UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

Filozofická fakulta

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Grandmothers and Granddaughters in *Umbertina* by Helen Barolini and *Crazy in the Kitchen* by Louise DeSalvo

Postavy babiček a vnuček v *Umbertině* od Helen Barolini a *Crazy in the Kitchen* of Louise DeSalvo

(Magisterská diplomová práce)

Autor: Alžběta Juříková

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Matthew Sweney, Ph.D.

Olomouc 2018

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným vedením PhDr. Matthewa Sweneyho, Ph.D. a uvedla v ní veškerou literaturu a ostatní zdroje, které jsem použila.

V Olomouci dne ..... Podpis .....

Poděkování:

Chtěla bych poděkovat PhDr. Matthewovi Sweneymu, Ph.D. za odborné vedení této diplomové práce a za jeho cenné rady.

Dále bych ráda poděkovala celé své rodině a nejbližším za jejich velkou podporu v průběhu celého studia.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the relationship of grandmothers and granddaughters in the selected works of Italian-American women authors, that is in *Umbertina* by Helen Barolini and *Crazy in the Kitchen* by Louise DeSalvo. These two books were chosen because of the evident parallels between them. Until today, literary critics have mostly focused on comparing *Umbertina* with *Paper Fish*[1] by Tina de Rosa. An example of this is the chapter "A Process of Reconstruction" in Mary Jo Bona's *Claiming a Tradition: Italian American Women Writers*.[2] The objective of this thesis is to provide a different outlook on the Italian-American female literature.

It is universally known that there are very close bonds between the members of Italian families and it is something that they did not lose on their journey to the New World. Italian-Americans do not perceive the immediate, but the extended family, which includes aunts, cousins and grandmothers (or *nonnas*), and many others, as the closest nucleus. Children were often encouraged to use the Italian form *nonna* to keep the tradition.[3] As Helen Barolini herself puts it: "One of the richest mines of the Italian American imagination is the grandparent—mythical, real, imagined, idealized, venerated, or feared."[4] They are the source of what has been left behind in the Old World and therefore a fount of wisdom.

Il pranzo dalla nonna, the lunch at grandma's place, is an example of a tradition that perseveres in the South of Italy and in some Italian-American families until today. The whole family gets together almost every Sunday to feast and socialize with other family members until late afternoon. This way, the grandmother remains in the center of the family circle.

In the first part, I will provide a brief overview of the lives and works of both authors and a background for Italian-American women writers, which will introduce the conditions and the context for their writing. The main body of my thesis will be focused on the grandmothers with sections examining firstly the figure of grandmother in general, followed by the relationships between the grandmothers and granddaughters in

[1] Tina De Rosa, *Paper Fish*, (1980, New York: Feminist Press,, 1996).
[2] Mary Jo Bona, *Claiming a Tradition: Italian American Women Writers* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 126–163.
[3] Frances M. Malpezzi, William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore* (Little Rock, AR: August House Publishers, 1992), 48.
[4] Helen Barolini, "Granddaughters," in *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women,* ed. by Helen Barolini (1985, Syracuse (N.Y.): Syracuse University Press, 2000), 100.

the selected books. In the following section, the focus would shift to the journeys the granddaughters go on, as they travel to Italy. The subsequent segment will present the history, as seen through the lens of grandmothers as immigrants and its influence on the granddaughters via storytelling. The final chapter will concentrate on the "relics," which remind the grandmothers of their homeland. In the case of *Umbertina* this would be the bedspread, which she bought herself before her wedding and brought to America and in *Crazy in the Kitchen* it is the tablecloths that the grandmother embroiders.

Both DeSalvo and Barolini are prominent Italian-American writers, with Barolini's debut novel *Umbertina* being what could be basically called an Italian-American classic. All the canon of Italian-American women authors has been silent for decades and subsequently largely overlooked by literary critics. Helen Barolini wrote about how it felt to be Italian-American woman writer. She said that "being Italian American, being female, and being a writer was being thrice an outsider."[5] It is only from the 1980s that they have gained more critical acclaim. This was due to the publication of *Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian-American Women* edited by Helen Barolini herself.[6]

There are not many people, who would be able to name a single name belonging to Italian-American women authors' canon but almost everyone has heard about the works of Mario Puzo and Don DeLillo. Unfortunately, Mario Puzo has largely contributed to the reinforcement of the Italian-American *mafioso* stereotype imported to the United States from Sicily. DeLillo, on the other hand, usually does not write about the Italian-American experience explicitly but he treats it rather "invisibly."[7]

Unlike their male counterparts, women writers were courageous enough to talk about the Italian-American experience more openly and they let us inside their households to provide us with an image of what Italian-American families look like. They shared their darker sides and their secrets and explored their limits, like the author Louise DeSalvo in her memoirs.[8]

---

[5] Helen Barolini, ed., *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women* (1985, Syracuse (N.Y.): Syracuse University Press, 2000), xii.
[6] Helen Barolini, ed., *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women* (1985, Syracuse (N.Y.): Syracuse University Press, 2000).
[7] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1996), 123.
[8] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent: Contemporary Italian American Women Authors* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002), 87.

1 Selected Authors in a Nutshell

1.1 Helen Barolini

Helen Frances Barolini, *née* Mollica, is a novelist, poet, short-story writer, essayist, translator, and for some time a spokesperson for Italian-American woman writers. She was born in Syracuse, NY, to a middle-class family as a second-generation Italian-American and grew up "at a time when it was not pleasant to be Italian-American,"[9] with the United States being at war with Italy and Italian-Americans always being perceived as class citizens. After graduating from Syracuse and Columbia University with a major in English, she continued her studies in Florence and Perugia, where she met the Italian writer and journalist Antonio Barolini, who would later become her husband. In the words of Helen Barolini, she traveled to Italy to find herself, and where she had come from, and what it really meant to be an Italian. Finding a husband was not a part of her plan.[10] They lived in Italy for several years before moving to New York. Together they had three daughters, one of which moved back to Italy. Helen became a translator of her husband's works. After her husband's death, she moved permanently to the United States and nowadays resides in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY.[11]

Her novels include *Love in the Middle Ages*,[12] *Crossing the Alps*,[13] *Umbertina* and *A Circular Journey*.[14] Barolini also became an anthologist by editing *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian-American Women*. As she spoke up for herself and her fellow Italian-American authors in its introduction, she became a cultural historian as well, "in her effort at self-valorization."[15] She wrote an essay collection *Chiaroscuro: Essays of Identity*[16] and in 1986 published an autobiographical

[9] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1993): 106, accessed January 30, 2018 http://www.jstor.org/stable/467936.
[10] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," 107.
[11] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 36.
[12] Helen Barolini, *Love in the Middle Ages* (1986, Indiana: iUniverse, 2000).
[13] Helen Barolini, *Crossing the Alps* (New York: Bordighera Press, 2010).
[14] Helen Barolini, *A Circular Journey* (2006, New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).
[15] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 36.
[16] Helen Barolini, *Chiaroscuro: Essays on Identity* (1996, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

essay "Becoming a Literary Person Out of Context,"[17] in which she talked about the difficulties the Italian-American woman had to face in order to become a writer and about the correlation between writing and class. Other famous essays include "Turtle Out of Calabria"[18] or "How I Learned to Speak Italian."[19]

Barolini's writing scope is extremely broad, having also written a cookbook *Festa*, which she complemented by cultural histories, photographs, subtexts, and biographical anecdotes[20]. This reinforced her problematic status as an idiosyncratic writer who does not concentrate on any genre in particular.[21] Edvige Giunta perceives her blending of genres as the willingness of Italian-American women authors "to explore diverse routes in order to become authors."[22]

Barolini often wrote on the displacement of Anglo-American expatriates. Her interest in displacement led her to examination of living on the margins.[23] Her wide range of writing then "sheds light on the displacement of Italian/American women authors in the literary market, which is directly linked to their absence from the curriculum."[24] She won the American Book Award of The Before Columbus Foundation for *The Dream Book*, the Susan Koppelman Award of the American Culture Association and she is a National Endowment for the Arts recipient.[25]

In order to make the novel *Umbertina* as credible and authentic as possible, she conducted many oral history interviews with people from the Italian-American community, searched through many historical resources and even travelled to the places in Italy that she describes.[26]

---

[17] Helen Barolini, "Becoming a Literary Person Out of Context," *The Massachusetts Review* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 262–274, accessed February 5, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25089757.
[18] Helen Barolini, "Turtle Out of Calabria," in *Chiaroscuro: Essays on Identity* (1996, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).
[19] Helen Barolini, "How I Learned to Speak Italian," in *Chiaroscuro: Essays on Identity* (1996, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).
[20] Helen Barolini, *Festa: Recipes and Recollections of Italian Holidays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).
[21] Edvige Giunta, "Blending 'Literary' Discourses," in *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana*, eds. Paolo A. Giordano and Anthony Julian Tamburri (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 116.
[22] Edvige Giunta, "Blending 'Literary' Discourses," in *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana*, 117.
[23] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 37.
[24] Edvige Giunta, "Blending 'Literary' Discourses," in *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana*, 117.
[25] Helen Barolini, ed., *The Dream Book*, 140.
[26] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," 104.

1.2 Louise DeSalvo

Louise DeSalvo grew up in a working-class neighborhood of Hoboken, New Jersey. She is a novelist, essayist, and a literary critic. She is also a professor of English and Creative Writing at Hunter College and a renowned Virginia Woolf scholar. One of her most distinguished works is *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*.[27] She has written memoirs, among which are *Vertigo*,[28] *Adultery*[29] and *Breathless*.[30] Edvige Giunta regards Italian-American memoirs such as those by Louise DeSalvo as some of the most captivating ones: "shaped by working-class consciousness, best historically contextualize the stories they tell. These authors are concerned with understanding and responding to the ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality intersect in American society."[31] She also called Louise DeSalvo "one of the most outspoken and politically minded contemporary Italian American women authors."[32]

She is one of the frankest Italian-American women writers, because of her readiness to spill some of her family secrets and talk about "historically unspeakable subjects, such as physical violence within the family, incest, racism and prejudice, working-class shame, mental illness, and adultery."[33]

Unfortunately, her books do not sell, as would be expected from the audience's search for feel-good books and avoidance of difficult topics. Due to this neglect, her most acclaimed memoir *Vertigo* was out of print only five years after its publication.[34] Together with Edvige Giunta she coedited the anthology on Italian-American women writing about food, called *The Milk of Almonds: Italian American Women Writers on Food and Culture*.[35] DeSalvo regards eating as "a ritual, a feast, a celebration of being alive"[36] and, being a gourmet herself, food is one of her most notable themes. It is without a doubt central to many of her works.[37]

---

[27] Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (1989, New York: Ballantine Books, 1990).
[28] Louise DeSalvo, *Vertigo* (1996, New York: The Feminist Press, 2002).
[29] Louise DeSalvo, *Adultery* (1999, Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).
[30] Helen Barolini, ed., *The Dream Book*, 93.
[31] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 124.
[32] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 32.
[33] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 88.
[34] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 126–127.
[35] Louise DeSalvo and Edvige Giunta, eds., *The Milk of Almonds: Italian American Women Writers on Food and Culture* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2002).
[36] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 111.
[37] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 105.

Some other themes Louise DeSalvo employs in her works are adultery and illness. In *Adultery*, she surveys "the significance of adultery in the whole American culture, drawing from literature, politics, and the personal account of her own husband's affair early in their marriage."[38] Using a light-hearted attitude, she aims at somehow toning down the gravity of these themes. As she herself suffered from asthma, she engages the theme of illness in her memoir *Breathless*.[39] DeSalvo also explores the Italian-American female identity and she began this quest in her essay "Portrait of the Puttana as a Middle-Aged Woolf Scholar."[40] She returned to the topic in her novel *Casting Off*.[41]

[38] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 20.
[39] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 20; Louise DeSalvo, *Breathless: An Asthma Journal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).
[40] Louise DeSalvo, "A Portrait of the *Puttana* as a Middle-Aged Woolf Scholar," in *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women,* Helen Barolini, ed. (1985. Syracuse (N.Y.): Syracuse University Press, 2000), 93–99.
[41] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 74; Louise DeSalvo, *Casting Off* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1987).

2 Italian-American Women Writers

Compared to writers from other ethnic groups such as African Americans, Native Americans or Chicanos, Italian-Americans were for a long time less prominent and less organized.[42] Only recently have the female authors become more widely known in that they have established a steady readership. This has naturally brought about more scholarly interest in the Italian-American literature.[43]

Some of the best-known authors belonging to the list of Italian-American women authors are Diane de Prima, Tina De Rosa, Diana Cavallo and Mari Tomasi. Most of the authors have been properly introduced in Barolini's anthology *The Dream Book*, which featured fifty-six Italian-American women writers. Even though the contribution of *The Dream Book* to the Italian-American literature is undeniable, "there has been no concerted effort on the part of the literary market and the academic world to allow the 'dream book' to enter the realm of literary reality."[44]

2.1 On Silence

There are several possible reasons for the Italian-American authors being overlooked and not read enough. Gay Talese was one of the first ones to investigate this issue as late as in 1993 in his essay "Where are the Italian-American Novelists?"[45] The essay was not, however, focused solely on female authors. He partially blamed the sparse audience on the fact that Italian-Americans themselves are not very keen on reading in general: "Too many Italian Americans, they said are nonreaders, and thus fail to form a book-buying market that publishers cater to."[46] Also, Italian-American writers did not have such a support system as other minority groups. Talese hypothesizes: "if I'd submitted an anthology on African-American writing, or Native-American writing, or Hispanic writing, or Ethnic Women's writing, or Lesbian or Gay men's writing I'm confident I'd have found a commercial publisher. But we Italian Americans as a whole

[42] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 69.
[43] Mary Jo Bona, "Introduction: Italianità in 2003: The State of Italian American Literature," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 28, no. 3 (2003): 10, accessed September 22, 2017, doi:10.1093/melus/28.3.3.
[44] Edvige Giunta, "Blending 'Literary' Discourses," in *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana*, 125.
[45] Gay Talese, "Where Are the Italian-American Novelists?" *Center for Migration Studies special issues* 11, no. 22 (1994): 470, accessed February 21, 2018, doi:10.1111/j.2050-411x.1994.tb00781.x.
[46] Gay Talese, "Where Are the Italian-American Novelists?" 470.

get little support from the mainstream."[47] As a result, the writers lacked the much-needed self-confidence to submit their works, which could have led to getting them published.

There has been a deadly silence on the part of Italian-American woman writing. Alison Goeller commented on this back in the year 2003 by saying that "only in the past fifteen or twenty years have Italian-American women found the courage and encouragement in significant numbers to give voice to their hyphenated American experiences."[48] This might have had origin in the Italian culture, in which women were used to being silent and to suppressing their personalities in households dominated by strong male figures, as will be proven later in the thesis.

Most of the authors from the Italian-American canon were connected to the South of Italy, the place from which their ancestors had been fleeing in thousands during the great migration. The first Italian diaspora took place after the Unification of Italy in 1861 and before the beginning of the fascist era in 1920s. Mary Jo Bona has also gone back to the past to trace the roots of silence in the disbelief in words among Southern Italians:

> Perhaps the most revealing cultural difference between southern Italy and America, especially relating to literary representations of selfhood, is the southern Italian's distrust of words itself. A firm belief in the value of deeds over words was held sacrosanct by the peasant stock in southern Italy well before Italians emigrated to the United States.[49]

A quite telling proverb in Italian, *la migliore parola è quella che non si dice*, translates into English as: the best word is that which is not spoken.[50] In the South of Italy, a land of the oppressed (by *padrone* and by the foreign invaders), the words were often being twisted and often used against entire families. It was most probably a way of thinking that they brought with them to the New World. The family stories were

[47] Gay Talese, "Where Are the Italian-American Novelists?" 469.
[48] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," *Melus* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 73, accessed February 21, 2018, doi:10.2307/3595261.
[49] Mary Jo Bona, "Broken Images, Broken Lives: Carmolina's Journey in Tina De Rosa's Paper Fish," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 14, no. 3/4 (Autumn–Winter 1987): 89, accessed February 5, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/467404.
[50] Mary Jo Bona, "Introduction: Italianità in 2003: The State of Italian American Literature," 8.

supposed to be only narrated at the dinner table and thus remain solely in the family circle by keeping the code of *omertà* (silence).[51]

Due to the position of Italian-American woman writers, speaking out in the American society was not an easy task. Helen Barolini wrote that "being Italian American, being female, and being a writer was being thrice an outsider."[52] She attributed this not only to the social and historical background, but also to the state of affairs in American literary circles. As she put it, it felt lonely to be on the margins with no leading example in any body of literature or fellow writers.[53] The author had to break the silence and become "a writer out of the void,"[54] without any proper models to follow. From this point of view, they were what one could call self-made writers.

Being an educated woman was not heartedly welcomed among Italian-Americans who believed that a woman's place was in the kitchen. This is something that Louise DeSalvo addressed in 1975, in "A Portrait of the *Puttana* as a Middle-Aged Woolf Scholar."[55] She couldn't travel abroad and leave her husband alone with the kids without being criticized for it. Her need to be independent of her husband and her will to win critical acclaim for her work earned her the pejorative attribute *puttana* from the people around her.

Education and emancipation was not perceived very well in the Italian-American families, because it meant deviancy and therefore straying from the traditional ways of living. Women found themselves "outside the protection of the family."[56] This was, however, necessary on their way to autonomy and these women had to undergo a road that felt like a betrayal to the family.[57] In order to be educated and start to write further down the line, they had to be courageous and step outside their families, which often "perceived the American public school to be a direct threat to the survival of the family"[58] and robbing them off their authority. They meant a departure from *la via vecchia*, the way they used to behave in the Old Country. The parents were

[51]Luisa Del Giudice, ed., *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, (New Yorks, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 57.
[52] Helen Barolini, ed., *Dream Book*, xii
[53] Helen Barolini, ed., *Dream Book* xii
[54] Helen Barolini, "Becoming a Literary Person out of Context," 263.
[55] Louise DeSalvo, "A Portrait of the *Puttana* as a Middle-Aged Woolf Scholar," in *Dream Book*, 93–99.
[56] Mary Jo Bona, "Broken Images, Broken Lives: Carmolina's Journey in Tina De Rosa's Paper Fish," 88.
[57] Helen Barolini, "Toward an Italian-American Literary Identity," *Center for Migration Studies special issues* 23, no. 11 (1994): 477, accessed February 5, 2018, doi:10.1111/j.2050-411X.1994.tb00782.x.
[58] Mary Jo Bona, "Broken Images, Broken Lives: Carmolina's Journey in Tina De Rosa's Paper Fish," 90.

very often unschooled and therefore suspicious of the American education system. American schools were teaching their children in a language they did not know at all or that they did not master. What is more, the teachers were putting stress on assimilation to the American ways.[59]

Expanding on the distrust of words, Helen Barolini added one from the proverb-rich Italian: "Even more distrustful of words, then, are those who cannot read or write them…"[60] Perhaps, Italian-American parents were just exploiting the ancient proverb of Italian peasant families: "Never educate your children beyond yourself," because that would deprive them of their control over their kids and it would "undermine the solidarity of the family."[61] This was surely communicating some mixed messages to the young Italian-Americans, who in the end could educate themselves but only within the limits of their families' wisdom.

Parent's attitude towards reading and writing was also to blame for the slow advancement of Italian-American writing. "Reading was ridiculed as too private, too unproductive, too exclusive an enjoyment. […] Learning gave children ideas, made them different; writing produced nothing."[62] Only someone familiar with the Italian American environment would understand the level to which children had to be part of everyday family life. Fred L. Gardaphé gave an account of this in the introduction to his book *Italian Signs, American Streets*,[63] where he recollects how privacy, so much needed for writing, was something almost nonexistent in most Italian-American families. Children were supposed to arrive home and write their homework in the crowded and noisy kitchen alongside their brothers and sisters. An isolated place for studying was not an option and there was a shortage of books in most households. One could only "smuggle" books home from public libraries.[64]

It was not only from within their community but also from the outside that they received discouragement and found themselves in "the uncomfortable position one comes to occupy as an Italian-American intellectual in an American culture that

[59] Helen Barolini, ed., *Dream Book*, 11.
[60] Helen Barolini, ed., *Dream Book*, 6.
[61] Gay Talese, "Where Are the Italian-American Novelists?" 472.
[62] Helen Barolini, ed., *Dream Book*, 11.
[63] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1996).
[64] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 1.

stigmatizes Italian Americans—especially women—as anti-intellectual."[65] Such unwelcoming opinions of the American society further marginalized the Italian American authors.

2.2 The Italian-American Label: Literary Criticism and Literary Studies

Labeling and categorizing Italian-American women writers was apparently not an easy task. Critics were uncertain as to where to place them. "Their works have been unfavorably shunted off to departments of sociology, immigration history, ethnic studies, or even Italian language and literature."[66] Somewhere in between, neither American nor Italian enough, it "mirrors, in its own distinct way, the phenomena of bilingualism and biculturalism in other U.S. literatures."[67] Categorizing Italian-American female writers is difficult because they "do not constitute a homogenous group in any way—in terms of regional origin, social and economic status, or political perspective."[68]

Borrowing from Hamlet, Anthony Julian Tamburri addressed the Italian-American duality already in the title of his book, *To Hyphenate or Not to Hyphenate?: The Italian/American Writer: An Other America.*[69] This "other America" is therefore "relegated to the *vicoli*, or 'side streets,' of literary discourse."[70] There are even critics of Italian literature, who perceive Italian-American literature "as an inferior second cousin to Italian literature."[71] The situation in Italy was not very different. Helen Barolini commented in the interview with Dorothée von Huene Greenberg for *MELUS* on the situation back in Italy, where, even though receiving praising reviews for *Umbertina*, no publisher offered her to publish it in Italian. She was attributing this to the class stratification in Italy, in which the literary establishment consisted only of the

[65] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 124.
[66] Helen Barolini, "Toward an Italian-American Literary Identity," 478.
[67] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with An Accent*, 3.
[68] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 23.
[69] Anthony Julian Tamburri, *To Hyphenate or Not to Hyphenate?: The Italian/American Writer: An Other America* (Guernica: Montreal, 1991).
[70] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 8.
[71] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 8.

upper class people who did not bother with "all those lower class people who left their country."[72]

It took no less than two generations of Italian-American scholars to gain enough legitimacy to teach courses dedicated solely to the study of Italian-Americans and likely even more to obtain professorship in Italian-American studies. At first they had to do some "actual work" and only then dedicate themselves to this emerging field.[73] According to Tamburri, Italian-American literature is still not being taught enough at universities:

> As for Italian/American studies being taught in departments of North American studies in Italy, the situation is still in an embryonic stage. While some Italian/American writers are studied in a variety of classes in North/American studies, very few universities have courses dedicated specifically to Italian/American studies…[74]

Fred L. Gardaphé sees the future of Italian-American literary studies in a necessary cooperation between scholars of Italian and American studies.[75] In his words, it is necessary to construct "a dialogical scene between what is Italian and what is American, […] read the consequential sign production and thus understand that there is an Italian American perspective."[76] To conclude, it would be most opportune to rephrase the question, as Helen Barolini did in the introduction to *Dream Book*: "The question had always been, why were Italian American women silent? It might well have been, instead, why were they not heard?"[77]

2.3 Common Themes

There surely are themes common for the Italian-American literature by women authors. Even though family and food are the dominant ones, they are not exclusive. Themes such as intergenerational problems, the loss of heritage, alienation, divided loyalties, cultural dichotomy, the search for new roles in terms of gender and the

[72] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini,"105.
[73] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture*, xiv.
[74] Anthony Julian Tamburri, "Beyond 'Pizza' and 'Nonna'! Or, What's Bad about Italian/American Criticism?: Further Directions for Italian/American Cultural Studies," *Melus* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 154, accessed September 22, 2017, doi:10.2307/3595265.
[75] Fred L. Gardaphé, ed., introduction to *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), xvii.
[76] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 18.
[77] Helen Barolini, ed., *Dream Book*, p. X.

dreadful effects of self-hate and self-doubt are all loudly present.[78] Writers such as Mary Cappello, Rosette Capotorto and Louise DeSalvo have also engaged in the issue of racism and classism.[79] A certain evolution of themes can be traced in the writings of Italian-Americans across generations:

> For the most part, the early Italian/American were dealing with contemporary subjects and themes which were based on autobiographical reflections of life in America. As we examine the later writers, the children and grandchildren of immigrants, we enter a period in which the immigrant past is examined, not through self-reflection but through a more distant, historical perspective resulting in re-creation of the immigrant experience in America through more distant and often more mythical, fictional forms.[80]

The later generation mentioned above corresponds to the authors and the works chosen for this thesis, namely *Umbertina* by Helen Barolini and *Crazy in The Kitchen* by Louise DeSalvo. A topic that is an indispensable for Italian/American literature written by female authors and that is conspicuous also in the selected books is food:

> In the writings of women, this topic takes on an especially poignant significance, as it articulates both a perception of the domestic space as oppressive and an awareness of the ways in which women empower themselves within that space. Not only does food provide a language through which to express such an ambivalent view of the domestic space, it also becomes a vehicle through which to articulate ethnic identity.[81]

Food works as a form of bond in Italian-American families, as they get together to feast and celebrate with their traditional dishes. After all, the stress that they put on food stems from its shortage back in Italy. It was one of the reasons they travelled to America in the first place.

[78] Helen Barolini, ed., *The Dream Book*, 31–32.
[79] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 8.
[80] Anthony Julian Tamburri, Paolo A. Giordano, and Fred L. Gardaphé, eds., *From the Margin* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2000), 9.
[81] Edvige Giunta, "Blending 'Literary' Discourses," in *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana*, 117.

3 Grandmothers and granddaughters

Upon choosing the focus of my thesis, I came across an article called "Beyond 'Pizza' and 'Nonna'! Or, What's Bad about Italian/American Criticism?: Further Directions for Italian/American Cultural Studies" by Anthony Julian Tamburri, in which he criticizes the current state of Italian-American criticism and suggests possible new pathways. Tamburri, however, does not discourage writers from writing about *nonne*, or grandmothers, altogether: "So, while I shall not discuss these Italian/American signs *par excellence*, I should underscore that regardless of my choice to silence them in this specific venue, I do not intend to signal in any sense at all that we should eschew these signs in our work as either critics or creative writers."[82] This only further proves that grandmothers are indeed central to Italian-American literary works and there is, in consequence, plenty to analyze.

Grandmothers have largely influenced the works of many Italian-American writers, certainly the writings of Helen Barolini and Louise DeSalvo. Both *Umbertina* and *Crazy in The Kitchen* are to a large extent autobiographical. In an interview for the *MELUS* journal, Helen Barolini confirmed that her grandmother was the person who kindled her interest in her ethnic heritage: "I know that she was always a mysterious figure, and I felt if I could figure her out, maybe I could figure out something about myself."[83] She has the memory of her grandmother as the "woman in black" who was "being served all this food"[84] by her close ones. Umbertina was surrounded by a "procession of people paying homage to her" and, in Barolini's eyes, she seemed "a queen or some kind of important personage"[85] at that time.

Umbertina Longobardi, a first-generation immigrant, who followed her freshly married husband Seraphino and crossed the ocean to escape the poverty in the South of Italy, took a lot from Barolini's grandmother. She too is "mythic, […] removed and distant" and she is "a figure that is in a sense a little romanticized."[86] Umbertina "became the grandmother in the kitchen, the old woman dressed in black with wispy

[82] Fred L. Gardaphé, "Beyond 'Pizza' and 'Nonna'! Or, What's Bad about Italian/American Criticism?: Further Directions for Italian/American Cultural Studies," 150
[83] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," 92.
[84] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," 93.
[85] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," 93.
[86] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," 95.

gray hair straggling down from the knob on top of her head, a household fixture standing at the stove stirring sauces…"[87]

Many Italian-American writers drew their inspiration from their families as they "have not ranged far from home"[88] but it's really the second and third generation American Italian women who turn to writing as a way of exploring the family dynamics.[89] Family is a rich mine that provides a vital context for the whole Italian-American culture and the folklore. The nature of the Italian family provides additional color.[90] Fred. L Gardaphé in *Italian Signs, American Streets* stresses the relationship of these writers with their grandparents as really fundamental to the interpretation of their works: "The key to reading the literature produced by third-generation Italian American writers is observing the role that the grandparent plays in connecting the writer to his or her ancestral past."[91] He then talks specifically about Helen Barolini's uses of the grandmother character: "Through the figure of the grandmother, Helen Barolini […] create[s] models to enable their protagonists to gain a sense of identity as both ethnic Americans and women."[92]

The importance of the two generations (of grandmothers and granddaughters) is only strengthened by the fact that in *Umbertina*, a multigenerational narrative, the second generation of Umbertina's daughter Carla gets skipped altogether. We find out about her actions only through the narration of others. Telling the multigenerational stories can provide ease to "the uprooted, displaced, and oppressed, to position themselves with dignity and a sense of cultural belonging and legitimacy."[93] *Umbertina* is a *bildungsroman*, in which "the journey toward the maturation of a woman is spread across four generations."[94]

This phenomenon of closeness to the grandmother is not exclusive to the Italian American experience. We can find the salient grandmother figure in Chinese American

[87] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 133.
[88] Helen Barolini, "Toward an Italian-American Literary Identity," 476.
[89] Mary Jo Bona, "Introduction: Italianità in 2003: The State of Italian American Literature," 8.
[90] Frances M. Malpezzi, William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore*, 37.
[91] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 120.
[92] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 119.
[93] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an* Accent, 38–39.
[94] Ewa Bakun, "Worlds imagined and worlds experienced: Italians in America in Vita by Melania Mazzucco and Umbertina by Helen Barolini," 46.
I came across this dissertation in the final stage of my writing. There are some similarities between our works, which I noticed only after I had written the given passages.

literature as well, for example in *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan.[95] In the part narrated by An-Mei Hsu, it is the grandmother Popo who does the upbringing and her mother is excluded for a long period of time from her daughter's life. She is diminished to being a mere ghost because of her behavior, deplorable for that time. Her mother is not allowed into the uncle's house, where little An-Mei is growing up. Only later in her mature years do the mother and daughter reunite due to the grandmother's illness. Seeing her mother take care of the ill grandmother serves as a catalyst that makes An-Mei find appreciation for her mother again. Actually, it could be claimed that through the deep love for her grandmother, she came to love her mother again. The bond between the female members of Chinese families is overall very similar to that of Italian Americans and *The Joy Luck Club* resembles *Umbertina* in telling a story stretching across generations.

3.1 The Relationship between the Grandmothers and the Granddaughters

The relationships of the grandmothers and granddaughters in the two books are quite different, even though they start on common premises. The language barrier pre-conditions both relationships as they have to find their own way to communicate together. As a matter of fact, the language characteristic of the first-generation is sometimes called *Italglish*. It "began with the basic structures of Italian or a dialect, incorporated some English vocabulary, and transformed the sounds of those English words to correspond with the speakers' native pronunciation habits."[96] In both cases, the granddaughters and grandmothers resorted to communication in two different languages. Louise in *Crazy in The Kitchen* explains how it worked: "I spoke to her in English (for I spoke very little dialect); she answered in dialect (for she spoke very little English)."[97] Actually, folk speech and dialect survived in America only because *nonnas* had spoken it and had used it in front of—and with—the subsequent generations.[98]

The language barrier surely complicated the communication significantly. Louise and her step-grandmother could at least understand each other to a certain extent. For Marguerite and Umbertina, however, the interaction was limited only to a

[95] Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989, London: Vintage, 1998).
[96] Frances M. Malpezzi,William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore*, 44.
[97] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 73.
[98] Frances M. Malpezzi,William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore*, 38–39.

ritual consisting of set phrases, pulling at little Marguerite's cheeks and patting her head: "It was their ritual; it was all they could say to each other. But the affection was there in the pats and the smiles."[99] They could not have a regular conversation while she was still in life because "they had had different tongues."[100] Secrecy was an indispensable part of Umbertina's nature. As "a reticent woman, she did not discuss emotions,"[101] which made it only that much harder for people around her, including Marguerite, to really get to know her.

Umbertina and Marguerite indisputably felt a certain distance between them with Marguerite being "foreign to Umbertina."[102] Umbertina tries to identify the causes, which led her grandchildren to seem "alien"[103] to her: "was it the food, the air, the dress of the New World that produced grandchildren she could not recognize?"[104] It held true also the other way around, as "Marguerite would ask her mother, 'Why does Granma look so strange?' And she meant: She doesn't look like other grandmothers, the American grandmothers in schoolbooks."[105] Her mother Carla must explain to her that it is because her grandmother comes from a place yet unknown to her that is far away from Marguerite's native land.

In spite of this, Marguerite "had always felt attracted to that mysterious old woman with whom she couldn't even speak."[106] She was after all named after Umbertina's lost child Margherita who had been most like Umbertina out of all her children. Marguerite's pull to her grandmother was undeniable, as "it was with that handsome, proud, direct-gazing, unflinching peasant face that Marguerite wanted kinship."[107] Their chances to bond were thwarted when Umbertina died with Marguerite only being thirteen. Marguerite regretted all the things that had been left unsaid. "All [her] life [she has] missed speaking to her."[108]

Louise's relationship with her step-grandmother is surely more intimate when compared to that of Marguerite and Umbertina. They live under the same roof and share the everyday things. Before leaving the house, Louise is used to going to her

[99] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 141.
[100] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 7.
[101] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 139.
[102] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 141.
[103] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 145.
[104] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 141.
[105] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 141.
[106] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 150.
[107] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 151.
[108] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 287.

grandmother to check on her before leaving the house and receiving a coin in return to buy something sweet. This gesture shows how generous she was even though she had so little. Her step-grandmother has a strong affection for Louise and she herself cannot comprehend that: "Her love for me defied explanation; she detested my mother, and I did little to deserve her love, nothing to invite it, except bake with her on occasion, or bring her a cool glass of water now and then…"[109] A moment which works as a token of her step-grandmother's love for Louise is the time when, despite her step-grandmother's disapproval towards all things new and luxurious, she wears a silk scarf—a Christmas present from Louise.[110]

Their closeness even becomes a source of jealousy for Louise's mother, who is on bad terms with her stepmother: "My mother discouraged us from speaking dialect, from speaking Italian. I think my mother didn't want us to know our grandmother, and through knowing her, come to love her, as my mother did not love her."[111] Louise herself compares the feelings she had for her grandmother and for her mother but puts it in brackets as if she was afraid to write it down in blunt terms. It must be difficult to admit that there was no love for one's mother and more affection for one's step-grandmother: "(I did love my grandmother. But as one might a forbidden, graven image. For my mother, I felt no love, but rage, and, yes, a deep and bitter yearning.)"[112] Her grandmother even called Louise "*mia figlia* […] my child,"[113] because she did not really have children of her own and Louise was the closest person to a child. She would whisper the same on her deathbed.

Grandmother passes down to Louise miscellaneous skills and its result is a bit amusing: "From my grandmother, I learn not only how to bake the bread, I learn how to curse and swear like a Southern Italian peasant woman."[114] When she thinks about her grandmother, she recollects "how she baked her bread […] how she cleaned her bowl and how [she] never thanked her for all that she had done for [her]."[115] In the end, it was her grandmother who, on a regular basis, "took a blow" from her son-in-law "that was meant for [her]"[116] and the one that "acted like [Louise] was worthy."[117]

---

[109] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 73.
[110] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 81.
[111] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 73.
[112] Louse DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 73.
[113] Louse DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 74.
[114] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 20.
[115] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 239.
[116] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 81.
[117] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 238.

3.1.1 The Strength of the Grandmother

Helen Barolini in the anthology *The Dream Book* dedicated an exclusive section to talk only about grandparents, and she mentioned the common feature of most Italian American authors included in the book. That is "the wish for the strength of the grandparent" as "an enduring topos, ineluctable and omnipresent, a referential for every writer represented in this collection."[118] In the words of Edvige Giunta, "Barolini's narrative of female development argues for the importance of ties between women and highlights the ways in which they can be sources of strength and resourcefulness for themselves and their daughters."[119]

Umbertina is described as "a strong woman, in good health, and with a clear mind and undiminished ambition."[120] She finds pleasure in hard work and approaches the way to fulfilling her American Dream as going to a battle, where the family members function as her soldiers. Umbertina, from a position of strength, commanded her little army in what to do and she oversaw their work.[121] Marguerite, her granddaughter, was drawn to this strength and toughness because she was being described as the complete opposite:

> I always thought I wanted to get back to her elementary kind of existence . . . her kind of primitive strength. I've always felt that my life was wasted on abstract ideas rather than being rooted in reality; even a brutal reality would have been better than the vagueness I've been floundering in. Naive, my daughters call me. What they mean is soft, mushy. My grandmother, though, was tough.[122]

When Marguerite felt like being in dire straits in the times of her separation from Alberto, she resorted to invoking her power: "Oh, Grandma Longobardi, give me your guts!"[123] Her marital problems and an overall sense of feeling lost in her circumstances brings her to see a psychoanalyst, Dr. Verdile, who understands how much Umbertina is admired by Marguerite and advises her very cleverly to "seek the strength she is missing in her grandmother Umbertina's experiences."[124] In the eyes of Marguerite's

[118] Helen Barolini, "Granddaughters," 100.
[119] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 48.
[120] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 133.
[121] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 133.
[122] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 18.
[123] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 7.
[124] Ewa Bakun, "Worlds imagined and worlds experienced: Italians in America in Vita by Melania Mazzucco and Umbertina by Helen Barolini," 15.

daughter, she was lacking this strength and "wasn't strong enough to be herself."[125] Of this she was not capable throughout her whole life.

An interesting thing to point out is that only Umbertina's great granddaughter, who never met her, gets to her source of strength and takes advantage of it: "Lately I'm beginning to feel her strength—it's like she's helping me. Or maybe they're just my own projections."[126] She is aware of the significance of strength, which could help women to achieve the objectives they set for themselves: "I think it is important for us as women to cultivate our strengths, to grow, and to move on with purpose whatever our goals."[127]

The wish for grandmother's strength is not as prominent in *Crazy in the Kitchen*. Louise does not talk about it explicitly. This might also be because of the rather oblique way her grandmother shows her strength. She was used to being subordinate to the government, to the *padroni* and to men and her defense was indifference: "My grandmother has come from a land of the poor, of the despised, of the powerless, a land where she has learned that the most potent weapon you can wield against your adversary is an utter and complete indifference."[128] Indifference is something she applies also in the family. When her son-in-law yells at her that she is an absolute disgrace, she simply ignores him and "for this, if for nothing else, [Louise] loved her."[129] Interestingly enough, Louise's step-grandmother found her source of strength in almonds, which she always had in her apron and she would nibble on them in the course of the day "*for strength and for remembrance*."[130]

Louise, however, must have felt her grandmother's strength to some extent. She knew the type of person her grandmother was. At a certain point in the book, she describes her grandmother as a "hardworking capable woman."[131] In the chapter "Matchmaking" she points out that she always earned her bread, as she had several jobs throughout her life and never boasted about it.[132] Louise does not talk about her grandmother's personality often but when she does describe her, she uses adjectives

[125] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 358.
[126] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 412.
[127] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 419.
[128] Louise De Salvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 21.
[129] Louise De Salvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 81.
[130] Louise De Salvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 74.
[131] Louise De Salvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 61.
[132] Louise De Salvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 211.

such as "tough [and] spirited."[133] Louise does not romanticize her grandmother, as was the case with Umbertina. She is aware of her strengths as well as her weaknesses. She realizes who her grandmother really was and it does not change the high esteem she has for her: "I didn't condemn her for who she was: a peasant from the South of Italy."[134]

There's an interesting analogy with the already-mentioned *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. Here as well, the women protagonists give importance to the attribute of strength. It is in the very core of Chinese education, this time brought to an extreme. An-mei comments on how this manifests in everyday life: "I know this, because I was raised the Chinese way: I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, to eat my own bitterness."[135] Her grandmother Popo taught her that it was not acceptable to cry when disappointed and threatened little An-Mei that she would cut off her hair and "send [her] to a place where Buddhist nuns lived."[136] An-Mei does not obey her grandmother and weeps alone by a pond because she really feels weak.

Both her mother and An-Mei are longing for the strength Popo had. An-mei's mother goes as far as poisoning herself in order to "kill her own weak spirit so she could give [her] a stronger one."[137] The moment when they finally feel strong arrives when An-Mei's mother is on her deathbed. There comes a moment of clarity for An-Mei: "I can see the truth, too. I am strong, too."[138] In this case, they gain what they have longed for.

3.2 Travelling back to Italy

Both granddaughters from the selected books travel back to Italy, most likely to search for their identity in the land of origin of their grandmothers. There was a fascination with the ancestral homeland on the part of Italian Americans throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, which was only strengthened by their recurring visits to Italy.[139] According to Edvige Giunta, Italian American authors revisiting Italy became a trend and them "writing about these 'returns' […] signals an important moment in the

[133] Louise De Salvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 211.
[134] Louise De Salvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 78.
[135] Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 215.
[136] Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 217.
[137] Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 240.
[138] Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 240.
[139] Mary Jo Bona, "Introduction: Italianità in 2003: The State of Italian American Literature," 8.

development of Italian American literature."[140] Marguerite from *Umbertina* sets off on her own and abandons her American family in her search "for her place in the world, for an environment where she can become independent individual whose identity does not depend on a man."[141] Probably the biggest paradox is that Marguerite's most palpable find in Italy is not her identity but an Italian poet who later becomes her husband.

Alison D. Goeller stresses how these women had to be courageous and go against what was expected of them: "Italian American women have faced an enormous challenge, for in to their being raised to deny their own needs, their culture has required them to stay at home and take care of their families…"[142] In "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," she compares the woman who travel to Italy to the heroines from Greek mythology.[143]

Firstly, she links them to Penelope, who waits patiently and dutifully at home for twenty years for the return of her husband Odysseus.[144] This figure personifies what is expected from the Italian American community. Secondly, she draws a parallel to Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter. For a limited period every year, Persephone could get away from the Underworld and from her husband Hades to go visit her mother. According to Goeller, Persephone is "a particularly appropriate symbol for the Italian American woman who travels in order to reconnect with her ancestral heritage, to discover a new identity, and to recover what perhaps had been lost in the acculturation of her mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers…"[145] This myth is then even more applicable because Hades took her to the Underworld as she was picking flowers in Sicily, an Italian island. Edvige Giunta extends this a year later in her essay by saying that Persephone is "a mythical traveler, a young woman who, willingly or not, adjusts to shuttling back and forth between two worlds. She understands the experience of living between different cultures, languages, identities."[146]

---

[140] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 4.
[141] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 127.
[142] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," 75.
[143] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," *Melus* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 73, accessed February 21, 2018, doi:10.2307/3595261.
[144] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy,"75.
[145] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," 76.
[146] Edvige Giunta, "Persephone's Daughters," *Women's Studies* 33, no. 6 (2004): 769, accessed February 21, 2018, doi: 10.1080/00497870490480406.

3.2.1 Marguerite between Two Worlds

This is above all applicable to Marguerite who is torn by literally living between The United States and Italy. Goeller sees this as "a sign of restlessness and unhappiness."[147] On her first coming to Italy, Barolini describes it as "her homecoming,"[148] which can be disputable. The flight from the United States and from her family is something she herself decides to do. She feels like suffocating in her family, which sees her as "too serious for a girl."[149] Her family also very often likes to emphasize her "duty" to owe respect to her parents.

Marguerite is unable to escape her family even in Italy. When she writes home to tell them about her upcoming marriage with Alberto, both parents are disappointed about her choice. Her mother responds in a letter: "It looks like you're running away again, or have something to hide. You owe us some consideration."[150] They therefore reiterate their demand for her respect towards them as parents and they are shocked to be excluded from the wedding. Goeller reflects that these women are "in a way reversing their emigration."[151] People around Marguerite indeed think that she made a step backwards. In the letter response to Marguerite, her father reacts to her decision to marry Alberto and to move to Italy by defaming Italy and prophesying nothing but bad things: "Italy has no future and never will…"[152]

Later, there comes a shift from being conditioned by her parents to being conditioned by her husband, who is the breadwinner of the family. It is the aspect of ethnicity and gender, which still count very much in these cases. The woman is expected to put her husband first:

> There is always the phenomenon of adaptation in marriage, and especially so in a mixed one… And it is, most times, the woman who undergoes mutation, despite her private resolves, just because of the circumstances of life. The wife lives in the husband's country because his work is there and so her life becomes his. Her ways of life, the foreign ones, are renounced because clinging to them in the face of different

[147] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," 80.
[148] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 166.
[149] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 152.
[150] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 175.
[151] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," 76.
[152] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 175.

> hours, language, customs, foods, friends, attitudes and practices would be intolerably difficult.[153]

Marguerite is expected to adapt to everything her husband Alberto is used to. She also translates the poetry that her husband Alberto creates and she promotes his work, it is therefore even more difficult to step out from his shadow. She is basically a "dim reflection of his coloring and glory."[154] Therefore, one more time, she is not able to free herself of the power that her close ones tend to exercise over her.

A crucial aspect of Marguerite's powerlessness lies in lacking her own home, which is "never easy or conflict-free, for it does not imply a disregard for home but, rather, a troubled and constant longing for a place."[155] She "cannot seem to negotiate a place for herself."[156] Her grandmother would have surely been unhappy about this as it was one of her most clear messages to her daughter Carla and she would have liked for it to reach Marguerite too: "'The important thing […] is to find your place. Everything depends on that. You find your place, you work, and like planting seeds, everything grows. But you have to be watchful and stick to it."[157] Umbertina practiced what she was preaching. Once she settled in America, she did not mourn for Italy and she simply let it go. She dedicated herself solely to her life there and then, and to her new role as a tacit leader.

Marguerite, in contrast, is torn between the two worlds—divided by an ocean and in the end not belonging to either of the two—being neither American nor Italian enough. This manifests in her way of handling the divorce: "Marguerite was a failure both as an American woman and as an Italian. She couldn't be one of those sharp, self-confident Americans who put their husbands through the wringer getting house, […] and even the lawyer's fees paid. […] And she couldn't be Italian, sticking in no matter what."[158] It also projects to her dreams, which she analyzes with Dr. Verdile. In one of the dreams, a teacher is not able to assign her a place in the American classroom. The teacher is not sure how to categorize Marguerite, which "has to do with [her] feeling of

[153] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 180.
[154] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 180.
[155] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with and Accent*, 124.
[156] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," 86.
[157] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 139.
[158] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 196.

alienation and [her] anxiety as to whether [she] [is] American, Italian, or Italo-American."[159]

Unfortunately, Marguerite does not find her place and on the verge of her divorce from Alberto, she says: "'I can't live like this, […] the waste, […] the waste I could die, honestly die of what I feel.'"[160] This could foreshadow the tragedy that would happen next. She dies in her car by driving it off a mountaintop. From the speed at which she was driving, considering that she was pregnant with her lover Massimo, it could be deduced that it was a suicide. Goeller assumes that her decision is driven by her inability "to break either the ethnic or gendered chains that bound her to a life of frustration and upheaval."[161] It also could be that she did not, eventually, want to belong and be linked to a certain place. This is actually a question raised in the book: "Or wasn't it that she wanted to be just that—unfixed and directionless, even in her aspirations? A wanderer and perpetual wonderer."[162] At least after her death she is forced to settle down, as her body is put to rest in Rome, far away from her birthplace, to the disapproval of her parents in America.

She fails to do and to understand what is presumably the biggest lesson not only for her but also for her whole family:

> One's parents and ancestors serve as the connecting link to the place of one's origins. This is the lesson that Umbertina's descendants need to heed in order to understand the sense of chaos and powerlessness they so often experience. While such crisis is already evident in the lives of Umbertina and her daughters, it reaches its moment of highest tension with Marguerite, whose unwanted pregnancy and premature death suggest both the desire to create and the powerlessness to do so.[163]

Instead of trying to solve her identity crisis by fleeting to Italy and learning its language, it would have probably been wiser to solve her situation by "searching her own roots, by taking an attentive journey into herself."[164] When Alberto forces her to seek help in the consulting room of Dr. Verdile, it is already way too late for an honest soul-searching.

---

[159] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 16–17.
[160] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 190.
[161] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy," 81.
[162] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 184.
[163] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 44.
[164] Ewa Bakun, "Worlds imagined and worlds experienced: Italians in America in Vita by Melania Mazzucco and Umbertina by Helen Barolini," 28.

Marguerite never manages to travel as far South as Castagna, the village her grandmother came from: "You know, I've always suspected it was my grandmother Umbertina who brought me to Italy in the first place. But I've never even taken the time to go see where she came from. I've never found her."[165] There is a moment with her lover when she suddenly feels the urge to get away and travel to Castagna and photograph it, but she abandons this idea in the next minute. Umbertina's great-granddaughter Tina of the fourth generation would undergo this journey only later in place of her mother. "She had wanted to come to Castagna, stand on the same ground and breathe the same air as old Umbertina, who had made a success of her life and had been a strong woman. Some voice was always in her head saying, If only I could be Umbertina, […] I'd know my place."[166] In this segment both Umbertina's strength and rootedness are being invoked. At least Tina manages to walk in her great-grandmother's footsteps and break the vicious cycle of her mother.

3.2.2 Louise's Food-ways

Louise DeSalvo in her memoir *Crazy in the Kitchen* talks about her impulse to travel to Italy as well. She most often travels to the South, "as if, in returning, [she] might find what was there when [her] people left, and what was left behind."[167] She yearns to travel to a village that is not even directly linked to her own family, but to the family line of her step-grandmother. She creates an Italy of her own long before going the actual distance. It is shrunk into Rodi, the village her step-grandmother Libera came from and a place she hears stories about throughout her whole childhood and adolescence. Her grandmother describes it as she makes the bread. It is for her "a place imagined, described […] in […] grandmother's stories."[168] And so her grandmother's Italy "became an Italy [she] created, a little white village with cubical houses tumbling down rocky hillside to a crystalline sea."[169]

Walking the streets of actual Rodi allows her to rewrite the history as she created in her imagination and to put herself in place of the local women she meets there: "If my people hadn't left, I would be: The woman washing her steps in Rodi. A

[165] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 18.
[166] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 387.
[167] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 251.
[168] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 143.
[169] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 76.

woman in a field, bending to hoe the earth."[170] Also, she really puts herself in the shoes of her step-grandmother who was about to abandon this piece of the world: "What could it have been like to leave this place she'd never left before, and leave its ways, for a man she didn't know, for a world she was unprepared to experience?"[171] It allows her to see how different the two worlds were and how difficult it must have been for her grandmother to adapt to the new conditions. She does not feel entirely at ease in the *villaggio* and decides to leave instead. She sees herself as a mere invader. Despite her not being of the same blood as her step-grandmother, she feels like it was this place that has influenced her as a person: "I am connected to this place, although by a very fragile thread. Who I am, who I have become, is rooted in this beautiful place that my grandmother's family was forced to leave."[172]

Louise travels also to the place where her father was born and where her actual ancestors come from, but compared to the village of her step-grandmother, she feels very much different there: "I don't feel any connection to this place, although I have imagined I might. Of course, there is no reason I *should* feel a connection to a place my family fled because they could not make a life here."[173] The place brings her, on the other hand, to a reflection on the life of the offspring of immigrants: "Mine, the dilemma of all the descendants of immigrants. To want to belong, yet to know that you do not."[174] This is probably her moment of clarity when she realizes that even though she can feel connected to a place, like that of her grandmother, this would not matter in the end because her feeling of belonging is only illusory. What she feels really connected to is in the end only a figment of her imagination.

Over the years she travels not only to the South of Italy but also throughout the whole peninsula with her husband. Metaphorically, like Persephone, she "rejoins her mother, though temporarily, in multiple, ritualistic homecomings."[175] They come back on a regular basis to enjoy the country and look for new dishes to try, new recipes, ingredients and equipment to bring back to America. After all, in her case it always comes down to food in her case. Her favorite restaurant that they return to many times when they travel to Italy alludes to the figure of grandmother. They visit "La Cucina di

[170] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 144.
[171] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 144.
[172] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 168.
[173] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 175.
[174] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 175.
[175] Edvige Giunta, "Persephone's Daughters," 782.

Nonna Nina," the kitchen of grandmother Nina, where she learns "traditional dishes made in the old way from heirloom family recipes."[176] In the words of Louise DeSalvo, food, or, precisely speaking, the bread of her grandmother, is what would bring her to travel to Italy in the first place: "And when I travel to Italy after she dies, it is this bread, her bread, that I hope I will find there."[177]

3.2.3 The Real and the Metaphorical Journey

When Italian Americans visit the land their ancestors came from, they realize the history and culture they draw from. A whole new world opens up for them. The previously mentioned Greek mythology is a part of their common knowledge, which has been imprinted on them by previous generations. It is the heritage of *Magna Grecia*, which "is not the legacy of a few privileged literati,"[178] and in consequence, the immigrants brought this cultural heritage into Italian American art and literature.[179] The rest of the Italian culture remained in the mecca of arts. The peasants, who constituted the majority of Italian immigrants going to America, knew very little or nothing of such luxuries. Renaissance art or such literary titans as Dante or Petrarch were reserved for the rich.

The sociologist Herbert J. Gans in his essay "Symbolic ethnicity in America" also touched on the search for ethnic identity. Symbolic ethnicity has several means of expression but he mostly perceives it as "a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country,"[180] which manifests the most on symbolic occasions rather than in their everyday lives. According to Hans, "people may even sincerely desire to 'return' to these imagined pasts, which are conveniently cleansed of the complexities that accompanied them in the real past" and this is something both Marguerite and Louise literally carry out. On the other hand, "they may soon realize that they cannot go back."[181]

His hypothesis is that the grandchildren of Europeans arriving to America throughout the years of the 'great migration' are more interested in conveying and

[176] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 189.
[177] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 23.
[178] Edvige Giunta, "Persephone's Daughters," 776.
[179] Edvige Giunta, "Persephone's Daughters," 774.
[180] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic ethnicity in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1979): 9, http://herbertgans.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/13-Symbolic-Ethnicity.pdf.
[181] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic ethnicity in America," 9.

getting in touch with their ethnic identity—in this case with maintaining the feeling of being Italian. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the third generation. They grew up without set roles and groups and therefore, ethnic identity is not anchored in them and they must look for it and find a way to express it (or to abandon it altogether).[182] He sees this not as an ethnic revival but rather as a continuation of acculturation and assimilation in the United States.[183]

Even though they have this common ground, they feel very different from Italians. It is "an immediate and nearly universal realization that most of these writers come to when they visit the land of their foremothers…"[184] It could be that they travel back to Italy to "look for their affinities to Italians" but find only differences instead by "turning [their] identities upside down."[185] They are a mixture of an American and an Italian part and cannot ignore any of the two components. Marguerite saw the contrast between her and the Italian women clearly: "how sure they were of themselves, how well they dressed and carried themselves; and she despised her soft, round, childish face and Italian-American uneasiness."[186] She intended to cancel this barrier by learning from Alberto. In the end, it was something she could not manage.

To sum up, traveling to Italy becomes an identity quest, which, in the case of Marguerite and Louise, is not as successful as expected. Most probably, it does not help the granddaughters to define their identity but surely contributes to creating a clearer picture of the place they originate from. In the end, no journey per se could help the protagonists to achieve this without their determination to accompany it by some internal (soul) work. Regardless of the result, Gardaphé understands the identity quest as "the key to reading the narratives of third-generation Italian American writers, for as their grandparents were economic and political immigrants, and their parents social immigrants, they themselves are cultural immigrants."[187] Their quests are:

> real or metaphorical journeys into the past with the goal of understanding the impact that both Italian and American cultures have had on the creation of Italian American identities. The result is a combination of memory and imagination that work together to explain the ethnic anxiety faced by those third-generation writers, who are just as alienated from the

[182] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic ethnicity in America," 7–8.
[183] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic ethnicity in America," 4–5.
[184] Alison D. Goeller, "Persephone Goes Home," 77.
[185] Luisa Del Giudice, *Oral History, Oral Culture, And Italian Americans*, 63.
[186] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 171.
[187] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 121.

> reality of the immigrant experience as they often feel they are from the very culture into which they were born.[188]

Still, it is a siren call they cannot resist and they simply have to "undertake an archeological excavation."[189]

3.3 History through the Eyes of the Grandmothers and the Granddaughters

Another way to view the figure of grandmother in *Umbertina* and *Crazy in the Kitchen* is as a mediator of the past things and as a person that "serve[s] as the connecting link to the place of one's origins."[190] Helen Barolini herself said that "in our grandparents is incorporated all of the past, all of tradition and custom, and, we imagine, some archetypal wisdom and native intelligence."[191] The immigrant grandparent is often the edge of what can be imagined by their Italian American descendants also because, in the words of Thomas C. Wheeler, "the irony of American opportunity is that it has required rootlessness."[192] The rest for them is too distant, left in the Old World, meditated via the stories of the grandparent:

> The grandparent embodies the whole tribe, the whole heritage for that—in overwhelmingly the most cases—is as far as a present-day Italian American can trace his or her descent. After the immigrant grandparent, or great-grandparent, there are just faceless hordes stretching back into the past—unknown, unvisualized, unnamed. Many Italian Americans embody the paradox of coming from very ancient roots of an ancient civilization and culture, but knowing their past only as far as a grandparent.[193]

When talking to Alberto, who was Italian-born, Marguerite addresses this and she sees it as one of the major differences between her and him: "just think of what my background was—nothing! We don't even know who we are any further than my grandparents, and you've got family trees right back to the thirteenth century. It's only with my parents that reading and writing and speaking correctly began for us. That's the difference between us!"[194]

---

[188] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 121.
[189] Edvige Giunta, "Persephone's Daughters," 769.
[190] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 44.
[191] Helen Barolini, "Granddaughters," 100.
[192] Thomas C. Wheeler, ed., introduction to *The Immigrant Experience* (1971, New York: Pelican Books, 1972), 11.
[193] Helen Barolini, "Granddaughters," 100.
[194] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 178.

A lot had to be abandoned in the place of their origin by the immigrants and "America dangled the rewards of money and success"[195] in return. People from Italy were longing for opportunities and economic stability, which their country could not provide in the times of great migration and agrarian crisis, when the old artisan crafts and Italian industry were on decline. Before the unification of Italy in 1861, the country consisted mainly of peasants, about 90 per cent of the population, who did not care about the bigger picture and the forces that were leading the scattered country to the unified Kingdom of Italy. They were the ones, nonetheless, who were experiencing the consequences of the crisis and unification first hand.[196] The soil was very poor as a result of exhaustion of the cultivated land. Also because of the massive import of American wheat, Southern small peasants were not able to compete with big estates.[197] These were only some of the causes, which forced the Italian people to emigrate. Even though in most cases they found what they came to America for, "the need for past [was] inevitable."[198]

Helen Barolini brought up a noteworthy fact in her interview for *MELUS*, pointing out that before *Umbertina*, nobody really got into the topic of the "great exodus from Italy."[199] From this point of view, the book is quite groundbreaking and brings to the fore a process which has been "labeled as the most significant from the modern history given that in 1861 more than 24 million departures were recorded in all regions of Italy."[200]

3.3.1 Storytelling and Oral Tradition

Storytelling and oral tradition is rooted very deep in the Italian American culture and it enables them to pass wisdom from one woman to another across generations. According to Fred Gardaphé, the strong oral tradition was the stepping stone for some of the

[195] Thomas C. Wheeler, *The Immigrant Experience*, 14.
[196] Robert Pearce and Andrina Stiles, *Access to History: The Unification of Italy* (2006, London: Hodder Education, 2010, Kindle edition), Locations 246–60.
[197] Ana Laura Buliga, "Causes and Effects of the Migratory Italian Waves in the 19th–20th Centuries," 53–54.
[198] Thomas C. Wheeler, *The Immigrant Experience*, 14.
[199] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," 106.
[200] Ana Laura Buliga, "Causes and Effects of the Migratory Italian Waves in the 19th–20th Centuries," *Bulletin Of The Transilvania University Of Braşov* 9 (58), no. 2 (2016): 58, accessed January 30, 2018, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=121252451&site=eds-live&authtype=shib&custid=s7108593.

authors who wanted to record the Italian American experience.[201] Marie Saccomando Coppola in *Oral History*, *Oral Culture, and Italian Americans* stresses the importance of the possibility of women to speak up and narrate their life stories: "Allowing women to speak for themselves provides an opportunity to tell their life stories, define their personal identity, and interpret the meaning of their own lives in their own words."[202] She perceives it as a kind of remedy to the one-sided masculine perspective as well. According to her, "oral history provides a way to record resistance to the patriarchal worldview and thus negate the stereotypical posture of feminine passivity."[203]

Speaking of identity in terms of ethnicity, Richard D. Alba conducted research among Americans descending from Europeans as opposed to those who identify largely with WASPs, whose roots go back many generations in America. He elaborated on this in "Identity and Ethnicity among Italians and Other Americans of European Ancestry."[204] Alba sees a strong connection between the way European Americans assert their identity and the histories of their ancestors arriving to the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth century. There is a commonality between all those of European descent in that they share their stories among themselves about how their forefathers struggled to gain prosperity in the New World:

> What is novel in the emerging European-American ethnic identity is a perception of ethnic commonality among individuals of nominally different European ancestries, a perception founded upon a sense of shared family experiences of immigration and social mobility. This identity is made manifest in the widely told stories of people who came poor from whatever European nation, suffered from discrimination and other early burdens, but worked hard and eventually succeeded in the new land.[205]

These stories help them to come to terms with their ethnicity. When compared to other European Americans, this phenomenon is more pronounced among Italian Americans of unmixed ancestry. The reason for this is that "Italians are more likely than the average white to have been raised in an ethnic milieu and to have had direct contact with the immigrant generation (in the form of parents, grandparents, and other older

---

[201] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 28.
[202] Luisa del Giudice, *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, 57.
[203] Luisa del Giudice, *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, 56–57.
[204] Richard D. Alba, "Identity and Ethnicity among Italians and Other Americans of European Ancestry," *Center for Migration Studies special issues* 1, no. 11 (1994): 21–44, accessed February 5, 2018, doi:10.1111/j.2050-411X.1994.tb00749.x.
[205] Richard D. Alba, "Identity and Ethnicity among Italians and Other Americans of European Ancestry," 21.

relatives).”[206] From this could be deduced that it is indeed the closeness to the immigrant grandparent, which leads to a reinforcement of their identification as Italian Americans.

For many respondents in Alba’s research, ethnic identity got reduced to a privatized form in personal and family terms, in which “the facts of family history are often equated with ethnicity.”[207] This is especially relevant to Italians, who value family among the most important things in life. Alba does not overlook the factor of variability, though, where the intensity of identity for each individual varies with respect to other individuals and to various situations.[208]

Women like Umbertina and Libera, Louise’s grandmother, had a lot to talk about and to pass down. Yet stories their stories “never made it into the history books or the media.”[209] These women were not even aware that their life stories could be of any historical value. They grew up with the belief that their lives could never be historically significant.[210] The history of peasant families was ignored for a long time by historians and labeled as “uneducated, unimportant, non-political and unworthy of study…”[211] Historical value set aside, their life stories had a profound influence on their granddaughters in multiple ways as will be demonstrated later on.

Marguerite could not listen to the stories of her grandmother about her life back in Italy but she was such a salient figure in their family that everyone talked about her success story. She was an inspirational person to look up to because “hers was a financial Cinderella story” and “not only does her immediate family but also the generations to follow benefit from her hard work and astute business sense.”[212] Yet in a way, the story of Umbertina and Serafino was similar to many of those abandoning the old country and crossing the ocean for the new world: “She knew from what she had heard that there was a huge lake of water, *l’oceano*, which could only be crossed in a

[206] Richard D. Alba, “Identity and Ethnicity among Italians and Other Americans of European Ancestry,” 28.
[207] Richard D. Alba, “Identity and Ethnicity among Italians and Other Americans of European Ancestry,” 31.
[208] Richard D. Alba, “Identity and Ethnicity among Italians and Other Americans of European Ancestry,” 30–31.
[209] Luisa del Giudice, *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, 29.
[210] Luisa del Giudice, *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, 29.
[211] Robert Pearce and Andrina Stiles, *Access to History: The Unification of Italy*, Locations 166–80.
[212] Anthony Julian Tamburri, Paolo Giordano,Fred L. Gardaphe, eds., *From The Margin*, 361.

journey of many weeks, so immense was it, and that it took one to a new world."[213] It was compared to an odyssey that was meant to be conveyed from one generation to the next: "it was the great story of their lives, an odyssey that was still real and vivid in their memories, a perpetual drama to be retold and acted out in all its shadings of sorrow and joy."[214] Like Odysseus,

> the immigrant becomes a hero in these quest narratives, a hero who battles forces larger than she or he. The re-creation of these battles and the representation of the sacrifices made by these figures serve more than a symbolic function integral in the formation of self-identity of the third generation.[215]

The reasons why Marguerite could not hear them out were firstly the aforementioned language barrier, secondly Umbertina's passing when Marguerite was thirteen years old, and thirdly because of the thick line Umbertina had drawn under her life back in Italy. According to her great-granddaughter Tina, "she had made a choice" and "had […] completely relinquished her Italian ties…"[216] She thought Umbertina's success story had lied in "her total uprooting, followed by total replanting"[217] in the United States. Umbertina really loved America and the opportunities and *benessere,* or well-being, it gave her and her family. She was comparing it to the hostile Italy that she knew: "although she found the climate harsh and erratic and the people graceless and ugly, still it was a country that gave *benessere* in return for hard work."[218]

Her relinquishing the Italian ties proved in the fact that she, unlike anyone else from the Italian American community, was not willing to send money back to Italy. The only thing she would want her families in Italy to have was her photographs. She justified it by gaining prosperity only in America and she decided to also spend the money there and invest it in her children: "Have you found fortune and *benessere* here? Then use it here. For your sons and grandsons who are Americans."[219] In fact, she decided to keep on looking to the future rather than to the past with her clear message as follows: "Leave, take a direction, go forward, do not look back."[220] Her approach probably stemmed from her overall negative outlook on Italy, which has, in her words,

---

[213] Helen Barolini, *Umbertin*a, 27.
[214] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 120.
[215] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 121.
[216] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 380.
[217] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 392.
[218] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 99.
[219] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 110.
[220] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 384.

"given them nothing, […] but it would be quick to take his sons for soldiers and his money for taxes."[221]

Louise would hear the stories straight from her grandparents and they would be so different from anything she was used to that she would think of them as figments of their imagination. The tales Louise listened to were far from fairytales and if so, they resembled those of the Grimm Brothers, with beasts sneaking into houses to kidnap infants: "There were feral cats that ate their babies, my grandmother said which was all right, because the babies would die anyway—there wasn't even enough food for people in the land where my grandparents came from."[222] Not only feral cats but also wild things have one of the leading roles in those stories and it seems like they have tracked them even to their new homeland and haunt them in Hoboken, New Jersey:

> There were wild things in my grandparents' stories about the Mezzogiorno, the South of Italy, the land that they came from so many years ago, always wild things. […] Wild wolves that came into villages at night to carry babies away to eat them, which was one reason why it was necessary […] to close up a house at night, even in summertime, even here in America…[223]

There is no doubt why she would think of the South of Italy as "a barbarous place," in which wolves would come "through a window to steal a baby."[224] Later arrives the inevitable moment of revelation, when Louise comes to the point where she can distinguish between fiction and reality and she is bewildered by the fact that what she used to listen to throughout her childhood was, in fact, based on true events: "And then I learned that their stories, which I believed were fabrications when I was young, were true, all true."[225] These stories, sadly, reflected the actual state of affairs in the South of Italy around the years of the great migration.

One could say that "there were two Italys at the time of unification and for many generations thereafter"[226] and regionalism was a significant factor in Italian culture. The diversification did not stop at the bipartition. There were major dissimilarities between each province and the cultural differences were perceivable even among neighboring villages, or *paesi*. Italian immigrants remained true to their regions by "recreating old world geography in new world Little Italys across America, subscribing to

[221] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 110.
[222] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 2.
[223] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 1.
[224] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 76.
[225] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 5.
[226] Francis M. Malpezzi, William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore*, 27.

companilismo, the village-mindedness distinct to a people whose isolating geography and lack of mobility made Italy a country of regions."[227] From this point of view, the immigrants were moving from their particular village and bringing the culture with them.[228] As a matter of fact, Italy as a country did not even exist until the unification of Italy, or *Risorgimento*, which was underway up to 1871. This way, they could not really "perceive themselves nationally or racially until they settled in America,"[229] in which they ended up in what could be basically called ghettos. Again, these historical facts project to the fiction, this time to *Umbertina*, who found herself in America "but living in a little Italy, in streets filled with Italians arranged according to where they had come from in the old country."[230]

The South was substantially behind—culturally, economically and industrially—in comparison to the faster-progressing North[231] and its people felt exploited by the government residing in the North and by the countless invaders that arrived to the lower part of the Italian peninsula:

> And there were ferocious invading armies as far back as anyone could remember—armies of Romans, Lombards, Greeks, Arabs, Germans, French, Spanish. Some would murder everyone in a village, burn the buildings to the ground, leave no evidence of life. […] And none of these invaders, my grandparents said, had ever helped the poor of the South. And the people from the North, my grandfather said, they were invaders, too.[232]

Even in the United States, people from the South could not escape prejudice and on top of that they were criticized for blackening the name of all citizens of the Italian descent. It was standard for the peasants in Italy to live in "dark, damp, poorly furnished cottages that they shared with their livestock for warmth at night."[233] Being used to such pitiable conditions at home, they settled for conditions no one else would be willing to accept and therefore lowered the standards of their fellows. This shows again in an excerpt from *Umbertina*:

> You people are impossible. It is you, from the South, who have given us Italians in this city a bad name. You live where the Germans and Irish

[227] Mary Jo Bona, "Introduction: Italianità in 2003: The State of Italian American Literature," 7.
[228] Francis M. Malpezzi, William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore*, 29.
[229] Mary Jo Bona, "Introduction: Italianità in 2003: The State of Italian American Literature," 6–7.
[230] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 61.
[231] Ana Laura Buliga, "Causes and Effects of the Migratory Italian Waves in the 19th–20th Centuries," 54.
[232] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 3–4.
[233] Robert Pearce and Andrina Stiles, *Access to History: The Unification of Italy*, Locations 180–94.

> and even the Jews, no matter how poor, won't live. You break the picket lines where workers are trying to force decent wages out of their bosses, and when you are robbed and even murdered, you won't go to the police—you want to take care of it among yourselves in your disgusting little vendettas.[234]

It only reinforced the overall stereotype of the "violent, ignorant and lazy Italian."[235] In the mid-1920s, the view on Italian immigrants worsened to the point of instituting quotas on their admission to the United States. Such measure, nonetheless, did not discourage some members of Congress from blaming the unemployment—and crime in general—on Italian citizens. Nativists even called for their collective deportation.[236]

Both Italian immigrants and anarchists were extremely suspected and that time. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti are probably the most famous Italian-American anarchists, who wanted to change the poor working conditions of their fellows and often attended anarchist meetings. They, unfortunately, paid dearly for it. Despite tenuous evidence, the U.S. government condemned them to death for an alleged murder of two other men. Instead of becoming a deterrent example, they became martyrs and acted as a trigger for a series of protests, nationally and globally.[237]

The image of Italy that Louise's grandmother presented to her was almost exclusively negative. From what DeSalvo recorded in her memoir, her grandmother Libera, like Umbertina, had a grudge against Italy because it had been so inhospitable. Her grandparents "would never go back to that place, they spit on that place, they said, though not because of the wild things that were there. They spit on that place because there, no matter how hard you worked, you stayed poor."[238] From this it is quite understandable why her grandparents did not experience nostalgia, which was common for so many other immigrants when talking about their homeland. Some even felt the urge to return.[239] Their *miseria* in Italy had been presumably so deep that it remained as a permanent scar on their hearts and kept them from feeling nostalgia later in America. Although Louise's grandmother did not bewail Italy as such, she was missing the people from her past. The life of Libera was "one of perpetual mourning even before

---

[234] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 74.
[235] Ana Laura Buliga, "Causes and Effects of the Migratory Italian Waves in the 19th–20th Centuries," 56.
[236] Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, 56.
[237] Olivia B. Waxman, "Sacco and Vanzetti Were Executed 90 Years Ago. Their Deaths Made History," *Time*, August 22, 2017, accessed May 7, 2018, http://time.com/4895701/sacco-vanzetti-90th-anniversary/.
[238] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 5.
[239] Ana Laura Buliga, "Causes and Effects of the Migratory Italian Waves in the 19th–20th Centuries," 56.

[Louise's] grandfather died, for the family she had left in Puglia that she never saw again."[240]

Louise felt like these stories were apparently not sufficient and she craved to know a lot more about her origins. At a certain point in the book, she attacks the Italian American families by saying that "they have taught [them] virtually nothing about the country [their] ancestors came from."[241] It was only a lot later that she learned "that Puglia had the highest death rate and the shortest life expectancy of all the provinces in Italy. That there were virtually no doctors, no medicines, no medical equipment."[242] There were many things she simply did not know: "I didn't know that farmworkers who ate every day were considered wealthy […] that workers lived in what were called rabbit hutches […] that many people in Puglia died of thirst."[243] Even though her grandparents told her many stories, she and Italian-Americans in general had very little knowledge of the Italian past: "We have learned nothing about the history of Italy, the history of the South of Italy, the reasons for the great emigration."[244] There are things her grandparents left out on purpose because it would have hurt them too much to talk about them out loud and so she later had to find out on her own from history books and books by Italian-Americans.[245]

She also would have appreciated someone teaching her the language her grandparents and her ancestors spoke. Most Italian-Americans could understand the dialect that was spoken in their homes but no one was able to actually speak the dialect or to speak Italian properly.[246] When traveling to Italy, the little of Italian that Louise used to hear from her grandmother helped her to understand most of what Italians were telling her but she was not able to communicate properly: "I speak almost no Italian, but from years of living with my grandmother, I can understand everything Anna Manna Maccarini says. Using gestures, helped by my husband's meager Italian, we exchange a score of recipes…"[247]

She has quite a realistic outlook on her getting to know more of the real history of their grandparents. After all, the image we try to make of the past is only a mosaic

[240] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 84.
[241] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 207.
[242] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 133.
[243] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 132–135.
[244] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 207.
[245] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 137.
[246] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 207.
[247] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 191.

that would always have missing pieces. We try to reconstruct it by the limited clues we have at our disposition that can never be sufficient to show us the whole picture:

> No, I will never know my grandparent's histories. No matter how much I try to remember my grandparent's stories; how much I listen to my father's stories; how much I read; how much I study my grandparents' photos, their papers, the few artifacts that remain of their lives. No matter whether or not I visit the places they lived. All I can do is conjecture, imagine, invent their lives. My story of their story of their story, a distortion, a misrepresentation of what they lived.[248]

The aftermath of her reconstruction of her grandparent's tough history haunts her in her sleep, when she has vivid dreams, in which she is "the avatar of her ancestors" and she vindicates them by "all those who have disrespected [her] people."[249] It gives her something positive as well. History helps her to understand herself and to understand the state of affairs in her family,[250] which was afflicted by it so much. This would to a certain extent confirm Gardaphé's and Alba's hypothesis about stories from her past working as an aid in defining one's identity. "It fixes [her] in time."[251]As she tries hard to recreate it and imagine it on an illusory timeline, she anchors herself and knows her place in time.

3.4 The Motifs of Bedspread and Tablecloths

In both works, there is a striking similarity between the choices of motifs from both authors of *Umbertina* and *Crazy in the Kitchen*. Barolini in her interview for *MELUS* revealed that she uses her motifs with a clear intention.[252] The two she mentions are the tin heart Umbertina receives as a present from Serafino and the rosemary tree that Tina grows in her house. Here, however, the focus in this thesis will be on *biancheria* (or linens, i.e. the bedspread), which belonged to Umbertina and the embroidered tablecloths grandmother Libera kept crocheting.

Sewing constituted a significant part of everyday lives and of socialization among Italian women. They learned this craft from other women; be they relatives, teachers or seamstresses. The most learned techniques were embroidery and lace

[248] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 143.
[249] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 139.
[250] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 252.
[251] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 143.
[252] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini," 92.

making.[253] Sewing was closely connected to the dowry, or *corredo*, which was very often the only property young women could bring with them as they emigrated to America. Traditionally, a family would provide their daughter with a trousseau and such custom would persist even in the United States.[254] The dowry consisted mainly of linens intended for the new household, such as the above-mentioned tablecloths and bedspreads or towels and sheets. One historian even called *corredo* and *biancheria* a "'cultural touchstone' of Italian Americana."[255] They would be later "imported" into the United States along with the artistry, "adapting it to a new social context."[256]

Lori Merish perceives *corredo* and *biancheria* as "a powerfully significant object for daughters of peasant and artisan families."[257] It surely applied to both Umbertina and Libera. For Umbertina there were two significant cornerstones in life: eating well and sleeping well. She did not really care about furniture, but she needed to make sure that her daughters received the finest linens possible. Actually, the advice she gave their daughters before they got married was nothing more than that she "believed in good food on the table and good linen on the bed."[258] Umbertina held that family property "should stay with the family name, and that the husbands of her daughters should be expected to provide for them after they had brought their marriage dowries to their new homes. That was the way things were done in a right and ordered world."[259] It was a tradition, which, from her standpoint, should not be changed in any way.

Umbertina, out of the ordinary, couldn't sew or seam. Otherwise, it was common for Italian women to learn basic stitching by the age of seven and later learn embroidery and lacework.[260] Peasant women in Italy were often expected to contribute to the family budget by sewing shirts, spinning, by regular weaving or by silk weaving.[261] Umbertina was engaged in the family business in a different way and it could be claimed that she was the one "wearing the pants" in the family. It was she who had decided to travel to America in the first place and to start the sandwich business, which influenced their path to prosperity significantly. Even though she did not master

[253] Lori Merish, "Reading 'things' in Italian-America," *Journal Of Transatlantic Studies (Routledge)* 14, no. 2 (2016): 205, accessed February 21, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2016.1169870.
[254] Francis M. Malpezzi, William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore*, 71.
[255] Lori Merish, "Reading 'things' in Italian-America," 206.
[256] Lori Merish, "Reading 'things' in Italian-America," 206.
[257] Lori Merish, "Reading 'things' in Italian-America," 206.
[258] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 130.
[259] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 133.
[260] Lori Merish, "Reading 'things' in Italian-America," 205.
[261] Robert Pearce and Andrina Stiles, *Access to History: The Unification of Italy*, Locations 194–207.

sewing nor seaming, nor stitching, she could really appreciate quality *biancheria* and she settled for nothing else than the finest goods for her daughters:

> She had an absolute feel for *biancheria* and knew what kind of mitering was right, what types of linens should accompany a woman in life, how fine the hemstitching should be, what monogramming was suitable, and what quality of material was appropriate. Always it was the best and most expensive quality that she ordered, and the most obsolete…[262]

Libera, contrarily to Umbertina, immersed herself in knitting and crocheting after the death of her husband. Louise would find her very often close to the radiator in their house in New Jersey, where she would sit all day long in "a space that was not Italy but that was not America either."[263] She kept on doing it "as if to crochet and to knit was what mattered."[264] Doing her needlework seemed to bring her satisfaction and seemed to be one way of reclaiming her "sense of worth and some small scrap of human dignity,"[265] which was something nobody else could have given her. In the eyes of Louise, she was "affirming her right to exist in a world that did not want her."[266] And if not the world, then certainly her stepdaughter.

It could be claimed that these motifs stand for a form of legacy of the grandmothers. The *biancheria* would be the little that could be left for their grandchildren as a tangible asset, referring to the culture they came from. It is another form of link to the past—this time a material one. Indeed, Edvige Giunta views the bedspread in *Umbertina* as "a physical token of the ties to her culture of origins, to her native village that longs for on her deathbed."[267] Thus, not only can it be pointing to the country and culture as a whole, but also the reference can be much more specific and designate the *villaggio* she came from.

Lori Merish sees it similarly. She understands garments in general as "texts," which "bear inscriptions of the past" and sewing and crocheting as "a transformative force, a means through which Italian women's artistry and traditional forms of cultural expression – like their forms of embodied performance – were woven into the material culture of the 'New' world."[268] To illustrate this, there is a passage from *Crazy in the*

[262] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 132.
[263] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 81.
[264] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 82.
[265] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 83.
[266] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 83.
[267] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 95–96.
[268] Lori Merish, "Reading 'things' in Italian-America," 206.

Kitchen which fits this description. It shows what happens to the embroidered tablecloths that grandmother Libera used to crochet and the way Louise treats them:

> The tablecloths I still have. They are now treasured heirlooms, which adorn our family's festive tables. I have many tablecloths to give, presents for my sons and their wives; gifts for my grandchildren, for you can crochet many tablecloths through the years when you have little else to do.[269]

Louise reserves the tablecloths for special occasions and she does the same thing her grandmother used to do: they are to be bequeathed to the generations to follow. This way it fulfills its function as "a terrain of cultural exchange."[270] It is likely that Louise learns from observing her grandmother's behavior that Libera feared falling into oblivion, as she did not have any blood-related offspring. She contemplates the reason for her crocheting the tablecloths: "Perhaps to pass the time. Perhaps to leave something behind, for there would be no children, no namesake, no one of her blood to tend her grave when she died."[271] As a loving step-granddaughter, she made sure that a piece of her grandmother would remain alive in the hands of her children. The inheritance is similar to that of the stories, carrying history with them. When talking about the tablecloths, Louise interconnects these two and she reveals her intentions: "And I will pass on, too, stories about the woman who made them."[272]

Unexpectedly, Louise's mother, who had a troublesome relationship with her stepmother throughout the whole life, used the tablecloths often and took care of them well by washing them by hand. She would even stitch placemats and matching napkins to go with them. Later, she learns to embroider tablecloths and, maybe unknowingly, she embroiders flowers and herbs on them, which used to sprout near the village of the grandmother. As Louise travels to Rodi and walks its hillsides, she realizes this link to the Gargano peninsula:

> On one, my mother embroidered orchids, mimosa, almond blossoms, poppies, daisies, thistle, gorse, asphodel, iris, cyclamen, rockroses. On the other, parsley, thyme, sage, rosemary, dill. And although my mother didn't realize it, many of the flowers she embroidered grew in or near Rodi Garganico, the village where her stepmother came from…[273]

---

[269] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 82.
[270] Lori Merish, "Reading 'things' in Italian-America," 206.
[271] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 78.
[272] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in the Kitchen*, 82.
[273] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 126.

This brings us back full circle to what traveling to the place of origin can teach you. Without traveling there, Louise would never create this association: "I didn't know this until recently, when I traveled to Puglia in search of my step-grandmother's village, because I thought that going there would teach me something I needed to know about her, about my past, my family history."[274]

It is interesting to observe what happens when a woman loses such an artifact. Even though Umbertina values the bedspread that she has brought with her from Italy, she has to let go of it and sell it to Anna Giordano when she is short of money. Umbertina's beginnings in the United States and in New York are tough on her and her family and she is aware of the monetary value of such fine linen, which is utmost difficult to buy in the United States. The importance of the bedspread lies, according to Edvige Giunta, in Umbertina's view of her bedspread "as the embodiment of her struggle to extricate herself from the entrapment in a world in which people are resigned to poverty…"[275] and as incarnation of "[her] hope for economic success and social ascent…"[276]

Edvige Giunta positions Helen Barolini among other Italian American women authors, who "foreground […] the importance of material culture and the very real consequences that the loss of artifacts can have on the members of a cultural group."[277] She was often coming back to her loss of the bedspread and she kept repeating its story to her daughters, probably in order to explain to them the importance of keeping it in the family at least this time: "Umbertina often told her daughters the story of her dowry bedspread and its loss during the hard times in New York; and she had told them that the bed-linen and spreads she provided must remain with them and then be passed on to their own daughters."[278]

The bedspread, nonetheless, does not remain lost forever. It finds its way to the Immigration Museum on Ellis Island, to the "Anna Giordani Collection." Her great-granddaughter Tina goes there one day and the bedspread catches her eye. Even though she does not have any idea that the bedspread in front of her used to belong to her family, it appeals to her. It reestablishes "the bond between the two women, so distant

[274] Louise DeSalvo, *Crazy in The Kitchen*, 126.
[275] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 40.
[276] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 95.
[277] Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent*, 96.
[278] Helen Barolini, *Umbertina*, 133.

in time, […] through the agency of this typically feminine work of art: a bedspread."[279] Helen Barolini comments on this as well in her interview: "It speaks to her of conserving what is best in her Italian tradition, but it speaks to her in the new world; and that's very significant."[280] By getting lost from the hands of the Longobardi family, it can reach many other people, who come to visit the museum.

[279] Ewa Bakun, "Worlds imagined and worlds experienced: Italians in America in Vita by Melania Mazzucco and Umbertina by Helen Barolini," 17.
[280] Dorothée von Huene Greenberg and Helen Barolini, "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini,"104.

4 Conclusion

The subject of this thesis was a literary analysis of grandmother and granddaughter figures in the two works by two Italian-American women authors; *Umbertina* by Helen Barolini and *Crazy in the Kitchen* by Louise DeSalvo. The attention was largely directed to the interaction between the Old World and the New World and the ways in which they shaped the two generations. In Thomas Wheeler's terms, "the cost of becoming American has been high. For every freedom won, a tradition lost. […] For the gains of goods and services, an identity lost, an uncertainty found."[281]

The thesis confirmed the prominent position of the grandmother character in Italian-American female literature and explored the ways in which the interaction with their granddaughters impacted them and vice versa. As was demonstrated throughout the thesis, the grandmother is a storyteller, a bearer of the Italian tradition, a teacher and a "means of empowerment"[282] to their granddaughters. The grandmother provides the Italian-American writers with one of the routes they can take "to find answers to their uncomfortable sense of otherness,"[283] by exploring their origins and their family lives.

The beginning of the thesis was dedicated to a brief introduction to the lives, the works and its themes of the two selected authors: Helen Barolini and Louise Desalvo. In order to provide a broader context, the subsequent chapter extended to the whole Italian-American female literary background. It traced some of the reasons behind the long silence on the part of Italian-American women writers, further on provided the some of the joint themes of this grouping and lastly showed the struggles these authors had to face on their journey to critical acclaim.

The main section focused on the grandmother and the granddaughter characters from the afore-mentioned books. The grandmother was explained in the context of her significance within the Italian-American framework and with respect to her influence on the Italian-American women writers. The first subchapter treated the relationship between the grandmothers and the grandmothers. It demonstrated the close bond that there was between Libera and Louise and the more distant that Umbertina and Marguerite had. An important factor conditioning both of these relationships was the

[281] Thomas C. Wheeler, *The Immigrant Experience*, 1.
[282] Ewa Bakun, "Worlds imagined and worlds experienced: Italians in America in Vita by Melania Mazzucco and Umbertina by Helen Barolini," 17.
[283] Ewa Bakun, "Worlds imagined and worlds experienced: Italians in America in Vita by Melania Mazzucco and Umbertina by Helen Barolini," 11.

language barrier. Helen Barolini in *The Dream Book* presented the outlook on the grandmother as a source of strength to the granddaughter.[284] From the analysis, this held true for both of the younger characters. It was not as clear for Louise as in the case of Marguerite, who explicitly expressed her wish to have her grandmother's power.

Both granddaughters left America to explore the land of their origins. Both hoped for finding their identity there, which they in the end did not manage to obtain. In the case of Marguerite, travelling to Italy elongated to a permanent stay. Yet, it did not guarantee a new home for her, as she felt like she belonged neither to Italy, nor to America. Marguerite and Louise shared a sense of uprootedness, which could not really be fixed by a trip, but required an exploration of the inner, the soul. Despite living in Italy for a great part of her life, Marguerite, unlike Louise, never made it to her grandmother's village. Their journey could also be viewed from the metaphorical perspective and compared to those of the heroines of Greek mythology, that is Persephone and Penelope.

The subsequent subchapter concerned the history filtered through the eyes of the grandmothers and the granddaughters. Mainly via their grandmothers' storytelling, the granddaughters found out about the past full of hardships their grandmothers had to go through. They listened to a journey of the search from abundance which brought their grandmothers from the South of Italy to the United States. They, however, heard the sometimes distorted, often incomplete side of the story. To Louise, the step-grandmother's stories seemed so far removed from anything she experienced in her life that they almost resembled a fairytale. Once she found them to be true, she hungered for learning more about the country her ancestors came from and she was angry that her grandparents left out some of the important facts. Marguerite in turn had to learn about her grandmother's success story in America indirectly from her relatives.

The final part of the main section concentrated on the motifs of the bedspread in *Umbertina* and tablecloths in *Crazy in the Kitchen*. These objects carry a great significance for both the grandmothers and the granddaughters and work as relics of the Old World. They are supposed to be handed from one generation to another, as they comprise a reminder of the past and they encapsulate the Italian tradition, such as that of dowry. The tradition obliged the parents to provide their daughters with the essentials for their new homes as newly-wed women. Umbertina mourned the loss of the

[284] Helen Barolini, "Granddaughters," 100.

bedspread, which she had brought with her from Italy, very much. It was the one material thing, that was left of her life in Italy and that was dear to her. Louise inherited the tablecloths her step-grandmother and her mother embroidered throughout the years. They were of a great value to her and she passed them to her children. The motif of the bedspread and tablecloths bring both stories full circle: In *Umbertina*, the great-granddaughter Tina (a symbolic name in itself) is attracted to the long lost bedspread when she sees it on display in the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. For Louise, as travels to Italy, she recognizes the flowers her mother embroidered on the tablecloths as she walks the hills near Rodi Garganico, her grandmother's birthplace.

5 Resumé

Tato diplomová práce si kladla za hlavní cíl analýzu dvou děl *Umbertina* od Helen Barolini a *Crazy in The Kitchen* od Louise Desalvo. Obě autorky spadají do kánonu italsko-amerických ženských autorek. Analýza byla zaměřená především na babičky a vnučky z výše zmíněných děl: na jejich vztah a na způsoby, jakými se navzájem tyto dvě generace ovlivňovaly.

Celá práce je logicky rozčleněna do tří hlavních kapitol. První kapitola obsahuje medailonky autorek dvou vybraných knih, které krátce představují jejich život, díla a často se vyskytující náměty. V následující kapitole je nastíněno to nejpodstatnější z kontextu italsko-amerických ženských autorek. Po celá desetiletá se na trhu nevyskytovala téměř žádná díla z pera italsko-amerických žen a jsou zde představeny některé z hlavních příčin tohoto dlouhého mlčení. Později se vyskytl problém se zařazením těchto autorek a jejich přehlížením ze strany literárních kritiků. V závěru kapitoly jsou zmíněny náměty společné pro celý kánon.

V pořadí třetí kapitola představuje samotnou analýzu postav babiček a vnuček. Úvod kapitoly je zaměřený především na postavu babičky v italsko-americkém kontextu a poukazuje nakolik byla v případě Helen Barolini její babička zdrojem inspirace v procesu psaní. První podkapitola rozebírá vztah babičky Umbertiny a vnučky v *Umbertině* a Libery s Louise v *Crazy in the Kitchen*. Z porovnání mezi těmito dvojicemi žen bylo vcelku patrné, nakolik užší byl vztah mezi prvně zmíněnými. Ovlivňujícím faktorem byla jazyková bariéra, díky niž bylo sblížení často znesnadněno. Součástí interakce mezi babičkami a vnučkami bylo přání vnuček stát se stejně silnými jako jejich babičky a snaha vnuček čerpat z tohoto zdroje energie. Marguerite se dokonce v těžkých časech dovolávala této síly její již zesnulé babičky a prosila ji o pomoc.

Obě vnučky se vydaly do Itálie, aby zde prozkoumaly jejich prameny. Obě doufaly v naleznutí jejich identity, což se bohužel nenaplní. V případě Marguerite se z období na studiích v Itálii stal pobyt, který se prodloužil do konce jejího života. Itálie jí však neposkytla nový domov, jelikož se permanentně cítila jako někdo, který nepatří ani do Ameriky, ani do Itálie. Marguerite a Louise sdílely pocit vykořenění, který žádná cesta nenapraví. Ačkoliv Marguerite strávila valnou část svého života v Itálii, do rodné vesnice své babičky se nikdy nevydala. Louise, na rozdíl od Marguerite, tuto cestu podnikla. Procestovala se svým manželem celou Itálii a v každém regionu ochutnávala

místní speciality. Na tyto jejich cesty do Itálie může být nahlíženo metaforicky a mohou být přirovnány k těm, které podnikly hrdinky Pénelopé a Persefona z řecké mytologie.

Následující podkapitola se zabývá historií, jak je viděna vnučkami, kterým byla zprostředkovaná především vyprávěním jejich babiček. Dozvídají se tak o životě na jihu Itálie v době babiččina mládí a o strastích, které je potkaly na cestě za hojností, kterou Amerika nabízela. Verze historie, kterou si však vnučky vytvářejí ovlivňuje fakt, že si vyslechly příběhy z babiččina úhlu pohledu a spoustu věcí se z vyprávění vůbec nedozvěděly. Historky, které si Louise od babičky vyslechla, jí zněly fantaskně a byl pro ni šok, když se jednoho dne dozvěděla, že vše v nich bylo založeno na pravdě. Tento fakt v ní vzbudil zvědavost a chtěla se dozvědět co nejvíc o historii země, ze které pocházela. Přepadla ji dokonce až zlost na její nejbližší, kteří jí nevypověděli všechno. Marguerite se o minulosti její babičky a její cestě k americkému snu mohla dozvědět jen zprostředkovaně od svých příbuzných.

Závěrečná část byla zaměřena na motivy přehozu z románu *Umbertina* a ubrusů z *Crazy in the Kitchen*. Tyto předměty jsou velmi důležité pro obě strany, jelikož jsou do jisté míry přechovávanými relikviemi ze starého kontinentu. Fungují jako dědictví, které by mělo být předáváno z generace na generaci. Je v nich totiž obsaženo něco z historie a italských tradic jako je poskytování věna pro dceru, která se vdává a zařizuje si s novým manželem jejich nový domov. Umbertina o svůj přehoz, který s ní přeputoval přes oceán, přišla. Velice ji tato ztráta rmoutila, jelikož pro ni moc znamenal a byla to jediná hmotná věc, která jí připomínala její rodnou zemi. Aniž by to její pravnučka věděla, shledala se s tímto přehozem na Ellis Islandu v muzeu imigrace a okamžitě ji upoutal. Louise později podědila všechny ubrusy, které její babička a matka za všechna ta léta vyšily. Všech si moc cenila a později je předala svým dětem. Když navštívila vesnici, ze které její babička pocházela, květiny, které za vesnicí rostly, byly shodné s těmi vyšitými na ubrusech.

6 Bibliography

Alba, R. D. “Identity and Ethnicity among Italians and Other Americans of European Ancestry.” *Center for Migration Studies special issues* 1, no. 11 (1994): 21–44. Accessed February 5, 2018. doi:10.1111/j.2050-411X.1994.tb00749.x.

Bakun, Ewa “Worlds imagined and worlds experienced: Italians in America in Vita by Melania Mazzucco and Umbertina by Helen Barolini.” PhD thesis. Ohio State University, 2004. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1162317019.

Barolini, Helen. “Becoming a Literary Person out of Context.” *The Massachusetts Review* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 262–274. Accessed February 5, 2018. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25089757.

— — —. “Granddaughters.” In *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women,* edited by Helen Barolini, 100. 1985. Syracuse (N.Y.): Syracuse University Press, 2000.

— — —. “Toward an Italian-American Literary Identity.” *Center for Migration Studies special issues* 23, no. 11 (1994): 475–482. Accessed February 5, 2018. doi:10.1111/j.2050-411X.1994.tb00782.x.

— — —. Introduction and Preface to *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women*, 3–55. Edited by Helen Barolini. 1985. Syracuse (N.Y.): Syracuse University Press, 2000.

— — —. *Umbertina: a novel*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1999.

Bona, Mary Jo. “Introduction: Italianità in 2003: The State of Italian American Literature.” *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 28, no. 3 (2003): 3–12. Accessed September 22, 2017. doi:10.1093/melus/28.3.3.

— — —. “Broken Images, Broken Lives: Carmolina's Journey in Tina De Rosa's Paper Fish.” *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 14, no. 3/4 (Autumn–Winter 1987): 87–106. Accessed February 5, 2018. http://www.jstor.org/stable/467404.

Buliga, A. L. “Causes and effects of the migratory Italian waves in the 19th – 20th centuries.” *Bulletin Of The Transilvania University Of Braşov* 9 (58), no. 2 (2016): 53–60. Accessed January 30, 2018. http://search.ebscohost.com /login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=121252451&site=eds -live&authtype=shib&custid=s7108593.

DeSalvo, Louise A. *Crazy in the kitchen: food, feuds, and forgiveness in an Italian American family*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2004.

— — —. "A Portrait of the *Puttana* as a Middle-Aged Woolf Scholar." In *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women,* edited by Helen Barolini, 93–99. 1985. Syracuse (N.Y.): Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Gans, Herbert J. "Symbolic ethnicity: The future of ethnic groups and cultures in America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1979): 1–20. http ://herbertgans.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/13-Symbolic-Ethnicity.pdf.

Gardaphé, Fred L. Introduction to *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture*, xi-xix. Edited by Fred L. Gardaphé. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004. PDF e-book.

— — —. *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1996. See esp. chap. 1 "Narrative in the Poetic Mode," chap. 2 "The Early Mythic Mode: From Autobiography to Autobiographical Fiction," chap. 4 "The Later Mythic Mode: Reinventing Ethnicity through the Grandmother Figure" and Introduction. https://books.google.cz/books?hl=it&lr=&id=OOxrAAAAIAAJ&oi=fnd&pg =PA24&dq=italian+american&ots=uqkf6DlAQf&sig =N96j0RgsYFkhqjqQmMkJdTIP6zg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q =italian%20american&f=false.

Giudice, Luisa Del, ed. *Oral history, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. PDF e-book.

Giunta, Edvige. "Blending 'Literary' Discourses." In *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana*, edited by Paolo A. Giordano and Anthony Julian Tamburri, 114–130. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998. PDF e-book.

— — —. "Persephone's Daughters." *Women's Studies* 33, no. 6 (2004): 767–786. Accessed February 21, 2018. doi: 10.1080/00497870490480406.

— — —. *Writing with an Accent: Contemporary Italian American Women Authors*. New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002.

Goeller, Alison D. "Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 28, no. 3 (2003): 73–90. Accessed February 21, 2018. doi:10.2307/3595261.

Greenberg, Dorothée von Huene and Helen Barolini. "A MELUS interview: Helen Barolini." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 18, no. 2

(Summer, 1993): 91–108. Accessed January 30, 2018. http://www.jstor.org/stable/467936.

Malpezzi, Frances M., and William M. Clements. *Italian-American Folklore*. Little Rock, AR: August House Publishers, 1992. See esp. chap. 1 "Setting the Scene," chap. 2 "Conversation" and chap. 3 "Customs: The Life Cycle." https://books.google.cz/books?hl=it&lr=&id=jqAps_5oo5wC&oi=fnd&pg=PA11&dq=italian+american&ots=rseGdIhAGw&sig=VyL2RNnZQiZkxnTAy37EjAY019w&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=italian%20american&f=false.

Merish, Lori. "Reading 'things' in Italian-America." *Journal Of Transatlantic Studies (Routledge)* 14, no. 2 (2016): 200–211. Accessed February 21, 2018. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2016.1169870.

Pearce, Robert and Andrina Stiles. 2006. *Access to History: The Unification of Italy*. London: Hodder Education, 2010. Kindle edition.

Talese, Gay. "Where Are the Italian-American Novelists?" *Center for Migration Studies special issues* 11, no. 22 (1994): 464–474. Accessed February 21, 2018. doi:10.1111/j.2050-411X.1994.tb00781.x.

Tamburri, Anthony Julian, Paolo A. Giordano, and Fred L. Gardaphé, eds. *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2000. PDF e-book.

Tamburri, Anthony Julian. "Beyond 'Pizza' and 'Nonna'! Or, What's Bad about Italian/American Criticism?: Further Directions for Italian/American Cultural Studies." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 149–74. Accessed September 22, 2017. doi:10.2307/3595265.

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. 1989. London: Vintage, 1998.

Wheeler, Thomas C., ed. Introduction to *The Immigrant Experience*. 1971. New York: Pelican Books. 1972.

7 Annotations

7.1 Annotation

Name and surname: Alžběta Juříková
Faculty and department: Faculty of Arts, Department of English and American Studies
Title of the thesis: Grandmothers and Granddaughters in *Umbertina* by Helen Barolini and *Crazy in the Kitchen* by Louise DeSalvo
Supervisor of the thesis: PhDr. Matthew Sweney, Ph.D.
Number of pages: 58
Number of signs: 130 507
Number of appendices: 1 CD
Number of sources: 29
Key words: Italian American literature, Italian American women authors, Helen Barolini, Louise DeSalvo, Umbertina, Crazy in the Kitchen, literary analysis, history, migration, Italy, South of Italy

The main aim of this thesis is the literary analysis of *Umbertina* by Helen Barolini and *Crazy in the Kitchen* by Louise DeSalvo with the focus on the grandmother and granddaughter figures. The thesis opens up in its first chapter with the lives and works of the two authors and continues in the second chapter with outlining the literary context of Italian American literature, concentrated solely on women authors. The third and main chapter consists of literary analysis. Its subchapters deal with the figure of grandmother, with the relationship of the grandmothers and the granddaughters from the two books. The last sections of the main chapter deal with the visits of both of the granddaughters to Italy, with history filtered through the lens of the grandmothers and the final subchapter concentrates on the motifs of bedspread and tablecloths.

7.2 Anotace

Jméno a příjmení: Alžběta Juříková
Název katedry a fakulty: Filozofická fakulta, Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
Název práce: Postavy babiček a vnuček v *Umbertině* od Helen Barolini a *Crazy in the Kitchen* od Louise DeSalvo
Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Matthew Sweney, Ph.D.
Počet stran: 58
Počet znaků: 130 507
Počet příloh: 1 CD
Počet titulů použité literatury: 29
Klíčová slova: Italsko-americká literatura, italsko-americké ženské autorky, Helen Barolini, Louise DeSalvo, Umbertina, Crazy in the Kitchen, literární analýza, historie, migrace, Itálie, italský jih

Předložená diplomová práce se zabývá literární analýzou knih *Umbertina* od Helen Barolini a *Crazy in the Kitchen* od Louise DeSalvo se zaměřením na postavy babiček a vnuček. Je rozdělena na tři části, z nichž první se zabývá životem a díly autorek. Druhá část představuje kontext italsko-amerických ženských autorek. Třetí je věnována literární analýze dvou děl. První podkapitoly jsou zaměřeny na samotnou postavu babiček a na vztah mezi nimi a jejich vnučkami z vybraných knih. Dále jsou analyzovány cesty obou vnuček do Itálie, historie zkreslená vyprávěním babiček a na závěr motivy přehozu a ubrusů.