eum

edited by **Dorothy M. Figueira**

"Minor Minorities" and Multiculturalism

Italian American and Jewish American Literature

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Italia, Americhe e altri mondi

Collana del Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi ItaloAmericani (CISIA) dell'Università di Macerata
1

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I dedicate this book to Immigrant Families across the United States of America.
Especially to my own family: my grandfather Nick Gentile from Calabria, my grandmother Carmela from Basilicata, my father Charles Figueira from British Guiana, my daughter Lila from Andhra Pradesh and my daughter Mira from Gujarat – immigrants all.

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Chapter 3

Leonardo Buonomo

Ethnicity, Gender, and Culture in Garibaldi M. Lapolla's *Miss Rollins in Love*

Published in 1932, *Miss Rollins in Love* was the second novel by the Italian American author, educator, and culinary enthusiast Garibaldi M. Lapolla, whose name and contribution to the literature of the United States regrettably remain largely unknown outside Italian American scholarship. *Miss Rollins in Love* attracted little attention and, like the two other novels Lapolla published in his lifetime, *The Fire in the Flesh* (1931) and *The Grand Gennaro* (1935), soon disappeared from the literary scene. Lapolla's novelistic output had been preceded by *Better High School English through Tests and Drills* and *A Junior Anthology of World Poetry* (both published in 1929), the latter co-edited with well-known poet and scholar Mark Van Doren. Together with *Required Grammar in the New York City Public Schools* (1937), these textbooks attest to the profound love of language, and the unfailing commitment to pedagogy, which marked Lapolla's career as a high school teacher of English and principal in the New York City public school system. His passion for good cuisine and desire to educate his fellow Americans about Italy's rich culinary tradition (well before it became fashionable), found expression in the 1953 cookbooks *Italian Cooking for the American Kitchen* (for which he also provided the illustrations) and *The Mushroom Cookbook*.

Born in 1888 in Rapolla, in the Italian region of Basilicata, Lapolla emigrated to New York City with his parents in 1890. A gifted student, Lapolla made the most of the educational oppor-

tunities available to him (earning a BA and an MA at Columbia University), and in his early twenties embarked on what would prove to be a very distinguished career as an educator. Particularly sensitive to the unique obstacles that first- and second-generation Italian immigrants encountered in American schools due to their social and cultural background, Lapolla championed a more practical approach to teaching the English language. His teaching philosophy, inspired by the work of the progressive educator John Dewey, also emphasized the importance of instilling early on in students a love of reading and literature (Belluscio 2017, 49-57; Lawrence 1987b, 117). Had he only been an educator, which was already contrary to the more popular image of the illiterate southern Italian immigrant in America, Lapolla (who died in 1954), would certainly merit more attention than he has received. The true tragedy of his obscurity, however, lies in the fact that he was an equally accomplished fiction writer, who captured the voices, manners, and ambience of the Italian community in Harlem at turn-of-the century and in the early twentieth century[1]. In his novels, Lapolla delved into complex questions of cultural assimilation and identity construction that continue to be relevant in the United States today and wherever people of different origins and backgrounds co-exist.

Long out of print after their initial appearance, *The Fire in the Flesh* and *The Grand Gennaro* were first re-issued in 1975, a period which witnessed the emergence of Italian American studies as a discipline. The previous year had seen the publication of Rose Basile Green's ground-breaking *The Italian-American Novel*, in which Lapolla was finally acknowledged as an important figure in the history of Italian American literature. Since then, Lapolla's literary worth has been increasingly recognized, albeit primarily by specialists working in the field of Italian American studies. Not surprisingly, critical attention has focused on *The Grand Gennaro*, widely regarded as Lapolla's greatest achieve-

[1] In his analysis of *The Grand Gennaro*, Richard A. Meckel notes that, unlike "New York's main Italian community – that situated between Pearl and Houston streets in lower Manhattan – Italian Harlem was something of an isolated enclave, far from both the city's central commercial district and from the patchwork of immigrant ghettos that abutted it" (Meckel 1987, 130).

ment. In the words of Martino Marazzi, this novel was, "the culmination of unmistakable artistic maturity" (Marazzi 2005, 190). Appropriately enough, *The Grand Gennaro* was the first of Lapolla's three novels to be made newly available when it was reprinted in 2009, with an informative introduction by Steven Belluscio. Belluscio also edited and wrote introductions to re-issues of *The Fire in the Flesh* (2012) and *Miss Rollins in Love* (2016).

Ignored in 1975, and left for last among the more recent reprints of Lapolla's work, *Miss Rollins in Love* is long overdue for a critical reappraisal. When it was first published, *The New York Times*, in a somewhat condescending review entitled "A Schoolmarm in Love", described *Miss Rollins in Love* as "a disappointing successor" to *The Fire in the Flesh* ("A Schoolmarm in Love", 1932, 50). However, no less a critic than Giuseppe Prezzolini, in an overview of Italian American authors published in 1934, described *Miss Rollins in Love* as being "more delicate and more subtly delineated" than its predecessor (Prezzolini 1934, n.p., my translation). Many years later, Rose Basile Green echoed Prezzolini's assessment. Comparing *The Fire in the Flesh* to *Miss Rollins in Love*, she argued that the latter novel captured the Italian American setting, "more aesthetically without sacrificing authenticity" (Green 1974, 74). Prezzolini and Basile Green concurred (as do the very few critics who have discussed the novel more recently), in identifying the school microcosm and the Italian American milieu as the two significant sources of inspiration for Lapolla.

Set in New York City after World War I, *Miss Rollins in Love* tells the story of a young high school teacher of Latin, Amy Rollins, who resumes teaching after the death of her invalid mother, for whom she had been the sole caretaker. No help had come from her sister Anna, married and living elsewhere, nor her brother Philip, a shell-shocked World War I veteran in need of psychiatric care. In the course of the novel, Amy receives the attentions of three men, Stephen Bennett (a lawyer), Messrs. Crabbing and Mortimer (both schoolteachers), whose interests she does not reciprocate. On the contrary, she develops strong feelings for and a powerful attraction to one of her stu-

dents, Donato Contini, who is equally drawn to her. Recognizing Donato's gifts as a student and a budding artist, Amy goes to extraordinary lengths to encourage him and "rescue" him from the dangers of the tough environment in which he lives. When he runs afoul of the law and ends up in a reformatory, she manages to obtain his release by providing him with a place to stay as his legal guardian, since both his parents have died by then. As his guardian, mother figure, and eventually lover, Amy is instrumental in creating the conditions for Donato's breakthrough as a sculptor. When Donato subsequently falls in love with a wealthy heiress who can further advance his career, Amy makes the ultimate sacrifice: she encourages the new relationship and refrains from telling Donato that she is pregnant with his child. By the end of the novel, Donato has become an internationally renowned sculptor and Amy has relocated to New Mexico, where she looks after their son, Donato Jr., and her recovering brother Philip.

Despite plot elements that seem to hark back to the Victorian era (a woman's renunciation and seemingly innate commitment to the care of others), *Miss Rollins in Love* stands out in early Italian American fiction for its multifaceted portrait of a modern heroine. When we meet her at the outset of the novel, Amy Rollins is a young woman who lives on her own in New York City and finds fulfillment in her work. While Amy's reluctance to enter into a relationship is attributed in part to her "inhibitions" (echoing the half-digested Freudianism of the time), Lapolla shows that she also values her independence and is not swayed by the idea that a woman's ultimate goal is marriage. Her palpable discomfort when dealing with the three older men who set their sights on her appears to stem in part from the threat that they would pose, as potential husbands, to her desire for freedom and the ability to remain in control of her life. This need is probably one of the reasons why, as she admits to herself early in the novel, she is attracted to younger men. It is also significant to note that she is not of Italian ancestry, and independence may well be attributed to her non-Italianness. At the end the novel, Amy may have lost the love of her life and is an unwed mother, but she is a far cry from the stereotype of a fallen woman. Hav-

ing turned her interest in plants and flowers into a profession, she creates a new life for herself in New Mexico as a working woman and a contented single mother (an absolute rarity in the period in which the novel was published).

While the trope of the benevolent and enlightened white Anglo-Saxon benefactor lifting the immigrant out of poverty was hardly Lapolla's invention (it dated back, at least, to Horatio Alger)[2], he did add an interesting twist to it by making the older parental figure a female and the young immigrant a male. As Rose Basile Green has suggested, Amy functions as an idealized personification of the American dream (74). She is, I would argue, America as it *should* have been in the 1880-1920 period, a nation capable of recognizing worth in, and willing to learn from, the newcomers from other lands who had flocked to its shores. It is certainly no coincidence that Amy teaches Latin and loves to share her appreciation of great Latin authors with her students. She is an American who reveres the classical heritage and tries to instill in her class the same reverence for those very cultures from which most of her immigrant students originally hailed. In Donato, whose parents emigrated to New York from Sicily, she finds a particularly responsive pupil. In some important respects, he differs from the typical portrait of the second-generation Italian American as penned, for example, by John Fante in the same decade in which Lapolla' novels appeared. In the first place, Donato has parents who, despite their precarious economic circumstances, value education over purely utilitarian pursuits[3]. Secondly, there is no trace in Donato (as opposed to so many of Fante's second-generation young heroes) of cultural and ethnic self-loathing. Not only does Donato appreciate the classics, acknowledging them as part of his heritage, but he also becomes heir to his father's artistry as a puppet maker. Later, as a sculptor, Donato is inspired by his family's (and, by extension, his community's) immigrant experience. Finally,

[2] See, for example, Horatio Alger's novel *Phil, the Fiddler* (1872).

[3] By contrast, in Lapolla's first novel *The Fire in the Flesh* the protagonist Agnese is openly hostile to her son's desire to improve himself through study. On Italian American diffidence towards literacy and institutionalized education, see Covello 1967, Lawrence 1987b and Gambino 2003.

although we may safely assume that Donato and his family are Catholic, the religious component of their background and identity is conspicuously underplayed. Considering that religious affiliation played a fundamental role in the cultural self-definition of turn-of-the century Italian immigrants (in the case of southern Italian immigrants, religion certainly trumped nationality as an identity marker) and that Italian artistic heritage is intimately connected with Catholicism, Donato's marked preference for secular subjects is noteworthy. The removal of Catholicism from the Italian American milieu also sets *Miss Rollins in Love* apart from Lapolla's other novels, where worship and the representatives of the Catholic Church figure prominently, though not always in a positive light. Lapolla's portrait of a young artist who is seemingly free from the influence of Catholicism may derive from his progressive Socialist leanings[4]. However, it seems particularly significant that he made Catholicism nearly invisible in a novel centering on education and artistic expression, the two endeavors to which he devoted his own life.

Reading *Miss Rollins in Love* today, we are inevitably confronted with the controversial nature of the relationship between Amy and Donato, even before it reaches the stage of physical intimacy. There is some imprecision about the difference in age between the two characters. At the outset, Amy is said to be "past twenty-eight" (Lapolla 2016, 36). A few chapters later, we learn that Donato is "not yet eighteen", but looks "older than his years" (127). However, towards the conclusion and *after* he has become Amy's lover, Donato is referred to as being "ten years younger" than her, and she is by then thirty-one (242). What is certain is that Donato is Amy's student, a role which opens up important questions of ethics, propriety, authority, and responsibility as far as her actions are concerned. It is a measure of the extent to which attitudes have changed over the years, that neither the anonymous *Times* reviewer nor Prezzolini made any mention of this issue when the book was

[4] Lapolla even ran for public office on a Socialist ticket and, as principal during the 1950s Red Scare, defended teachers who had been targeted by the House Un-American Activities Committee (Belluscio 2017, xiv-xv).

first published. Nor, for that matter, did Olga Peragallo in 1949 (in her *Italian-American Authors and Their Contributions to American Literature*) and Rose Basile Green in the mid-seventies. It is open to speculation whether Amy's and Donato's relationship had anything to do with *Miss Rollins in Love* not being re-issued in 1975 alongside Lapolla's two other novels. About one third into *Miss Rollins in Love*, Lapolla makes it clear that, upon acknowledging her feelings for Donato, Amy becomes keenly aware that she is treading on perilous ground. Interestingly, however, she is not worried about the possible repercussions on her own career and reputation, but rather about the "the effect upon the boy. 'He's just a child, Amy...', she shuddered thinking about it, shuddered, and then placed her hands over her eyes, and shut out the world" (101-102). Conscious of the power she derives from her maturity and, more importantly, her role as a teacher, Amy seems to fear the possibility that she might exercise undue influence on her pupil. At the same time, however, the idea of educating, molding, refining Donato fuels in no small measure the fascination she feels for him. It is an opportunity that would have been denied to her in her interactions with older men, given the gender dynamics of the time. At the core of the relationship between Amy and Donato, there is also, quite clearly, a very powerful mutual physical attraction. Amy may be inhibited with other men, but she responds intensely to the exceptional physical beauty of Donato. Indeed, even though we are made aware that the latter also finds Amy very attractive, the focus is overwhelmingly on his appearance, and this emphasis, in part, is due to the fact that we follow the narrative primarily from Amy's perspective.

Although intermingled with her attraction to him, Amy's interest in Donato's well-being and her capacity to recognize his talent stand in sharp contrast to the attitude of some of her colleagues and superiors, who exhibit both in word and action unmistakable signs of bigotry. Amy's school is a microcosm of early twentieth-century America, namely an increasingly diversified space, in terms of ethnicity and culture, wherein authority and power are almost exclusively in the hands of the dominant white Anglo-Saxon majority. Also, in line with the gender hi-

erarchy of the time, the imposition of discipline and the infliction of punishment are the prerogative of the male members of the staff. If Donato's Italian origins evoke for Amy a world of beauty, art, and culture, as well as a link to her beloved classics, others in her school unhesitatingly associate Italian immigration with organized crime and judge Donato accordingly. We see this difference at play early on, when Amy comes to Donato's defense after he has been accused of theft by Mr. Sidon, a teacher entrusted with the handling of particularly serious cases of student misconduct. Faced with the unjust accusation of being, in Mr. Sidon's words, the leader of "a nest of incipient thieves and gangsters" (69), Donato finds himself unable to defend himself verbally and resorts to violence, in a scene reminiscent of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*. It is Amy who becomes his spokesperson and manages to save him from the dire consequences of his action. When he is alone with Amy, Donato shares with her a painful chapter of his family's past which he had tried to keep secret. Some years earlier, Donato's older brother Giulio, himself a gifted student, had been enticed away from school by the prospect of making quick money. Sucked into the crime scene, Giulio had been involved in a robbery that had resulted in the death of two men. Even though he was not directly responsible for the murders, Giulio had been sentenced to death and was executed on the electric chair at the age of nineteen. Devastated by this tragedy, Giulio and Donato's heartbroken mother died shortly afterwards. It was only after taking a leave of absence from school to be close to his grieving father Emanuele that Donato decided to resume his studies, "for [his] father's sake" (271). The implication of these words is that the tragedy of Giulio's death had reinforced Emanuele's view that education was his surviving son's only way out of the degradation and dangers of Italian Harlem. Interestingly, however, a subsequent flashback to Emanuele's struggles as an immigrant reveals the ambivalence of his own attitude towards his adoptive country. While Emanuele believes that his younger son can be rescued by American educational institutions, he is also convinced that America, not Italy (nor, more specifically, Sicily), is responsible for his family's predicament. Contrary to the widespread

view of southern Italian immigrants as importers of crime (a view that partially fueled the introduction of the 1921 Emergency Quota Act and the 1924 Immigration Act)[5], Emanuele is convinced that it was on American soil that his sons were exposed to pernicious influences. Specifically, Emanuele blames America for undermining his patriarchal authority and inspiring rebelliousness in his sons, thus making them more vulnerable to the lure of street gang life. By evoking Emanuele's memories and recriminations, Lapolla suggests that the neighborhoods in which immigrants were confined were fertile grounds for inter-ethnic conflict, in which those left behind by the dominant culture preyed on each other. For example, we learn that when Giulio and Donato, as young boys, had taken to roaming the streets of East Harlem in search of vulnerable people to rob, their favorite targets were Jewish peddlers. Lapolla also uses the story of Emanuele to denounce America's corrupting emphasis on money as the ultimate measure of worth. A case in point is the failure of the café Emanuele tried to run with his wife and where (in the backyard) he staged his marionette shows. Initially very popular, the café progressively lost customers who were enticed away by the sale of alcohol that its competitors, thanks to their kickbacks to the police, were able to serve in defiance of Prohibition. Having witnessed the devastating repercussions of his father's law-abiding conduct, the young Giulio had vowed to make money at any cost.

In the pages he devotes to Emanuele's marionette theatre, Lapolla is at his very best, demonstrating in vivid, richly evocative prose an ethnographic understanding of Italian popular culture and traditions. Lapolla leaves us in no doubt that for Emanuele the marionette theatre is never simply a way to supplement his income. It is an art form, a vehicle for expression, and a way to reconnect with his culture of origin. What Emanuele stages in his little theatre is, essentially, his own identity.

[5] The aim of these laws was to limit drastically the influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who were widely believed to be racially inferior to so-called native-stock (i.e. white Anglo-Saxon) Americans and to have contributed to the spread of crime in urban areas (Jacobson 1998, 82-85; Mangione and Morreale 1992, 316). For a discussion of these laws, see Figueira's essay in this volume.

Through his skill as a wood carver, his expert handling of the marionettes, especially his vocal dexterity, Emanuele conjures up the historical and literary heritage, myths, and folklore of Sicily[6]. Although Donato's ability as a carver does eventually surpass that of his father and becomes the basis of his future success as a sculptor, Emanuele's gifts as a storyteller and voice virtuoso remain unmatched:

> It was the voice of twenty people at one time. It covered the whole range of emotions. It was plaintive with distressed maidens and stentorious with overbearing knights, champion or defender. It whispered and it bellowed; it spoke words of love and it rose to tumultuous pitches of anger… And as the marionettes stepped out in front of their long spit-like handles manipulated by Don Contini from invisible spaces in the rear, they dispelled the present world and conjured back the Middle Ages and the back streets of Old-World towns where macaronics and fanfaronades were the order of the day. (107)

Sadly, the world that Emanuele magically evokes in his theatre, though popular with children, is too far removed in time and place to ever attract a sizable audience in the most modern of cities. Other forms of cheap, mass entertainment appear to be much more in tune with American tastes and the pace of the metropolis: "Somehow the feeling spread that all this was puerile, belonging to an older time, to another society. It was too laughable. Were there not the movies and the peep-show arcades? It was all a thing of the past. Better be back in Messina, they told Don Contini and broke his heart" (107). Incapable of adapting to the demands of his new life, Emanuele feels diminished, emasculated, and reacts to the undermining of his

[6] On the importance of the marionette theatre for Italian American communities, see Aleandri (2006, 250-251). Lawrence Oliver has pointed out that Antonio Parisi, the man credited for introducing the Sicilian marionette theatre in the United States, was, "a native of the Contini's home province, Messina". Parisi, Lawrence further notes, "established the first marionette theatre in Boston in 1888, moving it to New York's East Harlem in 1896, where young Garibaldi Lapolla might have attended " (Oliver 1987a, 10). In 1911, in the Washington D.C. *Evening Star*, George Jean Nathan wrote the following of Parisi: "Parisi is probably the only dramatist in America who improvises a different drama every night in the year and by his extemporaneous plays make large audiences weep and laugh in a manner that might make Broadway's plodding dramatists jealous" (Nathan 1911, 13).

paternal authority by subjecting his two sons to savage beatings whenever they misbehave. Tellingly, when he visits Giulio the day before his execution, Emanuele complains "of his decision to come to America" (109), as if to imply that America has led Giulio astray, and that it is a country where (as its history demonstrates) children rebel against their parents. Remarkably, this is the only scene in which any mention is made of Emanuele's religious faith, but it is expressed in a familiar form, the only way he can express his bitterness and resentment: "[he] blasphemed the saints, called for God's wrath on the judge, the jury, the attorneys" (109).

It is Donato, only fifteen at the time of Giulio's execution, who after the death of his mother rescues Emanuele from the depths of despair. Significantly, he shakes his father out of his grief-induced stupor by suggesting one day that they check the conditions of the – by then long neglected – marionettes. Donato whispers the words "Let's see what they are doing" (Lapolla 2016, 111) as if the marionettes were living creatures. In a way, that is what they are, because father and son, with their shared passion and skill, have the power to make them come to life. Carved, painted, costumed and made to enact stories out of the Italian chivalric sagas (based in part on Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*), the marionettes provide a common language and a strong cultural bond between father and son. They also provide an escape from the squalor of their surroundings: "the two mean rooms in which he and his father lived, [...] the ugly disgusting street with its immense crowds, its dirty stores, the countless pushcarts that lined it night and day and, like a herd of animals, left their refuse behind to pollute the air" (113).

The other space where Donato can exercise his imagination and satisfy his need for meaningful communication is the school, because of the closeness that develops between him and Amy. In his mind, Donato associates the beauty that he and his father call into existence when they work together, with what he experiences when he is with Amy: "The light in the eyes of Miss Rollins had been like lightning in a dark storm. He had seen the high towers of magic cities and the broad plains of the

country beyond them. [...] Miss Rollins had in some manner, like a creature in the magic stories that the marionettes told, laid a charm upon the days and the nights" (115). If Donato's father may remind us, at times, of a Geppetto-like figure (he even talks to his marionettes), Amy is a cross between the fairy in Collodi's *Pinocchio* and a muse, because she awakens Donato to a new sense of himself as an adult and inspires him to be the artist he is meant to be: "The dreams became truth, and the experiences of the day the dreams. He had worked harder than ever at his modeling and hoped to have shown her the head on which he was working" (115).

Admittedly, Donato is not even remotely similar to a wooden puppet, but throughout the novel he is almost obsessively compared to a statue that has miraculously come to life. In his first novel, which told the story of a young woman's illicit affair with a priest and her subsequent, scandalous pregnancy, Lapolla had clearly drawn inspiration from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. It appears that Hawthorne was again in his thoughts when he wrote *Miss Rollins in Love*, because the character of Donato shares more than one trait with Donatello, the handsome Italian protagonist of *The Marble Faun*. To begin with, their names are practically the same, since Donatello is a variant of Donato[7]. Moreover, Donato's surname Contini recalls the word *Conte* ("Count"), which is precisely the aristocratic title that Hawthorne's Donatello bears in *The Marble Faun* (he is the Count of Monte Beni). In *The Marble Faun*, the three characters who gravitate around Donatello – Miriam, Kenyon, and Hilda – are simultaneously fascinated, amused, and puzzled by his uncanny resemblance to the statue of the Faun originally attributed to Praxiteles (now believed to be a Roman copy) and housed in Rome's Capitoline Museums. Repeatedly, Donatello is described as the flesh-and-blood twin to the marble statue, to the point that his friends half-jokingly wonder if the young man, underneath his curly hair, has pointed

[7] Given Donato's chosen art form, his name may also be a nod to the Italian Renaissance sculptor Donatello (1386-1466), whose real name was Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi.

ears like his inanimate counterpart. Similarly, in *Miss Rollins in Love*, Amy notices early on, and progressively becomes fixated with the idea, that Donato looks like Praxiteles's marble statue of Hermes[8]. Tellingly, the first time she asks herself whether the pleasure she derives from teaching has something to do with Donato, she mentally pictures him as the "slender Italian boy with a figure like the Hermes of Praxiteles" (60). Shortly afterwards, when she finds Donato unexpectedly waiting for her in her room at school, her gaze lingers lovingly on him, as if she were admiring a work of art:

> Donato had thrown up the shades and windows both, and stood with them behind him. Outlined against them, he looked a young god stepped out of a classic temple [...]. Especially clear in the light were the well-defined lines of his features. Nowhere was there bulge or depression. The forehead molded itself out of the massed curls of his light chestnut hair, the nose carried the line surely to a point where the eye of the spectator must seek for the lips and the chin, both well-proportioned to the rest and demanding no extra attention. The mouth alone, because it was never entirely shut tight nor open sufficiently to reveal the teeth, seemed always to quiver with expression and so drew ever the slightest extra attention to itself. (64)

Just as Amy opens up vistas for Donato onto a world of beauty, knowledge, and possibilities, so too does Donato for her, as a Hermes-like messenger from, and the living embodiment of, the classical world she loves. Indeed, his sheer presence seems to have the power to summon that world, transcending the limits of time and space: "She looked at him, and something like a shadow from a world beyond passed over her. The marvelous slim body of the boy, the chestnut curls almost amber in color, the grey eyes turned upward intently – why, he was, he was the Hermes on the stand, grown to human size, become human" (100).

[8] The statue, known as *Hermes Carrying the Infant Dionysus*, is housed in the Archaeological Museum of Olympia, in Greece. Some experts believe it might be a superb copy of the original.

Significantly, one of Amy's most rhapsodic musings about Donato occurs while she is walking in the company of Mr. Crabbing, a mean-spirited, miserly colleague of hers. A caricature of American close-mindedness, insularity, and philistinism, Crabbing makes Amy even more conscious of Donato's gifts. When she notices that Donato is watching her, Amy has the distinct sensation that he comes from some other place and brings with him something she craves:

> How hateful [Crabbing's] voice was, baritoning so complacently while within her flitted the ghosts of a hundred desires. […] And why could she not take her eyes away from the figure on the summit of the street, perched like a god, but like a god puzzled by a new landscape, the landscape of a world not of his making? Why did he sum up for her in a living person all the ecstasy she had had in the swing and imagery of the Latin poets? (119)

It comes as no surprise that Crabbing, increasingly aware of the special bond between Amy and Donato, should couch his jealously and resentment in xenophobic language, calling Donato, at one point, the "worst type of foreigner" (131). As portrayed by Lapolla, the young Italian American is indeed a foreigner, but only in the sense that what he embodies, what he can contribute with his person and artistry, is *foreign* to the American society of the time. Ironically, this Italian American is uniquely capable of revitalizing American culture by drawing from his national and family heritage in order to create new and original American art. Like the writers of the American Renaissance, Donato believes that while artists in the United States should study, and learn from, European art, they should absolutely avoid slavish imitation. When Amy suggests a visit to the museum (almost certainly the Metropolitan Museum), Donato launches into a tirade against derivative American art that carries echoes of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *The American Scholar*: "The American pieces are childish imitations of the Greek […]. Have we no symbols of our own? Haven't we ideas, people around us?" (Lapolla 2016, 159). Central to Donato's ethnic and cultural make-up is his family's emigration from Italy to the United States, with all its socio-economic implications, and the Contini family's story, in turn, is central to, and representative of, American history and culture. Thus, the art that Do-

nato eventually creates, and which wins him fame and fortune, is all the more American precisely because it comes out of, and reflects, the immigrant experience[9]. With titles such as *The Immigrants at Ellis Island* and *The Marionette Director*, Donato's most acclaimed pieces not only portray immigration as one of the most formative components of American society, but also pay homage to his father, thereby vindicating the latter's decision to relocate his family to the United States.

With his art and his ancestry, Donato brings new vigor to America at the very moment when the country was closing its doors to immigrants, especially to those who, like Donato's parents and Lapolla's parents, came from southern Europe. At a time when American politics and the media portrayed southern Italians as racially suspect (i.e. not entirely white) and, therefore, not capable of being assimilated, Lapolla ends his novel with the birth of a child born out of the relationship between Donato and the "all-American" Amy, and his subsequent marriage with Angel Smith, an heiress from Kansas (not only is she from America's heartland, but her surname is quintessentially that of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant). For all its melodramatic twists and turns – Amy keeping her pregnancy a secret from Donato so as not to stand in the way of his marriage and career – the novel's denouément reads like a parable of American national and cultural identity. In other words, Lapolla would seem to suggest that it is on the progress, creativity, and renovation embodied by Donato Jr. – and, perhaps, the future offspring of Donato's marriage with Angel – that America's continued enrichment through contact and exchange with bearers of other traditions, sensibilities, and perspectives depends.

[9] According to Lawrence Oliver, Donato's character may have been based in part on Jewish American painter and sculptor Jacob Epstein (1880-1959), whose "art career and aesthetic views parallel Donato's" very closely. Like Donato, Epstein was the son of immigrants (in his case, from Eastern Europe) and grew up in New York City. Early in his career, he depicted Jewish immigrant life in a number of sketches. Intriguingly, one of his idols was the fifteenth-century Italian sculptor (and Donato's namesake) Donatello (Oliver 1987a, 15-16).

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