illumination of the questions of class, labor, nation, race, gender, and sexuality that Italian migrants have elaborated in response to the specific conditions they have encountered in the world; among them as participants in a global diaspora; and in the relationships with their original "home."

With Gabaccia's work, Italian-American history has also entered a new era from a narrative point of view. Gabaccia's prose reproduces in form – with her very imaginative writing style – the dense, highly theoretically informed, contents of her essays. Perhaps less obsessed with the "objectivity" of sources than Vecoli, Gabaccia is more versed on broad theorizations and interpretations. She has consistently used the Italian and Italian-American case to deconstruct existing, and create new, interpretative postulates. Her works are *tour de forces* that are always rewarding for the scholar of Italian-American history who appreciates the tremendous heuristic values of the field.

MARINA CACIOPPO

The Role of Early Serialized Fiction in the Development of a Canon of Italian-American Literature

For a long time, "few in academia regarded Italian-American literature as a category in itself" (Bona, "Introduction" 3). The idea of an Italian-American literature seemed far-fetched to both Italian and American academics. On the European side of the Atlantic, the closedness of the bureaucratically defined disciplines and a certain snobbery toward the perceived lack of aesthetic quality of Italian-American writings and of the high cultural status of their writers has hindered its development and institutionalization as a field; on the other side of the Atlantic, the dominance of the glamorous gangster stereotype as a pole around which representations of Italian Americans gravitate has set the agenda for many scholars and has obscured the rich and varied cultural production of the group since its beginnings over a century ago.

The fact that we are only asking this question now is itself a sign of the late recognition of the existence of this field but also, at the same time, of the revived interest in exploring it. Having missed out on many of the developments spurred by the ethnic revival of the 1960s, Italian-American literary studies only began in the late 1980s and did not take off as a movement until the late 1990s. However, the predominant focus of this work has been on authors of the 1930s and 1940s such as John Fante, Pietro di Donato, Jerre Mangione, and those who came after, almost completely ignoring the vast literary output in Italian from the 1880s to the 1920s. Especially important, in my view, is the fiction serialized in newspapers and other periodicals of the day, which not only illuminates the early experiences of immigrants in America and the specific dynamics at work within these early Italian-American communities, but also sheds light on the process of forming an Italian-American ethnic identity – its mechanisms and dynamics, the external forces impinging upon it, and the group's own concerns with self-representation, both individually and collectively.

These texts have only begun to be recovered in the last ten years or so, their oblivion due to both practical and political reasons. Firstly, they are dispersed in the hundreds of Italian-American periodicals held in archives both in Italy and in the United States, making access difficult. Written in Italian and/or dialects, they are difficult for many non-Italian scholars to read and hard to inscribe within disciplinary boundaries as they are fundamentally transatlantic products, neither Italian nor American, but both. Secondly, for a long time scholarly attitudes have been influenced by the negative aesthetic judgments expressed by prominent critics, such as Giuseppe Prezzolini and Emilio Cecchi in the 1940s and 1950s (Durante 2: 4; Pietralunga 71; Viscusi, "The History" 46), who were looking for "the great, true book ... of the Italian in America" (qtd. in Marazzi 22) and viewed the textual production of the "*colonia*" as derivative and provincial, relegating it to a marginal position.

As Francesco Durante has noted, Italy's recent transformation from a country of emigration to a country of immigration has spurred a renewed interest in immigration studies; as scholars are starting to consider ethnic literature produced in Italy, a recovery of our own emigrants' literary production now appears long overdue. In the U.S., the multilingual turn in American literature, advocating the inclusion of texts in languages other than English in the canon

of American literature (see Shell and Sollors; Sollors), has opened the way to a re-discovery of what Robert Viscusi has called the "colonial period" in Italian-American literature ("The History" 45). The archival work done by Martino Marazzi and myself, and especially the enormous contribution of Durante, who has produced a comprehensive, two-volume anthology of early texts in Italian, have opened a whole new chapter in Italian-American literary studies (see also Buonomo's work on early Italian-American texts written in English).

As these early texts have become more well-known and accessible to scholars, some of them have begun to be included in survey articles on Italian-American literature. Some names have begun to emerge as common points of reference for this period, such as Luigi Donato Ventura, Bernardino Ciambelli, and Camillo Cianfarra. For example, recent articles by Viscusi, Mary Jo Bona, and Peter Kvidera in a collection of essays published by the MLA include these authors in their discussions of the history, canon, and pedagogy of Italian-American literary studies, showing that they are perhaps beginning to enter into the canon. The recovery of these texts should not only be motivated by the urge to fill a time gap in the history of Italian-American literature, or by the value that these texts have as an anticipation of themes and genres of future, more important works; instead, they should be appreciated for and studied in terms of the real cultural work that they perform and the dynamics that we can see at work in them. Ciambelli is an example that we can use to illustrate some of the interesting issues that can be found in these texts and which make them worthy of serious consideration in discussions of an Italian-American canon.

Ciambelli, like most writers of this period, was a journalist whose fictional writing has a close relationship to his journalism. His "sprawling" mysteries of the city novels (aside from their typical romance elements, *à la* Eugene Sue – tortuous and multiple plot-lines, prurient and sensational details, seedy and dangerous slums inhabited by swarthy, ruthless criminals, the vices of the upper class) contain original, more realistic elements tightly related to life in the *colonia*: a realistic representation of Italian communities, topographical references to the actual places in which they lived, references to real crimes and detective figures taken from reality, notably Lieutenant Joseph Petrosino and the Italian Squad (a unit of the NYPD formed in 1905 specifically to fight Italian crime). If one considers the attention to real social issues and the close relation to the local and crime news that filled the pages of the press of the

colonia, seeing this fiction as simply a derivative version of the Italian tradition of *feuilleton* (though correct to a certain extent) does not exhaust the analysis of these works, which also need to be put in relation to their social context and circumstances of production and consumption.

The interest of these texts lies more in analyzing how the conventions of the genre are bent to meet the needs of self-representation and self-definition of an Italian-American community that was struggling against prevailing stereotypes in the process of negotiating its ethnic identity. Progressively introducing the theme of the "recurring conflict with institutional authorities, in particular the police and judicial system," which Bona ("Rich Harvest" 87) has defined as an archetype of Italian-American fiction, Ciambelli's romances carry out a systematic attack on, and wholesale reversal of, anti-Italian stereotypes centered around the issue of Italians' supposedly innate criminal bent. Providing alternative representations of the Italian community as honest, hard-working people and addressing the topic of criminality in the Italian enclaves by creating a police detective character from a widely recognized American hero were effective means to counter stereotypes about Italian Americans that were becoming popular in the mainstream press, popular magazines, and even the Congressional Record and which represented them as an ethnic group which, by nature, race, and culture was unfit to adapt to American law and democratic institutions, or worse, ready to conspire against them.

For example, Ciambelli, interrupting the narrative – and echoing the words of the real Petrosino in a newspaper interview (Smith 49) – defends the community against accusations of complicity in criminality, arguing that they themselves are victims not only of crime but also of a system that left them unprotected in their under-policed neighborhoods: "every time a mystery was too entangled to be solved, they'd say: the Black Hand did it. An easy excuse that often covered the ineptitude of the police" (*I misteri* ch. 9, my translation). In another text, when a number of workers are killed in an explosion during the construction of Penn Station, the fictional Petrosino rails against the invisibility of the hard-working, law-abiding majority of the enclave to mainstream society as well as the exploitative capitalist system that sees workers as disposable. He laments that these men "did not belong to the Black Hand, but to the legion of men with calluses on their hands, to the squad of the martyrs of work," knowing full well that "his cry would not be

heard, as a clamor was only made every time an Italian committed a crime, while there was silence when hundreds fell victim in the line of duty" (*Il delitto* ch. 48, my translation).[1]

By engaging in these counter-representations, Ciambelli may have been gratifying his colonial audience to some extent, but to see it as merely a misguided defense of criminality means overlooking the broader discursive context in which he was operating. Ciambelli's fictional strategies, for example, can be usefully linked to the political stance of *La Follia di New York*, in which much of his work was published. Its editor, in fact, was a delegate of the National Liberal Immigration League whose main purpose was to counter the racial arguments of the nativists in the public debate over immigration restriction policies. The alignment of Ciambelli's representational strategies with his editors places this literary production firmly within the context of the contemporary debate over immigration restriction, which was very much on the mind of his colonial readership, as well as the general public. It also points toward a reading that can shed light on the massive popularity of this kind of fiction in terms of the community's need to contest the mainstream, racialized regime of representation, heavily influenced by nativist ideology, and to have alternative models with which to identify.

Thus contextualized and set against external, mainstream representations, the serial fiction of the colonial period can be seen to be participating directly in the processes of constructing ethnic identity and developing strategies for its representation. And as these issues are certainly among the primary foci of the broader project of Italian-American literary studies, these early texts need to be understood as fitting squarely within its scope rather than relegated to the status of a historical footnote presaging more interesting developments to come. These developments were already happening in these early texts, and these formulations need to be put in relation to later re-workings of the same issues in order to have a deeper and fuller under-

[1] Ciambelli's originals for the two preceding translations read as follows: "Tutte le volte che non si giungeva a trovare il bandolo di una matassa molto intrigata si diceva: è la Mano Nera. Comoda scusa questa che copriva spesso l'inettitudine della polizia" (*I misteri* ch. 9); "non appartengono alla Mano Nera, ma alla legione degli uomini dalle mani callose, alla squadra dei martiri del lavoro. Il suo grido non sarebbe stato udito, perché si usa far clamore tutte le volte che un italiano commette un delitto, ma si tace quando centinaia e centinaia cadono vittime del dovere" (*Il delitto* ch. 48).

standing of the range and diversity of Italian-American literary production; thus, in the process of constructing a canon in this field, it is important to consider these kinds of texts and not only those which have received the most scholarly attention and analysis.

MARTINO MARAZZI

What Fodder for the Canon?

A poet, an artist, doesn't ask for permission to his or her public. He needs, first of all, to be true to himself: not to the reader, not to the critic; not to the existing, but invisible, structures of society. His life and his urge to fulfill it by recreating it come first. The more I make room, in my own research for the creative words of immigrants (Italians to the U.S., but more and more, Italians everywhere, and all men to Italy and to the Western world: see, for instance, the overwhelming and disrupting force of Nuruddin Farah's *Yesterday, Tomorrow*), the more I try to learn the difficult art of listening with respect to the unique and individual intelligence deposited at the core of one's wounded personality. Those wounds and that perceptiveness, however expressed, are not matters of historiography, nor can they be comfortably tailored into a predetermined pensum. I have always found it sad to reduce works of art into the patterns of a genre: it's a good way to abuse the enthusiasm of our students and to stifle their genuine interest. Of course, there are several bona fide narrative and poetical genres, patterns, and structures. They've always been around, and there's nothing wrong in detecting them or in pondering over their strategic relevance in a writer's expressive style. But there comes a point when we as scholars should also try to be true to ourselves and consider the heart of the matter.

The decisiveness behind the ultimate journey that is emigration shows there's no time to fiddle around and demands that we get to the point. It would be relatively easy to linger around the surface of our theme. The fact that a number of scholars are asked to test the emergence of a canon is by itself