

READING CALVINO IN THE GARDEN AND SPEAKING ITALIAN IN THE
COURTYARD: THE MAKING OF ITALIAN AMERICANS IN TWO ITALIAN
AMERICAN NOVELS, WITH HELP FROM ITALY AND ITALO CALVINO'S FIABE
ITALIANE

K. Cole Schultz

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Approved by
Advisor: Ennio Rao
Reader: Andrea Mirabile
Reader: Diane Leonard

ABSTRACT

K. COLE SCHULTZ: Reading Calvino in the Garden and Speaking Italian in the Courtyard: The Making of Italian Americans in Two Italian American Novels, with Help from Italy and Italo Calvino's Fiabe italiane
(Under the direction of Ennio Rao)

As Italian American writers, Anna Monardo and Tony Ardizzone explore the connection between language and the hybrid identity of Italian Americans. Ardizzone's chosen mode of narration is the folktale. He both uses old ones and creates his own, telling them in such a way that one sees the language and cultural heritage of the immigrants. In Italy, these folktales can be found in Italo Calvino's Fiabe Italiane. By reading Calvino, one can see how Ardizzone has mined and used the oral traditions of his ancestors. Monardo uses the acquisition of the Italian language of her protagonist as a widening of social space in a *Bildungsroman* novel that takes place two generations after the large immigration wave. This examination of the Italian language looks at its relation to Italy, to America, and to the confluence of the two in social, historical, and political contexts.

DEDICATION

The time has come, my advisor said,
To think of many things
Of margins, words, and signatures,
And tassels, gowns, and rings,
And why Dey Hall is boiling hot
Even though it's spring.

But first, some thanks, where they are due
Before I take my leave.
For without these I would be stuck
No diploma to receive.
I'd be forced to ask for charity
And my parents much would grieve.

First to thank is my dear mom
Who gave a helping hand
In my times of stress and hysteria
She made me to understand
That some day would come the end of this
And wouldn't life be grand?

Next I shall send great gratitude
Along my father's way
For he offered solace incomparable
That misbegotten day
When my computer fried itself
Taking my thesis away

"Get thee to a Mac store quick!"
He cried on the phone to me.
Now is mine this marvelous Mac
Bourne out of misery.
Thanks to him I'm not locked away
For reasons of insanity

The red couch comes next in line today
For on it I did sit.
And ponder theories meaningless
And other useless ...
So Katie darling thank you much
For else I might have quit.

Last but not least to Dr. Rao
My gratitude is great
He kept my words from foundering
Along the narrow strait
Between theories rough and tales of yore,
My worries to abate.

It's over now, though at times I thought
I'd be like Atlas yet
And push this boulder forevermore
And never further get
There are the final words I'll type.
And for this thesis sweat.

T.D.M..D.

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Chapter One

Introduction

They came to knot their fingers in the looms that wove the American economy. They came to offer their backs and their children to the mills that multiplied up and down the eastern seaboard. They came to smell progress in the dark coal mines of West Virginia and offered up their lungs as payment. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, immigrants from Italy arrived on the Atlantic shore of the United States to *fare l'america*, to enter the cities, where streets were paved with gold and there was enough food for everyone. They brought, along with a willingness to work, their own languages, traditions, and histories.

As quick as the trip from the boat to the job, the illusions were gone, buried beneath hours of sweat and the disregard of those for whom they worked. And in generations, the culture that the immigrants brought with them began to disappear also, lost to the homogenizing imperative of a burgeoning nation on the cusp of engaging with a larger world.

Those Italian immigrants who came to the United States encountered a difficult reception. Not only were they pressed by economic considerations, which had led them to come to *La Merica*, but they also felt the need to integrate socially into their new American environment. One of the foremost considerations in this integration was their language. Fred Gardaphé, one of the most prolific and significant critics of Italian American literature, noted

in his book Leaving Little Italy that the financial and social success of any immigrant group “happens at the expense of ‘unmaking’ ethnic identity and allegiance to Old World customs and behavior. [...] For Italians, ‘making it’ has come with a high price tag. It has cost them the language of their ancestors – the main means by which history is preserved and heritage passed on from one generation to the next” (125). Language is inextricably bound to culture and tradition, a fact that current Italian American scholars and writers recognize. Thus, the action of later generation writers to engage in a recovery of language is a move to recover also history, culture, and tradition of their ancestors.

If the ‘homogenizing imperative’ of a nation demands that a constructed idea of unity be perpetuated in order to create and maintain that nation, then it is the task of ethnic and minority writers and critics to take apart that idea. At the very least they seek to modify it, so that while an “American” (in this case) may exist, there exist numerous legitimate forms and manifestations of this idea. William Boelhower offers an articulation of a useful theoretical framework for looking at ethnic literature. His application of sign theory gives the critic of ethnic literature a system of binaries to explore and interpret. “The sign gaze [does] not establish a series of semantic correspondences but [offers] instead an inferencing context. The gaze, the sign, is above all an interpretive relation, a putting into relation” (38). To look at the signs that point to a subaltern culture is to look at them in relationship to the larger culture. It is not an attempt to stabilize any one correspondence; on the contrary, such an approach invites multiplicity. An examination of the Italian language (a sign frequently featured in Italian American novels) looks at its relation to Italy, to America, and to the confluence of the two in social, historical, and political contexts. In the sense that the use of these signs is an act of uncovering what was lost over generations, writers and critics of

ethnic literatures are rather like archaeologists, finding bits and pieces of lost cultures and reconstructing them from present perspectives. And not unlike archaeologists, they undertake these excavations for a reason beyond intellectual curiosity; they are involved in the reconstruction of an idea that holds currency in the present, in the form of a fully articulated, historical, and cultural constituent of a nation.

As Italian American writers, Anna Monardo and Tony Ardizzone explore the connection between language and the hybrid identity of Italian Americans. For both authors, the Italian language itself plays a key role in their narratives. The language and its dialects (Sicilian particularly for Ardizzone) serve as a lynchpin of expression of self. It ties to and creates the Old World. It links family; it represents family. Its acquisition or loss has profound influence on an individual and within his/her social group. If, as Barolini has said, “Language and the culture of birth really do constitute the homeland,” (Chiaroscuro 107) then the Italian language creates a homeland that is spatial, spectral, temporal, and figurative.

Though both Monardo and Ardizzone foreground Italian as a language in their stories, its manifestation and function differ. In his novel In the Garden of Papa Santuzzu, Ardizzone retells and re-imagines the story of the immigration of one Italian family, passing in a picaresque narrative through three generations. The focus is not on the relationship of the characters to the Italian language but on their personal stories, immigration to the United States, and integration into their new social fabric. Ardizzone’s chosen mode of narration, however, is the folktale – specifically, the Sicilian folktale. He both uses old ones and creates his own, telling them in such a way that it is impossible to ignore the language that these immigrants brought with them. Using language by way of folklore, Ardizzone is rescuing the cultural heritage of his forebears. In Italy, this cultural heritage of folktales can

be found in Italo Calvino's Fiabe italiane, a collection of fables and folktales from around Italy, identified by regional origin but written in standard Italian. Calvino's work is not only important in its scope but also in the value of the written versions of the tales. By reading the folktales of Calvino, one can see how Ardizzone has mined and used the oral traditions of his ancestors.

Monardo, on the other hand, uses the acquisition of the Italian language of her protagonist as a widening of social space in a *Bildungsroman* novel that takes place two generations after the large immigration wave. Her protagonist is a generation later than Ardizzone's last one, and provides more completeness to the picture of the situation of the Italian American immigrant through the twentieth century. Monardo concentrates her story on the challenge of later generation Italian Americans to recover a culture to which their ancestors have a different relationship. In either narrative, the Italian language is the *sine qua non*, the thread that if tugged and pulled away, would lead to the disintegration of the stories.

Bedda Sicilia

"Papa Santuzzu's story starts back in Sicilia, in another world, the land that time forgot, where those who stayed behind sometimes gathered against the long night around a blazing fire, talking about themselves and all those who'd left" (Ardizzone 2).

As is language itself, the stories of a group are repositories of cultural memory and a reflection of the history of a given society. In a voice redolent of the hard-hewn soil of Sicilia and a rhythm that recalls the folktales, myths, and legends that abound on her shores, Ardizzone tells the story of the Girgenti family and their immigration to *La Merica* in search of a better life. Sicily has been ruled by many a hand, but always there were the peasants working the land, forcing it to yield, until they themselves were forced to yield, and their

backs gave out, and their bones became dust on the arid earth. It is from this cycle that Ardizzone breaks his protagonists, using methods extraordinary and mundane, to see them over the ocean and settling in to a new life. In telling the story of one specific Sicilian family, Ardizzone endows with a voice the droves of Sicilian immigrants who came to the shores of *La Merica* and found themselves newly mute, doubly so, for they neither spoke English nor the accepted form of Italian. The Girgentis' tale is told as the folktales of Southern Italy have been told for generations, using particular identifying phrases and rhythms, retaining the services of a few set characters of folklore and inventing others along the way, and ending each tale with an invitation to the next tale-teller and an exhortation for the audience to listen.

As Ardizzone reinforces the continuity in generations by telling his story in a form that has roots in the tales told among *la famigghia* in Sicilia, so does he re-populate and re-enforce the cultural inheritance of generations of Sicilian Americans. Upon their arrival in *La Merica*, the immigrants were forced to weigh their attachment to their culture and language against the need to succeed and sustain an existence that would allow them to flourish in the new land – which necessitated the abandonment of all that was not of the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. Thus by the wayside fell their dialects, often their traditions, celebrations, and stories. It is this loss that Ardizzone addresses in the very way that he weaves the story. His loom uses the threads of the Sicilian dialect – his tales are not told to *figlio mio*, but *figghiu miu*. *Baruni* and *patruni* are the villains of the piece, not *baroni* and *padroni*. He adds a bit of Giufà (a stock character in Sicilian folktales who makes appearances in Calvino) here, a few *streghe* (witches) there, and a funeral in which voices are not respectfully lowered: “When you grieve, grieve as fully and completely as you are able.

Shout out in sorrow. Scream. Tear your hair. Weep until your eyes and throat are red and raw” (Ardizzone 324). In the warp and the weft of his tapestry are the vibrancies, the jarring colors, the patterns that had no place in the New World, among those descendants of the Bayeux Tapestry.

Voices in the Courtyard

“The Italian part of me has been at war with the American me for as long as I can remember” (Monardo 8). With these words, Giulia di Cuore identifies the conflicting nature of her hybrid identity¹. Language is used in Anna Monardo’s The Courtyard of Dreams to symbolize and explicate Giulia’s ethnic, cultural, and gender self-fashioning. As her relationship to the Italian and English languages changes and evolves, her identity shifts to include the new selves that emerge. English and Italian switch throughout the novel as voices of self-containment and self-expression as the selves that Giulia has constructed war with each other for superiority. Giulia’s relationship to her father is closely connected with the way that each identifies with the Italian and English languages and the versions of Italy and America that each constructs depending on that identification.

Monardo uses her characters to explore the conflicts that arise in Italian-American literature as a result of the particular disunity that dual identification entails. Cultural and societal norms that govern behavior and identification become confused by the differences that arise between Italian and American norms. Further compounding this confusion is the change between each generation’s relationship with its Italian and American halves. The

¹ Hendin 37. In her essay, Hendin discusses hybridity in these terms: “...the ethnic author/persona embodies the hybridity of character, one who incorporates multiple affiliations and can combine as a speaking subject both the symbolic code that governs the public self and the language of “otherness,” that emotive self once considered silenced in the public world.

challenge to assimilate for early generations is juxtaposed with the need of subsequent generations to find roots and gain a complete notion of self. The use of specific languages among immigrants and their families is more than a means of communication; it is the expression of an identity.

Cu nesci arrinesci.

“He who leaves succeeds.” Thus does Ardizzone preface his narrative, and in doing so, establishes at once that he is telling a story of Sicilians, as it is a Sicilian proverb, and of migration, immigration, and the expectations of a new life. The ‘Italianness,’ or *italianità*, as it is known in the field of Italian American studies², used “as a terminological instrument with which to define and to locate – to recover – Italian American identity,” is highly visible (D’Acerno 730). Ardizzone is an Italian American author who is writing as such, clearly evoking his heritage in the setting, structure, and language of the narrative, as well as in the cultural codes that surface within the story. The story he tells is not only by an Italian American, it is of Italian Americans and their history. It is a story that perhaps has needed the interceding generations in order to be told. As Fred Gardaphé has explained:

The immigrant past is re-created in the writing of the grandchildren of immigrants through the self-reflection that is created by an increased distance from the immigrant experience; this most distant historical perspective is gained by inquiry into the ethnic experience, which results in the re-creation of the immigrant experience in America through more distinctively fictional forms. In essence these portrayals rewrite immigrant myths, with the immigrants, usually grandparent figures, as the heroes. (Italian Signs 22)

² The term as it is currently employed in the field has been stripped of its negative connotations. It has a different meaning historically in relation to Italy: “Within the history of Italy – that Italy that Metternich disparagingly called a “geographical expression” – the term emerged as a part of Italian national awareness during the Risorgimento (the movement for Italian unification). Throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, it was a key term in the forging of a positive political and cultural identity. [...] In the early part of the twentieth century, it became an expression of chauvinism as reflected in the irredentism (the attempt to recover Italian-speaking countries subject to other countries) and in Italy’s belated adventures in colonialism. It was coopted by the Fascist regime as part of its jingoistic rhetoric” (D’Acerno 730).

Ardizzone's picaresque narrative is indeed structured in this fashion, with each succeeding generation having its own heroes. By using folkloric elements, Ardizzone creates environments that almost demand a hero within each episode. The folklore and cultural codes work together in the tales to create a specific type of myth, one that is always identifiable as Italian.

Calvino, in the preface to his collection of fables, explains that the tales themselves are rooted in reality. "Sono, prese tutte insieme, [...] una spiegazione generale della vita, nata in tempi remoti e serbata nel lento ruminio delle coscienze contadine fino a noi; sono il catalogo dei destini che possono darsi a un uomo e a una donna"³ (13). The tales themselves are at once the history and the potential fortunes of those who tell them and those to whom they are told. Thus they are evocative of a specific geographical region and a shared history. Calvino also describes the encompassing nature of the tales and their common themes: their descriptions of varied political and economic forces which mold and shape the worlds of the characters and the moral fiber within the characters which must ultimately be the tools they use to effect their triumph (13). Ardizzone has taken these same themes as a framework for the tales that he tells in relating the history/story of Italian immigration.

Both the stories and the codes of behavior hearken back to their roots in Italy. Many of the tales in the book begin introducing a character as *un'omu d'onuri*, *un'omu di pazienza*, *un'omu di panza* – all of which mean a man worthy of respect, one who follows the codes of *omertà* and *bella figura*. Both terms describe comportment in public, governing what to say or not to say, and how to act or not to act. These codes, as much as the language, were a part

³ "Taken all together, they are a general explanation of life, born in the remote past and set aside in the slow ponderances of the rustic consciousness; they are the catalogue of the destinies to which men and women may give themselves."

of what the immigrants from southern Italy carried with them when they came to *La Merica*. They were transmitted through the oral traditions of that culture. To understand how Ardizzone uses these Italian signs⁴ in his narrative, one must grab hold of the thread and trace it all the way back to the source. *Figghiu miu*, one must follow the tales to Sicily, follow the language, the line of the family.

Lu muttu di l'anticu mai mintiu. The proverbs of the ancients never lie.

Passing on wisdom from one generation to the next was not done in libraries, nor schools, nor even churches – though they certainly had their place in the formation of the Sicilian psyche around the turn of the twentieth century. Knowledge was passed on in tales and proverbs, told in front of the fireplace, and shared judiciously when the situation called for it. Stories were told to entertain but also to inform. Gardaphé elucidates, “In the villages and towns of Italy, the *cantastorie*, or ‘history singers,’ were (and in many cases still are) the custodians of local tradition. Within the family, children learned by listening, watching, and imitating” (*Italian Signs* 24).

Even as he begins his story, Ardizzone has already started to connect language and folklore to the country from which the Italian Americans emigrated. He places phrases such as “*Lu muttu di l'anticu mai mintiu*” (3) in the mouths of his characters, linking them with their linguistic and familial antecedents. This same linkage exists in the folk stories themselves. Folktales, no matter what their origins, are influenced by the particularities of its place of narration (Calvino 17, 18). Sicilian folktales tell of marvels born in reality, told in a rich language of invention but grounded in the common speech of everyday life (Calvino 27).

⁴ Gardaphé uses this term to indicate anything that identifies *italianità*, such as language or cultural codes.

Thus, to speak of folklore in the sense that Ardizzone employs it is to speak of language, for he takes care to bind them so tightly that they cannot be considered apart.

The history of the family, the history of the land itself, was passed on through these stories, in metaphoric terms and personalizations that made the stories live for an audience. Ardizzone mimics this style in describing his place of ancestry and marks its difference from the mainland: “For thousands of years, since the beginning of time, Sicilia has been forced to feed a thousand and one mouths, her own true children as well as all the invaders from the south and east, the north and west” (4). In this lone sentence already, Ardizzone has adopted the persona and rhythm of a *cantastoria*, and has established a theme that will follow the children of Sicily to America: they will feed others before they will feed themselves. Calvino speaks of the importance of the *cantastoria*, the village storyteller in perpetuating the timeless lessons of the folktales and the shared sense of history (25). In addition, he points out the frequency with which Sicilian folktales revolve around themes of hunger: “quante famiglie affamate, che si mettono a cercar erbe per la minestra nella campagna!” (28) A reading of Calvino provides a deeper understanding of the economic and linguistic history from which Ardizzone writes.

Tales and proverbs had a profound formative influence in the communities in which they were told. Such stories are by nature inclusive, involving the audience and their surroundings in their very composition. Meanings of specific characters and incidents in the stories held pertinence to what was happening in the lives of the peasants. Witches and bosses, malevolent or benevolent animals – all stood not only for themselves within the story, but for the forces which controlled and influenced the lives of the audience and the narrator.

Often the villains were punished, sometimes they weren't – in either case, though, the hero of the tale triumphed in some fashion.

To illustrate a general instance in which belief, language and worldview are intertwined, it is helpful to look at the story of Colapisci. One of the most enduring and popular tales of Sicilian folklore, “Cola Pesce” (in standard Italian) is the story of a man who was also a fish, cavorting with sea-nymphs and spending all day in the water. Calvino includes it in his collection of fables, but as is wont to happen, the folktale has many variants. The bones of the story remain for the most part the same: upon hearing that such an unusual creature inhabited his realm, the King of Messina sends for Cola Pesce. Calvino has it that the King possesses a curiosity that eventually leads to the loss of Cola Pesce; he desires strongly to know what the bottom of the sea looks like and sends Cola Pesce numerous times to the deepest parts of the Mediterranean that he may be the king's eyes. It is what Cola Pesce discovers that leads to a great deal of variation in tales: one of the three columns that support Sicily is crumbling. As Calvino records it, the King becomes angry when Cola Pesce doesn't want to go back into the water on account of a frightening encounter in which he is forced to hide behind the column. The King throws his crown into the water, bidding Cola Pesce to retrieve it. Colapesce enters the water, and never comes out again (Calvino 810). However, another version, this one just as widely circulated, relates that Cola Pesce, upon discovering the disintegrating column, spurns the king's offer of marriage to his daughter and riches to return to the bottom of the ocean and hold up the column.

Sicilian folktales often begin with “it is told and it is retold,” and this story would have been retold throughout families in Sicily. The lessons in it teach loyalty to family (Calvino writes that Colapesce was turned into a fish when he didn't listen to his mother

calling him in from swimming [808]), loyalty to Sicily herself before king and country, the corruptive influence of power and wealth, and the dangers of too much curiosity (which in Calvino's version lead to the King losing his crown). Equally important, the tale links the listener to Sicily. It is said that when the earth trembles, it is Colapesce trying to ease his burden by shifting the weight of the column from one shoulder to another. Here is yet another example of how folklore and language are linked: folk stories engendered sayings that become part of the linguistic treasury of a population. Cola Pesce's triumph over the villain (the King) is more subtle than in other stories, but tangible nonetheless. In all versions of the story, the King loses something valuable – his crown or Cola Pesce (his window to the ocean floor).

Ardizzone follows the conventions and morals exemplified in the Cola Pesce tale. There are curses (the way Cola Pesce received his half-fish form), tasks to perform, rewards for good behavior, punishments for bad choices, quirks of fate that decide the lives of the protagonists. According to Calvino “La morale della fiaba è sempre implicita, nella vittoria delle semplici virtù dei personaggi buoni e nel castigo delle altrettanto semplici e assolute perversità dei malvaggi⁵” (50). The morals and social mores are present, but they are not the focus of the stories, saving the tales from the obscure fate they would meet were they related in an overtly pedantic fashion. Ardizzone pays heed to the necessity for adherence to convention and a degree of invention that Calvino identifies as essential features of the folktale:

Dato il tema, esistono un certo numero di passaggi obbligati per arrivare alla soluzione, i ‘motivi’ che si scambiano da un ‘tipo’ all’altro (...); sta al narratore organizzarli, tenerli su uno sopra l’altro come i mattoni d’un muro [...], usando per cemento la piccola o grande arte sua, quella che ci

⁵ “The moral of the fable is always implicit, in the victory of the simple virtues of the good characters and in the punishment of the equally simple and absolute perversity of the evil ones.”

mette lui che racconta, il colore dei suoi luoghi, delle sue fatiche e speranze, il suo ‘contenuto.’⁶ (51)

It might be tempting to say that the stories themselves were a way for the traditionally powerless peasants (vis-à-vis their economic and social superiors) to exert some sort of control over their lives, and while this is true to an extent, it is not the totality of the significance of the tales. As Gioia Timpanelli, herself a well known storyteller, points out:

*Iddi arristaru filici e cuntenti
E nuautri semu ca senza nenti.
(And they were left happy and content
And here we are without a cent.)*

This is one of the traditional story endings from Sicily. It says that *they* were left happy and content, not we. They are inside the frame of the story; they are in *illo tempore* (that time, mythic time, story time), while we are *here* without anything – except the wisdom of the story. (Timpanelli 145)

The stories embodied local beliefs, the predominant morality in the village, and modes of survival. The point was not a childish wish-fulfillment exercise, but to rescue from the vagaries of time the collective knowledge and history of a community. They were also a bulwark against the eroding of the spirit brought about by the harsh realities of everyday life.

The stories were set apart as being a creation, nonetheless they influenced behavior and buttressed beliefs. They were a tapestry of the fantastic woven into quotidian life. This combination of the divine and the profane, of the incredible and the pedestrian, of the marvelous and the mundane, instead of clearly marking the delineation between the two, served to reinforce and occasionally enmesh one another. David Bynum has discussed the conflation of rational and mythical when it comes to tradition and history. Oral history comprises the accounts and experiences of eyewitnesses, whose own understanding of events

⁶ “Given the theme, there exist a certain number of obligatory steps to arrive at the solution, the ‘motives’ that are exchanged from one ‘type’ to the next... it falls to the narrators to organize these, laying them one over the other like the bricks of a wall, using for mortar his art, large or small, mixing into what he tells the colors of the place, its hopes and trials, its ‘contents.’”

can be influenced by the myths or legends that inform their worldview. To attempt to separate the threads is problematic, as “one man’s reason is another man’s prejudice or superstition, and one man’s history is another man’s fable” (11).

The stories become the language by which a given population translates the world. Words that exist in one language to evoke or explain a particular belief don’t work when translated into the structure of another language, for the referents are no longer there. Though to speak of language in this fashion borders on assigning it a figurative role when one considers its quotidian employment, Ardizzone’s narrative invites a dual signification of language. Stories and language enmesh, just as the outlandish and the ordinary enmesh in the stories themselves and buttress each other.

Ardizzone expounds on a particular instance in which Sicilian mythology and Catholicism combine to create a tale that manifests itself often in day-to-day existence. Put into practice, it is one of the many gestures that Italians and Italian Americans make that is known even to those largely unfamiliar with Italian cultural traditions. In order to ward off the devil, children are given something that signifies strength, such as a claw or a tooth. In the event that the talisman has been misplaced, “and you suspect that someone is giving you the evil eye or that a devil is about to leap into your body and take a grab at your soul, you can make the horns or your first and little fingers, like this, see, to repel the evil” (89). There is no need to verbalize; this action is unspoken language that shows its roots as clearly as if it were verbally articulated.

Vladimir Propp has written of the necessity not only to study history through folklore, but to observe and investigate the conditions in which such stories were created and retold. A folktale is of the community and therefore incorporates it, unlike a literary work which is

set apart: “The fairy tale has to be approached from a standpoint of its environment, that is, the conditions under which it was created and exists. Life and, in the broad sense of the word, religion are the most important for us here” (96). The pagan roots of religion in Sicily ensured that even with the arrival of Catholics on the island, there would always be embroidery in the tales. What is directly experienced makes its way into tales, and thus the Christian mythology underwent a bit of transmutation.

Ardizzone makes use of all that oral culture represents and all that is represented in oral culture in his narrative, from the origins in Sicily to the voyage to America to the new life of each member of the family in the New World. Limning the historical circumstances and environment in which Sicilians emigrated, he creates a linguistic and cultural backdrop for their arrival in *La Merica*.

Of gabbilloti, baruni, and other disagreeable figures.

As the experiences of early Southern Italian immigrants to the United States were mediated by the *struzzi* to whom they were indentured, so were their lives in Italy determined by their relationships to the wealthy landowners and their agents. Re-imagining history has to be accomplished by examining and depicting the forces that shaped it, so Ardizzone takes care to include the diabolical counterparts to the heroic immigrants. Barolini points out, “The Italian immigration to the United States was preponderantly by people who were not wanted or valued in their land of origin, then found they were not wanted or valued in their new home country when they aspired to more than their exploitation as raw labor” (Chiaroscuro 146). The creation of the Old World and New World

in writing has to reflect the existence of the peasants vis-à-vis the landowners in Italy as well as showing the way in which that opposition transferred to the United States.

Ardizzone depicts the dichotomy between rural and urban in terms of the enormous gulf in economic circumstance between the peasant and the landowners/caretakers. A peasant “had to work against the thief of a government in distant Rome, which taxed him so severely that there were tariffs even on donkeys and mules, though none on the horses and cows that were owned by the *gabbilloti* and their fat-assed bosses, the rich estate owners or *baruni*” (78). Though the author offers initial English equivalents to the Italian words that he uses, he continues to put these Italian terms into the mouths of his characters without any more glosses throughout the entire book. Not only does this decision lend the speech of his *personaggi* more authenticity, but it also reenacts the immigrants’ initial relation to the words he or she would use to articulate the experience. Individuals whom they encountered in their lives who were more types than they were persons, and moreover were types with whom they were familiar, would have easily fallen into the categories of descriptors they used in Italy.

It was the lot of the peasants to line the pockets of the landowners and bend themselves to the task of coaxing from unforgiving land a harvest that would satisfy the *gabbilloti*. There were no avenues by which the *cuntadini* (*contadini* – *peasants*) could traverse the gap. Any sort of protest could have only been addressed verbally to the oppressors, as the ability to read and write was not typical among the agricultural population of Sicily. Gardaphé has observed, “In Italy, literacy was a tool used by those in power to exercise and protect their power over others. The Italian institutions of church and state controlled access to this power by controlling access to literacy” (Italian Signs 26). Thus almost all communication was verbal. In the event that communication was something

written, an intermediary was usually sought. Ardizzone describes the sort of mystic formality with which one of the letters sent back to Sicily from a family member is read: “I accompanied your father to the village, where we found the man who could read and write. Before touching our letter he washed and dried his hands, then drew his spectacles ceremoniously out of a box lined with green velvet and held the twin circles of glass up to the sun, then strapped their glistening hooks behind his ears” (15).

It bears mentioning that Ardizzone’s decision to employ not only Italian but specifically Sicilian words in his narrative is significant for its transformation of Sicilian into a literary language. D’Acierno has observed that immigrants from the Mezzogiorno were,

by and large, estranged from the mother tongue, the standard Tuscan-based language that had been imposed as the official, and effectively utopian, language of Italian unification, the language of the *signori*, of bourgeois domination, and of the system that marginalized them [...] Their linguistic identities were thus constituted in terms of the subcultural language of difference. (xlvii)

In using Sicilian words to indicate *italianità*, Ardizzone is privileging that language, making it into a ‘language of unification’ by setting it on par with other narratives that portray the Italian American experience. While he expresses the very real instances in which the peasant population of the *Mezzogiorno* was marginalized by the bourgeois landowners and agents, he does so with Sicilian words. Sicilian thus becomes a legitimate language with which to voice grievances or relate history, transformed from a subjugated language to a language on par with the dominant Tuscan-based dialect. According to Hendin, “The Italian American self that emerges in contemporary fiction incorporates and uses histories of economic deprivation and experiences of injustice to develop new sources of cultural strength and consolation” (16). In the case of Ardizzone, one of the new sources of cultural strength and consolation is

the rehabilitation of the Sicilian language by using it to articulate the ‘histories of economic deprivation.’

Just as Ardizzone acknowledges the existing power struggle between the Tuscan and Sicilian dialects and weighs his own hand in on the Sicilian side, so does he describe the struggles of the peasants and the ways open to them to exert their own versions of authority. He makes it clear, however, that these exertions were never without a price. Departure from the proscribed way of things resulted in situations that could be morally and physically uncomfortable for the farmers. The choice also did not guarantee success. One of Ardizzone’s stories revolves around Luigi, one of the sons of Papa Santuzzu, who joins a group of bandits who routinely rob the houses of the landowners. The author uses the mythic element of transformation in the episode, as the bandits change themselves into avenging wolves. Yet it is not a clean and sanitized redistribution of goods. The language that describes the force with which the *gabbilloti* were parted from their money is brutal and frank, as is the description of what happens to the unfortunate amoral reprobates. When Luigi comes to realize the error of his ways, he seeks redemption from the local priest, who demurs to grant him forgiveness. Upon closer inspection, Luigi relates,

I noticed that stuck in the gaps between his teeth were clumps of food from the table of the *gabbillotu*, and I smelled on his breath the landlord’s wine, and I saw on the front of his soiled cassock flakes of the dainty pastries the *gabbilloti* were fond of eating after they had gorged themselves with meat, while the *cuntadini* starved on their soup made of tree bark and stones. (92)

Corruption is shown to be pervasive in the social and economic strata that are superior to the *cuntadini*. Similar circumstances abound in folk stories, in which individuals of little means must pit themselves against characters of power and influence who are irredeemably corrupted.

Ardizzone's choice of the wolf as the character who takes it upon himself to rectify the distribution of food has another layer as well. Belmonte has explained that the she-wolf, *la lupa*, is a word that has a number of meanings to Southern Italians. It is both the hunger that comes with famine and the word used for the pestilence of insects that could destroy whole crops in a handful of days (12). Wolves, male and female, insects, and men can be compelled to take drastic measures when confronted with hunger. In the face of the harshness of existence, the importance of *la famiglia* as a source of emotional sustenance and humanity was paramount, as were the strengthening influence of the stories told at the family hearth. Here again is an instance in which language and folklore coalesce into one multilayered figure.

Part of the value that a reading of Calvino's collection of fables provides is its illumination of the way that Ardizzone's folktales differ from as well as resemble those time-honored stories that comprise Fiabe italiane. Ardizzone follows conventions of the genre, but he tailors them to fit his needs in retelling the story of the Girgenti family's immigration to *La Merica*. He employs stock characters of folktales in general, such as fairies or witches in the guise of little old ladies and talking animals, as well as characters particular to Sicilian folktales, such as Giufà. Using these characters and inventing others, he blends their appearance with events that are happening in the present lives of his characters. Giufà, the simple hero of a number of folktales featured in Calvino's collection,⁷ is conscripted into the service of Ardizzone's narrator. Death and disaster seem to peer over his shoulder yet never does he meet with any bad end. Ardizzone uses this particularity to place Giufà in a situation where he bumbles from the precipice of death into convincing a princess to provide starving

⁷ See Calvino, "Giufà," 1030-1039.

peasants with an unending source of food. Framing this tale are narratives of the harsh life of deprivation the immigrants faced when they arrived in the New World as well as the difficulties that prompted them to leave the old one⁸.

Italy as a country is presented as something far away from the lives of Sicilians, yet intrusive enough to make itself felt. “Soldiers from the mainland roamed everywhere, rounding the young men up, marching us off to seven years of service to Italia, the country rumored to lie somewhere north of Napuli. I didn’t think I owed this Italia seven years of my life. Italia seemed like just another absentee landlord to me, the soldiers her uniformed *gabbilloti*” (37). This particular dialectic and contradiction in loyalties will follow the children of Sicily to the shores of North America. Stories and histories of a community center around a village, a community, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion that only extends so far. The term *campanilismo*, which characterizes the limits of the boundaries of social and political contact in a given environment as extending as far as the parish bell or *campanile* could be heard, came to be used to describe the sort of parochial attachment against which integration foundered (D’Acierno 712).

So the immigrants to *La Merica* carried with them their strong connections to home, family, and language, forged in the folktales and traditions of the village, tempered by deprivation and hunger. They crossed the ocean to the New World, to *fare l’america*.

Tu vuo’ fa l’americano?⁹

“The marvelous new land was called *La Merica*. This place was said to have such vast, fertile fields that all you had to do was push a seed into the ground and watch it grow! You had to step back fast, claimed the men, or the plant’s stalk would knock you right down! In

⁸ See Ardizzone, “Giufà’s Hole,” 23-46.

⁹ Neapolitan dialect for “*Tu vuoi fare l’americano?*” Do you want to ‘do the American?’ meaning “Do you want to go to America and live as the Americans do?”

La Merica there were rivers and seas leaping with fish. There were vast mountain ranges filled with so much gold that the roads were actually paved with it!” (Ardizzone 8)

“America was an idea long before it became a place, and as an idea it enveloped all hopes of complete freedom, real equality, absence of persecution, and unlimited potential for living life to its fullest” (Gardaphé, Leaving Little Italy 13). It was the belief in the potential for a better life that drove the *siciliani* from the land of their birth to cross an ocean and settle in a new and alien world. Little notion did they have that in this New World they would be the aliens, that whatever potential that existed would not be offered to them.

As they arrived in the United States, the immigrants from southern Italy were funneled into the mills of New England to work off the price of passage. Arriving as “wops” or “WithOut Papers,” the term literally signified that they came without obligations or offers of employment, a signification that was usually false or misleading, as the immigrants were not about to do anything to jeopardize their chances of being allowed to leave Ellis Island to finally enter the New World by telling the officials that they indeed arrived as indentured servants. An alternate signification, visible only in the view offered by hindsight, was a wiping blank of the arriving immigrants, stripping them of history and meaning. Gardaphé, continuing his discussion of illiteracy and southern Italians, has commented that the those who came to *La Merica* were hoping that immigration would lead to the acquisition of literacy and by extension some measure of control over their lives. “Acquiring the ability to signify the immigrant experience would become the key to shifting from the powerlessness of an oral culture ruled by destiny to a written culture in which one could exercise greater control over one’s life” (Italian Signs 27).

The anticipated control, however, was not immediately forthcoming. Italian immigrants faced a number of barriers entering the country, not the least of which was the

indentured servitude to which they had consigned themselves. The story of the emigration/immigration of Gaetanu Girgenti, Papa Santuzzu's eldest son is a multi-layered example of how Ardizzone combines the fantastic with the historically accurate.

No sooner has Gaetanu left his village than he enters in the mythic realm by way of a forest. In Italian folklore, "the forest is in many cases the place of encounter with characters who assist the hero."¹⁰ Immediately after Gaetanu has entered the forest, he encounters three old women who asked him for food, along with quoting some sage Sicilian proverb: *cu dormi nun pigghia pisci* – he who slumbers doesn't catch fish, the Italian version of "the early bird gets the worm." The symbolism of the fish the woman is speaking of as well as the fish that Gaetanu offers to feed them is strong in Sicilian folklore. One need only recall the tale of Colapesce, though there are certain other stories in which the fish plays a significant role.¹¹ In addition, Ardizzone has rendered the phrase in the Sicilian language as opposed to Italian, giving a distinctly Sicilian-ness, or *sicilianità*, to play on Gardaphé's term, to the passage.

After Gaetanu empties his basket to feed the women, he discovers a thread that has fallen from his mother's sleeve. The thread grows into a fat thick rope, which is used during the course of the narrative as a physical and metaphorical tie between the family and Sicily. The Sicilian language itself, as it makes its appearances throughout the stories, is also a tie between family and homeland, surfacing in quotidian communication and in the folk elements that populate the novel. The old women, for their part, become gold coins that

¹⁰ "...la foresta è [...] in molti casi il luogo d'incontro con i personaggi che aiutano l'eroe" (Caprettini 95). The translation is my own.

¹¹ Caprettini 296. "Il pesce [...] rappresenta infatti l'animale totem, che non può essere ucciso: quasi sempre infatti, esso si rivolge al pescatore chiedendo di essere risparmiato o indicando cosa si deve fare di lui per trarne il maggior vantaggio. [...] Talora il pesce stesso è il veicolo della ricompensa: va ricordato che nel Medioevo al pesce fu talora riconosciuto valore di moneta. [...] In altri casi, in virtù delle sue prerogative, il pesce aiuta o sostituisce il protagonista nell'esecuzione di imprese altrimenti impossibile." Examples provided by Caprettini include "*Arsieri, Cecchino cervello fino, Due figli di pescatore a palazzo reale, Chi fa e chi non fa, Il basilicone, La Fortuna e il Galantuomo, La cavallina fatata.*" (296, 297)

Gaetanu uses to pay his passage on a steamship to the New World. They alone, however, are not enough: "...after borrowing many more coins at an incomprehensibly high rate of interest from a *struzzi* who hung upside-down by his feet from the ceiling, and with his long fingernails scooped the marrow from Gaetanu's bones while sipping a cup of his hot, terrified blood" (12). The dynamic shifts quickly from the helpful witches who reward good behavior to the evil and greedy blood-sucker who symbolizes the money-lenders who 'paid' the immigrants' way to *La Merica*.

The trope of the old women/witches continues with two of Gaetanu's brothers, Luigi and Salvatore, both of whom offer the women succor in the form of fish and bread again. Though the old women plead for the rope, the brothers remember the injunction of Gaetanu never to let go of the rope. They hold tight, and over the voyage on the ocean, feel all the relatives in New York pulling them. "The rope is *la famigghia*, see? Each of us is a thread, wound up in it. Before you were born, a rope connected me to you. One still does, *figghiu miu*" (22). Yet again language, family, and folktales are woven together in an intricate web.

These passages demonstrate the way that Ardizzone is able to use folklore as a narrative style both to "rediscover an ethnic aesthetic reflective of a hybrid identity" (Bona 6) as well as relate the historical conditions of the Italian immigrants in America. Upon their arrival, the fragmentation resulting in that hybrid identity would begin.

Welcome to *La Merica, paesanu*. You are now Italian.

"I am a *cristianu*, a *Sicilianu* from the province they call Girgenti, loyal only to my family and to myself." (Ardizzone 38)

As the immigrants were lacking the ability to articulate themselves as a group, most of them being illiterate and facing linguistic difficulties, they found themselves assigned to

the preexisting confines of the space allotted them. America did not divide the Italian immigrants into the discrete groupings from which they had come. While it was true that most of the immigrants were from southern Italy, the strong feeling of *campanilismo* meant that the ties felt were only particularly strong in small concentrated areas. These links were strongly connected with their language. So-called standard Italian was the language of the *signori* and the *baruni*, thus the language of their oppressors. D’Acierno has described the difference between what informed their behavior and those mores and norms that ruled other parts of Italy.

Their culture was not oriented toward writing (the text) or the Word – official, bourgeois, the law. They in fact systematized the exclusion from, and refusal of, the official wor(l)d by the practice of *omertà* (a word derived from *omo* [man] and originally meaning manliness or self-reliance, but coming to have the primary meaning of a code of silence and dissimulation observed by criminals when interrogated by the law and by which they maintained a conspiratorial network of protection. The term also has the secondary meaning of the wall of silence erected by a subculture or subaltern class to mask the secrets of its inner life from the intrusiveness of the ‘Other.’) (xlviii)¹²

Both senses of the *omertà* practiced by the communities of southern Italy are significant when examining how problematic the integration of individual communities was upon their arrival in America. They were no longer *Siciliani*, *Abruzzesi*, *Calabresi* - they were now assembled into one large collection of Italians. At the time, Italy was a relatively new concept, having only been around in its entirety as a state since the *Risorgimento* in 1861. So Italians immigrants had the dual task of coming to terms with themselves as Italians and as Italian American. In Italy, ironically enough, with the still loose connections between the regions, Sicilians didn’t have the immediacy of the experience that they faced when coming to the United States. It was presented to them that they were part of this group

¹² This is a false etymology. *Omertà* does not derive from *omo*, but from *umiltà*, meaning “submission to a higher authority,” e.g. the Mafia.

known as Italians. Malpezzi and Clements have explained that in spite of the very real regional loyalties and hostilities, the interaction that groups from different regions experienced in their jobs or churches worked to foster a sense of commonality. “They [...] began to recognize their shared identity in distinction from other ethnic groups they might encounter, especially the Irish. This resulted in their beginning to think and talk of themselves as Italians, a considerable expansion of provincial horizons¹³” (37).

While there was a strengthening of national ties, there was an increased feeling of division not only between the Italians and Irish, but between the Italians as a group and the white bosses that had become their new *baruni*. The separation between ‘white’ and ‘Italian’ fed itself – the cultural codes of the southern Italian kept the communities insular, and the prejudice with which they were treated supported their belief in inequality under the law.

The insularity of the communities could not, however, remain entirely unchallenged. Cultural codes worked because everyone operated by them – but by transporting a smaller community into a larger one, the cohesion required for the continued functioning of those codes was lost. The Italians, or at least the southern Italians, may have intended for the codes to remain intact, but the reality of their situation shook a great deal of the social mores that had been their grounding. Belmonte comments, “America liberates. But when it liberates the Italian American, it creates a self that is painfully divided...” (16) That division moved in to challenge gender roles, familial ties, and traditions.

Ardizzone’s narrative contains several episodes in which the Italians as a stereotyped group are presented and the divisions beginning to break apart the self are made manifest. There is one particularly telling instance that combines the former and the latter in which

¹³ Nelli, Italians in Urban America, 39-40, quoted in Malpezzi and Clements 37

Salvatore Girgenti, the last of Papa Santuzzi's sons to make the journey to *La Merica* and New York, is called on the carpet by his family because of neglecting to bring their father with him as he was instructed to do. He has broken the cardinal rule, that injunction that demands the unity of the family. In searching for a job, he comes across a sign, which is read to him, that sets the price of labor. One rate for white, another for 'colored,' and a third, the lowest, for 'Italian.' Upon inquiring how it is that one gets to be white, he is met with a barrage of laughter and angry explanations – the Italian is a sewer rat that pours off the ships in the harbor to steal and kidnap. “In the newspapers they say we're lawless and care nothing for our children, whom we'd sell into slavery just as easily as we'd wink, and that we have a natural and inborn inclination toward criminality. They think we're all ignorant peasants, dirty fleas reeking of garlic, hardly fit to blacken their boots” (155).

All of the folktales that Ardizzone inserts into his narrative are alike in that it is this image and idea of Italians that they contradict and take apart. In his re-imagining and retelling of the immigration of Sicilians and other Italians to the United States, he provides the reader with an alternate narrative. Gardaphé has pointed out that in a number of narratives of Italian American literature, “folkloric elements, when present, are used to deconstruct the dominant/official culture” (*Italian Signs* 17). The tales demonstrate the importance of family and adherence to the cultural codes that are the laws among their society and show that far from being ignorant, the Italians brought with them a rich cultural history, though most of it was oral instead of literate. Both language and the tales are links in and among family as well as being links to the Old World.

You may be white, sir, provided you adhere to these conditions.

“I could already see some of the fear of our feelings in the eyes of our children, who I realized then were *menzi e menzi*, half and half, half like us, half like the New Land. What had we done by coming here? I wondered.” (Ardizzone 327-328)

Integration proved to be a challenge to the Italian American diaspora, and Ardizzone speaks to the particular case of Sicilian American. Belmonte, in his thoughtful essay on “The Contradictions of Italian American Identity,” explains the conditions of change that integration necessitated:

The predicament of the Italian American was a predicament of loss. How to relinquish the medieval mind, with its sensuousness, its wisdom, its religious devotions, its oaths, its belief in envy-motivated magic and the power of incantation? How to become a ‘modern American’ and condemn the old country’s traditions of blood feud and vengeance? How to downplay its emphasis on virginal chastity and maternal sacrifice? (15-16)

The ‘medieval mind,’ as Belmonte characterizes it, was an inextricable part of the character of the Sicilians who came to America at the beginning of the twentieth century and is reflected in a number of stories of In the Garden of Papa Santuzzu. What Ardizzone does, however, is show that mind’s capacity for morality and humanity and how it is equal to that of the ‘modern and rational mind’ the Sicilian Americans encountered in their new home.

Ardizzone often uses the structure of a tale within a tale, telling the story of an individual related to Papa Santuzzu interspersed with another tale, this one usually more fantastic, that relates to the framing story. There are two such occasions that these stories deal with the inviolability of women and virginal chastity. Tucked into a tale called “The Botanist’s Assistant,” Ardizzone tells a story of *una bona fimmina* who took a lover who was cursed to live half his life as a plant (162-185). The woman’s brothers, to recapture the honor they feel the family has lost, destroy the plant, resulting in her decision to give a blood sacrifice to save her lover. Her lover, when becoming a man again, kills himself to be with his slain love. Fiabe italiane contains a tale, “Rosmarina,” that mirrors Ardizzone’s almost

exactly, excepting a few important details. In “Rosmarina,” it is a king who takes as his lover a woman who emerges from the rosemary plant one day as he is playing his flute. His sisters, out of jealousy, beat the girl almost to death when she emerges from the plant while they are playing the flute. In order to save the girl, the gardener (the king has left him in charge of the plant while he is away) takes the blood from a dragon and fat from his neck, rendering her hale and hearty when the king arrives back in the country (Calvino 895-898).

In Ardizzone’s version, the beating is not about jealousy, but about honor. Ardizzone reverses the genders of the protagonists and fixes the timeless tale in a specific historical circumstance, subjecting it to the current governing mores and mindset. The sacrifice required to save the plant-lover is greater, as all the blood of the other lover is required. Knowing the story of “Rosmarina” lends a greater depth to Ardizzone’s version, emphasizing the changes that he has made and underlining their importance for the social framework of his novel.

The “Rosmarina” variant is significant also when considering the tale that unfolds around it. Assunta Girgenti, the daughter of Papa Santuzzu, falls in love with a white boy, a botanist at a nearby university, who is well connected and fairly wealthy. Things take their natural course, and Assunta conceives. The boy’s father stridently and vociferously objects to his son’s decision to propose marriage. He threatens Assunta with deportation, he insults her while looking at his son: “They spilled onto our clean, white shores like vermin, like steerage rats, the garbage and the scum of southern Europe, and our great nation stupidly accepted them. But that doesn’t mean we want to marry them. We have our standards to uphold!” (182) The same smallness that crowds the medieval mind keeps the rational modern one tightly closed as well. Just as the family of the *bona fimmina* decided that their honor

had suffered when their sister conceived, so did the father of Assunta's lover feel his honor impugned by her willingness to sully his family with her offspring.

Ardizzone includes in this episode a poem that appeared in Life magazine in 1911, the father of the botanist pointing out to his son how foolish it would be to soil their bloodline with one of these sorts: "A pound of spaghetti' and a red-a bandan' / A stilet' and a corduroy suit; / Add garlic wat make for him stronga da mus' / And a talent for black-a da boot!" The illustration that accompanied the poem shows a smartly dressed man sitting in a shoeshine chair, leaning over the head of an ape-like man (the Italian). The primate-like appearance is emphasized by the way that the man is in turn leaned over his customer's shoes, his shoulders hunched in a fashion suggestive of a gorilla, his mouth puckered as if to blow the dirt off the shoes. That such a poem with its accompanying image could have appeared in a national magazine with as wide a circulation as Life had at the time shows the extent to which the national stereotype of Italians had permeated society and the degree to which it was accepted.

In such an environment, any sort of social or economic advancement was wrought with certain challenges that demanded a tremendous sacrifice. To make it in the New World, to join the ranks of the privileged, Italian Americans were faced with a choice that would have far-reaching effects on subsequent generations.

They have had to trade in or hide any customs that have been depicted as quaint, but labeled as alien, to prove equality to those above them on the ladder of success. In this way, Italian-Americans have become white, but a different kind of white than those of the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. Italian Americans have become whites on a leash. And as long as they behave themselves (they act white), as long as they accept the images of themselves as presented in the media (they do not cry defamation), and as long as they stay within corporate and cultural boundaries (don't identify with other minorites), then they will be allowed to remain white." (Gardaphé, Leaving Little Italy 125)

The Italian immigrants to the United States were thus presented with a choice: conform (and lose your language and customs) or stagnate.

A Benediction:

“If these rhymes and stories miss their aim or fail, / Cast blame on the teller and not on the tale. / And may the Holy Mother bless and heed most dear / All whose eyes read these words, all those gathered here.” (Ardizzone 339)

Thus does Ardizzone’s version of one family’s immigration to the New World bring the Old World into the New, enriching the tapestry, strengthening the threads, repairing the frayed edges of history. Sicily comes with the immigrants across the ocean, appearing in language, folktales, and customs to create a more complete vignette of the Italian immigration to the United States and sharpens the picture blurred by time, assimilation, and loss.

Chapter Two

Italy Speaks: From Fables to Fathers

Monardo's engagement with the Italian language differs somewhat from Ardizzone's, though both feature it explicitly in their narratives. Both authors write of and as Italian Americans, and both investigate and explicate the dynamics of multiple allegiances. William Boelhower writes of the interrogation that an ethnic subject must apply to that very sign of his dual identity, his name. He says, "By discovering the self implicit in the surname, one produces an ethnic seeing and understands himself as a social, an ethnic, subject. Implicit in one's family name is a story of origins, a particular systems of relations" (81). This 'story of origins' must include language, for in order to see oneself as a member of a social group, one must be able to articulate one's place in it, and one must use the language of the group to do that. Monardo explores what happens when the languages that one can use to identify oneself are so rigidly defined that any attempts to change the confines, as must happen in immigrant communities between generations, leads to disruption. Her narrative, as Ardizzone's, looks at history through the lens of language, but it is a different kind of lens. Whereas Ardizzone retold history in a voice that was always both directly expressing and indirectly implying its roots, Monardo brushes history by focusing on the Italian language, as well as English, and her characters' relations to them.

Boelhower explains further that "in other words, the system of relations making up the history of the family name is a dynamic system of ethnic recognition whose constructive

matrices generate ethnic meaning. To speak of ethnicity, therefore, is to speak of ancestry, but as a pragmatic strategy of identification” (81). This dynamism is a key component of Monardo’s narrative. She examines the history of the family name through her protagonist’s relationship to it, her Italian family, and the Italian language. In doing so, she also limns the placement of each generation vis-à-vis the larger community within which they operate: Giulia (the protagonist) and her larger social sphere versus the insularity of her father’s and aunts’ Italian American community, Giulia in Italy versus her father’s Italy. Giulia’s excursion to Italy is necessitated by the need to break the rigidity of the identity that has been determined for her by her father and his community.

Monardo speaks as Giulia, in a pseudo first-person narrative voice that invites a different kind of reading than does Ardizzone. Ardizzone writes a picaresque adventure of immigration and integration while Monardo explores the development of a later generation Italian American woman. Nevertheless, the narrative progression can be traced through the authors’ employment of the Italian language.

In the Beginning, There was Tradition

“We are all Giulias, the girls in our family, named, as a sign of respect and according to tradition, after our grandmother Nonna Giulia.” (Monardo 1)

Following Boelhower’s placement of significance on the family name, Monardo begins her story by establishing the importance of her protagonist’s name. She posits Italy and its history and entailments immediately into the American self of Giulia Di Cuore, thus creating the dilemma of dual allegiances. In the opening pages of the novel, Monardo makes explicit the difficulties faced by an individual pulled between two worlds and the challenges

through which the character will develop. Giulia's initial relation to the Italian language is formulated within the confines of her father's identity. "When I was young, the Italian me was the voice of my father, Nicola" (8). Her articulation of her voice as an Italian American is never her own; she is continually denied the ability to root an identity in one part of her being. Italian is coded as foreign and untrustworthy, but those characteristics war with Giulia's strong connection with her father, fortified by her mother's death when she was still young. Nicola and Giulia's aunts become her primary means of socialization, a socialization that is problematized by the orientation of her family's worldview and continual evocation of a place and culture that seem frighteningly other to Giulia.

The close-knit social environment in which Giulia grows up is an Italian enclave in the middle of America, Homefield, Ohio. Despite the fact that their home is located in the cradle of the American heartland, cultural transmutation and assimilation for Nicola, and by extension, Giulia, is mitigated by the inward focus of the Italian community. Loriggio comments, "The Little Italies or the Chinatowns of North America are forward-moving (they are not Italy or China), but they are distinct from their surroundings because they are also past oriented, refer to an elsewhere, and because of the effort that goes into retaining, into representing that past or that elsewhere" (10). Giulia's father conjures up the specter of a disciplining homeland that comes complete with sages that furnish admonitions and aphorisms designed to encourage certain behavioral norms and cultural codes that guide social interactions. Nicola, whose "Italian voice had absolute authority," forbade her to immerse herself in mourning for the death of her mother: "*Chi si ferma è perduto*" (12). Vacillating responses elicited the ghost of Dante, "*E qual è quei che disvuol ciò che*

volle...,”¹⁴ Giulia’s father counting on the wisdom of the father of the modern Italian language to still hold currency in the American theater of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Nicola calls forth an Italy situated in historic time, static and monolithic.

Linguistic disunity is indicative of the larger forces of national disunity that pervade Giulia’s childhood. Her father and her aunts come to represent Italy and an alien culture; America, on the other hand, assumes the characteristics of another as well, encroaching on the half and half existence that Giulia lives. The language of linguistic and cultural conflict permeates the novel. Nicola’s experience with the English language is described in terms of an offensive: “at first the English language felt to him so unpredictable and aggressive that it reminded him of the enemy bomb attacks that had fallen over Naples when he was medical student there” (13). As an immigrant, Nicola felt the pressure to master the English language, yet there existed an equal and opposing pressure to retain the old world and language as well. Giulia feels constantly pulled between the two countries, engendering feelings of anger and fear. She spends time with her aunts when her mother is sick, responding in English to their inquiries and comments in Italian, out of loyalty to her mother. She returns to them after her mother’s funeral and feels that in the embrace of their old-world sensibilities, she loses sight of America.

The buttonholes of her black dress were stretched, showing the slip underneath, and I knew that suddenly I was closer to Italy again. With my mother I had been firmly planted in America, but here I was with my aunt and with Cetta, who was also dressed in black, and they were asking me, with those echoes of Italy in their voices, ‘*Cara*, are you hungry?’ Their mourning dresses still held the faint scent of the cedar closets. Things from the past that

¹⁴ Monardo 40 - the attribution to Dante does not, however, identify the precise source: “he quoted from Dante, about some sufferer in Hell who keeps changing his mind.”

had been stored away for years were being pulled out. I saw America receding. (23)

Giulia is torn between the soft cadences of her aunts and father and the sure Ohio-tinged English of her mother. In a subtle evocation of Italy at a significant point in the life of her protagonist, Monardo demonstrates how the linguistic disjunction reflects the larger disjunction of identification.

The Italy of Giulia's father is a world indistinctly drawn: "a place defined by time and memory more than geography" (14). Its spatial situation renders that Italy particularly personal. It claims association with her father, but taunts Giulia with voices that both call and deny. "I suspected that the world he created with words was a mirage. Yet, I willingly drank from it. I listened to his stories because I wanted to conquer my father's Italian-ness, which unsettled me, threatened me and also was my home. And I listened because I was afraid that my father would wake up one morning and realize that I was foreign to him" (16). There is a part of Giulia that wishes to inhabit the Italian side of herself completely in order to retain an identification with her father, but that part of her is constantly at odds with her American surroundings. As she matures and the American side becomes more entrenched, the war intensifies. America becomes a threat to the enclave that is created after the death of Giulia's mother. Nicola's female relatives close ranks to protect him and Giulia "from the Russians, from hunger, from American food, from America itself" (25).

The Invasion of America

"By the pricking of my thumbs / Something wicked this way comes." (Shakespeare, Macbeth, IV, i, 44-45)

Despite the efforts of her relatives to maintain the insularity of her environment, as Giulia matures, problems begin to occur that highlight the divide between the cultural outlook of Nicola and that of the parents of Giulia's peers. As Fred Gardaphé has noted, "there are two cultural codes that govern public behavior: *omertà*, the code of silence that governs what is spoken or not spoken about in public, and *bella figura*, the code of proper presence or social behavior that governs an individual's public presence." (Italian Signs 12) Nicola's notion of what was appropriate behavior for a young girl differed significantly from the message that Giulia received from the families of her peers. Giulia comments, "When I was fourteen, America started to invade my father's house" (31). Nicola's house is not American; Giulia feels like an inhabitant in a world that is neither America nor Italy, but some island caught between both.

Italian is constructed as a voice of constraint that protects but alienates as well. Giulia says of her father,

[His voice was] filling me with fear of everything I wanted, scaring me and scaring me until it seemed that the things I wanted were evil, my friends were bad, that world beyond our house, over our hedges was terrifying....[yet] when I heard his key in the door, there was that tremendous feeling of relief – a lightening in my shoulders, a loosening in my throat. He was home, he was back from the world, and I was safe. (37)

America is looming in the distance of Nicola's Italian haven, and Giulia agitates to be free even as she struggles with the need to overcome her father's foreignness and establish a relationship that does not situate her and her father at such opposite poles. English is her primary mode of expression; she refuses to become conversant in the language that constrains her through the voice of her father, which is itself continually set at odds with the world around it. Whenever Monardo juxtaposes Nicola's voice with the environment, it is

always expressed in terms of opposition, and always prefaced with the adjective “Italian.” His association with Italian is prohibitive; it prevents Giulia from completely connecting with him. Through Nicola and Giulia, Monardo explores generationally the dynamics of the Italian American family: the centrality of family to the “core and identity” of Italian Americans, the “guilt in longing for distance from family,” and the “resentment for the lack of understanding” (The Dream Book 17) that merge to contribute to the conflicted character of individuals with a multi-ethnic affiliation.

The Courtyard of Dreams is structured in the form of a *Bildungsroman* and follows the formula, moving a protagonist from a given isolated environment to a wider social or geographical space and then returning to the original space. The insularity of the initial world that Giulia flees to go to Italy, which becomes transforming environment, is produced predominantly by the mindset that rules her father. His worldview is informed by a picture of Italy at the time that he departed for America. He speaks often of the war and the need to cleave to the sheltering *famiglia*. Loriggio writes that the separation that immigrant communities experience from their origins does not allow them to continually renew their conceptions of state-culture and forces them to attach a new culture and language to their identity. This in turn affects the mental image of the state they left. “As entities equally bound to and autonomous from the origin, [immigrant communities] can refract their own transformations on to it. The dispersed, pluralized, diasporic *little* Italies can [...] reinterpret Italian history, even remold it in their own image” (20). Thus Nicola’s Italy is not only a picture of an Italy that has remained trapped in the year that he left it, not having returned since he came to America, but it is also an Italy onto which he has projected all the

difficulties and fears that he has encountered in his new country. Everything that America represents that is threatening to his life and insular environment becomes reversed when applied to Italy. Cultural codes that regulate social interactions in America are manifest in an opposing context in Nicola's Italy. Because the concerns that Nicola possesses as a parent are heightened and complicated by his foreign environment and status as an outsider, aphorisms that guide or suggest become dictates carved in stone that serve as the only way to maintain the cloak of Italian respectability. "*Una ragazza per bene non lascia il petto paterno prima che si sposi*" (Malpezzi & Clements 68) becomes widened in scope, forbidding not only the pre-marital cohabitation but also casual dating and coed outings.

The alternate power structure that might have existed, the presence of a female in the household, possibly would have mitigated the severity of the injunctions around Giulia's social life. Bona explains that "because she was the center of the household, the Italian American mother transmitted to her children, especially to her daughters, whom she mentored, the values of cooperation, interdependence, hard work, and assertiveness" (64). Monardo creates her narrative with the noticeable absence of the Italian American mother figure. Hendin opines that as "traditional family cohesiveness is based on the centrality of the mother..." customary relationships in an Italian family change when confronted with a different environment.¹⁵ Monardo posits her characters in a non-traditional environment that invites extremes because of the lack of a strong female character to balance the male. This

¹⁵ Hendin 25. "Traditional family cohesiveness is based on the centrality of the mother and fixed gender roles that emphasize marriage and motherhood for women and authority and physical strength for men." Hendin explores the changes that family relationships must undergo when something disrupts the traditionally assigned roles within a family, i.e. gay or lesbian characters, non-traditional lives

imbalance disturbs the traditional Italian American “master narrative,”¹⁶ shifting the focus from the culture of patriarchy to the negotiation of identity by a member of a group traditionally represented solely by its position vis-à-vis the male members of the family.

Monardo also highlights the clash between group and individual identification that is aggravated by the emphasis the Italian and American cultures place on each. Giulia’s search to find herself has to be accomplished outside of the boundaries of the intricately connected matrix of her family. In her essay “The Epic Quest for the Self,” Helen Barolini discusses her own search for the self through writing. “How more dramatically come up against the concept of *la famiglia* or ethnic identity which is so ingrained in Italian-Americans? Part of our particularly complex fate is how to be ourselves without the tug of the larger, sheltering but limiting, group.” (Adjusting Sites 262) Monardo repeats this search at the level of her narrator, who journeys to Italy at seventeen for the first time in search of the other half of her identity.

In which we encounter *il Bel Paese, una bella lingua* and *un bell’uomo*

Alison Goeller has extensively explored the theme of the female returning to the ancestral homeland, “the Italian American woman who travels in order to reconnect with her ancestral heritage, to discover a new identity, and to recover what perhaps had been lost in the acculturation of her mothers, grandmothers, and great grandmothers, in a way reversing their emigration” (76), in her study of Italian American women authors who have returned to

¹⁶ Hendin 28. “The master narrative of Italian-American family life is the story of the authority of the father and the cohesion of the family.” Based on earlier arguments in the same essay, one could extrapolate that the authority of the father and the cohesion of the family also entails fixed roles (gendered) for other members of the household.

Italy to give voice to the other half of their hyphenated existence. Giulia's sojourn is an attempt as well to reconstruct her mother, an Italian American woman who had managed to negotiate for herself a space in the family when she was alive. Her mother was born on the ocean between the two continents and symbolically straddles the two cultures. The stories that her mother told her "grounded [her], painted a landscape [she'd] step into easily one day," whereas her father's stories "pulled [her] too far away" (14). Giulia's trip to Italy offers her the opportunity to possess an Italian voice of her own in an Italy that seems tangible and accessible rather than one that would always be one step too far away. Hendin has said of the ethnic aesthetic that it can "incorporate the past in new narratives that exhibit original synthesis of ethnic identity, narrative strategies, modes of realism, and symbolism. The means of that synthesis is language, which mirrors cultural interactions most explicitly in bilingualism, incorporates multiple linguistic and storytelling styles, and focuses on the individual as the site for crises of culture as well as character" (21). Giulia's acclimation into the Italian language allows her access to that synthesis and gives her the opportunity to negotiate and determine her cultural and linguistic allegiances. Until she makes the move to Italy, she is trapped in a space that does not allow her to form roots with either side of herself (or the Atlantic).

Giulia's arrival in Italy is less than auspicious; in the darkened room in her relatives' house she feels "invisible." She has not yet begun to create an Italian identity that derives from interaction with a different group than that to which she was accustomed at home. She must excavate her *italianità*, which is still covered in American sediment. Yet she is not allowed to cower, as her role in this new social environment is no longer the one that

determined her behavior and allowed/encouraged her silence in America. Her relatives cover her with new Italian voices, and Giulia begins to change her mental images of Italy and Italian. The Italian of her relatives rings with the music of the present and evokes no pictures of the past, instead situating the listener in the immediate vicinity, demanding attention. “In Homefield, when we were all together for family dinners, my father played Italian music. [...] While hamburgers and hot dogs cooked on the grill, the back yard filled with old songs that had been popular in Italy right after the war. During my first meal in Italy there was no Italian music, just Italian voices, and the clicks of forks and knives” (71). Instead of the one-dimensional nostalgic construction of Italy, Giulia experiences a textured, three-dimensional, and fleshed out experience of Italian. She quickly relaxes in the presence of the “Contadina Ladies” and her cousins. She recognizes the opportunity that lies before her. “I began to realize that with these strangers I could be anyone, become anyone, change my life” (73). Instead of the stable and established narrative that she was offered living in America, Giulia is offered the chance in Italy to write her own story and reinvent the Italian side of herself. She abandons the insularity of the Italy created by her father’s stories and steps into the wide world in which her Italian voice forms her own Italian surroundings.

Italian shifts from a voice of self-containment to self-expression. Her environment seems to have its own melody that continually reaches out and reaffirms her connection and inclusion. Names that once signaled foreign or alien suddenly attain a musicality that links them to the new rhythm of Giulia’s life. The open vowels at the end of appellations that once alienate now include.

Those Italians on the beach were like snake charmers with their own language, pulling me out of myself, drawing me toward them. The language

was part of the air at the beach, a constant breeze of vowel sounds and lulling l-l-ls. As I lay on the sand, Italian voices hovered over me, surrounded me, sharpening my ear, shaping my tongue, changing me as much and as quickly as the sun was changing the color of my skin. (92)

The riotous ocean of divide that threatened to drown her in America becomes suddenly calm and buoyant under the enchanting cadences of the Italian language. The silences of her home that were punctuated with sharp utterances in a foreign language are exchanged for an environment of constant communication in which silences only infrequently part the steady stream of conversations and sounds. Giulia immerses herself completely in the Lethean waters, washing away the maelstrom of emotions that accompanied the vitriolic arguments prior to her departure and bathing in the sure steady rhythms of her relatives' speech.

There is an openness and willingness to communicate that Giulia finds in Italy that offers a stark contrast to her life in America. The differences in her relationship with the Italian language is indicative of the way that each group from which she takes her identity relates to the Italian language. In America, Italian is a secret language; it is a mode of communication open only to a select few who possess the cultural and ethnic background necessary to unlock its mysteries. It tantalizes Giulia with membership in the group but does not allow her full access. In as much as it is an exclusive language for Giulia in both the privileged and restricted sense, it marks as well its participants' status as existing outside of the dominant group, and thus marginalizes them. Nicola and his relatives are no longer part of the dominant discourse. In America, Giulia is doubly alienated, not able to separate herself from her ethnic heritage and language but unable to participate in it as well. In Italy, however, Italian is the language of communication. Monardo's novel is filled with passages that reinforce the openness and accessibility of the words that Giulia uses to communicate

that summer. Giulia recognizes the easy conversations and the facility with which her relatives are able to relate with one another. “Maybe it was their language that helped them. It wasn’t the frustrated idiom of immigrants, who know, no matter how much they are loved at home, there is a world beyond that they are not able to latch on to completely. The Italians sounded so graceful with one another, and their language connected them to the world outside” (131). When Giulia hears her name called by her family at home, she feels that it is a demand by her relatives for something that she is unable to give them. Surrounded by her family in Italy, however, her name is one of many variations thereof, and always draws her into the circle. As Goeller points out, Giulia “discovers an openness and freedom of expression,”¹⁷ lacking in her relationship with her father in America, that stems from the continually open channels in the communication of her Italian relatives. “In Italy, there were no secrets” (91).

As Giulia begins to grow comfortable in the bosom of her Italian family, she is allowed access to their relationship with the Italian tongue. Sounds that once confounded her spring forth easily; Italian begins to “taste so good in [her] mouth” (125). Her nocturnal peregrinations through dreamland are in Italian; the vestiges of sleep present no linguistic contest or barrier to voicing an Italian good morning. Giulia is rarely left to her own devices, instead being continually integrated into quotidian exchanges. Her involvement in the cultural parlance of her relatives serves to develop and refine her newfound *italianità*. As

¹⁷ Goeller 84 - Goeller’s article, “Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy,” explores the writings of modern Italian American women writers that use the trope of homecoming, that is, returning to Italy, to “give voice to their hyphenated [Italian-American] experience. She examines Monardo’s novel in particular in terms of the struggles that Italian American women face when they arrive in Italy carrying the expectations of a previous generation.

Belmonte maintains, “identity is the fruit of intense participation in relationships and groups” (8). Giulia forges her new identity through her association with her Italian relatives. Belmonte continues to say that, “the south Italian word for a child who cannot yet speak is *una creatura* (meaning animal or creature). The implication is that selfhood and full membership in the social group are possible only in discourse” (9). Monardo figures Giulia in her pre-Italy existence as a sort of *creatura*, because she could not participate in the discourse that would allow her to create a selfhood and attain full membership in the closed ranks of her Italian American family. Giulia’s move to Italy endows her with a different group in which to take part. By adding her voice to the multiplicity of voices that form the music of her Italian summer, she weaves an intricate tapestry from the solitary thread that was her identity.

Giulia’s embrace of her new existence is symbolized in her relationship with Luca, a boy that she meets through her cousin. When Luca quotes Dante to her, it is no longer “that enigmatic language that [her] father used now and then to teach [her] a lesson (80);” instead, “*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita, mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, ché la diritta via era smarrita*” functions not only as poetic comment upon their sylvan surroundings, but also a statement of being at a point of possibility. By reintroducing Dante in a different context, Monardo demonstrates the way that Giulia’s relation to Dante is altered by the shift in her relation to his language. Dante no longer represents to Giulia an archaic voice speaking from the vague realm of her father’s Italy, a place that seems to have only a singular temporal position. Instead, Dante becomes the portable sage, ready to be extricated from one’s pocket and applied to the current situation or moment, providing pithy aphorisms that have

relevance at any number of times. The relationship with Luca also represents much of the newfound freedom that Giulia experiences in Italy. Her behavior is not as regulated; a certain amount of social interaction between the sexes is expected, even, at times, encouraged. The difference in the norms governing social behavior in the Italy that Giulia experiences and the one that her father invoked is marked. Luca becomes the focus of her newly forged identity. He is the recipient of the Italian words that her tongue has grown deft in articulating. The physicality of their relationship is also new ground and both a product of and an extension of her relationship with her family. “The more I loved Luca, the more I loved my family” (129). The gulf between her desires and allowances is not the wide abyss that she felt living in the boundaries set by her father and aunts; the guilt and shame that she felt when she sought associations outside of her family in America is not present in Italy. Indeed, some members of the family arrange occasions for the two to be together more often. Their association is encouraged. The Giulia that Luca meets and falls for is one created entirely by her family in Italy. Her articulation of self is accomplished in their idiom, manifested in an unabashed, unencumbered voice that expresses an individual with no attachments or history. In the same way that Nicola’s Italy exists out of time, Giulia’s Italian self is not tethered to a temporal spectrum. It is leashed instead to a point in time at which Giulia realized the freedom that she had to shed her Italian American shell and become anything she wanted. Thus the arrival of Giulia’s father in Italy presents a number of complications.

The Invasion of America (again)

Once Nicola appears on the scene, Italian and English become languages of constraint. Giulia is thrilled to be able to speak Italian with her father. She greets him in Italian, he instantly responds in a manner that indicates how he is going to react to her newfound idiom of freedom. “Giulia, your accent is really terrible” (137). He denies her legitimacy in Italian. Their relationships with the language spring from two different experiences, and he is determined that she will not find complete freedom of expression. Her father immediately begins to assert control over her Italian existence. He reminds her of her status as a foreigner by warning her that when vendors hear her speaking Italian they will know that she is a tourist and charge her twice the price for their wares. The presence of her father limits her in both languages. Her Italian is constantly questioned by him; she is limited in her freedom to speak it. The language, however, that he chastises her in, is English. In using her native language to do so, he is denying her membership in the group through which she has formed her identity all summer. He reduces her power to act or speak or think without externally imposed restraints. Nicola asserts his control over her existence as a part of another group. ““Where’s Giulia?’ He said it loudly, full of authority, sure he had the right to demand, to know” (144). He speaks to her often in English, particularly to discuss and question other members of the group. It is a move that divides her loyalties and once again yokes Giulia with the torn alliances that she had thrown off upon arriving in Italy.

Monardo shows the readers how Nicola’s perception of codes of social behavior in Italy no longer corresponds with the mores of society of modern day Italy. He chastises her, in English, “I believe that I know Italy a little bit better than you do, Giulia, and your behavior today - in fact since I arrived in Italy - has been completely unacceptable. Young

women do not act this way here. You know very little about this place” (151). The absurdity of his statement is evinced by the fact that she has spent the entire summer in the bosom of her family and has acted in complete accord with what is considered proper and appropriate behavior. Her behavior has been informed by a different mentality than determines her father’s worldview. Her relatives have urged her, “Especially today, you young people, you can have anything you want. There’s money, no war. And that’s how it should be. Why wait? Live today. Grab your chance” (107). Her father, on the other hand, is still guided by the mindset that prevailed during the war and the immediate postwar era. The difference between the two becomes more apparent as Nicola’s attempt to separate Giulia from the group shows him to be the one out of step with the rhythm of the time. His move is an effort to impose the code of silence, of *omertà*, which places his own family and relatives in the position of outsiders. It confines himself and Giulia to a different space in which their existence cannot be fathomed by the rest of the family and therefore places them outside the realm of trust to be able to understand the Italy that he has created for himself and his daughter and the social codes that accompany it. Giulia attempts to reassert herself and her right to her *italianità* by responding to her father’s criticisms in Italian, forcing him to voice his objections in a language that her family understands. She also manages clandestine meetings with Luca with the help of some machinations by members of her family, endowing her with the feeling of once again having power over her life.

Once she has regained a bit of herself, things begin to improve slightly between Giulia and her father. Their exchanges are not so volatile and emotionally charged. They reach an uneasy and tenuous accord, but one that is based on false pretenses. Giulia has seen

that direct confrontations with her father are fruitless, therefore she has no recourse but to try to steal pieces of herself and her previous relationship with Italian back in secret, outside of the realm of Nicola's control. For his part, her father comments that he "can hear that [her] Italian is improving a bit" (205). It is an attempt to reassert control, because his use of English was unsuccessful in determining the shape of her Italian life. He claims credit for her new Italian, an absurd move, seeing as how the comment comes just a short time after his arrival – this hardly leaves room for such a noticeable improvement in speech that he initially dismissed as being blatantly that of an outsider and non-native. He undertakes to establish himself as a medium between Giulia and the Italian language.

Nicola's reappearance in Italy forces Giulia to reexamine her relationship with her father. She looks at their connection with new eyes, and examines it from a different perspective, able for the first time to separate herself from her father. Though she is still "*Giulia di Nicola*," she realizes that neither of them quite belong in the simplistic confines of what that phrase evokes; theirs is not an uncomplicated father/daughter Italian relationship. Seeing her father surrounded by Italy shows her how much he is no longer a part of that life. "I turned to look and in that first second's glance at him sitting in that Italian room, wearing a madras cotton shirt and whistling 'Seventy-Six Trombones,' I saw that my father was not an Italian. To assimilate means to shed layers, to stop being one thing, to become another. What had we become?" (221) Though Monardo does not explore the conditions of initial immigration as Ardizzone does, she nevertheless addresses it in the personalities of her characters and the dynamics between them. While Nicola may not have been a part of the same wave that brought the Girgenti family to the shores of America, he nevertheless

encountered the same conditions of loss that those immigrants faced. In her poignant poem “apolide,” Liana Miuccio expresses the turmoil that remains part of the psyche: “una volta sola / terra madre / ti ho tradito / lasciandoti / ogni istante / terra matrigna / ti tradisco / restando.”¹⁸ With her newfound perspective, Giulia is able to look at her father not through the eyes of someone who is looking to him as her world, but as a part of a larger world.

Giulia realizes that as much as her father seems to belong neither in Italy nor in America, she too has a relationship with the two countries and languages that is constantly shifting and sliding, taking hold neither in one nor in the other but existing somewhere between. Her existence in America was a constant battle to ignore the Italian part of herself but maintain a relationship with her staunchly Italian father, but her existence in Italy is one that completely leaves behind all of the cares and responsibilities of her life in America. She realizes that she and Nicola are similar individuals and understands that her feelings about him leave her with no choice but to resolve her issues with her identity in a way that will eventually allow her to maintain a part of herself that is him and his struggles: “Once you have known the love of such a powerful father, you can never be rid of the need for him. And if he is gone from you forever, and you can’t find him anywhere, you have no choice but to become that man yourself” (164). Giulia has to take on the challenge that her father met in America and try to find a way of being both Italian and American. She realizes that to repeat her father’s mistakes would be to forge her identity entirely from her ethnic community. Having seen that it does not make for a successful integration into either culture, Giulia must

¹⁸ The poem, “without a country,” was published in a dual language collection of poems. The translation is as follows: “one time only / mother land / I betrayed you / leaving / each instant / foreign land / I betray you / staying

choose another way to straddle both cultures, with a move towards acculturation instead.¹⁹ In order to retain a part of both, though, she must first build an Italian identity that can be integrated with her American one instead of one that denies her existence and upbringing prior to her arrival in Italy.

The final part of the book explores Giulia's new relationship with the Italian language. She moves to Rome to build a life in the urban center of Italian culture, a life in which she is responsible for herself. Giulia faces what D'Acerno calls the

contradictions that inform the late twentieth-century Italian American identity: a destabilized identity that vacillates between Being Italian and Becoming Italian (to be more precise, between Being Italian by descent and Becoming Italian by consent and at a cultural level – by constructing a cultural persona that maintains the creative duality of Italian-Americanness), between maintaining an archeology of the self linked inherently to Italianness and fashioning a postmodern — post-immigrant and post-exilic — identity self-consciously and in terms of the play of those ever-receding traces, traces that can be reinforced by an intellectual and, therefore, ironic return to traditional and contemporary Italian cosmopolitan culture, the very culture from which the immigrants were denied access. (xxxiii)

Giulia gets caught up in being on her own for the first time in Rome. She falls into the existence, soon losing herself in Rome as much as she did on the coast. She becomes part of her environment, accepted as a native by passengers on the bus and vendors on the street. Yet she comes to realize that her existence in Rome, meant to give her a more grounded Italian identity, has completely taken over her identity. She had buried the desires to go to college and have a life as a photographer; when they resurface, it is an epiphany: “I wanted to

¹⁹ Barolini 264. Barolini calls these choices chauvinistic and creative ethnicity. Chauvinistic ethnicity “[stunts] individuality, for one’s personal world [revolves] around one’s ethnic community.” Creative ethnicity, on the other hand, is formed “by retaining the ethnic values of the group that [are] valuable but not at the expense of control over one’s life.” The term “acculturation” is used often in the field of ethnic studies to suggest a kind of creative ethnicity that allows one to retain ethnic heritage and layer it on to the new culture and allegiances; it is usually set in opposition to the concept of “assimilation,” which demands that one part be cast off in order to accommodate a new culture.

be cured of my amnesia: I'd forgotten how I wanted to live my life" (271). It is then that Italian finally becomes for her expression of true independence, no longer the language of unfettered expression, but adult acceptance of responsibility and obligations. She realizes that she can no longer discern which part of her is the true part. She has to see both sides in order to select the aspects that will give her a complete picture of herself.

Throughout the narrative, photography has functioned as a trope for her relation to the languages in which she expresses herself. Her frustration at not being allowed to attend a renowned photography school is part of what sends her to Italy, a place of separation from her father, where she can bide her time until she can truly strike out on her own. Once in Italy, however, her love affair with her new language prompts her to photograph whatever she can to solidify and preserve her attachment with that time. "I photographed the billboards, just because they were covered with Italian words – anything that would help me grasp that place and that time and the days that I was spending..." (127) She frames her new Italian family constantly through the lens of her camera, intent on fixing indelibly the images and moments that are flitting past her. Through the metaphor of the camera, she learns to shape her identity. "I was a young photographer, learning how to frame scenes so that I got just what I wanted, nothing more. Leave things out, frame the shot. Make the picture exactly what you want it to be" (134). The maxims are chanted like incantations, and in much the same way that Italian place names cast their spell over her romantic soul, the viewfinder of her camera frames an illusionary existence that loses its perspective with the arrival of her father. The moment just after he arrives and seems at ease with his surroundings Giulia finds herself out of film, despite her wish to capture and hold the easy

atmosphere that the scene appears to portend. Giulia finds herself disappearing after the arrival of her father and relegated to the margins to observe instead of participate:

With my father and Luca both in the courtyard there were so many Giulias, but they negated one another, canceled one another out, until there was no Giulia down there at all. The laughter, the party, the family – none of it was mine. Up on the balcony, though, the darkness was mine, the distance was mine, the camera in my hand was mine. The only Giulia that couldn't vanish was the one who stood back and watched. (144)

Her new identity is threatened as her father skews the picture of her newly acquired world. Once she is apart from her father once more though, she finds herself again framing her surroundings in Rome, creating the confines of her own environment. She equates her new visual relationship with the world with her linguistic association with it. “My Italian’s getting better. I’m taking tons of pictures” (261). Yet it is the act of photography that reminds her of what she has given up in exchange for her semblance of independence. Instead of the freedom to create the pictures that she wants, she is forced to pay for her life in Rome by working as an assistant to a filmmaker, banished from behind the lens to the sidelines once again. It is only an approximation of the world she had envisioned for herself. When she tries to gain perspective, she finds that her existence such as it is has rendered perspective unattainable. “It was like looking at a photograph and its negative at the same time. I couldn’t tell the difference between the truth and a lie” (274). It is in this dual side image that Giulia finds the articulation of her identity. As Goeller asks, “if [Italian Americans] are not quite Americans in America and they are not Italians in Italy, who are they?”²⁰ Giulia’s existence among Italians, even to the point of her almost losing herself

²⁰ Goeller 77. “An immediate and nearly universal realization that most of these writers come to when they visit the land of their foremothers, whether they are second, third, or fourth generation Italian Americans, is that

among them, was central to her realization that her identity is a spectrum of associations, a series of images that have ties to both parts of her heritage and a dual frame of reference. Her self both creates and is created by these images. The move outside of both the insular world of her father and the singular existence on a beach in an Italian summer lead Giulia to realize that “living in the world with each other, in time and space, we change, move, diversify, put our Self up against the Other to know ourselves and know we are *all* the Other. Just by living we impinge on each other. We invent each other, are part of each other’s transformation.” (Barolini, Chiaroscuro 110) Giulia had to carve out her Italian identity before she could learn the lessons that Rome taught her about herself. Her departure from Rome brings her full circle from the beginning. She left Homefield in anger, yet there is stillness as she leaves Rome so that she can hear the sounds of the Italian night to carry with her as she leaves Italy. Monardo leaves Giulia at a point that echoes the quote from Dante, that places her in the middle of her life in a dark forest – “I stared out the window, but Rome was passing: foggy, wrapped in mist, refusing to show me her face” (289) – and her way has disappeared. Yet she is equipped with the self-knowledge to forge her own path with a more complete picture of herself than she had before her Italian summer.

Monardo and Giulia both employ art as a language of expression. Giulia gains perspective through her pictures and relation to the Italian language, Monardo explores through her writing the themes of identity as they are related to language and perspective. In speaking of the novel written from an ethnic aesthetic, Hendin says that its “ability to bring together political and cultural discourses that originate in historical crises, ranging from

they are not Italians and, in fact, have very little in common with whom they meet.” Goeller goes on to admit that while this may seem obvious, the very fact that it is underscores the unsteady nature of identification.

immigration, to the crises of the Cold War, and the ways in which social forces reverberate in consciousness and affect sensibility all serve to reconstitute meaning as a dynamic relationship among culture, character, and language” (35). Monardo’s narrative explores the intergenerational and cross-cultural conflicts that are particular to the story written in minority discourse. She examines the instability of the notion of identity and its relation to language. Selfhood and language work together at both the authorial level and character level to express “the power of social experience, the role of the writer as a representative ethnic self, and the emancipatory power of the ethnic voice in both imaginative art and self-fashioning” (Hendin 18). Moving her characters through minority and master discourse by way of languages that constrain and liberate, Monardo responds to the explicatory imperative of the ethnic soul.

Folktales and Foreign Tongues: A Final Synthesis

Anna Monardo and Tony Ardizzone explore how the Italian language manifests and operates in the lives of Italian Americans and in their *storie*, in both senses of the word. Ardizzone re-imagines the Italian American immigration story, giving voice and history to those immigrants whose quest to succeed cost them their heritage. Monardo writes of a later generation Italian American who learns Italian and travels to Italy to recover her cultural history. Both authors are themselves involved in the task of sewing back into the tapestry of history what was lost by using the Italian and Sicilian languages, tales, and customs as their threads.

Examining the signs that are employed by ethnic writers to point to their own minority communities provides a deeper and broader understanding of a text. When these

signs point clearly towards a seminal work of literature as they do in the case of Ardizzone, then the signs widen their constellation of meanings even further. A comparative reading of Fiabe italiane and In the Garden of Papa Santuzzu shows how Ardizzone references the tales collected by Calvino, not only in structure but also by taking identifiable, particular tales, such as “Rosmarina,” and specific characters, like Giufà, and reinserting them in his narration of the Girgenti family’s immigration to and insinuation into America. Ardizzone’s *italianità* shows itself to be part of many relationships: between the Italian and Sicilian languages, Italy and America, Italian Americans and America, and Sicilians and Italy. An investigation of the signs and how and why they manifest demonstrates Ardizzone’s self-conscious use of the Italian tales in an American context for a specific reason: to elaborate and expand the immigrant narrative, and by extension expand the idea of American. Monardo’s interrogation of the Italian and American selves that are part of her protagonist also adds to the picture; it contributes its understanding of the multi-generational conflicts that arise out of the dueling impulses to forget and to remember, to assimilate and to preserve an idea of the homeland, and to honor the wishes of the parents but listen to the needs of the self. Looking at the signs of *italianità* is a position of reading that allows the reader to look at signs in context and thus derive a different, more thorough understanding of the text.

Last Words

“Public School No. 18: Patterson, New Jersey”
By Maria Mazziotti Gillan

Without words, they tell me
to be ashamed.
I am.

I...want to be still
and untouchable
as these women
who teach me to hate myself.

....

I am proud of my mother,
dressed all in black.
proud of my father
with his broken tongue
proud of the laughter
and noise of our house

Remember me, ladies,
the silent one?
I have found my voice
and my rage will blow
your house down (320-21)

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