THE LOST WORLD OF ITALIAN AMERICAN RADICALISM.
AN ASSESSMENT

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"Men, not pigs, go to jail"
(from an old Calabrian saying).

The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism is a collection of essays divided into three sections, "Labor", "Politics", and "Culture" which cover most of the twentieth-century Italian experience in the United States. In addition, a detailed and exhaustive introduction by Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerard Meyer enables the reader to place in context the sixteen essays or chapters that form the body of this substantial work.¹ The conclusion by Donna E. Garbaccia opens up the "lost world of Italian radicalism" to a broader context "as an important dimension of a global history of population movements out of Italy" (313). Essentially the book is a renewed attempt to dispel a deeply rooted prejudice that maintains that Italian immigrants were strikebreakers, ignorant and submissive people closed within their own family and easily dominated by the conservative Catholic Church. A renewed version of this stereotype is Edward Banfield's view of Southern Italians as "amoral familists" incapable of collective action.

Thematically, however, the book can be divided into two main topics, according to the meaning the various essayists give to the word "radical" or "radicalism." In fact, the sixteen chapters could have been assembled as two separate books: the "lost" and the "found" (mostly literary) Italian American radicalism. This is the approach I will follow in this review essay. The title of Garbaccia's closing remarks to the book, "The Lost and Found: Italian American Radicalism in Global Perspective," would have conveyed better than the current title the contents of this multi-disciplinary and ideologically pluralistic volume.

The "Lost" part of the book is about the activities of the Italian immigrant radicals, men and women in the United States who were anarchists,

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syndicalists, socialists, and feminists. To different degrees, these radicals opposed the capitalist system and its structures of power and oppression: the state, private property, the church, and patriarchy. These committed radicals had the support of a substantial portion of the Italian immigrant population that participated in their multiform political and social activities. Furthermore, they had contacts with like-minded people all over the world, having created, sustained, and read a considerable number of Italian language publications that displayed a wide range of ideological orientations.

The section of the book dedicated to the "Found" or literary radicalism relates the activities of Italian immigrants and Americans of Italian extraction. Their radicalism is of a different nature and exhibits a variety of meanings. It may consist of questioning or breaking away from coercive ethnic tradition or family expectations, transgressing social taboos in sexual behaviours, or making public what society and family consider strictly private. It could also mean recovering lost traditions or personal ethnic identity. In considering this type of radicalism, we should make a distinction between those writers who, besides being involved in literary activities, were personally active in radical politics and union work, and those whom we may call armchair radicals. For the first group, writing was an extension of their daily life; for the second group radicalism lay either in their life or literary style. In order better to appreciate their individuality, a further distinction should be made between those men and women who wrote in the Italian language and those who used English.

The content of the book moves then within these two meanings of radicalism that coincide with separate historical periods: the early two decades of the twentieth century, the radicals' heydays, and the closing decades of the century, when some strong personalities, second and third-generation Italian Americans, with pride and determination, rescue their Italian names and traditions from the trash bin in which the melting pot politics had thrown them. The following verses by Maria Mazziotti Gillan, which sound like sharp slaps on the face, are emblematic of one important aspect of the found or literary radicalism:

Today, I take back my name
And wave it in their faces
Like a bright, red flag (307)

Between these two timeframes, the years 1919-1970 roughly, lies the period when Americanized Italians and American-born Italians, for fear of being considered "not sufficiently American", hid or denied their traditions (2). In this middle period, the radical movement underwent a process of

involution, and an obfuscation of its objectives, which led to its demise, eventually re-emerging reincarnated.

1900-1919: THE HEYDAYS OF ITALIAN RADICALISM.

The opening page of the introduction is about a teenager, Cammella Teoli, who in 1912 traveled to Washington, D. C., to testify before a Congressional Commission about working conditions in the Lawrence factories. She told the Commission how, working in a textile mill, her hair was caught in the gears of a machine and she was scalped. The extraordinary aspect of this story is that Mathilda, Cammella's own daughter, ignored this tragic episode in her mother's life. Cammella's story becomes the *leit motif* of the "lost" section of the book. The vibrant history of the Italian Left in America has been ignored by mainstream historians and, intentionally, avoided by the Italian American *ben pensanti* who have chosen to "sanitize" the Italian experience by purging it of what they considered detrimental to the good name of the community.

Furthermore, the neglected story of Cammella points to a gender gap, revealing how even Italian American (and Canadian, too, I may add) historians had, until recently, paid little attention to the struggle of Italian women in general and radical ones in particular—a gap that scores of determined Italian American and Canadian women scholars have begun to fill. In fact, as the following 1905 appeal by militant social anarchist Maria Barbieri proves, Italian radical women were very active from the early years of the Italian Diaspora:

My women comrades, these thoughts are dedicated to you, from another woman worker: It is the thought and palpitation of my soul in which I feel all the social injustices, that for centuries we have been humble and obedient slaves; I am a rebel who rises up against all these inequities, and I also invite you to the struggle. (113)

These words, announcing, as they do, a feminist spring, as indeed all the writings of other contemporary women, do not sound like the expression of the "amoral familists" theorized by Banfield.

In the opening essay, "The Making and Un-Making of the Italian American Working Class," Rudolph J. Vecoli, the dean of Italian American history, reinforces the meaning of the word "lost" so conspicuous in the title. He cautiously advances a hypothesis about why the once lively Italian radical movement might have ended with the immigrants' generation. Unlike the Jews and Finns, Italian immigrants had, indeed, failed to hand down their radical ideals to their offspring. In the first two decades of the

twentieth century, writes Vecoli, "Italian immigrants coalesced into a working class imbued with a militant class-consciousness. Led by talented organizers—socialists, syndicalists, anarchists—they mobilized powerful radical movements that played decisive roles in strikes. They also formed unions, cooperatives, and cultural organizations, and they found their voices in song, theater, oratory, and popular manifestations" (51). Second- and third-generation Italians had no part in it. Vecoli suggests that the explanation of this political-ideological fracture might be hidden in the "dynamics" of the Italian family: "The nurturing of children by traditional (often religious) mothers and their alienation from radical fathers might help explain the political rupture between generations" (64).

Jennifer Guglielmo has, however, a very different view of Italian women. In her well documented essay "Donne Ribelli", Guglielmo dispels the common prejudice that was shared even by American radical women like Gurley Flynn who wrote that "Italian women were always in the kitchen cooking and sporadically sat down to eat with men." Wittingly, Guglielmo remarks, "we must peek into the kitchen and listen to what these women were saying and planning as they nourished these [radical] movements with "una buona salsa di pomodoro" (114). She denies the view that Italian women were absent from union activities and labour struggles, arguing instead that when Italian women perceived that unions were truly concerned with their lot, they joined them in mass. During the 1910 cloak makers' strike in New York City, "a total of 2,800 Italian workers joined the union in the first three days of the strike" (121). In time, women numbered more than 70 per cent of the 100,000 membership of the Italian Local 89 of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU).

Moreover, she traces the activities and ramifications of the *gruppo anarchico femminile* that had been initiated by Maria Roda, an anarchist who had been a labour organizer in Italy and France before immigrating to the United States in 1892. From the columns of *L'adunata dei refrattari*, the women of the *gruppo anarchico femminile* called on their supporters in the industrial and mining centres of America to stand against the forms of capitalism and patriarchy that were entrenched even among some of their male comrades. In addition, they "denounced imperialism, nationalism, the [Catholic] Church, racism, and nativism, as well as contributed to theoretical debates concerning syndicalism, parliamentarianism [sic], and free love" (118).

An interesting contribution to understanding Italian radicalism in its heydays is the essay "The Radical World of Ybor City, Florida (1941-

1994”),² jointly written by Gary R. Mornino and George E. Pozzetta. Using as a narrative device the experience of the anarchist Angelo Massari who arrived in Tampa in 1902, the authors reconstruct the singular experience of *el lector* (the reader) among Spanish, Italian, and Cuban radical cigar makers of Ybor City, an industrial complex created in Tampa, Florida, by Martinez Ybor, a Cuban businessman. “The reader, *el lector*,”—a singular Cuban tradition—“stood at the epicenter of Ybor City’s radical culture,” looming large “in social, intellectual and political circles.” For four hours every day, the reader read novels, newspapers, and tracts of works by Karl Marx and Garibaldi and others. “The reader represented a pivotal, revered figure” to Italians who were more than 50 per cent illiterate, opening up to them a wide world (254). Several Italian radicals, men and women, seized the opportunity and became readers. During the Red Scare years, Ybor’s radical community, like every similar community in America, was under police repression: “Agents seized presses, and scores of radicals were deported.” (259)

Calvin Winslow continues the saga of the Italian radicals’ heydays. He depicts the vitality of the Italian longshoremen of Brooklyn, New York: “the Italian Quarter was the center of waterfront radicalism” (108). He discusses the collaboration among Italian, Irish and black workers in two general strikes that paralyzed the New York port in 1907 and 1919. Sharing misery, long hours of work, low pay, and extended periods of idleness, workers overran their ethnic and cultural differences and chose to cooperate. Initiated by the Italians, the 1919 strike was the largest waterfront workers’ mobilization in U.S. history: “In defiance of the shippers, the government, and their own union, Italian strikers shut down the Brooklyn waterfront and marched over the bridge to Manhattan, where they were joined by other longshoremen, chiefly Irish, which quickly became another general strike involving 150,000 workers” (99). In the 1920s, the New York longshoremen’s union fell under the power of Irish and Italian mob gangs which “cooperated in carving up the waterfront”—a reality that Eli Kazan captured in his 1951 film, *On the Waterfront*. The mob, a bastard son of capitalism, wiped out unions with its delicate methods and eliminated the few brave leaders like Pete Panto (109).

From New York to San Francisco on the Pacific coast, Italian radicals were unorthodox messengers of equality and freedom. As in the rest of the

²The dates given in the title are misleading—the essay covers mainly the period between 1900 and 1919 and makes only cursory mention of other dates up to 1948 (and not beyond).

country, on the West coast, in California (and British Columbia, Canada), Italians were perceived “as unskilled workers and union busters” (191). Paola S. Sensi-Isolani (Chapter 8) focuses her attention on the struggle for Free Speech and the “right to organize” undertaken in San Francisco by the Italians of the Latin section of the syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). “The Latin branch of the IWW, with its Italian immigrant leaders, challenged among others the rich Italian businessmen within the community who took advantage of their compatriots by providing worse working conditions and paying even lower wages than American employers” (200). For example, “women in the [Italian] Fontana canneries in 1910 earned 60-70 cents for a 13-hour day while Italian women working in American owned industrialized bakeries earned \$1.75 for a 9-hour day” (191).

The efforts to organize San Francisco’s Italian bakers pitted the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL) against the radical IWW and united “the conservative [weekly] *L’Italia*, Italian socialists, and anarchists with the Latin Branch” of the IWW. The struggle for free speech and the right to organize aroused opposition from the city’s politicians and establishment, the AFL, the community’s *prominenti*, and the Italian Catholic priests who were angered by radicals attacking the Church: “*quel sacro pastribolo* [read “*postribolo*”] *delle coscienze*.”³ In 1919, in San Francisco as in Tampa, “political repression led to the persecution of individual members and to the forcible closing of San Francisco’s IWW and its Latin branch.” (201).

The activities and analysis of the IWW are further illustrated in Salvatore Salerno’s solid essay (Chapter 7). He takes issue with those historians who consider the syndicalist union, IWW, a singular indigenous American movement. Focusing on the “International” aspect of the union, Salerno states: “The industrial union [...] was a world wide movement carried by workers who spoke many different languages. Nurtured in intricate patterns of cross-fertilization, syndicalism traveled between states, countries, and continents” (180). Taking as an example the anarchist of Paterson, New Jersey, “*Gruppo Diritto all’Esistenza*”, a forge of working class innovative tactics and thinking (179), Salerno proceeds to prove that some innovative tactics employed by the Wobblers, the IWW activists, had first been experimented by Italian immigrants. The *Camera del Lavoro*,

³Sensi-Isolaini reads and translates the misspelled word “*pastribolo*” as *patibolo* instead of *postribolo* thus missing the point that anarchists used to consider the Church as a place where consciences were merchandized like women’s bodies (hence a *postribolo* or brothel).

which was instituted by the *Federazione Socialista Italiana d'America*, predated the mixed local of the IWW. Another revolutionary tactic that prefigured the Wobblers' "strike on the job" was, says Salerno, the Italian railroad workers' decision to cut their shovels in half in response to management's decision to cut wages 50 cents per day. "Short pay short shovels," Italians shouted (177). In closing his essay, Salerno links the experience of the Paterson anarchists and the multi-ethnic immigrant workers with the "Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) in the 1930s and the English-speaking second generation of industrial workers." In fact, radicalism, like the mythical sphinx, springs to life from its own ashes: it sheds a historically determined body, the IWW, and reincarnates in another.

1919-1950s: INVOLUTION AND PERSECUTION.

From about 1917 (the Bolshevik revolution) to the 1950s (the McCarthyism years), Italian Americans underwent a process of involution that led most of them slowly to become a bastion of conservative privileges and then an outright reactionary group like Mayor Franc Rizzo of Philadelphia "who boasted that his approach to law and order would make Attila the Hun look like a 'faggot,' and whose notorious anti-Black harassment included stripping Black Panthers in the street" (249). A similar process involved a large portion of Italian radicals who, by the 1940s, stood against their former companions of misery and discrimination: Blacks, Puerto Ricans, West Indians, and "Reds." The causes of this regressive process are basically three: internal conflicts, evolving into an outright war, government persecution, and personal and parochial interests. All this shattered the faltering collaboration, which Italian American radicals found during the long and unsuccessful campaign to save the lives of Sacco and Vanzetti, when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia and when General Francisco Franco and his fascist allies overran the Spanish Republic, a general rehearsal of WWII.

Charles A. Zappia's essay "From Working-Class Radicalism to Cold War Anti-Communism" portrays the regressive parabolic trajectory of the Italian garment workers *da incendiari a pompieri*. Initially discriminated and oppressed Italian garment workers organized unions to better their lot and engaged in community politics. They succeeded in forming two powerful locals of the ILGWU, Locals 48 and 89. During their radical years, they hailed the Bolshevik Revolution and condemned the United States' intervention in the Russian Civil War. "Local 89's Executive Council donated medical supplies to the Bolsheviks, joined and supported monetarily the pro-Bolshevik American Labor Alliance for Trade with Soviet

Russia, and authored resolutions of protest against the U. S. blockade of the revolutionary state" (147).

From these radical positions, the Italian garment worker leaders and ranks ended up engaging an all out war against communism and its American proponents. Charles A. Zappia traces this regressive process through the life of Luigi Antonini, the boss of Local 89: "Between 1919 and 1950, Antonini's political journey had taken him from membership in the Workers' Party and advocacy of working-class revolution to junior membership in the cold war policy elite and advocacy of placing the fight against Communism above virtually all other union concerns" (154). Triggering the enmity between socialists leading the Italian garment workers and the communists was the communists' attempt to capture the "central administration" of the ILGWU in the 1925 convention. Antonini, Salvatore Ninfo, General Secretary of the cloak makers' Local 48, and most of the union activists stood against the communist move.

They did so not out of an ideological stand but for practical considerations. The communist program aimed at "amalgamation [of unions] that would have destroyed the hard-won autonomy of the Italian locals." Once the fight was on, however, "it became so bitter, personal, and, at times, violent that, increasingly, Communism itself became the enemy" (150). Passing through different stages, Italian garment union leaders and the membership became increasingly more conservative to the point that during the Second World War, "Antonini became involved with the 'Columbus Citizens Committee,' an organization that included several former Fascist sympathizers and reputed mob figures" (153).

Further, in the 1930s, President Roosevelt's New Deal, accepting "cloak and dress codes, favorable to [garment] workers", stimulated a tremendous growth of ILGWU's ranks. This blinded most Italian union officers like Antonini who either failed (or did not want) to see that beyond cosmetic and semantic changes, Roosevelt's policy was essentially the same old conservative soup dished out on a new plate. As Barton J. Bernstein clearly points out, the New Deal Failed to raise the impoverished, it failed to redistribute income, it failed to extend equality and generally countenanced racial discrimination and segregation. It failed generally to make business more responsible to the social welfare or to threaten big business's pre-eminent power. In this sense, the New Deal, despite the shifts in tone and spirit from the earlier decade, was profoundly conservative, and continued with the 1920s.⁴

⁴Bernstein, "The New Deal", 264-265.

Under the anticommunism banner, Italian union leaders were more interested in re-electing Roosevelt than in helping workers outside their own parochial Italian and personal interests.

Nunzio Petricone (Chapter 2) and Gerard Meyer (Chapter 9) portray, in their respective essays, the inner struggle among the Italian radical groups and individuals. In his essay on "Italian Americans and the American Communist Party," Meyer unearths the divisive and pernicious struggle between the leaders of the Italian Locals of the ILGWU and the communists. In the middle of the 1920s when the communists attempted to take over the IGWU (discussed above), the confrontation turned progressively ugly, lasting throughout the 1930s, the Cold War years, and beyond. The Italian communists edited four weekly newspapers which superseded each other: *Il Lavoratore* (1924-1931),⁵ *L'Unità Operaia* (1932-1938), *L'Unità del Popolo* (1938-1951), and *Unity* (1954-1961). *L'Unità del Popolo*, writes Meyer, "lambasted Antonini far more frequently than it denounced Mussolini" (213). No less harsh, the paper was against Generoso Pope, the wealthy owner of *Il Progresso Italo Americano*, branding him as "a notorious fascist propagandist, whose sole idea of democracy has consisted of Tammany Hall" (213).

Petricone treats the long and vicious diatribe that pitted anti-organizational anarchists, *Gallianisti* (followers of Luigi Galliani's teaching) of *L'adunata dei refrattari*, against Carlo Tresca, "the most important and feared Italian radical in the United States" (81) and in Rome. Tresca was a pragmatic man; he was primarily interested in helping workers achieve their objectives in the struggle against capitalism. Ideological disputes did not interest him more than general class struggle. Because of his non-dogmatic approach, he "was always a little outside all the subversive theologies," said his long standing friend, Arturo Giovannitti, the poet laureate of the Italian left (80). On 11 January 1943, an unknown gunman (Carmine Galante by *vox populi*) assassinated Carlo Tresca. Throughout his long militant life, he had made too many enemies among fascists, communists, and anarchists and he even managed to infuriate a mob boss, Frank Garofalo. When he testified against communism before a Congressional Commission, even his friends and supporters were angry with him. Because of his controversial character, there are several hypothe-

⁵In 1926, the Communist Party of Italy did not approve the political line expressed by the Italian American paper, *Il Lavoratore* and complained about the paper in a letter to the Secretary of the Communist International (Comintern); see Istituto Gramsci, Roma, file: b. VII, 513.1.498/21.

ses on who might have been behind the killer. Tresca, like Sacco and Vanzetti, remains, however, a milestone of Italian American Radicalism.

Regarding the Sacco and Vanzetti case, Paul Avrich (Chapter 6) revisits those events and makes essentially two main points. One is about the two anarchists and the other about Judge Webster Thayer. He points out that Sacco and Vanzetti were not naïve, peace loving men, as some historians liked to portray them, but members of a secret revolutionary group “whose function was to carry out bombings” (164). Further, unable to escape from jail, they sought revenge: “If we have to die for a crime of which we are innocent,” declared Vanzetti, “we ask for revenge” (167). The second point concerns Judge Webster Thayer who presided over the two anarchists’ trial. In 1923, having denied a new trial, Judge Thayer “rewarded” himself by attending a football game where he said to a friend of his, James Richardson, professor of law: “Did you see what I did with those anarchistic bastards the other day? [...] I guess that will hold them for a while” (166-167). Avrich ends his essay reporting what Valerio Isca, an anarchist, told him about Judge Thayer: Sacco and Vanzetti “received a posthumous measure of revenge. For Thayer ... died on the toiled seat, and his soul went down the drain” (168).

By the late 1940s, however, many of the Italian American “arsonists” had become “firefighters”; and the generational fracture in the Italian community appeared wide open. Jennifer Guglielmo synthesizes it accurately: “Italian American women and men garment workers in New York City began to insist on their whiteness, entitling them to privileged political rights, better-paying jobs, and leadership of the union. They often did so by practicing and institutionalizing policies of racialized exclusion in the union and industry, a ploy which enabled them to gain control over higher-paying jobs and deny democratic representation to African American, Puerto Rican, and West Indian women and men in the union” (126).

To the ideological conflicts and the individuals’ likes and dislikes, we should add and ponder on the persecution that the American establishment and its government periodically inflicted on radicals in general and, after WWII, on communists in particular. This was done with the approval and support of ex-revolutionaries like Antonini and, of course, all types of organized religions with the Catholic Church at the front of the line. At the same time when radicals of every stripe were considered un-American and many of them had been deported, Mussolini’s men and their supporters in America were looked at with benign condescension by both Republican and Democratic Administrations and this policy continued, save during the war years, even after WWII.

For the about 250 fascist supporters and authentic fascists like Domenico Trombetta, editor of the ultra fascist *Grido della Stirpe*, who had been interned during WWII, the Order Sons of Italy wrote President George Bush requesting an apology for “the war time treatment of Italian Americans.” Fascists and fascism were not mentioned. Meanwhile for the hundreds of left wing activists who, before and during McCarthyism, have unjustly been persecuted, jailed, and repatriated, silence dominates inside and outside the Italian American community. Gerard Meyer has it right when he writes: “Those who eradicated this community [the communist and the radicals in general] have had no reason to remind anyone of these events, and those who fell victim to this political repression could never be sure what other penalties awaited them or members of their families if they sought rectification” (220). Consequently, the memory of those men and women and their struggles are in the limbo of the Lost World of Italian American Radicalism. Their yearning for justice and equality is, however, alive in the un-conformist Italian Americans and beyond.

THE FOUND (OR REINCARNATED) ITALIAN AMERICAN RADICALISM.

The political, rebellious, and democratic spirit which animated the lay Italian radicals of the early twentieth century—atheists, agnostics, anticlerical—reincarnated itself in two Catholic Italian Americans, Father James Groppi and Mario Savio in the 1960s and 1970s. Father Groppi was the most important white leader of the American blacks’ civil right movement, and Mario Savio led the student movement at Berkeley University in California.

Jackie DiSalvo’s essay (Chapter 10) sketches Father Groppi’s singular character and activities among young American blacks. DiSalvo writes: “Few of the demonstrations I have joined in my life are more memorable than the tense march into the white sector of Milwaukee led by Father James Groppi and his contingent of African American youth” (229). Groppi’s initiatives against racism led him, perhaps unknowingly, to emulate the wobblers. In fact, like the wobblers, he used very unorthodox means and tactics against racism. Besides leading blacks marching into exclusive white enclaves, singular was his decision to give his young black followers brown and black paint, telling them to paint all the white plaster statues of Saints and Christ located on his church’s ground in the colour they could identify themselves with. He even conceived the very radical idea of replacing all pews in the church with beds and tables to comfort and feed tired and hungry men and women. For his activities, he was the target of the *ben pensati*, conservative Americans, Italians included, who

branded him as a "white nigger". He left the robe when he married his secretary, but he remained loyal to the basic postulates of Christ's Church.

No less radical than Father Groppi was Mario Savio about whom Gil Fagiani gives an overview in Chapter 11. A Catholic like Groppi, Savio "was powerfully influenced by the dramatic changes emanating from Vatican II" (246). While at college, Savio became one of the leaders of the "free speech movement," linking the civil right protest and the antiwar demonstration of the early and late 1960s that generated the New Left in the United States and throughout the world. Firm in his Catholic outlook, Savio considered the "Free Speech Movement" as "secularized liberation theology" (247). Visiting Italy in the 1980s, the Catholic Savio seized the opportunity to speak against apartheid at communist rallies in Ferrara and Turin and on Italian radio (248-249).

Fagiani rightly argues that the media and right-wing politicians like the Mayor of Philadelphia, Frank Rizzo, managed to direct "Italian American resentment" for the many social evils "toward people of color, immigrants, gays, and others at the margins of society" (249). Italian politicians like Alfonse D'Amato, Joseph Bruno, Anthony Vacco, and Rudolph Giuliani, the cream of Italian American conservatism, brought to Savio's mind Tancredi's words to his uncle the Prince, in the novel *Il Gattopardo*: "Se vogliono che tutto rimanga com'è, bisogna che tutto cambi."

Moving from active politics to Italian American literature, in Chapter 13 Fred Gardaphè recovers the Radical Traditions in Italian American narrative. He unravels the Red threat, or radical tradition, leading out of the labyrinth from the 1920s to the present: "Italian American writing is working-class based; shaped by the experience of Italian immigrant workers. This tradition is built as solid as a red brick road by such writers as Luigi Fraina, Arturo Giovannitti, Frances (Vinciguerra) Winwar, Pietro di Donato, Angelo Pellegrini, Carlo Marzani, Vincenzo Ferrini, Diane di Prima, and many others" (265-266). From the different ideological positions and personal views of these and other writers, Gardaphè distills the common position in Fraina's words of the 1930s: "The threat of fascism, of new world wars and new barbarism arises out of the class necessity of entrenched interests which cling, at all costs, to the old order. This menace to all other classes can be met only by a struggle for a new social order capable of creating a new and higher civilization" (266-267). One may say that Fraina expresses, beyond the words politically dated, the twenty-first century reality.

From Fraina's world dimension, Mary Jo Bona (Chapter 15) focuses

our attention on the core of the Italian American family. Embracing the etymologic meaning of the word radical derived from the Latin “*radix*” (root), Bona says, “Italian American radicalism in the literature of the late twentieth century goes back to the family” (287). Analyzing two lesbian novels, *Saturday Night in the Prime of Life* and *Tender Warriors* by Dodici Azpadu and Rachel De Vries respectively, Mary Jo Bona states that “the families’ refusal to accept their gay daughters is deeply rooted in a desire to bury any discussion of sexuality itself—as though to examine sexual identity may potentially unearth secrets too private (or too shameful) to discuss” (287). The Italian family becomes, then, a paradigm of the Garden of Eden where, behind the apparent serenity, the mysterious beast hides. She ends her essay with some lines of Rose Romano’s poem, “Final Stage,” about a man dying of AIDS and his lesbian ex-wife, who is the speaker:

It all comes back to family,
 starts with family,
 lives with family,
 goes on and on and on with family.
 I’m not going to call you
 my ex husband any more. From
 now on, I’am going to call you
 my daughter’s father.
 But I have to stop and think
 Before I say it because if I just
 Let it come out of my mouth,
 Smooth and natural,
 I get confused and I call you
 My father’s daughter. (296)

The gay speaker and her dying gay ex husband “are faithfully connected to their cultural heritage – she, Italian American, he, African American. Both feel out of place in mainstream America; and most essentially, both value their flawed families” (295-296).

Homosexuality and Italian and Black ethnicities combine because they are both outcast in the dominant America ethos.

In the last chapter, the family is again at the centre of investigation by Italian American neo-feminist writers. Their work “waves between the desire for home and the necessity to reject it” (304), writes Edvige Giunta in her essay, “Where they Come From: Italian American Women Writers as Public Intellectuals.” Writers (Louise DeSalvo, Vary Cappello, Nancy Caronia, Rosette Capotorto, Maria Mazziotti Gillan, Rose Romano, Sanda

M. Gilbert, and others)⁶ place community and personal concerns at the core of their works: "Ethnic stereotyping; cultural assimilation; gender, race, sex and class oppression; domestic violence; mental illness; sexual and environmental abuse; and public health" (302).

Ideally connecting with the mute Cammella Teoli of the opening page of the book, some of these writers take a plunge into social America where poverty is cast aside by the national media, which are the proponents of the dream world of those who have succeeded. These Italian American writers speak for the marginalized, impoverished sickly and elderly men and women, the people identified in the following lines by Maria Mazziotti Gillan:

In the streets of our cities
The poor rise again like dough,
No matter how we push them down, (306)

In transforming silence into language, these writers are performing a radical act which, quoting from DiSalvo's story *Breathless*, Giunta says, "will not make people feel better, it does not allow us to feel comfortable about the way we have surrendered responsibility for our lives and the lives of others"⁷ (305).

⁶I may add here the names of some Italian Canadian women writers: Anna Camilleri, Domenica DiLeo, Gabriella Micallef, Mary De Michele, Mery Melfi, Gianna Patriarca, Concetta Principe, Francesca Schembri, Vivian Zenari and many, many others.

⁷Let me explain here why I have decided to leave out of this bookscape the fine essay on Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni (Chapter 14) by Julia Lisella. In my view, in whatever way radicalism is to be understood (politically, socially, on personal and/or sexual life choice, or on ground of style in which an artist expresses him/her self), Zagnoni Marinoni doesn't fit in. Lisella has unwittingly spelled out for me why Marinoni cannot be considered a radical with or without "mask": "she was too socially conservative and upper middle class to be considered either leftist or 'proletarian'; too scathing and analytical, perhaps ethnically identified to be considered a Southern writer; and too conservative linguistically to be considered a modernist" (283). Being "linguistically too conservative", her poetry cannot, I think, be considered radical: in poetry like painting and music, the "medium is the message." What, then, makes Marinoni a radical, "compassion" for the poor? Every Sunday the pews of every church, of every denomination are filled with people who feel compassion for the poor: are we to consider them radicals? Lisella's essay shows that Marinoni was socially, politically and culturally well entrenched in the higher part of the social tree-trunk, too far away from the roots.

In conclusion, this collection of articles on Italian-American radicalism is an excellent anthology of Italian American studies; it presents a rich variety of approaches to the political and cultural aspects of the Italian American experience. *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism* makes exceptional good reading for anyone who is interested in Italian American history, culture and related topics. The average reader discovers a new, interesting world that is ignored by mainstream American historiography; students will find in the abundant and pertinent notes a readymade and exhaustive list of texts which will facilitate their research and trigger their curiosity and desire to expand their knowledge in one or more of the book's many areas of investigations. Scholars, even those who are familiar with the subject, will find some new aspects that will intrigue them, and in Donna E. Garbaccia's closing remarks they will find a global perspective on which to focus their attention and research. The excellent introduction, the fine sixteen essays and the provocative conclusion stimulate interest and generate discussions which are the tree on which understanding grows, ripens, and produces new seeds.

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