

JOHN PAUL RUSSO

Giuseppe Lombardo: 1951-2018

Giuseppe Lombardo, linguist and literary scholar, associate professor of Anglo-American Languages and Literatures at the University of Messina, was born in Sant'Eufemia d'Aspromonte on 4 August 1951 and died on 2 May 2018 in Palmi (Reggio Calabria) after a long illness. Many of us knew Giuseppe as the genial board member and treasurer of AISNA, who kept our books in order during some of the most difficult financial years in its history. He was a familiar presence at our biennial conferences and our annual meetings, frequently giving papers and organizing panels, and coediting one of our proceedings. On these occasions, ever so gently, he would tap members for late dues, especially if we wished to vote.

Prof. Lombardo wrote widely on American literature and culture from the eighteenth century to the present. His early interest in the subject was fostered by a Fulbright Fellowship to Northeastern University in Boston (1976-77), which extended for a second year at the University of Tulsa, in Tulsa, Oklahoma (1977-78). His literary breadth was extensive, from the monographs ("*Through Terror and Pity*": *Saggio su Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War di Herman Melville*, 1984; *Ombre sui Pascoli del Cielo: Utopia e Realtà nei Romanzi di John Steinbeck*, 1990) to literary history ("La fortuna di Leopardi in America, 1852-1887"), numerous editions (e.g., Melville, *Il Lillà di Rip Van Winkle e Poesie*; Franklin, *Autobiography*; Erskine Caldwell, *Tragic Ground*), a coedited anthology of the history of instruction in Great Britain and the United States, and a coauthored, three-volume *Grammatica della lingua inglese* (2004). Not many of us knew this grammarian side of his career. Unquestionably his favorite form was the close reading of a single work in which he could exercise concentration and depth to an extraordinary degree. Some the figures upon whom he wrote were Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, Oliver W. Holmes, Pound, and especially Melville. According to Prof. Giuseppe Nori, "Lombardo's pioneering work in Melville's poetry was especially important for Italian Americanists and American Studies."

In his mid-50s, beginning with a contemporary fiction review in *Italian Americana*, Prof. Lombardo turned to the ethnic literature of the Italian Americans. He organized panels at AISNA conferences and wrote insightfully on Pietro di Donato, not only on the classic *Christ in Concrete*, but on the lesser known late novel, *This Woman*, which he rescued from obscurity.

He was proud of his association with the Accademia Peloritana dei Pericolanti and both his scholarly labors and his daily travels illustrate its motto, *Inter utramque viam pericolantes*, taken partly from Virgil on Scylla and Charybdis and very loosely translated “risk-taking either way.” Thus, he was not afraid to move across disciplines and into new fields. Moreover, except ferrymen, few have crossed the Straits of Messina more often than Giuseppe Lombardo. When the new transport services opened up, he used them like a New York subway. Starting in Palmi, he would arrive at his office in the Annunziata by 9:30 am, then cross back for lunch at a favorite restaurant in Villa San Giovanni or Reggio Calabria, then back to Messina for the afternoon office hours or administrative duties. One time, as I recall, a group of faculty and students were dining at a seaside trattoria; it was 10:30 pm when “Pino” glanced at his watch, rose abruptly, and hastened to catch one of the late ferries nearby – we went along to see him off. I can still see him standing aft and smiling. He carried every schedule in his head.

The high esteem with which Prof. Lombardo was held by colleagues and students alike is amply attested by the response to his death, and unusual for its personal tone, as if his loss were that of a dear friend or member of the family. “My heart broke when I heard of the passing of Professor Lombardo,” writes Maria Elena Alampi, PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham; “He was the first person I met at university when I moved from Bologna to Messina . . . My lifetime love of literature and cinema came from my many years as his student . . . He was a big smile and a positive thought every time you saw him.” Dr. Giulio Chiofalo speaks of him “as the wisest man I’ve ever met. Whenever I needed someone to rely on, he would be there at my side telling me the best thing to do. He taught me to love my job, to be patient, and never to lose faith in people. But, above all, he taught me to believe in myself and to be self-confident, and that’s why I loved him so much. He was like a second father to me.” Prof. Marco Ciccìo writes:

To Prof. Giuseppe Lombardo I return my deep affection and gratitude. As I was yet uncertain at the outset of my university career, he introduced me to the field of American Studies of which he was the master. And in the course of the years, he was never wanting in either counsel or encouragement. Of Giuseppe, I will always remember his mild character, his smile, and his amiable conversation at a well-laid table whose pleasures he enjoyed and which he knew how to find.

Prof. Maria Serena Marchesi, who teaches literature at the University of Messina, recalls:

Professor Lombardo was truly beloved by our students. They stood in awe of his great professional qualities but at the same time they were sincerely fond of him as a person, and very often I've heard my own students say: "I hope 'Lombardo' is on the panel on my graduation day: I would be less scared if he came." Many of them have been sharing the sad news of his death on Facebook, with words like "a role model," "a great man," "a champion of us students" and – perhaps the thing he would have liked most – "the man who truly made me love American literature."

Lastly, Prof. Maria Vittoria D'Amico, his colleague in the PhD course in English Studies, the joint venture between the Universities of Catania and Messina that she directed, recalled that "what was quite correct and normal to him has become something quite unusual in this age of ours: as a colleague he was a very gentleman and down to earth, always loyal and ready to be helpful at any moment."

Illness had slowed him down but little in recent years; he never stopped teaching, writing, and planning programs. His small office at the end of the first-floor corridor was located in the former Lettere e Filosofia building, now DICAM (Dipartimento di Civiltà Antiche e Moderne), which rises high on the Annunziata and affords views of the harbor of Messina, the Straits, and the coast of Calabria. When I sat there in conversation with him, he would look out and take inspiration from this grand panorama and grow expansive and hopeful with regard to the future. Then, with a little joke about something or other, he would turn to his work.