libro); Roberto Longhi (il maestro degli anni dell’università a Bologna, che le aveva insegnato a ‘leggere’ la grande pittura rinascimentale italiana); il regista James Ivory (caro amico del fratello dell’autrice, Antonio Maria Vellani, regista egli stesso e direttore, fino alla morte nel 1989, dell’American Film Institute di Los Angeles); Giorgio Morandi (incontrato dall’autrice nel famoso studio che il pittore ebbe a Bologna in via Fondazza); Marco Biagi (il giuslavorista bararamente assassinato dalle nuove Brigade Rosse in via Valdonica a Bologna nel 2002—amico di famiglia della Corsini); e infine l’immancabile Dante (che l’autrice ringrazia per aver creato la lingua che ‘oggi noi tutti usiamo’). Tuttavia, nella galleria dei ricordi, rievocati e coltivati con tocco lieve, occupano uno spazio considerevole anche attori meno noti della storia più recente e personaggi a cui l’autrice è legata dal vincolo di una tenera amicizia o dell’amore familiare. C’è spazio quindi per la nipotina Cristina, affetta da paralisi cerebrale e tanto più amata per la sua vivace dolcezza e sensibilità; per il fratello Antonio (preoccupata per la sua incoltà, l’autrice distrae l’unico archivio esistente di Giustizia e Libertà che rischiosamente il ragazzo custodiva nella casa di Bologna al tempo dell’occupazione nazista); per l’amica Rosa Trillo Clough, che, col suo entusiasmo per la lingua e la cultura italiane, rievocerà i soggiorni della Corsini a Palm Beach, in Florida; per un indifeso disertore russo che voleva dismettere la divisa della Wehrmacht e che l’autrice aiutò a contattare i partigiani delle colline bolognesi; per il marito, amato per più di quarant’anni; per la città di Venezia (e i suoi grandi pittoreschi) e infine per Bologna, la città della giovinella e del primo impegno civile.

A dispetto di quel che normalmente accade per una collezione di componimenti poetici, la lettura del libro della Corsini va assolutamente raccomandata, anche a fini didattici, non tanto e non solo per il valore estetico delle singole poesie, quanto per la ricchezza umana e morale del retroterra storico che le sottende.

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Not long ago, at an investigation for a plagiarized essay in my course, the accused student turned to me and with all the vituperative venom she could muster spat out words of chastisement at me for not having the least notion of what it meant to be the child of immigrant parents struggling in a new country. I think she had forgotten to look at my name. I wish now that I had had among my collection of her various incriminating writings also the three volumes under review here, volumes whose content is of far greater relevance to contemporary North American poetry than their slim form suggests. I could have read to my disbelieving student
my own life through the potent lines of Maria Mazzotti Gillan, Gianna Patriarca and Vittoria repetto. And thus I declare the biased perspective of this review, for I found in the verses of the three poets an immediate identification with, and an emotional personal reaction to, many of their offerings.

The volumes share common themes, notably that confusing and uncomfortable reality of belonging neither here nor there: not fully Italian, not fully North American (more precisely, Canadian for Patriarca and American for the two others). Nonetheless, each poet also explores her own self-identity within this non-place. And while each plays against the background of what she is not vis-à-vis the dominant culture, each also reveals what she is.

In that nebulous and unstable cultural space they describe, all three poets, true to their multi-faceted self construction, constantly shuttle back and forth, partaking in impatient displacement in hope of finding their home. The theme of displacement, seen also through travel and its contingent imagery, is both metaphorical and real. Patriarca, in a wonderful (and perhaps unconscious) riff on compatriot Eduardo de Filippo's poem "E bbalice" (1973), opens her volume with an impending departure:

how do i package
the weight of my heart

i will take with me
what my arms can carry

....

these things will remind me
of who i am
and where i came from (11)

For De Filippo, the ultimate fear was one of how he will be remembered after death; for Patriarca, departure from Italy is worse than death. It cuts much more closely to the human soul, and concerns not how she will be remembered, but how she will continue to remember, through a new identity, all those things, all the mundane stuff of her practice of her old everyday life that remains an ineluctable part of her.

Vittoria repetto displays similar restlessness, biking, walking, driving a taxi, exhausting herself against a New York City background:

and i find myself
smoking one pack two pack
sprinting at night on my bike
chinatown to eighty & second and back
in forty minutes
running
all the lights
and if a car doesn't get me
maybe i'll be lucky
and my heart will explode out of my chest
cause
what i could not trust
was my own heart (80)

As in Patriarca’s work, repetto’s fear of trusting her own heart is revealed through the little aspects of life, those seemingly irrelevant elements that bind us to an identity, or deny it to us in subtle subversive ways. She may defiantly proclaim “il mio nome è Vittoria / two t’s no c” (40), but she is almost submissive before the tyranny of something as ordinary as the food that pits her against her father:

he said
you’re fat
he said
  have some ravioli
you’re fat
  have some gnocchi
you’re fat
  have some cheese
you’re fat
  have some torta
fat
panettone
fat
cioccolate [sic]
fat
fat
fat (25)

What reconciles daughter and father and binds them is an unremarkable cat t-shirt, a simple gift from him to her that takes on importance because it marks his acceptance of a daughter who has constantly confounded him:

but i’ll tell you what i’m sentimental about
this cat t-shirt he gave me
... after forty seven yrs of italian gold
that i hardly wore
....he thought

he was raising a sweet innocent italian girl
from his little town of framura
but i was a budding defiant guinea dyke
from greenwich village
but this cat t-shirt
he thought about what i might like
who i might be
his daughter the cat lover
if he ever buys me a lesbian t-shirt
i’d be out of my mind with happiness. (35)

Similarly peripatetic and restless is Maria Mazziotti Gillan who bursts through the superficially protective cocoon of an established New Jersey neigh-

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bourhood seeking her identity:

The past, iridescent
and elusive, floats away from us.
I drag the present with me
like a heavy suitcase wherever I go. (128)

Of the three poets, Mazziotti Gillan is the most accepting of her rootlessness and the closest to recognizing who she is as a poet and as an Italo-American woman. But in the ironic stab that cleaves at her even more, it seems that when she finally reconciles herself to a self-identification through her own family, both her John and her Dennis abandon her; the former, her son, through misunderstanding and the latter, her husband, through debilitating illness. Among the three, it is Mazziotti Gillan who has best found the ability to love and forgive herself. Her volume ends with a poem entitled "Learning How to Love Myself":

I see my short,

sturdy legs, my thick body that carries me along,
unstoppable into my life, this peasant body.

For years, I longed for the slender grace
of a long body, tall and supple as marsh grass,

but would not give up this incredible energy,
the heat that pours from the furnace of my body,
the long line of women who taught me to laugh
my deep belly laugh and grab the world

in my arms and squeeze the sweetness out. (141)

On the other hand, repetto persists in her search for

a daily mantra
that i repeat
in the bathroom mirror
hoping to heal my heart
maybe
find un'amore del mia cuore [sic]
a friend of my heart... (81)

And Patriarca, in her closing verses, finds that even in a return to her birthplace, she does not find a home:

i have come back to the house
where i was born
but it is only the road i recognize
long, winding beneath the bridge...
my cousin's wife is polite
she offers me coffee
in porcelain cups...
we are strangers...
In an exquisite image of giving a gift to her elderly aunt, an image that serves only to emphasize how the poet must yet learn to love and forgive herself, she admits:

i bring her Canadian chocolates
caramel sweet
she has no teeth
i am a little ashamed
at my arrogance
my ignorance (117)

Patriarca's confession of unmerited shame echoes the hurts and the hopes of many women of what I refer to as an immigrant sandwich: with ancestors in one country, and descendants in another, they themselves caught in the middle. The ensuing shame, inadequacy and marginalization compels them to seek justification, explanation and comfort in all that is around them; not in grand allegories, but in the simplicity of everyday existence. How complex this existence reveals itself, however. Consequently, these poets paint images of grandmothers, mothers, children and especially fathers. The fathers have faults, but in the end, their love and their memories endure.

The vicissitudes of their lives inscribe themselves in the metaphors of these three poets, depicting their joy, their anger, their frustration, and finally their attachment to their past: the peach slice in the wine, nonna's shawl, dad's old jalopies, mamma's epileptic seizures. Patriarca bemoans that she is not like Margaret Atwood, repetto strikes out against the Anglos who know nothing of her Italy but think they do, and Mazziotti Gillan shrinks back from the blonde, blue eyed Dorothys who wear sweater sets and pearls. However, it is precisely in not being Atwood, Anglo or Dorothy, that these three poets find their own voice and allow their creativity its potential. And this act of creating, as Patriarca writes

...is about living the moment
not writing it
about the taste left on the tongue....

it is about ripening
tart
sweet
and feeding the hunger (99)

My student used her hunger for belonging in order to distract attention from her academic misdemeanour; may she learn one day to feast instead on the beauty produced through the hunger of fellow immigrants. May she find in the works of displaced poets such as Patriarca, repetto and Mazziotti Gillan, the sustenance she seeks.

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