendenza. Non ho mai lavorato fuori di casa mia" (32b).³⁷ She even re-marries with Joe and settles in Utica, New York. But her marriage is completely different now, she is strong and she clarifies it from the beginning when she says to her old friend Niela: "digli che lo sposo

³³ "Time corrodes even the big pains and transforms them in painful memories first, then pain disappears and only the memory remains."

³⁴ "I found the pleasure to be still young and free to enjoy life."

³⁵ "I was surprised from that mixture of colors and I defined it as my first American experience." The page number followed by a "b" refers to Elvezia's second handwritten notebook.

³⁶ "I noticed that people did not talk aloud and gesturing like in Italy."

³⁷ "It is good if I find a job [. . .] I will have many expenses to make Enrico come here. [. . .] it's time to think to earn my independence. I never worked outside my house."

ma se non andassimo d'accordo ci dovremmo divorziare" (23b).³⁸ When he accepts they shake hands: "quando mi strinse la mano pensai facessimo un contratto d'affari" (24b).³⁹ Even her walk through the church is different, it is that of a woman who is finally sure of herself: "mi sentivo piu' sicura di me stessa e camminavo spedita verso l'altare" (28b).⁴⁰

After a few years of American life, Elvezia is a new woman. She leaves the factory jobs and works in an office as a typist. She endures the boredom of her thirty-year marriage with Joe who is always depressed, "cercavo di sopportarlo con rassegnazione" ("I tried to bear him with resignation" [64b]), but at least she remains independent: "pensai che una cosa buona con Joe [era] che mai avrebbe avuto il coraggio di contrarmi (sic) per quanto io volevo fare" (54b).⁴¹ She even earns her driving license and surprises him by driving a used "Scevrolet." Joe dies of a brain tumor at sixty-two and Elvezia travels to California where her daughter has settled, and she learns to paint *batik* and oil painting, and work with ceramic. The re-discovery of her artistic side is the last gift of America. When she realizes that her children (both married twice) do not need her anymore, she returns to her roots, surprising everyone:

dopo qualche mese dalla morte di Joe, non trovai piu' lo scopo di rimanere in America, nessuno aveva piu' bisogno di me, e meravigliando parenti e amici decisi di ritornare in Italia, nella mia Maremma per la quale avevo sempre sentito la nostalgia. [[. . .] Joe] morì il 13 Marzo 1979 ed io ritornai in Italia il 20 agosto nello stesso anno. Avevo allora sessantanove anni e li portavo bene. Sentendomi ancora giovane per vivere da sola a Grosseto, nella mia Maremma . (99-100b)⁴²

³⁸ "Tell him I am marrying him, but if we don't get along we shall divorce."

³⁹ "When he took my hand, I thought we were closing a business contract."

⁴⁰ "I was more sure of myself and I briskly walked toward the altar."

⁴¹ "I thought it was fine with Joe because he would have never had the courage to contrast what I wanted to do."

⁴² After a few months from Joe's death, I did not find any purpose in staying in America, nobody needed me anymore and, surprising relatives and friends, I decided to go back to Italy, in my Maremma that I

She is another woman now, an artist with a batik scarf: "alcuni grossetani mi conobbero in tutt'altra spoglia, di quando li lasciai per andare in America" (105b).⁴³ Like Amalia, she lives her last thirty years split between America where her family is and Italy where her soul is: every year she visits the United States until she suffers a paralysis in 1998. The return of the immigrant woman to her home town after 32 years is described in poetical sentences, that are also a reflection on autobiography, the art of remembering: "Davanti al mare del mio paese, ritornata sono da un'altra sponda. Guardo nell'onda e vedo il mio passato far ritorno, socorrere sulla sabbia lasciando tracce piu' o meno profonde. Si ferma, si agita, poi con l'onde nel mare lontano si disperde" (102).⁴⁴ Waves of memories and the ocean of immigration superimpose.

A modern autobiography is that of **Elisabeth Evans** whose misspelled name reveals her being half Italian-half English (English father, Italian mother), and out-of-place. Her *Un attimo una vita* (1996)⁴⁵ is a "modern" autobiography because it is filled with feelings, and it figures as a therapeutic confession of a suffering mind. She is a rebel and is still suffering for severe depression and her inability to find her place. Immigration is a psychological dimension for her, more than a real one, since she lives in the United States only for a short while. She does not write in old age, but she does write after her many "deaths" (sorrows of her life): "Amare i miei figli, la natura, le persone, gli animali, ma non me stessa, io non esisto. Sono morta cosi' tante volte che, quando provo a

always missed. [. . . Joe] died on March 13th 1979 and I returned to Italy on August 20th of the same year. I was 69 then and still in shape. Feeling still young to live alone in Grosseto and in my Maremma."

⁴³ "Some people from Grosseto had known me as a completely different woman when I left for America."

⁴⁴ "In front of my country's sea I am back from another shore. I look at the waves and see my past come back, run on the sand leaving more or less deep traces. It stops, it moves, then with the sea waves it again lost far away."

⁴⁵ The original is in a chest, written by hand with a pencil.

cercarmi mi rendo conto che non ci sono piu'" (55).⁴⁶ Born in Rome in 1947, she lives with her grandmother in a fake well-to-do environment, she is shunned by her father who never wants to know her, and always fights with her mother: "ho la sensazione di scusarmi di esistere" ("I feel like I have to apologize for my existence" [3]).

Her America is the America of Paul Anka ("Ascolto Paul Anka, sogno l'America," 5), and the young soldiers of Camp d'Arby, her first love and her unlucky husband, Jim. He smells of beer from the beginning, but she marries him and follows him to the United States. Her immigration is full of pain. In New York she feels like an "alien," as she is immediately defined by the immigration law: "Sono un'aliena!" She moves to Texas and then to Fresno where Jim's parents are. There, Jim and his father are always drunk, and she experiences her first depression. She loses her second child because Jim hits her when he is drunk, but she stubbornly refuses to go home, because she wants "to take her responsibility." Again, Jimmy rapes her, and she is pregnant again. She escapes from him, and lives in a mission for the homeless. When he leaves for Vietnam, she forgives him: "Ho 21 anni, devo andare avanti per i miei figli, ma e' come se fossi morta di nuovo" (37).⁴⁷ They move to Oklahoma, Fort Sillis where "Jim e suo padre hanno ripreso a bere. Mancano i soldi e io passo parte delle notti incollata al televisore sintonizzato sul canale che preavvisa arrivi e traiettorie dei tornados" (44).⁴⁸

Elisabeth's America is mythless, naked America. It consists of hospitals, missions for the homeless, pills, anti-depressive, isolation, tornadoes, a gun she keeps for self-

⁴⁶ "Love my children, nature, people, animals, but not myself. I do not exist. I died so many times that when I try to look for myself I realizes I am not here anymore."

⁴⁷ "I am 21, I have to go on for my children, but it is like I were dead again."

⁴⁸ "Jim and his father started to drink again. We lack money and I spend the nights glued to the TV on the channel that give tornado warnings."

defense, a drunk husband who hits her... She remains there for three years out of stubbornness, almost betting on her own destiny. Her opinion of the United States in the 1970s is merciless: "Dopo tutto quello che ho passato ho imparato che qui l'incredibile e' normale e, se si parla di violenza non vi sono limiti, il bello e' che tutto cio' e' coperto da un tale perbenismo e bigottismo che esteriormente questo paese riesce ancora ad essere esempio di ideali per il resto del mondo" (41).⁴⁹ Her American dream nourished by Paul Anka vanishes in front of this hell, and she is finally free when she leaves. Curiously, she sees the Statue of Liberty in reverse - "sono libera!" (48):

C'e' un momento, quando il grande Jumbo dell'Alitalia sorvola New York e la visione della statua della Liberta' si presenta illuminata nella notte davanti ai miei occhi, in cui sento quasi un rimpianto, una disperazione e, mentre la vedo sparire nel buio, piango. Sento che non rivedro' mai piu' questo Paese in cui, nel bene e nel male, lascio una parte della mia vita. Ho ventitre anni ed e' come se ne avessi gia' vissuti quaranta. (48)⁵⁰

Elisabeth's life continues with a second marriage, two more children and an attempted suicide. It closes when she goes to England by herself to meet the new family of her father, and arrives there two months after his death. Elisabeth's life story is noteworthy because it gives a new dimension to the immigration of women in the United States.⁵¹ She is not an immigrant worker, not a peasant, but a doomed immigrant bride.

⁴⁹ "After what I passed here I learned that here the incredible is normal, that to violence there are no limits, that the funny thing is that all is covered by a well-to-do patina and bigotry that exteriorly this country still succeeds as an example of ideals for the rest of the world."

⁵⁰ "There is a moment, when the Alitalia jumbo flies over New York and the vision of the Statue of Liberty lit in the night passes in front of my eyes, in which I feel almost a regret, a desperation, and while disappears in the dark I cry. I feel I will not see this country anymore where in good or bad I leave a piece of my life. I am 23 but it is like being 40."

⁵¹ The story of Elisabeth has many similarities with another autobiography, of an Italian America, Louise De Salvo's *Vertigo*. They both experience depression and write to get out of it, they tell parallel events, they both hate their mothers, are not prepared for maternity, contemplate suicide and dream of independence, both live in the same turbulent period for American youth, the 1970s.

A positive version of Elisabeth's life is given by the experience of a war bride, **Maria Bottiglieri**, author of *Sposa di guerra* (1986). This is a romantic short story of a young girl who meets an American soldier in Naples, and is surprised by her love for an "enemy" ("odiavo gli alleati, come odiavo tutti quelli che avevano voluto la guerra," 4).⁵² "come poteva interessarmi un americano? Odiavo troppo i vincitori. A Napoli ne avevo passate tante. No, non era facile dimenticare le notti passate nei ricoveri e sotto i tunnel per i continui bombardamenti" (3).⁵³ Like Elisabeth, she is seduced by America at the rhythm of a song played in those years in the juke-boxes: *You Never Know*. She falls in love with a soldier, and marries him on her father's condition that he will not make her travel by herself to the United States. Her departure is a moment of growth:

Quando papa' mi abbraccio' ebbi l'impulso di mandare tutto al diavolo, di tornarmene a casa con lui, risedermi sulle sue ginocchia, lasciarmi ancora coccolare, ma poi, mi resi conto che un ciclo della mia vita stava per finire e ne stava iniziando un altro carico di responsabilita'. Dovevo imparare ad affrontare la vita. Ecco, dovevo maturare, e con il tuo aiuto, dovevo riuscirci. Era stata una mia scelta e dovevo essere coraggiosa. [. . .] Malgrado i miei buoni propositi, quando la nave parti' e io vedevo i miei rimpicciolirsi sempre piu', mi sentii vuota, cattiva, egoista. Quando li avrei rivisti? Avrei avuto la forza di vivere senza di loro? Piansi per quasi tutto il viaggio e in alcuni momenti mi sembrava di odiarti perche' mi portavi via alla mia famiglia, in una terra straniera, fra gente che non conoscevo e che forse non mi avrebbero mai amata. (22)⁵⁴

⁵² "I hated all the allied, as I hated all those who wanted this war."

⁵³ "How could an American interest me? I hated the winners too much. In Naples I had suffered so much. It wasn't easy to forget the nights passed in the shelters, in the tunnels for the continuous bombing."

⁵⁴ "When dad hugged me I felt the wish of throwing all away, of going back home with him, sit on his knees, let him cuddle me, but then I realized I had to finish a cycle of my life and start a new one. I had to learn to face life. I had to mature and with your help I would succeed. It was my choice and I had to be brave. [. . .] Despite my good propositions, when the ship left the harbor and I saw my family getting smaller, I felt evil, egoist. When would I see them again? Would I have the strength to live without them? I cried for almost the whole trip and sometimes I felt like hating you because you were stealing me from my family in a foreign land, among people I did not know and who perhaps would never love me."

In America she finds a job as Italian teacher and is welcomed by her husband's family who loves her Neapolitan *pastiera*. She has two children, and overcomes the initial problems with her husband: "io diventavo sempre piu' americana. Mangiavo alla loro maniera, e qualche volta mia accorgevo di pensare addirittura in inglese" (27).⁵⁵ When they are ready to leave for a visit to Naples, her husband is killed in an airplane crash on his very last trip for work. She leaves alone ("era quasi un pellegrinaggio che dovevo compiere," 1)⁵⁶ to maintain her sanity, and re-live her life in her autobiography as a therapeutic act: "Dovevo fare qualcosa, tornare in Italia, a Napoli, rivivere alcuni momenti della mia vita con lui" (1).⁵⁷ The flow of her memories thus starts when she is sixty, in Naples. The entire story is dedicated to her dead husband, as if talking to him in the "tu" form. Her last words are:

Ecco, John, ora sono qui. A Firenze ho comprato un cappellino di paglia [as in their first trip together]. [. . .] E adesso sono qui a Napoli, sulla panchina, nel parco, dove ci siamo parlati per la prima volta. Sono qui seduta con il cappellino di paglia sulle ginocchia, mentre intorno le foglie sugli alberi, col loro stormire, mi cantano canzoni d'amore, d'amore, d'amore. (37-38)⁵⁸

⁵⁵ "I was becoming always more American. I ate their way, and sometimes I even realized I was even thinking in English."

⁵⁶ "It was almost a pilgrimage I had to make."

⁵⁷ "I had to do something, go back to Italy and relive some moments of my life with him."

⁵⁸ "Here I am, John. In Florence I bought a straw hat [as in their first trip together]. [. . .] And now I am in Naples on the bench in the park where we spoke for the first time. I am sitting with the straw hat on my knees while around me the tree leaves sing songs of love, of love, of love."

CHAPTER 8: TOWARD SUCCESS

The Graduate

The doctors: Vincenzo Grossi, Michele Daniele, Giuseppe Previtali, Don Peppino. The Professors: Joseph Tusiani, Francesco Ventresca, Leonard Covello, Angelo Pellegrini.

Belonging to a different social class, these writers still all share the ethos of work that defines the Italian immigrant. Doctors, professors, agriculturalists, these immigrants have studied and earned a degree before leaving for the United States, or immediately after, as in Ventresca's case. They still see the United States as a land of opportunity, but from a higher standpoint; not from the pits but from the pulpit. Their writing, naturally, is influenced by their familiarity with words and with pen and paper, and their thoughts flow easily. One of the merits of their writing is their ability to create slices of immigrant life, describing the behavior of sick immigrants or of young immigrant students.¹ Even if they do not really fit in the "humble" category, it is significant to find that the inner *ethos* remains that of the humble worker. Joseph Tusiani's entire autobiography is a praise to the humble immigrant worker; the four doctors also never show off their position but are instead quite modest; and even when basking in their success, like Ventresca and the Chiarappas, they never forget their working status, and their humble beginning. A

¹ The same value is in the book by Edward Corsi, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, where the author, not really writing an autobiography (he starts his story directly from his arrival), puts Ellis Island in the center of his narration. He briefly speaks about his immigration and then dives into the story of the Island where he worked as an inspector, describing the people and the human cases he saw.

successful immigrant couple, Luigi Chiarappa, a graduate agriculturalist, and his wife Nicla, remain attached to their ethos of working-man even after their life achievements:²

In America, Nicla ed io ci siamo impegnati a fondo nei lavori piu' umili e disparati, senza guardare indietro alle famiglie da dove provenivamo od alle qualifiche gia' in nostro possesso. E lavorammo molto; nei pollai, nei grandi magazzini, nelle fabbriche di macchine da scrivere, nella centrale del latte, ad impaccare frutta od a zappare nei vigneti. Poi, per mantenerci agli studi, fu il momento della sartoria e delle pulizie delle case degli altri. (137)³

Four Doctors

The four Italian doctors show a similar path in attempting to find a new opening for their career in America. Immigration for them is a step forward in their career, not the only way out from misery. They show different stages of integration, and while Vincenzo Grossi fights America with all his might in the hope to return to Rome, Don Peppino and

² Luigi and Nicla Chiarappa write together their success story, *Emigranti. La storia di una vita meravigliosa*, after a lifetime passed in the United States. They write their story in English for their American grandchildren, to let them know their family and "quanto avevamo fatto noi stessi per affermarci e creare quella fetta di mondo da loro stessi vissuta" ("What we had done to establish ourselves here and create that slice of world they are living" [1]). Luigi was born in 1925 in Rome, graduated in Agricultural Science and earned a Ph.D. in the United States. Nicla was born in 1930 in Treviso and works in the catering business. They migrate to the United States in 1952, a year after their wedding. They travel first class: "nessuno sospetto" che fossimo soltanto due giovani emigranti" (54). Their arrival is optimistic and privileged; seeing their agricultural visa, the inspector asks to see their hands: "Avrebbe gradito riscontrare dei robusti calli su mani magari rosse e tozze, da contadina. Resto' deluso" ("He would have liked to see hardened skin on red and rough farmer hands. He was surprised" [55]). Luigi is finally employed in the canning factory Di Giorgio Fruit Co. in California. They are now retired in California, where they run a small *pensione*: "Albergo Fafazzi. Si parla Italiano." Faithful to his profession of agriculturist, he ends up comparing life to an artichoke: many do not know it and do not miss it, some eat only the leaves, some only the heart and throw the rest, "infine ci sono quelli che conoscono a fondo i tanti modi di fare i carciofi e di mangiarne quasi tutto, proprio fino in fondo. [. . .] Succede lo stesso nell'apprezzare le tante cose che la vita riesce ad offrire nella giusta stagione" ("Then there are those who deeply knows all the ways to savor artichokes, almost all of it, until the end. [. . .] It's the same with appreciating the many things life offers in the right season" [138]).

³ "In America, Nicla and I threw all ourselves in the most different and humble jobs, without looking back at the families from which we came or at the qualifications we had. And we worked a lot; in the chicken coops, in the malls, in the typewriter factories, in the milk factory, canning fruit or plowing vineyards. Then to finance our studies, we worked as tailors and cleaning other people houses."

Giuseppe Previtali find their ethos as "the immigrant doctor" who is able to touch the inner chords of their Little Italy. It is surprising to find that they are not simple success stories; they are stories of struggle and defeat no less than the humble ones. As Daniele writes: "mine is not exactly a success story; say, rather, it is just another human story" (87).

A reluctant American doctor, **Vincenzo Grossi**, writes his *Ricordi* when he is ninety-seven. Most of his life, he dreams of returning to Rome but he has to give up such a dream for the sake of career and family. This sprinkles his memories with regret. He is gaining something from immigration, but most of all he is losing something: this is clear when he sorrowfully lists the deaths of his family on each trip back ("Nel 1957 tornammo a Roma ma non trovammo Enrico che era morto il 7 luglio 1956. [. . .] Noi tornammo ancora Roma il 1960, il 1962 e il 1964. Ora tornando nel 1965, non trovammo Elvira," 89).⁴ A little snobbish, he never bonds with Italian immigrants like the other doctors, and he works in America only to be able to go back to Rome.

Born in Esperia Inferiore (Frosinone), in 1891, Vincenzo belongs to an old family and traces back its history and economic ventures back two-hundred years. He really echoes the medieval merchants of Florence: in the very first page, he annotates all the donations, inheritances, division of properties, wedding *doti*;⁵ he lists the blankets, books, and estates, and grosses out a total of 6.368 liras in 1888. He is born three years later in the family of the town's pharmacist. At nine, he enters the boarding school of Montecassino, and starts his education. He studies Medicine in Rome, contracting debts

⁴ "In 1957 we went back to Rome and did not find Emrico who died on July 7th, 1956. [. . .] We went back in 1960, 1962, 1964. Now in 1965, we did not find Elvira."

and working as tutor. His brother Peppino becomes an engineer, while he becomes a doctor: they are the pride of their father who "si sente vendicato del suo destino" (25).⁶

Vincenzo paints an affectionate portrait of this Old World, their feasts and dinners in the well-to-do family, and colors it with the regret of the immigrant who knows what he has lost:

Ma io quando ricordo il nostro piccolo mondo, mi domando se non valeva la pena rimanere a fare il medico a casa mia, come tutti mi consigliavano quando morì (sic) il medico Calcagni nel 1914 anno della mia laurea. E vero che oggi quando vado in villeggiatura in un bel paese d'Italia, con la nostalgia dell'emigrante, dopo pochi giorni mi annoio, ma e' sempre bello sognare che forse a Santupeto sarei stato felice tutta la vita. (39)⁷

Grossi starts his practice in little towns in central Italy where he is the respected doctor, and precisely annotates all his earnings: in 1914-15: 5.500 liras, in 1918 8.500 liras, in 1920: 22.500 liras. When he is failed at the exam for assistant surgeon, he thinks of America as an escape: "lasciato a me stesso, io ero disperato e così mi veniva l'idea di scappare all'estero" (72).⁸ When at his second attempt, he sees the other candidates older and well known, he surrenders to Destiny: "il mio destino era segnato" (73). He leaves for South America first and is deceived after eight months in Santa Fe, where he finds a hot climate and bad food: "clima umido terribile e mangiare impossibile. Non ci fu verso

⁵ He writes: "la famiglia De Sanctis aveva nel 1776 una proprietà che ammontava a oltre 10.000 ducati" (1).

⁶ "He feels his destiny vindicated."

⁷ "But when I remember our little world, I ask myself if it wasn't worth staying there to be a doctor, like everyone advised me to do when doctor Calcagni died the year of my graduation. It is true that when I go to vacation in a nice Italian town with the nostalgia of the immigrant, after a few days I get bored, but it is always beautiful to dream that perhaps I could have been happy in Santupete all my life."

⁸ "Abandoned to myself, I was so desperate I had the idea of escaping abroad."

di convincere il cuoco a farmi un piatto di maccheroni che non fosse una polenta" (75).⁹ Anyway, he comes back with 25.000 liras in his pocket. He is back in Italy in 1922 and hopes for a fresh start, but having to pay for his sisters' weddings, "pensai al Nord America" ("I thought about North America" [76]). He leaves with a letter from Mussolini in his pocket for the Italian consul, but to no avail since the consul is not a Fascist. He passes his American examination in 1923, three months after landing in Boston, even if he makes a funny mistake due to his English: "fui approvato nonostante ad una domanda dell'esame che chiedeva cosa bisognava fare dei feeble-minded cioe' degli scemi, io capii che si trattasse di rifiuti e risposi che bisognava bruciarli" (76-77).¹⁰ After his wedding to Laura, a Samaritan in the hospital of Rome where he met her in 1915, he practices in Boston. He never fits in, and he suffers the company of the poor immigrants, or "cafoni amari" (79), as well as that of Americans such as a friend's daughter who asks him "in gran segreto se il sapore dei sorci era buono, perche' la maestra a scuola le insegnava che gli italiani mangiano i topi" (79).¹¹ In 1925 they move to New York, where he finds "pettegolezzi che poi tornavano a mio danno" (81).¹² Vincenzo has only dry descriptions of his life in America and punctuates his narration with sad events and losses: his wife and his sister lose three babies; his mother dies in her bed, "piangendo che non mi avrebbe piu' rivisto" (82).¹³ His heart is clearly elsewhere, and with his wife he decides to leave America: "in 12 anni di professione non avevo cambiato fortuna e percio'

⁹ "Terrible damp climate and horrible food. There was no way of convincing the cook to make me a dish of macaroni that wasn't a polenta."

¹⁰ "I was approved even though at the question about what we should do with feeble-minded people, I understood they were garbage, and I answered we had to burn them."

¹¹ "Secretly she asked me if the mice's flavor was good because her school teacher had taught her that Italians eat mice."

¹² "Gossips that damaged me."

¹³ "Crying she would not see me again."

sussistevano le stesse ragioni per le quali ero venuto: fare un piccolo capitale per avere una base a Roma" (82).¹⁴ When he sees that his son studies with "the sons of farmers" ("i figli degli 'zappaterra'" [82]), he sends him to study in Italy: "non ero da criticare perche' mandavo mio figlio a studiare in Italia, quando era la mia profonda convinzione che io sarei tornato a Roma pel resto della vita" (82).¹⁵ In 1937 Laura leaves America to stay in Rome with their son, while Vincenzo keeps on working in America even if writing to her: "verro' a piangere a Roma, ci sacrificheremo, faremo magari gli affittacamere, ma crepero' a Roma" (86).¹⁶ He tries, but fails, and in 1939 he is back in New York: "l'america (sic) divenne per me una ossessione e il giugno 1939 partii da roma (sic), vinto ancora dal destino" (87).¹⁷ Here he buys a house in New York, sees his son become a doctor in Bellevue Hospital and go to war in Korea. "Beaten by destiny," Vincenzo is forced to give up his dream, and these are his last words of resignation: "L'unico sogno svanito per me e Laura era quello di vivere a Roma. Ora che potemmo stare nella citta' eterna, ogni volta che la nostalgia ci tenta, guardiamo i nostri quattro nipotini che crescono sani e belli, e ci rassegniamo finalmente al destino" (90).¹⁸

A similar life story of losses is that of **Michele Daniele**, author of *Signor Dottore. The Autobiography of F. Michele Daniele, Italian Immigrant Doctor (1879-1957)*, and of other three published books (*Rime vecchie e nuove*, *Calvario de Guerra*, *Yankee Faith and Other Stories*). Daniele was born in Agnone in Molise in 1879 of an ancient family

¹⁴ "In 12 years of profession I had not changed my luck and the reasons why I had come were still valid: make a little capital to start a base in Rome."

¹⁵ "I was not to be criticized if sending my son to Italy to study because it was my deep conviction to go back to Rome for the rest of my life."

¹⁶ "I will come to Rome to cry, we'll make sacrifices, we'll rent our rooms, but I'll die in Rome."

¹⁷ "America became an obsession for me, and in June 1939 I left from Rome, again won by my Destiny."

of sharecroppers (agricultural middle class) that even has a coat of arms and a motto: "Lavoro e Lealta'," "Labor and Loyalty," key-words for Daniele. He immediately starts off his autobiography by explaining his ethos as a doctor, a profession inspired by his uncle, and that he earned with much study and economical sacrifices. In 1905 he is fresh from graduation and facing a common dilemma: "I had to balance the greater security of staying at home, among my own people, against the opportunities offered by boldly adventuring into a new land and attempting to build a practice among strangers" (26). After his wedding with Elvira, the mayor's daughter, they decide to leave against the family's will ("only the lowest, poorest, most illiterate element of Italy's population emigrated - what my father-in-law scornfully called la *canaglia*, the rubble" [33]) and go into "a wilderness, to live among barbarians. What would people say" (33). Daniele and his young wife arrive in New York in 1905 and he immediately breaks the stereotype. He does not feel any thrill at the sight of the Statue of Liberty and even doubts anyone else did:

it only served to remind me of all that I had left behind - my family, my friends, my home. Perhaps if my background had been somewhat humbler [. . .] I might have been more excited by that symbol of freedom. Yet I honestly doubt that even the poorest, lowliest *paesano* experienced any different sensation that I did [. . .] This, I fully appreciate, shatters one of the dearest stereotypes of romantic legend. (34)

The Danieles are examined in Ellis Island, and immediately set off to the city, which reserves for them a negative impression because of the "frenzied maelstrom" of its traffic, of the noise, of the rushing of people and their anger ("where were they rushing to

¹⁸ "The only vanished dream for me and Laura was that of living in Rome, Now that we could stay in the eternal city, every time that nostalgia lures us, we look at our four grandchildren that grow healthy and

or why was something I could not comprehend - and, for that matter, I still cannot. And all of them seemed angry about something. Or if not angry, at least worried" [36]). They try the elevated train fearing for their life and get lost outside the city. They finally discover their destination "la citta' dei giovani in Oeeo" is Youngstown, Ohio, and there they settle, welcomed by their fellow Agnonesi who form a large colony. Daniele describes the aspect of such a colony: the houses look American except for Italian touches such as the vegetable garden, the religious statues in a corner, a painting over the door. Instead, "the interior of their houses remained stubbornly Italian" (50) with gaudy and large furniture ("for all its loudness and cheapness it had the breath of life in it; it was warm, alive and colorful" [51]). These houses always displayed the hand-cranked phonograph with Italian music, votive candles around a religious image, large wall calendars with battle scenes from the Risorgimento, oil paintings of the Madonna, Saints, Venice or Naples, and portraits of the Kings, Garibaldi, Verdi, and Mazzini. Daniele melts into this world and uses the pronoun *we* to identify with these struggling peasants, even if belonging to a somewhat higher class: "we were political outcasts, we had to work extremely hard for whatever we got, our living conditions were not ideal, our health deteriorated. But then," he adds with immigrant philosophy, "where could one find any kind of existence that did not have its drawbacks and shortcomings?" (52).

His five and a half years in Youngstown are perhaps the best in his life with a healthy wife and two children, and a good clientele thanks to the help of Madame Caroline, a "fallen woman" who likes his honesty and spreads his fame. He cynically observes the factory city, and states: "from a physician's point of view, Youngstown was

an ideal place to practice his art; it was a natural breeding place of disease and accident" (61). His first experience is symbolic of the work immigrant doctors had often to do. He is presented with an incurable case of a dying man. In his impotence, he only gives a prescription: he needs mountain air, but not that of Denver, that of Agnone, "he must go back to Italy to his wife and four *bambini*. At least he would die in peace among loved ones" (57). The prescription immediately lightens up the man's face who eventually dies in his hometown. Daniele, like other immigrant doctors, tells various stories of cases of acute superstition, fear of medicine and hospitals, dying children cured with magic potions, and patients who are cured by the cost of their medicine (he prescribes the same medicine telling the pharmacist to raise the price, as part of the cure!). Daniele becomes also an active crusader in the contraception movement, even if it clashes with his Catholic conscience; he fought for birth control after seeing women dying of consumption after too many babies, or dying after trying to abort them. Being quite well-off, he is also threatened by the *Mano Nera* and defends himself by firing back with a letter that says "I work too hard for my money to hand it to any idiot who tries to frighten me with childish threat" (131).

Daniele's hard times start when he is forced to go back to Italy for his wife's mental illness, and by his own restlessness ("my gypsy love for adventure that was stirring me up again" [134]). They move back to Agnone, returning "not as an Italian, not even as an ex-Italian, but as an American. That to me was my proudest achievement" (137). They spend all their American savings to get settled there and build a magnificent house impossible to rent out. He finds scattered jobs in various towns of central Italy, and when he is already deciding to return to Ohio, the first World War breaks out and he is

called up in the army (life is made of "teasing ironies and paradoxes" [143]: "I was trapped" [152]). He goes back home only when his wife is afflicted by a nervous disorder that brings her to suicide. He has to return to war and is in Feltre during the defeat of Caporetto and is taken prisoner in Austria. He is able to go back to Youngstown in 1919, and with high and low moments manages to bring his two sons to study in the United States, while his daughter marries an Italian doctor. He has "a feeling of discontent" deep inside: "whenever I would step back from myself and take a clear, hard look at F. Michele Daniele, M.D., I had the unpleasant sensation of watching a very busy squirrel whirling about in a cage, expending a great deal of precious energy, and getting exactly nowhere" (195). He moves to Cleveland where he receives the news of his daughter's death from typhoid that throws him into desperation, and his practice goes to hell. He moves about, in stinky Akron where there are factories of rubber, and then to Los Angeles where he cannot find clients. At the outbreak of World War II he is called up again in the Army in the shipyard of Calship. After the war he faces another readjustment. He dies in 1957, and the last words of his autobiography are quite subdued, a litany of what his life has *not* been:

Judged simply and solely by the worldly measure of things, mine I am afraid could not be called a 'success story.' I have not accumulated great wealth; in fact, I have never earned at any time in my existence anything that might be called 'great money.' I have not achieved fame. I have not a name. There are no great medical discoveries associated with me. I have not gained any position of power and importance in public affairs. Thus from a purely mundane standpoint my life has been anything but a resounding, resplendent triumph. (236)

His only satisfaction are his two sons, his honesty ("I have certainly done my share to keep mankind healthy and happy, content to perform my task in obscurity," 236), and his "having lived through life:" "I too have lived through seventy-five years of wars, depressions, disasters, changes, upheavals, crisis, disappointments, triumphs. There are those who might reckon this. In and of itself, as a definite accomplishment" (236). This spirit of survival in History is the morale of the humble Italian immigrant, the spirit of his autobiographies.

On the opposite side of the unassimilated immigrant Grossi and the unhappy doctor Daniele, stands **Giuseppe Previtali**, the doctor for the immigrant section of New York, East Harlem, who writes an interesting autobiography, *Doctor Beppo. An Italian Doctor in America*. He writes it at eighty, spurred by his spunky American wife once they settle in Pontida for his retirement. The book becomes the fruit of their relationship and her gift after her death. He clings to it with resilience and calls his son to type it for him because he is not able to write any more. When he dies, on his deathbed, he tries to speak to his son Giuseppe, but cannot be understood. He asks for a piece of paper and scribbles a word that Giuseppe still cannot understand, then with a look of despair on his face he dies. It is days later that the son understands his father's last word: it is in Italian, *il libro*. The huge book (390 pages) is thus the last desire of this doctor who squeezes into it all his life, with passion and good style (perhaps edited by his son).

Born in 1879 in the village of Pontida on the Alps, the writer sets his birth in the midst of nothing less than Medieval history by telling the story of Saint Alberto and the rebellion of the Alpine lords against the hordes of Barbarossa in 1167: "In this historic setting I was born" (6), he writes, stretching a little. He writes of the calamities on his

father's vineyards that brought them to poverty. He remembers the first rumor of America, the land where you get rich, as his neighbor a returned immigrant explains. But America (South America for them) meant also deceit through the story of the ship of immigrants landed on swampy lands as substitution for free slaves. In his childhood, *Nono* (sic) is an important figure as it often happens, the one who conveys him to study medicine. He studies in Turin where he wastes his father's money in games and drink, becomes acquainted with Socialism, becomes a student of Lombroso who theorizes about the criminal brain, and finally graduates with honors. He returns home where his father welcomes him "with a single word, "Peppino." Then, he added gravely, "Dottore." There was a light in his eyes that spoke more than words" (90).

The story of Beppo's graduation is quite engrossing. It occupies the first half of the book, while the second, equally well written, is dedicated to his amazing wife, the departure of his two sons for the war, their summer trips to Italy where they restore the villa, the church bells of the town and teach hygiene to the peasants. Beppo emigrates to America fresh upon graduation, after seeing that jobs were not easily available. He receives a letter from a fellow student who has gone to America: "America," he wrote, "is a wonderful country the people here really live a life of liberty and equality. Unlike in Italy, any man, however humble his origin, can make money according to his abilities and the measure of his hard work" (93). Beppo does not praise his own courage in leaving, but explains that he is not pushed by his own will but by a stronger force: "It was as if a force greater than myself impelled me to go beyond the horizon" (94). From his mother he takes a silver medal with the words: "I don't mind if you come back penniless or ill, but be sure your conscience is clear" (94), one of the many drops of wisdom that

parents give to their departing sons. In the first years of the century, Beppo lands in America after having learned his first American word on the ship, "greenhorn" addressed to him when he wants to send his mother the ship's menu to show her the abundance. He arrives in the mining town of Pittston, Pennsylvania. The town is black (as Riccobaldi's Scranton): "Everything looked black. Dark smoke rose slowly in the gray sky. A veil of coal dust filtered down from the clouds. A pall of sadness covered the whole town" (100). He is immediately shocked by the news that he has to practice illegally for one year at least until he passes his Board examination, and that he has to learn English: "what a fix" (103). His cultural shock is heightened by the rush to assimilation his companions force upon him: not bowing from the waist (only Germans do that), not kissing on the cheeks (like Frenchmen), not speaking too loudly (or people understand they are Italians). He rebels - "What are we coming to? Do you want me to blow my nose with my hands or spit on the sidewalk or elbow people in the street or trip them up by crossing in front of them as everybody does here?" (114) - until he learns that even his landlady apologizes for having an Italian in her home. Nevertheless, his integration is on the way and he soon exclaims: "Oh America! What sweet freedom I did not now in Italy" (116).

Beppo leaves for New York's Little Italy where he substitutes for an eccentric Italian (fake) doctor: "If I must drown," he thinks, "I don't want to drown in a puddle. The big sea is for me" (119). He manages to pass his examination only after five months and works among the immigrants: "Most of the calls were within walking distance and practically all emergencies, to the callers anyway. We rushed, rushed, even if we had plenty of time. It looked better; a busy doctor, an important case" (133). Beppo's experience among the immigrants is captivating: he clashes against the idea of

"malocchio" and the ignorance of peasants, "worst of all is their passivity against illness. Their village priests taught them to accept death as the inexorable will of God" (106). He learns the tricks: never take down the medical history of the patient ("most people will question your reason for taking their names and addresses" (136); make a quick diagnosis on the spot without the help of the laboratory to show self-confidence; "use a familiar name to them [the immigrants]. Better still, tell them a disease they would like to have. This always works well" (135); if Southerners say that the cause is "o frisco" (cold) or "o scanto" (fright), if Northerners "un'inflammazione;" learn a new nomenclature because every region of Italy has its own name for a disease (measles is *rossaina* for Sicilians, *vetrana* for Pugliesi, *rosoela* for Northerners, and *morbillo* for Roman and Neapolitans). Beppo is shocked by his first experiences and learns a way into the heart of his patients: "I entered, then, the field of practice like a whipped dog and, like a dog that goes around with his tail between his legs, I went among the people meekly. They were poor and ignorant, to be sure, but they were good people" (147). He ends up loving them - "their troubles were mine. More than that. I made them mine" (148) - and learns to value them, even if he risks becoming a target of the Black Hand: "They may be poor, ignorant in their way, but their hearts are pure gold" (152). Previtali's self-portrait is mainly that of the doctor of immigrants and poor people, at least before he works in the Pediatrics Ward of the New York hospital, Bellevue. He is proud of his Italian origins as he demonstrates as soon as he arrives in America, refusing to conceal his Italianicity, and seeing it as a sign of distinction. American doctors "lacked the human touch" according to him:

They were incapable of comprehending the problems of their Italian patients. They had no feeling for their hardships. The Italian doctors even

if some of them had some questionable conception of ethics, had the gift of understanding the psychology of their people. Patients would pour their hearts to them. They told them the story of their economic distress, family perturbations, emotional anguish, so often the factors in the vicious circle that surround illness. [. . . The Italian physician] was able to exert a beneficial influence upon his patients in the areas that bordered on their sickness. On this ground he had the advantage. He was able thus, to accomplish the mission of the medical profession more fully. (168)

Previtali keeps alive his immigrant ethos. When he describes himself and the other young doctors he writes: "we were young men who were going places. We had this in common: we had come to America to seek our fortune; none had found it" (194), "we were penniless newcomers, full of dreams, but we also had the daring of youth and the drive of poverty" (196). At the time of his first return to Italy he really feels split in the two famous "halves of one" man:

I had the sensation of being two persons. I felt double, not in the sense of schizophrenic where one personality is not responsible for the other. God forbid. I was two personalities, ambling along pleasantly together. One took part in the daily life of the ship in a sort of undertone, while the other lived a life that was more real, more beautiful, the life of which I was making my journey. My mind, in fact, had traveled ahead of me to my home in the Alps. (214)

A trimmed moustache, well-built and well-groomed, with good eyes: this is the doctor who would work after hours to fulfill his duty towards his patients and towards his family. This is the image that **Don Peppino** gives of himself in his autobiography. Born 1877 in Sanfele (Lucania) and writing at around eighty years of age, Peppino immediately explains the truth of his name that he chooses for his book jacket. His real name is Giuseppe Tomasulo, but Don Peppino, the nickname with whom people would call him, is more faithful to his inner image of himself: "mi sembra piu' indicato alla mia

indole, che ha una particolare attrazione per il linguaggio familiare, che da' quella dolce sensazione d'intimita', tanto casa agli esseri semplici" (9). Peppino thus identifies deeply with his job and with the way his patients call him. His entire autobiography is an apology of this straight man, spurred by a sense of "duty" towards his profession and his family. On his loyalty to these two values he measures his morality, and his weight as a man.

Don Peppino adopts the mode of the American success story, based on individualism and a "recipe" to succeed a la Franklin. Like Massari and Panunzio, Peppino dedicates the last part of his book to "l'esposizione dei principii dai quali mi son fatto guidare dal giorno in cui ho iniziato la mia carriera fino al giorno in cui ho dato il mio 'addio alle armi' (103).¹⁹ Here he describes his ethos as a doctor, the importance of poor clients with whom one must speak an easy language, the equal importance of curing body and mind, the history of illnesses, the importance of prevention, and so on. Peppino often shows his modesty, as when affirming that "per la cronaca, e non gia' per la storia, alla quale non ho mai aspirato, esordisco annotando che nacqui il 28 febbraio 1877" (9).²⁰ Elsewhere, he writes that his book is written only for the narrow circle of family and friends: "Se, non ostante la mia istintiva riluttanza, mi sono deciso a scrivere non la mia biografia, ma una modesta cronaca della mia vita, l'ho fatto solamente per appagare il desiderio della mia famiglia, di clienti e di amici per i quali ho riservato le poche copie di

¹⁹ "The exposition of the principles that I followed from the day I started my career to the day that it gave it my farewell."

²⁰ "For the report, and for history to which I never aspired, I note that I was born on February 28, 1877."

questa pubblicazione" (8).²¹ Notwithstanding all this, Peppino rises from the category of humble immigrant and stresses his own individual importance, even elevating his profession to the level of gods with a quote by Cicero: "in nessuna cosa gli uomini si avvicinano agli dei, come allorquando ridanno agli uomini la salute" (8).²² He clearly says, using an economical metaphor, that his individualism was never sacrificed: "Non ho mai cercato di quotarmi in rialzo, ma nemmeno di vendermi a ribasso" (119).²³ His sense of individual self is shaped by Virgil's verse "audaces fortuna juvat" ("luck helps the brave") that Peppino adopts as his own: "Sono stato e sono tuttavia audace e debbo alla mia audacia i miei modesti successi. Nessuna difficoltà mi è sembrata insuperabile. Nessuna contrarietà mi ha fatto desistere nel perseverare" (19).²⁴

Peppino studied Medicine in Naples, but being one of the poor students, and allowing himself no distraction, he does not remember it as a pleasant time. He never forgets he belongs to the poor class of fighting people: "avrei dovuto racimolare i miei cespiti toccando il polso di ammalati, che - come me - appartenevano alla categoria degli eterni condannati alla lotta per l'esistenza" (12).²⁵ America is the way out from his family's debts and his own career: "mi avrebbe consentito di alleviare a mio Padre l'opprimente onere dell'educazione dei miei fratelli. L'America mi apparve come la terra

²¹ "If, despite my innate reluctance, I decided to write not my biography but a modest chronicle of my life, I only did it to oblige to the desire of my family, clients, and friends to whom I dedicated the few copies of this publication."

²² "In nothing man gets closer to the gods than in giving back health to other men."

²³ "I never tried to sold myself for more than I am worth, but not even for less."

²⁴ "I have always been brave and I owe my modest successes to my audacity. No difficulty seemed insuperable to me. No contrariety made me desist from perseverance."

²⁵ "I had to earn some money holding the writs of sick people that - like me - belong to the category of people eternally condemned to fight for life."

promessa che avrebbe potuto risolvere il mio assillante problema" (12-13).²⁶ He arrives in New York and after only two months takes the exam for his license, at twenty-four. He works for the societies of mutual help, but the work is too hard, and he becomes a family doctor for the Italian community. He dedicates a large part of his autobiography to his friends and colleagues, the *pensione* Bosi where he would have lunch, and his clients: one who cuts his cheek with a razor one night in the darkness, and a lady who makes him "confuso e alquanto mortificato" ("confused and very mortified") when reproaching him, "dobbiamo pregare il Signore che quando ci punisce con un accidente lo faccia prima delle sette di sera!" (30).²⁷

At the end of his career, due to nervous stress after fifty years of work, Doctor Peppino makes a balance of his life as a material man, a "homo economicus" who measures his monetary success at the end of his life: "nel 1950 la mia posizione economica era la seguente: avevo una casa ma non ero piu' padrone del mio ufficio. Avevo dei titoli azionari, ma non erano sufficienti a colmare le esigenze del nostro bilancio" (118).²⁸ He is a happy man with a rich wife and six children, who immerses himself in the universal flux of life. Perhaps this is how the "normal" man sees his life, as a shiny moment, an interesting moment, but then, once it is over, it merges into the flux of universal destiny: "ho goduto la gioventu' e la maturita' come ora godo la vecchiaia. . .

²⁶ "I would have allowed me to relieve my Father from the oppression of maintaining my brothers. America appeared as the Promised Land that could have solved my assailing problem."

²⁷ "We have to pray God to make us sick before seven at night!"

²⁸ "My economical situation was the following: I had a house but I did not own my office anymore. I had bank titles but not enough to satisfy our needs."

e' questa mia filosofia e questa mi convizione che mi fanno considerare la vecchiaia come il sopravvivere dello spirito individuale nello spirito dell'universo" (120).²⁹

Four Professors

The most accomplished of these writers is **Joseph Tusiani** who reached fame not only as a professor and a critical writer of literature, but also as a translator and a poet with wonderful results in English, in Italian, and in Latin. Tusiani's autobiography of his forty American years is written in Italian and it is composed of three volumes, all centering around the tool of his trade, the *word*: *La parola difficile*, *La parola nuova*, and *La parola antica*. Each is a complete book built on a self-sufficient thematic knot: the first is about his "birth to new life" with his arrival, the meeting with his father and the birth of his brother, his search for a job, his entering the literary circles (Italian American and American), his friendship with the writers Arturo Giovannitti and Frances Winwar. The second revolves around the inner conflict between his American brother and his Italian self, another version of the second-generation complex of split identity. The third is about the resolution of such conflicts and the conclusion of the parable of migration with the disappearance of the first immigrants, his father and uncle. The internal conflict that drives the third book is threefold: the protagonists are the American son Michael (Maichino), the Italian son Giose, and the immigrant mother who does not speak English. They represent three different degrees of Italian-American identity: the first still rooted in Italy even if in America with her body, the mother; the second split between loyalty and love towards the motherland and the opportunity offered by America, Giose; and the third

²⁹ "I enjoyed youth and maturity like I now enjoy old age [. . .] this philosophy of mine makes me consider

that completely refuses Italy in order to embrace the new land. The three levels are played out on the different language of choice, a game for any poet: Mike speaks only American, the mother sticks only to Italian, and Giose "translates" between the two languages, speaking Italian - but not like his mother - and English - but not like his brother. As we can see, there is a strict correspondence between the plot of family life and that of external life in all his three books, in a perfect balance. The dramatic conflicts of life in America are reflected on the life of the family: father-son in the first book, brother-brother in the second, mother-American family in the third.

The three books can also be compared to the three moments of a day. The first is definitely a book of dawn. It is a work full of novelties, of births, and beginnings. It reflects the inner condition of starting life anew, and not only a different life, but life itself. Tusiani is found many times repeating words such as "io che mi stavo affacciando alla vita," "mi svegliavo alla vita," words that seem strange for a 25 years old man.³⁰ The truth is that even if he is already a college graduate in Italy, he still unable to call his father "papa". This is in fact the resolution of the dramatic knot of part one: when he can call his father 'papa' and his father calls him 'figlio' before entering in the hospital operating room. The second book is the conflict with his brother, and it is a work of high noon, completely immersed in the active American life. On the contrary, the third book is a work of the twilight with its heartfelt homage to the old immigrants and its most melancholic and touching vocabulary. In these three books, Tusiani exhibits his elegant writing. His style is incredibly harmonious, elegant and refined. If in his English prose it is possible to savor echoes of Latin and Italian, his Italian prose is rarified, perhaps on the

old age as the survival of the individual spirit in the spirit of the universe."

verge of pomposity and rhetoric, but always touching. He plays with words and with their semantic extremes like "Sammarchesi venuti qui a soffrire di piu' per soffrire di meno" (205) or Arturo Giovannitti, "punito dalla vita per aver vinto al morte" (355).³¹

Born in 1924 in San Marco in Lamis on the Gargano, Tusiani arrives in the United States after his graduation, joining his father whom he does not even remember. He is a 25-year-old man who lives the first-generation complex of split identity and defines himself as "two strange halves of one" man ("d'un uomo due strane meta'") in his poem *Gente mia*. He is the writer of Italian America: he avoids speaking about his physical birth and his Italian youth, but begins right at the time of his metaphorical birth to the American life, his arrival in the harbor of New York. *Nuova York* are the first words of his autobiography. His first American period is dedicated entirely to the search for a job, because "la giobba" is what defines the immigrant: Tusiani's description of Italian touches in a foreign land reveal the profound love that the writer feels for both, the original Italy and the recreated one ("come tutti gli emigrati, a ciascuna finii col dare meta' del mio cuore," 71).³² When he arrives in the Bronx his eye caresses the houses of his countrymen, "la mia gente" as he calls them over and over, all distinguished by

un ferro di cavallo ben visibile al centro del cancelletto, una statuetta di Sant'Antonio incastonata in una grotta di pietre policrome, un morettino di gesso con in mano una lanterna che il minimo soffio di vento faceva oscillare, e qualche metro quadrato d'orto che sfoggiava i suoi ultimi pomodori scarlatti" (*Difficile*, 15).³³

³⁰ "I was entering life;" "I was waking up to life."

³¹ "People from San Marco who came here to suffer more in order to suffer less;" Giovannitti was punished by life for having won death."

³² "As all immigrants I ended up giving half of my heart to both of them."

³³ "A horse shoe well visible in the center of the gate, a little statue of Saint Anthony in a grotto or colored stones, a statue of a black servant with a lantern that the wind made swing, and some meters of garden with its last fiery red tomatoes."

Tusiani also captures the nostalgia of the immigrant with a sense of lightness:

Chi non ha mai messo piede fuori d'Italia non sa cosa sia udire
all'improvviso un canto del paesello natio in terra straniera. Ti si
inumidiscono gli occhi, ti passano davanti, come su uno schermo magico,
tutti i volti dei vecchi amici, rivedi ogni pendio erboso, ogni vicoletto
ripido, senti e distingui le campane delle chiese, e passi il dito sull'occhio
per asciugare una lagrime senza vergognartene (*Difficile*, 20).³⁴

Tusiani thus enters the problem of a split identity, the main problem of the first-generation immigrant. He describes it in terms of vision, as in the passage above, but also in terms of sound as in the following, where he portrays the immigrants as "people without music:"

Sentiamo gli accordi di "Silent Night" e pensiamo a "Tu scendi dalle stelle", e fra l'una e l'altra melodia si frappongono alpi e oceani di differenza, e per la prima volta ci accorgiamo di non aver piu' radici: non siamo ne americani ne' italiani. Vorremmo anche noi cantare l'inno giocondo della nuova terra, ma ce lo impedisce un nodo alla gola: ci sentiamo gente senza piu' musica natalizia, senza piu' ricordi da rafforzare, addirittura senza piu' patria. (102)³⁵

Tusiani is attracted to his immigrant group and at the same time he feels the sting of prejudice for belonging to it, as when he is asked about his knife in school by a teacher, or when he is ashamed for the poverty of his people who eat squirrels and steal the flowers. The double soul of the immigrant is clear to him when he returns to Italy after an absence of seven years. If he knew he was not an American, now he understands

³⁴ "Those who never stepped outside Italy do not know what it is to hear a sudden song from the native village in a foreign land. Your eyes get wet, all the faces of old friends pass in front of you as if on a magical screen, you see each grassy slope, each steep alley, you clearly hear the bells of the churches, and you pass your finger on your eye to dry a tear without shame."

³⁵ "We hear the notes of Silent Night and we think of Tu scendi dalle stelle, and between one and the other song there are Alps and oceans of difference, and for the first time we realize of having no roots: we are neither Americans nor Italians. We would like to sing the joyous hymn of the new land but a knot in the

that he no longer Italian: "Erano li' le mie radici, ma erano altrove le mie ramificazioni. Ero, insomma, in un limbo indescrivibile, tra estasi ed affanno, tra piacere e dovere. Ero io e non ero io: ero qualcosa fra due mondi, due sogni, fra due civiltà concrete e non ancor del tutto comprensibili" (280).³⁶

The language is always the main battlefield for the poet, linguist, translator Tusiani. Paolo Giordano notes that Tusiani "is the only Italian/American author who looks at the language question as a spiritual dilemma more than a sociological problem" (317). Language is both the gap and the bridge between his two cultures. He espouses America through its language by working as a translator, and sees the drama of those who remain entrenched in the old language of Italy: his old friend Coco', his mother, and the old architect. A working-class immigrant, Coco' is described as making a strong effort, too late: he learns to read and write English when he is eighty, coming to Joseph's house with new words twice a day. Joseph's mother learns enough to pass the citizenship examination, but is heard saying: English "e' una lingua brutta come un debito" (381).³⁷ The old sad Italian architect instead refuses *la lingua maledetta* tout-court in his house, and dies alone and silent, forever rejected by America.

The same loving portrait of the old immigrants is present in *La parola antica*, the third part of his autobiography. As a middle man, Tusiani is able to speak both to the America of his brother and the Italy of his parents. His brother is the epitome of American philosophy made of optimism and mobility that Tusiani himself cannot share,

throat forbids us to do it: we are people without Christmas music, without memories to strengthen, even without a Motherland."

³⁶ "My roots were there, but my branches were elsewhere. In sum, I was in an incredible limbo, between ecstasis and anguish, between pleasure and duty. I was and I was not myself: I was between two worlds, two dreams, two concrete civilizations still not wholly comprehensible."

while his mother is the epitome of Italian stability and pessimism: "Era saggezza secolare, la sua, o semplicemente mentalita' garganica troppo impregnata di atavico pessimismo da potersi sentire sconfitta, e dichiarata inutile, dall'improvviso splendore di una societa' affluente" (101).³⁸ The death of the old immigrant, Coco', is for Tusiani the excuse to sing the praise of old immigration, the difficult one, not his own: the "Emigrazione sannamabiccia!" as his Uncle Giuseppe repeated (58); "l'emigrazione culle sagne all'occhie " (172).³⁹ Looking at the large forehead of the emigrant, Tusiani sees one of the writers of our autobiographies, a simple immigrant duped by destiny:

la fine di quell'uomo, di quel semplice emigrato, - uno dei tanti - che, per uno scherzo del destino, s'era dovuto cambiare il nome, per mancanza di denaro non era potuto mai piu' tornare in Italia a riveder la mamma, ma aveva fatto tutti i mestieri e tutti i sacrifici per potersi comprare, anche lui, la sua modesta casettina con la *iarda*, si', con la *iarda*, perche' li', in quel pezzettino di orto, quello smilzo fico, piantato e curato e 'velato' con epico amore, potesse, ogni anno col rinnovarsi della primavera, parlargli della sua terra (46).⁴⁰

In Tusiani's efficacious treatment of the theme of the incomprehension between Italian grandparents and American grandchildren (who have an abyssal gap between them than parents and children), we see the drama generating our autobiographies. The tragedy of miscommunication reaches its apex in the heartbreaking scene of *nonna* and her grandchildren who speak two different languages, and belong to two different worlds

³⁷ English "is as ugly as a debt."

³⁸ "She had a secular wisdom, or simply a Garganic mentality too full of ancient pessimism to make her feel won or declared as useless by the sudden splendor of a rich society."

³⁹ "Immigration with bloody eyes."

⁴⁰ "The end of that man, that simple immigrant - one of many - who for a joke of destiny had to change his name, for lack of money could not go back to Italy to see his mother, but who had worked all jobs and made all sacrifices to buy a modest house with the *iarda*, yes with *iarda*, because in that little garden, that skimpy fig tree, planted and cured with epic love, could speak to him of his land every year at the beginning of spring."

constantly brushing each other but never ever meeting. Tusiani stages the misunderstandings with this exchange that goes nowhere: "me, too", "certo che sono la vostra nonna io"; "what are you saying?", "sei? Non siamo sei; siamo tre: Maico, Polina e Neni'.. Tre." "Tray? Nanny wants to see the tray"... "I love you, nanny", "ai l'ova iu".. - "Beh, quelle 'uova' che volevano significare affetto e amore, non riusciva ancora a digerirle" (100).⁴¹ Maria Pastore Passaro comments on this passage: "Quanta tristezza, quanta corrente sotterranea, pervade ogni frase, ogni sillaba di quelle pagine!" (148).⁴²

The next three writers deeply differ from Tusiani. They can be considered almost second generation, and their ethos is less lacerated than Tusiani's. With Angelo Pellegrini we will find an example of clear and simple Americanization through education.⁴³ Left as a humble working man, but graduating from college in the United States is **Francesco Ventresca**, a teacher who writes his autobiography as a successful man. As James Craig Holte writes in *The Newcomer in America*, it is an Oratio Alger story: "very little about

⁴¹ "Well, those 'eggs' (*l'ova*) that wanted to mean affection and love, she could not digest still."

⁴² "What a sadness, what a subterranean current pervades every sentence, every syllable of those pages!"

⁴³ A story of an education is that of Salvatore Castagnola in his unfinished *Land Where my Father Died!* He recounts his childhood and youth up to his graduation at sixteen. He dedicates his story to his children "that reading it that may learn from whence came the America they now enjoy." He explains that "this is the story of an immigrant boy who, unlike most immigrants from Italy, came from a higher middle class family, leaving a home of luxury and culture. Like all other immigrants, he saw America at its worst, and by contrast to his former surroundings, felt more keenly the tribulations awaiting all foreigners of the early century and in particular of Italian origin." Born in 1883, he migrates from Messina with his mother and brothers in 1903, choosing what to bring to America: "even sentiment has to give way, however, when a life's belonging must be squeezed into one large trunk" (28). They join his father in New York. The trip occupies many pages with his expectations. He learns English, "anxious to show myself at my best, feeling toward my father, whom I had not seen for four years, as a total stranger and wanting so much to have him like me and accept me as his eldest son" (51). When they arrive he does not even recognize his father: "I had caught sight of a man in rustic working clothes, pointing and waving at me and shouting for recognition. [. . .] Could it be, I thought? Then with incredulity, I mused to myself, but father wore a beard, a beautiful blond beard. He was robust, immaculately dressed and cut the figure of a prince. Could this be he? And I repeated my thought aloud. 'Could this be he?' (67). His mother disillusion is equally bitter, when she sees their house with the hammock and the calico curtains for privacy: "she did not even notice the young man had gone, tears streamed down her cheeks and then she broke down, flung herself on the lowest hammock and cried. The three of us children took up the melancholy and clinging to mother's pitiful body we cried with her" (32).

the author's inner life is revealed. Instead, Ventresca concentrates on recording his actions and the people he meets on his rise to prosperity" (73-74). Born in 1872, Ventresca writes his story in 1936 (when he is sixty-four) at the apex of his teaching career. He is thus completely absorbed in himself and in his success story, dissected for his readers in all its stages. It is a didactic story, and the implied reader is not his close family, as in the case of humble autobiographies, but the wider public, at least his classroom.

Writing as the chairman of the Department of Foreign Languages at Manley High School of Chicago, Ventresca's education is the protagonist of this life story. It is the metaphor of his life. Ventresca left Italy ignorant of English (he studied until third grade), and his ignorance of the language becomes the vexation of his first American years that are all devoted to making a little money with humble jobs. He is hungry for work when he is only nineteen, but he discovers that he hungers knowledge more than anything else, and this constitutes his growth into an American citizen. Even his departure from Sicily is told as a freeing from fetters: "To me living in Santo Stefano was like struggling in a bag" (75), and he never shows regret for his hometown. The metaphor of himself as a young cat closed in a bag and struggling for light, is echoed when Ventresca describes his trip and compares his gift of sight with the blindness of his brute companions on the ship: "there was no singing. There was no joy. Everybody was serious. . . . the limitless expanses which surrounded them didn't did not interest them" (22). Education is his way to America, as it appears from this image: "I bought an Italian-English grammar not later than the second day in New York. I still have and prize that grammar which I bound, myself, with a railroad map of the United States" (25). It is interesting here to notice the

detail of the book (a revered object) wrapped in an American railroad map, both to signify his work to make America, and the limitless possibilities and roads that education opens for him to conquer. Reading names of cities is the first step to conquering them: "Chicago... pronounced the Italian way *kee-kah-go*, with the satisfaction of the discoverer" (34). It is clear that the struggler with History typical of humble autobiographies leaves here the place to the conqueror.

Ventresca is employed as an unskilled worker in New York State, working in the railroad construction, in Chicago and in the Mid-West. He lives among groups of Italian men: "we never quarreled. Nowadays, people would think this too good to be true for a large number of Italians living together" (33). His dependency on this group however ceases when his distinction in education begins, almost like in Pascal D'Angelo who nevertheless really never leaves the group. His detachment from the mass, the group, the material men begins with a book: "from now on I was living with my countrymen in body, but not in heart and mind. While they chattered and played and sometimes cursed, I was busy reading my lessons as loud as I dared and looking up definitions in the dictionary" (40). Learning English becomes the metaphor of his re-birth as an individual: "I envied her fluency in this new tongue, but I was as yet unweaned from my neighbors from home" (36). Significantly, he titles the chapter dedicated to entering primary school at twenty-one with a Dantean "Incipit Vita Nova. Here begins the new life" (39). When graduating from College Valparaiso, he exclaims: "This meant the commencement of life for me all right, and what was there for the future I dared not even guess" (69). When he remembers his first schoolhouse in Illinois, he says: "I love the place. It has played a major role in my life. It is the birthplace of my renaissance" (53). I would underscore the

importance of place in this statement, and in the next one as well where the Master he earns at the University of Chicago is indivisible from the campus location: "Wonders for me! The atmosphere of the campus and the beautiful dignified buildings . . . were uplifting to the man with the right kind of mind and soul!" (165). The schoolhouse and the campus are two concrete locations that make it possible for him to mark his success on a map. A stable location is even more important for an immigrant who spent the first years of his migration changing from place to place in America, and whose symbol of life is the railroad map that wraps his precious first book.

Success stories like this one buy into the individualistic American mode of narration, breaking with the communal tradition that is still strong in our humble autobiographies. Benjamin Franklin Ventresca's model, as when he declares that he would never take up drinking, "and, mind you, I had not read Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography yet" (24). Also resembling Franklin's autobiography is this reflection about his healthy habits: "before retiring at night I invariably knelt down of over half an hour and said prayers. I believe to this day that was good for me. It developed in me a stanch faith and tenacity of purpose" (43). Besides, Ventresca's detachment from the community perfectly illustrates the passage from the "age of Gods" to the "age of Heroes." There is no half-way here as in humble autobiographies, the old Gods are completely discarded and a new American identity is born: "I am not a bit superstitious," Ventresca writes, "I have lost entirely what little superstition was taught me by neighbors, who thoroughly believed in ghosts and in witches and in the wizards to whom the witches had to report at midnight on certain days of week" (26). This goes together with the change of the man of *survival*, that was the main character in humble autobiographies:

this hero is now not really surviving in the strong sense it had for the humble writers, but rather making his own destiny with his own hands, as in the typical American autobiographer. When Ventresca recounts two episodes of survival (a boulder rolls down from an open car and stops an inch from his foot; he jumps away from a train passing at incredible speed) he takes all the merit for himself, refusing - even if tempted - to think of a higher fate: "I had my doubts then; I do not believe it at all now. But I do think there is some sort of comfort in believing that somehow fate or destiny or Divine Providence" (27).

I should here insert other two professors, Leonard Covello and Angelo Pellegrini who both write autobiographies in the 1950s, after having established in the world of culture. They both can be almost considered second-generation because they immigrate at an early age. **Leonard Covello** (*The Heart is the Teacher*, 1958) is an immigrant who remains humble and down to earth, even refusing a University career to remain faithful to his vocation as a "teacher," a high school teacher and principal in underprivileged schools of New York. According to James Holte, Covello's book, "intended as a lesson [. . .] reaches out from personal experience of one man to address universal concerns. And in so doing becomes part of the great traditions of American personal writing" (*Newcomer*, 85). His immigrant-self and his teaching-self become inseparable in a noteworthy way ("I have learned much about the ways of immigrant peoples and their American born children. I was an immigrant boy myself," 1): out of his own experience as a son of hard-working immigrants, fighting for an education, ashamed of his culture ("we were becoming Americans by learning to be ashamed of our parents," 44), he designs a new method to teach Italian immigrant students. He privileges human contact with his

students, the knowledge of their background and their families, the value of their merits over their mistakes (as when he writes the wrong-doing of a group of students in pencil on their report cards: if they persevere it will be written in pen, otherwise it will be erased after graduation). From his father's pride (he gets angry when a teacher changes his name from Coviello to Covello: "A person's life and his honor is in his name. He never changes it. A name is not a shirt or a piece of underwear," 30), Covello learns to appreciate his student's heritage and make them comfortable with it.

His ethos as a teacher is established from the first page where he counts the forty-five years spent as a teacher in public schools and twenty-two as a principle of Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem. Born in Avigliano (Potenza) in the 1880s, Covello remembers his childhood in the little town, crushed under the sticks of his uncle the Priest and of his schoolteacher ("learning should come the hard way"), working as a shoemaker apprentice ("everyone was necessary. You had a purpose in living and that was to work and be of service," 6), punished for his running off after his dog ("the other apprentices looked at me with amazement, as if to say, 'It serves you right for venturing so far out into the world,'" 9), and hopelessly waiting for his American father to send for his family. In 1896 they finally leave, and he brings with his grandmother salute: "Narduccio *mio*! The gold you will find in America will not be in the streets, as they say. It will be in the dreams you will realize" (18). In New York he starts his American life divided between the Italian at home and American at school, like a second-generation immigrant. Education is for him a gift of his new land, together with the hope in something better: "The very essential difference between working hard in Italy and working hard in America became apparent to us who were young. In Italy it was work and work hard with

no hope of any future" (39). Never shying away from hard jobs (since he is twelve he works three hours before school delivering bread), he makes his way through scholarships and graduates from Columbia. He is immediately attracted to the organization of social activities for immigrants, but reaches his best results in the schools where he stresses a human treatment of his students ("I stopped talking at my students, lecturing to classes. I developed the habit of listening," 178), and values the parents' input by visiting them and ingesting thousands of black unsweetened coffees in their houses.

Covello's highest accomplishment is spreading the teaching of the Italian language in New York high schools. His own experience of shame and alienation makes him discover that the best way to the students' Americanization is not to forsake their native language, but to use it. He also imagines that knowing their culture could only enhance their self-confidence: "the idea was to acquaint these young men with their Mediterranean culture and give them an appreciation of and a pride in the country of their parents" (104). It is only after a long path teaching English and teaching French, that Covello reconciles with his own language. It takes him a while to go back to his roots, and start spreading the Italian language. As in Tusiani's work, language has a strong presence in this autobiography. In 1920, he enters a classroom of twenty-five boys "who formed my first class in Italian at De Witt Clinton, perhaps the only Italian class in any public school in the country at that time" (129). Against the accusation of "segregating" his students and keeping them out of America (especially in a time of conformity such as the after-war), his program succeeds, and he sees the enrollment grow from 25 students in 1920 to 538 students in 1925. He publishes a text book, *First book in Italian*, in 1923.

A University professor, **Angelo Pellegrini** writes *Immigrant's Return* by starting with the poetical dilemma of whether to be buried in Italy or America. His entire book is a mild success story ("I am of middle height, middle weight, middle class," 9); but most of all it is a reflection on what America has given to him. Giuseppe Prezzolini is quite harsh with this book and its author whom he defines as "l'emigrato scontento" (391):

"Questo professore americano mi pare poco professore, ossia poco dotato di spirito critico. La prima condizione per credere valida una esperienza e' quella di distinguere il fatto personale dal fatto generale" (393).⁴⁴ Prezzolini is in fact stung by Pellegrini's research for what it means to be Italian and what it is to be American, and almost takes personally Pellegrini's lamentation that Italy is a backward, melancholic, and sad society, and that it lacks democracy, Prezzolini answers:

Tanto avrebbe lamentarsi che le ragazze di un paese abbiano gli occhi azzurri anziche' neri, e le chiome bionde anziche' more. Il Pellegrini dice proprio il vero quando riconosce di essere americano. E' proprio americano in quella caratteristica della maggioranza degli abitanti e degli studiosi di qui, che 'e' quella di *non avere senso storico*. Basterebbe il fatto di aver cercato dove si trovano 'i valori spirituali,' in Italia o in America. Son domande da professori americani. I valori spirituali americani si trovano in America, e quelli italiani in Italia. (397, emphasis in text)⁴⁵

Like Covello, Pellegrini arrives in America when he is only nine years old and thus could be almost considered a second-generation American. The fact is that he needs to go back to Italy thirty years later with a scholarship to discover how American he has

⁴⁴ "The unhappy immigrant;" "this American professor seems to me little professor, little gifted of critical spirit. The first condition to believe an experience valid is that of distinguish the personal from the general."

⁴⁵ "It would be the same to complain that the girls of a country have blue eyes instead than black, or blond hair instead than dark. Pellegrini says the truth when he recognizes to be America. It is really American that characteristic that people and scholars of this country have, that of lacking *a sense of history*. It would be

become. He remembers his childhood in the little town of Casabianca (Florence), but his trip to America in 1913, his "emigration to America meant a new birth" (17). America appears with its "Great American Breakfast," a buffet where one only has to "*just ask for it!* So that was America! Just ask for it! Or, *just reach for it!*" (35, emphasis in text). He settles in the wilderness of the state of Washington in the wood mill town of McCleary. He offers interesting reflections on what it means to be an Italian peasant, accustomed to fences and landscape "endings," and to elbowing people and fighting a sterile land, suddenly "lost" in the wide American spaces, where nature is wasted and man just takes from it and moves on ("Nowhere we could see evidence that human hands had worked to subdue the environment to human needs," 45). An example of this for him is wood, chopped badly in the forest, with stumps left in the ground, and burned unendingly with a conveyer belt that throws it into the fire. The conveyer belt becomes the metaphor of the incommunicable distance between Italy and America: with a reflection on language that reminds of Tusiani's sensibility, he explains that he never succeeded in describing the conveyer to his Italian relatives, because

in the language of an Italian peasant there were no words adequate to describe such good fortune as we had found. The New World simply could not be communicated in the idiom of the Old. The conveyer and the perpetual fire, out of their context, would have seemed to my friends in Italy the vision of an irresponsible mind. And at that time I could not have supplied the context necessary to give the phenomenon meaning. (50)

Language also measures the distance between him and his parents. He cannot explain to them the reasons of his American world, because words fall too short in the

enough to be looking the place of 'spiritual values,' Italy or America. These are questions of American professors. American spiritual values are in America, and Italian ones are in Italy."

task." "When I tried to explain to them in Italian why it was important that I should play in the baseball team and participate in school programs, the language not only proved inadequate to my needs; it made my preoccupations sound silly. The glory of a home run was simply not transmissible in Italian" (73).

Pellegrini sticks to his origin and is proud of his double language. He never trades his culture for America, and he portrays himself "as an authentic American who preferred Gongonzola to apple pie" (87). His Americanization is clear in the individualism of his conduct, and in the freedom to "take" (he also switches to the third person in such key-passages of glory): "He had reaped the educational harvest as he had gathered the material abundance of the American landscape. *Here I am, come and get me!* had implications which extended farther than he had at first even dreamed was possible. [. . .] He had won recognition on his own terms" (96-97, emphasis in text). He is completely conquered by America as only an almost second-generation immigrant can be, relinquishing the double identity that our other autobiographers show: "*I am not an Italian; I am an American. I issued from my Mother's womb in Italy; but I was born in America*" (252, italic in text). This drive to individualism, typical of success stories such as Ventresca's and Pellegrini's, is surely the most clear sign of American autobiography, while all the others in this research belong to the category of Italian immigrant autobiography with its mode of "quiet individualism."

The Sweet "Self" of Success

Angelo Massari, Guido Orlando, Fortune Gallo, Vincent Sardi, Frank Capra

The last corridor of our gallery of immigrant portraits contains those who have been particularly successful, like the banker Angelo Massari, or who mainly portray themselves as winners. They constitute a small number of our autobiographies, but they also represent the most typical idea of an immigrant autobiography as a mere success story, as critics of immigrant autobiographies have read them, as stories of Americanization and American individualism.¹

The same title betrays **Angelo Massari's** autobiography as a success story: *The Wonderful Life of Angelo Massari* (translated, and probably edited, by a friend, Arthur Massolo). This is the story of a self-taught public man who rose from the streets to become the head of the International Bank of Tampa. White hat over a large face, this

¹ A story of Americanization is that of Peter Campon that could be easily catalogued through Boelhower's model, or as Holte's stories of conversion. The very title justifies it: *The Evolution of the Immigrant*. His success does not relate to his job, but to his citizenship. He is a furniture salesman who writes his autobiography at eighty-four (around 1960, but the book has no date) as an example for Americanization in emphatic terms. America has become the devotion of his life, and he spends many years as a vociferous member of many civil organizations and Italian American groups. Born Pietro Campolongo (his name has thus been changed to become even more American) in San Donato (Cosenza) in 1876, emigrates with his parents and sisters in 1886. In Oneonta, New York, he goes to school and is conquered to American life, so much that he decides not to return to Italy with his family: "as I must have been 'inculcated' with the spirit of America at that early age- not yet 14 – I resolved to remain behind, determined to make my own way alone and carve out my destiny" (3-4). In the book he collects speeches and articles about his American activities. The happiest in his life is the day he receives his citizenship or "the noblest title any man can bear, 'An American Citizen'" (6). His writing is drenched in American rhetoric, punctuated with capital letters, and he becomes the shiniest example of a throughout Americanization: "I have sincerely dedicated myself to America, am proud to be the Father of American children, and rejoice in my heart of the great ideals which have made America the hope of the World" (5). Autobiographies such as this one do not stir the water, do not offer an alternative view or a divided soul. Their uniformity is almost boring.

immigrant really "made himself" in America. He came up from nothing thanks to his will and when he writes his story, at almost seventy years of age, he is an *inflated* personality. Massari started as a factory boy in the cigar factories of Tampa, Florida, where he migrated at the age of sixteen. He then became the founder and the owner of the International Bank of Tampa, a bank that survived the 1929 crash. Now happy and content, Massari is ready to pull out the string of beads of his successes and his virtues and write an entire book about them. His autobiography is an exemplary autobiography, written for the family, he says, but geared to exalt the figure of the successful banker who becomes a doctor, a philosopher and a wise man for his readers.

Massari was born in 1886, in Sicily, where he was uneducated (he only goes to school for 8 months), but avidly read books. He immigrates in 1902, after pleading to his uncle for a loan to go to America, where he thought he could accomplish something. He shows himself as stubborn from the beginning. He goes to Florida, it being one of the least popular destinations among Italians, except for Tampa where a community of Sicilians has settled at the turn of the century. He works as a boy in a cigar factory. "I thought of my mother. I did not cry when I parted from her, but now I cried as a child. [. . .] On the other hand, I did not like the idea of being a burden to anyone" (94). He immediately embraces the "the practical side of life" (35), and first opens a fruit stand, then a fruit shop, and finally in 1925 a bank "that could protect and abet the interest of our countrymen, serve without any selfish motive our community, and show the local ethnic groups and also the natives that the Italians of Tampa were capable accomplishing big things in the financial world" (236).

When he returns home twenty years after his departure, at thirty-seven, he portrays himself as an exception among returned immigrant: being successful and still young: "I was only thirty-seven years old and financially I had been quite successful. I had returned to my homeland in a much better position than the others. I returned wealthy and still young. Mine was a triumphal march, like that of Rhadames in Aida. Rich and young" (76). He tells of his successes in business, and measures it proudly: "Strange indeed is the story of my life. It may seem at times paradoxical or incredible, for how can a humble worker in this world of ours, without any preparation or financial means, create and conduct without any outside help, a large wholesale business of food products and the International Bank of Tampa, of which he is the owner? All by myself and without any assistance" (9). He even narrates his successes as a doctor (for his barber and his carpenter who ate too much fried meat!) and as a psychologist (for his brother). His high opinion of himself is clear in his obsession with self-depiction through an abundance of "I am:" "I am a positivist. I am a modest thinker. I am a good executive, I have initiative and plenty imagination, but above all I am a hard worker" (8).

This is a self-contained man, contented with himself, interested in himself. His autobiography is a triumph of individuality: "there is glory only in what I am interested in, my own, no matter how small it is. [. . .] I have my own philosophy; it may be good and it may be bad, but I have always been contented either with something or nothing, with little or plenty" (16). His individuality is proclaimed at every step: "I have always used to live in my own way without any outside help. I was never taken ill. [. . .] This seems hard to believe, but it is true" (1); "In all truth I believe that there are not many who think the way I do, and at times it seems to me that I am out of place, for I hardly fit

in what surrounds me" (9-10). He boasts of being the individual who has detached himself from the "herd": "The common herd annoys me and I detest it. Dealing with intellectuals I gain, with the others I lose" (21). Individuality and freedom are his "American" values: "the main reason why I have never sought association with others is due to the fact that I have always wanted to be and remain free, and to act freely in accordance with my free will" (22). Here indeed is the manifesto of his individuality: "I have always belonged to a good and trusted party, *myself*, and I have been quite alert and quite active in the party best known to me - the Angelo Massari party" (22). He goes further and even ventures to write a book, *Filosofia Personale*, as an "individualist of the Stirner school." He makes us smile, at the very least, when he dares to suggest better words to put in the mouth of Jesus on the cross: "He would have done better if he had said, 'Father in Thy omniscience and being the Creator of all, Thou should not have created man so dissimilar one from the other'" (20). The last chapter of his autobiography is dedicated to his "word of advice" for future generations, six pages with the list of his principles a la Franklin ("I ran away from all vices" 94). Among this advice, there is the rule of keeping to oneself, not showing off, be sincere, never humiliate people, never create revulsion against yourself, if you cannot speak well of a person "keep mum," looking at people straight in eyes, never offending or neglecting anyone (all behavioral acts that bring to personal gain).

Another individualist is the publicity agent **Guido Orlando** who writes *Confessions of a Scoundrel* in 1954, a book that seems his ultimate act of publicity for himself. Born in 1909 in Barisciano in the South of Italy, Orlando migrates when, at a young age, he is lured by the promises of America. Orlando's ethos is that of a working-

man, but most of all that of a trickster of work, the "scoundrel" who is not ashamed to use any trick and lie to move people to do what he wants. He starts young, when he pretends to be playing in a band without knowing music at all in order to sell guitars: "playing to an audience and making a profit out of it. This was the first successful bluff I ever threw" (15). He admits: "cornball? But it did the trick" (65). His entire life is a rhetorical bluff: he is a public relations man who builds movie stars out of nothing (Greta Garbo with her image of shyness, Tza Tza Gabor, Valentino...), who can sell the desert (Desert Palm Spring in California), and make politicians win (Roosevelt and La Guardia who both forgot him afterwards, and De Gasperi in Italy in 1948). His ego is fed by being the power behind things, behind the visible. His autobiography figures as the rhetorical act of selling his public image, and this naturally shakes our faith in the storyteller; it raises the question of how much "cornball" we are reading, but it nevertheless does the trick, creating a charming (though not nice) character and a gripping story. Besides, as we have already said, the dimension of truth matters partially: in fact, the book gives another side of Italian immigration, that made of men like him, full of ideas, unashamed of playing tricks to succeed; the immigrant as a trickster.²

His individuality jumps out from this autobiography with force. His persona is built through the episodes of his life, and he starts with no one less than the one involving Gabriele D'Annunzio during a visit to his elementary school. Young Orlando asks him: "Sir, how can I do what I want to do when I grow up?" To which D'Annunzio replies: "You have asked a very good question, young man. First, you decide what you want to do

² The spirited Orlando could thus be another version, on the lawful side, of the trickster archetype that Fred Gardaphe' sees in the literary figure of the gangster (cf. "A Class Act. Understanding the Italian/American gangster").

- then, don't let anyone stop you" (9). America and his immigration are part of his self-image. He craves America as a place where he can do what he wants, and he does not care about not seeing his mother or brothers again. When he wins a scholarship offered by two rich Americans, he arrives in Boston only to find out that they are dead. He is not discouraged and joins his dad who works in a mine. Besides working with his father, Orlando starts selling newspapers and even uses his own immigration as a rhetorical means. When he finds clients hard to convince, he tells them: "Look, mister, I am a poor boy from Italia, trying to help my family buy food," or "I'm just an immigrant kid, trying to work my way through school" (15).

The making of his self is the great gift of immigration to this resourceful man: "it gave me a big charge to be treated as an equal by a count - me, the barefoot boy from Barisciano" (53). He says he studies "at the college of hard knocks" (65), but is able to build a name for himself as the maker of movie stars and politicians, anywhere he can sell an image. At forty-four, he is still selling newspapers on the street, as an eccentric move to celebrate his humble beginning, but also as a well-thought publicity stunt, that stresses the success of his story as an individual who made it:

On July 29, 1953 I went out on the streets of Paris for the 5th year and sold newspapers. What began as a simple piece of self-promotion had turned into an annual event. The original purpose of the trick was to remind caste-conscious Europeans of the fact that I was something of a Horatio Alger American. The idea that a man of any stature was ever a newsboy remains unbelievable to most citizens of France, Germany and Italy. And it was worth business and money to me to pose as an alien eccentric - within limits. It fitted their idea of what an American should be. And therefore, it was always good for free newspaper space. (262)

Very similar to Guido Orlando is **Fortune Gallo** who also works in the shadow of famous stars, as an impresario. His *Lucky Rooster. The Autobiography of an Impresario* is the story written by a seventy-year-old writer who depicts himself as a fortunate man who dared and was lucky. Born in 1878 in Torre Maggiore (Foggia), his very name is luck: Fortunato, Americanized as Fortune. At his birth his father explains to the priest: "Upon this *bambino* I bestow the name of Fortunato, combined with the family name of Gallo, it will be a perfect description of him, I hope – Lucky Rooster. May it always be for him a measure of the success I pray will someday come his way" (28). His story lives up to this wish. Fortunato plays the harmonica and becomes a young musician, he organizes a little band, and thus starts his job as impresario at a young age. Like Orlando, America is the ideal for freedom, since he hears a returned immigrant say to his father that "you can't tie him down in Torre Maggiore." He arrives in America with a few cents in his pocket, the rosary and a bottle of holy water from his mom. He is immediately lucky in starting his own business, adapting quickly to the American life: "I missed the slower tempo of life back in Italy. It took a determined effort on my part to get back into the swing of things, to attune myself to the quicker pace" (131). He marries an American girl from San Francisco, and spends 37 years of his life bringing Italian opera and operettas to America. His whole autobiography is a triumphal song to his name.

Another immigrant whose name identifies with his business is the restaurateur **Vincent Sardi** who writes *Sardi's: The Story of a Famous Restaurant*. His name and his restaurant are inseparable and even the food he serves has a part in his autobiography, which has an entire section dedicated to the birth, life and recipes of his dishes. Even if

this is definitely a success story dictated by the great success of the restaurant, Sardi's work ethic is clear from the beginning. The first sentence of the book is

one of the saddest days of my life, if not *the* saddest, was the day I retired officially from the restaurant business. [. . .] My wife and I had practically lived in the restaurant from the very first day when we opened it in old location a few doors to the west... [. . .] My whole life has been predicated upon my work - in Italy, in London, and finally in America. Now I was leaving; and I confess, as I glanced up and down my street, my eyes were not quite dry. (13-14)³

His entire autobiography is, in fact, the story of his humble beginning and then of his life through the restaurant, with the description of his clients. Sardi basks in the reflected light of his clients, like James Cagney and Barbara Stanwyck, but also Tony Curtis who was a bootblack who worked in front of Sardi's, until he became a client. But Sardi also remembers the drama of the fellow immigrant, Mr. Frank Cavaluzzi, the ice-man, who, coming day in and day out, never missing a day, one morning collapses and dies in the restaurant without even seeing one of his many children return from the Army. Food colors the language of this cook (perhaps for the intervention of the ghost writer?), and he serves his recollections on a dish: "to some they may be meat, to some others they may be cafeteria beans. To others, they may not be palatable at all.... I offer these memories with the same feeling of uncertainty Jenny and I used to share when we put a new dish on our menu" (25-6).

Born in 1885, in the village of San Marzano Oliveto (Alessandria) in Piedmont from a well-to-do family, he attends the boarding school "Don Bosco" that is translated

³ The Italian-American musician Guy Lombardo dedicates the last chapter of his *Auld Acquaintance*, to "Retire? To what?" According to him, there is no life outside of work and his work is fun, sparkling with friendship and glamour in the music industry.

as "Dunwoody College"! He is a mischievous boy and is sent to a sailing ship for punishment: "that's what families did to incorrigible boys in those days. I decided not to run away after all. The prospect of going aboard a real ship was fascinating" (41). Like Panunzio, he learns the hard life of the schooners when he is only eleven and a half years old. He goes to London with his uncle, and works as a waiter in an Italian restaurant. He learns good manners as a servant for a surgeon, and thus he is able to find work in elegant restaurants and hotels. At twenty-one he knows his job well, but has experienced a hard life: "I was telling some of my boyhood experiences in London to my son. 'Why, Dad' he said, 'that sounds like something out of Dickens.' 'I don't know about that,' I said. 'But I do know that in those early days, I certainly had a dickens of a time'" (70). This idea of living the novelistic life without knowing it is common among immigrants: their life is adventurous and interesting even if nobody would ever write a novel about it, and even without them knowing it.

In 1907 Sardi leaves with his brother for America and again, the metaphor of the table signs his departure: "One night my aunt gave us a farewell dinner. As it was over, I folded my napkin and laid it beside my plate. 'Three years from now,' I said, 'I will come back from America and unfold it', at that time I meant it sincerely" (79). His first image of New York is shocking: "I thought I had never seen anything so ugly. The streets [. . .] were drab and dark, and the storefronts were covered with soot and grime.... Sometimes the noise really got on my nerves. Everything was shaking. Now after 50 years it is truly my home" (83). Sardi works in fine restaurants, like the Bartholdi Inn, run by big-hearted lady, Theresa Bartholdi. Here he meets Jenny (Eugenia) from Castel Afero near Canelli, his future wife. He buys the restaurant from his friend Mario Cremona who is also from

Canelli, and struggles to pay the bills by working in a nightclub at night. He has two chefs, whose names are those of the movie *Big Night*: Secundo, the first chef and Primo, the second chef. Vincenzo is soon completely Americanized, and when he returns home for the burial of his mother, he has the surprise of realizing he is no longer an Italian (like Pellegrini). He even starts eating only American brand pasta ("last time I was over there I could hardly bear to eat the *pasta*," 213): "It was hard for me [. . .] to get used to the fashion of speaking with hands. And of all things, I missed the drinking water!" (125).

If so far we have met only immigrants working behind the curtains (a chef, an impresario, a publicity agent) we have now a writer who is "above the title:" **Frank Capra**. His autobiography, *The Name Above the Title*, tells most of his film career and leaves little space to his experiences as an immigrant. As he says to Vito Zagarrio, that his is an identity he wishes to forget, and his life starts anew in America:

I was only six years old. What roots could I have had? I don't remember anything before, because when we left Palermo and got out into the open ocean, it was such a marvelous thing that all preceding memory was wiped out. That is the originary moment. From there my memory begins. It begins on the ship. Before the big ship I don't remember anything. And to say that I returned to Bisacquino three years ago. I didn't feel any emotion. I didn't recognize anything. (133-4)

Capra brushes over his humble beginning in America only in the preface: "I hated being poor. Hated being a peasant. Hated being a scrounging newskid trapped in the sleazy Sicilian ghetto of Los Angeles. My family couldn't read nor write. I wanted out. A quick out. I looked for a device, a handle, a pole to catapult myself across the tracks from my scurvy habitat of nobodies to the affluent world of somebodies" (xi). He works frenetically to make something out of himself. Hour by hour, he describes his long day,

spent on the street as a newspaper boy, in a power plant as a janitor, and in his high school a studious student. He is the pride of his family, earns an education, and will not die a peasant. He comments: "conquering adversities was so simple I began to think of myself as another Horatio Alger, the success kid, my own rags-to-riches hero" (9).

In his rush to glory, Capra describes the making of his sixty films, and, now retired, looks back at his life ("was I a happy man? Oh, sure. There is no greater punishment for a creative spirit than to wake up each morning knowing he is unneeded, unwanted, and unnecessary. Retirement was becoming slow death," 494). It is significant to notice though, that even if he erases his immigrant origins, his autobiography finds a *raison d'être* in this negation. And after many years he goes back to see the shack where he grew up with his parents, and interprets it in the light of his philosophy, the good-hearted, striving-for-a-better-life philosophy of all his movies. When he sees the house, half-destroyed, with two old people looking at him with hostility, he says:

How could they know that their run-down house had been built by courage; the courage of two middle-aged, penniless, illiterate peasants who had dared travel halfway around the world to meet the unknown fearful challenge of a strange land, a strange people, a strange language? And who slaved like oxen and fought like tigers to feed and clothe their children. And who fed them. And clothed them. And one of them became a film director. And became famous, and retired, and now he was belly-aching because he was not needed. . . . Like Antaeus (whose strength depended upon his touching the ground), I had to return to my roots for a much-needed draught of peasant courage. Out of the refill came a book that is an impertinent trying at saying to the discouraged, the doubting, or the despairing what I had been presuming to say in films: 'friends, you are a divine mangle-mangle of guts and stardust. So hang in there! If opened for me, they can open for anyone. (495)

This is the end of his autobiography where Italianness, being strongly negated, becomes the very inspiration for his book, as courage and striving force.

PART IV

STYLE

CHAPTER 9: AUTHORS BETWEEN ORALITY AND LITERACY

The oral poet Homer called words "winged words," and the Romans used to repeat *Verba volant, scripta manent* (words fly, writing remains): the instability of spoken words has been a constant, even in mainly oral societies. Our authors come from an oral society, and like winged words they have "flown away" from their birthplace, they have experienced the instability of migration. It is now time for them to pin themselves down, as immigrant and as stories, with the ballast of written texts.

It has been said that Italian immigrant autobiography descends from the oral tradition of peasant Italy.¹ The immigrants retained their habit of storytelling and "added to their repertoire tales of ocean voyages, work accidents, and comical incidents involving 'greenhorns' in this strange land" (*Spectrum*, 1). In our autobiographies we find testimonies of the presence of these storytellers among the immigrants who would entertain with real stories or literary ones like the Carolingian sagas. Francesco Ventresca remembers that among the railroad workers there was the storyteller who everyday would tell a piece of "the long drawn-out story of the Royal House of France (*I Reali di Francia*) . . . without a hitch . . . to me unconsciously it was an inspiration which was to

bear fruit in future years" (37-8). The returned immigrant is also an inexhaustible source of tales: as a Agostino Stagi who immigrated to San Francisco between 1899 and 1908, and tells numerous stories to his granddaughter repeating: "Novelle? [. . .] ma che dici o biscarina? Le novelle 'en quelle che racconta tu ma' sulla befana. Le mi' novelle 'en fatti veri" (Stagi 5).²

The decision to write an autobiography, to pass from the voice to the pen, should not be taken for granted in these authors. By writing, they break with a mainly oral tradition. They often are the first in the family who learn to write, and they live in an environment where writing is used for its mere instrumental value (to keep record of expenses or write sporadic letters). "Gli autori sono *popolo*, sono *scriventi e non* scrittori (professionisti della scrittura), sono uomini *transitivi* (secondo la suggestiva definizione di Barthes), la cui scrittura costituisce un'*attività*' e non una *funzione*" (212) writes Quinto Antonelli.³ Their decision is therefore significant, not only because it bridges the oral and the written culture, but also because it involves a larger shift of consciousness.

Walter Ong reflects on such shift provoked in the human mind when orality becomes literacy ("more than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness," 77); and when literacy of manuscripts becomes that of printing and then of technology ("technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformation of our consciousness," 81). First of all, says Ong, the alphabet is a democratizing script, it is

¹ See for example Gardaphe', "The Evolution of Italian American Autobiography."

² "Tales? But what are you saying, little fool? Tales are that your mother tells about the Befana. My tales are real facts." In *Quaderno di Divo Stagi* (Archivio Diaristico of Pieve Santo Stefano), Divo Stagi remembers his father (1883-1966) who lived in San Francisco as a farmer for 9 years and never stopped telling his stories.

³ "The authors are lowly people, they are *writing* people, *not* writers (professionals of writing), and their writing is an *activity* not a *function*." Antonelli is referring to Roland Barthes, "Scrittori e scriventi." *Saggi critici*. Torino: Einaudi, 1972. 120-128.

easy for everybody to learn, and it soon becomes available for all. Our writers do notice this "democratizing" aspect of writing, as Calogero Di Leo who opens his book of memories with the claim that everybody writes books today, and if even Monica Lewinsky wrote one, he can do the same:

Signori e Signore se oggi qualsiasi persona puo' scrivere un libro della sua vita, o del suo passato, o delle sue avventure, o del suo romanzo amoroso, di qualsiasi genere. Ci sono tanti scrittori nel mondo e tanti libri scritte che non si possono contare sono Biliardi di libri e buono che la lettura istruisce lagente. Adesso si e' aggiunta un'altra scrittrice la signora Monica Luewinkie, col suo romanzo amoroso la dolce vita di qualche anno col signor Presidente degli Stati Uniti di America Bill Clinton, e un libro di pochi anni di avventura amorosa e gia' e famosa in tutto il mondo, anche essa e il presidenti vengono di discentenza di emigrante e se essa a scritto un libro perche' non lo posso scrivere anchio uno. (1)⁴

Writing is a democratizing act also because it gives poor people a tool to enter in the "history" usually written by the powerful. The most conscious of this and the most pungent in repeating it is the Sicilian Antonio Margariti who reacts to the elitism of history written by the few: "la vita dei grandi viene scritta dai grandi storici e remane nella Storia, ma per me che sono come un granello cascato nello spazzio e fuore del mio vicinato nessuno sa che io Esisto" (87).⁵

Second, the technique of writing moves internal mechanisms when it calls for an enhanced introspection of the individual. The necessities of writing - silence, longer time

⁴ "Ladies and Gentlemen if today anybody can write the book of his life, or his past, or his adventures, or his romantic past, of any kind. There are many writers in the world and many books written that we cannot count them they are billions of books and it is good 'cause reading educates people. Now another writer has arrived Mrs Monica Luewinkie, with her love novel her dolce vita of some years with Mr. President of the United States Bill Clinton, and a book of a few years of love romance and she is already famous in all the world, she too and the president come from an ancestry of emigrants and if she has written a book why can't I write one too."

and long meditation - bring about an "inward turn" of the writer, as Ong underlines: "the evolution of consciousness through human history is marked by growth in articulate attention to the interior of the individual person as distanced - though not necessarily separated - from the communal structures in which each person is necessarily enveloped. . . . Writing is consciousness-raising" (174-175). In this light, we could see the genre of autobiography as a direct child of the writing technique, since it is an individual act that favors a lonely meditation on the self. Besides, only in writing, and not in the instability of spoken words, we find a stable construction of the story into a self-contained unit, where there is a closure between the three stages, beginning-middle-end, and there is no possibility of modification. It is therefore the perfect mold for revisiting and "wrapping up" a life.

Oral Qualities

Being the bridge between two modes of thinking and narrating, our authors maintain stylistic qualities of both. Especially the less educated writers, those who are still unfamiliar with the art of writing, often translate onto paper their oral tonalities, such as repetition, redundancy, direct appeal to the reader, and so on. The weighty oral tradition still tilts their pen in different ways. David Vincent notices the same in his research on British working-class autobiographers who "write as they spoke. Punctuation is disregarded, syntax owes nothing to the grammar books, and spelling is determined by the accents in which the authors conversed with his family and neighbors" (*The Autobiography of the Working Class*, xiv). As ours, they draw from the oral tradition,

⁵ "The life of the big people is written by the great historians and it remains in History, but for me who am

thus "we must look not for the author and his pen, but the narrator and his audience, whether it be his children, his workmates or his drinking companions" (*The Autobiography of the Working Class*, xiv).

In fact, our authors still maintain the strong feeling of the presence of a listener typical of orality, by directing their speech to the young ones or addressing the readers directly. They often break the fourth wall and seem to be looking at the reader in the eyes, and say "But I will tell you about that later on..." or "You must remember the story I told you . . . Remember?" (Montana 54, 104). The farmer poet, Antonio Andreoni, writes his epic of immigration in eight-verses stanzas like the knight romances he heard orally repeated in the Tuscan countryside, and thus address his readers by calling them "listeners": "ecco, uditori, un giorno di allegrezza / ecco, uditori, un giorno di conforto, / ecco, uditori, la piu' contentezza / che un uomo puo' provar pria che sia morto" (222-223). The same happens to the unskilled worker Tommaso Bordonaro who at the end of his written memories thanks his "listeners:" "Grazie per aver ascoltato la mia storia" (134). Even the most educated writers, like David Yona, speak to their grandchildren: "again please do not laugh at me; those times were tremendously different from the one when I write these notes, and probably even more from the ones when you may read them" (164). We find this habit, says Ong, even in many 19th century novels that continuously intone "dear reader." This is because "both author and reader are having difficulties situating themselves. The psychodynamics of writing matured very slowly in narrative" (Ong, 102). Emily Hicks sees the presence of the *lector complice* as one of the

characteristics of texts of border writing: "much of border art and culture is considered with the active participation of the audience" (xxvi).

Second, our autobiographies make use of formulaic expression typical of orality. The oral poets (Homer is the example) had a large list of formulas to use as it fitted their metrical verse. This habit remains in our authors even if they do not have to obey any metric rule. Some formulaic expressions remain to punctuate the discourse, and perhaps to give it an internal rhythm. For example, we find phrases as "il duro destino dell'emigrante" or "magra vita dell'emigrante," or "lavorare come un cavallo," "fatti veri," that sound as refrains and seem to reflect the repertoire of themes and formulas available to describe a specific hero. As Aeneas was "pious," Odysseus was "clever" and Nestor was "wise," we find the "hardworking" immigrant, the "struggling" immigrant, the "suffering" immigrant.

Oral expressions appear in these works. The postman, Michael Lomanto' for example inserts many sayings like "believe it or not ripley" (sic), "don't get me wrong," even the exclamation "boy" etched at some point in the text. The construction worker Emanuele Triarsi finishes his digressions with statements such as "ritorniamo ai maccheroni che..." (let's go back to the macaroni...). He even closes his booklet of memories, morals and poems with a formulaic expression that ends all Italian fairy tales, "Larga e la foglia, stretta e la via, dite la vostra che io ho detto la mia:" In Triarsi this becomes: "Io così la penso. Gli altri la pensano come vogliono" (*Piccole storie*, 73).⁶ The ice-cream maker Calogero Di Leo colors his narration with oral expressions such as "seeing is believing" or "there are more days than sausages" (80), and with many

⁶ "I think it so. The others can think it as they like."

proverbs: "E per questo il vecchio proverbio non sbaglia che il sazio non crede al digiuno" (175), "Il vecchio proverbio dice finche ce vita ce speranza" (47), "Sapete il vecchio proverbio tutto fa brodo" (81), or "Un vecchio proverbio Siciliano dice che tanto la brocca va all'acqua e si rompe" (122).⁷ Proverbs are also presents in a more educated writier, the prinmaker Carlo Dondero: "There is more time than life" (59) he writes hinting to the immigrant's fear of not having enough time to pursue all the opportunities. Elsewhere he adds: "Young as I was, this saying of wisdom occurred to me, 'as a hound returns to his vomit, so do fools return to their folly'. As my good mother had often demonstrated to me, my motto was 'that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'" (18-19).

In the third place, these autobiographies maintain the characteristic of oral speech as being additive rather than subordinative, and making large use of "and... and..." or short phrases typical of paratactic prose. Let's take for example this passage from Antonio De Piero's fantasy of his trip before his departure.

Il sonno non vuole venire, tante cose mi si accavalavano una sopra l'altra nel cervello e chiusi gli occhi per vederle meglio, la prima inanzi l'amara partenza; il treno che doveva portarmi a Parigi il Bastimento, il mare, l'America del Nord coi suoi tesori, la gran baia di New York grande metropoli, La colosale statua della libertà che con il suo braccio destro in alto stringe con la mano una gran torccia acesa, simbolo di protenzione e di libertà a tutti i popoli; e troneggia maestosa in mezzo al mare sull'entrata del porto. D'irimpeto la collosale città col suo incesante traffico a migliaia gli automobili gli autocarri un strepito indiavolato, coi suoi titanici palazzi detti gratanuvole data l'imensa altezza, vedo ancora le numerose Fabriche Stabilimenti Fattorie coi suoi

⁷ "We say who lives hoping dies in despair," "the old proverb does not err that the satiated does not believe the hungry," "the old proverb says if there is life there is hope," "you know the old proverb everything is good for broth," "an old Sicilian proverb says the jug brings the water until it breaks."

poderosi camini tutti fumanti tutti lavorano, tutti vivono, e bene, quì si muore dal'inedia. (63-64)⁸

It is a long list of short events and short flashing images that almost make up an expressionist painting: the departure, the train, the ship, the bay, the statue, its torch, the city, its traffic, the trucks, the noise, the skyscrapers, the factories... The list works through an addition of images, as they spontaneously appear in the mind by association of thoughts. As the oral storyteller, this narrator does not edit, but blurts out his thoughts as they blossom.

Fourth, the structure of these autobiographies keeps a temporal movement, from the beginning to the end, along a mostly linear itinerary. This attachment to a traditional storyline is the natural form of the narrative structure of oral expression. Ong asserts in fact that "human knowledge comes out of time. . . . The elemental way to process human experience verbally is to give an account of it more or less as it really comes into being and exists, embedded in the flow of time. Developing a story line is a way of dealing with this flow" (137). Only a few of our autobiographies jump in time, and mainly those of more educated authors. Even when there is time shifting anyway, it is of the most basic form: a few flashbacks or flashforwards, and a few examples of beginning in the present tense, at the time of writing. Walter Spengeman calls this temporal order typical of "historical autobiographies" and Paul John Eakin describes it as "autobiography simplex"

⁸ "Sleep didn't want to come, many things were crossing one another in my brain and I closed my eyes to see them better, the first was the bitter departure; the train that had to take me to Paris the Ship, the sea, North America with his treasures, the big bay of New York the big metropolis, The colossal statue of liberty with her right arm raising a big lit torch, symbol of protection and liberty for all the peoples; and it dominates majestic on the sea at the harbor's entry. In front the colossal city with its restless traffic with thousands of cars and trucks a deviled noise, with his titanic buildings called cloudscrapers for their immense height, I see also the numerous Factories Mills Farms with their ponderous chimneys all smoking everybody works, everybody lives, and well, and here we die of hunger."

in his "Narrative and Chronology." Eakin defends the simplicity of our authors for whom self and narrative are not old concepts, but are still very much alive (especially among people who never heard of Derrida...):

My guess is that the announcements of the death of the unified subject are premature, [. . .] I remain unconvinced that narrative is an obsolescent, retrograde structure in autobiographical discourse. Narrative is the supreme temporal form, and I believe that it is, finally, our life in time and our mortality that generates much of the impulse to write autobiography. (38-39)

Fifth, almost all our autobiographies share the tendency to remain down to earth and avoid abstract interpretations, a tendency that Ong finds to be typical of orality. To explain the unknown they choose images of the known world, of their job or their rural world. They conceptualize "their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate familiar interaction of human beings" (Ong, 42). We find this tendency in their use of metaphors derived from the life they lead, and images drawn from their works, or their animals. One of the best images is that of the terrace-maker of Friuli who cannot find a better way to describe the panic of immigration than using the image of the scared deer he has seen in his mountain: "Dovevo sembrare un cervo inseguito, fermo sull'orlo dell'abisso" (Toffolo 35).⁹ The shoemaker and postman Lomanto instead describes people without circumvolutions but with concrete details that his eye catches, for example: he was "the best teacher I have ever had and the first who wore rubber boots" (44). We can compare

⁹ "I must have seemed a pursued deer, immobile on the edge of the abyss."

these with Vincent's example of his British farm worker who writes "I was as fond of my wife Has a Cat is of New Milk" (*Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 42).¹⁰

Sixth, the way of knowledge of our writers is "situational rather than abstract." Especially in the least educated autobiographers we find more the description of external events than stages of development in the character: "I was born, my son was born," or "I did this, I started that" is the normal sequence. The assessment of the character comes more often in practical terms: their success on the job or their accumulation of belongings substitute for their internal evaluation. "Externals command attention" says Ong (54)¹¹ who finds this is typical of oral cultures that to the question "are you happy with yourself?" give this answer: "I need more land and sow more wheat." In the same way, the appraisal of a life comes together with an economic computation in many of our autobiographies: "Per me era un imperativo, guadagnare la mia paga e fare del mio meglio e questo e' cio' che ho fatto in tutta la mia vita," declares Pietro Toffolo (39).¹²

Besides, the attachment to facts is a characteristic of the rhetoric of these writers. They dip their hands into the bucket of "nonartistic proofs," as Aristotle calls them: they bring facts as their testimonies, real facts, "fatti veri," as Calogero Di Leo says all the time. The stress on the veracity of their words is always strong. To remain with Aristotle, for their "artistic proofs" these authors naturally appeal to *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. First of all, they create their own *ethos*, the ethos of the immigrant, the unlucky struggler, the fighter against an adverse destiny, the poor that bends but never breaks. Then, they make

¹⁰ The quotation is from James Bowd, "The Life of a Farm Worker," *The Countrymen*, vol. LI, n. 2, 1955 (manuscript, 1889), 297.

¹¹ "Self-analysis requires a certain demolition of situational thinking. It calls for isolation of the self, around which the entire lived world swirls for each individual person, removal of the center of every situation from that situation enough to allow the center, the self, to be examined and described" (Ong 54)

large use of *pathos*: their stories drip sufferance and hardship. *Pathos* is their first source of *ethos*, because their lives of sorrow make them heroes. The narration of the difficulties of emigration, their arduous integration, their complex process of identification are many elements of their *pathetic* path. Finally, the kind of *logos* these writers create is drawn in great measure from folk culture. They rarely use enthymemes or syllogisms, but often play with maxims and examples. They repeat the “maxims” of their youth, the words of their ancestors with which they have grown up, and they retell “examples” from the oral tradition, stories of the past that everyone in the village knows. Maxims and examples give to their stories the flavor of eternity, the echo of timeless knowledge.

Words and Punctuation

Style and content are often strictly connected in these works. The unfamiliarity with writing of these autobiographers often reveals a "sweat of writing" ("fatica di scrivere") where style is strictly intertwined with content. The hardship of writing is heavily present in these pages that are sometimes almost incomprehensible, that are filled with Italian-American slang, and at the same time reek with the will to tell. The prototype of the immigrant working man barely literate but still wanting to leave a written trace of his economical accomplishment, is Giuseppe Camilletti who writes *Diario di Giuseppe Camilletti* (typewritten, with a translation of Robert Scott, 1982). His style is a succession of bare facts that build his life in a cumulative way, brick after brick. His ethos is that of the working man who from the very beginning tastes the harshness of the American mines: "lavorai molto forte che alla sera mi faceva male laschiena anche le coste [. . .]

¹² "For me it was imperative, gain my paycheck and do my best and this is all I have done in my entire

con la stanchezza di poter morire" (1).¹³ His entire life he has been a "leba," the Italian correspondent for *laborer* in his own language.¹⁴ Camiletti uses "mina" for mine, "jiobba" for job, "bosso" for boss and "bordinbosso" for boarding boss, "lo storo" for the store, "piccare la sletta" for pick the slate (even if the translator interprets it as "pull the car"). Many of the phrases, if not all, are sing-songed in verses, a characteristic that is completely lost in the translation by Robert Scott, but that seems to derive directly from the oral tradition. This difficulty of writing becomes a principal characteristic of this autobiography (like in the Antonio Margariti's work) where the hard work and the hard life are conveyed almost primarily by the style than by the content. Reading this autobiography in the simple but ordered English in which it is translated, makes it appear like an easier life, or another life.

The outer appearance of these humble writings is stunning: like a construction, it is made of bricks of different provenance and material (English words, Italian and dialect), and even its visual appearance is chiseled like wrought iron through the particular use of punctuation and capitalization. Our humble autobiographies are disseminated of linguistic *pastiches*, becoming an interesting mix of English pronounced the Italian way, Italian and

life".

¹³ "I worked very hard that in the evening my back hurted and my ribs [. . .] with a tireness I could die."

¹⁴ Camiletti is older than 67 when he sits down to write the seven sandy pages of his memories. Born in 1896, in a town he precisely situates on the globe - "un paese chiamato Colmicoso. Parocchia di Casalvento. Comune di Sassoferrato. Provincia. Di Ancona. Marche. Italia" (1) - he migrates as a youngster of 15, in 1912, with a third-grade education and 30 liras in his pocket. He joins his unknown uncle, and becomes one of the many Italian miners who sweated in the bowels of the Scranton mines in Pennsylvania, in Providence and in Plains (Pa) loading coal and rocks. He marries Consiglia Baldrice in 1917, and in 1918 they move to Detroit, Michigan where Consiglia's brother lives. Here he starts working with General Motor and never leaves it for 42 years. He carefully annotates all the changes of residency in Detroit, the houses rented, bought and sold, the house he lost ("perse la casa e tutto quello che pagai," 7) and that is then given back to him in 1936 after the Depression. He remembers the money he payed for each until the last cent, according to the interest of the economical men. His family seems to be part of his capital, because the last words of his autobiography are "Ci abbiamo (8) NIPOTI. (2) PRONIPOTI." With his three children, the count is done.

local dialect. The tailor Pio Federico intersperses his writing with Italian-American words such as "la fattoria" for the factory, "argomento" for argument (*litigio*), "renditai un appartamento" (40) a verb coming from "to rent" (*affittai*). He also resents from the echo of his dialect and "earnings" becomes "guadambi" and its verb "guadambiare". Another wonderful example of this linguistic *pastiche* is Calogero Di Leo. The language in which his story is told is a living language, reinvented at every sentence, the language of Italian-American immigrants that Calogero limpidly describes as "l'Italiano non buono e il Siciliano perfetto e venti parole inglese" (118).¹⁵ It is a fresh, untranslatable language. Calogero re-baptizes New York toponyms in "Rigivud Brooklin" and "an avenue called Nichibacher" (137), while even his humor is shaped on the American repertoire: "my maternal grandfather Calogero my sister Calogera, I Calogero from my father and my mother's side all the heirs are 80% Calogeros like a chain of (MC DONALD)" (5).¹⁶

Calogero's lessons of Italian American phonetics filtered through Sicilian dialect are precious: "biurifu'" (*beautiful*) says Calogero of America, and following the same phonetic rule that sees the T transformed into a R he tells the anecdote of the "vuora" (water): "Bicchieri in'Inglese si scrive (glass) e si pronuncia lostesso glass acqua si scrive (WATER) si pronuncia vuoter, in America si manciano la T e la Vuoter la pronunciano Vuora, la signora mi dice per favore posso avere (glass vuora) si vado

¹⁵ "Not good Italian and perfect Sicilian and twenty english words."

¹⁶ "Mio nonno Materno Calogero mia sorella Calogera, io Calogero della parte di mio papa' e di mia mamma tutti gli eredi siamo 80% Calogeri una catena come (MC DONALD)."

incucina pero' nonso' che vuoldire Vuora" (124).¹⁷ He also remember the misunderstanding due to mispronunciation:

Una sera che giocavamo a carte io tiro un arso lei a sentire arso si e messa a ridere che non si poteva fermare, mamma mia che o detto che questa signora si ride tanto puoi mi a fatto capire che la parola arso in inglese vuoldire CULO io non lo sapeva, arso si scrive ACE e si pronuncia eis, e la signora e chiaro che doveva ridere quanto io o buttato un culo sopra il tavolo fatti veri" (123).¹⁸

Sometimes these immigrants make up their own words that are juicy with meanings. Pietro Riccobaldi's despise towards the evil America of cold business and money makes him find a new word to call it: "la Malamerica." One of the most meaningful words invented by our immigrants is Tommaso Bordonaro's "spartenza." This original term, translatable perhaps as an incredible "disdeparture" gives all the idea of the upside-down world of the immigrant, forced to leave in a way that does not make sense to him, that is unnatural, a negation of the natural law. "Dolorosa e straziande e' stata la spartenza, ma trovando tutto al contrario di cio' che io credevo. Non potevo immaginare cio' che ho trovato" (46),¹⁹ he writes with disbelief. Like in Camilletti or Margariti, Bordonaro's style has been defined as "wild" (Natalia Ginzburg's "scrittura selvaggia"), and it is perfectly adherent to its content. A harsh style is the perfect tool to describe a working life: as a naked succession of facts (often disgraces) where descriptions are

¹⁷ "Glass in English is written (glass) and is pronounced the same glass wateris written (WATER) is pronounced *vuoter*, in America they eat the T and the *Vuoter* becomes *Vuora*, the lady says please can I have (glass *vuora*) yes I go to the kitchen but I don't know what is *Vuora*."

¹⁸ "One evening we were playing cards I lay an ace [*arso*] she heard *arso* and started to laugh and she couldn't stop, *mamma mia* what did I say this lady laughs a lot then she told me that the word *arso* in English means ass I didn't know it, *arso* is written ACE and is pronounced *eis* and the lady it's clear she had to laugh when I threw an ass on the table true facts."

¹⁹ "Painful and heart-wrenching has been the *disdeparture*, but finding all the opposite of what I thought. I could not imagine what I have found."

almost absent. Descriptions are not possible in a life always busy on some activity, in which it is impossible to take a rest to look around and brood.

Graphics play an important part in these writings. Perhaps for their unfamiliarity with words, these authors mold their words and written signs as they would mold a hot iron or a piece of wood. These workers-writers play with the materiality of writing. Antonio Margariti for example uses punctuation to express irony by inserting a sequence of question marks, or gives words visual importance when he writes them in capital letters (like LIBERTA', PEPPINO or AMERICA or the visible meaning of *Ipossente*, "thepowerful," and *ipoverette*, the poor). Perhaps for his little familiarity with writing, Margariti makes it almost a sacred alphabet, a hieroglyphic where all signs have a meaning. We find this same use in of capital letters in Antonio De Piero that thus stresses the *performative* aspect of his writing that makes man become agent and maker of history. His last words in justification of his work resonate in capital letters (in the manuscript), and pronounce his belief in man as a creator: "IO PURE HO COMPIUTO I DOVERI CARATERISTICI DELL'UOMO: I FILOSOFI NE CONTANO QUATRO: 1) FABRICARE UNA CASA 2) SCRIVERE UN LIBRO 3) E FARE UN FIGLIO 4) IMPIANTARE UN ALBERO" (72).²⁰ This strong assertion of humanity that finds a graphic translation. In the last words of his photographic autobiography Paul Ricciardo literally underlines it: "I have remained alone as a scarecrow, and thus ends the life of a poor man" ("io sono rimasto solo come uno spaventapasseri, e così finisce la vita di un

²⁰ "I ALSO HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THE CHARACTERISTIC DUTIES OF A MAN: THE PHILOSOPHERS COUNT FOUR: 1) BUILD A HOUSE 2) WRITE A BOOK 3) HAVE A CHILD 4) PLANT A TREE."

povero uomo").²¹ Pio Federico bends orthography to his will and the effect is ingenious, like when he inserts a period to enhance the last phrase as a rhyming lapidary saying: "percio'. Ve ne sono grato, se non sbeffeggiato". The beginning of his story also demonstrates the wit often hidden in the humble prose. The insertion of graphical signs as commas and periods and capital letters, play an important part in shaping the meaning on the author's will: "in un piccolo paesello, del forte e gentile Abruzzo, l'undici marzo del 1891, venni a fare parte, di questo mondo. Battezzato. PIO Nicola Camillo Giuseppe." (6). Those two commas breaking the sentence in unorthodox places only magnify the poetry of the antithesis "forte e gentile" (strong and gentle) and the sense of belonging in "venni a far parte, di questo mondo" (I came to be a part, of this world) heightening the "being a part" and the isolation of "this world" as the Other at the same time. The importance of the first name is shown in the capitalization of the letters of his name, a short name that most needs highlighting.

Style. Anticulture

According to Jean Starobinski's article (1971), style is an essential element of autobiography because it creates the *I*. According to her, in autobiographies

even more than elsewhere, style is the act of an individual. . . . In a narrative in which the narrator takes his own past as theme, the individual mark of style assumes particular importance, since to the explicit self-reference of the narration itself, the style adds the implicit self-referential value of a particular mode of speaking. (74)

²¹ Quoted in L. Faranda - L.M. Lombardi Satriani, *Memoria e autorappresentazione* in C. Pitto (ed.), *Per una storia della memoria*; 177.

As we have seen, the style of our authors tells us about the oral heritage of their tradition. It tells us something about their *ethos* too. To describe their style I will borrow the words by the work credo of the French painter and sculptor, Jean Dubuffet (*Anticultural Positions*, 1951). Speaking in a time of crisis and disillusionment, in a Western world already grayed by the ashes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Dubuffet criticizes the conception of high art, the Western centrality of values, the category of the beautiful, and proposes a type of *art sauvage*, closer to the man in the street, in almost Gramscian terms.²² Thus he seems to be describing the style of our authors, men of the streets: "For myself, I aim for an art which would be in immediate connection with daily life, an art which would start from the daily life, and which would be a very direct and very sincere expression of our real life and our real moods" (3).

The style of our autobiographers is not a style of deconstruction. They do not appreciate the pleasure of analysis, of demolishing, of breaking things apart to understand them (à la De Man), because their life is already too full of crevices and holes, fractures and fissures. They instead aim at unity, at encompassing their past under one embracing gaze that founds the parts together and de-puzzles them. Speaking for his inclusive painting and collages, Dubuffet offers a kind of ventriloquism for our author's work:

I have no taste for analysis and no confidence in it. One thinks every thing can be known by way of dismanteling (sic) it or dissecting it into all its parts, and studying separately each of these parts. My own feeling is quite different. I am more disposed on the contrary to always recompose things. As soon as an object has been cut only in two parts, I have the impression

²² "I think that the culture of Occident is a coat which doesn't fit him, which in any case, doesn't fit him any more. I think this culture is very much like a dead language, without anything in common with the language spoken in the street. This culture drifts further and further from daily life. It is confined to certain small and dead circles as a culture of mandarines. It no longer has real and living roots" (3).

it is lost for my study, I am further removed from this object instead of being nearer to it. (10)

We have already touched on the "ugly" aspect of our autobiographies, on their lacks in terms of canonical aesthetics. Many of our autobiographies are scarred by grammatical mistakes, stained by spelling errors; they do not build a balanced form, they exit from the path of logic, they include everything - the important and the boring detail - in their structure; they do not bloom with metaphors and similes; they do not dig into philosophical depths or spring in artistic flights. In one sentence, they cannot be described as canonically beautiful works of art. Unless we question the concept of beauty, as Dubuffet bravely attempts: "I believe beauty is nowhere" (13). Almost answering to the *elitist* of autobiographies, like Pascal and Pritchett, Dubuffet provocatively states:

I find even this idea that the world we live in is made up of ninety per cent ugly things and ugly places, while things and places endowed with beauty are very rare and very difficult to meet, I must say, I find this idea not very exciting. It seems that the Occident will not suffer a great loss if it loses this idea. On the contrary, if he becomes aware that there is no ugly object or ugly person in the world and that beauty does not exist anywhere, but that any object is able to become for any man a way of fascination and illumination, he will have made a good catch. I think such an idea will enrich life more than the common idea of beauty. (16-17)

CONCLUSION

Nello was a good hearted man, loved by many. He left the island of Giglio when he was a young boy and spent the strongest years of his life in the darkness of the mines of Scranton. All his life he felt nostalgia for his Tuscan island and even named his daughter, Elba. From the work in the mines he earned his living and a disease that ruined his old age: his legs periodically swelled with pus and blisters. In the hope of healing him his daughter brings him back to Italy, to Liguria. He always longs to go back to his island in Tuscany, but he dies, "come il lumino cui viene mancare l'olio," (like the lamp where oil is consumed) and is now buried in the cemetery of Manarola, on the seaside, looking towards the island of Giglio.¹

The story of Italian immigration is filled of these "silent" lives and deaths, lives that have left no trace, lives consumed without words, between work and nostalgia. This dissertation aimed to save the memory of the few that rebelled against silence, and left a weak and trembling trace. I opened this dissertation with Prezzolini's bleak statement: our immigrants left only sweat and tears, not words. And I shared the painful research for material that Prezzolini also attempted: "una volta chiesi per mezzo della stampa locale di lingua italiana di formare una raccolta di memorie della emigrazione. Non ebbi risposta. Nessuno conservava memorie della emigrazione propria, o dei genitori. Cercavano, se

¹ This short portrait is taken from Riccobaldi's autobiography. The quotation is on p. 158.

mai, di dimenticarsene" (242).² He calls first-generation immigrants "a lost generation," and immigration "a great mute tragedy."

Le testimonianze dell'emigrazione italiana sono poche. L'emigrazione fu una grande tragedia muta. Le sue vittime non sapevano scrivere, e quasi non sapevano esprimersi. I sopravvissuti non vogliono ricordare. Chi l'interroga oggi trova un muro di reticenze coperto talvolta dall'intonaco dell'orgoglio. Il buon successo di alcuni fa da paravento alle disgrazie di molti. (403)³

At the end of this research, I can say the silence is less deep than what we think. The material has been there all the time (in these recent years), but it was not deemed interesting enough for analysis. The "personality" of a story is often seen as a mark of shame, and all minority writing is considered to be always autobiographical, like Trinh Minh-ha reminds us "the *minor-ity*'s voice is always personal; that of the *major-ity*, always impersonal" (28). Italian autobiography in fact has suffered from the snobbish consideration of the very Italian-American critics who often saw autobiography as the "only possible product" of people without culture and vivacity. The last one of these critics is Luigi Fontanella who writes: "Esaurito l'impulso bruciante di dare voce alla propria esperienza essenziale di emigrati, non vollero o non seppero scrivere altri libri. Quell'unico libro divenne il loro bagaglio spirituale" (45).⁴ And he gives this explanation:

² "Once I asked through the local Italian-language press to gather memories of immigration. I had no answer. Nobody preserved memories of his own or his parents' migration. Instead, they tried to forget it."

³ "The testimonies of Italian immigration are a few. The immigration was a great mute tragedy. Its victims did not know how to write, and almost did not know how to express themselves. The survivors do not want to remember. Who interrogates them finds a wall of reticence sometimes covered by the paint of pride. The good success of some covers the disgraces of many."

⁴ "Exhausted the burning impulse to give voice to their own essential experience of migrant, they did not want or were not able to write other books. That unique book became their spiritual inheritance."

Fontanella also writes: "Di fatto la grande maggioranza della produzione narrativa di questi scrittori (da Di Donato a Panunzio, da Mangione, Tusiani e giu' giu' fino a un Robert Viscusi) e' costituita dalla propria autobiografia: scritta la quale sono venute in certo senso meno ulteriori spinte destinate a opere di genere

"E d'altra parte, cosa potevano narrare questi nostri emigrati, spesso semianalfabeti, e affamati di lavoro e di sogni, se non delle disgraziate esperienze vissute sulla propria pelle?" (46).⁵

These autobiographies have spoken to us with the same voices of the immigrants. They spoke of their inner lives and the adventures that shaped them. They posed themselves as workers, hard workers, who were able to make their America and in the same time made themselves: *self* and *immigrant self* are intertwined. They showed us the living face of immigration through the men and the women that have acted in it and worked for their community:⁶ professors and doctors spent more than one word on the little world where they operated, but also non-graduate workers brush affectionate portraits of their fellow immigrants.

Though these writing we see that immigration, like any other experience of man, has been lived and distilled into images and myths, because, as Enzo Neppi states, "l'uomo e' una creatura mitopoietica, che osserva, che vive cioe', immerso in fantasmi, miti e sistemi simbolici attraverso i quali ordina il proprio mondo, esplora le proprie origini, costruisce sia a livello collettivo che individuale, la propria identita'. [. . .] L'uomo e' una creatura fondamentalmente autobiografica" (5).⁷ These immigrants

prettamente inventivo" ("Indeed, the large majority of the narrative production of these writers (from Di Donato to Panunzio, from Mangione, Tusiani to someone like Robert Viscusi) is constituted by their own autobiography. After having written it, they somehow lacked any further motivation for a work of mere invention" [45]).

⁵ "And on the other hand, what could they tell those immigrants often illiterate, hungry for work and dreams, if not of the disgraced experiences they lived on their skin?"

⁶ Beyond the easy rhetoric of the slogan "Look in the back of every big skyscraper, every worth-while achievement, and you'll find an Italian" (Jimmy Walker running for mayor of New York). Quoted in Guido Orlando.

⁷ "Man is a mainly mythopoetic creature, who observes, who live immersed in ghosts, myths and symbolic systems, through which he orders his world, explores his origins, and builds his identity on a collective and individual level. [. . .] Man is a fundamentally autobiographical creature."

constructed myths on themselves. Not only the myth of the Promised Land that lured them to leave, but also those the myth of the immigrant with two hearts, that of the worker, that of the survivor, or even that of the Renaissance knight.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ilaria Serra was born in Venice, Italy. She graduated from the University of Ca' Foscari in Venice with a "laurea" in Italian Literature. Her thesis on the history of Italian immigration to the United States through the first movies, the *New York Times*, immigrant autobiographies, letters and interviews received the First Prize of the Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli. It was published with the title "Immagini di un Immaginario: L'emigrazione italiana negli Stati Uniti fra i due secoli (1890-1924)" (Verona: Cierre, 1997). She is also the author of several articles and book chapters on cinema, history of immigration, and popular culture.

Ilaria was the recipient of a scholarship for a year of study at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the Department of Film, Television and Digital Media (1996-1997), and started her Ph.D. curriculum at Purdue University, then transferring to Florida Atlantic University.

She has taught Italian for many years, in Italy, New York (Colgate University, 1992-1993), California, Indiana, Florida and the Czech Republic (Palacky University, Olomouc, 1998). She has also worked as a journalist for local and national Italian newspapers and magazines, for radio and TV-stations, and has been a Member of the Album of Journalists, Publicists List, since 1999. She presently edits the *Florida Atlantic Comparative Studies (FACS)* journal.

