

Part Five

The Language and Culture of the Immigrants

THE IMMIGRANTS' CHILDREN

While I was in a hospital for a minor operation I received a letter from one of my Canadian readers. I don't get much mail and usually I tend to answer right away. This time I had to put my reader on hold with the promise that I would get back to her later. In the meantime, I had a chance to discuss the issue she raised with a friend who is an expert in the field.

But I haven't told you yet what it was about. The letter came from a woman, yet (apologies to my female readers) I was struck by its quasi-masculine tone, that is, its lack of sentimentalities. Moreover, while it was presenting a personal experience, it showed a remarkable grasp of a general problem of great relevance. To use a big word in vogue among scholars, the problem is bilingualism among immigrants. Sooner or later immigrants must learn a second language and they are thus using two communication instruments. I wonder what consequences this has on their minds and especially on the minds of children. I am sure the letter from this lady and my answer will interest my readers. And here it is.

Chatham, September 13

Dear Sir:

I trust that your reply to my letter will help me solve a delicate problem of great importance to me. In order to provide you with a context, I will first introduce myself in hopes that it will make my situation a bit clearer. My husband and I are from Bologna. We are 34 years old and we immigrated to Canada in 1955. We are from an upper middle-class background, politically liberal and economically secure. After the liberation¹ we became disillusioned... So, we decided

¹ The term *Liberation* is generally understood to be the period between 1943 and 1948. It includes the fall of the Fascist regime (July 25, 1943); the armistice with the Allies (September 8, 1943); the civil war that ended with the liberation proper from the German occupation and the surrender of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana, the Mussolini puppet government of northern Italy (April 25, 1945); the plebiscite that ended Italy's monarchic rule and established the new republic (June 2, 1946); and the election of the first post-war democratically elected parliament (April 18, 1948).

to move to a new country and we chose Canada. To make our break even more drastic, we bought a farm (130 acres) a few miles from the town of Chatham,² and we started farming.

Back in Italy my husband owned his own business, a metal shop. I was a middle-school teacher. The jump was both huge and exhilarating. I discovered that manual work, which in Italy is needlessly disdained, actually leaves the mind free to explore and get to know oneself in depth. The parcel of land we own, the huge maple tree outside my window, the tall corn that ripens in the sun, all this makes us feel we are part of this country and no longer foreigners. We have been married for nine years and last June I gave birth to a baby. He is an authentic natural born Canadian. And here is my problem: what language should we teach our child? We always speak Italian at home and my mother, who lives with us, barely speaks any English at all. The most natural thing would be to teach him first Italian and, later, English. But I am afraid that this may make it difficult for my child to make friends in the first years, or that he may be self-conscious and unable to communicate with other children. I am also afraid that if we taught him both languages at the same time he might become confused. I would like him to possess his own words deep inside. I know how much you like clarity and since you belong to two worlds, I feel nobody else could help me as much as you. I apologize if I imposed on you, but I trust you will understand. With many thanks for your attention.

With great admiration,

Maria Vera Corsini³

And here is my answer:

Dear Ms. Corsini:

My answer is very simple and concise: teach your child the language

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² Presently, Chatham-Kent, Ontario.

³ Maria Vera Corsini (1923-) is a published poet. *The Immigrant's Two Souls: Le Due Anime Dell'Immigrante*. Edited and with an introduction by Guido Pugliese. Welland, Ont., Editions Soleil, 2006. Attempts to reach Maria Vera Corsini through her publisher were unsuccessful. We were told she now lives in Florida but no further information was available.

of the country where you live. From the little I know, Chatham is a small town of about 30,000 people in Ontario where English is spoken. Make sure your child learns English from the beginning without mixing it with Italian, at least until he is eight years old. Later he will be able to learn other languages, but first he must absorb the language of his country. The roots of his expression must penetrate deeply into the national soil.

You touched a very important point when you expressed your fear that two languages may cause confusion in your child's mind. This kind of mental confusion in life at times can lead to hesitations and uncertainties in making decisions. This is the central point of this issue and I will return to it later. I will also provide you with the opinion of a specialist, but, before I do that, please allow me to present another reason why you should teach English to your child from the beginning. One day in the future he will inherit your land with the big maple tree and the corn fields. You should not turn this child into a Canadian who speaks some kind of Italian Canadian dialect. As an adult he will have to buy, sell, negotiate; maybe argue and, let's hope, make love to girls from his hometown—in English. If you start speaking Italian with him while he is a child, chances are his English will be a bit deficient, crooked and unnatural. If you speak English to him, his English will have a bit of a foreign accent but he will correct it in school. His words will have a natural flavor, the same way Italian feels to me, and French to a French and so forth. This sense of ownership, the kinship with one's own language, is essential to form the spirit of a person. Undoubtedly there are a few exceptional individuals who can withstand the hardship of learning foreign languages in childhood at the same time as they absorb the national language. One of the most unusual cases is described by Michel de Montaigne⁴ in his *Les Essais*. While he was a child his overbearing father gave him a German tutor who only spoke Latin to him. At age six, he could only speak Latin and not a word of French. He grew up lively and alert despite the fact that he was nourished with a dead language. Yet, not everyone can have the resilience to withstand a similar treatment. We are all familiar

4 Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), philosopher and de-facto inventor of the essay as a new literary genre. *Les Essais* [*The Essays*] was published in 1595.

with people from the upper classes raised by foreign nannies. They can speak with ease two or more languages but the concepts they express are a bit gauzy, as if the words had been smoothed and polished. Even when they have brilliant minds and shiny personalities, their speech lacks the color, the flavor and, I dare say, the smell that are present in the words of a peasant.

Obviously you and your husband will have practical problems to solve. First of all, you will have to make an effort to speak English to your child. However, the other approach would present a different order of problems: what would happen when your child goes to nursery school, kindergarten and finally elementary school? This is the problem facing parents who speak Italian at home. The social environment is more powerful than the family and, after a few months spent with peers, children start speaking English to their parents even when they are spoken to in a different language. At times, in less educated families, children develop contempt for their parents when they cannot speak the educated language of their schooling. And finally there is an ethical issue that concerns your duty toward the country that you chose and that adopted you. The official language and the language of your community is English. Language is an integral part of the sense of unity that is necessary for the health of a country. I remember reading that child-development specialists advise against using two languages with children. I talked to a friend, a renowned scholar who studies these issues and I asked him for his opinion. Here is his answer:

The majority of scholars who study this issue believes that bilingualism is harmful. The leading Italian scholar in this field is Giovanni Calò. Here is the argument in brief: Jean-Jacques Rousseau stated that children should first learn the mother tongue and begin to *reason*. Later they can learn a second language. In favor of bilingualism are Louis Necker, Ferdinand de Saussure and Antonio Rosmini. The first experimental findings prove that this optimistic theory is wrong. I remember the work of John Smith, Frank Saer and James Hughes, who conducted field work in some areas of Wales where children spoke Welsh at home and English in school. They found that these children were one to two years behind their peers in intellectual development. Izhac Epstein and Gonzague de Reynold reached the same conclusions. Giulio [sic] Ronjat studied the phenomenon of

bilingualism using his son for his observations. The child was raised in French and German, respectively the father's and the mother's languages. Their house servants were French or German speakers. The result was that the child showed signs of what is now called bipolarization of linguistic activity in bilingual individuals. This consists in a phenomenon whereby each language has a different role in the consciousness. Ronjat's son finds it more natural to discuss scientific matters in French and literary matters in German. At the 1932 Nice, France, convention on new education, in the section dedicated to bilingualism one of the speakers stated: "As children in primary and secondary school we were taught to understand and use two languages simultaneously. As a result, our tendency was to focus more on words than on ideas. When we spoke, we created utterances in one language while we were thinking in another. Our consciousness became accustomed to this lie since infancy and would not longer rebel. We became full of nuances and different shades of meaning. We could shine but we could not concentrate and burn: our soul is made of changing colors, not stainless steel." (This passage is taken from a text by Luigi Volpicelli,⁵ a renowned scholar of pedagogy and social criticism.)

To be fair I want to clarify that there are scholars who favor bilingualism. Some of them think that having two languages means having two souls. I personally believe that we have only one soul and

5 Giovanni Calò (1882-1970). Professor of pedagogy at the University of Florence from 1911 to 1952.

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1718-1778). Swiss philosopher and social scientist. His most influential book is *The Social Contract* (1762).
- Louis Albert Necker (1786-1861). Swiss scientist.
- Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Swiss linguist. He is recognized as the founder of modern linguistics, and in particular structural linguistics.
- Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855). Catholic priest and philosopher.
- John David Saer, Frank Smith, James Hughes. *The Bilingual Problem. A Study Based Upon Experiments and Observations in Wales*. Aberystwyth, Hughes and Son for University College of Wales, 1924.
- Izhac Epstein (1862-1943). *La pensée et la polyglotie: essai psychologique et didactique*. Lausanne, Payot et Cie, 1910.
- Gonzague de Reynold (1880-1970). Swiss political philosopher and nationalist activist.
- Jules Ronjat (1864-1925). French philologist. His studies focused primarily on Provençal and Occitan.
- Luigi Volpicelli (1900-1983). Professor of pedagogy at the University of Rome.

that the other languages we know are just instruments. I observed often that Italian immigrants do not have two souls but two half-souls. They are able to speak neither the language of their fathers nor that of their children. I assume you and your husband are proud of your Italian culture. You can transmit it to your child with photos and books translated into English. Then, when he is 17 or 18 years old, you should send him to Italy to learn Italian in a course for foreigners. One of my principles is never to give advice, but this is a special circumstance and I believe there are no doubts about this. If you don't want to take it as advice, you can consider it a consultation. Free of charge, of course.

Sincerely,

New York, November 21, 1957

Dear Mr. Pagani:

While reading the *Giornale della Libreria* n. 18, 1957, page 128, I found a passage that concerns me directly:

In a recent article [August 15,] by Giuseppe Prezzolini published in the Florence newspaper *La Nazione*, the famous writer—whose illustrious reputation is due to other pursuits—advised Italians living abroad against “teaching children Italian in addition to the language of the host country” because children and “young people” are not able to learn well two different languages at the same time. His conclusion is that it is better to reach only the language of the new country where the youngsters will grow up and build their careers.

Mr. Pagani, please calm down. I never wrote those words. I also have the impression you did not read my article directly, first of all because you do not mention the publication date. You probably read some interpretation of my words that were circulated by representatives of Italian immigrants not in a generic place called *abroad* but specifically in Argentina. According to those *smart* Argentine readers, I basically stated that “children and youngsters” should not learn a foreign language

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⁶ *Il Giornale della Libreria*. It is the official organ of the Associazione tipografico-libreria italiana. It began publication in 1888.

and that only "old people" should. Mr. Pagani: I never wrote crap like that. Here is a brief summary of my article: "The majority of pedagogy experts, starting with Rousseau, believe that teaching two languages simultaneously to *children* under eight years old is harmful and creates confusion in their minds. *Foreign languages* should be studied only after the *national* language is well rooted in the mind. This opinion is supported by several studies (not all of them) conducted in bilingual areas such as Switzerland, Belgium and even China and Korea. The findings show that children before eight years of age who grow up in a bilingual environment have a lower IQ than their peers raised in a monolingual setting."

This concept apparently was too complicated for those Argentines who took it upon themselves to scold me with an interpretation that you, in turn, took at face value without bothering to check the original. The Argentines were happy with their misunderstanding and reported things incorrectly. I have a long experience with immigrants, not only in the United States and not only Italian. I am convinced that the experts are right. Of course, ^{there} are exceptions and I reported a very famous one, that of Montaigne. My article advised against the use of two languages during *childhood*. Parenthetically, I wonder how many Italian immigrants speak the *Italian language* that you so ardently defend as opposed to some crude dialect. The study of foreign languages is fine in middle school, not during nursery school or even elementary school. In most countries foreign languages are not taught in elementary school. The exceptions are those countries where bilingualism is a *political* issue. It seems to me you believe that our immigrants are still *Italian*. In this you are incorrect: in reality the large majority is composed of *citizens* of their host countries. Moreover, immigrants want their children to be respected and considered true citizens of the countries where they are growing up. They want them to be equal in everything, be it dating, doing business, working etc. My realism tells me that their natural language is not Italian; it is American English, Spanish, Portuguese, whatever.

I won't bother to discuss other statements in your letter because they are not directly related to my article. All I want to say is that, in my opinion, your arguments are pulled out of thin air and fit with

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the rhetorical strategy used to solving problems that one doesn't know how to solve. Your opinions on Italian immigration, on Italian schools abroad, on textbooks and so forth belong to that category. They are not based on reality. Believe me: if Italians abroad had been minimally united; if they had real knowledge of Italian language; and if they really had the will; they would have been able to open lots of Italian language schools even without the support of the Italian government. They would have done so with their own means and the support of the countries where they once were guests and where they now are in charge. Isn't it time that Italians abroad stop expecting the Italian government to do what they cannot do by themselves because they lack the will, knowledge and unity?

Yours "realistically," not "illustriously" because I am not illustrious among rhetoricians.

October 2, 1957

P.S. As I expected the *Giornale della Libreria* did not publish my reply. The editor of this periodical cannot read and when he makes mistakes he doesn't want anyone to correct him. But he wants to teach.

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ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA
ARE AGAINST EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN

I was researching the history of Italian immigration to the United States in Italian sources when I ran into a very interesting book, *Gli americani nella vita moderna osservati da un italiano* by Alberto Pecorini.¹ I remember that I first read it in 1911 when it was published by Fratelli Treves,² the leading Italian publishing house of that era. Back then I wrote a very favorable review and I probably corresponded directly with the author. The book is about fifty years old and I am afraid it won't last much longer as it was printed on wood-pulp paper and the pages crumble as one leafs through them. In these kinds of books the decay begins at the edge of the pages then spreads to the printed part and soon only dust is left. Pecorini's work is not a literary masterpiece and it is not a great loss that nobody will be able to read it fifty years hence. However, it is a very interesting eyewitness account, probably the most relevant text after the volume by journalist Dario Papa³ which, in my opinion, was the first remarkable travel reportage from America by an educated and cultivated Italian not from consular ranks.

In those days Pecorini was well known in the Italian press community in America. It would take a picaresque writer to depict with appropriately colorful adjectives the condition of the other pigmy-like descendants of Pietro Sbarbaro's [sic] *Le Forche Caudine*.⁴

1 Alberto Pecorini. *Gli americani nella vita moderna osservati da un italiano*. Milano, Treves, 1909.

2 *Fratelli Treves* was a prestigious publishing house, founded in 1861. In 1939, due to financial difficulties, the company was sold to industrialist Aldo Garzanti who gave it his own name in order to avoid controversies with the Fascist authorities with regard to the recently promulgated anti-Jewish laws (Treves is a Jewish name.)

3 Dario Papa (1846–1897). *New York*. Milano, Giuseppe Galli Editore, 1884.

4 Pietro Sbarbaro (1838-1893). Journalist and editor of *Le Forche Caudine* (1884-1885), a satirical magazine that regularly denounced corruption in the Italian parliament. He was found guilty of libel and served several years in prison. Prezzolini is making a rather obscure and sarcastic comparison between journalists working for Italian-language publications and Sbarbaro, who, in addition to great skills as a writer and satirist, was a man of great moral integrity. Prezzolini mockingly calls Italian journalists "descendants" of *Le Forche's* tradition.

Pecorini deserves credit for being, or, better said, for trying to be a reformer in the community of Italian journalists in America, which was composed of a motley crew of mostly kooks, adventurers, crazy geniuses, blackmailers, weird-and-excitabile exploited artists, some subversives, some nationalists, some anarchists, some half-doctors and some total failures. Regardless, they all were always eager to get into fights both with the pen and often with their fists to defend their ideals and attack those of others; always over the top and beyond the pale; with a tone of superiority that vastly exceeded the influence and the importance of the newspapers they were working for.

There are no archives of the close-minded press that mushroomed for decades until quality writers and editors arrived from Italy, such as Luigi Barzini Sr. and Italo Carlo Falbo.⁵ More serious publications emerged when, finally, true professionals brought with them the highest standards Italy could offer.

With regard to Pecorini, I heard two different versions of his life. I wanted to check which one was true. I thus wrote to a relative of his and to one of his friends in Argentina where he died. Unfortunately, neither one answered my letters. It seems that Pecorini's mother was from Austria and his father was an Italian Jew. He came to America with a recommendation by Luigi Luzzatti,⁶ studied theology at the Divinity School of Springfield, Massachusetts, and, according to one account, converted to Protestantism. Some sources claim that he sold the periodical *Il Cittadino* to the businessman Alberto Tarchiani,⁷ but I could not verify the correctness of this information. (Incidentally, I remember that when I was editor of *La Voce*⁸ I corresponded with Tarchiani.)

5 Italo Carlo Falbo (1876-1946). Journalist and politician. With Luigi Prandello he founded the journal *Ariel* (1893-1933).

6 Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927). Economist and politician. He was Italy's prime minister from 1910 to 1911. He is also considered the founder of the Italian credit union system (*Banche popolari*).

7 *Il Cittadino*. Italian language periodical published in New York (1907-1919).

• Alberto Tarchiani (1885-1964). Journalist and publisher; he founded the weekly *Il Cittadino* in New York. He later served as ambassador of Italy to the United States from 1945 to 1955.

8 *La Voce* (1908-1916). Weekly magazine of culture and social criticism founded in 1908 by Giuseppe Prezzolini and Giovanni Papini. Despite its short life, it is still

Pecorini's book is one of about two dozen serious accounts and reportages on America written by Italian visitors and travelers. In this case we are presented with observations and analyses based on real research. It is not clear how deeply Pecorini dug, but for sure at least he tried. My impression is that he combined research with direct knowledge of people and places, complemented by personal interpretations based on his biases and a general conceptual framework. That's a lot if one considers the times. In hindsight, we now know that there are methodological approximations in the interpretative framework of the statistics he reports (he gives no sources for them.) The book was written after the economic crisis of 1907⁹ which was as serious as that of 1930.¹⁰ His conclusions surprisingly contain very sound theories. The ideas may not be original, but, for sure, Pecorini was smart enough to choose the right ones. Here are some passages worthy of quoting:

There is no other country in the world with a potential for continuous and abundant prosperity as great as that of the United States, for it is endowed with unparalleled natural resources, advantageous geographical position and vastness of territory. But it is necessary for the economic life to be regulated: it must stop being so tumultuous and without control. So far the United States has been similar to a person who, instead of eating regular meals three times a day, prefers to binge all at once and spend the rest of the day taking care of indigestion.

How many times have I heard this very same concept in the years after the 1930s depression? A hundred times? A thousand times?

One chapter is devoted to the conditions of Italian immigrants. It is a very sober and truthful summary that can shed light on some peculiar phenomena still present today even in communities of Italian descent that have been fully integrated into American life.

regarded as one of the most influential publications of twentieth century's Italy.

9 The financial crisis is also known as "The Panic of 1907." In the course of three weeks, in mid-October, the New York Stock Exchange fell fifty percent.

10 The reference is to the Great Depression whose beginning is usually dated in the year 1929, although it exploded in all its fury only a year later.

Ninety percent of the typical Italian colony in a large city is composed of laborers and their families. Fifty percent are illiterate and a third is comprised of newly arrived individuals who depend on contractors or middlemen to survive. One way or another, these people are systematically exploited by those they depend on. The remaining ten percent is made of individuals whose only interest is making money as fast as possible: small business people whose commercial activity is primarily the import of foodstuffs for the *piasani* from their regions of origin in Italy; some bankers; travel and shipping agents and notaries public, most of whom so irresponsible and unscrupulous they would sign anything for money. The so-called community leaders could not be bothered with the social and moral improvement of the masses. They want to make money any way they can and spend the remaining time partying and dining. If the thirst for gold in Americans is a sad spectacle, among Italians it is totally revolting.

Today the situation is different for the better. However, the consequences of those beginnings are still felt. For instance, one of the least known aspects of Italian immigration was the opposition, or at least the indifference, of Italian parents to education for their children. The individuals who went to school and now constitute the middle class of professionals, doctors, lawyers, judges, senators and representatives don't owe their education to involved parents. Indeed, they owe it to American laws that made it mandatory for children to attend school (recently the age has been raised to sixteen) while making it illegal for them to work. Dario Papa was the first to notice it, and Pecorini confirms it:

An Italian boy who arrives in the United States at twelve or thirteen years of age goes to work with his parents instead of going to school, violating the provisions of the law. Very often parents lie about the real age of their children so that they can start working immediately, often in industrial plants, in dirty and unhealthy environments. The only thing a child learns about Italy is the horrendous dialect spoken at home; the obscene words he picks up in the neighborhood streets; and the primitive reasoning and thoughts of his illiterate parents. He never sees an Italian book because nobody in his home can read. And then, when he grows up smart and educated he

develops a sense of repulsion for everything Italian.

Pecorini didn't realize that the hostility by peasants from southern Italy toward education also existed in Italy. This was one of the causes (though not the main one) of illiteracy. Southern peasants had been afflicted by such poverty; by such need to get out of the brutal conditions of life; that their immediate instinct was to focus only and exclusively on making money. In America they ran into the American thirst for money that results from collective excitement and dynamism—the kind of excitement that extends to spending all the money earned or to invest it in risky adventures. This mentality merged with the hunger for money (which was hunger for bread) of Italian peasants. ~~With the significant difference that the first priority of Italian immigrants was to build a house for their families. Education was never considered a way out of poverty. The antipathy toward education can be seen in the fact that, especially in the older generations, the Italians who did go to school ~~choose~~ professional careers, such as medical and legal, that would lead to the exploitation of their clients. Very few of them chose careers in the sciences, which in those days promised only moral and idealistic rewards. Jewish immigrants, in comparison, made different choices. These observations came to mind while I was reflecting on a recent play, written by an Italian American policeman, titled *The Opening of a Window*. The author, Gene Radano,¹¹ took as subject the story of a smart boy, from an immigrant Italian family, whose father did not want him to get an education. I found the root of this mentality in old books about immigration. Sometimes, it pays to look back to find the origins of things that are coming to the surface in our time.~~

New York, October 29, 1961

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11 Gene Radano (1917–2007). Police officer in New York City from 1946 to 1966. He was also a playwright, novelist and screenwriter for television shows. His play *The Opening of a Window* opened on September 20, 1961.

YES TO PARTIES, NO TO CULTURE

When I was appointed director of Columbia University's *Casa Italiana* in 1930, I tried to develop several initiatives for the Italian American community of New York City. It was a complete fiasco. A cursory review of my columns may give an idea of the cultural level and closed-mindedness of Italians in the new homeland.

One of my first proposals was to pool together the financial resources of the many Italian American associations. I had noticed that every year these associations would compete with banquets, socials, balls and other events to attract donations from people of Italian descent whose collective wealth has increased significantly over the years. My idea was not a novelty in New York: the Jewish community was doing something similar, reflecting both its wealthier status and a much more modern mindset. They have long understood that it is pointless to waste energy in too many initiatives: thus, they created a committee to select a few but very relevant events worthy of support. The Italian consul agreed with my concept but nothing came of it. From the very beginning I noticed that my proposal of working together never drew any open opposition. However, it was received coolly and with a silent deliberation not to cooperate. In another case, I reached out to the local Italian language press proposing the creation of a collection of archival materials on immigration. There was no answer. Nobody was keeping mementos of personal immigration stories or those of their relatives. If anything, they were trying to forget.

Left to my own devices, I concentrated my efforts on an initiative that I cared about personally, namely the creation of scholarships for students of Italian in advanced college courses.¹ My logic was that it made sense to invest in them because any effort to improve the cultural and linguistic level of potential future teachers would be more effective than the encouragement given to high school students. A good teacher who had the opportunity to live in Italy for a few months, in the future would be able to affect hundreds of students. I was not interested in helping children of Italian American parents

¹ Presumably the scholarship was for Education students.

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pass a generic language test. I wanted to help the diffusion of Italian among non-Italian students. Indeed, to tell the truth, I thought it was more important to recruit students from other ethnic backgrounds. My ideas about this issue were not welcome: the local newspapers didn't even consider my proposals and continued to publicize the usual banquets and fundraisers to endow scholarships reserved for Italian American students. The only time I succeeded in gaining the support of Italian Americans was when I proposed the creation of a scholarship fund to send Columbia University students to Italy to improve their language skills. I organized a ball on one of the transatlantic ships of an Italian cruise line, generously made available free of charge by the owners. I charged much less than the customary ticket in order to make it possible for all members of the Italian American associations to participate; shoemakers and barbers included, not just the well-offs. It seemed that this time I hit the right note: more than four hundred associations joined and we collected 6,000 dollars.² The money was deposited in a special account where it is accruing interest until it reaches the 100,000 dollar mark. To honor the participants I called the account *Italian American Associations Fund*. I also suggested that these associations continue their contribution with a five percent surcharge on the tickets they sell for the lavish and endless colonial banquets they keep organizing. But nobody listened. Not only: the following year, when I proposed repeating the initiative, nobody joined me. I thus concluded that the so-called Italian American community lacks a sense of commitment and continuity. Most likely, the first time they were attracted by the novel concept of a low-cost ball organized on a ship, not by the goal of the initiative.

For several years I also dedicated my energies to the publication of a *giornalino*³ destined for the schools where Italian is taught. At that time there were similar publications in French, German and even Latin; in addition to several ones in Spanish. The number of students of Italian in high school and college was high enough to support that

² Most likely this is a typo. From the context, the correct figure is probably \$60,000.

³ Literally, little newspaper.

kind of initiative. With the help of publisher Vanni,⁴ I started working on this project but I soon realized that the teachers of Italian origin were very cold. The only ones who showed some enthusiasm were usually non-Italian. The two associations of teachers I contacted, one of teachers of Italian, the other of teachers of Italian origin, didn't want to have anything to do with it. One of my best students, who had in turn become a teacher, finally explained with great honesty: "Your Italian is too good for us." A few years later, the publisher and I decided to give up.

I also tried to experiment with music, to see if I could awake some interest in my fellow countrymen who, as legend has it, are musically inclined and have great musical taste. Together with Mrs. Perera, a well known and highly respected organizer of fundraising events, I tried to organize a *concertino* of Italian classical music. As long as the events were free, people showed up; but the moment we mentioned charging a small fee, nobody was interested anymore. Better luck had a choir, organized by Maestro Benelli, the brother of poet Sem Benelli.⁵ The choir, dressed in traditional costumes, specialized in old Italian folk songs. In that occasion I noticed how far Italians have fallen from their traditions. Despite my efforts, I could not find even a single elderly Italian woman who had preserved a dress from the Old Country. We had to resort to photos in folklore books in order to have them recreated by a tailor. The only times the auditorium of *Casa Italiana* filled up (only 300 seats) was when we had performances by opera singers. Opera is the only artistic passion of the Italian American population.

Immediately after the end of World War II, when I was no longer director of *Casa Italiana*, in agreement with the new director and with publisher Vanni, I tried a bigger initiative, namely the publication of a special series of classical Italian texts with front translation. I was under the illusion that I would find support from a large Italian American association with many chapters all over the United States that every year organizes major gala events and very nutritious banquets. One of the top leaders, a banker that I thought was a very serious person,

⁴ S.F. Vanni is a publishing house located in New York City with a catalog of books in Italian.

⁵ Sem Benelli (1877–1949). Playwright and librettist.

made lots of promises. In order to develop the series, all the publisher needed were commitments for five hundred copies. The person who made the promises disappeared: his interests remained alive only the time to satisfy his vanity and be introduced to Eisenhower, who at that time was president of Columbia University. In the end we could not find one single Italian American family willing to purchase a series of twenty volumes of Italian classics with English translation. When I developed the project, I submitted it for revision and suggestions to five of the most important professors of Italian in the United States. Two of them, both Anglo-Saxon, approved it and promised they would help. The remaining three, Italian American, didn't even bother to answer. The publisher decided to try anyway.⁶ He thought that once the volumes had been printed, the public would buy them. He published a new translation of the *Divina Commedia* in three volumes; the *Ricordi* by Francesco Guicciardini; the *Odi Barbare* by Giosuè Carducci and even the first complete translation of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.⁷ The majority of those volumes is still languishing in a storage room in some dark basement.

My most recent experience with Italian Americans goes back a couple of years. By now Americans of Italian origin are almost completely absorbed into the mixture of races in the United States. Some families have been here for four generations. Starting with the

6 Library of Italian Classics. Disambiguation: a series with the same title is also published by Oxford University Press.

7 Translated by Harry Morgan Ayres. New York: S.E. Yanni, 1949.

• Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540). Renaissance historian and political writer. None of his books were published during his lifetime. His most famous work is *Scoria di Italia*, first published in 1561. *Ricordi*. Translated by Ninian Hill Thomson. New York, S.E. Yanni, 1949. Written over the course of several decades, the book was first edited and published in its present form in 10 volumes by Giuseppe Canestrini in *Opere Inedite di Francesco Guicciardini*. Firenze, 1857–1867.

• Giosuè Carducci (1835–1907). Poet. He was the first Italian to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1906. *Odi Barbare*. Translated by William Fletcher Smith. New York: S.E. Yanni 1950. *Odi Barbare* is a sylloge composed between 1873 and 1893. The title refers to the topic of the collection, primarily the world of antiquity.

• Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533). Poet. *Orlando Furioso*. Translated by Allan H. Gilbert. New York: S.E. Yanni, 1954. It is the most famous chivalric poem of Italian literature, first published in 1532.

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second generation the dominant language has been English and, with the disappearance of Italian, other surviving remnants of Italian culture are also being wiped out. I thought it was time to examine the outcomes of our immigration and compile a list of names and addresses of prominent people of Italian descent. I drafted the project of a *Who's Who* of Italian Americans, based on an impartial and rational approach. There are already two similar publications but they contain very few names, mostly chosen with sloppy criteria or for reasons of friendship and personal connections. We don't have yet any compilation with brief biographies of the names of, let's say, all the doctors; pharmacists; judges; members of prestigious orchestras; priests and so forth of Italian origin. My idea was to publish a catalog with at least 10,000 names, with regular updates. The concept was received with favor by Ambassador Manlio Brosio who supported it to the extent possible with the Italian American Chamber of Commerce [sic].⁸ Several functionaries of the Istituto commercio estero (ICE)⁹ and several Italian consuls in America also liked the idea a lot. However, not a single Italian American I presented my project to showed any interest. I mentioned that mine was not some kind of self-promotional effort, and in fact I was willing to do it without any compensation. Nevertheless, the Italian American Chamber of Commerce did not even want to talk to me—literally. This organization, which mostly comprises Italian American business people from New York City, regularly buys expensive advertisements in periodicals that nobody reads; and spends tons of money for social events that have nothing to do with commerce and trade. The leaders of the group didn't even think they should at least listen to my presentation before rejecting it. I remember that, later, one of the authorities who had supported my project asked me if I was disappointed that nothing had come of it. "To the contrary," I answered. "You see, I have the impression I made that proposal in hope they would say no." "What do you mean?" "Well, most of all I wanted final proof that Italian Americans, even the rich ones who are

8 Italy America Chamber of Commerce. Founded in 1887.

9 Istituto nazionale per il commercio estero [Foreign Trade Institute]. Founded in 1920, it is the state agency of the ministry of economic development [Ministero dello sviluppo economico] responsible for the promotion of Italian export.

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so full of themselves and their success, have not reached the American level. This is already evident in newspapers, books and speeches where they demonstrate an inability to come to terms with a wider and more modern perspective. With a few exceptions, they are close-minded, backward and provincial. They are like a self-enveloped cyst, closed to the most modern country in the world. They have climbed the ladder of wealth but not that of thought. They have risen because America has risen and the rise has brought them up, the same way a ship carries around the world the barnacles attached to her keel. And, by the way, this image is not mine: it comes from banker Giannini, one of the few who could actually say it because he was one of them."

The only initiative that has achieved a measure of success is the poetry festival. Every year New York public schools students of Italian recite Italian poems chosen by them or, unfortunately, by their teachers; and for their efforts they receive small gifts consisting of books, boxes of chocolates and cakes. This initiative costs nothing, doesn't bother anyone and only tickles the ambition and curiosity of those kids and their teachers. Probably this is the reason it's still going on. However, in the next pages you will be able to read my observations about this as well.

POETRY AS AN EMBALMED CADAVER

During my tenure as director of Columbia University's *Casa Italiana*, I had the unfortunate idea to organize an Italian Poetry Day and to invite all the New York schools where Italian was taught. Students and pupils would compete for prizes by reading Italian poems of their choice. Events like poetry readings and staging of contemporary or ancient plays in a foreign language are very common in American schools. The winners were to be selected by a committee composed of teachers whose students did not partake in the competition. The initiative was successful and continued for a number of years. I am not sure, however, how much it has contributed to the popularity and love of Italian poetry. My guess is that the students of Italian I had to listen to every year were not worse than those who acted in Molière's¹ farces in French or in Cechov's [sic]² tragedies in Russian. It was in this context that I had a revelation. The poems, as is bound to happen, were obviously chosen by the teachers, not the students. And the choices were a window on those teachers' culture and taste. I remember distinctly that three particular poems kept coming up for years and years, recited by more than one student. These were, in order of preference: *La spigolatrice di Sapri* (1858)³ by Luigi Mercantini; *A mia madre* by Edmondo de Amicis; and a poem by the same title by Alcardo Alcardi.³ How many times did I hear:

de late

1 Molière (1622-1673). Stage name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. French playwright and actor.

2 Anton Chekhov (1860-1904). Russian playwright and short-story writer.

3 Luigi Mercantini (1821-1872). Poet and member of the Italian parliament famous for patriotic poems.

• *La spigolatrice di Sapri* [*The Gleaner of Sapri*], his most famous poem was written in 1858 to memorialize a disastrous expedition of volunteers whose goal was to liberate southern Italy from Bourbon rule in 1857.

• "A mia madre." *Poesie*. Milano. Treves 1881.

• Alcardo Alcardi (1812-1878). Poet of the late-Romantic period.

They were three hundred, they were young and strong
and now they are dead.⁴

(*La spigolarice di Sapri*)

I didn't count, but to me it felt like a thousand times and every time it felt like nine hundred and ninety nine times too many. After these poems, best sellers were the works by Giovanni Prati;⁵ sometimes Giosuè Carducci and, the most recent, Gabriele D'Annunzio. Among the classics, the best known was *A Sibinia* by Giacomo Leopardi.⁶ Clearly we were witnessing the literary stratification of the Romantic period. The teachers who were showing off personal knowledge and preferences through their students had, in turn, been taught by teachers who had gone to school in Italy between 1880 and 1900 and were exposed to poetry anthologies that reflected the sentimental choices of those days. Nothing had broken the tradition. The poetical baggage of those new teachers was the same as that of *their* teachers when they were high school students in Italy. In the meantime in Italy things had been evolving dramatically. Poetry had undergone great changes with deep transformations. New sensibilities, new issues, new sources of inspiration, new and different poetical languages had—and have—recently emerged. The trauma of World War I hasn't had any influence on these teachers; nor has the social transformation from an agricultural to an industrial society; nor a different psychological landscape and the absorption of realistic language into poetic expression. In America everything has remained the same, as if fossilized. Not even the most recent immigrants had brought with them the new Italy. However, the aspect that struck me the most was the almost complete impermeability of the teachers to *new* country, where many were born and schooled; and where most of them completed their studies in English and were exposed to Anglo-Saxon literature. At the

⁴ This is the most famous refrain from *La spigolarice di Sapri*, a couplet that practically every Italian knows by heart.

⁵ Giovanni Prati (1814–1884). Poet and senator.

⁶ Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837). Poet and philosopher. He is universally known as one of the greatest poets of Italian literature.
• *A Sibinia* (1828).

beginning of the [twentieth] century, Italy started absorbing literary experiences, styles and concepts from other countries. In the meantime, in the immigrant communities the patriotic and provincial taste and the languid and frayed vocabulary of Italian late-Romanticism⁷ were still honored and preserved, like in a museum glass case. The poetry festival resembled the exhumation of embalmed cadavers.

In this as in many other cases, the image that came to my mind to describe Italian immigration (although, in all honesty, the image applies to other immigrations as well,) was that of a cyst, an image I used in previous occasions. A cyst is a blister of sorts that shows up in the body and surrounds itself with resistant tissue for protection. Cysts remain isolated and do not respond to the evolution and renewal of the surrounding tissues. Most of the times they are harmless and live on, until the body dies. The literature of the last gasps of bloodless and exhausted sentimental Romanticism will last until the death of Italian immigration; despite the fact that it no longer has any relation with the body of Italy and it is an anomaly even within the body of America, against which Italian immigration still seeks protection.

Other residues of this phenomenon grab the attention of Italians who visit the United States for the first time. These residues are the names of Italian associations that honor the likes of Giordano Bruno, Camillo Sbarbaro or Giovanni Bovio.⁸ Or they can be on the shelves of an old bar where a yellow liqueur is sold, the *Galliano*,⁹ something that takes me back to Italy's colonial wars in Africa before 1900. The festival of Italian poetry revealed to me the existence of a literary cyst

⁷ Romanticism was an artistic movement that emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century. It emphasized the expression of individual emotions, passion and a fascination with the grieving soul of the artist. In Italy, literary Romanticism was closely related to the political movement known as *Risorgimento*. Late-Romanticism took the same themes and style and brought them to an extreme, becoming repetitive and bombastic, without genuine inspiration.

⁸ Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Dominican friar and hermetic philosopher. He was accused of heresy and burned at the stake in Campo de' Fiori in Rome.

• Camillo Sbarbaro (1888–1967). Poet and translator from French and Greek.
• Giovanni Bovio (1837–1903). Philosopher, politician with republican leanings and member of the Italian parliament.

⁹ ~~Galliano~~: Sweet liqueur created in 1896.

e. Jolite

that doesn't hurt anybody and that no doctor with common sense would recommend removing.

The literary cyst, present in Italian teachers, is identical to the literary cyst carried by the old wave of literate immigrants from the same social class. By old immigration I mean the stream that arrived before the great break of World War I. That hiatus constitutes an enormous abyss between the old and the new wave. In the first wave of the great migration, the educated immigrants brought with them the literary taste, level and style of that time; therefore, this is how they expressed themselves as soon as they were in the position to "make the presses squeal"—as we used to say before the linotype machine was invented. Today there are still several Italian poets in the United States who use the language of Alcardi and Prati. Isn't this an interesting phenomenon from a social, anthropological and folkloristic standpoint? There are daily and monthly publications that print these works. Here is, for example, a passage from the self-introduction to a poetry book. This is fascinating to me in that it is a mix of classical and American languages, in a total unselfconscious way, of course. Hear Ye, Hear Ye:¹⁰

I am enamored of the old form and I abhor the extravagances that today [1931] pass for poetry; extravagances that deface the melodiousness and levity of Calliope's¹¹ divine art and tend to condemn the beautiful and harmonious Italian muse to a shameful decadence. I wrote what this soul of mine dictated with no sophistry or hesitations and without worrying about the poisonous arrows flung by jealous people and the cunuchs sitting in the first rows and high price theater boxes... I wrote for those who suffer like me, for those who know the cramps of hunger and the torment of seeing one's child cry for a miserable penny, for those whose heart is not petrified... I abhor pedantic individuals because they have given nothing to the world; they are relentless naggers, repugnant orthodox who feign being scandalized at every chance they get, people who splash themselves in a stagnant pond; they cannot comprehend my verses, the same way they ignore the *speed-up* in

¹⁰ No bibliographical information is provided in the original text.

¹¹ Calliope. The foremost of the nine muses. In Greek mythology she was the patron of eloquence and epic poetry.

the factories of America...

And do you want to hear one of the poems of this enamored of the ancient form? I am selecting a passage that talks about the life of those who, like the poet, took the big step of immigration:

And there they go! away, toward unknown
shores, pushed by indecent fever
for gold, always they are the eternal Helot¹² servants
who only know of trouble and hunger.

Here is someone who probably really endured suffering and paid a heavy price, but that experience has triggered only trite clichés in his poetry. This immigrant carried some literature in his baggage and when he tried to say what he perhaps felt but could not express, he just repeated what he had read. When one examines the poetics, or, better yet, the versification that was born from immigration and was transplanted in America and survived like a cyst, it is incredible how little reality, how little novelty and sincerity it contains. There are dozens and dozens of poetry volumes whose publication is paid for by the authors themselves. They are a literary tragedy even more painful than the social ones they describe. In the passage I quoted above, the only hint of reality comes from the two English words: the child desperate for a *penny* and the technical term—which becomes poetic in this rhetorical context—of the mechanical cruelty of the *speed-up* (“quicker-or-you-are-fired”). The word *penny* that came out of his pen in America is an almost archaic expression, because generally the word used is *cent*; the child that cries for a penny takes on an almost mythical character. The *speed-up* sounds like the tyrannical order given by a supervisor. These two English expressions are more lively than the Italian. Curiously, in order to find expressions that are born from a poetic, non-literary spirit, one needs to search in popular songs.

If the so-called poets of the old immigration that are still alive should happen to read this article, god knows how much they would despise me. The paradox is that I respect and appreciate them for

12 Helots. A class of serfs or slaves in ancient Sparta.

the love they kept for that kind of literature that cost them a lot of disappointments, sorrows and, I presume, money. In addition to the unhappiness for being far removed from Italy's new sensibilities and expressive modes that were evolving in a different direction, they also were met by the silence of fellow immigrants who couldn't care less about their poetry; didn't even notice their existence and, naturally, didn't spend a dime to buy those volumes. As a result, these poets were pushed toward becoming lachrymose beggars and they now make for a curious chapter in the history of Italian immigration. They wanted to be poets in a language that is foreign to the country that took them in; they wanted to live off their poetry which, by the way, is no longer considered poetry even in their country of origin.

New York, April 8, 1960

ITALIAN AMERICAN POETS ARE AN UNHAPPY BUNCH

Among the five million Italians who came to America looking for work, a few had some education—and wrote poetry. The Italian-language newspapers of those days regularly published their poems in every issue—a tradition that continues to this day. How many of these poets have seen their work published? Nobody knows. A detailed analysis would yield funny and even surprising results, but nobody has bothered to investigate because, frankly, not many readers would be interested in finding out how many individuals brought from Italy a baggage full of clichés, worn-out words and banal meters. Their survival, though, is an interesting phenomenon. It is similar to the phenomenon studied by biologists who observed that animals that are transferred to an environment with a different climate continue to give birth to descendants with unchanged characteristics, even if those characteristics do not serve any purpose in terms of sustenance and preservation. The environment apparently has no influence on them.

This happens to humans as well. There are families of white people who migrated to Africa centuries ago who keep generating children with blond hair and blue eyes. The sun does not change those traits as the power of the seed is stronger than that of the environment. Residues of immigrations or of invasions from foreign peoples can be found, for instance, in the foothills of the Italian Alps, where small communities of Germanic people still speak dialects by now extinct in Germany. These Italian American writers are the same: they use a poetical dialect that nobody in Italy has used in a long time. The size of their production, published in America, is significant. There are many books, probably published at the authors' expense, that look like they came out of the presses of small, marginal printers. And now, there is a cottage industry of publishers in Italy, mostly unknown, who publish the works of the last survivors of the literary migrations. They take advantage of these authors who are willing to spend their hard-earned money in hope of gaining fame in Italy.

I am not referring here to Italians who ended up in America for a variety of reasons and published their work in American journals, as

fiction writers like Nicola [sic] Tucci and Antonio Barolini; or political essayists like Giuseppe Borgese.¹ These authors are integrated in the American system and now enjoy good success and a loyal following. I am not even talking about the phenomenon of writers of Italian origin who are writing in English. This is a phenomenon that deserves attention in a different context and concerns writers who sprung out of Italian roots but whose thoughts and imagination are primarily American.

These others survive perpetually nostalgic, spending their own money to publish their work. In a poem dedicated to his unfortunate comrades, namely the “Italian poets in America,” one of the most famous of them sang this song:

Oh poets who came here
To end your lives

After living

For many years in that desirable
Land where the sun almost

Always shines, and where

Sweet love sparkles

Deep in everyone's pupils

I know you are oppressed

And cannot find peace

Because although you are messengers

Of true Beauty

Nobody listens to you here

for here there aren't enough people

cultured enough to understand a cantor.

And all those beautiful

Rhymes that you write

Pushed by the sublime inspiration that you know

Are like flowers lost in the wind

Stars that for one moment

Shine in the firmament

upper case (D)

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1 Niccolò Tucci (1908--1999). Writer of short stories and journalist. He interviewed Albert Einstein for *The New Yorker*.

• Antonio Barolini (1910-1971). Poet and novelist. Some of his work appeared in translation in *The New Yorker*.

• Giuseppe Antonio Borgese (1882-1952). Writer, essayist and journalist. He was professor of Italian at University of California-Berkeley; Smith College, Northampton, Ma; and at the University of Chicago.

And then disappear in the darkness.

[O poeti venuti/ venuti a finir qui la vita/ dopo esser vissuti/ molti anni
in quell'ambita /terra ove il sol brilla /quasi sempre, e sfavilla/ in
fondo alla pupilla/ /di tutti un dolce amor/ io so che siete oppressi/
e non trovate pace./ giacché sebbene messi/ della Belfà verace./
nessuno qui v'ascolta./ perché qui non c'è molta/ gente abbastanza
colta/ da intender un cantor./ E tutte quelle rime/ belle che voi
scrivete./ spinte da quel sublime/ afflato che sapete./ son fori sparsi
al vento./ stelle che un sol momento/ raggian nel firmamento/ e
spazion nel buio.]

I cannot fathom how, with all the real tragedies that immigration caused (about which the survivors feign amnesia and the dead keep silent), anybody one could also include the tragedy of poets, a supposed tragedy that consumed only paper and it spread—at least so I hope—more ink than blood and tears. There is something pathetic about a group of decent people who stuck faithfully to their love for what they claim are the pure Italian words. At a time when their language, or better yet, their dialects, were mutating into a barbaric mix contaminated by low-class English learned from the American plebes, they kept writing in grammatically perfect Italian, following the rhymes and the same identical century-old so-called poetical words, untouched by the changes that were taking place in Italy. At their core lies the rhetoric of the late-Romanic period, undisturbed even by the influence of more modern poets such as Carducci or D'Annunzio.

Italian-language poets were a deeply unhappy bunch, at least judging from the wailings of their poems and the introductions of their books. Actually, since many of them are still alive, they are still unhappy. Everywhere one can hear the same lament over and over: “Philosophy, ye poor and naked go”² (with the only difference that here it is not philosophy but poetry). I guess it was inevitable. These people grew up locked inside the mass of Italian immigrants who either spoke only dialects and couldn't read and write; or, if they could read, they didn't read books. On the other side they saw the masses of American

no space after the hyphen

² The quote is from a sonnet by Petrarch. *Canzoniere*, VII, *La gola e 'l sonno e l'oziose piume*. 1336–1374.

natives, indifferent to what they called the “beautiful language of Italy” unless it was sung by opera singers. Their merchandise had no value in this country. Riccardo Cordiferno,³ one of the best known and most appreciated practitioners of this trade and who, to this day, is held in high esteem by the members of this poetic tribe, in an article inveighed with epithets like “filthy, loutish, cheap” against the solid Italian businessmen who were making a lot of money trading chestnuts, olive oil and wine but would not buy their poetry books. It could be that those businessmen deserved the epithets for other reasons, yet I don’t understand how and why importers of cured salami and tomato paste with a bit of the color and scent of Italy should have supported a literature that was alien to them, that nobody understood and that the host country didn’t even know existed. It was not a product worth patronizing.

In Italy their poetic language had already disappeared. Books no longer swooned about “swallows that chirp about love” and “weave fair love-carols in the sky.” You couldn’t find anywhere in print “Hyrcanian tigers,”⁴ “the deep maelstrom of sin,” “fate that ridicules and threatens me,” “hours of pleasure, days of inebriation.” Really, were they dreaming of making money—by the hateful—in America—with this kind of imagery? Almost none of these poets had any contact with American schools. Some went through high school in Italy and called themselves *professor*, a title that enjoys very little consideration in Italy, particularly in the south, where even kindergarten teachers are called professor. Whatever the case, they never got regular jobs as teachers. I met many teachers of Italian in American schools and none of them, as far as I can remember, mentioned being a poet. They all used prose to write their idiocies, which is exactly what I do when I write my own idiocies.

* * *

3 Riccardo Cordiferno, (1875–1940). Pen name of Alessandro Sisca. His *nom de plume*, translated as Richard Ironheart, is a clear reference to “Lionheart.” He is best known as author of the lyrics of *Core hignato* [Ungrateful Heart] (1911), one of the most famous Neapolitan songs.

4 Hyrcania in antiquity was a region along the southern border of the Caspian Sea. Hyrcanian tigers have long been extinct, exterminated by ancient Romans who used them in gladiator games.

Note: I want to immortalize the colonial bard Riccardo Cordifero with a few quotations from his work because I don't want my readers to think that I am making things up. Italian provincial poetry, the kind that is published by the *Farfalla illustrata*, came to shore here and here it is preserved with mothballs in a museum glass case. And let's not talk about the cravings for publicity and praise pursued by these poets. Cordifero, for example, in his own periodical re-published press reviews of his work taken, respectively, from *Colombo* (Houston, Texas), *La Rassegna letteraria* (Palmi, Reggio Calabria) and *La Sentinella* (Bridgeport, Connecticut).

Here are a few lines from his sonnets. From "T'ho troppo amata" [I Too Much Loved You], first quatrain:

If a Hyrcanian tiger ripped apart my chest
 And if it tore up piece by piece my heart,
 No, I would not sense as much pain
 As I feel, oh ungrateful one, in front of you.

[Se ircana tigre mi squarciasse il petto/ e mi facesse a brano a brano il cuore/ no, io non sentirei tanto dolore/ quanto ne provo, o ingrata. al tuo cospetto.]

Here is another example from "Perché?..." [Why].

Why are you asking me for love rhymes,
 Why are you asking me for winged song,
 Now that a gelid tomb is my heart,
 Now that of my lyre broken are
 All the strings and mute it lies..?

[Perché mi chiedi tu versi d'amore,/ perché mi chiedi tu canzoni alate,/ se una gelida tomba è questo cuore,/ se della cetra mia si son spezzate/ tutte le corde e muta se ne sta?..]

Is it possible to imagine a collection of worse worn-out words, of falser feelings, of more banal rhymes; of a sentimental vacuum rendered even worse by the show of the ellipse, those infamous three dots, the ineffably romantic poetry's specks of dust that fell from the skies on

a delete and replace with (reprinted)

those “love rhymes”³; on those “songs”³ that, of course, are “winged”; over the tomb that had to be “gelid” and on the “lyre” (where could he buy it, if not from a junk dealer?) with, it goes without saying, “broken strings?” Why didn’t someone grab a mop and do a clean up?

New York, June 26, 1960