Helen Barolini *A Circular Journey*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006. Pp. 210. ISBN 9-7808-2322-6153 \$ 22.95 US

Helen Barolini has dedicated her writing life to articulating the Italian American experience: that is, to exploring the human state of cultural dissonance, duality, and *différance*. She helped define and legitimize Italian-American literature, both through her editing of the ground-breaking *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writing by Italian American Women* and through the sterling example of her own writing, her ten books of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction.

Although *A Circular Journey* is a collection of essays written over a number of years and previously published in various prestigious literary magazines, the book succeeds as a unified work that takes the reader on a stimulating and satisfying voyage. It serves as a casual autobiography: a record not of the major events in Helen Barolini's life, but of her preoccupations and influences, as well as her development as a writer. Her journey is divided into the usual three stages: *Home*, *Abroad*, and *Return*; however, Barolini does not conform to the trope of the hyphenated writer. The place where she begins is Syracuse in New York State, and she vividly evokes her family, her house, and the elegant street where she grew up in the 1930s. In a way, her childhood was archetypically American: Nancy Drew mysteries, Saturday afternoon at the movies, and summers at the lake. Her parents were determined "to get past" being Italian and become acceptable. They stopped speaking the language and cut off relatives, "those people", who did not assimilate. Only in the kitchen were the traditions upheld. Still Barolini writes: "Even as a child I could tell there was a difference between what I thought of as real Americans with their easy names and those of us who were American with 'foreign' surnames" (17).

Helen Barolini was influenced by her love of literature as much as she was by place, time, and close family. Her love of Latin and eventually the poetry of Catullus propelled her to visit the country that her grandfather told her, "we came here to get away from" (159). After she married the poet and journalist Antonio Barolini, she lived there for many years and grew to know and appreciate deeply both Italy and its artistic life. The essays in the section *Abroad* centre on her travels in Italy during this time and also after her husband's too early death. In prose that is a joy to read, exhibiting as it does the classical principles that Barolini ingested from her reading, balance, clarity, precision, elegance, and harmony, she shows us Taormina on an Easter holiday, Vicenza after the last war, or Bellagio from an artists' retreat. "Neruda vs Sartre by the Sea" delivers a satirical account of a meeting in 1967 of the Viareggio Prize jury and the accompanying hoopla and politicking. "Montale and Mosca on the Train" exposes a more petty side of the great poet. Helen is not an academic, but she sprinkles literary judgments and insights throughout, including a suggestion that James Joyce may have absorbed D'Annunzio's cadences in "*La Pioggia nel Pineta*" and used them in his sublime conclusion to "The Dead."

Inspired by a view of the two branches of Lake Como, Barolini suggests her writing life has been formed by two confluences: "American on one side...Italian

on the other...It's not a question of choice. Both realities are simply there (135). In *Return*, she embraces both sides, while coming to the understanding that her final resting place should be beside her parents in Syracuse.

I found "A Story of Rings" which deals with her struggles and disappointments as a writer particularly resonant. Helen compares her career with that of her husband. "He simply wrote out of who he was and for the literature of which he was a part" (178). Antonio and his literary friends could afford to dismiss critics and reviewers "so assured were they of their own place as writers" (177). An Italian-American woman, who brings an unfamiliar voice to the national literature, cannot write with the same confidence or support from either family or the literary establishment. Her novel *Umbertina* which she states was the first "not based on stereotypical mobs or mafia, but ... a cross-cultural narrative ... told for the first time through the voices of the women who lived it" (177), was not reviewed in *The New York Times*. Years later, she is asked accusingly (as I have been) why she always writes about *Italians*. She protests that she writes about Italian-Americans and thinks Saul Bellow was not asked why he always wrote about alienated Jews.

Italian-American and Italian-Canadian writers need "mainstream connections ... advocates ... [and] reviewers" (177). (Tellingly, Barolini told me that her recent books, this fine collection of essays and another on American women in Italy, have been so little publicized that she felt they "disappeared into their own black holes.") Since, for complex reasons, mainstream literary approval rarely exists for hyphenated writers, we need the attention, the interpretation, and the validation of academic critics in order to survive. As Barolini argues, we are too often classified as marginal (and thus unimportant) because we choose *différence* as our subject. She defines herself as simply an American writer, but one who believes in striking "a balance between excesses of any kind, between too European or too American a way" (208).

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Maria Vera Vellani Corsini. *The immigrant's two souls. Le due anime dell'immigrante*. Edited and with an introduction by Guido Pugliese. Welland: Éditions Soleil Publishing Inc., 2006. Pp. 238. n.p.

Nel 1955 Maria Vera Vellani e suo marito decidono di lasciare l'Italia e stabilirsi in Canada. Due anni dopo, acquistato un podere a Chatham, la coppia comincerà una nuova vita dedicandosi alla coltivazione dei campi. Ma quella che potrebbe sembrare la normale vicenda di due dei tanti emigranti italiani del dopoguerra nasce da premesse del tutto particolari. L'autrice, nata in una famiglia abbiente della provincia bolognese, sposa infatti un partigiano che ha combattuto in Piemonte nelle formazioni di Giustizia e Libertà, il nucleo di quello che diverrà, a liberazione avvenuta, il Partito d'Azione. Anche suo fratello diventerà un militante di Giustizia e Libertà e Maria Vera, per parte sua, aveva presto sentito crescere in sé, all'indomani della promulgazione delle leggi razziali, una coraggiosa avversione