JAST

JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES OF TURKEY

NUMBER 60

FALL 2023

ITALIAN AMERICAN MATERIAL CULTURE ISSUE

Journal of American Studies of Turkey

A semiannual publication of the American Studies Association of Turkey, Journal of American Studies of Turkey is an international journal. It operates with a blind peer referee system. It publishes transdisciplinary work in English by scholars of any nationality on American literature, history, art, music, film, popular culture, institutions, politics, economics, geography, and related subjects. Contributors need not be members of the American Studies Association of Turkey.

Articles which cross conventional borders between academic disciplines are particularly welcome, as are comparative studies of American and other cultures. The journal also publishes notes, comments, book and film reviews. Details about the submission of manuscripts are provided on the back (inside) cover of this issue.

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Journal of American Studies of Turkey (JAST) yaygın süreli bir yayın olup, 6 ayda bir İngilizce olarak yayımlanmaktadır.

Yayın sahibi : Türkiye Amerikan Etüdleri Derneği adına Defne ERSİN TUTAN

Sorumlu Yazı İşleri Müdürü : Defne ERSİN TUTAN

Cover Photo/Kapak Fotoğrafı: © Maria Mazziotti Gillan, "New York studio #75"

Journal of American Studies of Turkey is indexed in the MLA International Bibliography and the Classificazione ANVUR delle riviste scientifiche (Italy). It also appears in the Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory and the MLA Directory of Periodicals.

Publisher:
On behalf of the American Studies Association.
President, Defne Ersin Tutan
Editor in Chief:
Defne Ersin Tutan
Address of ASAT:
Cinnah Caddesi No:20, Oda 48,
Kavaklıdere, Ankara, Turkey
Printed by
Başkent Klişe ve Matbaacılık Bayındır Sokak 30/E
Kızılay- Ankara Tel: 0312 431 54 90
Date: November 2023

Yayın Sahibi:
Türkiye Amerikan Etüdleri Derneği Adına,
Defne Ersin Tutan
Sorumlu Yazı İşleri Müdürü:
Defne Ersin Tutan
Yayın İdare Adresi:
Cinnah Caddesi, No: 20, Oda 48,
Kavaklıdere, Ankara
Basıldığı Yer ve Matbaa:
Başkent Klişe ve Matbaacılık Bayındır Sokak 30/E
Kızılay- Ankara Tel: 0312 431 54 90
Basım Tarihi: Kasım 2023

ISSN 1300-6606

Journal of American Studies of Turkey

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Giannina A. Lucantoni completed her doctoral research at SUNY, Buffalo in 2022. Her areas of expertise include Italian American author Pietro di Donato, and twentieth-century Italian American literature. In addition to teaching adjunct at the university level and conducting research as an independent scholar, Dr. Lucantoni teaches high school English.

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Stefano Luconi teaches US History at the University of Padua in Italy. He specializes in Italian migrations to the United States with specific attention to Italian Americans' political experience and transformations of their ethnic identity. On

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GIULIA TARANTINO

Giulia Tarantino grew up in Soverato, in the South of Italy, and spent several years studying in Rome. In 2018, she decided to move to Orlando, Florida, where she spent one year working. This experience, in conjunction with the study of Anglo-American literature, aroused a passionate interest in the Italian American condition on which she decided to focus her research project. Upon graduating from the University of Rome Tor Vergata, fascinated by the academic world, she felt the urge to further explore the literary field. Having realized the importance of the teachers' role in her life path, she decided to pursue a career as a professor. In 2021, she obtained the tenure for one year as teacher of English Language and Literature at the institute "Maria Ausiliatrice" in Soverato.

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ORCID# 0000-0002-5508-3179

Introduction

Italian American Material Culture: Setting the Ground

Elisabetta Marino

According to Christopher Tilley, "The object world is […] absolutely central to an understanding of the identities of individual persons and societies" (61). Objects and commodities serve as tangible representations of our past, present and future; they function as a medium that enables individuals and communities to express themselves, articulating personal histories and collective cultural narratives. In turn, objects are seemingly endowed with what Arjun Appadurai has termed "a social life": their silent presence (or absence) shapes one's everyday life, as well as providing insight into the structure and system of values of various social groups.

Objects acquire a crucial importance in the context of migration, described by Paolo Bartoloni as "a physical, emotional, and psychological test" (96), suggesting that such experience might lead to feelings of depression and alienation, often juxtaposed with temporary states of elation and euphoria. Due to the high relocation expenses and the limited storage capacity onboard, not all belongings and possessions could travel along with the Italian emigrants to America: circumstances dictated a meticulous selection process. Cherished heirlooms, as well as useful tools and valuable items were carefully chosen to accompany migrants on their journey, furnishing them with a sense of comfort and security amidst an uncertain future. Acting as potent talismans endowed with a semi-magical power, they ritualistically contributed to transforming new houses into homes, "meaningful place[s]" (Bartoloni 98) that sheltered vulnerable subjectivities in need of reinvention and

redefinition. At times, freshly-purchased objects, markers of the settlers' acquired economic influence and stability, were placed alongside relics of the past, to visually represent one's progress and achievements. American artifacts and luxury goods occasionally followed the reverse path: transferred to Italy when emigrants visited their motherland, they increased the sense of wonder that had originally drawn many Italian peasants to the promised land of opportunities.

Laura Ruberto and Joseph Sciorra, who have devoted considerable time and efforts to investigate the connection between Italian emigration and material culture, have identified five categories or areas (aside from food and preparation equipment) that help classify "Italian American stuff" (16-54): home and domesticity (tablecloths, embroidered towels and linen, knitted or crocheted garments)[1]; architecture and vernacular structures (such as chapels, churches, home altars, *presepi* − Christmas nativity scenes −, roadside shrines, ovens specifically designed to bake pizza or bread);[2] landscapes (*bocce* courts, burial grounds, Little Italies – frequently turned into tourist attractions, through a lucrative process of self-commodification −, vegetable gardens, where Italian vegetables were lovingly grown); statuary and public monuments (plaster casts, stone carvings, statues of saints or prominent Italians in America, such as Mother Cabrini or Columbus); display environments and museums, intended to memorialize both hardships and successes. Casa Italia in Chicago (https://casaitaliachicago.org/library-museums/) stands as a significant example: in its premises, a Sicilian Heritage Museum, the Italians in Chicago Exhibit (a collection of photos, objects, oral history tapes and their transcripts), and the Scalabrini Museum (dedicated to the missionaries who have assisted migrants and refugees in America) are hosted, together with other artistic displays and memorabilia.

The essays comprising this special issue of *JAST* will undoubtedly elucidate several of the aforementioned aspects, with a particular emphasis on food, a common thread among most of the articles. To lay the groundwork for the analyses carried out by both emergent and well-established scholars, some statements by prominent Italian American artists, poets, researchers have been here collected. Their words will indisputably pave the way for the more in-depth investigations that will follow.

Maria Mazziotti Gillan

"For me, objects and mementos represent all the ways my mother tried to teach us about Italy, although we could not go there ourselves. For example, she brought a big black metal trunk full of *biancheria* [linen] when she married my father, and came to America in steerage. This trunk was really important to her, because it was filled with all the dresses, scarves and nightgowns and towels and other kitchen objects that she made as part of her dowry. The pieces were often very rough, homemade pieces. I can remember towels; they were very rough to the touch, but had very delicate flowers embroidered on them. They represented the Italy she left behind and tried to bring with her to share with us, so that Italy would be a real place for us. I still use her handmade tablecloth and dresser scarves 25 years after she died, and I use an exquisite tablecloth made by my grandmother more than 100 years ago. My mother could not afford to give us the kind of heirlooms wealthy people have, but she gave us things that she had made in Italy as a girl with the material she had on hand. And they represented for her the Italy she loved. They were symbols of the love she had for us and what she was trying to pass on" (Marino, personal correspondence with Maria Mazziotti Gillan, 6 November 2023).[3]

Maria Terrone

"As a child visiting my Sicilian-born grandmother in her Manhattan railroad flat, I was mesmerized by the flickering votive candles, holy cards, and saints' statues standing watch on her dresser. In the otherwise dark, windowless bedroom, they communicated mystery, her deep religious devotion, and perhaps the most essential part of her past life carried with her into the New World. My mother Concetta ("Connie"), the only child in the family who was born in America, rejected Old World ways but never her parents' Catholicism. And so, at age 99, my mother sleeps at home beneath a huge picture of the Sacred Heart, and her dresser top is filled with candles, albeit electric ones, and her favorite saints. In my own bedroom I cherish an exquisitely embroidered pillowcase that my mother gave me, a gift to her from her mother who was my only living grandparent. This splendid creation from my grandmother's trousseau lies buried at the bottom of a cedar chest—another tangible link to my Italian heritage and two generations

of women" (Marino, personal correspondence with Maria Terrone, 9 November 2023).[4]

Louisa Calio

"I have a few treasures left from my family. My grandfather Rocco Marchesani's hand carved mahogany box lined with velvet and covered with cherubs in my possession and an inlaid table he made for our cousin Mike. Then, there is a page of my mother Rose M. Marchesani's graduation yearbook from Lafayette high where my father Joe Calio, her boyfriend Joe, wrote a sweet note: 'May you always be the Queen of happiness with a little sadness so your heart will know the difference.' The third is an old white tablecloth hand-embroidered in blue thread by my Grandmother Angie (whose hands hand seasoning, like in the title of one of my poems), Angelina Consolmagno. My grandfather's furniture was shared among the Marchesanis who had the space for it" (Marino, personal correspondence with Louisa Calio, 7 November 2023).[5]

Maria Famà

"Material objects that have been lovingly handed down through the generations are objects of solace and inspiration for me. I have written poems about my great-great grandmother's tablecloth which she wove, my great-grandmother's large apron that she worked in, and my father's little hat that he wore on his journey from Sicily to America. These material objects bring me comfort. They are talismans that I use, honor, preserve, and treasure because they connect me to my ancestors, no matter the distance in time and place of origin, in my case Sicilia. They give me strength to deal with the uncertainties of life because they are imbued with the perseverance and endurance of those members of my family who once owned these material items when they walked the earth before me" (Marino, personal correspondence with Maria Famà, 7 November 2023).[6]

Al Tacconelli

"The roots of belonging surround me every day in 'objects of memory;' they foster continuity with the past and reflect my non-Italian world. I find their nurturing presence in the following objects:

- Sterling silver spoon used only for sugar, we called, of course, the sugar spoon. Once I crushed *Brioschi*, the white crystals mixed with sugar in coffee caused everyone a surprise laugh.

- Above the dining room and kitchen door are two crucifixes—one from Nonno's funeral and the other from Ma's.

- In the bedroom closet hangs the long-sleeved plaid shirt with Nonna's skillfully sewed patches. I wore this a long time ago in high school.

- Ma's wood mixing spoons fill a green, heavily glazed flowerpot bought at Woolworh's Five and Dime store.

- On the kitchen counter is displayed Wanamaker's large black serving tray hand-painted with pink roses; this is the tray I served Ma's last supper the night before she was taken by ambulance to the Bryn Mawr Hospital.

- On the doorbell fixture sits Nonna's painted plaster Infant of Prague—a penny tucked under the Infant's feet ensures that I will never be poor.

- Nonno's very large hand blown 20-gallon glass wine bottle; it is my pride and joy. I remember it among the other bottles as a little boy.

- To keep my father warm Aunt Loretta wove a brightly colored Afghan—and I remember when my brother Johnny was born, I spent the summer with my aunt and uncle in Clifton Heights. I remember helping uncle Orestes whitewash the driveway's low stone wall.

- *Immaginette* or holy cards used as page markers are tucked inside some of my books.

'Objects of memory' provide a sense of my place in a non-Italian world. As mentioned already, much of my past life has been erased. A strong sense of the identity comes from these 'objects of memory.' In them I see images of my childhood's vanished world. Throughout the day I sense my beloved Italian family's vividly alive heritage. Without their nurturing presence I would feel more deeply my life's long alienation" (Marino, personal correspondence with Al Tacconelli, 7 November 2023).[7]

Susan Caperna Lloyd

"My most precious piece of Italian American material culture is my Italian father's icon of the Madonna of Loreto, which he acquired in Ancona, Italy, when he stepped ashore for a leave during WWII, when he was in the US Merchant Marine. He then tried to cross Italy to find his relatives in Frosinone, but he said he turned back because he couldn't understand the dialect. He never found or reunited with the family his parents had left, departing from the US in 1922. He kept the Madonna by his bedside for 50 years in Oregon until his death. My sister, Angela, until her tragic death (written about in my current memoir, *Dance It Up! Travels from Spain to India to Find the End of Grief*) then acquired it. After her death, I then became the protector of the Madonna and I have taken it on EVERY journey or trip I've taken myself… or it is by my bedside. Dad prized this icon and believed it protected him, as I believe it does me. He believed the Madonna was flown to Italy from the 'East.' This Madonna was also my introduction to the healing Black Madonna and dark deities I have sought in many different forms from Sicily and other parts of Europe to Latin America, the Philippines and India" (Marino, personal correspondence with Susan Caperna Lloyd, 9 November 2023).[8]

Karen Tintori

"In my bedroom, I keep family memorabilia in the wood and stamped tin humpback steamer chest my paternal great-grandmother brought in steerage from Sestola, Modena province. In my kitchen, the 18'' long stainless-steel spoon my maternal Sicilian grandfather stirred *sugo* with in his truck stop diner. Next to my computer, the pocket watch

my paternal grandfather from Fanano, Modena, wore. I also treasure the hankies my grandmothers embellished with crocheted lace" (Marino, personal correspondence with Karen Tintori, 7 November 2023).[9]

Dominic Candeloro

"I remember my mother's rolling pin and the rectangular wooden board she placed on top of the kitchen table to make pasta and bread. *Spinatore?* [*spianatoia*] I remember the mountain of white flour and then the eggs that went on top of the mountain. The mixing with a wooden spoon, then her hands (she'd let me help) and finally rolling the lump into a thin circle. Next it was cut into two-inch-wide strips, run through the machine and flattened some more, then run through the sharp blades to create limp, moist pasta which was put to bed on bag-paper spread out over every flat surface in our bedrooms" (Marino, personal correspondence with Dominic Candeloro, 25 November 2023).[10]

Mary Saracino

"I have an apron that my Grandma Saracino wore. It has meatball grease permanently embedded in it, even after years of washing it. It also has a safety pin in its bodice that she had pinned there, for what, I do not know. I wear this apron every time I make homemade ravioli, even though it was my maternal Grandma Vergamini whose legacy I embody when I make ravioli. In this way, I honor both of my immigrant grandmothers" (Marino, personal correspondence with Mary Saracino, 7 November 2023).[11]

Fred Gardaphé

"Ever since I read Alice Walker's short story, 'Everyday Use,' I have thought differently about the material legacy I have maintained in my life through the objects that I have kept, which were once part of the daily lives of my ancestors: the *falchino* my nonno kept in his pocket for cutting plants and anything that needed separation from its roots; the never rusting Mouli cheese grater I used to render Pecorino

Romano into hills for our Sunday dinners; my mother's wooden spoon that stirred her culinary masterpieces, that also worked as scepter and a behavioural adjustment tool; the eye loupe that helped my father closely examine rings and things that came into our pawnshop. These and many more keep alive memories and the stories I now tell to my grandchildren, as I wonder, what will they keep of me when to pass on my story" (Marino, personal correspondence with Fred L. Gardaphé, 6 November 2023).[12]

Donna Chirico

"The Tenement Museum in New York City has an interactive exhibit about immigration that includes asking visitors: What would you bring with you on the voyage to the new world? Given you likely had one suitcase, what treasures would you take and what would you leave behind? Most took photographs, others religious artifacts, still others cookware. When I think about what Italian 'relics' are important to me, that are part of the 'who am I' of identity, the items that mean the most are the ones given to me by my grandmother. The one that stands out is her engagement ring. My grandmother was bought bride (for $50.00). I can only imagine the journey as a teenager to America to marry someone she never met. That ring must have seemed like a king's fortune to her and certainly did not portend the difficult life she would have. I keep that ring as a reminder of the journey, struggles, and triumphs that led to the present" (Marino, personal correspondence with Donna Chirico, 7 November 2023).[13]

Michelle Reale

"I inherited my maternal grandmother's prayer books, a few of which are in Italian, her rosaries, her holy cards and death cards. They are the totems of the way she lived her life. I handle them almost as sacred objects. I interpret them and photograph them as I have with many of the things left to me or that I have claimed for my own from my parents and grandparents as a way to remind myself of the temporality of life – that our things outlive us and that objects handled by someone over a lifetime have energy. That the culture of Italian-American life can be told by the things that provided meaning and accompanied

one on their journey through life. They are indicative of a way of life, culture and being in the world" (Marino, personal correspondence with Michelle Reale, 6 November 2023).[14]

Chiara Montalto Giannini

"The sun streams through a curtain at the window where I sit. This cream-colored curtain was embroidered by hands that never held me but to whom I am connected through the unspoken bonds of blood and time. *Biancheria*: linens, hand-embroidered linens, curtains, tablecloths, table runners, doilies, coasters, a dowry of sorts, embroidered by my great-grandmothers, the women who came before me. I can't sew anything, not even a button, but I have the *biancheria*, all folded neatly in a trunk, except the curtain. That stays out on the window, where it catches the late afternoon sun. These linens made the transatlantic journey by boat from southern Italy to New York. First, they adorned Manhattan tenements, then Brooklyn apartments and homes, great-grandmothers to grandmothers to mothers and aunts, to me. This curtain is tall, long, and made for an Italian window or door – not a small North American window. Though it's hung and draped nicely on my bedroom window, it, like me, clearly doesn't fit in perfectly. Its intricate pattern of animals and flowers, each in a separate and entirely hand-tatted panel. This was made before devices stole our attention spans, when time was an asset, and means were creativity and talent. Not only do I have the *biancheria*, but I also have many of their objects – pots and pans, cast iron, pasta pots, tomato grinders and food mills, their serving dishes, their Neapolitan *macchinette* for black coffee. When my husband, who is an Italian immigrant from Florence, saw those ancient coffee pots, he had only ever seen them before in history books. In that moment, he understood that our very real Italian-American culture is, in many ways, Southern Italian culture from one hundred years ago. I've been told that 'you can feel the ancestors' in our home. I take that as a compliment. For their journeys, struggles, accomplishments, and pain, all of that – led me to existence, to here, to now, gazing at the late afternoon sun beaming in through the curtain" (Marino, personal correspondence with Chiara Montalto Giannini, 9 November 2023).[15]

Mary Beth Moser

"I always wished that I had something physical that belonged to my maternal grandmother, who died three years before I was born. The only item of hers that existed was her gold wedding band. My grandmother likely wore it for 45 years, until her death, and my mother wore it another 60 years or so before giving it to my sister. Four years ago, my sister gifted it to me for my birthday while we were in Trentino, Italy. I slipped it on the middle finger of my right hand where it has been ever since. It is a daily reminder of the sacrifices of my grandmother as an immigrant. When I lament having troubles, I see the gold ring and recognize that, by comparison, my challenges are small. The gold also reminds me of the men's sacrifice, often with their lives and lungs, in the mines of Colorado. Both of my grandmothers were widowed at a young age and with children to care for. Knowing that my mother also wore this ring links me to my motherline. Although it has surely witnessed strife and loss, this gold ring symbolizes for me strength and resilience. It reminds me to be grateful" (Marino, personal correspondence with May Beth Moser, 26 November 2023).[16]

Christina Marrocco

"Memories of objects from or symbolizing Italy are strong in myself and in my family. But always it is a person who is the real memory, and the object is simply a carrier of that person, who is us, us now, and us then, and sweepingly, us always. Whether it is the intricate ivory doilies made by my great grandmother Rosaria Pernice as a means of supporting her many children after the death of her husband or the creche everyone says great grandpa Francesco Marrocco had sent from Sicily to be placed in his front hallway on Taylor Street, Chicago, the blood seems to pulse through these objects, and they are perhaps more alive in memory themselves than if you are the one who has the box in which they are packed under your bed. And here's a twist: the thing with the creche is this: after a lot of family squabbling over who would be honored with the keeping it, someone discovered a Woolworth's sticker on the bottom of it. Was that falsehood, or was the story of the sticker a falsehood? No one knows anymore, but what we do know is Francesco kept it in the hallway, where he let in the men and women who came to his flat for healing and prayers. That he was a healer and that this was part of his symbol, and of our story" (Marino, personal correspondence with Christina Marrocco, 30 November 2023).[17]

Notes

[1]As Evan Casey and Deirdre Clemente have pointed out, "what we put on our bodies is perhaps the most personal choice we make as human beings" (7); hence, traditional Italian clothes, hats, headpieces, embroidered gowns are extremely meaningful.

[2] Focusing on New York City, Joseph Sciorra has elsewhere observed that "today, yard shrines, domestic altars, *presepi* (Nativity crèches), extravagant Christmas house displays, and a constellation of street *feste* (religious feasts) and processions are examples of the vibrant and varied ways contemporary Italian Americans have used and continue to use material culture, architecture, ritual behaviour, and public ceremonial display to shape New York City's religious, cultural, and ethnic landscapes" (xvii).

[3] Maria Mazziotti Gillan is the Founder and Executive Director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College in Paterson, New Jersey, editor of the *Paterson Literary Review* and Professor Emerita of English and Creative Writing at Binghamton University-SUNY. Her newest poetry collection is *When the Stars Were Still Visible* (Stephen F. Austin UP, 2021).

[4] Maria Terrone, poetry editor of the journal *Italian Americana*, has published three full-length poetry collections: *Eye to Eye*, *A Secret Room in Fall* (McGovern Prize, Ashland Poetry Press), and *The Bodies We Were Loaned*, with a new collection, *No Known Coordinates,* forthcoming from The Word.

[5] Louisa Calio is an award winning poet: Connecticut Commission Individual Writers, 1978; Finalist Poet Laureate, 2013, Nassau County; 1st Prizes Messina, Sicily, 2013; Il Parnasso Internationale, Canicatti, Sicily (2015, 2017, 2019). Director Poet's Piazza, Hofstra Uni 12 years, Co- Founder City Spirit Artists, Inc. New Haven (1976-1986). Her latest book, *Journey to the Heart Waters* (Legas Press, 2014). See Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisa_Calio. Accessed 5 December 2023.

[6] Maria Famà, author of nine books of poetry, has been featured reading her poems in films. Her forthcoming book, *Trigger*, will

be published in Spring 2024 by Bordighera Press. Famà lives and works in Philadelphia.

[7] Poet and artist, Al Tacconelli lives in the Philadelphia suburbs. Tacconelli's illustrations are covers for Maria Famà and Maria Mazziotti Gillan poetry books. Tacconelli's poems have appeared in *Paterson Literary Review, Endicott Review*; anthologies, *Avanti Popolo, The American Voice in Poetry*. Tacconelli has read at Hofstra University; Allen Ginsberg Poetry Contests acknowledged Tacconelli's poems. Bordighera Press published *Perhaps Fly* 2014, Finishingline Press published *Alone at the Border* in 2018, and Moonstone published *Such Things* in 2023.

[8] Susan Caperna Lloyd is an author, photographer, and filmmaker based in Ashland, Oregon, USA. The daughter of an Italian immigrant with work focusing on transcultural issues of loss and identity, her 30-year archive was recently acquired by the Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[9] Karen Tintori, a dual citizen of the US and Italy, is an international bestseller of fiction and nonfiction, translated into 25 languages and to film. www.karentintori.com. Accessed 5 December 2023.

[10] Dominic Candeloro is a historian of Italians in Chicago.

[11] Mary Saracino is a novelist, poet, and memoir writer. Her maternal and paternal grandparents immigrated to the US in the early 20th century. https://marysaracino.com/ Accessed 5 December 2023.

[12] Fred L. Gardaphé is Distinguished Professor of English and Italian/American Studies at Queens College/CUNY and the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute. His books include *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, *Dagoes Read: Tradition and the Italian/American Writer*, *Moustache Pete Is Dead!*, *Leaving Little Italy*, and *From Wiseguys to Wise Men: Masculinities and the Italian American Gangster*. His latest study is *Funny How?: Humor and Irony in Italian American Culture*, that will be published by Penn State UP.

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***JAST*, 2023; 60: 17-42**
Submitted: 27.01.2023
Accepted: 16.02.2023
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Food as a Terrain for Identity Construction and Ethnic Confrontation among Italian Americans in the United States

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Abstract

This article investigates the representation of foodways in autobiographies, memoirs, and semiautobiographical – albeit fictional – works by Italian Americans since the age of mass immigration as a lens that can help cast light to examine the ethnic identity of the newcomers from Italy and their offspring in the United States. It argues that the initial local and regional tastes in cuisine yielded to a preference for Italian-style recipes without subnational characterizations. The latter inclination was then rejected to embrace an American gastronomy that, in turn, ultimately gave in to the revitalization of an interest in Italian dishes. That trajectory is a symbol for Italian Americans' early retention, subsequent disavowal, and final rediscovery of their ethnic identity.

Keywords: Foodways, regional cuisine, ethnic identity, Americanization, Italian Americans

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki İtalyan Amerikalılar arasında Kimlik Yapılandırması ve Etnik Yüzleşme için Alan olarak Yemek

Öz

Bu makale, İtalyan Amerikalı yazarların, kitlesel göç döneminden bu yana yazılan otobiyografi, anı ve (kurgusal olmasına karşın) yarı-otobiyografik eserlerinde yemek kültürlerinin temsilini

sorgular ve İtalya'dan yeni gelenlerin ve çocuklarının Amerika'daki etnik kimliklerinin incelenmesini sağlar. Başlangıçtaki yerel ve bölgesel damak tatlarının daha sonra alt sınıflandırmalar olmaksızın İtalyan tarzı yemek tariflerinin tercih edilmesine dönüştüğünü vurgular. Bu sonradan şekillenen tercih, daha da sonrasında reddedilmiş ve yerine Amerikan gastronomisi benimsenerek İtalyan yemeklerine olan ilginin yeniden canlandırılmasına olanak tanımıştır. Gözlemlenen bu adımlar, İtalyan Amerikalıların etnik kimliklerinin önce korunmasının, ardından reddedilmesinin ve son olarak tekrar keşfedilmesinin bir sembolüdür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yemek kültürleri, bölgesel mutfak, etnik kimlik, Amerikanlaşma, İtalyan Amerikalılar

Introduction

Linguist Cornelia Gerhardt maintains that "food is not only sustenance," because it fulfills more than "bare necessities" for physical survival (4). Indeed, echoing the aphorism *dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es* by the late French epicure and gourmet Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (3), historian Donna R. Gabaccia suggests, starting from the title of a 1998 volume, that "we are what we eat," namely that preparing and consuming meals are a reflection of people's self-perception. Many scholars share her view. For instance, according to social scientist Claude Fischler, "food is central to our sense of identity" (275). Likewise, anthropologist Carole Counihan argues that "every coherent social group has its own unique foodways" (6).

Such observations are particularly pertinent in the case of immigrant minorities. On the one hand, ethnic cuisine is much easier to reproduce and to retain than the mother language and other cultural traits over the generations in the adoptive country (Alba 4; Waters 116). On the other, newcomers and their progeny tend to recognize themselves by means of their eating habits (Diner 413). Since gastronomic practices operate as tools for inclusion and exclusion, shopping for ingredients, cooking them, and consuming meals symbolically express identity. Donna Caruso, for instance, recalls about her immigrant mother and aunt that "memories of Italy come fill their hearts while they stand at the stove, stirring, tasting" with "their hands forming the meatballs or handling the pizza dough" (114). Helen Barolini similarly revived her ethnic identity through a cookbook project after endeavoring to

"dissolve my Italian ties of more than twenty-five years" (*Chiaroscuro* 70). Indeed, according to historian Luigi G. Pennacchio, "for immigrants, food is a primary means by which they socialize, worship, shop and do business – in short, by how they live their lives as ethnics coping with the alien culture that surrounds them" (111). Against this backdrop, scholarship has repeatedly stressed the relevance of culinary choices to define, to contest, and to negotiate the sense of belonging, the boundaries of the community, the social standing, and the connections to the broader host society in the experience of Americans from Italian background (Chiaricati, "The Transnational Food Network;" Cinotto, *The Italian American Table*; Cozzi; Tebben; Chiaricati, *Identità da consumare*).

Warren Belasco suggests that "the connection between identity and consumption gives food a central role in the creation of community. […] To eat is to distinguish and discriminate, include and exclude. Food choices establish boundaries and borders" (2). In particular, Vivian Nun Halloran shows that recollections about cooking and eating offer insights about the ethnic identity of immigrants and their offspring. Although those phenomena are hardly unique to Italian expatriates and their descendants, the latter experience such phenomena in a relevant way because Italy is a land where eating has always held a central cultural function (Parasecoli, *Food Culture*). Along such lines, this article examines the representations of foodways in a few autobiographies, memoirs, and semiautobiographical – albeit formally fictional – narratives by Italian Americans since the age of mass immigration to explore the latter's changing attitude toward their native or ancestral heritage in the United States[1]. It focuses primarily on differences and conflicts over cuisine, since ethnicity is a relational identity that does not stem from social isolation from outsiders and is often constructed by drawing boundaries with and in opposition to other groups (Barth).

Other sources could reasonably be explored for this kind of analysis, most notably movies and television serials that address directly or indirectly the relevance of food for Italian Americans' identity[2]. Yet, an imaginary dimension generally bulks large in such works, while this article intends to offer a historically-grounded reconstruction. For this reason, for example, it takes into account novels and short stories only if they reveal autobiographical contents, namely if realism prevails over invention. In addition, Louise DeSalvo and Edvige Giunta emphasize

the importance of written texts to examine Italian Americans' relation to food and the ensuing implications for their self-perception and sense of community (8). After all, when he wished to delve into how gastronomy reflected his ethnic identity, even Italian-America movie director Stanley Tucci resorted to printed words and published a recipe book and an autobiography (*The Tucci Cookbook*; *Taste*). Specifically, he contends that the recipes of the Calabrian dishes he has "grown with" have "been so significant in shaping who I am" and, for this very reason, he wants them to be "documented for me, my children, and future generations" (Tucci, *The Tucci Cookbook* xiii).

The Transposition of Regional Culinary Tastes

Italians landed en masse in the United States between the late 1870s and the early 1920s, when more than four million people settled in this country (Daniels 188-9). At that time, notwithstanding their common national origin, few newcomers thought of themselves as Italians because the belated political unification of their native country had caused the survival of regional, provincial, and even localistic senses of belonging among the inhabitants of the peninsula and its islands (Rose 38-9). Separated by diverse dialects, traditions, and antipathies, migrants from different areas in Italy shied away from one another in the United States (Candeloro 238).

Foodways were no exception. Pellegrino Artusi's cooking book *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* was the first attempt to create a national cuisine among middle-class Italians. The volume, however, was published as late as 1891, namely thirty years after the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy, and failed to reach illiterate laborers, who made up the great bulk of the expatriates in the United States. Here, in the decades of the mass European inflow, the widespread assumption was that all Italian immigrants shared the same eating habits of their fellow citizens from Campania and Sicily simply because the latter predominated among newcomers from Italy. For instance, while polenta – a subsistence staple resulting from maize – was the basis of the everyday diet in the northern Italy, Americans believed that pasta was the main dish in that area, too (Levenstein 76).

Yet, as author Laura Schenone acknowledges, when her great-grandparents, Salvatore and Adalgiza, left Recco – a village close to

Genoa in Liguria – for America in the early twentieth century, "there was no 'Italian food'" in the United States (49). Therefore, their diet in the host society continued to be based on Genoese ravioli, not on macaroni. Actually, Italian-American writings contribute to highlighting that homogeneity in cooking was not the case. For example, Ines Cassettari – aka Rosa Cavalleri – reports in her memoirs that she had to learn how to prepare spaghetti and ravioli when she was asked to cook for a group of southern immigrants in a mining camp in Missouri to which she had moved with her husband in the mid-1880s (Ets 172). A native of Cuggiono – aka Bugiarno – in Lombardy, Cassettari was familiar with polenta but unaware of macaroni (Ets 12, 16, 34, 55, 58, 77, 84, 89, 91, 172). Conversely, spaghetti was the daily dish for the Griecos, who had arrived from Brindisi di Montagna in the southern region of Lucania (Grieco 187). Ann Federici-Martin, born of an immigrant couple from the province of Massa Carrara in 1914, recalls that she usually ate "huge bowls of minestrone," but each family in her neighborhood "brought its special way of cooking and seasoning food" (6, 63).

Given the dissimilarities in diet, eating regional specialties was a way of maintaining some tie with the native land. Consuming cannoli, for instance, helped revive a Sicilian identity in the case of both Jerre Mangione's father in *Mount Allegro* (128-30) and Vincent Donitella in Camille Cusumano's *The Last Cannoli*. *Cassatelle*, a typical desert, played a similar role for another immigrant from Sicily, Francesca Morale's maternal grandmother, who managed to find the proper ricotta to prepare them in a neighborhood store that a *paesano* operated in Boston's Little Italy in the 1930s (84, 89). In the same decade, the figs from a tree in her backyard were "a reminder of Sicily" for John D'Emilio's grandmother (6). Lucania-style dishes also offered an opportunity to "gather family stories, memories of old customs" for people from this region (Herman, *When I Am Italian* 72). Likewise, at the turn of the twentieth-century, Adelia Rosasco-Soule's mother took care of her husband "Genovese stomach" in Florida by preparing *pan dolce*, *pesto*, *minestrone genovese*, *zuppa di ceci*, and *bourrida* (102). Actually, Italian journalist Amy Bernardy, who made several inquiries into the migrants' conditions in the United States in the late 1900s (Tirabassi 2005), pointed out that "the Genoese do not renounce the *taglierini* with pesto, and the Neapolitans remain loyal to *maccheroni*" in America (175).

The retention of local foodways also contributed to consolidating subnational communities among immigrants. For example, the ability to prepare "an *Aviglianese* soup that sets souls straight when the world is all wrong" with "golden broth and floating pieces of rich green *cicoria* and *scarole*" was a worthwhile criterion to select a wife for Joanna Clapps Herman's grandfather, a newcomer from Avigliano, a village in Lucania (*The Anarchist Bastard* 29-30).

Expressing loyalty to one's native region and taking pride in its cuisine led immigrants to re-elaborate dishes created in other areas according to the cooking standards of their homeland. For instance, Joe Vergara reports that his mother, who had arrived from the hinterland of Naples, turned any recipe into a plate of her native area: "if she started out to make corned beef and cabbages – a most unlikely choice – it would end up tasting like a Neapolitan specialty" (89). This attitude also reflected rivalries with people from other Italian regions and often involved competitions with their gastronomy. Such dynamics implied extolling one's ancestral food and ingredients while conveying criticism, if not even revulsion, for dishes and staples that were associated with different places. Mangione confined himself to boasting that Sicilian bread was "finer and tastier than any other Italian bread" (133) and Vincent Panella's uncle Mario, who had moved to the United States from the same region, similarly bragged that "Sicilian olives were bigger and tastier than those further north" (123). But Celeste A. Morello's aunt, an immigrant from Campania, took on Genoese tomato sauce in order to praise her Neapolitan version. In her opinion, the former was "extremely thin, almost watery" as opposed to the latter, that had "the consistency and flow of a gravy" (Morello 6, 20). To a lesser extent, Calabrian fictional family matriarch Umbertina, in Barolini's eponymous semiautobiographical *bildungsroman*, prepared her husband's pizzas "with onions, or with potatoes and rosemary, or with pieces of scamorza cheese, or olives and anchovies – but never with tomato sauce as the Neapolitans did, for that disguised the good taste of fresh dough and turned it soggy and soft" (*Umbertina* 93-4).

Different food preferences were also exploited to forge derogatory slurs. For instance, poet Joseph Tusiani's father, an immigrant from the southern region of Apulia, designated his prospective in-laws from the northern town of San Vito al Tagliamento as *polentoni*, namely polenta eaters, to express his disdain. In this case, regional gastronomic pride yielded to the misuse of differences in culinary habits to elaborate stereotypes. As Tusiani desolately

concluded about sectional rivalries splitting the residents of Italian-American settlements along geographical lines, "not even at table North and South manage to agree" (323, 325).

The Establishment of a National Identity

To immigrants, the most significant divide in the adoptive country was not the southern-versus-northern cleavage, but the conflict that pitted Italian newcomers against the larger host society. Foodways helped the former define a common sense of belonging beyond the diverse geographical origins in the homeland and contributed to asserting their Italianness as opposed to pressures toward Americanization that were often exerted by attempts at reshaping gastronomic practices and everyday diet, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century (Veit 125-40). In the eyes of many social workers operating in the Little Italies in the 1910s, assimilation equaled the adoption of US culinary habits to such an extent that, after visiting an Italian family, one of them remarked in a report: "Not yet Americanized; still eating Italian food" (Santorio 57).

Immigrants, however, resisted those efforts to influence their behavior. For instance, Robert Ferrari's childhood memoir reports that his fellow ethnics "ate Italian food" and retained their "agricultural habits" in preparing meals in the late 1910s and early 1920s. His father, who had been a shepherd in Roccanova in Lucania, even made his own goat cheese and preserves, while her mother prepared *zeppelli* along with *ciceri* and *baccalà*[3]. Peter Carusone, the grandson of a couple who landed from Naples in 1928, similarly states that "my grandmother never changed the family recipes" (23). By the same token, Chery Burke's Italian mother "used only fresh ingredients and shopped at Cangiano, an Italian specialty store in Staten Island. She forbade me to eat junk food but had no problem when I helped myself to a large plate of lasagna with sausage" (106). Likewise, Umbertina "had never taken to the American Thanksgiving and its strange food" (Barolini, *Umbertina* 42), while the family of Denise Calvetti Michaels ate polenta as part of that traditional US festivity and took that opportunity to evoke places and people in native Piedmont, keeping alive memories of and ties to the native land (296-8). Specifically, Barolini's Italian-born women made fun of US culinary habits in a display of ethnic attachment to

their native traditions. As one of them pointed out while claiming her Italian heritage:

> These American *femmine* know nothing. My Vito comes home and says his teacher told the class they should have meat, potatoes, and a vegetable on their plates every night, all together. Like pigs eating from a trough, I tell him. In my house I have a *minestra*, a second dish, and a third dish. And beans if I want to! Madonna, that skinny American telling us what to eat! (Barolini, *Umbertina* 69)

The initial part of the quotation seems to have taken a leaf from what an Italian-American student told educator Leonard Covello, the principal of Benjamin Franklin High School in the heart of East Harlem's Little Italy in New York City from 1934 to 1956 (Cantore; Johanek and Puckett; Petruzzi, *Frammenti* 15-116; Petruzzi, *La scuola* 67-152):

> My mother showed opposition to the teacher's recommendation about food. She began ridiculing all my teachers for their ideas. […] I felt that I needed milk in the morning more than anything else. But my mother, and so my father, insisted that this was not according to the good [Italian] customs; that American milk was poison. (Covello, *The Social Background* 341)

Covello was an eyewitness to Italian immigrants' rejection of US food, too. When he was a student and brought home a box of oat flakes that he had received from his teacher, his Italian-born father showed his disapproval: "To him it was the kind of bran that was fed to pigs in Avigliano. 'What kind of school is this?' he shouted. 'They give us the food of animals to eat and send it home to us with our children!'" (Covello, *The Heart Is the Teacher* 25). Covello also collected testimonies about the migrants' surviving attachment to Italian cuisine. One of his informants stressed that he was "glad to see families gather together on Sundays" at dinner with "their preference for the good old Italian cooking." Another stated as late as 1943 that she was "delighted at the sight of her children and grandchildren eating good and healthy Italian food, and being brought up in the good Italian tradition" as opposed to American ways. Remarkably, their references were no longer to regional dishes but to Italian gastronomy[4]. Likewise, in Tina

DeRosa's autobiographical *Paper Fish*, which is set in Chicago's Little Italy during the 1940s and 1950s, it is Italian food without any regional feature that makes Carmolina, the protagonist, aware of Italy's beauty and her grandmother offers samples of edible identity by means of her recipes (15).

Criticism of US foodways was not confined to turn-of-the-twentieth-century Italian newcomers, but it characterized more recent expatriates, too. For example, in journalist and screenwriter Chiara Barzini's semiautobiographical novel *Things that Happened Before the Earthquake*, Eugenia's mother, who moved to Los Angeles in 1992, resented the fact that American women did not know how to cook with garlic because they fried it (227).

A few immigrants eventually contributed to the creation of syncretic dishes. The most notorious example is spaghetti with meatballs. This culinary invention had no equivalent in Italian gastronomy (MacAllen 78). Nevertheless, it stands out in New Yorker Joe Famularo's recollections about his mother's Sunday dinners (271) and in San Franciscan Christopher P. Delorenzo's similar reminiscences (4). The daughter of actor Dean Martin, the English-sounding name de plume of Dino Paul Crocetti, was convinced that the Italian menu did include such a dish and wrote that her father had been "raised on traditional Italian cuisine such as spaghetti and meatballs" (Martin 8). There were, however, other specious Italian dishes. The alleged ethnic specialty of journalist Tony Barbieri's grandmother, for instance, was tuna casserole, an unlikely Italian delicacy with baked canned fish, cheese, and tomato sauce as its main ingredients (Zucconi 138-9). Nonetheless, while boasting their Italianness, many newcomers also pursued the defense of authenticity in ethnic food and stigmatized hybridized dishes. For example, Joe Vergara's mother contended that pizzerias serving junk spaghetti with meatballs did "more damage to the Italian honor than all the combined membership of the Mafia" (47)[5]. Vincenzo Campora, who moved from Naples to New York in 1914, similarly criticized drugstores selling pre-cooked spaghetti, contrary to the Italian tradition of eating them *al dente*, in a 1935 poem (453).

A similar attitude affects Italian Americans' assessment of the ethnic authenticity of US restaurant chains, such as Olive Garden, boasting recipes that are only nominally Italian[6]. Author Thomas J. Ferraro (181), for instance, argues that "My grandmother would

have made an immediate about-face at the smell of half cooked garlic wafting from the Olive Garden door."

The abundance of foodstuff available to immigrants was another way of claiming one's ethnic identity at the table while asserting the superiority of Italian-style eating habits. As scholarship has remarked, resettlement to the United States implied escaping a life of hunger in the native land (Del Giudice 246; Mangione and Morreale 136). Yet, although they left behind a gastronomy of scarcity for one of copiousness at a low cost, newcomers and their offspring initially portrayed access to plenty of food in US society in Italian overtones underlying criticism of American cuisine-related practices. Peter Corona, for example, points out that "The Italians may have been short of money, but they ate like Kings" (159). Novelist Mario Puzo follows suit and observes that

> [d]uring the great Depression of the 1930s, though we were the poorest of the poor, I never remember not dining well. … our poor family on home relief ate better than some of the richest people in America. My mother would never dream of using anything but the finest imported olive oil, the best Italian cheeses. (39)

Foodways brought Italian immigrants together beyond their initial regional division and separated them from the white Anglo-Saxon protestant (WASP) establishment and the members of other national minorities. Frank Montimurro distinguished his fellow-ethnic comrades from the other schoolmates on the basis of their respective meals:

> Other kids' lunches were in nice, clean brown paper bags. Our lunch bags were covered with oil on the outside and had a fine aroma of olive oil or provolone or whatever was in there. […] We'd sit on some old desks on the way to the cafeteria, where they'd allow us to eat, and you'd see a row of lunch bags – greasy bag (Italian), clean bag (Wasp). (23-4)

A contrast emerges from the description of an outdoor meal in a public park in Mangione's *Mount Allegro*, too. The author stresses that

"spaghetti, chicken, and wine were consumed with pagan abundance" by his relatives. Conversely, the members of a nearby American family ate "quietly munching neatly cut sandwiches that came out of neatly packed baskets – and drinking, not wine of course but iced tea with trim slices of lemon stuck into the brims of their glasses to make them look pretty" (Mangione 222).

Foodways, therefore, contributed to divisions, too. Writing about the Italian and Irish branches of her family, Dianne Aprile recalls that "there was […] a certain competition between the two heritages. This rivalry, however masked or muted in daily life, surfaced blatantly in the kitchen" (3). Even when all dining companions shared Italian-style dishes, behavior at the table separated those of Italian descent from the others. In John Fante's semiautobiographical short story "My Dog Stupid," for example, noisy mastication sets Henry Molise, the protagonist of Italian origin, apart from Harriet, his wife of Anglo-Saxon descent, although they both eat *lasagna* and drink wine (65-6).

The selection of bread was often the litmus test of Italianness beyond regional differences in recipes because, as in the case of the mother of author Alfred DiGiacomo, immigrants and their descendants contrasted the American kind with the Italian type, overlooking possible local variances in the motherland (1)[7]. Regard for one's ancestral roots in foodways implied making bread at home or buying it in neighborhood ethnic bakery instead of consuming the industrial brands – such as the iconic Wonder Bread made with enriched white flour (Houshofer 1-6) – that were sold in chain stores and achieved national recognition on US shelves. As scholar Anthony Julian Tamburri argues, "Wonder Bread is that proverbial icon used to differentiate between the two cultures," the Italian and the American (*Re-reading* 97). Indeed, an academician such as Mario B. Mignone recalls that "at lunchtime most of the people took out their own sandwiches with Wonder Bread and sat at their benches. I pulled out my two long sandwiches with Italian bread" (49). Similarly, Antonella DeMasi remembers that, in her schooldays, "When we went to lunch everybody had Wonder bread and I had homemade bread with tomatoes, ham and hard cheese" (qtd. in DeMasi 91). According to Peter Corona's reminiscences about San Diego's Little Italy, too, "the people in the neighborhood preferred Italian bread. […] First they grew up on Italian bread and secondly, the wider Italian bread made for better sandwiches" (159). Likewise, Nicole Scarcella emphasizes that, as late as 1940, in Brooklyn, New York, "No Italian would dare

eat Wonder Bread. There were many bakeries in the neighborhood, and every Italian family patronized their favorite establishment" (54).

One of them was Battaglini's. In the view of John Lanuti, "Battaglini's Italian bread was not only king, but the only acceptable choice. It was the perfect bread – crusty on the outside, yet soft and fluffy on the inside. My mom brought over Wonder Bread one evening, and received such a mocking we laughed for hours" (3). Further North, in Detroit, Maria Frances Bruno's mother made a similar mistake by the standards of ethnic loyalty in terms of foodways. She "served self-processed Wonder Bread every night instead of making the daily trek to the Italian bakery," a pick that was included among her infidelities (Bruno 11).

Other mothers, however, stuck to ethnic bread. Alfred DiGiacomo, for instance, remembers that his "lunch consisted of thick Italian sandwiches" (64). Italian-American sociologist Michael Parenti did not yield to the store-bought white bread resulting from a combination of bleached flour and preservatives either and ironically contended that "the reason they call it Wonder bread is because, after tasting it, you wonder if it's bread" (166). Covello, too, expressed his dislike for American-style bread, contending that the "white soft bread" served at school "made better spitballs than eating in comparison with the substantial and solid homemade bread to which I was accustomed" (*The Heart Is the Teacher* 24). Filomena Abys-Smith even felt "sorry for our classmates that had to consume such prefab foods" as "fluffy white bread" (59).

Rejecting Italian Foodways, Seeking Americanization

Cultural anthropologist Lola Romanucci-Ross, the daughter of an Italian-born couple from the area surrounding Ascoli Piceno in the Marche region, recalls her schooldays in Hersey, Pennsylvania, in the late 1920s, when she was the only pupil who ate large sandwiches with Italian-style bread, contrary to her playmates who had American sliced bread (43). She felt lonely because her mother's ethnic choice for her lunch contributed to separating her from the other boys and girls. The fear of a similar lot affected Covello as well and influenced his and his Italian-American schoolmates' eating habits. As he writes,

> we were always ashamed of the bulky sandwiches of crusty Italian bread heaped with salami, cheese, or Italian sausage. We used to keep them hidden or eat them even before we got to school, so that our friends of the white-bread-and-ham upbringing would not laugh at us. (*The Heart Is the Teacher* 70)

Not all the American-born children of Italian parents resorted to such a compromise to reconcile their family's eating practices with the habits of the larger US society. To the members of a second generation pursuing accommodation within the host country, Italian foodways often became a source of discomfort. Carol Falvo Heffernan remembers that, during her schooldays, "I usually had sandwiches made out of leftover eggplant parmigiana or asparagus (sometimes mushroom) frittata. I was embarrassed by my lunches; they were like nobody else's." In fact, Kathy Kamen, her best friend, "tended to bring liverwurst, baloney, or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches" (Heffernan 81). Similarly, Stefana Pietrofesso hoped that her US schoolmates would not pay attention to her "sandwich made with Italian bread" because she wanted to "become *American*" (Barolini, "Greener Grass" 40). In the effort to dodge xenophobia during her childhood in Syracuse, New York State, Barolini herself made a point of keeping Italian products at a safe distance:

> Once in a while my mother would have me accompany her to get cheese in an important store which I hated to enter because of the smells – smells that were Italian and which intensified my own determination not to be. I hated the fish store because of the revolting un-American eels and squid that were displayed there. ("Heritage Lost" 127)

Actually, the rejection of the ancestral cuisine was tantamount to the embracement of an American identity and sense of belonging along with a symbol of the disavowal of one's ethnic roots. Covello easily realized that "Italian food" was a leading feature of the ancestral culture that his students of Italian descent refused in the hope of being welcome in the United States (*The Social Background* 342). Indeed,

Joseph Tusiani's younger brother, Michael Dante, discarded Italian-style food to overcome social ostracism. After other boys in the neighborhood declined to play with him on the grounds of his ethnicity, he called the traditional Italian bread "junk" and asked for an American sandwich (Tusiani 199, 221-2). Likewise, during his school years, Joseph Luzzi did not want to eat "fried peppers and eggs," the main ingredients of the Italian-style meal that he carried from home: "by my teenage years I was obsessed with eating American. […] I begged my mother to give me a bland lunch like that of the other kids" (67).

The repudiation of Italianness in exchange for acceptance by the surrounding society reached a climax in the interwar decades with the emergence of a US-born second generation of Italian Americans with loose emotional and sentimental ties to their parents' native country. The denial of the ethnic extraction to prevent discrimination and to win incorporation in America often pitted the new generation against the immigrant one (Child esp. 76-117).

Gastronomy-related choices and behavior reflected that conflict. As sociologist Irvin L. Child specifically points out, "the Italian American, eating Italian food, feels that that food will give him more right to become an American" (111). A page from John Fante's narrative highlights such generational clashes. In *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, Arturo – Fante's alter ego – dissociates himself from his Italian heritage by both stigmatizing his immigrant father's behavior at breakfast and referring to him by an ethnic slur[8]:

> What kind of people were these Wops? Look at his father, there. Look at him smashing eggs with a fork to show how angry he was. Look at the egg yellow on his father's chin! And on his moustache. Oh sure, he was a Wop, so he had to have moustache, but did he have to pour those eggs through his ears? Couldn't he find his mouth? Oh God, these Italians! (37)

Louise DeSalvo similarly turned her unnamed mother's Italian dishes into the symbol of an ethnic identity she initially made a point of refusing, as she points out in her memoir *Vertigo*: "I don't like anything my mother cooks" (201). She also remarks that "for years, my mother cooked things that I believed no one should eat, things that I certainly couldn't eat, Old World things, […] things I was ashamed to say I

ate, and that I certainly couldn't invite my friends over to eat" (204). Even baseball legend Joe DiMaggio, born in California to Sicilian immigrants, made a point of assuring his fans in 1939 that "he never reeks of garlic and prefers chicken chow mein to spaghetti" (qtd. in Busch 69).

DeSalvo further re-elaborates her generational conflict over food in a subsequent autobiographical volume, *Crazy in the Kitchen*. Here, cooking becomes the battleground between her step grandmother, Libera, and her mother. The former struggled to recreate an Italian-style cuisine. For instance, she made a "big bread, a substantial bread … a good bread … A thick-crusted, coarse-crumbed … peasant bread" (DeSalvo, *Crazy* 9). Conversely, the latter relied on convenience food such as gristly meat for hamburgers and fatty sausages that she covered with Worcestershire sauce. Specifically, bread was, once again, the epitome of the conflict between the retention and the rejection of ethnic roots. Libera baked her own bread following an Italian recipe. Conversely, her mother purchased "white bread, sliced bread, American bread" from the Dugan store (DeSalvo, *Crazy* 12). The Italian-style product was "a bread that my mother disdains because it is everything that my grandmother is, and everything that my mother, in 1950s suburban New Jersey, is trying very hard not to be" (DeSalvo, *Crazy* 9). Instead, with reference to her American bread, her mother was convinced that "eating this bread will change her, that eating this bread will erase the embarrassment of a stepmother – all black dresses and headscarves" (DeSalvo, *Crazy* 12).

To a lesser extent, leaving aside overt conflicts, incomprehension about foodways symbolizes Italian Americans' cultural differences between the immigrant generation and the following one. For example, according to US-born Bea Tusiani, her failure to manage traditional Italian recipes was the hallmark of the distance separating her from her immigrant mother-in-law's ethnic roots (176).

By means of her gastronomic choices, DeSalvo's mother looked for a way to be included within the US society and, according to her daughter, assumed that if she ate "enough" of Dugan's bread, "she will stop being Italian American and she will become American American" (DeSalvo, *Crazy* 13). It was hardly a chance that her preference for the US bread emerged after the family had moved from Hoboken's Little Italy to suburban Ridgefield (DeSalvo, *Crazy* 87), namely after it had

left an ethnic enclave for a residential area where dwellers had lost their national-origin characterization. Indeed, as access to consumer culture became a significant component of the fulfillment of the American Dream in the transition from the scarcity of products in the ancestral land to the relative abundance of the host society, shopping for food, including bread, at chain stores was tantamount to achieving success in the new country[9].

Conclusion

DeSalvo eventually overcame her previous refusal of the Italian cuisine and consequently accepted her ancestral background. Food was key to her personal voyage to take back her forebears' heritage as well as a powerful way to reconnect to her cultural inheritance. A self-styled "gourmet chef" (as qtd. in Bona and Kightlinger 193), when she decided to "explore" her "ethnic roots," she bought "a pasta machine" and started to prepare macaroni, the quintessential Italian dish. Learning "how to combine the ingredients for pasta, to roll out the dough, and cut it" equaled a symbolic initiation that enabled her to reclaim an Italian identity (De Salvo, "A Portrait of the *Puttana*" 94).

DeSalvo responded to gastronomic culture in intense ways. Her behavior corroborates the theory of Rosalyn M. Meadow and Lillie West that, for contemporary women, "food has become a metaphor for their emotions" (4). Moreover, her struggle over Italian staples confirms Edvige Giunta's thesis that, in terms of identity, "the dinner table" is "a highly politicized site" (106). DeSalvo's narratives, however, also reproduce and exemplify the experience of most first-, second-, and third-generation Italian Americans, respectively assertion, rebuff as well as reconciliation and celebration. Something similar occurred to the children of poetess Rita Ferrarelli, who moved to the United States in 1954 when she was fifteen years old: they shifted from an initial rejection of Italian bread, "afraid to be different," to its final acceptance as they came to embrace their ethnic heritage because "they discovered / that anything Italian / was good, fashionable" (40-1). This was also the case of third-generation Italian-American John D'Emilio, who felt comfortable while eating pizza with his schoolmates in the 1960s (75).

Such encounters with Italian foodways not only reflect the so-called Hansen's Law, by which immigrants stick to their native roots, their children distance themselves from their ancestral baggage, and their grandchildren feel free to identify with their ethnic background

(Hansen)[10]. As generational fights appease, those experiences also reveal a rise in Italy's ranking in the eyes of US public opinion that have encouraged people of Italian extraction to associate themselves with their forebears' homeland in the last few decades (Martellone 741). Actually, as pizza and spaghetti have turned into global food – which is appreciated even by Americans who are not of Italian descent (Jones 17-9) – and more elaborated Italian-style dishes have nowadays reached the level of stylish and trendy cuisine (Helstosky), it is quite easy for present-day Italian Americans to accept their ancestral roots at the table. Indeed, food is currently a leading identifier especially for young Americans of Italian extraction (those aged between 18 and 34) and its consumption is the equivalent of the acceptance of one's Italianness at least in the symbolic dimension of ethnicity (Serra 91-6, 130-1, 197-9, 287)[11].

Notes

[1] Tirri (150-83) has recently reiterated the relevance of autobiographical writings for a deeper understanding of the Italian American experience.

[2] Besides the centrality of Italian cuisine to *Big Night* (1996) by Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci (Hostert; Tamburri, "Viewing"), one might refer to one of the most quoted lines from Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather I* (1972), Peter Clemenza's "leave the gun, take the *cannoli*" (as qtd. in Welsh, Phillips and Hill 150), as the epitome of Italian Americans' devotion to food, or to the words of Arthur "Artie" Bucco, Jr., the fictional restaurateur in the HBO crime television serial *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) by David Chase (whose original family name was DeCesare): "food is not just the fuel for the Italian body. Food is family, tradition, birth, confirmation, marriage, sickness, death – life itself" (as qtd. in Rucker 1). The connections between food and identity also emerge from movies by directors who are not of Italian descent. In *Analyze This* (1999) by Harold Ramis, for example, the recollections of the dishes that mob boss Paul Vitti ate in an Italian-American restaurant on the night his father was murdered are key to the recovery of his identity.

[3] Robert Ferrari, untitled and undated autobiography, pp. 20, 23-4, Robert Ferrari Papers, box 1, Immigration History Research Center

Archives, Elmer L. Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

[4] Transcript of an interview with Guido Maglio, n. d., and with R.M., 1943, both in Leonard Covello Papers, box 68, folder 1, Balch Institute Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[5] In *Big Night*, a movie that addresses the authenticity of Italian-style food in the United States, chef Primo Pilaggi calls spaghetti with meatballs a "rape of cuisine" (as quoted in Gardaphé 149).

[6] For the controversy over the real Italianness of Olive Garden's dishes among Italian Americans, see Parasecoli ("We Are a Family" 253-5).

[7] For actual regional varieties of Italian breads, see Welker (13-8).

[8] *Wop* is a derogatory word to designate people of Italian extraction. See LaGumina.

[9] For the consumeristic implications of the American Dream for the progeny of the Italian immigrants, see Cinotto, *Making Italian America*.

[10] For a critique of Hansen's Law as for specifically Italian Americans, see Sollors.

[11] For the concept of symbolic ethnicity, see Gans.

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***JAST*, 2023; 60: 43-60**
Submitted: 19.11.2022
Accepted: 26.01.2023
ORCID# 0009-0005-4078-2945

Dining with the Authors:

Food and Cultural Identity in Italian American Literature

Giulia Tarantino

Abstract

This manuscript explores the connection between cultural identity and food in relation to the Italian American experience, placing a particular emphasis on the metamorphosis underwent by the latter, from comforting element to stigma and vice versa. The peculiarity of this work lies in considering the topic from a literary perspective. Through the analysis of the literary works produced by authors like Helen Barolini, Maria Mazziotti Gillan, and Jerry Mangione, this work reconstructs the way in which the perception of food has changed from the first to the latest generations. As the works cited suggest, the complex relationship between Italian Americans and food is not a newly discovered subject of interest. Nevertheless, the studies around the changes that this relationship has undergone are not exactly extensive. For this reason, the manuscript aims to provide valuable evidence on the crucial role played by food in defining Italian American identity.

Keywords: Diasporic food, food and stigma, generational gap, hyphenated community, identity

Yazarlarla Yemekte:

İtalyan Amerikalı Edebiyatında Yemek ve Kültürel Kimlik

Öz

Bu çalışma, İtalyan Amerikalı tecrübesiyle ilişkili olarak, kültürel kimlik ve yemek arasındaki bağlantıyı inceler ve özellikle yemeğin rahatlatıcı bir unsur olmaktan damgaya dönüştüğü başkalaşım sürecini vurgular. Çalışmanın farklılığı, konuyu edebi bir bakış açısıyla ele almasında yatmaktadır. Helen Barolini, Maria Mazziotti Gillan ve Jerry Mangione gibi yazarların edebi eserlerinin incelenmesi yoluyla, ilk nesilden son nesile kadar yemek algısının nasıl değiştiği tartışılmaktadır. Kaynakçanın ortaya koyduğu üzere, İtalyan Amerikalılar ve yemek arasındaki karmaşık bağ yeni keşfedilmiş bir ilgi alanı değildir. Ancak bu bağın geçirdiği değişimleri ele alan çalışmalar pek de kapsamlı değildir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma İtalyan Amerikalı kimliğinin tanımlanmasında yemeğin oynadığı önemli rol üzerine kanıt sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Diasporik yemek, yemek ve damga, kuşak farkı, tireli topluluk, kimlik

Introduction

As the aphorism of the famous French lawyer and gastronomist Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin underscores in his *Physiology of Taste* by saying "tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are" (3), there is a symbiotic relationship between people and the food they eat. Since the preparation and consumption of food widely varies amongst countries, over time it has come to be regarded as a significant factor characterizing a specific culture or, more precisely, an ethnicity. Therefore, food is not only fundamental to survival but it is also integrally connected with social function and identity (De Angelis and Anderson 48). As reaffirmed by Sarah Sceats, "it is essential to self-identity and it is instrumental in the definition of family, class, and ethnicity" (1). This assertion reveals itself to be true for those who migrate, too, in that it provides a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Although the settlement of the migrant populations in a new land is usually followed by the clash of cultures, often resulting in a phenomenon of identity loss, some aspects of their original custom stand firm. This argument is supported by the words of the journalist Ryszard Kapuściński affirming that "People from one culture find it hard to get rid of it and adapt a new one. People wish to preserve their own roots and identity even after changing their place of living" (qtd. in Bodziany 76). Clearly, it is necessary to analyze each case in order to provide a more complete overview but, overall, it can be suggested that one of the most important elements that shaped the identity of migrants has quite possibly been food. The latter, in fact, has always remained a hallmark of where they came from, limiting thus the effects caused by the process of assimilation that marked their transplantation experience on the whole. But how does this general statement apply to the specific case of Italian Americans and what role did food play in the battle between assimilation and distinctiveness?

In order to tackle this issue, the literary works, produced by several generations of Italian Americans, represent the best means to reconstruct the process that has led to the metamorphosis of the concept of food, translating its meaning from nourishment to identity. Considering what Louise De Salvo and Edvige Giunta have argued, "food-writing and life-writing in Italian American culture are interconnected" (8). For this reason, food is to be considered central to defining the Italian American identity. Furthermore, through the astonishing variety of written texts, from fiction literature and cookbooks to autobiographies, diaries and personal correspondence, it is possible to recreate and investigate the way in which the perception of food has changed across the generations, from comforting element to stigma and vice versa.

Food as the Missing Ingredient in the New World: From Humble Meal to Worldwide Fame

The Italian American condition has always been strictly interconnected with its past of migration. From the time of their settlement in America, Italians have always strived to reproduce an environment where they could feel at home. Since the so-called Great Wave of 1880, immigrants have re-created the elements of the old

paese (Laurino 64) giving birth to what was known as Little Italy, namely a totally Italian enclave. The rise of these ethnic neighborhoods fostered awareness of the need to replicate what may have been the ingredient missing most in their lives: the food of their regions. As a result, Italian immigrants embedded their distinctive eating habits onto the spirit and life of the Little Italies themselves. As Laurino points out, "the Italians believed that American salt was not as flavorful as its Mediterranean counterpart, its tomatoes not as sweet, and its bread not as crusty, and they wanted food from the Old World in the New World" (64). Compared to the mass-produced American cuisine, which lacked both distinctiveness and flavor, the *homemade* Italian one was highly regarded in terms of value and authenticity. This meaningful comparison can be detected in Helen Barolini's *Umbertina* (1979), a novel that dramatizes the journey food takes through the generations, in which immigrant women ridicule the American eating habits in a display of allegiance to the Italian traditions: "My Vito comes home and says his teacher told the class they should have meat, potatoes, and a vegetable on their plates every night, all together. Like pigs eating from a trough, I tell him. In my house I have a *minestra*, a second dish, and a third dish. And beans if I want to!" (69).

In order to respond to this new need, Italians settling in America began to grow their own food and tried to make a living by it. The tendency to cultivate a food garden is underlined in the poem "My Father's Fig Tree Grew in Hawthorne, New Jersey" by Maria Mazziotti Gillan, award-winning Italian American writer: "Each winter, my father wrapped his fig trees in burlap and buried them; / each spring / he lifted them out of the earth and unwrapped them. How they turned / toward the sun / in their flowering, grew hundreds of fat purple fruit that my father picked / each day, / washing them off and presenting them to me as though they were diamonds / or pearls" (*All that Lies* 20). What emerges in this poem, beside the cultivation process, is the dedication and care that her father puts into this practice that are interweaved with the memories cherished by the author.

For what concerns the work resulting from the agricultural activities, it has experienced several changes over the years. Selling food, especially to one's own people, has traditionally been an inroad for new immigrants trying to find work. Their intention of making a living by it soon manifested through the presence of Italian pushcarts cramming the dusty, unpaved streets of America with products like

bread, vegetables, and wild greens. It was just the beginning of a successful business. During the 1920s and 1930s, in fact, Italian American cooking became codified, and Italian food and cooking were increasingly recognized as unified and coherent patterns that differed from other foods and cuisine. A further growth was achieved when, saving money, Italians began to afford commercial space and elevated pushcart businesses into fruit and vegetable stores. They opened bakeries, live poultry markets, cheese shops, and pasta stores (Laurino 64). Therefore, the peasant instinct to preserve the tastes of Italy has not extinguished over the years but has evolved and expanded by being refined from the early pushcarts to fruit and produce shops to specialty stores to contemporary temples of gastronomy like Eataly.

In light of the great change undergone by the selling of food and its worldwide fame, it can be argued that for Italians and Italian Americans food is the most common example of what Herbert J. Gans calls "symbolic ethnicity"[1] (9) and, as Gardaphé points out, "although the Italian's relationship to food has been trivialized and reduced to the point of absurd media stereotyping, cooking and eating are important identity-creating acts" (92). For first-generation Italian Americans, food is not only a symbol of affection that protects their *Italianness* in American life and solidifies their ties, but a language that reinforces the projection of the Italian identity (De Angelis and Anderson 51). The diasporic food, eaten by the migrants as a strategy to preserve their territorial roots, represents the source from which the stereotype of Italian identity is produced. It has the power to let immigrants keep alive their national identity and even if, as Regina Barreca argues, "orientation toward food has now become a stereotype it represents a truthful component of the portrait of Italian Americans" (xvii).

Conviviality and Rituality: Food as Social Glue

Food and the rituality related to its consumption are some of the elements that most characterize the identity of the Italians around the world. But, as Frances Malpezzi and William Clements noticed, "while a reflector of group identity on the general Italian level, food has had its most important symbolic value in the context of the family" (224). It is in fact in the realm of domesticity and family intimacy that Italian American identity has been forged. Family, considered the key

to survival in a foreign land, represents the core of Italian-American experience. In a moment of crisis and transition, the ideology of the Italian family was imbued with concrete meaning through the importation of food practices. Ethnic food and all food-sharing rituals were, in fact, very influential in the conceptual creation of an Italian American identity, both socially and symbolically. It is therefore not surprising that the sense of belonging, along with warmth and loyalty, is often associated with food and family meals.

The consumption of food has been traditionally regarded by the Italians living in the United States of America as an element of conviviality with family members, as well as friends and fellow citizens. Paraphrasing what the anthropologist Mary Douglas says, meals are for family, close friends and honored guests. To share food has been the consummate act of hospitality, and very often it has served as the mediating force between personal and social relationships in and outside the home. The most significant symbol of family cohesion was, in fact, the gathering of all family members around the table. In the literary field, one example can be drawn from the poem "What I Always Wanted," where Maria Mazziotti Gillan underlines how the kitchen was a gathering place "full of noise and laughter" in which "there was always room for one more" (*Winter* 31-2). Cooking and eating together represented and remained, thus, an irreplaceable pillar for the Italians living abroad.

The fact that conviviality was a cornerstone of Italian ethnicity is supported by the Italian American narrative, which is, according to Luconi, "a proper field to analyze the inner meanings encoded in Italian Americans' food-related behavior" (206). As Cinotto notes in his article on Leonard Covello's papers, "immigrants drew heavily on symbols of food and conviviality as they forged collective self-representations of their being Italian in America" (498). Italian American writers use food, in fact, not only as a means of support but also to illustrate socio-economic ties, cultural identity, group affiliation and emotional expressions as nostalgia, grief and desire. Food has the power to ensure an apparent continuity with an idealized Italian past. As Michele Fazio argues, "eating ethnic foods helps diminish the geographical and temporal distance caused by immigration and assimilation" (115). In *Mount Allegro*, for instance, Mangione's father creates a social network of familial and affinal ties and underlines how, for first-generation Italian Americans, the passionate faith in food was an expression of their philosophy. Even if in Mangione's work "if you ate well, you felt

well" (131), food was not only about its nutritional values, but had the power to form strong bonds and fortify community ties. Offering food, the act of hospitality par excellence, may be seen, therefore, as a way to gain social dignity, reputation and respect. Moreover, domestic food-sharing events functioned to express, organize and manage conflicts. As Amy Bernardy remembers in her travel reminiscences of the 1920s, familial Italian-style cuisine was a channel to galvanize patriotic sentiments among the members of the Little Italies abroad (qtd. in Luconi 208). Although travel diaries are not recognized as complete evidence, in this case they provide a number of valuable observations on the topic under scrutiny.

Produced by the labor of both father and mother and representing the cooperative efforts of an integrated family, food has had almost a sacramental significance. In "Learning Grace," Maria Mazziotti Gillan describes her mother while she makes bread, while she reproduces with her hands the miracle of creation, the miracle of an imminent grace, stating that "When you do something with your hands you have to put your love into it, and then it will be sacred" (*Talismans* 64). Traditions, thus, revived through simple and daily gestures, are perceived as sacred. The banquet, moreover, concretizes the ties of extended families and, as Boelhower says, "changes linear time into rite and ceremony and individuals into a community" (201). The meals consumed on feast days, gathering all together around a table, represent an important feature in the lives of Italian American authors, like Helen Barolini or Maria Mazziotti Gillan, and are pervaded by an atmosphere of sacredness. Sharing and cooking food is the love language that shaped relationships as it is highlighted in the first lines of the prose poem "Sunday Dinners at My Mother's House":

> After I was grown up and had a house and a family of my own, my mother cooked and served dinner for all of us, her children and grandchildren, at least sixteen people each Sunday in her basement kitchen. My mother was an artist of food, and we gathered around three tables lined up, end to end, macaroni and meatballs, *braciola*, salad and roasted chicken, potatoes and stuffed artichokes, fruit and nuts with their own silvery nutcrackers, apple pies and turnovers, espresso and anisette … I'd see her smiling, happy that we were all together, willing to cook for all of us, week after week, to make sure we'd stay that way. (*All that Lies* 24)

The act of cooking for the relatives was, for the Italian immigrant women, the most common way to communicate love. This peculiar feature is pointed out in the last stanza of another poem of hers, namely "My Mother Was a Brilliant Cook," in which Mazziotti Gillan says that her mother "was content to offer platter after platter / of food to her family gathered / in her basement kitchen, and to watch them / laughing and talking together, / while she stood behind them / and smiled" (*Winter* 41). Therefore, it is evident once again how the everyday practice of preparing and enjoying a meal becomes socially and culturally significant. As La Trecchia argues, "it not only shapes our identity but also connects us to other people" (46). Therefore, food traditions provide, as Cinotto underlines, "a language with which to articulate affective relationships" (*Una famiglia* 431).

Stigmatization and Fracture:

From Rejection to Acceptance

Although food serves as a source of ethnic identity, it can also become a site for conflict between Italians and Americans as well as between generations (Gardaphé 147). To the immigrants born Italian and emigrated across the Ocean, eating habits represented a form of preservation of their identity that opposed to the excesses of Americanization. The label *Americanization* was originally applied to the assimilation of immigrants and racial minorities into the dominant culture (Elteren 51). As the contemporary analyst of this movement, Hill, better explains, it was "a process by which an alien acquires our language, citizenship, customs and ideals" (612). It is for this reason that since the vast influx of migrants, between 1880 and the outbreak of the First World War, the anti-Italian American bias of the U.S. society has set in motion the complex cultural dynamic that has resulted in the phenomena of uprooting, assimilation and generational conflicts. As Luconi points out, "Italian Americans faced bigotry in the United States because of their national descent" (210), and the stereotypes caused by it began to modify the value of the material culture and transformed food not only into a distinctive mark of *Italianness*, but also into a motive of hatred. Many Anglo-Saxon social workers, indeed, in their attempts to assimilate the newcomers, tried to convince Italians to abandon their eating habits which were considered not *American* and

unhealthy. In particular, they used to attribute to Italians the excessive use of garlic, whose pungent smell was used to denigrate their personal hygiene. An example of one of the many epithets that were hurled against the Italian Americans is food-related and can be detected in the fourth stanza of the poem "Growing Up Italian" by Maria Mazziotti Gillan, in which she writes that "almost everyday / Mr. Landgraf called Joey / a 'spaghetti bender'" (*From* 54). Italians were forced to confront a wave of deep-rooted prejudice and nativist hostility in which food has likewise been connected with stereotypes and marginalization.

The hostility felt against the foreigners played a crucial role in molding the Italian cultural identity. The policies based on assimilation carried out by the American government inevitably led to the denial and abjuration of the Italian ethnic origins and, consequently, to the break with family affections. The proud cultural identity, that lied at the base of *Italianness*, made of traditions and values, has been completely rejected by the second-generation and replaced by a deep sense of shame and inadequacy. In *Cutting the Bread* by Louise De Salvo, for example, lies a "fascinating portrait of three generations of women," as Kathy Curto argues, that underlines "how the bread one eats serves as an indicator light for acceptance and belonging" (204). While the grandmother makes her brown Italian bread, her daughter is disgusted by this practice because she sees in it an obstacle that interferes with her acceptance into the white-breaded American community. Food or, in this case, bread becomes a measuring device that establishes a separation line between those who are American and those who are not.

Ethnic food had great significance for the generational conflict. Food rituals, not limited to Sunday dinners, served to counteract exposure of the children of immigrants to American culture through schools and other social institutions. As Cinotto underlines, Italian domesticity "was the answer to the importing of modern American values, in the immigrants' perception, that destabilized the family and the community" ("Covello Papers" 515). Despite all the attempts made by the Italian parents, the displacement from one culture to another provoked a real crisis of identity where the children, unwilling to give themselves completely to the transmitted old ways, ended up with shame. As stated by De Angelis and Anderson, food can be seen "as the focal point of the inter-generational tensions of Italians in America" (48). The offspring went through the painful process of Americanization and this meant, as Maria Laurino argues, "rejecting

one of the two worlds" (102). The necessity of distancing themselves, felt by the generations born on American soil, is displayed in the poem "Cafeteria" of Maria Mazziotti Gillan (Dougherty 42). In the lunchroom scene, the speaker is ashamed to be eating an escarole and garlic sandwich while the traditionally American middle-class kids are lining up for boiled hot dogs and greasy hamburgers. The gaze of the other kids turns her homemade escarole sandwich rancid making it impossible for her to swallow it. What the author shows in this work is how Italian food, together with her appearance and family, falls short of the American norm. This belief holds true also for Stefana in Barolini's "Greener Grass" who, sitting with the American girls at lunchtime, finds the courage to take her homemade lunch. But thinking "I hope [her friends] wouldn't notice my sandwich made with Italian bread" (40), she shows how food brings her discomfort and creates a further obstacle to surmount if she wants to become an American. As De Angelis and Anderson pointed out, "her homemade lunch on Italian bread classifies her as a member of the working class" (54). Food, once again, deepens the rift between one's cultural identity and who they want to be.

Lunchtime, as evident in the last two works, became just one more occasion where children would become ashamed of who they were, and food would be the source of that shame. For fear of having to invite them home and show their lifestyle and their family's foodways, some youth even hesitated to make friends outside their ethnic neighborhood. The resentment toward food and all its symbolism is evident in what Louise De Salvo writes in her autobiographical novel *Vertigo*: "For years, my mother cooked things that I believed no one should eat, things that I certainly couldn't eat, Old World things, cheap things, low-class things, things I was ashamed to say I ate, and that I certainly couldn't invite my friends over to eat" (204). As underlined by De Angelis and Anderson, "instead of providing the security and comfort usually associated with communal eating, the family gathering at mealtime intensifies the differences in personal identities and socioeconomic standings" (53). Sometimes, even families were not willing to invite people outside their circle of trust. This is evident in the words of Covello's parents when they say "We do not want stranger knowing the business of our family" ("Covello Papers" 514). The creation of an area of private conviviality, in this case, undermined the immigrant community and critically hindered the integration process.

The lesson that Italian Americans had to learn was, in fact, that until they conformed, they would never succeed. A further example of the consequences of the process of separation caused by the generational conflict is provided by Umbertina's children, in the homonymous novel of Helen Barolini, who are influenced by the lure of Americanization process and leave the *Italianness* behind, including food. That food could create havoc in social and familial relations is made quite clear in the episode told by Maria Mazziotti Gillan in her "Betrayals": "At thirteen, I screamed, / 'You're disgusting,' / drinking your coffee from a saucer. / Your startled eyes darkened with shame" (*Talismans* 12). The author reveals the disgust and shame she felt at her father, unable to fit into the Anglo-Saxon standards, and, since she sees in him everything that is wrong with herself, she decides to humiliate him trying in vain to draw a line between them. Therefore, in their struggle to distance themselves from their Italian extraction to prevent discrimination, second-generation Italian Americans even clashed with their own parents. Food, the symbol of ethnic identity par excellence, fails as the vehicle for unification and communication and becomes the one through which the revulsion with *Italianness* manifests itself and is reinforced (De Angelis and Anderson 53). The repulsion and shame felt towards their Italian parents take shape in the words of Arturo, the protagonist of John Fante's novel *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, when he stigmatizes his father's behavior at breakfast saying "What kind of people were these Wops? Look at his father, there. Look at him smashing eggs with a fork to show how angry he was … Oh God, these Italians!" (47). As evident, Arturo not only insults his own parents but speaks of his people in the third person, attempting a separation from his ethnic peers.

New generations perceived spaghetti and other Italian dishes as the legacy of their parents' culture from which they wanted to distance themselves, consequently preferring to eat American dishes like their peers. In another poem of Maria Mazziotti Gillan, namely "Arthur," she associates the typical Italian dishes with a feeling of affliction, perceiving them as the cause of her marginalization: "the anguish of sandwiches / made from spinach and oil; / the roasted peppers on homemade bread, / the rice pies of Easter" (22). The same unpleasant sensation is experienced by Michael Dante in *La parola difficile*, who declines eating Italian food and calls the traditional Apulian bread "junk" after his neighbors refused to play with him

because he was Italian (Tusiani 221-2). At the heart of being a second-generation American lied the feeling of shame at your heritage and the sting of family betrayal, creating an inner turmoil from which one never fully escaped (Laurino 103) and in which food has always played an extremely important role. The acknowledgement of one's own behavior, displayed through the rejection of traditions and the betrayal of one's family, represents a significant feature pointed out in several literary works. In the last lines of the poem "I Come From," for example, Mazziotti Gillan underlines the feeling of powerlessness in the face of what she did during her adolescence, saying "I didn't understand all that I had / till it was gone" (*Winter* 89). This aspect is further explored in "The Italian Pilgrim"'s last stanza, in which the author states "it would be years before I'd recognize all I'd lost / in trying to leave behind the Italian that was / in my blood, electric and necessary, / and a part of me / I could never change" (91). The "inner turmoil" mentioned by Laurino is, thus, corroborated by the words of the poet and many others like her.

Fortunately, during the years of the Ethnic Revival, which occurred between the mid-sixties and the mid-seventies, the Italianness of food has reassumed a central role. By rediscovering the roots that were being severed, third and fourth generations recognized the importance of the Italian way of eating. In fiction, the reconnection with the cultural heritage is shown in *Umbertina* through the character of the fourth-generation Tina, who acknowledges the value of the hyphenated identity and prompts the rapprochement that brings food back to the commensality of its past. The gradual acceptance of the Italian traditions by the second and third generations is evident also in the prose poem "Christmas Eve at Our House." In this work, Mazziotti Gillan recalls the moments spent with her entire family during what is considered to be the most important holiday, underlying once again the conviviality of eating: "For years, we gathered at my house for Christmas Eve, the entire / family and their assorted spouses and children / and grandchildren, extra friends who had nowhere to go" (*Winter* 79). What she adds to this description is her and her daughter taking part in the preparations for the dinner, side by side with her mother: "My daughter and I would cook and bake and set the tables … and my mother would bring meatballs / and sausages to go with the *lasagna* we made, she'd bring fish, / five varieties, and *sfogliatelle* and *struffoli*, covered in honey / and sprinkles, the house so full of laughter and talk, / all of us happy and together" (79). If the abovementioned

behavior of the author during her adolescence, her impatience with the Italian culture, and her disgust towards her family's eating habits are compared with the extract of this last poem the difference is clear. Therefore, food changes from a breaking to a unifying element.

Food as Catalyst of Memories

There is a strong link between memory, emotional dimension and food (Lupton 56). The last offers to those who are living an experience of separation the possibility to temporarily break down the space-time barriers, allowing the memories to replenish with the places of origin and the loved ones. "Consuming familiar foods," as La Trecchia underlines, "brings back the comfort of home" (45). Therefore, food appears, as Ortoleva said, "as an element of recovery and remembrance, more than an act of creation" (31). As the author Helen Barolini remarks in her *Festa*, "starting in her kitchen, my mother found her way back to her heritage, and this, I suspect, happened for many Italian-American families" (52). Cooking and sharing meals are, in fact, a way through which it is possible to revive the reminiscences of the native land. In *Mount Allegro*, for instance, Jerry Mangione's immigrant father carries his Sicilian identity by means of *cannoli*, the traditional regional dessert, that is considered a symbol of affection as well as a language that revitalizes the ties to his land (128-30).

The power of food to keep alive one's identity is not confined to Italian newcomers only but it also applies to the generations born on American soil. In the stories told by the Italian American authors, the familiar cooking smells often recall moments from their childhood. To Barolini, the instruments of cooking, the ingredients, whether seen in the wild or on a grocer's shelf, the aroma of a spice, a ragu, or the sweet bite of a pastry, have, according to Gardaphé's view, the power to evoke endless streams of memories (92). By saying "*Mangiando*, *ricordo*" (*Festa* 13), Barolini shows how food is the medium of her remembrance. Another example is provided by Mazziotti Gillan in her "This is How Memory Works." In this poem, the author mentions a variety of apparently simple elements through which memories flood back. Among the vivid images she presents, what stands out the most is the evocative power of food highlighted by the mention of "the aroma of garlic and peppers / on a Sunday morning / in my mother's basement kitchen" (*Winter* 58).

Food does not only evoke memories, but lies at the base of one of the most important scenarios for the lives of the Italian Americans. The kitchen is the place where magic happens; it acquires an enormous significance for the immigrants because inside it they can truly feel at home. As shown several times in her works, Maria Mazziotti Gillan in "I Come From," underlines once again the immense value this area of the house had for her: "The kitchen was where we did everything, / surrounded always by the aroma of baking bread / or sugar cookies and boiling soup" (*Winter* 89). It is around its table that families reunite and share stories that often offer images of food and family meals as the symbol of cohesion and commonality. Food becomes, as previously affirmed, a powerful symbol of cultural identity, as well as a fundamental element for remembering. In the poem "My Grandmother's Hand," the author Mazziotti Gillan traces back her distant past, even if she did not experience it directly, recalling the stories told by her mother about her grandmother. She underlines the importance of that "tenement kitchen" in which she could feel safe, filled with "the old stories weaving connections between ourselves and the past" (*From* 65).

Memories that revolve around food preparation and consumption are not to be seen only as moments of nostalgic recollection but also, as La Trecchia argues, "as critical acts that bear crucial implications for the immigrants' exploration of their identities" (54). Food itself, so central to the sustenance of lives, affirms one's cultural identity and ethnicity and becomes part and parcel of one's material culture. Italian Americans' ethnic identity, in fact, usually takes shape through a metaphoric association with Italian food. This evident relation is detectable in the words of Maria Nardell who, in her article, says that "being Italian American meant my grandma's famous meat sauce for the holidays, my mother's *biscotti* at Christmas time and the trips to our favorite *pizzeria*" (208). Among Italian Americans, as Gabaccia and Helstosky argue, food and cooking are powerful expressions of their ties to the past and current identities (5). A totally different point of view on this matter is offered by Maria Russo who says that this oft-paralyzing nostalgia for a romanticized past is "a psychological trap, a vague longing for connection to an immigrant culture that no longer exists and a motherland that has moved on" ("Fuhgeddaboudit"). Yet the Italian American culture need not to be denigrated and dismissed as "vague longing" for bygone days. The interest in this culture for many Italian Americans who grew up among immigrant parents and grandparents represents, as Christine De Lucia says, "a desire to sustain part of a lifestyle they once knew" (205).

Conclusion

On the basis of what has been previously exposed, it can be reasonably argued that the role of food within the complex process of separation and transplant, that took place after the great wave of migration, has been fundamental. Its unquestionable importance is demonstrated by the copious amount of narrative works and articles that revolve around this topic. As exposed in the first section, the works of the Italian American authors provide valuable evidence to the notion that food represents a powerful means by which Italian Americans celebrate their culture in their relationship to Italy. Food, adopting the *rhetoric of nostalgia*, is a thin thread of memory that leads Italian immigrants home but whose power is not limited to this. Its central role in reinforcing familiar and external ties is illustrated through the works cited in the second section, where sharing food does not only represent an act of hospitality but it acquires a dimension of sacrality. In the third section, food changes once again its face turning into a motive of marginalization and stigmatization. The literary production reconstructs the way through which the hostility felt against the foreigners manifests itself through stereotypes that were related to food, too. This disruptive behavior led to the rejection and abjuration of the Italian ethnic roots, ripping apart the familiar ties and widening the generational gap. It is only after several years, when the urge to rediscover the roots is felt, that food returns to be a feature to embrace to feel truly Italian American. The path towards self-acceptance and cultural recovery is pursued by the Italian American authors, and it is made possible by the resilience of the cultural ties that were, fortunately, not completely cut. The multi-faced aspect of food is reaffirmed in the last section where its ability to catalyze memories does not only serve to provoke an emotional response but, most of all, to forge the Italian American ultimate identity.

Since food has obviously undergone a certain degree of change throughout the years, it is difficult to define Italian American cuisine as authentically Italian. The history of Italian food in the United States is one of cross-cultural pollination, being the dishes influenced by the possibilities offered by an unfamiliar territory. Even if the techniques and ingredients are neither entirely Italian nor entirely American, food remains an essential element in the construction of identity, becoming a distinctly Italian-American hybrid. Reconnecting with the aphorism of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, the relation between food and identity also applies to the Italian Americans, who have successfully created their own hallmark.

Notes

[1] In sociology, symbolic ethnicity is a nostalgic allegiance to, love for, and pride in a cultural tradition that can be felt and lived without having to be incorporated into the person's everyday behavior (Gans 9).

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***JAST*, 2023; 60: 61-72**
Submitted: 23.04.2023
Accepted: 31.05.2023
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Food and Women in an Italian-Canadian Novel: *Tenor of Love* by Mary Di Michele

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Abstract

Food is an important "identity marker" and plays a key role in the migration process: by consuming the food and maintaining the culinary habits of their country, migrants affirm their identity and culture. Moreover, food is often associated with memory and nostalgia for the country of origin: indeed, it is evident that the presence of food and its preparation in literature becomes a kind of mirror for society. In the case of Canada, this analytical perspective appears particularly interesting, because its cultural context is hybrid: half American, half European, and with a considerable number of immigrants from all over the world.

In this "gastro-literary" journey I propose to take, I will try to show that nourishment is a solid and real principle in the construction of identity in Canada, through the works of Italian *migrant* writers. In this contribution, I will analyze the theme of food connected to pleasure in a novel by an Italian-Canadian writer, Mary Di Michele, entitled *Tenor of Love*. I will mainly consider the passages in this novel in which culinary practices are used as metaphors for situations typical of Italian migrants to Canada. Thereafter, I will examine the close link between the search for identity and female authenticity present in the novel, and how Di Michele manages to deconstruct the *clichés*

associated with Italian culture and tradition through the figurative value of nourishment, managing to restore, through writing, legitimacy to women.

Keyword: Food, identity, Italian-Canadian writer, Mary Di Michele, women

İtalyan-Kanadalı Bir Romanda Yemek ve Kadın:

Mary Di Michele'in *Tenor of Love* Adlı Romanı

Ylenia De Luca

Öz

Yemek önemli bir "kimlik göstergesi"dir ve göç sürecinde temel rol oynamaktadır. Göçmenler ülkelerinin yemeğini tüketerek ve yemek pişirme alışkanlıklarını koruyarak kimliklerini ve kültürlerini olumlarlar. Ayrıca yemek, sıklıkla kendi ülkelerine duyulan nostalji ve bellek ile ilişkilendirilir. Aslında edebiyatta yemeğin varlığının ve hazırlanışının toplumun bir çeşit aynasını oluşturduğu açıktır. Bu analitik bakış açısı Kanada bağlamında özellikle ilginç görünmektedir. Çünkü Kanada'nın kültürel dokusu, yarı Amerikalı yarı Avrupalı ve dünyanın her yerinden gelen önemli sayıda göçmenlerle hibrittir.

Bu "gastro-edebi" yolculukta, İtalyan göçmeni yazarların eserlerinde, Kanada'da göçmen kimliğinin oluşumunda beslenmenin temel ilke olduğunu göstermeye çalışacağım. Yemeğin keyif almakla olan bağını İtalyan-Kanadalı yazar Mary Di Michele'in *Tenor of Love* başlıklı romanında inceleyeceğim. Özellikle yemek pişirme pratiklerinin Kanada'ya göçen İtalyanların durumlarını anlatmak için metafor olarak kullanıldığı kısımlar üzerinde duracağım. Sonrasında, romandaki kimlik arayışı ve kadının özgünlüğü arasındaki yakın bağı ve Di Michele'in beslenmenin sembolik anlamlarını kullanarak İtalyan kültürü ve geleneğiyle özdeşleştirilen klişelerin yapısökümünü nasıl yaptığını ve yazarak kadınlara meşruluklarını iade ettiğini tartışacağım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yemek, kimlik, İtalyan-Kanadalı yazar, Mary Di Michele, kadın

As a well-known Latin saying goes: *Venerem sine Libero et Cerere frigere,* there is an intimate connection between food, wine and love, a triad that, since antiquity[1] to the present day, has represented the essential intersection of the joys granted to human beings and comestible commodities, such as prepared foods, are the foundations of social transactions. From the biblical myth of an Edenic paradise and original sin to today's advertisements that show sensual baths in milk or chocolate, the combination of food and pleasure, sex and creativity, is one of the major literary and cultural tropes of the Western world (Kiell). Simmel suggests that objects are not difficult to acquire because they are valuable, "but we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them" (Simmel 67).

And what constitutes the consumption of food at a feast is the transformation it effects – which may be minuscule or intensely significant, depending on the nature of the occasion – in the relative social identities of the parties to the host/guest, feeder/fed, transaction involved. This is analytically quite distinct from any contingent metabolic processes the food may undergo at the same time. In many Italian-Canadian feasts the food is not actually eaten by the participants, but the feasts remain consumption rituals in Douglas and Isherwood's sense (Douglas and Isherwood). What distinguishes consumption from exchange is not that consumption has a physiological dimension that exchange lacks, but that consumption involves the incorporation of the consumed item into the personal and social identity of the consumer.

Within this purely patriarchal tradition, woman is often excluded from the enjoyment of these pleasures, even though she is the one who grants them, through her body and her role as mother, wife, lover and cook who lovingly prepares and offers food to others. In the collective imagination, a series of stereotypical associations have developed between women and food, between the female body and nourishment, between food and eros, which have contributed to a decreeing of female passivity in the dichotomous construction of pleasure in terms of binary oppositions between eating/being eaten, desiring/being desired, creating/being created, nourishing/being nourished (Sceats).

The search for female identity and authenticity, present in a myriad of contemporary texts written by women, thus aims to re-appropriate the figurative value of nourishment in order to subvert the

conventional links between food, sexuality and artistic creation. The result is to reassign legitimacy to women, both as desiring beings and as creators.

In the novel *Tenor of Love*, Italian-Canadian writer Mary Di Michele recreates the life of the famous tenor Enrico Caruso through his love affairs with different women, with the Giacchetti sisters in Italy, at the dawn of his career, and with his young American wife, when he is at the height of his success. In all three cases, extensive use is made of the metonymic value of food to depict sexual desire, both as a key stage in female emancipation and as a tool of domination by men. For example, in the novel's *incipit*, the description of the first meeting, in July 1897, between the almost 17-year-old Rina Giacchetti and the young and penniless Rico, is dominated by olfactory, gustatory, visual and tactile sensations related to food. Rina perceives Rico's smell as that of cooking oil and Sicilian olives spiced with garlic and chili peppers mixed with a "murky music composed of musk and wood" (Di Michele 10); his full-bodied voice reminds her of the flavor and sweet voluminousness of whipped cream, so much so that she perceives "a fluttering in my knickers as if a moth, asleep for sixteen years, had suddenly burst through its cocoon and was beating its wings against my bottom" (Di Michele 11). According to Dante, this is the beginning of Rina's *vita nova* as a desiring woman, which is then metaphorically made explicit through the image of artichokes. Those "thorny green roses" (Di Michele 10) that Rina buys at the market for her mother, fall from her hands at the sight of the young Caruso, rolling like heads, free, bloodless, "as if from the clean execution of the guillotine" (Di Michele 10). Despite her attempts to pick them up and carry them in her skirt, the forbidden flowers fall again, forcing her to expose herself to Rico who, perceiving the artichokes as "golden apples" (Di Michele 59), enjoys staring "at the lace of her skirt" (Di Michele 11). On a symbolic level, the artichoke's dual association with the apple and with a thorny-crowned rose, concealing its heart in its center instead of flaunting its beauty, evokes the antithetical feminine ideals of the sinner and the saint. These same ideals are deconstructed by Di Michele throughout the novel, as elsewhere in her poetic production.

While eager to share her mother's "cravings" for artichoke, which, in Rina's words, "is not a mistress, but a wife swathed in a chastity belt" (Di Michele 10), with the unexpected arrival of the tenor, the young woman sniffs for the first time "the smell of eating in bed,

not the invalid's, but the lover's" (Di Michele 10). She immediately surrenders to carnal fantasies about "the Neapolitan" (Di Michele 10) with an angel's voice, who she identifies as her long-awaited future husband. When she walks on the Ligurian beach, and the frothy waves "lick my feet, and then suck at my toes" (Di Michele 22), she tries to imagine the taste of "a man's mouth, a man's tongue" (Di Michele 22), while, at night, dreaming of her beloved, she accidentally touches herself, deluding herself that his skin is an extension of her own and, caressing her round, smooth belly, enters "a territory both familiar and strange" (Di Michele 26), into that uncharted territory of one's own body and erotic desire.

Therefore, Rina's search for identity and pleasure clashes with the dominant feminine ideals of the late 19th century which, in part, survive to this day. On the one hand, there is an almost sacred model offered by the figure of the mother, a perfect nurturer capable of curbing her own sexual instincts through ascetic Christian fasting; every morning, for example, she allows herself breakfast only after going to mass, praying and taking communion. On the other hand, there is the figure of her sister Ada, a beautiful *femme fatale* who delights in devouring the men who worship her, such as the naive Enrico, whose appetite is, according to Rina, far greater than that of all other diners.

Despite being married and having a child, Ada categorically rejects these conventional roles and behaves like a successful diva whose desire for fame and independence is commensurate with her sexual appetites. Sporting a haughty and contemptuous attitude toward the infatuated "*little tenor*" (Di Michele 35), at the restaurant, for example, Ada carefully studies the menu, ordering the most expensive dish, namely veal marsala, followed by dessert. Her carnal desire, symbolized by her choice of the meat dish, contrasts with the simple choice of Rina who, like her mother, orders spaghetti *alla marinara*.

The sexually mature and willing woman who does not deny her body is contrasted with the young virgin who is, yes, curious to discover her sexuality, but only within the social conventions of marriage. Rina does not deny that she wants to be similar to her mother, as evidenced, moreover, by her dedication to learning the art of *making tortellini*, curiously, they look to her like the buttocks of newborn babies rather than the navel of Venus. This confirms the privilege she accords to the procreative role both on the level of pure sexual enjoyment and on the

artistic and creative level. Unlike her rival, Ada, who lives for art, Rina, in fact, does not desire a musical career, but considers music simply as "the *zabaione*, the sweet and frothy dessert in life's feast," where "the first and primary course was always the family; a husband and children was what I planned for" (Di Michele 20).

Yet, Rina's youthful, Platonic infatuation with Rico marks not only the blossoming of her sexual desire, but also her artistic initiation. Complaining that she does not know the language of love, except through the verses composed by men to describe women, Rina attempts to create a new one, pleased that she has managed to imitate Dante in weaving metaphors: "The rose may be Dante's, but the fern, the fern is mine" (26).

Similarly, Rina's romantic disappointment, ironically she lost Rico to preserve her virginity until marriage, brings her closer to music, that "cheap form of catharsis" (Di Michele 60). In fact, music becomes her life, turning her into a fairly successful opera singer and enabling her to earn her own economic independence. The latter condition is denied to her adulterous sister who, according to the laws of the time, cannot even obtain a divorce from her husband in order to marry Enrico, her new partner, upon the birth of their firstborn son.

Through the dichotomous opposition between the two sisters and their relationships with Caruso, Di Michele executes a parodic deconstruction of female stereotypes that imprison female pleasure in the roles of chaste nurturer on the one hand, and erotic nurturer on the other. In this deconstructive framework, recurrent references to the Catholic religion, exemplarily impersonated by the mother, help subvert the biblical myth of creation and original sin. Eve's condemnation for having brought the apple to Adam fueled the ideal of woman as mere corporeality, causing her to feel ashamed of her own body. Rina's gradual rediscovery of her own sexuality, which represents a milestone in the process of female emancipation, finds its climax in the almost archetypal moment of mock communion that Rina and Rico share during their first picnic. Here bread and wine, the sacred symbols of religious ritual, are ironically consumed as a prelude to mating. In fact, mating does not take place on this occasion because Rina, feeling ashamed of her own menstrual blood, reins in her passion. Significantly, the dual perception of sex, sacred act and sin, is co-present. For Rina, in fact, the first kisses they exchange have the mystical and ecstatic flavor of the sacred host, but also the impetuosity

of a large snake, "as if to kiss meant to eat – or to be eaten" (Di Michele 20)[2].

The author's parodic intent is clearly to subvert both of these distorted visions of love: the romantic love embodied by Dante's heavenly Platonic feeling for Beatrice, idealized even more by Rina, and the instinctual, carnal, devouring love that is proper to both young Enrico and Ada. The latter has devastating emotional consequences for both, as it openly puts them in conflict with social conventions, making them dangerously transgressive. In recounting the love triangle between Rina, Rico and Ada, Di Michele denounces the weight of sociocultural conventions, and specifically those in Italy, from Stilnovism to the early 20th century, that stifle female eros and hinder authentic relationships devoid of idealizations between the sexes.

Dante's ideal of love as a kind of nourishment of the soul, capable of orienting to bliss and eternal salvation, proves particularly harmful, as it perpetuates the split between body and soul and, therefore, between "lust" and "pure love" (Di Michele 73): the separation of the passionate desire for pure love imprisons the woman in the role of angelic nurturer. Initially, Rina accepts that role, deluding herself that she can win Rico back and take their relationship to a higher plane, where the temptations of the flesh can be repressed, and one feeds only "on crumbs" (Di Michele 73). Her desire for food/sex fades so much that "the food, all the pasta and roasted meat, had made me drowsy" (Di Michele 83). Regressing almost to the stage of "child" (Di Michele 82), she accepts that she is only "an angel" for Rico, with the resigned knowledge that Ada is his "goddess" (Di Michele 84), the goddess without whom he cannot live.

The chaste nurse attempts, forcefully, to suppress her own passionate instincts, not only by offering her breasts to Rico and Ada's baby Fofò, substituting herself for her sister as surrogate mother, but also by projecting her desire to make love to Rico on the stage, imagining fictitious intercourse while acting in *Carmen*. Paradoxically, however, her choice to pursue a career as an opera singer in order to get closer to Rico and share, like asexual angels in the firmament, the music of the heavenly spheres, takes her in the opposite direction.

Hence, her erotic transgression with another man, one of the many petty suitors who, while on tour in Chile, forcefully slips into her

dressing room, attempting to seduce the "weak" and "hungry" nurturer-virgin with flowers, chocolates and champagne. Rina's transgression, though a single, brief moment of weakness of the flesh, is punished almost biblically and with greater severity than the many transgressions of the adulteress Ada. Rico treats her with cold detachment, while her family now judges her "as a Carmen, a gypsy harlot" (Di Michele 132). Such loss of innocence, such a sinful fall reminiscent of Eve's, will enable her to overcome the nurturer/nutrition dichotomy and enjoy a new freedom. The following words are significant, "If I was a fallen woman, at least that made me a free one. It made it easier to make decisions…I was now a woman in every way. I was no longer afraid to leave home" (Di Michele 132-3).

In the second part of the novel, which chronicles Caruso's New York affairs, Di Michele again exploits the symbolic value of food, not only to legitimize the female libido, but also to articulate the ethnic woman's desire to conquer her own cultural identity.

In fact, the spatial dislocation from Italy to the new continent allows the author to introduce the perspective of Bibi, the aspiring Italian-American singer who works as a companion in the home of the American lawyer, Park Benjamin: she resorts to her passion for food as a strategy of resistance against patriarchal indoctrination and to re-appropriate her Italian heritage.

Since the presence of her compatriot Caruso allows her to rediscover the pleasure of speaking Italian and singing opera, Bibi tries unsuccessfully to charm the famous tenor by cooking him traditional Mediterranean, and particularly Neapolitan, dishes. She explains that: "Italian folk wisdom says that if you cook like a man's mother, he begins to see you as a wife" (Di Michele 234). On the occasion of Enrico's first visit, Bibi prepared a sumptuous lunch with the singer's favorite dishes: "a prosciutto and melon appetizer, spaghetti with tomato sauce, veal stew with lentils and peas, fried eggplant flavored with garlic, peasant bread with spiced olives, and Neapolitan pastries stuffed with ricotta and raisins" (Di Michele 215).

The abundance of food is as closely related to the woman's physical appearance, described as "a petite woman in her thirties, buxom and bubbly" (Di Michele 198), as to her sexual desires. The male diners consider these "appetites" to be somewhat exaggerated

and inappropriate, as reflected in Park's lapidary response to the sight of dessert: "Don't you think we've eaten enough?" (Di Michele 217). Caruso himself does not give in to the effervescent Bibi's attempts to seduce him, as he considers the exuberant Bibi's pleasure in food, sex and *bel canto* as a dangerous transgression of the feminine ideal he has in mind. After the disappointment of his relationship with Ada, Enrico, now a mature and successful man, is well aware of the danger of the devouring woman, who nurtures eros, but is incapable of offering the nurturer's protection and affective tenderness. He is, therefore, careful not to be devoured by female voluptuousness falling back instead on the tranquility and security offered by the nurturing woman. He continues to attend convivial dinners, organized by Bibi, but only to win over Dorothy, Park's young daughter. The thin, well-mannered young woman, who is anything but sophisticated and lascivious, has dormant appetites, for as she herself states: "I was a comatose patient, not a princess, asleep in my father's house. Or worse, trapped in the cloistered space of the kitchen where it was perpetually morning and my father would be demanding perfectly cooked eggs" (Di Michele 191).

Although she plays the role of nurturer in her father's cloister, Dorothy, like the nuns at the Sacred Heart Convent where she studied, is denied the enjoyment of food. Only the father-master, described by his daughter as a tyrannical Egyptian Pharaoh and Dickensian *Master*, is allowed to find pleasure in food, enjoy drinking a good cognac after dinner and impose his own tastes on his daughter. When he then repeatedly insists on steak, disdaining the dishes of lamb in mint sauce, rice and green beans that his daughter prepares for him, he also usurps her role as nurturer.

As in the Rossinian aria placed in the epigraph, Dorothy, a modern Cinderella who dreams of meeting her prince, naively accepts the attentions of the king-tenor in order to free herself from oppressive patriarchal power; but her American fairy tale does not have a happy ending. Her quest for independence and authenticity is not, in fact, satisfied by marriage to Caruso: the union turns out to be, in some ways, as oppressive and alienating as life with her father.

Unlike the descriptions of Rina's amorous encounters, which are characterized by abundant culinary metaphors, an absence of references to food emerges in the relationship between Dorothy and

Caruso: this makes explicit the failure of Dorothy's search for an authentic and satisfying sexual identity. Food and pleasure are, instead, presented as the prerogatives of the male world: it is Caruso who smells of licorice, who identifies watermelon as the best fruit, who recalls the practice of hunting, since in Italy "it takes a lot of birds to season spaghetti sauce" (Di Michele 245), playing with double entendres. One example is offered by the following observation: in his dialect *ice-cream* is read "i ce creame", that is "here we create ourselves" (Di Michele 223), thus reaffirming his role as creator/artist. In his hands Cinderella Dorothy becomes Doro, a little princess with golden hair, an obedient, passive and humble wife who shines in reflected light, a tender mother and a helpful nurturer, but never a prima donna like Ada. Although she satisfies her husband's palate by learning to make a real Neapolitan espresso, her libido is suppressed and her desire for bread is again reduced to the communion wafer, preparing to be "good like the Madonna herself" (Di Michele 273).

In the same way as Rina, Dorothy seems to resign herself, then, to the passive role of nurturer, condemned to give up her own pleasure in order to be appreciated by Caruso. Their resigned surrender is, however, only an apparent failure of the identity *quest*. Indeed, while dedicating the novel to the legendary Tenor of Love, Di Michele does not make Caruso the absolute hero. Instead, it is precisely Rina and Dorothy who are the real protagonists of the story: being placed as the narrating voices of the novel, it is they who tell, in the first person, their own stories and that of the great tenor, who retrace their desire for sexual emancipation, taking pleasure in the creation of culinary metaphors, and who enjoy the act of textual creation that is also a re-creation of themselves.

Unlike Ada and Bibi, the *creative* transgression that Di Michele grants to Rina and Dorothy allows the latter to redeem themselves and overcome the split between being a nurturer or being nourished, accepting both roles as complementary aspects of female identity. Doro, like Rina, nurtures, but is, at the same time, nurtured by Caruso, not so much sexually as intellectually. It is through him that she approaches the world of opera by discovering alternative female roles; that she learns to overcome the impenetrable mystery of her own face and to recognize in the mirror the body of a woman "capable of seeing well" and "worth being seen" (Di Michele 194). Having abandoned her youthful shyness, Doro learns, moreover, to have self-confidence,

both as a woman and as an aspiring writer: hence the awareness that her destiny will be to become the biographer of the great master, the one who can "record the small details, the intimate gestures of his last moments" (Di Michele 299).

In adopting the female perspective to reconstruct Caruso's life, Di Michele restores to his women the dignity as prima donnas precluded to them in the era in which they lived and reevaluates the significant role they both played for Enrico, not only as chaste nurturers/loving mothers/tender lovers, but also as artistic and spiritual nourishment, and as musical inspiration and accompaniment. Like Ada who serves as singing teacher to the young tenor, Rina and Doro also help the great Caruso perfect his singing and strengthen his voice at important moments in his career. The female narrative also reshapes the myth of Caruso, revealing the man, with his weaknesses and false illusions about women and love, with appetites and disappointments, with the pleasure of *devouring* women and with the horror of being devoured like a dessert, with the desire to seduce by playing the clown and with the pain of suddenly discovering that he has been betrayed and transformed into the *clown* Cain, not only on stage.

Di Michele, as is also evident from the numerous musical, literary and ekphrastic references, conceives of the text as a kind of banquet, a modern symposium where female voices participate in an alchemical fusion of pleasures, where the metaphorical associations between food, eros and creativity are revisited and re-appropriated. In this way, the cannibalistic and subversively erotic act of writing becomes a feminine instrument of liberation, a new recipe book of rebellion, capable of enrapture and excitement, pleasure and fulfillment, nourishment and devouring. In the text's carnivalesque banquet, the Italian woman-writer creates a new expression of desire, a language that, in freeing her voice, provides her with a sublime pleasure that is both erotic and spiritual by satisfying every appetite. In uniting the complementary processes of cooking/writing and eating/reading, Di Michele invites us to share, savor and enjoy the pleasures offered by her orgiastic banquet.

Notes

[1] In Greek symposia, the consumption of food and wine combined with the playful enjoyment of singing, music, and conversation is an inevitable prelude to libido.

[2] The opposition between sacredness and sin, which recalls the dualism between physical love and spiritual love, between pleasure of the body and pleasure of the soul, is skillfully and ironically deconstructed through contrasting biblical references. The symbolism of the serpent, along with the observation that "We might have been Eve and Adam" (28) in the Garden of Eden, is, for example, counterbalanced by the symbolism of wine and menstrual blood that refer to Christ's sacrifice.

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***JAST*, 2023; 60: 73-96**
Submitted: 27.11.2022
Accepted: 03.12.2022
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Religious Rituals of the Italian Community in Pietro Di Donato's Novel *Three Circles of Light*

Matteo Cacco

Abstract

Italian immigrants arriving in America after the Italian Unification hoping to conquer the American Dream faced misery, inhumane working and poor sanitary conditions in the tenements where they were living. Pietro Di Donato, born in the tenement of West Hoboken in 1911 to a family of Vastese immigrants, worked in the construction scaffolds after his father's death. Self-taught in the literary field, Di Donato became, along with John Fante and Pascal D'Angelo, a fundamental reference in Italian American studies, especially through his social novel *Christ in Concrete*. He represents a unique socio-historical source, as he was able to narrate the traditions, superstitions and religious rituals of the Vastese community in New York. This essay focuses on the 1960 novel *Three Circles of Light*, which did not achieve much financial or critical success, but recounts in particular the living reality and the religious rituals of Italians in America.

Keywords: Italian Americans, Italian religious rituals, Italian traditions, migration literature, social literature

Pietro Di Donato'nun *Three Circles of Light* Adlı Romanında İtalyan Cemaatinin Dini Ritüelleri

Matteo Cacco

Öz

İtalya'nın birleşmesinden sonra American Rüyası'nı gerçekleştirmek için Amerika'ya giden İtalyan göçmenler sefalet, insanlık dışı çalışma koşulları ve kötü hijyen koşullarıyla karşılaştılar. 1911'de Batı Hoboken'in gecekondu bölgesinde Vastese göçmeni bir aileye doğan Pietro Di Donato, babasının ölümünden sonra inşaatlarda çalıştı. Edebiyat alanında kendini yetiştirmiş olan Di Donato, John Fante ve Pascal D'Angelo ile birlikte, İtalyan Amerikalı çalışmalarında, özellikle *Christ in Concrete* başlıklı toplumsal romanıyla temel referans noktasını oluşturur. New York'taki Vastese topluluğunun geleneklerini, batıl inançlarını ve dini ritüellerini anlattığı için özgün bir toplumsal-tarihsel kaynağı temsil eder. Bu makale yazarın finansal ve eleştirel bir başarı kazanamadığı, ancak özellikle İtalyanların Amerika'da yaşadığı gerçekleri ve dini ritüellerini anlattığı 1960 yılında basılmış romanı *Three Circles of Light* üzerine yoğunlaşır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İtalyan Amerikalılar, İtalyan dini ritüeller, İtalyan gelenekleri, göçmen edebiyatı, toplumsal edebiyat

Between 1880 and 1924, around 4.5 million Italians migrated to the United States (Michaud 1). When Italian immigrants, implying therefore the Di Donato family too, came to America, they resisted giving up their identity and traditions (Luconi, "Becoming Italian in the US" 153). For instance, they continued believing and practicing their native village customs. The concept of religion can be initially discerned as a branch of the notion of family and village cohesion. Indeed, in Di Donato's *Three Circles of Light*, family and religion cannot be separated because the Vastese community is assuming the role of bearers and defenders of religion. Furthermore, this essay attributed religion with power beyond the reality of mere church services. Indeed, his writing

shows how religion, and thus the rituals we shall see, become medicine, law and morality that replaced America's identity-less progress.

As happened for many Italians that arrived in New York, they experienced the poorness of the tenements and acknowledged how their families' support was needed *in situ*. Therefore, they encouraged their village relatives to join them in the United States. Family reconciliation and new Italian arrivals from the same Italian areas strengthened the territorial village unities the country had experienced before the Unification in 1861. As a result, the Italian *campanilismo*[1] became manifested in America (Luconi, "Forging an Ethnic Identity" 90), as is implicitly stated in Pietro Di Donato's Vastese community in New York. Adding to the soiling of the tenements, difficult working conditions, meager incomes and religious persecution that the first generations of Italians in America encountered, there was the attempt of Americanization undertaken by the American institutions with Italian children. However, convinced that America would not integrate them, the parents decided to obstruct the Americanization of their children (Durante 16). As a matter of fact, the first generation refused to be Americanized mainly because what they found in America was the opposite of the promised fortune. They felt triggered by their new country, as it ended up being "cold-hearted and dangerous" (Knapen 46).

Within Italian customs and tradition there was the Catholic religion, which constituted a living connection to the homeland they left behind in pursuit of the American Dream. The Catholic religion, however, found itself to be the opposition of the American society and institutions, as its rituals became the symbol of the Italian resistance not to give up their old customs and integrate. These were in fact reliefs to endure the harsh daily life that immigrants had to face and represented a binding moral law that immigrants obeyed in order to remain faithful to their homeland.

The reason for the analysis and contextualization of Pietro Di Donato's *Three Circles of Light*, which represents one of the less famous novels in his literature, is based on the fact that it recounts and investigates carefully the religious rituals of the Italian community in New York, therefore being a living proof of the Italian American life at the time. Those rituals represented a lifeline for Italian immigrants to defend themselves against the Americanization, and to cope with the miserable working conditions in which they were coerced by American

companies and the racism that American institutions ignored. Indeed, the terms used by the Americans to define Italians, such as *dago* or *Tony Macaroni,* were indicative of the racist association that existed between American society and the Italian community. Specifically, this religious defense, which later turned out to also be an identity defense, further forged the Italian ancestral spirit in the community and the second generations (Luconi, "Becoming Italian in the US" 163).

Through *Three Circles of Light*, Di Donato stated the crucial value of those superstitious rituals to Italians and their daily lives in New York. By focusing on this novel and recounting part of Pietro Di Donato's biography fundamental in understanding the novel, the essay asserts how this text does not exist as novel for literature, but it represents also an historical and sociological source allowing scholars to cope with any lack of diaries and chronicles in the matter of Italian Americans (in fact most Italian immigrants were illiterate). Furthermore, the essay explores more deeply the Italian superstitious rituals to understand in detail their function and the ways in which they were applied, but above all how the daily reality of the Italian community was still divinely connected to the ancestral life abandoned in Italy, as in the case of the Di Donato family. Specifically, on Pietro Di Donato, it is not possible to interpret the novels of *Christ in Concrete* and *Three Circles of Light* without investigating his family backgrounds, his career and the spiritual contemplation which took place in his personality after this novel and affected his future literary production.

The dust, as John Fante would call it, that covered Pietro Di Donato's literary production for many years is finally fading, thanks to the efforts of many literary critics, scholars and journalists. It should be considered that on January 19, 2022, in the well-known literary magazine *Robinson*, edited by *Repubblica*, Stefano Massini wrote an article recalling the thirty-year anniversary of Pietro Di Donato's death (Massini 23). In addition, in May this year, the international conference "Writing Brick by Brick: Remembering Pietro di Donato" was held at the University of Stony Brook, which, thanks to the preservation efforts of Pietro Di Donato's son, Richard, and the efforts of researchers in the Italian American department in the aforementioned university, has reinvigorated Pietro Di Donato's writing (Brioni and Polezzi).

Di Donato, through a writing style that is oriented between

the historical journalism and the novel, has managed to provide a representation like no other author of the Italian American situation in New York in the early decades of the twentieth century, specifically of the community we know as Little Italy. Di Donato's style differs from other Italian American narratives because of the language used by the author. On this matter, Di Donato was able to capture the lexicon, syntax and oral tradition of the Vastese *paesanos* (note that the term *paesanos* should not be confused with *peasants*). Such lexicon was achieved thanks to the author's Italian American direct experience, which included Italian colloquialisms in American speech and numerous Italian words that had no English translation. This is a *modus operandi* of writing that succeeds in awakening emotions in the reader that the English language could not (Stefanìa 27).

On the contrary, Di Donato's style endows the characters with a unique language that shows the desire to remain tied to their ethnicity and be considered as one collective body (MacKenzie 9), which presumably refers to the *paesanos* community. According to this essay, Di Donato's narrative style had the purpose of preserving and consolidating the identity, and therefore traditions, of the Vasto community in America. The case of Di Donato's language is also peculiar in terms of him being a second-generation American. Specifically, in his narrative about the Vasto community and the new borns in America within Italian families, we can observe the emotions felt by Italian American adolescents. These children experienced an identity clash by being tempted to become American and respect the love for the ideals of their Italian ancestors impersonated by their parents (Marazzi 284).

Pietro Di Donato was born on April 3, 1911 in West Hoboken, in the heart of New York's Vasto community, to a family with an immigrant background. A community of *paesanos* – as Di Donato has always defined them – attached to pre-immigration traditions and rituals, distant in terms of time and space from modern America (Stefanìa 31). This is why Di Donato's Abruzzese *paesanos* recall the descriptions in John Fante's letters during his cinematic work travels in Naples in 1957 (Cooney 471), in which the local people and landscapes evoke the primitiveness of the Enlightenment, to be precise, that primordial society advocated by Rousseau that was not yet corrupted, in Di Donato's and Fante's case by the American progress. Di Donato's father was named Geremia Ventura and his mother

Annunziata Cinquina. As it can be seen, we do not notice the surname Di Donato, and in explaining this, it is the aim of this paper to focus also on Italian migration to America in the late 1800s. By verifying the records of the digital archives of the Ellis Island Foundation and confirmed by an article of Mascitti (Mascitti 1), it was possible to reconstruct Geremia Ventura's journey: having embarked from the port of Naples with other *paesanos* from Vasto, he arrived at Ellis Island on April 5, 1906. Historically, around 1880, Italian emigration to North America underwent a significant increase. A mass flow of people, leaving mainly from the Italian southern regions, but also from some parts of the North-Central region, moved to America (Durante 9). It was a gradual emptying of towns and villages, especially of the rural districts of the Apennines, Abruzzi, Calabria, and Sicily, so that by the beginning of the 1920s, about 5 million Italians had left their country (Durante 9).

Excellent physical condition was not the only prerequisite for entry into Manhattan, because a *call* (in Italian it has been named *la chiamata*) was required as well: by *call* it is meant the filling of the arrival form with the name of a family member or friend by whom one would reside in New York. According to Ellis Island records, Geremia Ventura wrote "Cousin Di Sciorni Luigi" residing at 137 Mott Street in New York. Today, this is a domicile very close to China Town. However, Geremia could have had no cousin in America since he was an orphan from Taranta Peligna and even the records do not tell who Geremia's father was. In the interview with Diomede, Di Donato asserted that Geremia would be the child of an affair between a woman and the writer Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was in the proximity of Taranta Peligna at the time because he was writing *La figlia di Iorio* (Diomede 167-8). Di Donato does not cite sources, but claims to have spent some time there, probably while he was writing the *The Penitent*, and would have learned of that secret, removed, however, from all municipal records (Diomede 167-8). Such statement, however, would deserve further investigation.

The day before Geremia left the province of Vasto in a quest for the American Dream, he married Annunziata, who, however, did not travel with him to America, but stayed with Filomena Di Donato, the woman who had recognized Geremia as her son. Only in 1909 did Annunziata join her husband in America. Waiting for Annunziata in America was not the wealth of her husband that had been promised

to her, but rather the poverty of the West Hoboken tenement in which, two years later, Pietro Di Donato would be born. He was the first of eight children. Like many other Italians who had arrived in America, Geremia, being uneducated, had begun working on the New York construction scaffolds where Manhattan's skyscrapers were being built and in which immigrants, in order to work and earn something to survive, would lose their lives for a few dollars per hour. Sadly, Di Donato's own father lost his life, drowned in the concrete of construction scaffolds on Good Friday, as one can read in *Christ in Concrete* and observe in Edward Dmytryk's film *Give Us This Day*, which is based on the aforementioned Di Donato novel.

Thus, Di Donato found himself at the age of twelve supporting his mother and seven other siblings. The young boy then had no choice but to continue his father's profession and work together with the *paesanos* on the construction scaffolds: he was to become one of the Big Apple's most highly appreciated bricklayers. Indeed, the *paesanos* were men of skilled manual talent, as well as assiduous and willing workers (Avery 29). This essay asserts how their willingness to be able to achieve the American Dream was so established in their mind that, in order to achieve it, they suffered discrimination, enslavement, sometimes to the point of losing their lives because of what Di Donato called the "Job." The "Job," which has been represented through the bosses of the American construction scaffolds' in Di Donato's writing and nullified the value of the Italian immigrant's lives, was the impersonation of the suffering of the *paesanos* that made them feel humiliated only to provide survival for their families. Beyond the "Job," awaiting the *paesanos*, there was the utopia of conquering the American Dream.

Despite a childhood spent among the construction scaffolds and being considered a great bricklayer, Pietro Di Donato succeeded as a short story writer, especially thanks to his masterpiece *Christ in Concrete*, which recounted the death of his father and his separation (which occurred in his youth and for a few years) from his Italian origins, the Catholic religion, and the rituals of the *paesanos* considered superstitious and related to the poverty of the Italian tradition. However, although the novel *Christ in Concrete* is a supporting historical and sociological source for observing Italian tradition and culture in America in detail (Esposito 188), there is a novel that narrated the meaning of Italian religious rituals (such as the celebrations of

weddings and funerals) and the ones performed by religious (and non-religious) personalities to defeat the Spanish Flu that had begun to spread and reap victims in the Italian community in the tenements: *Three Circles of Light*. It was published in America in 1960 by Julian Messner Incl, New York, while in Italy the only authorized translation by Lydia Magliano was published in February 1961 by Rizzoli. More than a structured novel, it is a series of "loose collection of incidents" (Esposito 184). To emphasize how fundamental the religious traditions in the community of *paesanos* were in the Italian American context, the critics recalled how the very definition of *Italianità*[2] is based on the concept of religion, since *Italianità* is religious in all its nuances. Specifically, all these nuances lead to the concept of *Italianità*, but they refer to the different meaning of religion that each Italian American writer intends to express through their writing (Gardaphé, "Italian-American Fiction" 77). Within *Three Circles of Light*, specifically religious rituals and their meaning in the Italian American community are the subject of the article.

The first peculiarity of the Italian American community of West Hoboken that Pietro Di Donato decided to address in *Three Circles of Light* was the significance of the ritual of marriage in relation to the extra-marital affairs that the Italian bricklayers had at the time. As it happened in the case of Geremio and many other Italians, after a hard day's work on the construction scaffolds, waiting for them at home was a woman consumed by the daily tasks of raising children, maintaining the residual finances and devoted to religion. Indeed, in the evenings, the Italian workers, after their exhausting work went off to consume some wine while having a good time in the saloons. This is recounted by Di Donato when he asserted that this happened before and after Prohibition, as seen in the case of Tony Soma's saloon (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 119). Here, the *paesanos* would gather in small cliques, such as the one known as "the Society of the White Button," reminiscing about the stories of their youth in the Abruzzi, in a context where the alcohol fumes obscured the tragic reality of the new American world by opening a temporal door and leading the Italian protagonists back to their beloved land. However, these men did not use to stop at alcohol and the recollection of their past; rather, they had affairs with American and Irish women. This can be observed also in Edward Dmytryk's film *Give Us This Day*, based on the novel *Christ in Concrete*, with the dance between Geremio and Delia Dunn

(Paul and Pietro's godmother), ending with Geremio's adultery toward his wife, who kicked him out of the house after knowing the truth. Occasionally, however, as Di Donato himself recounted, the *paesanos* would instead direct their attention to an Italian woman married to another Italian, as it can be observed in the affair between Pasqualino and Stella L'Africana in the novel *Three Circles of Light*.

Despite these evident betrayals that the women knew about, and of which they were informed by the priest or the other women of the community, it can be observed how the same wives did not want in any way to break the religious ritual of marriage with their husbands: the Italian married women, as in the case of Annunziata, believed their husbands knew where their real home and their real bed were, de facto asserting how those women met in saloons, or in the speakeasy, were a mere pleasant diversion. Di Donato exposed to readers how in the Vastese Italian American community, marriage was a ritual that did not establish simple monogamy, but rather was an oath that was impossible to break because it was made before God. Di Donato stated this implicitly in his interview when he said that this masculine lifestyle marked by extra-familial affairs was "accepted by the tribe" (von Huene-Greenberg 47). Of course, by *tribe* Di Donato means the Vastese tenement community. However, in *Three Circles of Light*, in this instance referring to the Italian life in the tenement of Paul di Alba (Di Donato's alter ego), it consequently resulted that *home* (as a concept), and therefore the family household, was the element that could not be discarded because that would dishonor a man before the *paesanos* and God's judgment.

Briefly anticipating some of the content stated later, it can be interpreted that Geremio's death was not only a mere consequence of the lack of security on the American construction scaffolds and the low value assigned to the lives of Italians, but also as God's will for Geremio's adultery and behavior toward the woman he married. Certainly, Paul's childhood is intertwined with the extra-marital affairs of the Abruzzese *paesanos*, especially with the one that took place behind Sebastiano Mezzanotte's back, who was the community sculptor devoted to religion with a gentle character. Sebastiano was married to Stella L'Africana, so called because of the color of her skin: she was in fact the daughter of Luna Ciucanera, a renowned prostitute, and an "olive grower from Tripoli," and who was the reason why her mother had been given that negative nickname (Di Donato, *Three*

Circles of Light 36). Stella L'Africana, who as mentioned was married to Sebastiano, was having an affair with her godson Pasqualino, who was the illegitimate son of Paul's uncle "Uncle Charlie Chaplin" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 37). This affair had a tragic conclusion shortly before the end of the novel, with the death of Sebastiano and her godson through a murder-suicide of the former.

Prior to Sebastiano's murder-suicide, it should be stated that everyone in the Italian community was aware that young Pasqualino was having an affair with Stella L'Africana in Sebastiano's absence. However, it is also true how Stella L'Africana always tried to save the reputation of Sebastiano, making clear to Pasqualino how it was necessary to be discreet, since after all he was her husband as well as his godfather. Furthermore, Sebastiano had an affable personality and was always ready to help those in need, such as when he hired Paul in his store to allow him to earn a few dollars. Only when Sebastiano was confronted with the harsh truth of the affair between the two, he changed his personality by becoming more introverted and by apparently ignoring the reality he had witnessed. Sebastiano knew that the religious ritual of marriage could not be broken and tried in every way to mold reality to his own vision. Finally, Pasqualino's obstinance and disrespect for Sebastiano, as well as the shame to which Sebastiano was exposed by the community, led him to commit suicide, killing his godson and himself.

The second extra-marital affair dealt with by Di Donato, which affected the protagonist closely, was the one of his father with his mother-in-law Delia (as Di Donato stated in the interview with von Huene-Greenberg, she was the wife of a high-ranking American police officer as well as his godmother in his real life – 37), through which the novel protagonist Paul reflected on the concept of love and understood how he fell for Stella L'Africana. Their love manifested after the death of Sebastiano and Pasqualino, but it was destroyed only a few months later, when Geremio died, by the very dullness of Grazia La Cafone who represented the deepest traditions of the Vastese community in the West Hoboken tenement (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 44). Annunziata, who knew about the affair entertained by Geremio with Delia, let him dance and sing with his mistress, convinced that at the end of the day, her husband would still return home in West Hoboken, because his beloved family was there. In effect, this is what happened for a long part of the novel, in which Delia was the lady companion of

Geremio's soirées and dances, cheering him up and reducing his daily work sufferings, since dancing and singing were two artistic passions at which Geremio excelled and were the only diversions that made him joyful, along with Tony Soma's saloon.

The situation changed when Delia gave birth to Geremio's child: at that point Geremio was confronted with an ultimatum by Annunziata, who had been reprimanded by the *paesanos* entering the scene to defend her marriage: Geremio had to decide between *la famiglia* ("the family") or Delia. Despite the difficulties in the decision, Geremio knew that his family is composed by the *paesanos* and Annunziata, who are not allowed to be betrayed. He chose therefore to return to his old and true home. He also knew how a decision favoring Delia would disable him in his relations with the *paesanos* of West Hoboken and would negatively conclude the religious bond that resulted from his marriage with Annunziata. On this contrast between the libertine traditions of the Vastese *paesanos* and the religion preached by Father Onofrio (community priest) in the West Hoboken tenement, Di Donato stated how in his older age he was inclined to love what he had rejected in his youth, namely the rituals and spirituality of his mother's religion, which he had openly criticized in *Christ in Concrete* shortly before Paul's mother (in fact, the character in the aforementioned novel is also named Paul) died. As a result, he was convinced that religion was a smokescreen in the eyes of Italian immigrants (von Huene-Greenberg 37).

During Paul's puberty in *Three Circles of Light*, the Italian, or rather Vastese religious rituals known to Di Donato, fit into the narration regarding the spreading of the Spanish flu pandemic affecting America. Di Donato described the methods of the Vastese community's defense against the flu. The community appealed to the supernatural powers of *La Smorfia*, who opposed those of the objective science. Di Donato, through Paul, recounted how in 1918 Influenza broke out in the tenement where he and his family resided: "Within a week there were more cases throughout West Hoboken with the same symptoms: raging fever and rapid death. The sickness was given a name 'The Spanish Flu.' Maria Virgine's 'La Morte' had arrived" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 72).

While the Americans, in this case Di Donato gave the example of his godmother and godfather Delia and Sam Dunn, fled to mountain resorts, the Italians lived like insects in the tenement at the mercy of

fate awaiting to contract or not the virus. In introducing the Spanish Flu, Di Donato immediately attributed to it the connotations of the umpteenth test the *paesanos* had to face: "The paesanos knew that from birth they had been ordered to labor, poverty and war. … But how to defend against the unseen foe who stalks you at all turns, the silent, fatal germ?" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 72). When it became clear to the community that science, impersonated by Dr. Episodio, was not able to protect them, as not only Germans, Armenians and Turks were dying every day, but also people the *paesanos* were actually close to, asking for the help of the Providence became the primary thought in West Hoboken. The person the community had deputed to intercede with the power of the almighty God was La Smorfia who lived together with Maria La Virgine behind Sebastiano's backyard: La Smorfia had a twisted face and black hooded cloak, while Maria La Virgine was a harmless, demented woman (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 14-5).

Recounting the spreading of the Spanish Flu, Di Donato, in the chapter dedicated to the "Miracle of Eighteen," focused on the divine power of La Smorfia and on the reasons why the Vastese community recognized her as capable of performing miracles through her rituals. Indeed, she was the holder of the Italian spirituality: "To the paesanos La Smorfia was the high priestess of healing, and of the Fattura, that shadowy region of the Cabala from whence emanated the evil eye, portents, prophecy, the influencing of love and hate, and occult communications with the dead" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 64). Her rituals were performed in the presence of Maria La Virgine: not much is known about her, only that she arrived from Vasto with La Smorfia and had become pregnant by a stranger, giving birth to a premature unborn fetus. Because of this event, she was convinced that she was the Virgin Mary, and her fetus therefore the Divine Child. This is the reason why the unborn was preserved by Mr. Pellegrini in his drugstore (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 65). Maria La Virgine, along with the ever-present La Smorfia, had demonstrated her power during Good Friday of 1918 when she engaged in a premonitory ritual at Central Avenue in front of Saint Rocco's Church, shouting, "La Morte, La Morte! The butchery on the Life Tree of my boy Jesus brings soon the finite end of the world! And they are without count for whom this world must end!" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 69-70). At the same time La Smorfia followed her by repeating: "La Morte! There is nowhere to flee! La Morte shall find you" (Di Donato, *Three Circles*

of Light 69-70). Di Donato stated how the people of the community did not believe in the mere madness of the Virgine, because there must have been a reason to have begun shouting in the streets, since human actions are driven by the Lord's will. The Vastese community of West Hoboken judged the whole performance of this premonitory screaming ritual as a signal sent by God, who was about to challenge them again with *La Morte* ("death"). It is interesting to note how the author writes *La Morte*, using a capital letter. The reason for this is the impersonation of death, which refers to the figurative representation that occurred in the 15th century. The depiction of death that can be interpreted from Di Donato's narrative is that of the skeleton cloaked in black and armed with a scythe (in this case the Spanish Flu) with which it divides the human being's soul from the body. The scythe is symbolic of death severing life, just as it can be severed by reaping grass or wheat. Death reaps life as the farmer reaps the wheat, and it is the symbol of equality among men. Maria La Virgine is convinced she has seen La Morte. The air in New York was filled with disease and La Morte had hidden itself in the most elusive way: it was in the air that everyone had to breathe, and it would spread, trying to kill as many people as possible. Paul also caught the Spanish Flu (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 75-6). Indeed, Paul, while working in the store at Pellegrini's, vomited and fainted due to the illness. He was taken home and brought under the attention and care of Maria La Virgine and La Smorfia. It can be observed in this case the performance of a ritual that finds its origins in the legends of the villagers of the Abruzzi mountains, which for both Di Donato, Pascal D'Angelo and John Fante were an oasis of magic that contained the *paesanos*, where traditions are transmitted orally, and the food tastes savory compared to the unflavored dishes cooked in America. Di Donato, in his narration of La Smorfia's ritual, recounted how she "poured sugar and kerosene into my mouth painted the inside of my throat with iodine, laid vinegar-soaked rags on my burning forehead, pumped me full of enemas, febrifuges and stomachics, alternated applications steaming poultices and ice on my chest, rubbed me with hot olive oil, and made me swallow acrid nauseous liquid from a dirty milk bottle within which were corn silk, worms and seaweed" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 75).

Paul was able to regain his senses and recover, but the family had to eat raw garlic and carry around their necks a lump of camphor in a cheesecloth bag (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 76). However,

while science was not able to heal the sick *paesanos*, La Smorfia was busy curing as many sick people as possible. Unluckily, she too became debilitated and fell ill (not from the Spanish Flu), so much so that she was no longer able to cure her patients. At the same time, Maria La Virgine also fell prey to one of her catatonic phases, which is why La Smorfia decided to stay with her (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 76). This meant that there was no longer any protection for the Vastese community and in a very short time the Italians became hysterical, not knowing how they could stand up to this invisible enemy. The *paesanos*, believing that Maria La Virgine had predicted the arrival of the pandemic and death with "a signal", became convinced that a "counter signal" would enable them to cast out "La Morte." On November 2, 1918, to convince La Smorfia and Maria La Virgine to restart with their rituals, the Vastese community went on a pilgrimage to the backyard of Sebastiano's house where La Smorfia and La Virgine resided. Di Donato, who wrote as a chronicler in this case, asserted how the Vastese women wore "white shawls in their heads, and in their hands held tapers and holy pictures" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 77). After convincing La Smorfia and Maria La Virgine, the *paesanos*, the Americans and Armenians moved toward the church of Saint Rocco. When the sorceress took over the church, a clash with ecclesiastical institutions occurred: indeed, with Padre Onofrio plagued by Spanish Flu, Don Pietro stood in a corner of the church. As soon as La Smorfia entered, she grabbed the glass jar in which the unborn fetus was contained and placed it on the altar, while after she started shaking incense.

Through this ritual, La Smorfia replaced Catholic institutions, which were already facing a large extent of criticism at the time for being only apparently sympathetic to the poor. During that time, the commitment to support the Italian communities in America was carried out by the Catholic missions, see for example Mother Cabrini, or by those Italian sorceresses who also believed in God. Indeed, Italian immigrants were quite reluctant in financially supporting the Catholic church and children's parochial education, which is why village religious rituals in America were strengthened. Moreover, the same critic argues again how Italian American church celebrations, as it can be noted in the narration of Di Donato in *Christ in Concrete*, refused to conform to the doctrine of the Catholic tradition. Such interpretation implied that celebrations were of course aimed at demonstrating

passionate devotion to God, but the dances taking place during those celebrations primarily indicated sexual awakenings, communal fellowship, and national identity (Kvidera 172), being therefore distant from the pure Catholic tradition. Don Pietro howled sacrilege and ran out of the church. The community had decided, despite their Catholic belief, to put their faith in La Smorfia's rituals and superstitions, since she had the power to be in contact with the Lord. A mystical atmosphere enveloped the church: La Smorfia asking the Lord to save the devotees, children shouting, and women chanting *salve, salve, salve* (Latin for "being healthy"). Not long after the ritual ends, there was a storm with thunder and lightning, which illuminated the church and granted the *paesanos* the first rain of 1918. La Smorfia died at the altar and the Spanish Flu disappeared, while Maria La Virgine, after being caught raving at La Smorfia's grave, was taken to a hospital in Snake Hill. The science, impersonated again by Dr. Episodio, determined that La Smorfia had died of an epileptic stroke due to her early dementia. The *paesanos* did not believe this version of events and felt pity for the doctors unable to accept her miracle, while Father Onofrio, after his recovery, affirmed how that was a deplorable pagan episode from a religious point of view. However, Father Onofrio affirmed that even the Church could learn from the aforementioned pagan episode, if the result of that action was propitious.

In the end, science was disregarded and relegated to an inferior status. Dr. Episodio asserted how he has spent years trying to bring education into the tenements, but it was precisely personalities like that of La Smorfia and the stubbornness of husbands not willing to entrust their wives to male doctors that has determined the social inferiority of the Vastese community. Specifically, this tie to the traditions, the fear of male doctors and the lack of confidence in science were the reasons why the Italian community did not want to be corrupted by modern American customs, intending to remain loyal to their pre-immigration period traditions. In the novel, La Smorfia was a mystical character precisely because of the rituals that mark Di Donato's spiritual growth: she was the one who saved him from death and, like a saint, immolated herself for the community. A character similar to her is found in *Christ in Concrete*: her name was "The Cripple." "The Cripple" was a sorceress from West Hoboken who was able, thanks to her primitive powers reminding of Pascal D'Angelo's old magical woman in the Abruzzi mountains (D'Angelo 32-3), to put Geremio in

touch with his family after his death and thus be a reason for fascination in Di Donato's narration. Getting in touch with the dead was pure superstition, which, however, helped Annunziata to continue her battle for the American Dream, which in this case meant the survival of her children. Di Donato's interest in La Smorfia has been manifested in a further publication: namely in the *Esquire* magazine edition of December 1955, where he dedicated a short story to her, demonstrating the significance of this woman among the *paesanos* of Vasto, as she was able to bring to life the religion through the rituals practiced in front of the Italian community. That very short story would later be republished in the last Di Donato production, which was a collection of short stories, known as *Naked Author*, published by Phaedra in 1970.

Another case in which religious rituals are associated with the lives of Vastese *paesanos* can be observed in a diatribe among the *paesanos* workers at the construction scaffolds where Geremio was employed and ended with the murder of one of the Angelini brothers. Tito Lupo had been deputed by the members of the White Button circle of Tony Soma's saloon to deal with the punishment to be inflicted on the Angelinis. The Angelini brothers were bricklayers who had dared to disregard the Vastese traditions and to replace *Mastro* ("master") Geremio, attempting to emulate the Americans and doing "grievous wrong to tradition" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 112). Tito Lupo decided that they should pay such dishonor with their lives because, as he said at his trial, this was a matter of honor, something the American judges could not understand since they did not know the value of Vastese tradition. Analyzing the Italian and American society status, we observe the presence of a clash between the American reality and the life of the tenements carried out through the Italian values (Weinberg 422), in this case regarding the Vastese community. To carry out this punishment that served to restore honor among the bricklayers and the community, and which Tito Lupo described as divine, he chose the religious celebration of San Rocco, in which music, Italian flags, and above all the praying *paesanos* served as a backdrop for this murder mission (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 121). Through his murder action, he substituted himself for God in order to restore justice. Indeed, for Tito Lupo, the streets of New York were not the right place for the murder; rather, he waited for the Angelini to enter the church with their wives for the mass. Here, the action became convulsive: Tito Lupo entered the church as the function was about to begin, but Concettina, the wife

of Annibale Angelini warned her husband about Tito's gun. She asked him to flee, stating how San Rocco was going to take care of Tito. After shooting down the statue of San Rocco built by Sebastiano and decapitating it, Tito shot Annibale Angelini between the eyes. Actually, the religious ritual of the mass of San Rocco was meant to bring relief to the community, but at the same time it represented to Tito Lupo the symbolism of punishing the Angelinis for their arrogance and dishonor in front of everyone, including the Saint celebrated and thus the Lord.

The last episode in which religious rituals were included in the narrative of Donato's novel concerns the funeral of Geremio di Alba, Paul's father. Specifically, it was the ritual of viewing the deceased that followed the fatal accident at the construction scaffolds. Dealing with the father's death in *Three Circles of Light* served as a gateway to understanding the novel *Christ in Concrete*, which appeared as a short story in 1937 in *Esquire* and then in 1939 as a novel thanks to publisher Bobbs-Merrill. However, *Three Circles of Light* is not Donato's only text recounting the ritual of his father's funeral, because there is a fairly unknown play by the same author, who was an enthusiast and a good theater writer, that recounts that ritual: *The Love of Annunziata* from 1941. *The Love of Annunziata* was a play written during a stay in Cuba edited for the magazine *American Scenes* in the May issue edited by the screenwriter William Kozlenko and published by The John Day Company of New York, a publishing house founded by Richard Walsh in 1926 that took inspiration for its name from the English Protestant printer John Day (Kozlenko 8). Compared to both his play and *Christ in Concrete*, in which Geremio was portrayed as the proletarian hero victimized by the American capitalist system, in *Three Circles of Light* the death and ritual that followed the fatal incident of Paul's father, and thus of Di Donato's father, assumed a religious significance. In this case, one recognizes in Geremio's death the Dantesque *retaliation* for his polygamy, since despite his redemption and return to his family, he had nevertheless recently become the father of a child with his mother-in-law Delia. It was precisely that brief happiness after the breakup of the relationship with Delia that preceded the Good Friday incident, in which La Morte (the impersonated death described in the chapter of the Spanish Flu) was preparing itself to run its course and take Geremio's life. This is an interpretive reading based on the ongoing spiritual development of the author who, as we saw earlier, after *Three Circles of Light* would mostly deal with religious themes, specifically saints.

It was Good Friday in 1923, and Paul was then, like Pietro Di Donato, 12 years old. Di Donato, through his character, recounted how he had heard his father's voice in the wind that day, hoping, however, that it might still have been a consequence of the debilitation he had suffered after the Spanish Flu. It was not. In fact, that afternoon, a long procession of *paesanos* led by Father Onofrio had moved toward Geremio's apartment: they seemed to carry with them the "gray odor of death" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 228). Stella L'Africana, who had just lost Sebastiano and Pasqualino, had also gone to visit Paul. However, once arrived in the tenement, taking the lead of the mass of *paesanos* had been the task of the woman who in every way was the symbol of Vastese traditions, and whose ugliness Geremio had always mocked: Grazia La Cafone. Paul described Grazia La Cafone as follows, "She was of the very earth, primitive and Latin, embodying the deepest Vastese roots and their powers fed of darkness. Her stony, resenting face, swart features, amoral clear black eyes, strong brows and firm jaw spoke the raw poetry of survival" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 44). Di Donato then recounted how Geremio's cadaver had been brought into the tenement, specifically to the living room, where he had been dressed in his finest clothes for the viewing of his body. This is the farewell of all the *paesanos* to Geremio, whose soul was thus ready to be reunited with the Lord. A new ritual was going to begin: indeed, we can observe Grazia La Cafone's husband, who is called "The Horse," holding a hammer and three nails (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 229). The ritual was supposed to eliminate death from that house: Grazia La Cafone ordered that all of Geremio's records had to be burned, therefore her husband carried out the order. However, the records were not Geremio's only possessions; in fact, the woman ordered that "BB rifle, crystal radio and Father guitar" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 230) also had to be burned to ashes. Grazia La Cafone, being the bearer of the Vastese traditions and performing this esoteric ritual, was convinced that death would no longer be present within those walls and thus in the proximity of the *paesanos*. None of the present *paesanos* opposed her, a symbol of the fact that the ritual was known and recognized by the community. Only Stella L'Africana attempted to block Grazia La Cafone, asking that some of the belongings should not be burned, so that Paul could keep them for remembrance. In that moment, Stella L'Africana's feeble membership in the *paesanos* community ended, as she was ordered to get out of Paul's life forever, given the fact that she was a woman of easy virtue and bringer of misfortune. Geremio's belongings were

destroyed and Paul thrown against the wall; Grazia La Cafone warned him that Americanizing himself would lead him to be like Jerry Philips whose records were lying in Geremio's destroyed box. The woman stood as tribal leader and her ritual served to appoint Paul with his role as a *paesano*: he was no longer a child. He was an adult, who had to provide for his mother and seven siblings. He was reminded that Americans would certainly not pay for Geremio's funeral or even shed any tears. The death, interpreting Grazia La Cafone's words, was about the failure of the American Dream of Geremio, who could now only watch his family from heaven and hope that they conquer wealth.

During the viewing of Geremio's deceased body, Grazia La Cafone reminded Paul that the Vastese community had existed since before Christ, while the American tradition, and therefore culture, had no past. A statement that, during the ritual, is meant to mark the differences between the Italians and the Americans, to whom the *paesanos* were not supposed to be mingling. Indeed, the risk was that in the process of Americanization, the centuries-old traditions of the Vastese community would be annihilated, as these would slowly fade from generation to generation. Americans, from the words of Grazia La Cafone, could not understand the magical meaning of the Vastese traditions, because they did not have any of their own; a statement that based its logic on the lack of identity in America, which at the end of the Civil War had not yet been defined. Successively, the women present during the viewing of Geremio's deceased body began reciting verses to commiserate Annunziata, therefore letting the funeral begin: "The funeral joy of the brass band, louder and louder and louder, with flutes and cymbals and horns and drums in unison, quivered the windowpanes" (Di Donato, *Three Circles of Light* 235). At that moment Paul's childhood and love for Stella L'Africana ended, as they did for the author. Unfortunately, as it can be seen in *Christ in Concrete*, which chronologically follows Di Donato's story, Paul's family have been abandoned by the American institutions. As predicted by Grazia La Cafone, it will always be the *paesanos*, who will support each other in survival.

In conclusion, *Three Circles of Light* ended the biographical saga of the main character, Paul (aka Pietro Di Donato). After *Christ in Concrete* explained the death of his father due to the working conditions the Italians had to endure on the construction scaffolds and the puberty of Paul, and *This Woman* with Geremio's jealousy toward

his wife Annunziata, the novel *Three Circles of Light* closed Paul's childhood by narrating the community of the *paesanos* with their stories and nicknames, their daily life, religion and rituals analyzed earlier. In fact, after *Three Circles of Light*, Di Donato undertook a self-spiritual analysis and a redemption of his past, thus opting for religiously based publications: *Immigrant Saint: The Life of Mother Cabrini* (1960) and *The Penitent* (1962). The first text recounted in a novelized journalistic style the life of the first immigrant saint. To write this novel, which was initially thought to be used as the subject of a film, but instead led to the novel about the immigrant saint, Di Donato had to travel to Italy in order to gather the pieces of information kept among the nuns (Gardaphé, "Dagoes Read" 87). The second text, *The Penitent* told the story of Alessandro Serenelli, the man who took the life of the young peasant girl Maria Goretti, who would later become a saint. Also for this work, Di Donato had to travel to Italy to collect information, interviewing both Maria Goretti's mother and sister, but more importantly he convinced Alessandro Serenelli to talk to him as well. Up to that point, Serenelli refused to be interviewed, but he understood how Di Donato was not just writing a novel about the brutal murder, instead he wanted to understand the motivations and the process that led Serenelli to confine himself in the convent and embrace the faith after being released from prison. Serenelli decided to give the interview because he realized that he was not the only penitent, as Di Donato himself was also going through a process of redemption. However, Di Donato was not yet convinced of the goodness of the ecclesiastical institution that stood to be the bridge between God and man, as one can interpret in his article "Christ in Plastic" in the Aldo Moro murder case.

To understand the reasons why Di Donato narrates the religious rituals so profoundly and anthropologically in *Three Circles of Light*, we need to explain two points: first, the reference to the arrival of Italian immigration and, second, understanding why such rituals had developed within the Italian community. The arrival of Italian immigrants was not particularly welcome, so much so that there were serious manifestations against them in many parts of the country that culminated in terrible outbursts of violence. The most violent one occurred in New Orleans in 1891, when eleven Italians from Sicily, members of a thriving community that held the monopoly on the city's fruit and vegetable market, were accused of the assassination of police deputy Hennessy and were taken from the jail in which they were still

being held and lynched by an enraged mob (Durante 11). Therefore, the only solution left for the Italians to escape discrimination was to lock themselves up in their communities and recreate the life they had abandoned in Italy. As stated in reference to Panunzio, Italian communities in America were organized families and micro-societies in which the ancestral traditions present in their Italian lives were not only preserved but also recreated in the new country (Weinberg 419). By the time the American Civil War ended, it was clear that there was no American identity in which Americans could recognize themselves, which is why some socially and intellectually relevant personalities promoted nativist ideology. According to their point of view, the Catholic religion brought to America by the Italians and Irish was nothing more than a Vatican plan to subvert American democracy (Daley-Bailey 1).

This negative approach from part of the American society was certainly not propitious to improve the determination of Italian immigrants to fit in the emerging American identity. On the contrary, after the birth of the fascist movement in Italy, this ideology increased the nationalist feeling of the Italian communities, who at that point felt protected by Fascism and Benito Mussolini, who was the most prominent exponent of Fascism (Luconi, "Becoming Italian in the US" 157). Mussolini appealed to the dormant *Italianità* of the immigrants and managed to use the role of the Catholic religion in America as a vehicle for his policy (Izzo 11), so much so that the high point of this connection between Fascism and the Church occurred in 1929 with the Lateran Pacts. Becoming an instrument of political propaganda far from the suffering of the tenements, the Catholic church did not adequately support the Italians like the *paesanos* did. Therefore, there was an observable distrust in ecclesiastical personalities, which the readers experience in Paul's estrangement from religion in *Christ in Concrete*.

Three Circles of Light is a direct representation of the tragic life of the tenements and the alienation to which immigrants, whose lives were considered worthless, were left: discriminated, in slavery job conditions and without social support. Di Donato knew that the role of literature could increase the general awareness of his experience, which at 12 years old, forced him to take care of an 8-member family. This is the reason why he encouraged the younger Italian American generation to write: in a lecture in Chicago in 1978, Di Donato stated how "the Tony Macaroni writers are shot. This new breed of writers must know

the highest standards. They must become aristocrats of the soul. It is coming now, the renaissance. Our time is now. I see it, because you are no longer 'sons of bricklayers.' You go to school and you are children" (Gardaphé, "Italian-American Fiction" 70). Furthermore, he stated how it is the working class, specifically the common man, that holds the destiny of the world, urging communication and dialogue between nations. In his *Gospels*, Di Donato reflects on the two world wars and reminds his fellow working-class people that they have betrayed themselves, as almost all of the human beings who committed all of the war crimes are what we name the *common man*, leaving the impression that the world was created more by the Devil than by God (von Huene-Greenberg 38).

Notes

[1] The word is a derivation of *campanile* ("bell tower"). The *campanile*, which is ordinarily the highest and most distinctive edifice in any Italian village or town has come to symbolize loyalty to and love of one's region, city, town, village, or even district. *Campanilismo* is a highly significant aspect of life in Italy, expressing a feeling of attachment and pride to the place where you were born. This feeling of identity can be stronger than any sense of national identity.

[2] The use of the Italian form is based on Helen Barolini quoted by Gardaphé in "Italian-American Fiction: A Third Generation Renaissance," p. 75. There is an English translation, which is 'Italianness' however the text stuck to the Italian American sources.

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***JAST*, 2023; 60: 97-120**
Submitted: 13.01.2023
Accepted: 01.06.2023
ORCID# 0009-0007-0168-5581

More than Marias and Toninos:

Pietro di Donato Takes Italian Americans beyond a Single Story

Giannina A. Lucantoni

Abstract

This essay examines specifics in the literary works of Italian American author, Pietro di Donato, that demonstrate how the author highlights complexities of Italian American identity. Focusing on scenes from a variety of di Donato's works – not just the ever-popular *Christ in Concrete* – this essay shows common objects from every-day life playing a role in revealing some profound characteristics associated with one America's most misunderstood immigrant groups.

Moving through a timeline of novels, articles, and short stories produced during di Donato's fifty-plus years of writing, this essay brings attention to scenes and characters unacknowledged in previous research. The scenes from di Donato's writing focused on throughout this essay feature objects and tools that have a role in character development, thus expanding the understanding of Italian American Identity. Most notably, this essay departs from typical indicators of Italian American identity like food or religion and includes references to di Donato's last novel which remains unpublished; *The American Gospels*.

Keywords: Italian American, job, labor, objectify, Pietro di Donato, Stereotypes, tools

Maria'lar ve Tonino'lardan Daha Fazlası:

Petro di Donato İtalyan Amerikalıları Tek Bir Hikayenin Ötesine Götürüyor

Giannina A. Lucantoni

Öz

Bu makale İtalyan-Amerikalı yazar Pietro di Donato'nun edebi eserlerinde yazarın İtalyan-Amerikalı kimliğinin karmaşıklığını vurguladığı özelliklere odaklanır. Di Donato'nun sadece en popüler eseri *Christ in Concrete*'teki değil diğer eserlerindeki çeşitli sahnelere de yoğunlaşarak Amerika'nın en çok yanlış anlaşılan göçmen grubuyla ilişkilendirilen bazı önemli özellikleri ortaya koyan günlük hayatta önemli rol oynayan bilindik objeleri tartışır. Di Donato'nun 50 yılı aşkın yazarlık kariyerinde ürettiği romanlar, makaleler ve kısa öyküleri gözden geçirerek bu makale önceki araştırmalarda incelenmeyen sahnelere ve karakterlere dikkat çeker. Di Donato'nun eserlerinden sahnelerin tartışıldığı bu makale karakter gelişiminde rol oynayan objeleri ve aletleri örnekleyerek İtalyan-Amerikalı kimliğin anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunur. Bu makale çoğunlukla İtalyan-Amerikalı kimliğinin yemek ve din gibi tipik göstergeleri incelemekten çok di Donato'nun basılmayan son romanı *The American Gospels*'ın incelemesini içerir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Christ in Concrete*, İtalyan-Amerikalı, nesneleştirmek, Pietro di Donato, *The American Gospels*

In her 2009 Ted Talk, Nigerian-American novelist, Chiamamanda Adiche warns against believing "a single story" associated with a people, place, or era. In her talk, after sharing some past personal tragedies, Adiche says,

> All of these stories make me who I am but to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story (Adiche 00:12:54–00:13:25).

Adiche's message about a single story is warning about limiting one's exposure to and the awareness of truths. Throughout the Ted Talk, Adiche emphasizes how oppressive social and political structures perpetuate the single story.

The work of Italian American author, Pietro di Donato, criticizes and challenges a single story commonly associated with Italian Americans. In di Donato's writing, labor, survival, and pride materialize to contradict stereotypes and add complexity and depth not usually associated with this ethnic group in America. Using the objectified body of the worker and the actual construction tools, di Donato challenges the single story of Italian Americans to show multiple truths about the Italian American people and experience.

Di Donato, too, holds accountable the oppressive social and political structures responsible for perpetuating stereotypes associated with Italian Americans. For example, in his 1960 biography of Mother Xavier Cabrini, *Immigrant Saint*, di Donato confronts the stereotypes Italian immigrants were met with upon their arrival at Ellis Island. He writes, "Social workers periodically probed the immigrant masses through dispassionate interpreters … Italian women were portrayed as stout, cheerful, rosy-cheeked 'Marias,' singing at their chores, and the men 'Toninos' loving the pick and shovel, wine, macaroni and fiestas – or, as swarthy born killers committed to such nebulous, often mystical societies as the 'Black Hand,' the 'Camorra,' or the 'Mafia'" (*Immigrant Saint* 72). Di Donato's use of the word "portrayed" emphasizes the Maria/Tonino description of the immigrants as empty and inadequate. The portrayal and ensuing stereotype perpetuate a single story about Italian Americans.

Working-Class Studies scholar, David Roediger, discusses the single story and stereo-typing commonly associated with the Italian American and Italian immigrant labor force in America at the beginning of the twentieth-century. In his 2017 collection of essays, *Class, Race, and Marxism*, Roediger's research reveals Italians were perceived to be irresponsible and therefore unfit for leadership positions, or those involving risk (Roediger 148). Interestingly, evidence confirming such can be found in di Donato's famous first novel, *Christ in Concrete*.

In the semi-autobiographical *Christ in Concrete*, the protagonist Paul's father dies on the job and the remaining family members are left

destitute. After the fatal accident, twelve-year-old Paul leaves school to work in his father's place. Paul's father, Geremio, is killed on the job because the project foreman tried to cut-corners and save money. In one of the novel's most famous scenes, the family is denied any compensation for Geremio's death. The foreman tells the hearing board about Italian laborers, "I'll be hanged if I can prevent them from hurting themselves" (*Christ in Concrete* 131). The foreman blames Geremio for his own death. From this point forward in di Donato's writing career, one of his underlying purposes is fighting Italian American stereo-types.

Looking closely at di Donato's works, especially those published later in his career, reveals representations of Italian Americans beyond a single story; as more than "Maria" and "Tonino." With his novels, biographies, and short stories, di Donato creates a more complete picture of the Italian American experience by dismantling the role labor plays in the immigrant's life. Di Donato uses the construction job, the body of the laborer, and the construction tools to evolve Italian American identity. Returning to *Immigrant Saint*, for example, di Donato shows how many Italians felt forced to immigrate. In conversation with Mother Cabrini, one man explains, "As much as I loved Caccamo I could not bear the hunger of my family and my business debt of 450 lire. Pray for me, pray that I will return someday to Caccamo with the money to pay off debt and feed my family," (*Immigrant Saint* 65). This man from Caccamo is not simply a "Tonino" excitedly searching for the chance to work hard and buy pasta. He is looking for a chance to earn well and survive. His goal is to return to the place and people he was forced to leave behind.

In the coming pages I discuss how the act of labor, the body of the laborer, and construction tools, all function as objects that contribute to the development of Italian American identity in novels and short stories by Pietro di Donato. In addition to an analysis of such published works, I conclude with an explanation of di Donato's last, currently unpublished novel, *The American Gospels*. I show how even this final piece adds to the complexity of Italian American identity.

Job Personified

Pietro di Donato entered the literary scene in 1939 when *Christ*

in Concrete was chosen over John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* for the book of the month club. Di Donato's semi-autobiographical novel draws upon the author's own experiences after his brick-layer father is killed in what could have been a preventable accident. Italian American scholar and di Donato expert, Fred Gardaphé, argues that

> *Christ in Concrete* has become a literary classic because it presents di Donato's own true story as a founding myth of Italian/American culture. As a myth it presents a heroic figure, Paul, who searches for God in the form of Christ, whom he believes can save his family from the terrible injustices brought upon them through a heartless society (*Dagoes Read* 90).

In the novel just as in di Donato's real life, Paul's family is initially denied compensation for Geremio's death and the twelve-year-old is forced to work in his father's place.

Christ in Concrete establishes some ideas that will have a consistent presence in di Donato's writing. In his article, "'Flesh and Soul': Religion in Di Donato's *Naked Author*," Anthony Cavaluzzi claims that what would become long-standing themes in di Donato's writing are introduced in that first novel. Cavaluzzi writes, "Di Donato's place in American literature has been sourced with *Christ in Concrete*. And among the many themes developed in that novel is Di Donato's portrayal of immigrant religion as it relates to daily experiences of Italian/Americans. The relationship between religion in America and the elusive American Dream (views in capitalist economic terms) is drawn primarily through abstract images" (Cavaluzzi 59). It is true that religion, Catholicism, the American Dream, and the exploits of capitalism are major themes established in *Christ in Concrete* that maintain significant roles in di Donato's writing. In addition, themes like poverty, death, love, family, labor and sensuality are also explored, and maintain significant roles.

What Cavaluzzi refers to as "abstract images," can be attributed to di Donato's syntax. The novel's syntax is probably the most defining feature of *Christ in Concrete*; distinguishing it not just from other Italian American novels, but di Donato's other work. In Anthony Tamburri's *Re-reading Italian Americana* (2014), Tamburri clarifies

the methodology that produces the abstract effect. He explains,

> the language that the characters speak in their utterances is often the "English" equivalent to what it is, we may readily assume, the "Italian" they are speaking; and the accented English that they also speak, that which we come to know as, colloquially, broken English … In a sense, di Donato goes from writing a novel in which he adds Italian to one in which he translates, so to speak, to English for his reader's comprehension of the dialogue that takes place among his many characters. (Tamburri 30)

According to Tamburri's explanation, *Christ in Concrete* is an Italian language novel written in English. The language is English but the structure, for the most part, remains Italian which creates, at times, an abstract effect.

We can go directly to the author for additional explanation of the language in *Christ in Concrete*. In one of the most detailed and complete interviews with di Donato, originally published in *MELUS* during the mid-eighties, di Donato discusses his writing style. He tells the interviewer, Dorothée von Huene-Greenberg, "By virtue of not having had an education, I can be direct and literal and translate literally. If my mother said a thing in a certain way, that's the way I translated it, without any thought of grammar or this and that" (von Huene-Greenberg 36). A brief but succinct example of such, from the "Fiesta" episode of the novel, is dialogue between two *paesanos,* The Lucy and Luigi, "The Lucy winked at Luigi, nodded toward the joyful breasts of Cola and sighed: 'Ah, mother mine, your nursing habit I yet have not lost …' Luigi's twisted eye danced" (*Christ in Concrete* 149). 'Mother mine' is a direct translation of *mamma mia,* a familiar Italian phrase. In this scene as well as throughout *Christ in Concrete*, di Donato's writing adjusts for language but leaves the Italian syntax.

Italian syntax was something that remained unique to *Christ in Concrete* as di Donato evolved his craft. His third novel, for example, *Three Circles of Light* (1960), is set in the same neighborhood and tenement housing as *Christ in Concrete* and includes many of the same *paesanos*[1]. *Three Circles of Light* functions as a prequel to *Christ in Concrete*, providing more background and information about life

within the immigrant community and details every day events before Geremio is killed at Job.

This third novel essentially ends where *Christ in Concrete* begins, with some overlap and repeated telling of Geremio's death. *Three Circles of Light*, however has more typical English-language syntax. Looking more closely at a scene from *Three Circles of Light*, which includes dialogue like the example above from *Christ in Concrete*, it is easy to see the change. Geremio, in conversation with young Pietro, says, "'Do not ever dishonor the art of the trowel … If you lay one brick in your lifetime, lay it true. Scrape the mortar from beneath your feet, slob!' Do not beat the brick with your trowel as though you were sounding the tambourine – press the brick into the mortar lovingly and without chicanery'" (*Three Circles* 80-1). This conversation between Geremio and Pietro surely would have taken place in Italian like the talk about Cola between The Lean and Luigi. Two decades later, though, di Donato chooses to present the conversation in English with conventional syntax. This choice regarding syntax changes both the mood and tone of *Three Circles of Light* in comparison to *Christ in Concrete*, despite the retelling of similar events and a similar setting. While the syntax of the latter transports the reader into a time and place, sharing in the narrator's pain, the former creates feelings of nostalgia and conveys reflection and sometimes regret.

In addition to di Donato's sentence structure and language style in *Christ in Concrete*, di Donato combines the act of labor and the physical space of the construction site to create an additional character in the novel. Job, personified, has a sense of autonomy. It is free to interact with the protagonist and other characters in the novel. In a later work from the 1970s, published originally in *Penthouse Magazine*, di Donato revisits the year 1939. "My Uncivilized Past" is a cynical retelling of the events from the day *Christ in Concrete* wins book of the month and di Donato finds himself changed from a day-laborer to a wealthy writer. Di Donato describes how, "In the novel I gave labor a soul. I made family an intimate, sacred community. I theatricized the fable of religion, placing each sentence within the framework of ritual, instinctively patterning my work after the morality plays of dark mystic times gone" ("My Uncivilized Past" 94). In this excerpt not only does di Donato refer to, and confirm the presence of themes Cavaluzzi mentions above, but he describes how he personifies labor in the novel.

Fred Gardaphé talks more about Job personified and the way it works to elevate the laborer in *Christ in Concrete*. In his article, "Italian American Literature and Working-Class Culture," Gardaphé explains,

> Donato's highly mythic and poetic best-selling 1939 novel, *Christ in Concrete*, personifies work as 'Job,' the antagonist to the worker-as-Christ, the protagonist. The novel turned Pietro di Donato into a hero of the working class, a champion of the exploited worker struggling to express his/her experiences of being used and abused. Early publicity photos included some in which the author was bare-chested, laying bricks on a job site, as evidence of his worker-god status. (Gardaphé 412)

Job, functions perfectly as an antagonist in *Christ in Concrete*, as Gardaphé explains above, because it remains in control throughout the novel. The strong, persistent men of Job, with their work ethic, skill, resilience and knowledge of their craft are consistently controlled, belittled, and attacked by this antagonist.

The personification of Job that emphasizes its presence in the novel and establishes it as a truly evil force in *Christ in Concrete* appears early, when it kills Geremio and the others. Before Geremio's death, the reader is introduced to the oppressive nature of Job when di Donato describes the force it has over a *paesano* called The Lean. Di Donato writes, "The Lean as he fought his burden on looked forward to only one goal, the end. The barrow he pushed, he did not love. The stones that brutalized his palms, he did not love. The great God Job, he did not love" (*Christ in Concrete* 8). The misery Job causes The Lean is conveyed with words like "fought" and "burden," while Job is portrayed as truly powerful when it is referred to as "great God Job." And then, just a few pages later, di Donato describes how, "Job tore down upon them madly. Walls, floors, beams became whirling, solid, splintering waves crashing with detonations that ground man and material in bonds of death" (*Christ in Concrete* 14). In this moment, Job flexes its power and capabilities as a functioning character in the novel. Job, maintaining its autonomy through the last pages and beyond.

The personification of Job described by Gardaphé as originating in *Christ in Concrete* maintains its human-like presence in some of di Donato's future novels. Two of di Donato's later novels,

the aforementioned *Three Circles of Light*, and *The Penitent* (1963), both include examples of Job personified. Di Donato assigns the responsibility of his father's death to a building that "hated father." He writes, "The edifice on which father was laying brick collapsed. The building hated Father, hated Annunziata and her children. The many floors and walls threw themselves vengefully upon Father and crushed him. That Good Friday, Father, against his wishes and our wishes, became my very own Christ in concrete" (*Three Circles* 176). This example from *Three Circles of Light* demonstrates the continued personification of Job. The essential materials of Job – the floors, the walls, even the building itself – are capable of hate. Di Donato is careful to include the resonating hate of the building, since Geremio's death results in such suffering for his family.

Job, or labor personified is also noticeable in di Donato's fourth, full-length novel, *The Penitent.* When di Donato set out to tell the story of Saint Maria Goretti the project eventually took a somewhat different direction. While the first part of the novel does focus on the young saint, the remaining parts are mostly about the experience of her murderer, Alessandro Serenelli. Returning to the von Huene-Greenberg interview, di Donato explained the connection he developed with Serenelli while conducting research for the novel. Di Donato tells his interviewer,

> she didn't live long enough to become a woman. Alessandro is twenty years old, and she is twelve years old, and his life was ruined and her life was destroyed. In his little cubicle in the Franciscan *convent*o in Macerata he had books, and had my book in Italian, but the book that he read and reread and [which] was worn and frayed was *Crime and Punishment*. We communicated. He had read *Christ in Concrete* backwards and forwards. He was so sympathetic. He said, 'You're the boy that did that and went to work.' He wept. (von Huene-Greenberg 41)

Di Donato also describes the closeness he feels to Serenelli in *The Penitent.* Di Donato explains, "I had reached common ground with Alessandro: we were both of Italian pleasant blood, are saved and strengthened by the same faith, know manual labor, and relish profound literature" (*The Penitent* 121). Perhaps this common ground inspired di Donato to personify Job in Serenelli's story as well.

As a poor sharecropper, Serenelli often felt his life did not belong to him and he was consumed by apathy and desperation. Serenelli's bleak circumstances are considered early in the novel, "Soon the army would take him against his will. Another trap made by incomprehensible forces. If he did not lose his life in the army he would be returned to his father and the soil. Was he to wed a peasant, raise more slaves and be in hopeless debt …" (*The Penitent* 13). Serenelli eventually admits to his biographer, "I was bored, and stung by a life of exhausting labor and hopeless bondage to landowners, and so I reasoned that it made no difference if I did commit a crime and was incarcerated" (*The Penitent* 62). Perpetually feeling the sting of labor, di Donato and Serenelli are imprisoned by the same forces; exploited by the same economic structures. Job personified assumes the same oppressive role in both of their lives.

The Body of the Laborer

The previous section analyzed the personification of labor in di Donato's writing. "Job" materializes as a functioning character in novels like *Christ in Concrete*, *Three Circles of Light*, and even *The Penitent*. In these novels, Job controls the laborer's life. The personification of Job and the power it exerts over the worker, however, is dependent upon the body of the worker. Therefore, the laborer's body is a vehicle from which the individual is controlled – as discussed in the last section – and, as I demonstrate in this section, the body is an extension of the laborer's identity.

Italian American identity in the United States is a complicated topic. Although Italians were never denied the rights of citizenship because of their ethnicity, religion, or skin tone, some members of the traditionally white or Anglo-Saxon community regarded Italians as "other," and many still do. In her book, *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America*, Historian and Italian American scholar, Jennifer Gugliemo, attributes Italians being classified as other to the slow ascent of the group into a space of economic stability. Guglielmo writes, "Since many Italians remained poor and working class longer than most other European immigrants, they have often lived in the nation's blue-collar neighborhoods, amid people of color" (Guglielmo 4). Relatedly, Thierry Rinaldetti argues that, "being Italian meant, first

and foremost, being an outcast not only in American society at large but within the U.S. proletariat as well" (Rinaldetti 96). Italians seem to exist in a culturally "gray-area," even among others in the same social class.

Similar to Guglielmo's implication above, that Italian American whiteness is young, and Rinaldetti's claim that the Italian American experience is characterized by otherness, Gardaphé feels Italian American whiteness is fragile. Gardaphé explains,

> For Italian Americans, "making it" has come with a high price tag … They've had to trade or hide any customs which have been depicted as quaint, but labeled as alien, in order to prove equality to those above them on the ladder of success. In this way, Italian Americans have become white, but as a different kind of white than those of the dominant Anglo Saxon culture. Italian Americans have become white on a leash. And as long as they behave themselves (act white), as long as they accept the images of themselves as presented into the media (don't cry defamation), and as long as they stay within corporate and cultural boundaries (don't identify with other minorities), they will be allowed to remain white. ("We Weren't Always White" 187)

Based on the work of Guglielmo, Rinaldetti and Gardaphé one can draw the conclusion that Italian American identity is closely associated with the individual's proximity to a working-class social status as well as a lingering dedication to Old World tradition.

In di Donato's writing, Italian American identity is expressed in exactly this way; not only in his novels, but also in shorter pieces of writing where di Donato shows how the laborer's body is an extension of Italian American identity. Di Donato does so by depicting *paesanos* engaged with physical labor and includes descriptions of the *paesanos*' physical features that are shaped and defined by labor. Some of the best examples of this are in di Donato's second novel *This Woman* (1958), and some short stories published in magazines and the collection *Naked Author* (1970).

This Woman is a sensual novel that focuses on the relationship between the adult Paul from *Christ in Concrete* and the woman he eventually marries. *This Woman* is Joycean in structure, relying heavily on writing strategies like inner-monologue and stream of consciousness. Much of the novel explores the relationship between the mind, body and spirit, as the protagonist constantly reckons with identity, where he fits in society, and his commitment to Catholicism. As the protagonist contemplates his identity, he is unable to separate himself from his work. The unnamed narrator describes the protagonist's thinking; "His mind dwelt mainly on three sets of scenes, brickwork, women, and his soul. The three-act drama of his mental health theatre would revert first to the factual solidity of building construction, evolve to the mercury of sex, and then culminate with the spiritual judgement" (*This Woman* 8). This example from the novel shows how the protagonist's contemplation of his personal identity and his metacognitive awareness are never separate from the act of labor.

In a recorded speaking engagement for the Italian American Historical Society from the early eighties[2], di Donato, responding to the audience's questions, talks about why he renames his protagonist Paul, when he is obviously telling his own story. He first admits to an audience member, "Yes I am the – I'm Paul" ("St. Valentine's" 00:15:24-00:15:26). He then goes on to talk about the name change, explaining,

> It's easy to live somebody else's life, it's easy to – when I call him Paul, I can be objective. I could weep for him; I could feel sorry. I weep – I weep – for instance, when I – the play that I wrote about my novel, *This Woman*, this obsession because he married a widow [*inaudible*] (00:16:53) and he thought he had liberated himself, and then he finds out he is – he is the most prejudiced Madonna-Prostitute-Catholic there is and condemns his wife for having – as a human being who lived and lusted before. ("St. Valentine's" 00:16:34–00:17:10)

Not only does this example of self-criticism – or criticism of the protagonist in *This Woman* – confirm di Donato is the main "character" at the center of his work, but it also sheds light on the previous example, explaining why the division between labor and self, seem to be so difficult.

Additionally, throughout the novel, descriptions related to the protagonist's physical appearance or descriptions of the protagonist's movements coming from the narrator and other characters, also rely on his identity as laborer. For example, as Paul examines himself, the narrator describes how, "He flexed his laborer's hands. There was that dependable strength, a flowing fullness in his joints, the tickling satisfied goodness, the bite and grip" (*This Woman* 21). And, when the protagonist's love interest thinks of him, her inner-monologue reveals phrases like, "Mister bricklayer if you only knew" (*This Woman* 19). As the novel continues, Paul is referred to as, "The bricklayer husband," (*This Woman* 136) and "The young bricklayer," (*This Woman* 218), never escaping his livelihood as a descriptor for his sense of self.

Some of di Donato's lesser-known works, like the short stories "The Broken Scaffold," "The Fireplace," and "O'Hara's Love," show how the Italian American laborer's body is an extension of his identity. In these stories, di Donato tends to leave the alias Paul behind and write simply as Pete. Pete's body, although young, is very strong from years of hard work. In "The Broken Scaffold," for example, the other laborers are resentful of the contradiction between Pete's youth and ability. Di Donato writes, "Most of the men on the job hated me because, only a kid, I was the fastest bricklayer" (*Naked Author* 179). And, when a Jewess matriarch chooses Pete to impregnate her daughter, to compensate for her sterile son-in-law in "The Fireplace," it is Pete's physical appearance that first catchers her attention. Di Donato tells how, "In June I was building a patio around Dave's pool. Sarah and Leda visited. Sarah watched as I laid the slate in mortar. After I had a backstroke workout in the pool, Sarah ran her hand over my shoulder muscles and complimented my physical ability" (*Naked Author* 70). In both instances, the worker's developed body, a result from day after day of hard labor, is the primary determinant for how he is judged by others. This body of a working man, however, is not presented negatively or less than; it exudes capability and strength.

"O'Hara's Love," explores more complicated ideas associated with identity in the life of an Italian American laborer. Young Pete, who is at the center of this story, is coming of age and beginning to explore his sexual, sensual self. The complicated part, though, is that Pete has already lived and worked as head-of-household in his late father's absence, so his physical self is further developed than his emotional self. The plot of the story is centered on this dichotomy of Pete's identity; the strong working man, and the child.

Upon meeting the wife of his family's lawyer, young Pete becomes obsessively attracted to the much older Lilly-Mae Kennedy. Lilly-Mae is the wife of Mr. Kennedy, the lawyer who helps Pete's mother finally receive compensation for her husband's work-related death. When Mr. Kennedy and Lilly-Mae attend a family celebration, Pete likens himself to the *paesanos* who are drawn to Lilly-Mae's flirtatious drinking and dancing. Di Donato describes how, "The paesano men, mostly bricklayers and hodcarriers, got royally drunk and whirled willing Lilly-Mae Kennedy around in the native dancing and blatantly ogled her and salivated and ran their hot hard hands about her, and the flies of their trousers poked up obviously" ("O'Hara's Love" 3). Like the grown men at the party, Pete wants Lilly-Mae. He grapples with giving into his sexual desires, and staying true to his responsibilities as the head of household, but eventually gives in:

> Raindrops smashing on my window were tom-toms drumming Lilly-Mae, Lilly, Lilly, Lilly, sex, sex, sex. My flesh between bedsheets was an unbearable flamboyant symptom. I tried to concentrate on my mother, my studies of building-blueprints, on my sacred duty as breadwinner and head of family, of Father in heaven, of Christ who died for us and his Virgin Mother, of my debt of honor to Mr. Scott Kennedy, but the rain knew what I had to do. ("O'Hara's Love" 6)

Pete, after all, works like a man, so he has justification to desire like a man, like the paesanos at the party whom he works alongside, and who also desire Lilly-Mae.

Consistent with his complicated dual identity, Pete must lie to his mother about having to shop for construction tools for a chance to be alone with a woman. Lilly's response to his advances, continues this conundrum. Pete tells how, "She grabbed my hips and surged upward, saying, 'Petey, honey, if you don't blab to no one, I'll let you have all you can take. Kid, you're built like a man – all cock!'" ("O'Hara's Love" 10). Lilly-Mae, even as a mature woman, is confused. She is aware he is a "kid," but admits he feels like a man. The construction tools Pete claims to be shopping for – as I demonstrate in the following section – are significant objects, just like the worker's body, in developing Italian American identity.

Tools

Bricklaying and construction tools[3] materialize similarly to Job in Pietro di Donato's writing. Like Job, the tools of Job have an unwavering presence. If Job is personified in di Donato's writing, then tools are symbolic of the lifestyle and experiences of the worker. With tools in hand, a laborer has no hope of escaping who he is or what he does. The physical separation from those tools helps the laborer to realize other parts of himself.

As I demonstrate in the first section, the personification of Job is illustrated most clearly when it takes control of the Italian laborer's life, and it exerts its power over him. Because the laborer uses the tools in the same way labor uses the body, construction and bricklaying tools seem to become an extension of the worker's identity. The tools are objects which the laborer can control. The laborer's ability to properly manipulate the tools and perform a task satisfactorily ensures success when work is available. In the following paragraphs I show the relationship between construction tools and the worker's personal identity.

Like his father, and grandfather, di Donato made a living laying brick. During the von Huene-Greenberg interview, di Donato talks about how the danger associated with bricklaying became an inescapable fear – both is father and grandfather were killed on the job. Di Donato says, "My grandfather, the man that adopted my father, was killed with the collapse of a tunnel that he was building a shell in … How many times I risked my life" (von Huene-Greenberg 46). Geremio was the illegitimate child of a poor girl and a nobleman. In *Three Circles of Light*, di Donato gives some exposition on how masonry became a generational endeavor; Geremio learned to lay bricks from his adopted father. Di Donato writes,

> When father was born in secrecy, the nobleman gave him to the childless wife of a bricklayer, left his wife and family and took Father's mother to South America. They were never heard from again … At the age of seven Father was put to the craft of bricklaying. He had virile physique of the proletariat, and the proud poise of the nobility (*Three Circles* 18).

Bricklaying, being a skill handed down from one generation to the next, accompanied by intense risk and danger suggests commitment to tradition and a sense of identity is represented in the craft itself. This family exposition creates a space within di Donato's writing for brickwork to be honored, respected and treated as an art among the *paesanos*, and within the Italian American community di Donato represents in multiple texts.

Of the tools associated with Job, the trowel receives most of the attention in di Donato's work. The trowel is a source of pride for the Italian American worker in the sense that one's ability to work with the trowel effectively earns one a living. As little Paul desperately tries to fill Geremio's role in *Christ in Concrete*, one of the first things he must master is use of the trowel. Paul brings it with him to one of his first days at Job. The novel describes how,

> Paul removed his coat and pulled the trowel from his belt. He stood nervously … He reached the trowel down into the mortar. Slice down toward him, edgewise, twist in quick short circle scoop up away from him. The trowel came up half-covered with mortar – but how heavy! He dropped it back into the tub and worked the trowel back and forth in the mortar just as he had seen the bricklayers do. (*Christ in Concrete* 69)

In this scene, di Donato emphasizes the difficulty involved with being a successful mason, as well as the necessary skill that can only develop over time. The heaviness of the loaded trowel foreshadows the endless challenge that lies ahead for Paul, yet his imitation of this action celebrates the start of his apprenticeship.

Using the trowel to expand the Italian American community is also a source of pride for the mason. In *Three Circles of Light* and *Immigrant Saint*, di Donato shows the trowel as a foundational tool for creating permanent infrastructure within the ethnic community. In *Three Circles of Light*, the members of the Vastese community in Hoboken, New Jersey join to build a church. Di Donato writes, "Every family contributed almost their last dollar for our new church building.

Padre Onorio had consulted with the women. 'Can you secure the art and labor of your men?' They responded in effect: 'The trowels that earn bread shall also lay up the edifices of San Rocco'" (*Three Circles* 31). Similarly, in *Immigrant Saint*, when Mother Cabrini moves forward with building her famous Columbus Hospital, her limited financial resources present a challenge. However, the bricklayer "Master Pietro," willing to work for free, assures Mother Cabrini, "no trowel is surer and faster than mine!" (*Immigrant Saint* 175). In both novels, the trowel is synonymous with the worker and his capability.

In addition to a source of pride and representing the bricklayer's skill, the trowel and other building tools also function as a tether to labor. While physically engaged with building tools, the Italian American man is inseparable from his laborer identity. In the closing pages of *Three Circles of Light*, di Donato describes the moment he accepts responsibility for his family, writing, "As I stared into the night, I saw a trowel in my hand, and wall after wall to lay up" (*Three Circles* 188). The trowel he sees in his hand represents a life of perpetual physical labor. Revisiting *Three Circles of Light*, as well as two lesser-known short stories by di Donato, we see examples of the worker disengaging from labor by physically separating himself from the construction tools to be able to realize alternate parts of his identity.

In *Three Circles of Light* di Donato shows the bricklayers and construction workers of the Vastese community in Hoboken physically disengage from their work by hiding their work tools from view. Di Donato writes, "The winter came early with enveloping snow and mad winds. Bricklaying tools were shoved under the bed to gather rust until the spring, and the men spent the days in Tony's saloon, smoking stogies, playing cards for pennies, then going home to lean fare, and returning to Tony's to sit around the potbellied stove" (*Three Circles* 141). Weather, preventing the men from working, means relaxing days in which the men of the community spend their hours together in recreation. And while the men of the community cannot work, the women shoulder domestic responsibilities and earning. On the same page, di Donato tells the reader that during the winter,

> It was the women who managed the home, hiding a scrunched-up dollar during good weather when their men were working and eking it out in small change like drops of blood in the winter, running up a small account at the

> markets, to be honorably paid in the spring … In the winter the women and their daughters bore heavier burdens, for beside cooking, hand washing and housework, they worked at cutting embroidery. (*Three Circles* 141)

These successions of scenes in *Three Circles of Light* shows how the weight of labor never really lessens, it simply shifts; sometimes spread somewhat evenly through all members of the working-class immigrant community, other times more burdensome for the women. Most importantly these scenes emphasize the male laborer successfully disengaged from labor when the construction tools themselves – those things on which the laborer relies to complete the task – are physically removed from daily life.

A situation similar to what is described above in *Three Circles of Light* occurs in a lesser known, shorter piece from di Donato called "O'Hara's Love," referenced once already in the previous section. "O'Hara's Love" is reflective, being told through di Donato's perspective decades after the events being described have taken place. This narrative gives recount of the period in which the young laborer, Pete, already working like a grown man, develops the sexual desires of a grown man. Pete uses construction tools to help him realize the sexual part of his identity, explaining, "I dressed, put on my beret and trench coat, and told Mother I was going to New York City, and the Bronx, to two stores that sold only bricklayer's tools – that I needed a new trowel and new level" ("O'Hara's Love" 6). Pete's role as a laborer, and reliance on tools to earn for the family, allows him the opportunity to use them as an excuse. Claiming to need new tools, Pete leaves the family home and freely explores a budding aspect of his personal identity.

Finally, one of the most significant instances in di Donato's writing, showing the Italian American laborer relying on tools as a vehicle for developing personal identity, can be found in "My Uncivilized Past." Referenced briefly in the first section of this article – "Job Personified" – "My Uncivilized Past" is a retelling of how the young bricklayer becomes an overnight success when *Christ in Concrete* is chosen for Book of the Month Club. Having a reflective tone and some scattered bitterness, this story delivers occasional laugh-out-loud punchlines. This short piece captures the moment in di Donato's life when he transitions from "bricklayer," to "author."

"My Uncivilized Past" begins with di Donato declaring, "Having to work outdoors in winter for your fucking bread makes you wish you were never born" ("My Uncivilized Past" 92). This direct statement leaves no confusion of whether or not di Donato is the stereotypical "Tonino" loving "the pick and shovel." By confronting one miserable aspect of labor, di Donato expands the single story of the Italian American immigrant laborer. He develops the persona beyond the humble, thankful immigrant who is grateful for any job.

Di Donato celebrates his instant fame and financial freedom from Job. Now an author instead of bricklayer, he can officially develop the latter part of his identity by physically separating himself from his construction tools. Upon entering Bobs-Merrill Publishing Company the elevator operator tries to direct di Donato to the service elevator, basing his assumption on the tools di Donato has in hand. The operator says, "'You don't look like an author or talk like an author.'" ("My Uncivilized Past" 94). Later that evening, after it is revealed that his life is now changed, di Donato officially begins to look like an author by throwing his tools from the Brooklyn Bridge, explaining, "Every, poor, tawdry, ball-busted, day-dreaming bricklayer has cursingly vowed that – when his ship comes in, when a rich relative in Rangoon dies and leaves him a fortune, or when he wins the Irish sweepstakes – he's going to throw his fucking tools off the Brooklyn Bride" ("My Uncivilized Past" 119). This ceremonious act completes the day's transition, officially freeing the new author from Job, for the first time since he was a child.

The American Gospels

Job personified, the physical body of the laborer, and tools for construction remain material indicators of identity for the Italian American laborer in most of di Donato's writing. Later in life, Di Donato generally referred to fellow Italian laborers as "the common man." Interviews, speeches and his last novel, *The American Gospels* (which remains unpublished), demonstrates how di Donato's dedication toward this undervalued member of society shifts from portrayal to accountability. Di Donato tells von Huene-Greenberg,

> The poor man occupied himself with alcohol, with baseball, with nonsense, with trivia, with situation comedies, vulgarisms. He kept himself enslaved, and then he, becoming policemen and military and so forth, was the Praetorian Guard for the wealthy … The poor masses didn't and still don't know what they want and are incapable of uniting to get what they need. So these are the truths. Do you think the politician is going to say that? Do you think the priest will say that? Do you think the school teacher will say that? 'Slobs, you goddam robots …' No, no. (von Huene-Greenberg 46)

Truth-seeking, and action from the working man or common man become some of the most clearly stated messages di Donato puts forth during his last years. In this concluding section, I offer a discussion of The *American Gospels* in which I emphasize how this last novel continues to explore Italian American identity with material objects like Job personified, the body and tools. However, I also call attention to di Donato's challenge to the working man to fight back against the oppressive societal structures working against him.

Di Donato, a working man himself, and self-proclaimed communist, has from the beginning of his career emphasized the value of the worker's physical body. Although *The American Gospels* did not develop into a novel until much later in his career, there is evidence of the text's foundational messages – such as reaching the working man and inspiring him to act against greed-driven class inequality – being part of di Donato's personal convictions as far back as 1939. At the third annual League of American Writer's conference held at Carnegie Hall in June of 1939, di Donato recited a speech called, "Why I am a Writer," for about five-hundred people. At one point, during his speech, he says,

> I realize that in reaching out to the worker I must disregard all the lieutenants and generals of the Capitalists, disregard the Capitalists as shrewd men who are going to get what they can out of it. I say to the worker, you are the guys that are permitting this and you are hurting me too. How to reach them and tell them that they are permitting it! ("Why I am a Writer").

In each section of *The American Gospels*, Christ punishes both powerful societal figures acting in greed as well as the bystanders belonging to working class for allowing such evil actions to have been carried out by elected officials.

Fred Gardaphé is one of few scholars who has had the chance to look closely at the unpublished manuscript of *The American Gospels*. In the early nineties, *Voices in Italian Americana* featured di Donato's work, including an excerpt from *The American Gospels*. Gardaphé wrote the introduction to the issue. He explains that despite *The American Gospels* coming many years after *Christ in Concrete,* "it demonstrates the continuation of Di Donato's lifelong commitment to social criticism through story" ("An Overview" 2). Gardaphé also tells us that *The American Gospels* should be read as di Donato's, "cry out of the world just as *Christ in Concrete* was his primal scream into the world" ("Working Class Literature" 414). Gardaphé's statements suggest that the two novels are representative of di Donato's authorial essence. Di Donato's own words confirm such as well. While speaking with von Huene-Greenberg, di Donato said, "I treasure *Christ in Concrete* and I treasure *The Gospels* because they are my fate, my identity, my soul, my conscious evaluation of myself" (von Huene-Greenberg 33-4). It is important to note that some of di Donato's later work presages themes and ideas which develop fully in *The American Gospels*.

The cynical tone of the previously referenced, "My Uncivilized Past," is evidence of an ever-evolving voice during a career spanning almost six decades. The bricklayer-author in "My Uncivilized Past" is not the scared, sick tenement kid from *Christ in Concrete*, or even the sexually curious, hard-working teen who still fears God and his mother like Pete in "O'Hara's Love." The voice in "My Uncivilized Past," is more akin to di Donato's protagonist, "Pete the Red," in *The American Gospels*, as opposed to Paul from *Christ in Concrete*. For example, the term "robot slob" often appears in the *The American Gospels* to describe the mindless masses of working people allowing themselves to be manipulated and fooled by dishonest politicians. Di Donato first uses "robot slob" in "My Uncivilized Past," to discuss his disappointment about having to carry his tools with him to the publisher when he discovers *Christ in Concrete* is chosen for book of the month. Di Donato writes,

> At the end of the day, sure enough, I was fired. That was the evening I had to go to the publisher Bobbs-Merrill, then located at Fourth Avenue and 28th Street, to find out whether the Book-of-the-Month Club had chosen Steinbeck or me. Being laid off I had to take my four-foot level and big white canvas toolbag with me. I hated to carry tools in the street and subway – it made me feel like a goddamned robot slob. ("My Uncivilized Past" 92).

The suggestion from this excerpt is that di Donato is embarrassed about the judgement that will surely come from those who see him trudging along New York City's streets with his tools. They are an example of a material item that makes others assume he is a thoughtless, weak, member of that masses, content to be a slave to the wealthy corporations from which his paycheck comes.

Gardaphé emphasizes in his article, "Italian American Literature and Working-Class Culture," that "The man who wrote *The American Gospels* is very different from the one who created *Christ in Concrete*" (412). Whereas honest portrayal of ugly and unfair conditions imprisoning and killing the common man trying to survive are definitive of *Christ in Concrete*, *The American Gospels* is characterized by middle class masses who choose mindless entertainment and to believe anything told to them on TV. In *The American Gospels*, Job personified, tools for labor, and the body of the laborer still materialize to demonstrate the enslavement of the common man, but in this final novel di Donato's tone is one of disappointment and revenge as opposed to empathy.

Whether di Donato is choosing to describe the exploitation of the Italian American laborer, or he challenges the common man to push back against his oppressors, he moves Italian American identity beyond the single story or stereotypical portrayal. Di Donato's ability to consistently personify labor, as well as the role he assigns to the material necessities of working-class life – like tools or the objectified body of the laborer himself – articulate the complexity of the misunderstood Maria and Tonino.

Notes

[1] I realize the proper plural term for friends or country men would be *paesani*, however, di Donato consistently used the term "paesanos" in interviews and speeches.

[2] The recording of this speaking engagement existed in the archives only on cassette until recently. As part of my doctoral studies I not only digitized this recording of di Donato but also transcribed it.

[3] Trowel owned by Pietro di Donato. Box 30a. Pietro di Donato Collection. Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University. Accessed and photographed by Giannina Lucantoni, 8 March 2017.

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***JAST*, 2023; 60: 121-137**
Submitted: 23.07.2023
Accepted: 28.08.2023
ORCID# 0009-0006-9067-1933

Reading (Italian American) Material Culture in the Work of Louise DeSalvo

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Abstract

This paper proposes a reading of Louise DeSalvo's work from a material culture perspective. In the first place, I consider how women were conceived of as objects in Italian American families, by looking at DeSalvo's memoir writing; specifically, in *Vertigo* (1996) and *Chasing Ghosts: A Memoir of a Father, Gone to Work* (2016). In the second place, informed by DeSalvo's theoretical writing (*Writing as a Way of Healing*, 1999), I will address what I term the *material texture* of her writing, that is to say, the ability to involve – and take inspiration from – material things in the process of writing. Lastly, following Irina D. Mihalache and Elizabeth Zanoni, I will draw on the idea of *food's materialities* (4) – and their three interrelated facets (food, environments, and representations) – to investigate how DeSalvo – as a third-generation Italian American woman – tackled questions of food preparation and consumption in *Crazy in the Kitchen* (2004). In this fashion, the article complements the work on the interrelationship between materiality and identity, by offering an alternative reading of its diverse textual representations.

Keywords: *Chasing Ghosts*, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, Louise DeSalvo, material culture, memoir writing, *Vertigo*

Louise DeSalvo'nun Eserlerinde İtalyan Amerikalı Maddi Kültürünü Okumak

Giuseppe Capalbo

Öz

Bu makale Louise DeSalvo'nun çalışmalarını maddi kültür perspektifinden inceler. Öncelikle, başta *Vertigo* (1996) ve *Chasing Ghosts: A Memoir of a Father, Gone to Work* (2016) olmak üzere, DeSalvo'nun anılarından yola çıkarak İtalyan Amerikalı ailelerde kadınların nasıl birer nesne olarak algılandığını ele alacağım. Daha sonra, DeSalvo'nun kuramsal metinlerinden (*Writing as a Way of Healing*, 1999) yararlanarak, onun yazılarındaki *maddi doku* olarak ifade ettiğim özelliklere, yani yazma sürecinde nesneleri kullanmasına ve onlardan esinlenmesine değineceğim. Son olarak, Irina D. Mihalache ve Elizabeth Zanoni'yi izleyerek, *Crazy in the Kitchen*'da (2004), DeSalvo'nun, üçüncü nesil İtalyan Amerikalı bir kadın olarak, yemek hazırlama ve tüketimiyle ilgili sorunlarla nasıl baş ettiğini incelemek için yemeğin maddeselliği (4) fikri ve bu fikrin birbiriyle ilişkili üç yönü (yemek, çevre ve temsil) üzerinde duracağım. Makale böylece, farklı metinsel temsillerin alternatif bir okumasını sunarak maddi kültür ve kimlik arasındaki ilişki üzerine yapılan çalışmalara katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anı yazını, *Chasing Ghosts*, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, Louise DeSalvo, maddi kültür, *Vertigo*

Encoding *Things* with (Patriarchal) Significance in Louise DeSalvo's Memoir Writing

In her seminal essay "A Portrait of the *Puttana* as a Middle-Aged Woolf Scholar" (1984), Italian American writer Louise DeSalvo states: "I come from a family, from a cultural heritage, where women simply don't go away to do things separately from men. That is not to say that men don't go away to do things separately from women.

They do" (35). In making this declaration, she hints at the patriarchal ideology of separate spheres whereby women are tied up to domesticity as the Patmorian angels in the house (Hartnell 458). Accordingly, DeSalvo describes how she felt uncomfortable not being able to fit into the Italian American tradition of women as pasta makers; specifically, when she decided to pursue academic excellence by enrolling in a PhD program, she had to leave the domestic space she was assigned at birth, which led to the definite crossing of the threshold dividing proper from improper femininity: "You can imagine the way I felt as I flew high above the Atlantic. There I was, a *puttana*, alone at last" (DeSalvo, "*Puttana*" 36).

As Edvige Giunta has rightly pointed out, the "*Puttana*" essay helped DeSalvo realize "that she was leaving the safe academic haven of textual scholarship to 'came out,' as she puts it, as an Italian American working-class woman who could not claim a legitimate place in the snobbish and hierarchical world of literary scholarship" (xx). Though she was initially afraid of voicing concerns about intersectional discrimination, DeSalvo eventually decided to give a full account of her story by turning the "*Puttana*" essay into a memoir, namely *Vertigo* (1996). The by-now huge body of scholarship on *Vertigo* has sought to analyze it from several methodological perspectives – e.g., transnational studies (Romeo), trauma studies (Covino), and pain studies (Capalbo) – which nevertheless fail to grasp how Italian American matrilineality is both conceived of and questioned in the continuum of her life writing. In this regard, Mary Jo Bona has recently advanced a tentative reading of the mother-daughter bond which, whilst mentioning *en passant* the role of the "patriarchal family structure in post-World War II America" (392), focuses on "the specter of clinical depression" (392) looming over DeSalvo's mother and sister. And yet, I contend that from a material culture perspective,[1] Louise DeSalvo's memoir writing can open up new paths towards an understanding of the relationship between women and materiality; for instance, following Arjun Appadurai's proposal, if "human actors encode things with significance" (5), it goes without saying that things – or, broadly speaking, the home as a material site under male control – are vehicles for the oppression of women.

In the chapter entitled "Combat Zones," DeSalvo reexperiences her childhood by looking at past pictures of herself: "I am fourteen months old when my father goes away to war. I have no memory of

this event. In the pictures that are taken of me just after my father goes to war, I look shell-shocked" (*Vertigo* 49). The critical reflection on her past – what Julia Breitbach has otherwise called "the narrative edifice of one's life story" (37) – is thus enhanced by the very material support of the photographic image[2] which reconnects DeSalvo with a perceiving subject, namely her father. After picturing the wartime lives of children and women as a period of relative happiness and freedom, an issue which has been read by Kym Ragusa as at once linking DeSalvo's family history to the history of the United States at large (Ragusa 108), she specifically details what happened upon the return of her father from the war front; she felt dispossessed of the safe space she had inhabited until then with her mother. She harbored such a deep resentment against her father that her rage also extended towards the gifts received from him: "I took to 'punishing' this doll for being a very bad girl by scraping her face against the bricks of the building across the street" (*Vertigo* 58).

Against this backdrop, the photographic medium proves to rebut DeSalvo's memories: "This is how I remember I felt when my father came home, but the photos taken of my father and me after the war tell a different story" (*Vertigo* 60). In other words, the photo-as-object has captured DeSalvo and her father as happy subjects; it is only DeSalvo's narrative that discloses what is hidden behind the surface or, to use Bill Brown's words, what exceeds its mere materialization as an object, "the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems" ("Thing Theory" 5). Indeed, the Janus-faced nature of photography helps DeSalvo cope with conflicting feelings and realize how, in challenging her father's authority, she was trying to emulate his leading "the cavalry charge" (*Vertigo* 106) for a feminist purpose: to redeem herself and her family's women from the subaltern position to which they were confined.

The patriarchal attitude of her father is even more visible when she takes the chance to look at her parents' honeymoon photos: "My father is relaxed and happy, grinning broadly, proud to have married such a hard-working woman, such a serious woman, such a well-dressed woman, such a faithful and loyal woman, such a beautiful woman" (*Vertigo* 43-4). The very syntactical construction – via hypotaxis – of this passage, together with the repetition of the word *such*, highlights the objectification of women within the bounds of a conventional heterosexual marriage between two individuals of Italian descent: DeSalvo's father performs his dominant masculinity in his proud look

for having conquered – rather than married – a woman adhering to the expectations placed on Italian American women. Indeed, compared to the wide – toxic – grin on his face, DeSalvo's mother – and her weak smile – seems nearly lifeless in the pictures she describes: "But there seems no gaiety, no pleasure at all in my mother in the pictures my father has taken of her on their honeymoon, though she manages a weak smile" (*Vertigo* 44).

When DeSalvo's father takes on the role of photographer, we witness the full objectification of his wife because, although she is "oblivious to him" (*Vertigo* 45), he can decide how to frame the woman's body in a bathing suit. As Susan Sontag has pointed out: "Having a camera has transformed one person into something active, a voyeur: only he has mastered the situation" (7). And yet, in that same picture, DeSalvo's mother "is concentrating intently on a piece of writing" (*Vertigo* 45), just as DeSalvo herself would do later: "There are innumerable photographs my husband has taken of me throughout my life in precisely this pose" (*Vertigo* 46). DeSalvo identifies the act of writing as a way of creating a safe space to stand against the voyeuristic – and patriarchal – gaze of the photographer; this is because the picture can immortalize – and objectify – the *material* body, but it cannot grasp written words and – by proxy – the woman's individuality.

If *Vertigo* – and the extensive hermeneutical work on it – pictures DeSalvo as living "in the shadow of an authoritarian father" (Patrona 176), as the years pass, she reconsiders her position. In 2016 DeSalvo published another memoir: *Chasing Ghosts: A Memoir of a Father, Gone to War*. Compared to previous autobiographical writings, which are relatively narrow in scope (e.g. *Breathless*, 1997), *Chasing Ghosts* proves to connect directly to *Vertigo* as it reworks war contents from a quite different perspective, whereby the reading of canonical war reports is substituted for her father's first-hand account of those years. Indeed, whilst in *Vertigo* DeSalvo sought to understand World War II by reading Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), since this was an issue that her father "won't talk about" (*Vertigo* 6), in *Chasing Ghosts* that same father is willing to share war stories, which were nevertheless affected by post-traumatic stress disorder and so were "brief, sporadic, disjointed, attenuated" (*Chasing Ghosts* 10).

In Part 2, the connection between *Vertigo* and *Chasing Ghosts* is straightforward: in the former, there is a chapter entitled "Safe Houses,"

where DeSalvo details the "shock of being torn away" (*Vertigo* 92) from Hoboken to Ridgefield in 1949; in the latter, "Safe House" goes back to 1941, when her parents – just before the wedding – were looking for an apartment in Hoboken, where they put down roots. On the one hand, DeSalvo illustrates the transition from "her parents' Old World ways to the modern way of life she and my father would create together" (*Chasing Ghosts* 111), that is to say, from the first Italian generation to the second Italian American generation, which tried to decorate houses by taking inspiration from the (American) illustrations in women's magazines. On the other hand, DeSalvo accounts for the marriage of her parents – on 6 July 1941 – and the subsequent honeymoon. Here she gives us more details about those photographs described in *Vertigo*; specifically, she integrates her reflection into her father's testimony, heading towards a new understanding of the husband-wife bond: "I sense, but don't say, that this honeymoon marks a turning point in my parents' relationship, for from now on my mother will have to reckon with a man who is obsessed with warfare, and that from now on my father will have to reckon with a woman who despises armed conflict and who is far more fragile than he imagined" (*Chasing Ghosts* 117).

This does indeed prove to be a turning point because, from then on, DeSalvo's father would treat his wife as a burden or, to use Bill Maurer's words: "Women . . . were reduced to their bare, or, one should say fertile, materiality, and not treated as social subjects" (20). Indeed, to ease his wife's terror about the war, DeSalvo's father starts thinking about having a child before going away to war. Setting aside his actual departure, which charged DeSalvo's mother with the responsibility of looking after her baby girl alone, what interests me is the post-partum depression that DeSalvo's mother is subjected to; indeed, upon expressing concern for his wife's unusual behavior in the hospital, following a tradition which dates back to seventeenth- and eighteenth century medical treatments for birth, the doctor "assured my father that many women have a hard time adjusting to motherhood after giving birth and that she would soon snap out of it" (*Chasing Ghosts* 143). The verb *adjust*, which refers to changing something slightly to make it work better, fosters the usage of the metaphor of the woman's body as a machine and the doctor as "the supervisor or foreman of the labor process" (Martin 63). After marriage, women turn into inanimate matter, and the description that DeSalvo gives us is particularly striking: "She'd lie in bed, staring at the wallpaper, wrapped in her pink chenille

bathrobe, wasted milk leaking from her breasts, drying and crusting and making her nipples bleed . . . falling into a deep sleep that was not so much rest as oblivion" (*Chasing Ghosts* 144). In this image, whilst the baby feeds off her mother, her body starts deteriorating up to the point that the woman also loses her nurturing function; in place of receiving milk from her mother, DeSalvo's father has to feed his daughter with formula, and it is again via the photographic medium that we witness this inability to answer to her *natural functions*: "There are no pictures of her smiling . . . And there are no pictures of her holding me" (*Chasing Ghosts* 146). Missing this "rite of family life" (Sontag 6) – at this stage – signals what Sontag defines as "parental indifference" (6).

Listening to these stories helps DeSalvo revalue the figure of her father: "Because the effect his story had on me was to unravel my hatred of him, a hatred that I had carried for years" (*Chasing Ghosts* 146). And yet, she cannot deny the fear she felt every time his rage blasted, making his home unsafe by significantly throwing *things*: "Plates. Knives. Forks. Saucepans . . . Sometimes he is satisfied with breaking things or ripping things apart. Crockery. Chairs. Books. Magazines" (*Chasing Ghosts* 203). The patriarchal control over women is thus enhanced by the regulation of their bodies as well as the mis- and over-use of the familiar space they inhabit – plenty of those *personal effects* which DeSalvo explicitly mentions at the very end of *Vertigo* and within her body of memoir writing. In this light, the mixing up of photography and testimony in *Chasing Ghosts* grants DeSalvo the opportunity to resemiotize her memories.

Intermezzo: Writing as a Fixer of Things Past, and Other-Than-Past

Writing memoirs fostered, in DeSalvo, an urgency to critically reflect upon the very act of writing, and the key text in this regard is *Writing as a Way of Healing* (1999); whilst I agree with Peter Covino when he states that it "functions as a theoretical and creative treatise that positions and interrogates the socio-political dimensions of much of DeSalvo's earlier work" (52), I do believe that *Writing as a Way of Healing* also paved the way for later considerations of her life as an Italian American woman. In other words, it does not merely serve a

retrospective purpose, but it marks a new beginning for DeSalvo in terms of self-representation. She starts thinking about the act of writing life – and authoring a text about it – as textured (*Healing* 6): as Halliday and Hasan have pointed out, "the concept of texture is entirely appropriate to express the property of 'being a text'" (2), when conceived of as a semantic unity made of linguistic features which give it coherence and cohesion. In this light, I argue that the material turn can shed new light on the reading that DeSalvo proposes of the dialectics between text and texture: specifically, apart from the similarities between linguistic texture and matter, in its broader meaning of "the substance of anything" (Williams 164), we could say that DeSalvo draws on what we might call *material texture*, the latter being understood as the ability to involve – and take inspiration from – material things in the process of writing.

In Part 1, Chapter 1, the idea of texture is implicitly embedded in the comparison between writing and the *fixer*: "As in photography, writing acts for me as a kind of fixer, like the chemical – the fixer – you use to stabilize the image" (*Healing* 6). This metaphor proves successful if we think of how *Vertigo* and *Chasing Ghosts* helped DeSalvo *stabilize* – i.e., to give texture to – the image of her father: going beyond the "narrowly selective transparency" (Sontag 4) of photography, she had the chance to "discover deeper and more complex truths" (*Healing* 11) by bringing back and shaping memories coherently. Nevertheless, creating texture is neither a homogenizing nor a straightforward process: patterns of texture are generated and revised in due time. As DeSalvo herself remarks: "If you're not ready to write about something, don't, yet; you will when you're ready" (*Healing* 16).

In Part 1, Chapter 5, when structuring her argument about the healing power of the writing process, DeSalvo recalls the time preceding the starting of her career as a memoirist to get at what triggered that event: "In the year before I started writing my first book, I became interested in Japanese Zen *ensō*, or circle paintings, and, through this, in Japanese ideas about the creative process" (*Healing* 69). Current scholarship investigating the relationship between writing and healing in DeSalvo (e.g., Hodges Hamilton) has overlooked this *material* detail, which constituted a turning point in the way she commingled different aesthetic traditions to conceptualize her idea of art writing. She states that: "Zen artists and writers devote themselves

to an orderly, contemplative way of life that prepares them for their work. But . . . their work, too, becomes a form of meditation. Work and life are deeply integrated" (*Healing* 70). In this sense, DeSalvo saw writing not as an academic duty but as an integral and *slow* part of her life: indeed, the idea of writing across one's life course means – by proxy – that writing itself is not a sporadic activity, but rather a "slow writing path" (*Slow Writing* 23).

As such, writing progresses through several stages, amongst which, in line with the conceptual focus of this special issue, I am concerned with the germination stage. During this stage "we gather and work on fragments of ideas, images, phrases, scenes, moments, lines, possibilities for plots, characters, settings" (*Healing* 110). In DeSalvo's case, two objects inspire each session: "A ballpoint pen with an angel on its cap for making manuscript corrections; a used brick I bought . . . at Hemingway's house in Key West, Florida, ostensibly from a building that had fallen into despair, which I use as a paperweight" (*Healing* 127-8). Objects seem thus to take on an active role since they act as catalysts for writing: considering the *vexata quaestio* object-thing (Parlati 10-1), we could probably say that these inanimate *objects* – specifically, following Appadurai's insights, commodities for their being "objects of economic value" (3) – turn into *things* "richly networked, used, felt, sustaining" (Yates 33).

During the germination phase, apart from the ballpoint pen and the used brick which serve as talismans fostering the writing process, there are also those material things that directly connect to the individual's past and, in so doing, they "seem magical" (*Healing* 127); for instance, DeSalvo recounts how a copy of the *New York Times* from her birth date triggered "images and ideas" (*Healing* 129) for picturing the time men left their wives and children for the war front (e.g. the chapter "Finding My Way" in *Vertigo*). The reference to the *magical* power of things is not to be taken for granted because, as Peter J. Pels has pointed out, things are perceived as magical when they "exert agency beyond or against human intentions" (613).

Besides, in Part 3, Chapter 10, DeSalvo presents the act of writing as a "healing partnership" (*Healing* 179). Again, it is an art object that stirs this reflection: "I stand in front of an Ethiopian healing scroll, an iconic drawing of geometric shapes and five sets of eyes and written prayers and invocations . . . Ethiopia has a thousand-

year tradition of using words and images to cure illness or heal the spirit of the stricken person if a physical cure isn't possible" (*Healing* 178). As for the Japanese Zen *ensō*, in response to these aesthetically-moving forms – what Timothy Carroll otherwise called "significant form" (385) – DeSalvo parallels the process of making one's scroll to that of writing and, more importantly, she advanced the idea that such a process "would act as a permanent record of my journey" (*Healing* 180), thus extending questions of preservation and sharing from museums (Stocking) to writing and its material support. Hence, DeSalvo's systematization of life writing as a genre is grounded on cherishing the slowness of the process itself and on the material texture underlying it which, far from being irrevocable and homogeneous, is communal, stratified, and always in the making.

"Wild Things" on the Table: Food Preparation and Consumption in *Crazy in the Kitchen* (2004)

In 2004 DeSalvo published *Crazy in the Kitchen: Food, Feuds, and Forgiveness in an Italian American Family*. Paratextual elements – notably the prologue "Wild Things" – signal in advance the new materiality characterizing this memoir: "There were wild things in my grandparents' stories about the Mezzogiorno, the South of Italy, the land that they came from so many years ago, always wild things" (*Crazy* 1). Here *wild* is intended to refer to the property of something very unusual but attractive; apart from animals such as jackasses and wolves, DeSalvo zooms in on the wilderness of Italian vegetables, which are mentioned in a non-standard Italian variety – e.g., *cicorielle* (*Crazy* 4) – accompanied by a description in English. This serves a specific purpose, that is, the framing of DeSalvo's account in the South of Italy, between Puglia and Sicily: as Maddalena Tirabassi has pointed out, the different living conditions in northern and southern regions implied a differentiation in terms of diet. So, whilst the former could count on some protein (e.g., milk and cheese), the latter mainly ate bread, olive oil, and vegetables (120).

The discourse on the importance of food gives way – by proxy – to a reflection on what it means to lack food; accordingly, if home is where food is granted, then the lack of food is what compels people to find a home elsewhere, as was the case with the first wave of Italian

migrants heading towards the United States "to scavenge for food in other places" (*Crazy* 5). The prologue is thus key to introducing a new understanding of memoir writing, this time based on the intersections between food and identity across three generations of Italian Americans (Ottaviano 130). Given the impetus of this special number, I consider food's materialities and their three interrelated facets: food, environments, and representations. As Irina D. Mihalache and Elizabeth Zanoni have pointed out: "This model places food itself . . . at the center of material cultures – it considers the environments . . . where food is produced, consumed, articulated, or challenged, and differentiates between the many systems of representation" (4).

Part 1 is centered on the bread: "My grandmother is in the kitchen cutting the Italian bread that she has made . . . A bread that my mother disdains because it is everything that my mother, in 1950s suburban New Jersey, is trying very hard not to be" (*Crazy* 9). As such, the interrelationship between food and identity "bears historical, social, and cultural significance" (Gardaphé and Xu 5); DeSalvo's mother distances herself from that food to embrace the host culture. Indeed, DeSalvo compares the Italian bread to its American counterpart, which is significantly termed "the other bread" (*Crazy* 12), thus calling to mind Adorno's stance on objectivity (189-94) and the necessity, as Brown puts it, of "accepting the otherness of things [as] the condition for accepting otherness as such" ("Thing Theory" 12). In this case, there is a first-generation woman who does not accept this otherness and proudly lives as an Italian in America; conversely, her daughter – a second-generation woman – longs for that otherness in as much as fully rejecting her ethnic identity: "Maybe my mother thinks that if she eats enough of this other bread, she will stop being Italian American and she will become American American" (*Crazy* 13).

As stated above, apart from food itself, "environments . . . are the second critical facet of food's material cultures" (Mihalache and Zanoni 8); indeed, the making of food happens in a specific area – the kitchen – which gives way to the intergenerational fight: "My grandmother's bread . . . is a bread that my grandmother makes by hand in my mother's kitchen, much to my mother's disgust" (*Crazy* 19). Such an emplaced fight is complicated by the usages of other material manifestations, such as knives: "The knife that my grandmother uses to cut the bread is a butcher knife . . . To her, the only way to cut the bread was to pull the knife through the bread toward your heart" (*Crazy*

30). This act semanticizes the knife in a way that threatens DeSalvo's mother, who feels that it possesses a representational function opposite to the American paradigm, and so she shouts: "Why can't you cut that goddamned bread like a normal human being?" (*Crazy* 31).

This reticent attitude of DeSalvo's mother is later explained in the chapter "Slicing Onions," where she is caught using the knife to cut and chop the onions she will then add to the Italian foods prepared on selected special occasions. In this case, DeSalvo wonders why her "mother didn't cry the way everyone cries when slicing an onion, the stinging, unbidden tears annoying the corners of the eyes . . . She *really* cried" (*Crazy* 33). If cooking requires engagement with objects and physical spaces, as well as body and mind, to succeed (Trubek 153), then the very material and infrastructural conditions in which DeSalvo's mother is living make traumatic events come to the surface: abuse; the mourning of family members who passed away; secondary victimhood. Her traumatic past comes to be intertwined with her neglected *Italianità* and the kitchen becomes the receptacle for all she abhorred in life, up to the point that her tears "became an ingredient of the food she prepared" (*Crazy* 37).

And yet, the spaces and places where food preparation happens also serve to tighten the bond between the first and the third generation of Italian American women; against her mother's will, Louise DeSalvo experienced the making of the bread as a rite of passage to embrace her *Italianità*: "The two of us, enveloped in a nimbus of flour, inhaling the yeasty, narcotic vapors that transport her to a little white village by the sea, where she returns in reverie . . . And when I travel to Italy after she dies, it is this bread, her bread, that I hope I will find there" (*Crazy* 23). Representations of bread are thus destined to last beyond time and space, turning their materiality into a psychic essence, and helping DeSalvo experience Italy as if she were already familiar with it; in other words, when she first visited Italy, she did so whilst having in mind the consistency, the smell, the memories associated with the making of the bread.

In Part 2, DeSalvo goes back in time to narrate and expand upon her memories of war; this effect-before-cause structure – which resembles *Vertigo* – is explicitly chosen by DeSalvo because it allows her to foreground the events that she experiences firsthand, as she states in *The Art of Slow Writing* (2014): "I started with a narrative about

how I made bread with one of my grandmothers. With each successive piece, I moved further back in time" (192). In this section, when relating how her grandfather contributed to the development of her sense of belonging to Italy, food enhances an act of communion between them: "I am sitting at my grandparents' kitchen table in Hoboken. My grandfather and I are drinking wine (mine diluted with water) and eating lupini beans for a snack . . . My grandfather tells me stories, in dialect" (*Crazy* 64). In this case, food can be seen as a cultural mediator between two individuals who do not share the same language; indeed, DeSalvo's grandfather only speaks Italian, and whilst DeSalvo can understand it, she speaks English only. Moreover, DeSalvo realizes that, during this time, when they were staying in Hoboken, before moving to Ridgefield, her mother had a different attitude towards Italian food because she enjoyed eating it: "She enjoys what he cooks. She has not yet developed her revulsion for the peasant fare he and my grandmother eat. This comes later when she moves to the suburbs and tries to put her Italian past behind her" (*Crazy* 67-8). In chronicling the move from Italian Hoboken to the more Americanized area of Ridgefield, having lost the support of her caring father, DeSalvo's mother felt deprived of love, so it is her father's death that is the turning point in the rejection of her ethnic identity.

When DeSalvo finally had the chance to visit Italy, she went through Italian culinary traditions in quite a different way compared to what she was accustomed to in the United States, because she was outside the familiar space of hers or her mother's kitchen. It is exactly what she ate – pasta and pizza – that made her understand how the idea of Italy she had was based on very personal memories, which did not represent Italy – or, at least, the Italian American heritage – as a whole, but it was a Southern Italian past she was attached to: "A pasta in the shape of a large teardrop, dressed with a sauce of cauliflower, bread crumbs, a touch of onion, a touch of anchovy. *Cicatelli con cavolfiore e mollica fritta* …. These are pastas I do not know; these are pastas my family never tested" (*Crazy* 140). Ingredients, tools, and physical space for cooking take on a different connotation when switching from domestic kitchens to public restaurants; this new dimension engenders what Brown has termed "misuse value" (*A Sense of Things* 75), which helps DeSalvo see how all that is concerned with Italian food is not reducible to everyday commodity relations. In this light, she starts cherishing her cooking environment and all those objects that inhabit

it and that have been recollected whilst journeying through Italy: "When we travel, we look for equipment and ingredients to lug home from wherever we've been – an authentic mortar and pestle (from Genoa, very heavy, carried by Ernie); salted capers (from Sicily, bought in Taormina) …; dried wild mushrooms (from Varese Ligure)" (*Crazy* 186). Thus, following Brown's insights again, the history *of* commodified things – purchased in Italy – is to be understood as the history *in* things, given the subsequent crystallization of feelings and memories that "linger there in the material object" ("How to Do Things" 935). Indeed, DeSalvo states: "I *love* all my cooking equipment. I talk to my appliances. I praise them for jobs well done . . . My kitchen is my refuge. My cooking makes my writing possible" (*Crazy* 186). In this light, near the end of *Crazy in the Kitchen*, we understand how the *affective* life of things, to loosely recall Appadurai's seminal work, is key to understanding DeSalvo's process of writing, which is tied up to her kitchen as a liminal place – connecting Italy and the United States, but also the image of the woman as a pasta maker to that of woman writer – fostering meditation and communion with *things past and other-than-past*.

Notes

[1] For an up-to-date overview of the many approaches to material culture studies within the Italian American context, see Ruberto and Sciorra.

[2] As Nancy Caronia remarks, the pictures DeSalvo meditates on have not been made public yet; they are "something those of us who write about DeSalvo theorize only" (Caronia, email correspondence, April 2017).

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***JAST*, 2023; 60: 139-167**
Submitted: 28.11.2022
Accepted: 30.12.2022
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Italian Floridians[1] in South Florida: An Oral History Collection in the *New New Land*

Vincenza Iadevaia

Abstract

This article discusses a new concept, *new new land*, and the role of material culture as an identity marker. The research is based on ethnographic data (Italian American Oral History Collection). The *new new land* is a space in which Italians who relocated to South Florida experienced a different migration from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Methodologically, excerpts from interviews are used to document the Italian Floridian experience in South Florida and pursue answers to such questions: Why did Italian Americans choose the Sunshine State as their new home? What meaning do Italian Americans give to this *new new land?* What happens to *Italianità* when one moves to a different area? In the *new new land*, Italian Floridians experience a symbolic idea of *Italianità* in their ongoing journey for which more research will reveal hitherto undocumented aspects of this vibrant group.

Keywords: *Italianità*, Italian American Oral History Collection, Italian Floridians, *New New Land*, place, space

Güney Florida'daki İtalyan Floridalılar:
Yeni Yeni Topraklarda Bir Sözlü Tarih Koleksiyonu

Vincenza Iadevaia

Öz

Yeni bir kavram olan *yeni yeni toprakları* ve maddi kültürün kimlik belirleyici rolünü ele alan bu araştırma, etnografik verilere (İtalyan Amerikalı Sözlü Tarih Koleksiyonu) dayanmaktadır. Güney Florida'ya yerleşen İtalyanlar, *yeni yeni topraklar*da on dokuzuncu yüzyılın sonları ve yirminci yüzyılın başlarındakinden farklı bir göç deneyimini yaşamışlardır. Çeşitli mülakatlardan yararlanarak Güney Florida'daki İtalyan Florida deneyimini belgelemeyi amaçlayan bu çalışma, İtalyan Amerikalıların yeni evleri olarak neden Florida eyaletini seçtikleri, *yeni yeni toprakları*n ne anlam ifade ettiği ve farklı bir yerde *Italianità* deneyiminin nasıl şekillendiği sorularına yanıt aramaktadır. İtalyan Floridalıların *yeni yeni topraklar*daki yolculuklarında sembolik bir *Italianità* düşüncesini deneyimledikleri görülür. Yeni çalışmalar, bu hareketli topluluğun şimdiye kadar belgelenmemiş yönlerini ortaya çıkaracaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Italianità*, İtalyan Amerikalı Sözlü Tarih Koleksiyonu, İtalyan Floridalılar, yer, *yeni yeni topraklar*

Every two Italians living in the South ...
called Florida home.
(Mormino, *Land of Sunshine* 17)

This article discusses the role of material culture as an identity marker and proposes a new concept, *new new land*, based on ethnographic data from research carried out in South Florida (Italian American Oral History Collection). I specifically focus on Italians in

South Florida, or as I will refer to them, Italian Floridians, who, to my knowledge, have not yet been studied in detail so far.

Over the past decades, a large number of Italian Americans have relocated to Florida, "The Italy of America" (Mormino, *Italians in Florida* 24), usually leaving the first place of arrival of their progenitors. In this paper, I will pursue the following questions to understand this group and discuss some possible answers based on ethnographic data:

(1) Why did Italian Americans choose the Sunshine State as their new home?

(2) If people ascribe meaning to places, what meaning do Italian Americans give to this *new new land*?

(3) What happens to *Italianità* when one moves to a different area?

I propose that the *new new land* is a space in which Italians who relocated to South Florida experienced a different migration from the one that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century primarily in the northern sections of the United States. In addition, they "are adopting [a] new form of ethnic behavior" (Gans, "Symbolic ethnicity" 5). For this reason, the *Italianità* we encounter in the *new new land* may represent a new stage in the Italian American migrants' history. In the following section, to provide a broader socio-historical perspective, I will first introduce a brief history of Italians in Florida. Then, to better understand the concept of the *new new land,* I will define my use of the terms *space* and *place.* This background is necessary to address the second question.

Lastly, as a response to question three, I provide ethnographic data from the project Oral History Collection. Excerpts from some interviews help me draw a more accurate picture of the Italian Floridian experience in South Florida specifically in Palm Beach County and Broward County. Among the themes that emerged in the interviews, I concentrate on *Italianità,* Florida as a paradise, a new idea of community, material culture, and food as a remembrance.

In the end, it becomes clear that, in the *new new land*, Italian Floridians are experiencing a symbolic idea of a community, where new semiotics of *Italianità* can lead to broadening our perspective on Italian American studies.

Brief History of Italians in Florida

Turning to the first question – *Why did Italian Americans choose the Sunshine State as their new home?* – we witness that Florida represents a world apart compared to other states. Namely, while for the first-generation migrants to Florida, geographic mobility was linked to ethnic groups, for later generations one can see the fracture in the community bond for different reasons, i.e., mixed marriages, and the opportunity to find better jobs (Battistella 1989).

Preliminary research on Italian migration in the State of Florida was undertaken by the American historian and writer Gary R. Mormino in Tampa who examined the period between 1885 and 1985. Mormino's work delineates the historical presence of Italians in the Sunshine State, conferring an extensive understanding of the Italian experience in Florida.

The Sunshine State needed to repopulate its wide space, and the Italians embodied the migrants who could adapt perfectly to a tropical climate (Mormino, *Italians in Florida*). Tampa comprised distinct ethnic groups, African Americans, Spaniards, Italians, and white natives. Based on Mormino's research, the Latin enclave was the only place where the primary wave of Italian migrants could live. They sought work in the cigar factories, living predominantly in the Ybor City district. Italian migrants who had settled there "by the mid-1890s, [were] seeking refuge to escape the nativist persecution suffered in New Orleans" (Mormino, "Tampa" 348).

Tampa not only attracted Italians from other states but also directly from Italy. These Italian migrants did not solely work in the cigar factories, but they were also skilled as artisans, sculptors, craftsmen, fishermen, and gardeners (Mormino, *Italians in Florida*). Despite all difficulties, they were able to carve out a space for themselves, and even a sense of community (Mormino, "Tampa").

Mormino's seminal work is essential for comprehending Italians' earlier migration to Florida. However, I must emphasize that my investigation explores a much later and significantly different migration story and thus it merits a new conceptualization. In this latter case, the focus is later migration to South Florida (vs. initial migration to Tampa), which, in my opinion, has become a dreamscape, an island of symbolic spaces that I call the *new new land*. To that end, I will argue that the concept of space and place is distinct from not only initial migration to Tampa but also from other Italian American spaces and places. I argue that in the *new new land,* the outside space is more symbolic. On the contrary, the inside space, seen as an emotive environment*,* appears to be the more essential. In this regard, the house becomes a private sphere and *Italianità* is a memento. Thus, this new legacy of re-invented *Italianità* deserves to be analyzed with a novel perspective.

Having briefly introduced the preliminary works on the history of the Italians in Florida, I will now proceed to discuss the terms space and place and their relation to my second research question.

Space and Place

Broadly speaking, one can say that "each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space" (Lefebvre 170). In other words, space and place are neither innate nor permanent (Gieseking et al., 2021) but they are constructed and adapted according to the actions and meanings that people associate with them. In this regard, Henri Lefebvre's fundamental work on the social production of space underlines that space carries social meanings and people create social space while producing social relations (Lefebvre).

There is also a nuanced formulization of the relationship between space and place. Namely, space is often seen as "the more encompassing construct, [where] place retains its relevance and meaning but only as a subset of space" (Low, *Spatializing Culture* 12). However, as I will detail soon, I aim to show how this relationship undergoes a reversal in the case of Italian Floridians. Namely, I will try to convey that for the Italian Floridian space *Italianità* is encapsulated in a more symbolic way in one's private place.

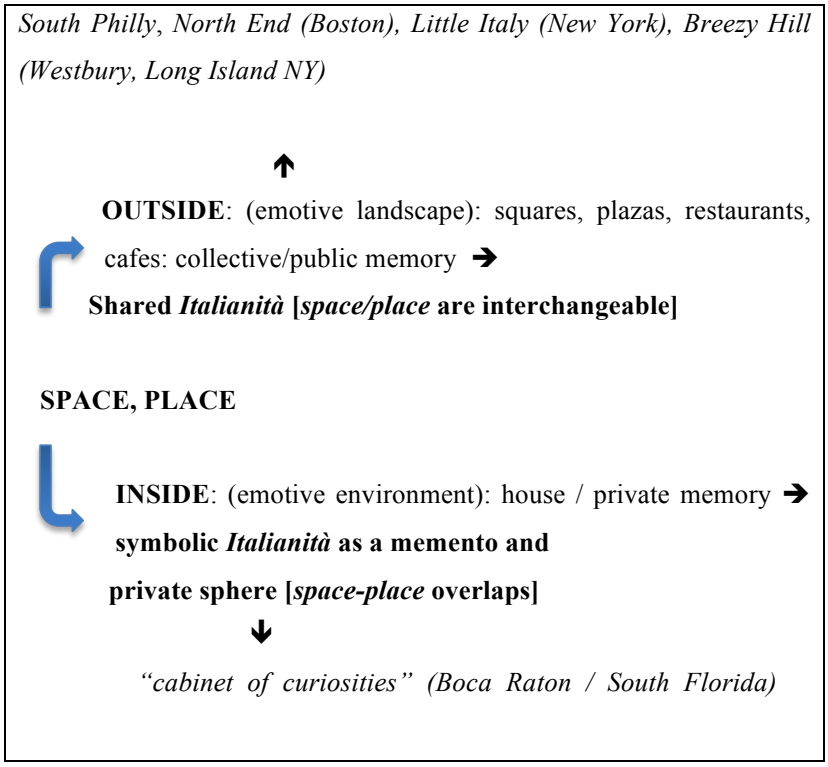
The anthropologist Setha M. Low coined the concept of *spatializing culture* by approaching space and place as social constructions and analyzing both the social and environmental elements that generate physical space and place, as well as the experience of individuals and the way they construct meanings. In this article, I revisit the usage of the two terms space and place drawing mainly upon her insights.

More specifically, Low's approach facilitates my theory on the similarities and differences between the terms space and place inspired by analyzing the Italians in South Florida, in comparison to the Italian Americans' *space/place* elsewhere. This change of perspective is useful to show how Italian Floridians interact, live, and create meanings in their *space-place*, which I labeled the *new new land*. Here, the adjective *new* is repeated intentionally: the adjective *new* closer to the noun *land* means contemporary. The repeated adjective, which now modifies *the new land,* informs us that something beyond the ordinary and mundane is taking place, thus *the new new land*.

In this imagined land, *Italianità* takes on symbolic connotations rather than tangible experiences. That is, if not all, the great majority of memories and imaginations that exist in the *new new land* about Italy seem to have been passed down from their parents or grandparents, but they were often not experienced first-hand by Italian Floridians themselves. In this regard, one can say that space and place acquire distinct meanings among different generations of Italian Americans.

As it is well known, the Italian American migrant communities, like many other ethnic communities, have historically constituted ethnic enclaves in created ethnic landscapes with a strong sense of ethnic identity, whereas I argue that, being Italian Floridian presents a different picture, more of a symbolic association. Based on this distinction, the spaces in which Italian Americans live can be categorized into two types: i) *space/place* outside, and ii) *space-place* inside as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1:



Note that the use of different punctuation marks is not random. Namely, the slash in *space/place* shows the possibility to interchange the two elements since the ethnic identity is experienced in both venues. In other words, *Italianità* is felt both outside the house (the ethnic enclave) and inside the house. On the other hand, the dash in *space-place* indicates the combination or the overlapping of the two elements. Thus, as a *space-place,* the house of a Floridian Italian is "a third area that has the potential of bringing together aspects of both constructs into a new synthesis" (Low, *Spatializing Culture* 13). The first-generation migrants recreated the communities after their birthplaces in their image and likeness. However, for the Italian Floridians, this ethnic community takes on a symbolic connotation, over time becoming only a state of mind. This distinction makes me argue that Italian Floridians harbor a new paradigm of *Italianità*.

We can now discuss in more detail how these constructs (*space/place* vs. *space-place*) are instrumental in understanding the changes in Italian migrants' spaces through initial generations of migrants settled in ethnic enclaves such as North End (Boston), Little Italy (New York), Breezy Hill (Westbury, Long Island), to the most recent generations now re-settled in counties of south Florida such Palm Beach and Broward.

First, consider the initial generations of Italian migrants and enclaves they created. For them, the outside space is a remarkable venue to share *Italianità* with other *paesani* 'paesans.' In this context, one can say that "the built environment of an ethnic enclave contributes to the definition and redefinition of the ethnic identity of its inhabitants" (Bogdana Simina i). Here, to understand the contribution of outside space to the feeling of shared identity among the first generations of Italian migrants I would like to cite an excerpt from our interview with Edmondo Catania. Born in South Philadelphia in 1944, Edmondo moved to Florida in 2012. While talking about his childhood, he reports:

> We lived in South Philadelphia, and we lived in an all-Italian community. . . . we lived with people like Bobby Ryddel[2] and Frankie Avalon[3] were all in the neighborhood at the time, unknown people so it was a real . . . fun place to be. Pat's Steakhouse, . . . where they served steaks right around the corner, always smelling it. And the smell of Italian food was always going on.

Likewise, Dina Santomaggio, born in Yonkers (NY) in 1942 to Italian migrants says:

> The neighborhood in which I grew up was strictly Italian. It was all Italian because all our neighbors were Italian, we all knew each other. In the wintertime, the kids would all play outside and you know, have snowball fights. And then my mom would have everybody come into the back of the store. And she'd make hot chocolate for everybody in [and] all the mothers are there with the kids, we'd have a big social event. It was a lot of fun. And it was safe then to be outside. But like I said, we all knew each other. We're all neighbors, and we all helped each other.

Shared places create feelings of identity. As observed by Low, the migrant community can be described as an ethnic enclave with an extensive array of common feelings and desires:

> the urban spaces have always included performative components that guide public and private emotional responses, … The relationship of the urban environment, however, is not just that the built environment produces affect and feeling but also that affect in part produces the built environment. ("Spatializing Culture: Social P. and C." 153-4)

In addition to the excerpts I cited above, a look at some Italian American literary examples can provide further evidence of an emotive landscape of first-generation migrants. 10th Avenue, part of the area called Hell's Kitchen, in the heart of New York's Neapolitan ghetto, accurately stated by Mario Puzo ("Choosing a Dream") represents a great model of an ethnic landscape in New York, which South Florida in contrast did not experience yet. The first-generation migrants tried to recreate places and spaces according to their native villages: "the *Panettiere* … the grocery filled with yellow logs of provolone … the barber shop closed for business but open for card playing" (*The Fortunate Pilgrims* 5), but more than that, "the children covered the pavements, busy as ants, women almost invisible in black, made little dark mounds before each tenement door" (5). The community of initial generations of Italian migrants is not an imagined one, it is filled with the typical *botteghe* ("shops"). The surrounding space reflects customs and practices that accurately define their ethnicity. For instance, religious feasts are an important element in Italian American communities and external space is also instrumental in practicing awareness of belonging in this domain. According to Joseph Sciorra, "In New York, Italian Americans … create socially accepted sacred space within their neighborhoods. These structures, created by individuals and families, are an expression of the larger community's ethnic, religious, and aesthetic values" (185). The trope of an emotive-ethnic landscape is also found in the verses written by the Italian American poet Giovanna Capone,[4] who underlines the necessity for the migrant, to live *porta a porta* 'next door' with *la famiglia* 'the family' and other *paesani* 'paesans.'

They moved in next door
and next door
and next door
till one by one, all down the block, the dagos flocked
and our neighborhoods became
a Little Italy, of sorts. (16)

All of these anecdotes reveal that the ethnic enclave of first-generation Italian Americans is a good specimen of a constructed and shared emotive landscape. In contrast, in South Florida, the community as an ethnic space has a more elusive definition. For most of the Italian Floridians, there is an impulse to recapture the mood of an imagined land. However, the persistence of ethnicity, whether symbolic or not, seems to apply only to older generations of Italian Floridians[5]. We currently have no evidence that the younger generation of Italian Floridians is concerned with preserving the concept of ethnic community.

More than their belonging as a community, the Italians of Florida focus on private spaces to recompose fragments of a diluted identity. Thus, the space acquires a different connotation, from the outside to the inside, from an emotive landscape to an emotive environment, and from collective to private, hence my use of *space-place* for these Italian descent individuals in Southern Florida rather than *space/place* which I spare for Italian Americans in other states.

Some cities on Florida's southeastern coast such as Boca Raton, Delray Beach, and Fort Lauderdale are prominent examples of newly imagined Italian communities, where cafes, restaurants, and *pizzerie* already gained their success: reinvented Little Italies,[6] "ethnic theme parks' … which are virtually Italian in name only" (Krase). The image of Florida as "The Mediterranean of America" is just a folkloristic one. Although even the architectural style resembles Italy, it's simply an American invention (Mormino, *Italians in Florida*).

In this sense, a representative illustration can be Boca Raton, which has a consistent Italian Floridian community. Our project started and is stored in this city. There are several Italian cafes and restaurants located in different areas of the city. For instance, Cosa

Duci is a Sicilian restaurant that serves pastries and lunch, where people gather, especially late morning for an Italian breakfast with cornetto and cappuccino. Saquella Cafè is another Italian American bistro where every Saturday *affezionati* 'loyal' Italian Floridians gather to practice Italian and *sorseggiare un caffè* 'to sip a coffee.' Doris Bakery is a Sicilian Market where *parlando Siciliano* 'speaking Sicilian,' one can order *cannoli* and *cassata*. Principessa Ristorante is a high-class restaurant specializing in classic Italian dishes with a range of handmade pasta. It is a fascinating example of an imagined Italy. Their website reports its "waterfront location and grand 1930s interior transport guests to the iconic villas of Lake Como."

While these places serve the same function as elsewhere, namely public spaces where people share an ethnic identity, it should be emphasized that in the case of Italian Floridians, this ethnic identity is symbolic. In South Florida, there is nothing of the ethnic character of a so-called Italian neighborhood that

> involve a concentration of the members of a group, together with an ethnic institutional infrastructure …. Population concentration combined with infrastructure cause an area to be perceived both by group members and by outsiders as having a specific ethnic character. (Alba et al. 886)

Many of those we interviewed were born in the USA. Some of them visited Italy but not the places where their descendants were born. Some of them only did it after their descendants' passing. Some others have never learned the dialect spoken by their parents or grandparents, or standard Italian.

Adrienne Martin, who relocated to South Florida in 1955, visited Italy twice, but not Sicily, the island where her grandparents were born. She explains this common situation very well:

> [Sicily] it's on my list for the next time … I've been to Italy twice, but not to Sicily …
>
> so, if I had learned Italian, I probably would [have] learned Sicilian dialect, anyway …
>
> I never had the chance even to learn that [emphasized]. I did

> spend quite a bit of time with my grandmother when I was, like, preschool age, while my mom was at work. But she had always been very much, even with her children growing up, she'd been very much interested in the idea that we are Americans now and we do everything the American way, and so. . . She spoke in dialect with her sisters, but to her children at home, not that much.

Interestingly enough, Adrienne decided to learn standard Italian in Boca Raton only a few years ago. The *new new land* somehow allowed her to rediscover her grandparents' *Italianità*. For Adrienne, learning the language of her ancestors is a way of sharing Italian identity even if it is mostly symbolic for her by now. Perhaps, in general, the feelings perceived in a specific place can provide the impetus to piece together or recreate the social, linguistic, and cognitive dimensions of an ethnic group. However, this is not the case for the *new new land*. To clarify, if "Language use also affects the public identity of a neighborhood" (Alba et al. 889), this is not present in the *new new land*. Basically, in the *new new land,* "emotion is the sociocultural fixing of affect in individual lives through personal experience and meaning-making" (Low, *Spatializing Culture* 145). In fact, through personal experience – learning Italian at her age – Adrienne is making her own symbolic Italian identity like many others.

In this section, to substantiate the nuance between *space/place* vs. *space-place*, I compared initial Italian migrants with Italian Floridians. For the former, the Italian enclave is real where *space/place* is reproduced after their birthplaces, and they experience first-hand *Italianità* not only in their houses but also through a closely-knit community with customs and shops in their image and likeness. On the other hand, for the latter, the Italian Floridians, the use of *space-place* captures a rather symbolic association with *Italianità*.

In the next section, I will describe the oral history collection. Then, I will present excerpts from interviews that focus on *Flor-Italianness*, Florida as a paradise space, new ideas of community, material culture, and food as a legacy. All of these themes support my argument for the Italian Floridians' symbolic association with the *Italianità*.

Italian American Oral History Collection:

The Case for South Florida[7]

The digital archive project on Italian Floridians in South Florida[8] was carried out at Florida Atlantic University (FAU, Boca Raton) in 2017. It was created and developed by Vincenza Iadevaia, Viviana Pezzullo, and Federico Tiberini under the supervision of Professor Ilaria Serra. This project aimed to start an oral ethnographic archive of Italian Americans who resettled in South Florida. The archive includes a series of interviews with Italian Floridians. Our goal is to continue collecting stories, focusing on material culture, and memories, and above all we would like to continue investigating how the concept of *Italianità* evolves in the *new new land.*

We employed a qualitative method and collected video-audio recordings with semi-structured interviews. A form with interviewees' information was filled out before an interview. The form included questions regarding the name, place, and date of birth of the interviewee. We also asked whether an interviewee was a first, second, or third-generation Italian American and the origin of their parents as well as the languages that they spoke. Finally, we asked when they relocated to Florida. Permission was granted by all interviewees for us to archive the interviews with their names and to use the collected data for research purposes. Additionally, I will also mention personal communications as a follow-up.

All the interviewees are first or second-generation Italian Americans who live permanently in South Florida where they settled at different stages of their life. In this first stage of the project, people over 50 years of age were given priority.

The interviews were recorded in English. Only a few of the interviewees were fluently bilingual. Some were able to code-switch between English and Standard Italian or regional languages of Italy, i.e., Neapolitan and Sicilian. An initial set of queries were presented while we video-recorded the interviews. The questions focused on stories revolving around family heirlooms, memories, and their idea of *Italianità*. In addition to these set questions, which facilitated getting to know the interviewees, they were also allowed to add any other details.

The first interviews we conducted were transcribed by Angela Rivieccio from FAU Digital Library. Thus, the ethnographic archive contains both an audio database and accompanying transcriptions. The ethnographic material is stored at FAU. These resources are not only available for researchers, but we also aim to produce self-standing project outcomes.[9] The archive is still in progress, and it is constantly enriched with new material.

After this methodological background, in the following subsections, I will present excerpts from the interviews. The material is very rich with many interesting themes among which I selected excerpts that I considered crucial to describe the Italian Floridians. The themes that the excerpts cover are the *Italianità* in South Florida, Florida as a Paradise, what remains of the ethnic community, material culture, and food as a remembrance.

The *Italianità* in South Florida

What is the new phase of *Italianità* as experienced in Florida? Can we describe *Flor-Italianità* in terms that are distinct enough from *Italianità* experienced by the first Italian migrants to the United States? Can one talk about a mingling of feelings? Is there a new kind of Italian ethnic identity? From the information I gathered, it appears that the notion of *Italianità* in South Florida is based on fragments, narratives, and memories. Sometimes it takes a while before one can rediscover *their* own Italianness. I will now include some excerpts that attest to these. I would like to start with an excerpt from Vincent Zarrilli, who first migrated to the United States in 1960 from a small village in the Campania Region and moved to Florida in 1998.

> Interestingly enough, um, when I first came here [to South Florida] there were very few Italians. And, uh, I was so busy traveling. I rediscovered my Italian, interestingly enough, through my business when I was in Argentina, in Brazil, or even Peru. Um, I'd, I learned how to speak Spanish. And I met many of the Italians who had migrated there, so we'd speak. And, and, eh, they, we'd start talking about their [emphasized] Italian heritage, and my Italian heritage. So I, I rediscovered this, uh, this feeling of [being] Italian.

As we discover thanks to the project, Italian Floridians are starting to metaphorically re-establish a connection with an imagined Italy and rebuild their *Italianness* in a distinct way than other communities in the United States. While the first Italian migrants experienced "nostalgia [as] a sentiment of loss and displacement" (Boym, *The Future* xiii), Italian Floridians consider nostalgia as "a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii). Another interesting example comes from the interview with Nicoletta Sorice. Born in Southern Italy in 1936, Nicoletta migrated to the United States in 1950. In her interview, while talking about memories and remembrance, she points out that the feeling she perceives in the *new new land,* where she relocated permanently in 1982, is different from the one she experienced in her first move to the United States. Switching from American, through Italian to Neapolitan, she underlines:

> A pride that I have as an individual today is to be an American. Because America has taught me many things and my children are part of this country. *Essere Italiana* 'Being Italian,' of course, I love it, *però mi sento più Americana Italiana*, *che Italiana Americana a questo punto, perché sono già settant'anni quasi* 'but I feel more American Italian than Italian American at this point because it has already been almost seventy years'… I mean, 69 years … I switched… You know… *Non che l'Italia non rappresenta… diciamo la bellezza dell'Italia* 'Not that Italy does not represent… let's say the beauty of Italy' is enormous for me, and I have my pride there too, *però mi sento più Americana* 'but I feel more American.'

Nicoletta is proud of being an American citizen. At the same time, her *Italianità* is "a romance with [her] own fantasy" (Boym, *The Future* xiii) and it is not filled with "a sentiment of loss and displacement" (*The Future* xiii). She is still proud of her Neapolitan dialect: "I switch…*inglese* 'English'… *napoletano e italiano con facilità*" 'Neapolitan and Italian easily.' The dialect is for Nicoletta the language of rage and love: "*Si mi faij sentì na canzun napulitan*" 'If you make me listen to a Neapolitan song'… I mean … I go crazy! Because my soul wakes up, you know."

Similarly, Dina Santomaggio, who relocated to South Florida in 1987, reports that her ethnic identity is based more on her admiration of Italian culture than a feeling of being Italian *per se*. Despite having grown up in a strictly Italian neighborhood in Yonkers, New York, only when she visited Italy, she started to develop an interest in her Italian heritage. "Once I visited Italy, I kind of became more Italian than I was growing up. Because it seems to me that as I was growing up … it wasn't the right thing to be Italian. You had to assimilate and become American." As she underlines "culturally, I think I described myself more American … Yes, I am Italo American, but the American seems to win out. I still enjoy Italian culture and the Italian food. I like to go back there and visit. I love to go to Venice. I love to go to museums."

Vincent, Nicoletta, and Dina consider *Italianità* a meaningful addition to their identity. However, it is not "a sentiment of loss and displacement" (Boym, *The Future* xiii). It seems that their ethnic identity is "remembered and perhaps even felt and expressed when the situation demands it" (Gans, "The Coming Darkness" 761-2). In these cases, as for other later-generation descendants of the European immigrants, ethnic identity is more symbolic than functional. This is why the Italian Americans who moved to Florida can represent an evolving type of ethnic identity, "turning into symbolic ethnicity, an ethnicity of last resort, which could, nevertheless, persist for generations" (Gans, "Symbolic ethnicity" 1). Consequently, the journey of Italian Floridians should be investigated more to understand how it will evolve. I included excerpts from interviewees who are older than 50; however, this exploration should also be conducted across several generations of Italian Floridians including the youngest ones.

O' Paravis – 'A Paradise'

Whereas migrating to the Italian enclaves mentioned above was of necessity, relocating to Florida seems to be more of a choice. Italians who visited the Sunshine State were often attracted by the exotic environment. In most cases, the climate reminded them of a paradise, or *'ó paese ro' sole* 'the land of the sun.' Not surprisingly, in a 1974 article, George Pozzetta points out that the prevailing perception is that Florida is seen as the "Italy of the South" (9). Likewise, Mormino underlines that it "has evoked contrasting and compelling

images of the sacred and profane: a Fountain of Youth and Garden of Earthly Delights" ("Sunbelt Dreams" 4). The sacred can also evoke the idea of belonging and family history. It can also be reflected in a space recognized as a unique sphere to which sacredness is assigned through culture and experience. An example of this is indeed illustrated by one of the interviewees. When her family relocated to South Florida, Adrienne Martin was 7 years old. She reports that when her grandparents, first-generation Italian migrants, visited her in Florida, "It was winter and my grandmother said right away that the plants and the weather, everything, just reminded her very much of Sicily."

The sacred space of her grandmother's childhood is mirrored in the *new new land.* The *madre patria* is viewed in a mystical-religious way, filled with a feeling of nostalgia experienced by Adrienne's grandmother. Yet Florida turns out to be a valid surrogate, acquiring the same mystical-religious value.

Another interviewee, Ann Blumberg Capone (Mount Vernon, NY, 1921), who relocated to South Florida as a young girl during the 50s, tells the story of her father, a migrant from Caivano (the Naples province), who decided to visit her during the winter. Once in Florida, he was amazed by the weather. However, when Ann solicited him to move in with her, he suddenly refused to live in that paradise: "I can't move here because they don't have cellars." Here, paraphrasing Mormino ("Sunbelt Dreams" 4), we have a compelling case of the sacred and profane, a land seen as a paradise (sacred) has no space to create the (profane) space of a cellar to store the wine[10]. For Ann's dad, a migrant from Southern Italy, a place is, therefore, an assemblage of practicality and meaning, storing the wine in Italian style matters. The cellar is not only a part of material culture but more importantly, it embodies a symbol of *Italianità* the initial migrants wanted to preserve, a tie that connects them to their past. Therefore, the cellar overweighs the paradise-like climate and thus relocating to Florida which is short of this functional space – ironically because of its climate – becomes difficult if not impossible for the first-generation migrants. The absence of a cellar in Florida vs. the first enclaves that I mentioned is of course only a token of a more fundamental difference between the two types of locations. The *space-place* in the Italian enclaves is both the functional and emotive landscape for establishing the sense of community that the initial Italian migrants had to adhere to. The cellar is one of many of these spaces. In contrast, when later generations of Italian migrants

had a stronger feeling of being part of the overall American society, the *space/place* where they preserved fragments of their *Italianità* does not need to include any of these functional spaces that were so indispensable for the initial Italian migrants.

Keeping Ties with the Ethnic Community

As we discussed above, the idea of a community was essential for the initial Italian migrants. Thus, the community bond cannot be broken. In other terms, when someone tries to alter this linkage, the ethnic group feels betrayed. An example is given by Jean Simonelli Giarrusso, who relocated to South Florida in 1986. In her interview, she reports: "We caused a great sensation in the family because we were moving away from this big Italian family … everybody was upset."

Leaving the ethnic neighborhood, which has established and prolonged a chain resettling process, is like fracturing a system of relationships considered unbreakable. In this sense, the community embodies an essential part of the adaptation of the initial migrants. Similarly, Ann Blumberg Capone, reports that even her family, at the beginning, did not agree with her choice. However, since she was always sick in the cold New York winter, they finally agreed that her move was mainly related to her health. Nonetheless, not entirely reassured of that change, they flew to Florida to visit her. As Ann reports: "My father, like all Italian fathers, had to know where I was, who I lived and socialized with. He came to Florida with my mother. In the end, he was satisfied and said, 'I don't blame you.'"

The space of Italian Floridians differs from that of their parents. Jean and Ann's example of relocation to South Florida represents a second stage in which the Italian Americans "combined a pragmatic politics of independence … with the symbolic assertion of community identity" (Amith 161). For example, in Giarrusso's case, winter became the symbolic tie to her ethnic enclave. In her words: "My husband and I both wanted to keep the Italian influence on our family, so my mother and father spent every winter with us. Sometimes they came before Christmas, sometimes after. My children grew up, in some way, with their Italian grandparents" (Iadevaia, personal communication, May 19, 2017). Thus, the broken piece is repaired. The ethnic enclave can resume its existence, albeit in different ways and at different times.

The Cabinet of Curiosities

Another way of keeping ties with the past is through material culture. Undoubtedly, for Italian Floridians too, heirlooms passed down from generation to generation still hold considerable significance. However, among the majority of Italian Floridians interviewed, the cabinet of curiosities is only symbolic.

In a study concerning material culture as memorabilia, it has been suggested that the majority of the identified objects were revered not simply for their value, but also for helping define identities, and because of their invitation to recall a faraway past (Sherman). Objects and heirlooms serve to symbolize memories and histories. They are connected to that kind of nostalgia defined by Svetlana Boym as "reflective" (*Common Places* 283-91), which emphasizes the memory of the past, and it is not "merely an individual sickness but a symptom of our age, a historical emotion" (*The Future* xvi).

As an illustration, Adrienne Martin describes the Sicilian donkey cart in her grandmother's dining room, "Very colorful … my grandmother had one of those …. Um, and she had kept it in her china cabinet in her dining room. And … When I was small we always had Sunday dinner at grandma's house, so I would see it a lot." The Sicilian cart lives in Adrienne's memories. She has never owned it, but its remembrance is bright, and it will always be associated with her *Italianità.* Adrienne only remembers specific objects from their childhood, but no trace of them is seen in her household anymore. At the same time, in one way or another, the cultural biography of an object is intertwined with people's lives.

A further example comes from Dan Pichney (East Elmhurst, NY, 1950), who moved to West Palm Beach in 2005, "I remember the white marble ashtray stand and ashtrays from my grandparents' home …. I used to have one of the ashtrays in my library …. I believe that I gave it to one of my nieces along with other memorabilia of my parents." In this case, like for other Italian Americans, the ritual of passing down family heirlooms reflects the necessity of preserving the ethnic heritage, "I did a very good job of organizing, labeling and explaining so that my nieces would have as good a sense as possible of family history" (Iadevaia, personal communication, July 5, 2023). Heirlooms and memorabilia, along with the symbolic identity

associated with them, become also focal points in narrations that pass down stories of individuals and families.

While recording the interviews, we realized that in some cases, objects and heirlooms allowed the interviewees to tell the journey and the lives of their objects without having to describe them. This is the case, for example, of Vincent Zarrilli. As a matter of fact, among all the interviews collected, I decided to give special attention to his cabinet of curiosities.

Vincent has dedicated his entire adult life to collecting memorabilia. His ancestral home in Southern Italy is regarded by him as sacred. For this reason, he carried many of his family's heirlooms, belongings, and objects to his place in South Florida. Most of the things Vincent carried along the years were commodities before entering the indefinite world of remembrance. The objects, once in Florida, acquired a different meaning. They "perform the work of metaphor that ties the sensate present to a contingent realm of myth and cosmos" (Robert St. George 224):

> I have, um, many, many, um, artifacts that, over the years … going back, I was able to pick up . . . little things which are important to me. And they're all over the house. A ceramic tile on the wall, the number on the house—the number twenty-three, . . . the utensil to wash—, the washboard that my grandmother used. So I brought all these things here, and they are throughout the house. As a matter of fact, I even brought in a bottle full of the earth from my little . . . land—. A vineyard, I still own it . . . in Italy. I brought a part of the land to the United States.

Vincent's memorabilia are all placed on the same level. No object is less valuable than another. As Vincent claims, switching to Italian, "Non ci può essere un ordine con i ricordi, tutto è posto sullo stesso livello" ("there can be no order with memories, everything is placed on the same level"). As soon as one enters his house, one can see many *presepi* 'nativity,' in various sizes, covering a large part of the living room. Next to the *presepi* collected over many years, one can notice Florida's kitschy souvenirs, pink flamingos, and wooden palm trees: the sacred objects alongside the profane ones. Kay Turner observes that "This additive

process results in a tendency toward excess, a creative layering of objects that simultaneously evokes many relationships, many meanings—religious, familial, personal, political" (101).

While different objects are spread all over Vincent's house and are visible to the guests, there are others kept in a private space, like a suitcase jealously hidden in his master bedroom. He clarifies: "It wasn't really a suitcase, it was made of wood, which my uncle built for me, full of my notebooks, and my books from first grade to eighth grade … I still have my first grade, when I was writing my little penmanship, the little s— ah, story, and a little poem to my mother."

As Vincent's case illustrates, *la casa,* 'the house', nourished with objects of lasting emotional value and symbolic meanings serves the desire to recreate self-contained *space-places,* becoming a cabinet of curiosities. The house, in this regard, is not only a "tool of analysis of the human soul" (Bachelard xxxvii), but it represents what persists in a symbolic ethnicity. Gaston Bachelard (1994), in his fundamental work, illustrates how the spaces we inhabit shape our memories and thoughts. To this end, he defines the house as an essential and primal space, which acts as a first universe. However, one could say that the intimate *space-place* that the Italian Floridians keep sustains a deeper meaning: the house is the world itself since it represents the only connection with an ancestral past. The house becomes a *space-place* "filled with relationships that transcend the bounds of a human lifetime and memory" (Lillios 243).

In short, objects acquire symbolic value that bonds the Italian, Italian American, and lastly Italian Floridian cultures. Thus, in this latter case, they epitomize the "shuttling back and forth" (Giunta 769) between these spheres of belonging.

Food and (no More) *Pranzi della domenica*

Vincent points out that cooking is also his way to feel close to his past, and his heritage:

> My mum's cooking activity is now reflected in my cooking passion … So, cooking has become an important part of my retired life …. My Italian friends always say 'That's not

> really Italian food!' - It's MY Italian food. It's Vincenzo's interpretation of his mother's dishes …. My mother's recipes with a little twist of South Florida, a zest from this land.

Vincent's mother resembles a character artistically symbolized by the poet Capone, who grew up in an Italian American family for whom making the sauce was truly like a religious event:

> You picked bushels full of red tomatoes
> grown in a backyard garden
> You'd chop and simmer
> them fresh in a pan
> with basil, garlic, onions,
> always making your Sunday sauce from scratch. (21)

In contrast, Vincent's recipes echo his hybrid identity. While his mother would make the traditional pasta from her hometown, with the sauce made from scratch, Vincent, using "a little twist from South Florida" makes them with shrimp or *aragosta,* 'lobster.'

However, while food still has a strong ethnic connotation among all generations of Italian migrants (Gabaccia), what has been lost in the *new new land* is the ritual of Sunday lunches. The peculiar reality born from *i pranzi della domenica* 'Sunday lunches' at the grandparents' house, the sound of accents and dialects, and the many stories heard and repeated a thousand times, are only a distant and almost faded memory for the Italian Floridians. A case in point comes from Dan Pichney's anecdotes from his childhood:

> Nearly every Sunday we would go over to *nonna'*s … for dinner. And I would be there with my, what came to be twenty-eight, cousins. … we're all about the same age, and I was very close to them. And, uh, it was wonderful. We were totally immersed in this Italian culture on, … a weekly basis. (Iadevaia, personal communication, July 5, 2023)

After Dan's grandparents had passed away back in the Seventies, the third generation tried to recreate the same atmosphere of the *pranzi della domenica* for a while, but then they all headed in different directions.

As I listened to the many stories of Italian Floridians, I realized how dishes, even the most ordinary ones, permeated their memories. Food is a ritual and reinvented or not, it is still a legacy "etched deeply … in the tastes and smells" Italians took with them (Mormino, *Italians in Florida* 88). Food, "including its implications in terms of opportunities for reunions of relatives at mealtime—generally turns out to be a more durable ethnic identifier than their [family] language" (Luconi 69). As an illustration, Dan points out "mostly I remember my Italian American heritage through food rather than language or objects" (Iadevaia, personal communication, July 5, 2023).

Conclusion

The interviews were a major tool for analyzing the Italian Floridian's internal worlds and exploring what I have labeled the *new new land*, a *space-place* where concepts such as ethnic community have undergone an interesting shift, adding new layers of meaning to it. I would like to highlight the interesting points from the interviews.

First, there is still high regard for an Italian identity. All the interviewees were deeply proud of having an Italian heritage. Second, while among the majority of interviewees, only a few of them were fluently bilingual, I witnessed that there was a high motivation to learn the Italian language to make a connection with their past. Third, among the initial Italian migrants, sharing an identity is connected to sharing a place but this is not the case for Italian Floridians. The idea of an ethnic community among them is more of a symbolic one, thus the distinction I make between *space/place* for the former group and the *space-place* for the latter. Lastly, material culture was an important part of the interviews. Some of the interviewees have a lively memory of certain family heirlooms, but they never owned them. Others have passed down their family objects to their nephews and nieces. Some others, like Vincent Zarrilli, still keep objects, heirlooms, and artifacts that are jealously guarded and projected into a mythological sphere, a highly illustrative example of *space-place*. Each object encountered

is a "culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings" (Kopytoff 68) for those who own it, and also for those who only remember it. Each object ends up being narrated and associated with a specific moment. However, once in Florida, the meaning people attribute to things changes (Appadurai) acquiring a more sacred value. As a matter of fact, "we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories" (5).

In presenting this project, I intended to investigate how Italianness in South Florida has undergone changes and what makes it still lively. To paraphrase Gary R. Mormino "What then is this Italian Floridian?" (*Italians in Florida* 116). A possible answer may be an identity in progress, a mimetic being, with multiple selves.

Mormino, in the last paragraph of his book, asserts that according to the circumstances, it is "highly fitting" that Italians in Florida "have completed their historic trajectory" (*Italians in Florida* 120). However, as observed from my research, in the *new new land* Italian Floridians are experiencing a symbolic idea of a community, where new semiotics of *Italianità* can probably give a different horizon to Italian American studies. Therefore, "their historic trajectory" (120) is not complete yet and future studies on the current topic will provide more insights. Indeed, a broader aim would be to foster a debate from a diverse perspective that is not restricted to Florida but is also enriched by examining how the relocation of the new generations of Italian Americans to other American regions or rural areas affects their symbolic Italian identity.

Notes

[1] In this article, I use the term Italian Floridians only for people who have resettled in Florida permanently. Additionally, the terms Italian American and Italian Floridian have no hyphen. The recognition of Italian migrants (or other migrants) came along with convoluted forms of identity politics applied to them and controversial ways of describing them. One of these controversies that retains its currency revolves around the concept of hyphenation, which in this article I prefer to avoid.

[2] Teen music pop idol of the late 1950s and early 60s. He was born

Robert Ridarelli in a neighborhood of South Philadelphia. Both of his parents were of Italian descent.

[3] Francis Thomas Avallone was an American actor, singer, and former teen idol. Avalon started appearing in films in the 1960s and is also well known for his role in the 1970s musical film Grease as Teen Angel. He was born in South Philadelphia from Italian migrants.

[4] Poet and a fiction writer. She was raised in an Italian American neighborhood in Mount Vernon, New York whose strong Neapolitan influence still resonates in her life.

[5] At the time of writing this paper, there were no interviews with the younger generations of Italian Floridians in their 20s or 30s so this is just speculation.

[6] In South Florida, there are only a few streets with Italian names, while the recurring term Little Italy is also used to name a neighborhood in Fort Lauderdale. A Little Italy of sorts, named La Centrale, has been opened in Miami: 40,000 square foot emporium of Italian-inspired dining.

[7] https://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau:oralhistories. Accessed 26 July 2022.

[8] Berardi, Tucker. "FAU student archive seeks to preserve Italian culture: Three graduate students have conducted 18 interviews with Italian-American students." *UP, University Press,* 30 April 2017, https://www.upressonline. com/2017/04/fau-student-archive-seeks-to-preserve-italian-culture/. Accessed 26 July 2022.

[9] A docufilm titled *My FlorÌta* is currently in preparation. It focuses on Italian Americans' experience in South Florida. This project is thoroughly original as it represents the first media effort ever made that specifically centers on Italian Floridians.

[10] Houses in Florida lack basements and cellars because of the nature of the soil. Territories like the "Sunshine State," are characterized by the presence of swampland, wetland and coastline. For this reason, the amount of water in the soil does not allow one to build basements without running into flooding or mold. Data collected by the project *Orality and Microhistory*.

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***JAST*, 2023; 60: 169-186**
Submitted: 10.09.2023
Accepted: 13.10.2023
ORCID# 0009-0002-3649-1676

Home Is Where You Hang Your Hat: Finding Garibaldi on Staten Island

Christine Contrada

Abstract

Giuseppe Garibaldi's stay on Staten Island, New York in the humble home of Antonio Meucci is a little-known turning point in Garibaldi's life, which invites a reconsideration of the Italian Risorgimento. The materiality of Meucci's home and the objects it houses form the basis for exploring Garibaldi's connection to the Italian American narrative. While historians lament that there is little which is new to say about Garibaldi, this episode on the margins of Garibaldi's life, offers a richer portrait of a well-known figure during one of the most difficult periods of his life. The relationship between Garibaldi and Meucci remains a subject to investigate. When examining Garibaldi's experience on Staten Island he still appears heroic, but he also emerges as being far more humanized.

Keywords: Antonio Meucci, Giuseppe Garibaldi, historical memory, Sons of Italy, Staten Island

Ev Şapkanızı Astığınız Yerdir: Staten Island'da Garibaldi'yi Aramak

Christine Contrada

Öz

Giuseppe Garibaldi'nin, Antonio Meucci'nin Staten Island'daki (New York) mütevazı evinde geçirdiği günler, Garibaldi'nin hayatında az bilinen ve Risorgimento'yu farklı bir açıdan değerlendirmeye olanak tanıyan bir dönüm noktasıdır. Meucci'nin evi ve bu evdeki eşyalar, Garibaldi'nin İtalyan Amerikalı anlatısıyla bağlantısının da temelini oluşturur. Tarihçiler Garibaldi hakkında söylenecek yeni bir şey kalmadığından yakınsalar da, Garibaldi'nin hayatındaki en zor dönemlerden birine denk gelen Staten Island günleri, bu tarihi figürün daha kapsamlı bir portresini sunmaktadır. Garibaldi ile Meucci arasındaki ilişki araştırılmayı bekleyen bir konudur. Staten Island'daki günleri incelendiğinde, bir kahramanın yanı sıra, insani özellikleriyle öne çıkan bir Garibaldi görüyoruz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antonio Meucci, Giuseppe Garibaldi, tarihsel hafıza, Sons of Italy, Staten Island

Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi's cylindrical velvet hats are the most iconic and identifying aspect of his material legacy. Those on display in Bologna's Museo Civico del Risorgimento*,* Museo della Repubblica Romana e della Memoria Garibaldina in Rome's Porta San Pancrazio, Museo Centrale del Risorgimento in the Altare della Patria in Rome, and Museo Risorgimento in Turin are presented in glass display cases set into museum spaces dominated by military artifacts. They represent a sharp contrast to the nature of the display in the Garibaldi Meucci Museum on Staten Island, New York.[1] There, one of Garibaldi's hats which is constructed of exquisite purple velvet embroidered ornately with gold thread rests, in excellent condition, directly on a small bed in what was Garibaldi's bedroom in the home of Antonio Meucci. Like this hat, Garibaldi is accessible in this intimate space. Here, he is not a larger-than-life figure casting a shadow over the

Risorgimento including all of its foibles, and perceived failures. Here, the man is as exposed as the hat he once wore. Meucci's home allows historians to more easily take Garibaldi's sojourn in New York off the periphery of the narrative. Doing so illuminates the shift in Garibaldi's thinking which would allow the Risorgimento to move forward past the fall of the Roman Republic in 1849. The home and the objects collected inside do not challenge what we know about Garibaldi. Rather, the objects woven together with the textual record provide a much richer portrait of an intense and complex figure.

With materiality in focus, it is clear that the globally recognized Garibaldi also identified with his global status. Garibaldi's consistent donning of a Victorian smoking hat and a South American poncho in tandem was a purposeful combination. Those material artifacts have also become synonymous with Garibaldi's likeness on manufactured objects. Biographies of Garibaldi often introduce him in the same breath as describing the proliferation of souvenirs, medals, wine labels, blouses, and biscuits, to name only a few, successfully marketing themselves using his name. There is a clear and lasting desire to own his image or to connect with an item he owned, or a place that he occupied. There is a gray area between what we label as *stuff* versus *heritage* (Macdonald and Morgan 155-68). The heritage entails how the mystique of the nation is not only built on a common history, folk traditions, and language but also the cult of the hero who built the nation (Huggins 15-33). The nation builders often embody virtue in times of great suffering, Garibaldi's exile to a location as distant as Staten Island feeds that narrative.

Much of what has been written about Garibaldi has an overtly pro-Garibaldi bias. George Macaulay Trevelyan's early twentieth century trilogy is an influential example of this tone of hero worship.[2] Denis Mack Smith's 1956 biography, which remains a standard overview of his life, salutes Garibaldi's character as well (Smith). This is not to suggest that Garibaldi is infallible in these accounts. Smith offers criticisms saying that Garibaldi dressed like a clown and that he was prone to being exceedingly moody. Trevelyan pointed out that Garibaldi was too hotheaded to be politically savvy. Despite these critiques, the common theme across Garibaldi's biographies is that he is presented as an ambitious and independent spirit with charisma and tenacity, perhaps even to a fault because it consumed him. Lucy Riall has made a clear departure from the narrative by arguing that Garibaldi's

persona was not his identity. Rather, it was the product of a carefully calculated propaganda exercise (Riall). Does it matter that his eyes were brown, but people were convinced they were blue? Yes, because it was a tiny part of a manufactured image that was orchestrated and staged by Garibaldi to cast himself as a hero. Garibaldi's behavior on Staten Island stands in contrast to Riall's argument. He did not simply withdraw from public view, as he was active in the local community in a manner that was not seemingly staged to play a nationalistic martyr in exile card which would have been easy to do and in keeping with the precedence of Giuseppe Mazzini's behavior in exile. While Riall presented a case that Garibaldi was too good to be true, Alfonso Scirocco continued to argue in a reconsidered biography that Garibaldi was nothing if not admirable and genuine (Scirocco). The historiography is becoming more polarized although it still leans toward presenting Garibaldi as a laudable figure despite a more pronounced aversion to the Great Man Theory.[3]

On Staten Island, Garibaldi was a very big fish in a very small pond. The setting for an exploration of Meucci's home and the objects it houses is significant for cultural clarity. If Manhattan is historically the epicenter of New York City, the borough of Staten Island is its boisterous red-headed stepchild. Thought of as the outer borough (read beyond Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx), the island is perceived as far on the margins of New York City much like Northern New Jersey. Culturally, Staten Island is unique. It remains more suburban than the majority of New York City, and there is a long history of the inhabitants being politically ostracized because it is more conservative than much of downstate New York. Notable exceptions include Italian neighborhoods in Queens, Whitestone, Middle Village, and Howard Beach which are also conservative enclaves.

Today, the island is home to 500,000 residents spread out over 60 square miles. Close to 40% of Staten Islanders identify as having Italian ancestry and Richmond County now has the highest reported proportion of Italian Americans in the United States.[4] The island has the lowest population concentration in New York City (although it still has a population larger than Miami or Saint Louis). The Italian American community expanded exponentially following a wave of migration from Brooklyn after the completion of the Verrazzano Bridge which connected Staten Island to Long Island in 1964. The migration was a shift of second and third-generation Italians to the suburbs in search of

the *American Dream*. This move west matched the pattern of Italian Americans heading east to the white picket fences in Suffolk and Nassau Counties on Long Island. Most historical exploration of Italian migration frames itself around the history of the nations that received the immigrants. However, Donna Gabaccia challenged this approach with an Italy-outward framework to grapple with the diaspora of 26 million Italians leaving Italy. The problem with the historiography in the United States, as she saw it, was that it was relentlessly focused on incorporating the story of Italian immigrants into the mainstream American narrative. This massive wave of Italian immigrants around the turn of the twentieth century was not part of the victim diaspora. Most of these Italians chose to leave Italy in the decades following unification to improve their economic situation. This is distinct from the Italian community that Garibaldi interacted with on Staten Island. They were part of a victim diaspora as many were exiles who had fled life-threatening political persecution (Gabaccia xxi-6).

In sharp contrast to a large and vibrant community of Italian immigrants being a dominant part of the cultural fabric of Staten Island, when Garibaldi arrived in Staten Island in 1850 from Gibraltar, by way of Liverpool, England, there were very few Italians living there. These political refugees, like Garibaldi, had fought to push foreign powers out of Italy. Many of these immigrants had been tortured by the Bourbons or the Austrians. They were the lucky ones that had managed to escape death in exile. It is a significant distinction that the Italian immigrants that Garibaldi had contact with in New York were distinct from the tidal wave of immigrants who would flee Italy by the turn of the twentieth century when it was clear that the promise of the Risorgimento to lift the *Mezzogiorno* would not come to fruition. Lack of economic opportunity due to lack of industrialization, lack of education, famine, malaria, and a lack of infrastructure was only the tip of the iceberg. Garibaldi, unlike many of the immigrants to follow for economic opportunity, never had an intention to stay. Garibaldi was transient on Staten Island. He would come to the Island intermittently in the early 1850s. Despite the ephemeral nature of his time there, he did enthusiastically join the local Masonic Lodge which marked a deep connection to the local community despite the impermanent nature of his time on the island.

Garibaldi had arrived in New York at the age of 43 in poor physical and mental health. He was suffering from debilitating

rheumatism that was so severe he had to be carried off the ship to the infirmary where the tricolore flag of the Italian Republic was hung to greet him. He was also struggling with the death of his 27-year-old wife Anita who had perished at the end of an arduous journey across Italy with enemy troops at their heels. A Brazilian freedom fighter who was also his comrade-in-arms, she was carrying their fifth child when she died of malaria in the wake of his July 1849 defeat in Rome and the collapse of the Roman Republic. His militia of 7,000 had valiantly attempted to hold the Gianicolo hill against 30,000 heavily armed French soldiers. The Garibaldini, who did not flee for their lives, followed him across Italy toward San Marino and the Adriatic. They zig-zagged across the Apennines in the heat of summer in a game of cat and mouse as the French and Austrian troops tried to kill them. In the end, Garibaldi carried his heavily pregnant wife to a farmhouse just north of Ravenna where she succumbed to fever.

With his life in shambles, his time in Staten Island can be constructed as a turning point. It marked a transition from the first part of his life as it is bound to the Risorgimento where he is perceived as more of a loose cannon of a passionate freedom fighter with lofty ideals, to a more mature, focused, and successful general. The historiography around Garibaldi gives very little attention to his time in New York.[5] Because of that trend, his residency in Staten Island might appear to be a lull, a silence, or even a disappearing act. However, he regrouped relatively quickly for the apex of the Risorgimento and victory. In a sense, he stepped off the stage into this house for the second act. Garibaldi's time in the house pushes the traditional narrative of the Risorgimento toward an often-overlooked episode in Garibaldi's life between the defeat of the Roman Republic and the Invasion of the Two Sicilies. Most thought this invasion was an impossible feat. Perhaps Garibaldi was in New York long enough for the attitude that *anything is possible* to rub off on him. Knowing what is to come, it is clear that a significant episode in the narrative of the Risorgimento has been reduced to local lore about a modest, now out of place, house.

The humble home was built in the Gothic Revival style. It was moved by the Sons of Italy to 420 Tompkins Avenue, where it still stands, in 1913. This civic organization intervened when the house was in a serious state of disrepair. It was recognized as an arch connecting Italian and Italian American culture in its infancy that should be preserved. The house is utilitarian, while the objects it contains are

symbolic. Few Italian Americans know about the existence of the home, in part because the community does not generally have a strong cultural connection to the Risorgimento. The home is not an example of material culture that was lost and found, but rather it went through long phases of being severely undervalued and ignored. The house is a historical curiosity because it is unexpected to find a founding father of modern Italy this far afield. Despite that and the sensationalism of how close it came to being destroyed (if the Sons of Italy had not intervened), it fell quickly into obscurity. Staten Island was a ferry ride and a world away.

The precarious survival of this home is not only due to geography, it is because it was the home of Antonio Meucci. Meucci has not been drawn into the narrative of the Italian American success story. The home survives because Garibaldi lived in it. Meucci is not well-known to the contemporary Italian American community. Meucci's unfortunate economic circumstances have been framed as anti-Italian discrimination in both the historical narrative and in popular culture.[6] In the wildly popular but deeply controversial (because of the stereotypes of Italian Americans that it presents) HBO series *The Sopranos,* Meucci was featured in a memorable scene in the first season of the series.[7] Anthony Jr. tells his father at dinner that he learned in school that Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. Tony, his father, irately laments that his teacher is wrong and that Antonio Meucci did not get the credit because of discrimination against Italians. Despite this appearance in popular culture, Meucci remains a footnote in the history of the second stage of the Industrial Revolution while Garibaldi drives a revolution. Because of Meucci's connection, historical memory around this home is certainly entrenched in marginalization as is Staten Island and its particular Italian American community.

Meucci's story is marked by far more tragedy than triumph. Antonio Meucci was born in Florence in 1808. He showed a clear aptitude for mechanical engineering and worked as a mechanic at La Pergola Theater. It was there that he met Ester Mochi. They married and moved to Havana, Cuba, to work in a theater after he had served time in prison in Florence for his political views. When the theater burned down, they moved to Staten Island in 1850 not long before Garibaldi's arrival. Meucci was impoverished and looking for economic opportunity. Despite his best efforts, he was down on his luck constantly. He was able to purchase a modest Gothic revival home built in the 1840s. It consisted of four symmetrical bedrooms over four

symmetrical rooms on the main floor with a lab in the basement for his work.

Necessity is the mother of invention. Esther grew increasingly incapacitated from severe arthritis and that was the impetus for Meucci to build the first telephone using a copper wire to connect her room to his workspace. Despite his entrepreneurial spirit, Meucci remained poor. He almost lost his home after he was badly burned in an engine fire on the ferry and unable to work. Great minds do not always have economic fortune.

His economic troubles stemmed in large part from the fact that he could not secure a patent for his phone because he was poor, was not well-connected socially, spoke little English, and faced systemic anti-Italian discrimination in the courts. Down but not out, he sought out Garibaldi at a dinner party and convinced him to rent a room in his house. Garibaldi worked for him making candles using a smokeless wick that Meucci invented, and they were able to scrape by. The two men met by geographical happenstance, but they became friends and shared a passion for liberating Italy from foreign control.

Writers of *The Sopranos* choose to mention Meucci and not Garibaldi. This speaks to the larger point that the Risorgimento is not a dominant contributor to Italian American identity even though it was the failures of the Risorgimento that directly drove Italian emigration. The Risorgimento is a sore spot in Italy for many regardless of whether they stayed or left to find opportunities overseas. Rather, the successes of the Roman Empire, and the cultural production of the Renaissance serve as sources of pride among Italian Americans because they point to more familiar moments of vitality and success. Garibaldi is also exceedingly complicated, especially to an unfamiliar audience. It is particularly difficult to separate the man from the larger-than-life heroic persona that he crafted. He is quite controversial in terms of his role in the failure of the Italian nation-state to lift the South because he handed off southern Italy to the new Kingdom of Italy without sticking around long enough to push for the South's interests in the construction of the union. He is not an easily understood patriot. Garibaldi is wrapped in the dense fog of the mythology of nineteenth century nationalism and Romanticism that is both foreign and arcane to contemporary Italian Americans. While there are many Italians who still blame Garibaldi for abandoning the South to what would prove to be empty promises of Cavour and the North, there is no palatable bitterness toward him in the

Italian American community. There are many in places like Naples who still blame Garibaldi for their economic troubles, any circumstantial blame in the Italian American community does not fall on Garibaldi. For Italian Americans, the failures of the Risorgimento are distant in terms of time and space.

It was not always so. There was palatable excitement when General Giuseppe Garibaldi arrived in New York in what The New York Tribute described as a spirited occasion to celebrate his arrival in New York. The Beatles weren't the only thing to come out of Liverpool that would make men cheer and women faint. But Garibaldi had no mop top, rather he was the image of a new messiah bearded with long hair. Ironically, this vision of Jesus was an enemy of the Catholic Church in New York as he was in Rome which explains, in part, why he left Manhattan so quickly. He was not described as typically handsome, but there was something about him, despite being easily flattered with little evidence of a sense of humor (Hibbert 7).

When Garibaldi arrived in New York, Meucci sought out the like-minded and admired patriot to rent a room in his house. Garibaldi spent almost a year in the modest Staten Island home of the Florentine-born inventor Antonio Meucci. As described earlier, Garibaldi arrived reeling from both the untimely death of his wife Anita and the 1849 defeat of the republic in Rome. Garibaldi, under duress or not, can display the polarities and extreme self-fashioning in which he purposefully projected heroism, sacrifice, and humility. Garibaldi's extended stay in Meucci's home on Staten Island invites conversation around the problematic nature of psychological biography. Garibaldi's mental state on Staten Island is something to tread into with extreme care. The tone of his autobiography which was finished there certainly shows evidence of his difficulties (Garibaldi). Situationally, it was a time mired by sadness and difficulty, and we know he declined far more luxurious accommodations and fanfare in rapidly industrializing Manhattan. He even refused a ticker tape parade. Instead, Garibaldi spent his days hunting and fishing in a remote corner of the city on an island removed. His struggle for a basic existence lends itself to the motif of exile, which is difficult to conceptualize through a twenty-first century lens. Exile is pushed to the forefront of conversation in this remote locus. His friend Meucci recognized Garibaldi's love of the sea and his homesickness. The two rigged up a little boat painted like the tricolore for them to sail across the Narrows to Long Island to fish. Despite the sense of exile, Garibaldi liked the United States, writing

"this nation is certainly living up to its reputation and will soon become the first among great nations" (Marraro 185).

Out of the spotlight, Garibaldi reveals himself. Never one to avoid getting his hands dirty, he worked beside Meucci making candles in a backyard kiln. The remains of the kiln point to a narrative that Garibaldi used to project his humility. Meucci's home was not just a refuge, it was a place of employment which was necessary for survival. The kiln is a symbol of suffering as it was work that overwhelmed Garibaldi, who was not in good health, with extreme heat and putrid smells. When looking at the kiln, moved along with the house, one can understand that this was not a time of leisure. Meucci was a kind friend who treated him like family, but it was not always easy to live there. Beyond longing to return to Italy, Garibaldi disliked the cold New York winter, and he desperately wanted to buy a proper fishing boat. Garibaldi was not a recluse in the house, nor was he miserable. Those that Garibaldi met around his neighborhood on the shores of the narrows at the market, at the bocci court, and on the dock commented that he was kind, unassuming, and friendly (Marraro 179-203).

We also know that he appeared in court in Staten Island at least twice. Charges were dropped when he was arrested for hunting on private property, and he testified to help a victim of an assault on the Staten Island ferry. These *local matters* highlight, perhaps, his desire for a simpler rural life along with his sense of community and civic duty. After a consideration of his decision to live on Staten Island, it is no surprise that after Italian unification he stepped away from it all on the tiny island of Caprera.

While Garibaldi is buried in Caprera, Meucci is buried in Staten Island in a grave that is far more monumental than Garibaldi's. Grave sites tend to draw the curious because of their materiality. Garibaldi was a man who unrepentantly did not want to be buried in a way that would draw such attention. He wanted to be quietly cremated on an open-air pyre of wood with his face positioned toward the sun on his beloved island, lest his body be hauled off to Rome, and placed in the Pantheon in an ornate tomb next to kings and Renaissance giants. A compromise seems to have been reached with his remains being placed in a marked grave near his home on the island. On Staten Island, Garibaldi is no longer present, but his colossal ghost is the one that seems most present in the memory of the house due to the orchestrated

collection of material artifacts that have been curated to allow visitors to make connections to Garibaldi.

While we have considered the house itself, we have yet to consider its contents. It contains limited but well-curated items seemingly selected to introduce Italian Americans to someone they presumably should know. A lock of hair, a hat, a walking stick – the things that have been collected in the house like those that might have been left behind in a hotel room. These objects are not the military artifacts that most Risorgimento museums display.

The ground floor of the house consists of a museum space focused on the Risorgimento. Far less intimate in tone, it is an educational space adorned with maps. One of the first items that one sees upon entering is a piano that Meucci had a hand in building. There is also a death mask of Meucci that is dwarfed by an over-sided metal bust of Garibaldi which presents his title as a Grand Master of the Masons of Italy. The dwarfing of Meucci seems to be the dominant trend. The more exceptional artifacts are located up a narrow staircase on the second level. In what was Garibaldi's bedroom, there is a hand-held shaving mirror used by Garibaldi along with a wooden chair that carried him off the field during the Battle of Monte Suello (east of Bergamo) in 1866 when he was too injured to walk. It surprisingly unceremoniously holds open the door of the bedroom. While the window looks onto the narrows, today the view is dominated by the Verrazzano bridge, Garibaldi would have only seen the inlet. Meucci's well-worn rocking chair in the space invites the visitors to think about the long conversation that built a friendship between the two men.

A display of clothing lends itself to the domestic nature of the space. The clothing found here includes a rare ceremonial red shirt worn by Garibaldi, along with the earlier-mentioned trademark velvet hat. The hat is iconic in photos of Garibaldi, but there are not many of them. It is rare. Beyond these material artifacts, the style of the shirt bearing his name has had a transatlantic impact on men's and women's fashion. It was pervasive in the uniforms of the American Civil War. Also on the bed, sans display case, is a finely carved, albeit simple, wooden cane, a reminder that, despite his larger-than-life legacy, Garibaldi wasn't larger than life in terms of his stature. It also reminds us that he was not invincible. He did not escape injury in battle. Many of these gifts came from Garibaldi's family. Almost everything in the

house was sold off so, without these gifts, it would be bare and the effect of being in the space would be significantly different as it would put all the focus on the materiality of the house itself.

The presentation of material culture to illuminate the life of Garibaldi is a difficult curation. Garibaldi was a man who, even when he wasn't in exile, lived a Spartan existence. His propensity toward frugality means that he leaves little in his wake in terms of material possessions. Anita, his wife, left almost nothing. Anita, often described as an Amazon warrior, was truly nomadic. She didn't live long enough to settle into Sardinia with Garibaldi which also explains why she leaves so little. Even her corporal remains, buried in haste as Garibaldi was still running for his life, were dug up by dogs. Her bones would be moved by Mussolini to Rome and interred in a bronze equestrian statue to commemorate her on the Gianicolo hill. Too much the Amazon for some, Mussolini saw here as an embodiment of maternal virtue. Anita's presence is not highlighted in the cultural artifacts in Meucci's home. Her obvious absence highlights the mourning Garibaldi likely experienced during his tenure in the home. Material goods that become valuable can be described by Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism (Marx). Because Garibaldi owned little, what we do have lends itself to the trope of rarity.

The house is small and inviting, almost cottage-like to our contemporary gaze. Garibaldi's stay on Staten Island is also defined by an approachable story of friendship forged during incredibly difficult circumstances. The friendship between them is a remarkable intersection of lives. Despite being from very different circumstances, they both had personalities that were exceedingly defiant in the face of extreme hardship. These men were down on their luck, but together they showed incredible perseverance in the face of financial and emotional hardship. Rooting for the underdogs comes naturally and easily. In times of tremendous adversity, Garibaldi called Meucci his kind Florentine friend and noted that Meucci treated him like family. Meucci had his own struggles. Despite severe economic hardship, they were able to survive.

This materiality of the home is a sharp contrast to a monumental equestrian monument in a massive square overlooking Rome or a sweeping bronze statue in Washington Square Park in Manhattan. This home is not monumental. It, like its former inhabitants, is an underdog.

Remarkably, the house survived at all, as very little has from mid-nineteenth century New York. That alone should draw a crowd but, like many, New Yorkers are rarely tourists in their own city. However, guests from all over the world visit this inconvenient corner of Staten Island. Because of the location, the house is not a place you will stumble upon as a tourist. Yet, despite the logistics, motivated guests manage to visit the home. The inconvenient trip from Manhattan becomes a pilgrimage, and it can be an emotional one at that. University students from Italy have shown up with tears in their eyes looking into the shaving mirror. A Brazilian nonagenarian could barely climb the stairs but did so with great determination before sitting down to cradle Garibaldi's cane and weep. Even Garibaldi's grandson appeared at the door resembling his grandfather to the extent that, as the story is told by staff, it was like seeing a ghost. And yes, ghost hunters do come to the home as well. The common denominator is that this home is a place to connect to the men who occupied it.

You leave the home with a sense that in reality, Garibaldi's time on Staten Island was far from quiet. And it does the historical narrative a disservice by pushing it to the margins of historical curiosities. As rumors swept Europe that he was raising funds and planning his return, he did plan aspects of the tactical invasion of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. It was that seemingly impossible invasion that caused the collapse of the Bourbon monarchy and Papal control over central Italy. This planning is what made it possible for Garibaldi to hand over southern Italy to the new nation-state.

Staten Island is not the end of the story because Garibaldi did not stay. Despite even receiving written requests from President Lincoln asking him to lead the Union army, he remained unequivocally focused on Italy. Had Garibaldi not lived in this home, albeit briefly, it most likely would be gone, and the memory of it all but lost. Meucci seems doomed to play second fiddle due to the continued impact of the out-of-fashion, but continually lurking, Great Man Theory (Harrold). This house invites us to step away from the heavily curated narrative of Garibaldi's greatness as the valiant guerilla fighter with a cult-like following. Here it is easier to look behind the romanticism and nationalism to ask if he was an opportunist or a man of the people. This material legacy exists on Staten Island without smoke and mirrors.

Beyond Staten Island, popular culture's fascination with Garibaldi can be seen in the consumerism that exploded around Garibaldi's likeness. It was both immediate and long-lasting. As the 2022-2023 exhibition *Hero: Garibaldi Icona Pop* in Turin's National Risorgimento Museum illustrated, there was a purposeful construction of the myth of Garibaldi through 100s of objects spanning the 140 years since Garibaldi's death that bare and sell his likeness. He proved to be a trustworthy brand. From toys to banknotes, if a cigar is good enough for Garibaldi it is good enough for you! Garibaldi's appeal was directed at both the masculine and the feminine. Men want to be him, and women want to be near him. Many of these goods reflect common everyday purchases so they were not cost prohibitive. Items like Giuseppe Garibaldi Brand Macaroni (United States, 1910-1915) or a chewing gum card in a *Men of Courage* series (England, 1958) could be purchased by anyone. Also noteworthy is that although Garibaldi can be used to market nostalgia, his likeness markets to contemporary youth culture as well. This is evidence from a Swatch campaign showing him in his red shirt smiling over a raised wrist bearing a watch with a leopard print band. A comic book printed in 2022 with the title *Garibaldi vs Zombie* has a cover image that is a graphic drawing of Garibaldi, clad in red complete with a hat and brown tunic, at the top of a rocky mountain planting an Italian navy flag (with no ocean in sight) while fighting off zombies in nineteenth century uniforms. All fantasy, but Garibaldi was first and foremost a man of the sea, so the seemingly misplaced flag aptly points to his identity.

Overall, the volume and scope (both chronological and geographical) of these material artifacts present Garibaldi's popular legacy globally. There was a clear mention of Staten Island in this exhibition. In 1960 the Postal Service in the United States issued a stamp to commemorate Garibaldi as an "Italian Revolutionary and Liberator." The design of the stamp shows his face on a gold medal. It includes that he is a "Champion of Liberty." Interestingly, the post office used red and blue for the design rather than the colors of the Italian flag. The information card with the stamps says that he became a freemason at the Tompkinsville Lodge on Staten Island, New York while in exile from Italy in the 1850s. Thus, managing to highlight his connection to the red, white, and blue.

Biographers and historians have long lamented that there is not much new to say about Garibaldi; even trivial details of his life have

been published (Hibbert). However, the connection between Garibaldi and the Italian American community has been given little attention. In more recent decades that community has made a more concerted effort to distance itself from the stereotype that Italian Americans are by proxy connected to the mafia. This pushback to redefine popular impressions of the community away from the *Godfather stereotype* coincides with a growing narrative about the contributions of the Italian community to the building of the modern United States through food, family, and patriotism. To negate the negative perception of Italian American immigrants before the end of WWII, many distanced themselves from their Italian identity by speaking English to their children and embracing American holidays and its history. Second and third-generation Italians are more eager, in what is now a more globalized perception of identity, to embrace their Italian-ness. Garibaldi's sojourn in Staten Island is a homegrown connection to Italy's foundation myth. In an Odyssey/ Aeneid-like narrative the hero, bouncing around the sea at the mercy of fate and yet to return home, comes to the shores of Staten Island for an episode.

Also given far too little focus in the historiography around Garibaldi is the relationship between Meucci and Garibaldi. This house frames a very human story. Their circumstantial cohabitation bridged the gap between one man on the margins of history and the other at center stage. Far from Italy, there they were equals. A small research library in one of the bedrooms reminds us that there is more work to be done in this intriguing albeit under-utilized space. Through things, we see the construction of collective historical memory.

While this sojourn in Garibaldi's life is barely a blip on Risorgimento's complex historiographical radar, it makes a larger-than-life founding father figure more accessible. This micro view of Garibaldi is particularly useful because his legacy is so controversial. His identity can be difficult to understand, especially if it is a surface-level introduction embedded into the larger cast of characters who built nation-states. The house presents Garibaldi in a way that mirrors his self-fashioning. While it does not change the narrative, it helps us to understand his motivations. He is a man of the people and one who projects humility, heroism, and sacrifice even when no one is looking because he is not at center stage.

When the narrative is shifted toward Staten Island, it runs off the well-worn track of revolution with a sharp diversion toward localism

and material culture. Although 1850 was a low point in Garibaldi's struggle, it doesn't derail the train. Garibaldi still emerges as heroic, but far more human. The pandemic's closer-to-home mindset served as an impetus to look in our own backyards with curiosity. Even in a city as well-traversed as New York, there are overlooked corners. Material culture is indispensable to understanding Garibaldi's time in New York. Garibaldi's global renown allows for his likeness to permeate domestic interiors across the world. His image was an idol, something to be venerated. His legacy was so powerful it was manipulated into representations across the political spectrum from the fascists and the partisans to Italy's 1948 postwar political campaign.

On Staten Island, we do not have such an idol. 1850 was a low point in Garibaldi's struggle so it does not fit the *hero* narrative easily. Of the numerous accounts of Garibaldi's life, many of which were written during and just after his lifetime by people who knew him, few discuss his time in Staten Island. If they do, it is an aside.[8] As we have seen, it is not an upsetting episode and, there is more to say about Garibaldi. As historians explore methodological questions around how material objects connect to text, it is important to stress that reading *things* is more complex because the use of those things and the meanings ascribed to those material objects vary so much more widely than meanings from interpreting language (Auslander et al. 1354-5). The chair that carried Garibaldi's bleeding body out of battle before making its way thousands of miles to Staten Island is not just a chair.

Notes

[1] The Garibaldi Meucci Museum is a nonprofit organization which has been run by the Sons of Italy Foundation since 1919.

[2] While Trevelyan's trilogy, although an idealized portrait written more than a century ago, remains foundational in terms of our understanding of the myth crafted around Garibaldi (Trevelyan, *Defense*; *Garibaldi and the Making*; *Garibaldi and the Thousand*).

[3] The scholarship that has been published on Garibaldi is vast. For a sense of the size of the literature in Italian see Anthony P. Campanella, *Giuseppe Garibaldi e la tradizione garibaldina: una bibliografia dal 1807 al 1970*, Comitato dell'Istituto Internazionale di Studi Garibaldini, 1971.

[4] Macaulay Honors College at CUNY has compiled Staten Island's demographics which includes this data about Italian Americans.

[5] Hibbert's biography is typical of the common trend to mention Garibaldi's trip to Staten Island as an aside in passing (Hibbert).

[6] There has not been a tremendous amount of historical inquiry around Meucci's life, but the bicentenary of his birth was marked with more interest in his circumstances. In particular, his scientific achievement has come more clearly into focus (Respighi).

[7] "The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti." *The Sopranos*, created by David Chase, season 1, episode 8, HBO, February 28, 1999.

[8] Scirocco's book uses these detailed accounts of his life extensively to revisit Garibaldi's life.

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Journal of American Studies of Turkey
Number 60 (Fall 2023)

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