

VIA

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PASCAL D'ANGELO

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Twenty-five poems! That may not seem an impressive quantity of work, but the poems and the man who wrote them are extraordinary. Pascal D'Angelo (1894–1932) published an immigrant autobiography, *Son of Italy*, in 1924. He interspersed ten poems throughout it. During the mid-1920s he published poems in newspapers and magazines. He worked as a manual laborer, and he wrote as witness of the world of toil. In 1910 when he came to America as a teenager with his father to work, save money, and eventually return to Italy (or so they had planned), he knew not a word of English, and yet when his poem “The Toilers” was published in the October 1922 issue of *The Literary Digest*, it appeared alongside poems by Rudyard Kipling and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

When Pascal D'Angelo died destitute in 1932 at age thirty-eight, notices claimed both that two-feet of manuscripts and that several suitcases full of poems had been discovered in his room, that “cobalt dome of silence,” as the poet put it in his poem “Mid-Dream.” We have neither the two feet of manuscripts nor those several suitcases. Neither do we have Pascal D'Angelo's silence. Let him speak his poems in these pages. Listen to all that's here.

Dennis Barone

MAY 2021

Poems of Pascal D'Angelo*

MIDDAY**

The road is like a little child running ahead of
me and then hiding behind a curve –
Perhaps to surprise me when I reach there.
The sun has built a nest of light under the eaves of
noon;
A lark drops down from the cloudless sky
Like a singing arrow, wet with blue, sped from the
bow of space.
But my eyes pierce the soft azure, far, far beyond,
To where roam eternal lovers
Along the broad blue ways
Of silence.

* Editor's Note: Many of these poems were reprinted in newspapers across the country and in Canada, frequently shortened and with altered lineation. Each poem lists the publication(s) where it was featured. Poems from *Son of Italy* refer to the pagination of the Guernica Editions 2003 publication.

** *Son of Italy*, 22 and *The Literary Review* 1922

MID-DREAM*

In spite of the whirrs made up by the
fractional universes
My room is the cobalt dome of silence.
If silence were a stream my room
would be a flower blooming on it,
For nothing is heard there save the
purring of a gas light,
Licking its fiery lips.

Outside the night is nailed on the
cross of darkness:
The stars, distant, tremulous, are like
infant fires sucking splendor
from the bare breasts of heaven.
In a startled helplessness I stare
about!
Am I a blossoming rose whose life is
fed on the hope of priding some
young beast?
Do I dream like the rose
Of those maiden lips that blend with
moonlight,
Like a sweet red wound cut by a sud-
den kiss?

* *The Brooklyn Eagle* 1932

In my heart are echoes of young sighs,
But from young lips no words are
 falling, to settle in the silvery
 liquid of silence.

The azure flower of my room is
 a tremor,
But all the mischievous words have
 run away from my lips, rosily,
And the silent maiden lips of dreams
 are silent.

MONTE MAJELLA*

The mountain in a prayer of questioning heights
gazes upward at the dumb heavens,
And its inner anger is forever bursting forth
In twisting torrents.
Like little drops of dew trickling along the crevices
Of this giant questioner
I and my goats were returning toward the town
below.
But my thoughts were of a little glen where wild
roses grow
And cool springs bubble up into blue pools.
And the mountain was insisting for an answer from
the still heaven.

* *Son of Italy*, 22 and *The Literary Review* 1922

THE CITY*

We who were born through the love of God must
die through the hatred of Man.
We who grapple with the destruction of ignorance
and the creation of unwitting love –
We struggle, blinded by dismal night in a weird
shadowy city.
Yet the city itself is lifting street-lamps, like a
million cups filled with light,
To quench from the upraised eyes their thirst of
gloom;
And from the hecatombs of aching souls
The factory smoke is unfolding in protesting curves
Like phantoms of black unappeased desires,
yearning and struggling and pointing upward;
While through its dark streets pass people, tired,
useless,
Trampling the vague black illusions
That pave their paths like broad leaves of water-
lilies
On twilight streams;
And there are smiles at times on their lips.
Only the great soul, denuded to the blasts of reality,
Shivers and groans.
And like two wild ideas lost in a forest of thoughts,
Blind hatred and blinder love run amuck through
the city.

* *Son of Italy*, 149, *The Brooklyn Eagle* 1923, and *The Nation* 1925

THE RAILROAD*

In the dark verdure of summer
The railroad tracks are like the chords of a lyre
gleaming across the dreamy valley,
And the road crosses them like a flash of lightning.
But the souls of many who speed like music on the
 melodious heart-strings of the valley
Are dim with storms;
And the soul of a farm lad who plods, whistling, on
 the lightning road
Is a bright blue sky.

* *Son of Italy*, 146-147, *The Nation* 1922, and *The Boston Globe* 1922

THE TOILERS*

Brown faces of immatured senility
Twisted into an ecstasy of unshaped satiation.
Eyes that are huge, tumultuous flares of light
Peering athwart the forced austerity of tiredness.
Your hugely-muscled, stalwart arms
That lift the mammoth weight of majestic industry,
Branch up from your broad Herculean shoulders
In a magnificence of thronged power.
Reeling on the verge of eagerness
You shift about –
Throughout the night you are hurled
In a confused heave of struggling illusions,
Under the machinal flights of those moistened walls,
Under those black, moistened walls of disregarded
futility.
Facing this Giant monument of bitterness –
Your thoughts!
Amid the incessant whirrs of the maniac motors,
Are smashed into fragments of an irresolved dream,
And you are swept on! On!
By the involuntary rapids of meniality
In the frenzied whirls of humiliation!
On! On!

* *Il Carroccio* 1922 and *The Literary Digest* 1922

TO A DEAD FRIEND*

Death has pressed his lips upon your
brow,
My Friend, and you are gone
And did he speak, and did you bow,
Or walk, as bidden, on?

Upon the broad, dim stairs that lead
to light,
Out of the abyss of life,
Did he stand, pointing upward, robed
in white,
Far from these scenes of strife?

Ah, death has touched you with his
fingertips,
And you are gone, My Friend,
And he will pause some day to seal my
lips
Of care, some day, My Friend.

* *Il Carroccio* 1923 and *The Brooklyn Eagle* 1932

TO A DEAD POET*

The Sun stands aloft like a giant sign of
splendor
Sealing the secrets of Eternity.
Before its baffling brilliance,
Your eyes were like strange heavens
peopled with souls of smiles;
And now – and now they have flown with
their burden of loveliness
Beyond the giant seal of light.
What were you but a dream – a gentle
dream
In the thoughts of your sleeping fate?
The Brute has awakened and you have
vanished
Into the pathways of dreams
Beyond the light.
And now you must disobey forever
The sweet trumpet calls of Spring.

* *Shadows* 1922 and *The Brooklyn Eagle* 1932

TO A WARRIOR*

You saw the slow finger of Time writing your name in
gold within the heart of the hours.
Great poets were priests to minister
The giant burning taper of your fame,
With perfumed wax of their ecstatic melodies –
From the great yellow flame, the sparks of light
Shone like a thousand suns encircling the universe of your
glory.
And to-day, I also sing to you,
Great murderer!

* *The Liberator* 1922

TO SOME MODERN POETS*

Your names are like decapitated giants bleeding black
oblivion;
You are the frail voices.
The indomitable rhythm of beauty writhes under the
claws of your pens;
Your eyes are twin candles burning flames of yearn-
ing desire toward the high, sacred altar of poesy.
All that you sought to attain has eluded you;
You have tried, and your day is passing.
Yet grieve not;
Much that charms is small and fleeting
To the greatness of eternity.
The earth is a tiny shadow tottering on the edge of
death;
The moon is a throb of splendor in the heart of night;
And the stars are ephemera in the long gaze of God.
So grieve not
That your poems are the cool, fresh grass of a short
summer;
The flowers are few.

* *The Century* 1922

WHISPERS*

When the azure hives of silence are
filled with soft whispers –
Whispers of lovers that pass into faint
twilights,
Whispers from the hazy distances,
And the last drowsy whisperings of
day –

And when night half opens her deep,
sorrowing eyes –
Eyes that gaze but see not, save beyond –
beyond –
And the wind comes like an artist
Sculpturing the monolith of silence
into a statue of whirring gloom,
And the black hives of stillness now
quiver with crimson murmurings –
Then my subdued heart swoons
With the silence of a flower that abandons
itself in the embrace of spring.

For – Ah! What use is the jangle of words,
or of thoughts, even,
When God is whispering?

* *The Literary Review* 1922

Translations and Transmutations

EXAMINING THE REPATRIATED SON OF ITALY

by Domenica Santomaggio Diraviam

Son of Italy represents the translative journey that transformed a pick-and-shovel Italian immigrant into the pick-and-shovel Italian American poet of the early twentieth century. The genesis of the account is relatable to the myriad immigrants who shared Pascal D'Angelo's roots. This particular Abruzzese immigrant's narrative deviates from cultural folklore and culminates in a remarkable outcome, juxtaposing the author's linguistic and physical relationship with his adopted and native cultures.

Pascal D'Angelo realized his dream of replacing the transitory jingle of the pick and shovel with the permanence of poetic verse as a testament to his sufferings in this new land. The arduous uphill battles and the brief period of success revealed in the author's physical *translatio* are safeguarded in the pages of *Son of Italy* where they remained suspended in time and space from the original publication in English in 1924 until the inaugural Italian translation in 2003. My study examines the translation of the young Abruzzese native from two viewpoints: A description of his physical journey provides introspection on the transformation of his cultural identity as an individual and as a representative of the Italian diaspora; and a linguistic and contextual comparison of the original English editions of *Son of Italy* with the more recent Italian translation reveals the value of the text in an American, Italian, and Italian American context. Although the "son" of Italy did not return to his homeland in the flesh, the repatriation of his work memorialized his unique

experiences as part of the Italian immigrant collective through a first-person confirmation of that experience.

Economic misery plaguing much of Southern Italy thrust D'Angelo from the womb of his pastoral town—nestled up against the majestic Monte Majella, a land he described as having “too much boundless life and too little space” ([1975] 74)—into “alien lands” (21). The maternal security and innocent qualities of youth abounded in the author's poetic recollections of the area. His memories of Alberto, a master of the poetic bagpipe, and of storytellers foreshadowed his own proclivity for the humanities (D'Angelo [2003] 20). Even within the confines of his non-erudite environment, D'Angelo appreciated the value of acculturation. The reader witnesses the catalyst of D'Angelo's physical translation from naïve youth to exploited immigrant in a glance he exchanged with his mother. In this silent expression she perceived her son's imminent departure, the familiar destiny of many desperate *paesani* from rural Italy. As D'Angelo recalled, they sat observing the valley in silence. She drew him to her breast sobbing, and the silence “was broken when he said tearfully, “I will return soon, we will return soon” (D'Angelo, *Son of Italy* 72). His reassurance on behalf of the group symbolizes a severance from a filial mindset and a metaphorical bridge to adulthood as he and his extended group of male companions in the convoy relinquished familial blood ties in order to identify as members of a work gang beholden to various *padroni* in a foreign environment.

Following the ritual send off, D'Angelo departed for America. Narration of the iconic transatlantic journey, characteristically expounded upon in Italian American literature, is condensed into a mere few pages of text. He describes it through visual fragments of a “voyage [which] was a nightmare, interposed with moments of

strange brilliance" ([1975] 57), an allegory of D'Angelo's existence as a whole. In *Migrating Words*, the poet and translator Luigi Fontanella surmises that D'Angelo was more interested in what happened at each of the poles of his "emigration phenomenon" than the transit between them (56). The brevity of this passage symbolized the author's physical translation and transplanting of self as a narrow tunnel connecting his previous universe, one comprised of natural open spaces in the foothills of the Apennines, to the lofty urban concrete structures that surrounded him in New York. D'Angelo's first memory in this new land provides the baseline of his level of linguistic competence and his naïveté. He marvels at the semantic and syntactical use of the word "Ave" in English. The familiar liturgical term in Italian adopted a new context and meaning: "[T]here were signs at all the corners of the streets with 'Ave. Ave.! Ave.!' How religious a place this must be that expresses its devotion at every crossing. ... Still they did not put the 'Ave.' before the holy word, as, in 'Ave Maria,' but rather after. How topsy-turvy!" (61) The new immigrant's linguistic observation manifested his assumption that he had relocated to a sacred space, while the alternate truth was revealed at each upcoming crossing.

Poverty and disenchantment transfigured D'Angelo. He and his Abruzzese work crew swarmed together like bees until they were forced to disperse due to misfortunes and job-related deaths. D'Angelo's own father conceded failure and was compelled to repatriate. Despite Pascal's continued oppression, his determination fueled his resolve. While D'Angelo's physical well-being perished, his linguistic aptitude ameliorated. Eva Hoffman's autobiography, *Lost in Translation*, and Nancy Carnevale's *A New Language, a New World* explain these stages of physical and cultural identity. Hoffman and Carnevale's protagonists are reinvented

after withstanding phases of remorse, bewilderment, and excitement in the process of language acquisition, and they emerge as a new version of their initial being. In D'Angelo's case, Pasquale was reborn as Pascal (some referred to him by the diminutive "Pat"). Identifying with an Americanized name reestablished his relationship with the host culture and his perception of self as he transitioned to literacy in the dominant language. In reality, the migrant worker was still marginalized and isolated, and he did not possess a command of the standard English language, but he did develop an ability to negotiate his space within the community and increase his individual and collective visibility. He assimilated the objects of his past into his new hybrid cultural identity, altering the relationships between the signifiers and the signified. For example, his now foreignized "battered valise" translated into a "culinary panoply" (D'Angelo [2003] 103). He conveyed an inner sense of social mobility affirming that previously familiar dialects, such as Calabrese, sounded as "weird" as did Mexican laborers sharing semi-comprehensible stories in their "queer" sounding languages ([1975] 140).

D'Angelo persevered in his pilgrimage "in this wonderful perilous land where [he] had suffered so much and where [he] had so much more to suffer" ([1975] 115), to the extreme of narrowly evading death on a job site. To avoid a fatal fall, he hurled himself against a wooden structure, piercing his hand with a rusty nail in the process. This experience at once added a hagiographic tone to the text and exemplified D'Angelo, in accordance to William Boelhower's philosophy, as the immigrant ultimately sacrificing his physical self in order to adopt a new identity (105). The scene of this common immigrant's crucifixion and resurrection possessed the archetypal elements including the protagonist's hand being pierced by the nail, his body impaled to the beam,

his wound enshrouded by tatters of fabric representing the vestiges of his past, and the permanent scar. The foreman, ironically named Dominick (Sunday, the day of the Lord), chases him from the site when he attempts to return. Three days later he secures a less strenuous job at another site. The physical hagiographic imagery is textually enriched by the poem that opens the chapter, bearing a Latin title, "Omnis Sum." This decisive moment marked a shift of position for the author relative to his peer group and community at large. The protagonist is translated into an agent for change. His hand, previously the tool that built the nation for the oppressors, was decisively translated into the one that wrote a story of the oppressed within that nation.

The path to literary recognition was stilted by the psychological wounds of rejection that further impacted the author's wretched physical state. An Italian newspaper editor in New York delivered the most scathing blow to D'Angelo's ethnic pride. The negative response of his co-nationals in America may have stalled the recognition of *Son of Italy* as a relevant literary contribution to the Italian community and eradicated the author's potential of abandoning construction and manual labor. D'Angelo did believe that he had fulfilled his goal and recognized that, "before colds, wets, sleets, and many other sufferings pitilessly distort[ed his] physical and mental shapes into a monstrous deformity" he achieved self-realization (D'Angelo 183). Editors of two weekly publications demonstrated interest in his work and by merit of their support Pascal D'Angelo "r[o]se from the ditches and quicksands of toil to speak his heart to the upper world" (185).

Examining D'Angelo's future as an immigrant writer exposes a romanticized revelation of success. Although he demonstrated the agency of translation from multiple perspectives and, through an Italian American

immigrant lens, he personally triumphed over adversity, he was forever alienated from the dominant culture. His publication remained contingent on the favor of select prominent native English-speaking men in the literary community who promoted his works within their elite circle. Consequently, D'Angelo's remembrances were confined within a group that could not appreciate them, and the author was for a time inhibited from building a legacy for future generations in both his native and adoptive homelands. It is plausible to assume that D'Angelo envisioned his role as a spokesperson for the oppressed Italian immigrant and that he intended for his narrative to make a mark in the United States as well as in Italy. In a passage from *Son of Italy*, D'Angelo inquired:

Who hears the thuds of the pick and the jingling of the shovel? Only the stern-eyed foreman sees me. When night comes and we all quit work, the thuds of the pick and the jingling of the shovel are heard no more. All my works are lost forever. But if I write a good line of poetry - then when the night comes and I cease writing, my work is not lost. My line is still there. It can be read by you to-day and by another to-morrow. But my pick and shovel works cannot be read either by you to-day or by any one else to-morrow. ([1975] 74)

(Chi sente fendenti del piccone ed il rumore metallico della pala? Solo il caposquadra dallo sguardo austero mi vede. Quando scende la notte e noi tutti smettiamo di lavorare, i colpi del piccone ed il tintinnare della pala non si sentono più. Tutte le mie fatiche sono perdute, perdute per sempre. Ma se scrivo un buon verso di poesia, poi quando giunge la notte e smetto di scrivere, il mio lavoro non va perduto. Il mio verso resta ancora lì. Può essere letto da voi oggi e da un altro domani. Invece i miei lavori di piccone e pala non possono essere letti né da voi oggi né da nessun altro domani.) (D'Angelo [2003] 86)

The English excerpt is drawn from the 1975 Arno Press edition of *Son of Italy*, published as a volume of the *Italian American Experience*. The text of this book is indistinguishable from the 1924 original (presently available in electronic format), but it is enhanced with an additional list of texts of Italian American literary canon. In 1999, Il Grappolo published the first Italian translation of *Son of Italy* in Italy, edited by Italian professors Sonia Pendola and Luigi Fontanella. In 2003, a subsequent Italian translation of the text was published by Edizioni Qualevita in D'Angelo's native region of Abruzzo, Italy, celebrating a true homecoming for the autobiographer and his text.

The language of D'Angelo's original narrative was standard English, aside from an occasional reference. The Italian editions remain faithful in the translation of the language without taking the liberties of domesticating it and avoiding phrases in Abruzzese dialect. They closely mirror the linguistic essence of the autobiographer, limited by the accessible language varieties including a homogenization of the maternal dialect he abandoned, the dialectical hybrid of vernacular English and Italian, and the academic versions of English he assimilated during his extensive visits to the public library. The Italian editions omit the linguistic variations within the immigrant community, which are present in the English language version. Itaglish terminology that colored the immigrants' vernacular is carefully circumvented in the text. The consumer of the Italian text experiences an interlingual translation insofar as the original English work already represented a linguistic translation from the author's native dialect, in which he spoke, to the language he acquired through translative experiences, subsequently mutilated by English-speaking editors. The completed Italian translation is yet another divergent language translation. In fact, based on the setting and

the characters, very few of the original interactions, thoughts, or dialogs likely unfolded in the grammatically standardized forms of English or Italian in which they are chronicled. Only anecdotal references approximate the author's original language transactions. It is foreignizing in the original English publication, and the translation aims to mirror that approach in Italian.

The English title of the book, maintained for the Italian editions as well, simultaneously professes the author's dedication to the English language, endows him with nationalist pride in Italy, and confines him within the space of marginalized immigrant. It repatriates him as a foreigner, *son* rather than *figlio*, but then again, D'Angelo more likely displayed regional ethnic ties than a sense of nationalism, since Italy was a fledgling nation when he first departed. In addition, the maternal connotation of the word *figlio* misrepresents the relationship that D'Angelo had with his home region. Although he spent the first half of his life in his ancestral hills, America nurtured him into adulthood. Furthermore, the English title accords D'Angelo an elevated status of English writer while romanticizing his humanistic roots among Italian authors. He himself demonstrated this objective combining the revered language of modern culture and society with the humanistic qualities of the poetry in the autobiography. It is also interesting to consider the immigration politics of Italy at the turn of the millennium when these Italian-language translations were first published. Immigrant literature now includes representations from African and Eastern European immigrant writers migrating to Italy. Italy is the United States of the new immigrant wave. The singular title *Son of Italy* binds the narrative that is otherwise characterized by a series of dichotomies: two cultures, two languages, two identities, and two homelands.

Son of Italy is dedicated to “Mr. Luigi Forgione” for his “aid and encouragement” in the publishing process. Aside from the Guernica edition, the text begins with an introduction by future Pulitzer Prize–winning biographer Carl Van Doren, further authorizing the value of the text and demonstrating Van Doren’s esteem for D’Angelo within the marginalized immigrant community. Forgione’s and Van Doren’s support bolstered D’Angelo’s visibility in otherwise inaccessible literary and social circles. Translative markings within *Son of Italy* lead the reader to imagine that there was some degree of outside editing, perhaps from these mentors who were sympathetic to his circumstances. In chapter 12, D’Angelo included one of the only surviving writing samples from his “‘prehistoric’ attempts at English” ([1975] 142). The excerpt is riddled with spelling, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic errors, indicative of his nascent command of spoken and written English. Whatever extent of outside editing D’Angelo received, his text maintained an authentic voice in contrast to other immigrant accounts, overtly filtered and censored by American editors (Carnevale 107).

The 2003 Qualevita publishing house’s version of *Son of Italy* represents Pascal D’Angelo’s official homecoming and the diffusion of his autobiography and poems to his Abruzzese family and his co-nationals. Massimo Tardio is the editor of this translation and an Italian historian who specializes in Pascal D’Angelo’s history. He curates the social networking site *Pascal D’Angelo: Mostra Biografica-Bibliografica*. Tardio, a native of Abruzzo, is professionally associated with D’Angelo’s house, the historic foundation in Introdacqua honoring this “son of Italy.” Tardio verified that D’Angelo’s cousin brought a copy of *Son of Italy* from the United States in 1926. It is housed in the family’s personal library and is the only remaining authenticated copy of the text in Italy. Subsequently, a library copy of the autobiography

was left in Italy by an American visitor in the mid-1980s. Other copies, including some autographed by Pascal D'Angelo, surfaced in the 1990s. The curated artifacts in D'Angelo's house most closely embody the author and poet illustrating his origins, his journey, and his repatriation in textual form (Tardio n.d.). Tardio credits Professor Robert DiPietro, an American language professor of Abruzzese origin, for sparking passion for Pascal D'Angelo's literature, as well as that of other notable Italian immigrants from Abruzzo (such as Feliciano DiPaolo and Francesco Ventresca) among the Italian American hyphenates in America in the 1970s. The generations of Italian Americans raised in the decades following the initial publication of *Son of Italy* were encouraged to submit to an American cultural and linguistic identity, and interest in Italian roots and ancestry was thwarted and frowned upon.

The cover for the Qualevita translation, designed by Claudia Colangelo, typifies an intersemiotic synthesis of D'Angelo's translation in visual art form. In the foreground there is the image of the author thumbing through a book with his gaze fixed ahead. In the background there is the trinity: a steamship, a terracotta-colored panorama of Introdacqua (designated by its prominent bell tower), and the Statue of Liberty. The cover is interspersed with metaphorical "birds of passage." The images of the pickaxe and shovel commonly associated with the Italian emigrant are absent from this visual. Instead it is a representation of D'Angelo's dream realized; the tools of manual labor replaced by the pen. This illustration, along with the richness of paratextual evidence, situates the reader within the time and space of the original text. Footnotes, by Panfilia Colangelo and Massimo Tardio, privilege a contemporary audience with facts beyond the scope of the author's knowledge, including extensive summaries of the lineage of the Abruzzese people in

chapter 2 ([2003] 26). No footnotes are associated with any of the poetic verses, allowing each reader a personal interpretation of the poetry. Black-and-white photographs and period propaganda are interspersed throughout as a kaleidoscopic view of the Italian immigrant diasporic experience. These elements frame the cultural and historical context and generalize D'Angelo's personal experience.

Comparisons of linguistic elements in the English and Italian texts highlight the sonority of the Italian language and its canorous quality contrasted to the English original. The poem "Midday" plays with alliteration and variations of the color blue. In English this verse is characterized by the repetition of bilabial sounds inherent in the word *blue*:

Like a slinging arrow, wet with blue, sped from the
bow of space.
But my eyes pierce the soft azure, far, far beyond,
To where roam eternal lovers
Along the broad blue ways of silence. (D'Angelo [1975] 19)

The Italian translation maintains the literary devices as well as selecting nuanced synonyms for blue. The repetition of /l/ and /a/ enhance the melodic nature of the Italian version:

Come una freccia sibilante, intrisa di blu, dall'arco
spaziale scoccata.
Ma i miei occhi trafiggono il soffice azzurro, lontano,
lontano al di là,
Fin dove errano eterni amanti
Lungo larghe vie azzurrognole
Di silenzio. (D'Angelo [2003] 32)

These examples echo the author's authentic thoughts and sentiments in Italian (or in the related Abruzzese dialect) presumably subsequently translated mentally

into English. The title of the poem “Midday,” translated to “Mezzogiorno” in Italian, plays on a double meaning. It is the temporal setting of the poem, but it is also the antonomasia for the forgotten and downtrodden southern part of Italy, a derogatory connotation that contrasts with the tone of the poem ensuring a relevant connection to the Italian reader.

The editors and translators are diligent in their attempts to respect and preserve D’Angelo’s intentions in balancing language usage. Quotation marks and accompanying footnotes identify the author’s ethnic and linguistic identification. Untranslatable expressions, such as units of measurement, are expressed in English within the Italian text and are footnoted as well. For example, in chapter 8, a boy asks his uncle to lend him a nickel to buy bananas. The Italian translation, “Prestami un nichel,” demonstrates an attempt to remain faithful to the English meaning while domesticating the pronunciation for the Italian reader (by spelling *nichele* phonetically in Italian) (D’Angelo [2003] 101). Ezra Pound discussed this approach to translation. He proposed that “interpretive translation contradicts the ideal of autonomy by pointing to the various conditions of the translated text, those specific to the foreign as well as the receiving culture, and thus makes clear that translation can make a difference in the translating language only by trying to signify the differences of the foreign text” (Venuti 176). In fact, *nichelino* is an archaic term used in the early 1900s to refer to a coin of little value. It is likely that the term was part of the vernacular of repatriated Italians and that the signatums *nichele* and *nichelino* were each a translation of the Italian signatum *lira* (Schulte and Biguenet 144).

The translators’ visibility is evident in the sonority of the Italian text as is characteristic of the romance language. They are less conspicuous in their stylistic

choices, vigilantly employing the current standardized version of the written language much as D'Angelo did in the original English text. Even emotional outbursts that readers would assume had been articulated in dialect, vernacular, or Itaglish, are rendered in standard Italian, at the expense of sounding contrived. Returning to the dialog about the nickel, Matteo, the uncle, discovered that his wallet had been stolen. He turned to the boy and grumbled, "Do me the favor to go to the devil, both you, the bananas, those who produce them, and those who sell them" (D'Angelo 90). The Italian version sounds equally gauche, "Fatemi il favore di andare al diavolo tutti, tu, le banane, chi le produce, e chi le vende" (D'Angelo [2003] 101). A similar expression is used soon after. When a Neapolitan asks the men to go to work in a remote location in West Virginia, D'Angelo refers to the place as "casa du li diavel" (D'Angelo [2003] 101), and the Italian version repeats the same and pretextually notes that it was stated as such in the English version (parenthetically explaining that this is dialect for "casa del diavolo") (112). The translators formalize that this example illustrates D'Angelo's distinction of his native dialect as a representation of a purer or standardized Italian and denigrates the dialect of an immigrant from his neighboring region.

The author's, translator's, and editors' adherence to standard language usage in both the English and Italian versions of *Son of Italy* reinforces the desire to elevate the social standing of the Italian immigrant at a time when immigrant languages were devalued, and the transformative powers of standard English were exalted (Carnevale 15). Furthermore, it imbues the protagonist with a nationalist quality. For D'Angelo, language informed his personal conception of ethnic identity as an Italian American who was more culturally informed than his peers but nonetheless lacked the

social mobility to improve his status (Carnevale 9). Luigi Fontanella, Filomena Piera Giammarco, as well as the other translators and editors are instrumental in endorsing Pascal D'Angelo as the son of Italy rather than a son of Abruzzo. The nationalist image does not artificially assign him to an ethnic group but broadens the scope of his experience so that modern-day Italians (including migrants to Italy) and Italian Americans can identify with their shared traditions. Both the English and Italian publications illustrate that D'Angelo relied on English primarily as a means for transcending the plight of the pick-and-shovel worker rather than as a segue into the dominant culture. D'Angelo never experienced the reverse migration that was at times a measure of success and at others an acknowledgement of defeat for his peers. Readers of *Son of Italy* may only hypothesize what the author's intentions were for repatriation of his work to Italy, but D'Angelo may rest in peace with the knowledge that the efforts of his pen did in fact surpass the jingle of his pick and shovel.

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The Dreamlife of Pascal D'Angelo

by B.G. Firmani

Pascal D'Angelo wants to break your heart.

He's largely forgotten today as a poet, or even as a writer of an immigrant narrative. His brief and ardent autobiography, *Son of Italy*, first published in 1924, wasn't reprinted until 1975 and can be found most readily today as a 2003 paperback put out by Canadian publisher Guernica. But among a small circle of readers and writers interested in a certain type of finely tuned Italian Americana—one that perhaps deals in secret histories, loss, and lamentation—D'Angelo inspires a kind of mania. He is our brother, our grandfather, our father, our son. He's operatic, foolhardy, clumsy, passionate, a real *testa tosta*. He's "big and elemental and simple," in the patronizing words of a Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* writer from 1923. He is maybe our best self, the writer who (do people still say this?) did not sell out. He wrote and he wrote and he starved and he suffered and, against the most wretched odds, he never gave up. And then he abruptly departed this planet, dying at Kings County Hospital at the age of thirty-eight.

I.

Among that small circle of readers, his story is well known. He is born Pasquale D'Angelo into a peasant family in a hamlet near Introdacqua, a town in the Abruzzi, *provincia di L'Aquila*, in 1894. At the age of sixteen he accompanies his father to the United States to seek his fortune and immediately starts work as a laborer, a "pick and shovel man." This monotonous, backbreaking, miserably paid, anonymous work is

D'Angelo's lot for years until, while living in an unheated boxcar at a jobsite in New Jersey, the light of learning breaks upon him. He sees a new friend reading a Spanish newspaper—D'Angelo is puzzled, since he had “gotten to think of a newspaper as something to start a fire with.” But soon enough D'Angelo is buying his own newspapers, and he teaches himself to read. He buys a ratty old dictionary for a quarter. He starts to write. He sees *Aida* at the Sheepshead Bay racetrack, and in this he finds his lodestar: beauty. He begins writing poetry and discovers Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* at the library. One November morning in 1919, he makes a “hasty decision” to quit the laborer's life to devote himself to writing poetry.

Pasquale moves to New York City, probably becoming Pascal along the way, and finds cheap quarters in “the slums along the Brooklyn waterfront.” He sends his poems everywhere but finds no takers; he loses heart and gets a job in the dockyard. “But,” as he put it, “the Enchantress would not let me free.” He finds the cheapest housing available, an old chicken coop with an entrance “through a toilet which served ten families besides unwelcome strangers and dirty passers-by.” He lives on stale bread, rotten bananas, thin soup. He perseveres.

And he does it. Somehow he does it. He writes an impassioned, impossible, ridiculous letter to *The Nation's* Carl Van Doren—the journal is holding a poetry competition and Pascal believes he should win it, if only on heart alone—and Van Doren hears him. As Van Doren would go on to write in the introduction to *Son of Italy*: “If this was not an authentic cry, I had never heard one. It drowned out the loud noises of Vesey Street; it seemed to me to widen the walls of my cramped office.”

Van Doren meets D'Angelo and is taken with him: “He came with the mark of his hardships upon him ...

yet I found him full of that quiet patience which is the underlying quality of the peasants of his race, and capable of gaiety.” He writes a profile of D’Angelo in *The Nation*, and D’Angelo becomes something of a sensation. The work of the young poet is picked up by leading journals—*The Literary Review*, *The Bookman*, *The Century*—and is published alongside the likes of H.D. and Carl Sandburg in *The Bookman Anthology of Verse* in 1922. Van Doren urges him to collect his story in a narrative, and the book *Son of Italy* is born. As D’Angelo writes in its final pages, “The literary world began to take me up as a great curiosity and I was literally feasted, welcomed and stared at.” He receives letters “from Boston to ’Frisco,” he is celebrated by his fellow workers, and, perhaps most meaningful of all, his fame spreads across the sea to his homeland: “And sweeter yet was the happiness of my parents who realized that after all I had not really gone astray, but had sought and attained a goal far from the deep-worn groove of peasant drudgery.”

There ends his narrative—on a high note, and one that not only reflects the reality of D’Angelo’s accomplishment but that’s also perhaps driven by the swell that accompanies the moment when one finally finishes writing a book: the angels do sing.

Then there’s the morning after.

II.

Here’s what I wanted to know when I first finished reading *Son of Italy*: Was the book well received? I’m not sure I found the answer. It was reviewed in the *New York Times* on January 4, 1925, and nearly anyone who writes about D’Angelo cites some version of the beginning of this piece where the unnamed reviewer tells us that D’Angelo is:

one of the few Americanized immigrants whose success has been non-worldly yet decisive. Edward Bok, Jacob Riis, to mention but two of our best-known national conversions, stand for the practical, solid achievement that constitutes mundane success. Pascal d'Angelo is one of that class of men, rare in America, whose success is so spiritual as to be almost entirely devoid of material embellishments.

But read this more closely—and keep reading—and one finds a review that's actually quite sour. It's filled with contempt for the figure of the big, striving yokel and peppered with "funny" phrasings ("the paraphernalia of Italian peasant life" is described "with a candor that is disarming, even if a bit affected") that dismiss D'Angelo's struggle. "One gladly passes over his account of the privations on which he prides himself"—words that only could have been written by someone who's always had a full belly. Perhaps most insulting of all, in response to D'Angelo's moment of realization that comes toward the end of *Son of Italy*—"I had learned the great lesson of America: I had learned to have faith in the future"—the reviewer writes: "This apparently was not enough, and so he learned the second lesson of America: 'It Pays to Advertise.'" The reviewer wonders aloud

what percentage of [D'Angelo's] subsequent success is due to the mental laziness that makes people judge a work of art by its source rather than on its merits, plus the inverted snobbery which leads one to admire the "dancing dogs" of Dr. Johnson's well-worn simile.

Does the reader know the origin of that well-worn simile? Samuel Johnson was talking about the spectacle of a woman preaching: "Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all." What is this

attitude besides the power group's unwillingness to share the power? An Abruzzese peasant attempting to write lyric poetry in the United States of the 1920s must have seemed unthinkable, offensive.

The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* was a great champion of D'Angelo, in a way that only a populist daily would have it. One article from 1923 is a splashy full-page feature, with illustrations (by Rex Maxon, who went on to draw Tarzan comics) and the subhead "Feeding Upon Stale Bread and Soup, Pascal D'Angelo Has Grown Great!" Despite the paper's embrace of D'Angelo, its writers still seemed amazed that such a person could be an actual poet, even if their amazement is tempered by appreciation for D'Angelo as a human being and striver. Or maybe he just made for good copy? Two years later, instead of a review of D'Angelo's book, the occasion of its publication becomes another "human interest" story, with words likely to make today's reader cringe: "Calling at The Eagle office with a copy of the precious autobiography in his hand, Pascal's brown face was one wide gleam of radiance, his white teeth flashing, his brown eyes beaming" (January 4, 1925).

Even the generally positive reviews contain some strain of this amused condescension, whether winking or outright. In the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle's* "Current Literature" page, the reviewer writes: "In his autobiography Pascal D'Angelo lays stress upon the great suffering he endured in the cause of art. ... Whether the accomplishment of his dream has been a boon to the world of art and 'belles lettres' is a matter of personal opinion" (January 18, 1925). *The Bookman's* review ends on this note: "He begs a dictionary and starts exploring the magic of words, whereupon poetry results, and a measure of success. It is a great romance, isn't it?" (January 1925).

At the other end of the spectrum are the reviews that celebrate, sometimes hyperbolically so. The review in the *Hartford Courant* begins, "This is one of those vital books which the sensitive reader approaches in the spirit of reverence" (January 18, 1925). In *The Pittsburgh Press*, one Barrett Mann nearly drowns both the book and the man in praise (as well as tortured syntax) (January 18, 1925):

Pascal D'Angelo, son of Italy, "the pick-and-shovel" poet, one of the few worth-while writers of poetry today, has written a brief but trenchant autobiography, that is really the perfect word in the description of this man. He has put himself into book, has written into the lines all the glamour and appeal of his years in this country, the story of his hardships, his struggles, and the fight he made to achieve recognition. As one expects, the actual writing, the telling of the story is beautifully accomplished.

There seems to have been a handful of reviews that didn't stoop or inflate. *The World Tomorrow*, a Christian socialist magazine, ran a short, thoughtful piece in its March 1925 issue: "As a narrative of experience, struggle, and achievement it is admirably told, with recurring bits of sensitive perception. But it is also far more. Without obtrusive self-consciousness the young poet reveals the slow growth of his artistic sense."*

A review in *The New York Herald Tribune* is a strange little artifact, a construction that seems to collapse as you read it under the weight of its empathy, while also somehow avoiding any qualitative assessment of the book. "The story is real and yet like a grotesque fairy tale. Throughout the book you see the man and his story

* This is signed "A.R.," which appears to be Anna Rochester, a social reformer who had an abiding, forty-year same-sex relationship.

with the same mystery, amazement, and bewilderment as he sees it” (December 21, 1924).*

In a similar spirit—a review suffering from the burden of over-identification—is Elizabeth Stead Taber’s compassionate and admiring piece for *The Literary Digest*’s March 1925 issue. It seems to bind up the book with her experience of knowing D’Angelo: “[I]n spirit he is strong and gentle, shy and unafraid, suffering and serene. ... [His book] is a marvel in simplicity, truthfulness, vividness, grace and strength.” She delves deep into his life, strongly feels his suffering. Maybe this is because Taber was also a writer and knew something about striving and disappointment?*

III.

When I pulled myself out of the rabbit hole of online newspaper archives, I thought: No one knew what to do with this guy. Was he just too strange? Too unprecedented? Too hard to categorize? The burning question for me then became: What happened next? *Son of Italy* came out in 1924, and D’Angelo died in 1932. He published almost nothing in those eight years between. What did he write? How did he live?

In Carl Van Doren’s introduction to *Son of Italy*, he wrote that as D’Angelo’s fame spread, he was offered many forms of assistance, everything from money to editorial jobs, but “after paying so high a price to be a poet, he was not willing to take his reward in

* The author is Margery Latimer, a writer herself, who would later marry Jean Toomer. Their marriage would run afoul of anti-miscegenation laws, the couple hounded by the Hearst press, until Latimer died in childbirth at the age of thirty-three.

** She seems to have had one well-received short story, “The Scar,” published in 1917; and the rest is silence.

some meaner coin.” Jim Murphy, in his young adult book, *Pick & Shovel Poet: The Journeys of Pascal D’Angelo*, conjectures that perhaps it was D’Angelo’s embarrassment over his lack of education and thick accent, rather than pride, that kept him from taking a job as an editor. A tantalizing mention of D’Angelo appears in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* a year and half after the publication of the autobiography, in an article titled “Italians Excel in American Artistic World”: “His poems struck the profoundest notes in Italian life and today he is in a school studying that he may pour out easier the thoughts that surge through his soul” (June 6, 1926). Whatever that school was, D’Angelo’s attendance there could not have lasted long.

Tyler Anbinder’s *City of Dreams: The 400-Year Epic History of Immigrant New York* contains a section following the poet’s trail, attempting to fill in the blank stretch after *Son of Italy*’s publication. It is a kind of detective’s job, a rewind based on clues picked up at the scene of the crime, in that Anbinder must work backwards, drawing from accounts of D’Angelo’s life published in papers at the time of the poet’s death in 1932.*

Anbinder writes that a few months after D’Angelo’s memoir was published, he did indeed drop off the map, disappearing from the New York literary scene. “It is not clear whether he stopped sending his poetry to publishers or his submissions were rejected. At the time his autobiography appeared, he told an interviewer that he planned to begin work on several novels.” Anbinder conjectures: Maybe he had writer’s block? What is clear is that, after a reprieve from his wretched living conditions, D’Angelo had gone back to living near the

* I am indebted to Tyler Anbinder’s book for leading me to these sources.

Brooklyn waterfront in equally squalid ones, and all this hard living had taken its toll:

He stopped answering letters from his relatives. ... They wondered if “the strain and deprivations of his struggling years had affected his mind.” Indeed, his landlady reported that “he sometimes acted strangely.” Among other oddities, he decided that despite his desperate circumstances, he had to teach himself Chinese. The onset of the Great Depression must have made things even more difficult. ... By [1932] D’Angelo had pawned his typewriter and could not even afford paper. He continued to write, however, scrawling his poems in the margins of old newspapers, on the backs of calendars, and eventually on the walls of his apartment. (*City of Dreams*, 388-389)

By the time that D’Angelo began suffering from terrible stomachaches, likely he had waited too long. “From his neighbors it was not possible to learn much ... except that he had been out of a job for some time,” a reporter writes in a contemporary account in the *Eagle*. Those neighbors had to call for the ambulance that took Pascal D’Angelo to Kings County Hospital, where he died on March 13, 1932, after an appendectomy. No doubt his health was compromised from so many years of starving.

IV.

In those newspapers again, this time ones from the year 1932, the lamentations poured in. These are by turns moving and corny and maddening, with plenty of handwringing, plenty of sensationalism. The *Eagle*, D’Angelo’s great booster a decade earlier, runs a photo of the sad little house that was his last address with the caption, “MUSE ROAMED BEHIND THESE WALLS” (March 20, 1932). Who will bury him? A brother, John, is found in Paterson, New Jersey, but he’s a jobless

laborer in equally dire straits. A cousin, Arthur, turns up in Philadelphia and he says he's "an automobile salesman and that's just like being out of a job at present," in a cheeky assessment quoted in the *New York Herald* (March 17, 1932). Arthur calls Macmillan to see if any royalties are due from *Son of Italy* and finds out that the poet's estate is entitled to \$4.60. The paper also checks in on Van Doren, who remembers D'Angelo as a "peasant boy who spoke English badly." He recalls that D'Angelo was "inert in conversation but then so are lots of poets." He describes D'Angelo as "the only extremely unlettered immigrant I knew who wrote pretty good poetry without rising above the level of a day laborer." Van Doren seems to want to keep an even tone and not dive into the sensationalism, but the effect is dismissive, as if he is regretting his earlier enthusiasm.

The Herald reports that, besides an uncashed money order for fourteen dollars, strewn around D'Angelo's "two mean rooms are manuscripts that, if stacked, would reach two feet high." Many contain "formless snatches of unfinished poems." Ten days later, an *Eagle* reporter and the poet's brother are digging through the garbage, attempting to retrieve these very papers. Among the things they find is Pascal's beloved 25-cent dictionary.

And if D'Angelo's landlady wasn't a fan, it turns out that—readers of *Humboldt's Gift* will know these words—there were in fact fans of poetry at the morgue. The *Eagle* rallies on the dead poet's behalf and helps raise money to save him from a burial on Hart Island, the city's potter's field. The coverage is lavish, excessive, self-congratulatory. The paper makes good, and D'Angelo is given a proper burial, where many come to pay their respects (among them is Garibaldi LaPolla, who would publish *The Grand Gennaro*, a touchstone of Italian American fiction, the next year). Some months later,

the grave of Pascal D'Angelo is given a headstone—donated, who knows why, by the Knox School for Girls of Cooperstown, New York.

And then, the man buried, his life celebrated and lamented, the coverage peters out. The last mention in the *Eagle* that I could find dates from May 30, 1934, in an article titled “Grave of Poet Spared Poverty Plot Decorated by Idolators” (fire *that* headline writer). This is a short item describing how members of the Pascal D'Angelo Society placed a wreath on the poet's grave. By now, it seems that Pascal has learned English through a “ten-cent dictionary,” losing a full fifteen cents and, I suppose, gaining a corresponding 60 percent in pathos.

As I reached the end of the archive, as the name Pascal D'Angelo disappeared, a profound sadness came over me. What did I miss? What clue didn't I follow? What did I not understand? Maybe because I'm a writer of fiction and no kind of critic—at heart I am a celebrator, not a critiquer—I found myself going back to the words of the critics. Except that I was reading these words from the other side, from the side of the writer putting a book out into the world: go, little book! How dare one do such a thing, how dare one write a book? It is a bit like very publicly asking to be loved. I found myself wondering about Carl Van Doren's about-face, his dismissal of D'Angelo after his death, and the tendency of so many critics to see the poet as a freak of nature. Perhaps to these tastemakers, D'Angelo was more valuable as a story, not as a person. Perhaps it was actually best of all that he was dead, so he could be ruefully lamented—and out of their hair.

And maybe the poet wasn't as simple as they all thought.

I kept wondering: Was he reading his reviews? As his English got better, was he getting hip to all that condescension? Did it burn his peasant ass? Did he

tell himself that he'd quit the poetry scene, lock himself away, sharpen his pencils, and write his heart out in his Gowanus hovel? That he'd perfect his poetry until he was finally ready to come out flawless—not only mastering English, but speaking Chinese, just to show everyone else how lazy and stupid they were? I'll deal in some subjective tribalism and say that Abruzzesi are nothing if not tenacious. We are stubborn, we are great fixators, we are *teste toste*. But we're also great dreamers.

D'Angelo had to cling to his beliefs, crazy as they might have seemed to others. They are what made him and what kept him alive. Book people criticized D'Angelo for “advertising” his poetry—but would he have got anywhere at all if he hadn't come knocking on their doors? He recognized the mobility possible in America, the opportunity to take his chances and make himself a new self—a poet, which would have been impossible in Italy, even if he did grow up a stone's throw from Ovid's native Sulmona, even if there was an actual tradition of Abruzzese shepherd poets. This country destroyed D'Angelo, but it also made him a writer.

I fixated on those stacks of paper left behind in that Gowanus hovel. Those scraps of manuscripts, those unfinished poems. I found myself going back to a particular article from the *Eagle*, one titled “Verses, Dictionary, Poet's Only Estate,” written by Lou Wylie. “Many of the manuscripts left by him ... contain only one line, as though a phrase had been singing itself over to him until he was forced to scribble it on paper” (3/27/32). “Singing itself”—such a strange phrase, suggesting a hallucination, a manic state, maybe even a private hell. It also points to what Anbinder posited: Was it writer's block?

Myself, I don't actually believe in writer's block. Many writers have thought out loud about this, and what comes to my mind is the formulation Toni Morrison

made when asked about it in a *New York Times* interview (September 11, 1994): “I disavow that term. There are times when you don’t know what you’re doing or when you don’t have access to the language or the event.”*

Or maybe you’re hiding. I think of Henry Louis Gates’s essay about Anatole Broyard in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*. Broyard, a Black man, buried his history and passed as white. Gates, and the writers around Broyard, conjecture that this could be exactly what gave Broyard the epic case of writer’s block that stalled him out as a writer of fiction. He could not write about the unspeakable.

How strange will it sound to you, reader, to hear my own conjecture, in this case absolutely out of school, about Pascal D’Angelo? He had plenty of obstacles to contend with—he was an immigrant, an unskilled laborer with almost no education, and a poet writing in a second language. He was a thorough “Other.” Was he also gay?

What an irresponsible piece of conjecture! Plenty of straight men remain single all of their lives; plenty of straight men never have a relationship lasting long enough to be noted or written about in any form; plenty of straight men “marry” their work, their art. Correct? Or not? There is something so utterly complete about the nature of D’Angelo’s solitariness, of his retreat from society, that seems to point to still another reason, an attenuating cause. A source of shame.

Looking at the slim stock of D’Angelo’s poems available, I find myself, irresponsibly or not, searching for clues.** I find ones for and against. In a poem called

* “Chloe Wofford Talks About Toni Morrison,” Claudia Dreifus, *The New York Times*, September 11, 1994.

** I am indebted to Siân Gibby for sending me Dennis Barone’s compilation of D’Angelo’s poetry.

“Light in Light,” the poet—or the constructed I of the poem, better said—is wandering by “... a living field/
Seeking you, O unrevealed!” In the last stanza, he writes:

I feel that you are near to me;
My quickened steps are springing free.
Perhaps you linger there, to smile,
Confounding dogmas with the wile
Of one long kiss, beyond that turn
Where the golden fringes burn,
O unrevealed!

“Confounding dogmas” is doing some interesting work here, as we said in college. What dogmas could this kiss be confounding? And who is this Unrevealed, this hidden being? I somehow picture a big blond farm lad leaning on his shovel, smiling at the handsome dark man crossing the field. The balance of the poem is vague, pastoral—to me it reads like a draft, as many of D’Angelo’s poems do—and it’s “about” something, but it’s something too blurry to come into focus.

In a poem called “Mid-Dream” found in D’Angelo’s room after his death and reprinted in the *Eagle* (which seems to be the sole source for some of these poems), the constructed-I wonders:

Am I a blossoming rose whose life is
fed on the hope of priding some
young breast?

Which, to be a dreamless philistine, seems a contorting way for a man like D’Angelo to think of himself. Though immediately after this follow the words:

Do I dream like the rose
Of those maiden lips that blend with
moonlight

Which would suggest another impulse, except that the stanza ends this way:

Like a sweet red wound cut by a sudden
kiss?

Does the tortured syntax reflect an inner tumult, or is it purely about a failing on the part of the poet (or, of course, is this a rough draft)?

In another poem reprinted in the *Eagle*, actually a fragment, the poet writes:

The moon, a giant pale taper burning in
the mosque of night,
Floods your hair with calm, golden
splendor;
The adoring wind weaves her soft silken
hair with yours.

This “adoring wind” caressing the beloved is female. I think of the Sappho fragment in which she watches a man talking with her female beloved and considers how godlike he seems by this mere proximity. There is also the secret contained in this, that the woman can hide her love by gazing not at the real lover but at a “correct” object of affection, a man.

Prefacing these poems in the *Eagle* article, Wyle (a woman) wrote a section titled “No Lover Had He.” She writes:

It would be hard to think of d’Angelo, young, handsome and popular, without some female companionship. Poverty has rarely kept women from loving geniuses, or even members of pick and shovel gangs, for that matter.

But if there were amours in the life of the young poet, the physical was submerged into the almost sexless beauty of the spiritual. Several of his poems

do hint at the existence of an adored one, but they are much the same sort of poems that Petrarch indited [sic] to Laura.

A poem, hinting at his loneliness, and a number of lines, some of which were jotted down on the back of a dinner invitation from Pitts Sanborne on the letterhead of the old *Globe*, are given here to show with what sincere purity thoughts of love came to this man whom we are most apt to think of in connection with pick and shovel work.

The mischievous part of me reads “the almost sexless beauty of the spiritual” and “sincere purity [that] thoughts of love came to this man,” with all their hyperbole, and hears coded language pointing toward the unsayable. I was curious who Pitts Sanborne—actually “Sanborn”—was, and Wikipedia told he was a music critic for the *Globe* and several other now-defunct papers. In fact, he was an opera fanatic who died at his desk while writing a review of that evening’s production of *Don Giovanni* at the Met. I also learned from Wikipedia that Sanborn was a “sometime lover” of Carl Van Vechten—a Carl Van whose predilections ran along very different lines from those of Carl Van Doren, lest the reader be confused.

In *The Tastemaker: Carl Van Vechten and the Birth of Modern America*, Edward White writes of the underground gay scene of 1920s New York City, particularly Greenwich Village: “By night the Village, the winding streets and poor working-class Italian communities living cheek by jowl with the recent influx of artists and political radicals made the neighborhood feel very different from any other that Van Vechten had previously encountered” (p. 69). White goes on to write that

the popular stereotypes of homosexuality of the time revolved around caricatures of limp-wristed inverts, half-male creatures mincing their way up and down Broadway. In reality, of course, gay men expressed

their sexuality in many more subtle ways that often went entirely unnoticed by the straight majority. As Van Vechten discovered, New York had a thriving gay social world, but almost none of it was out in the open. Outside the clubs and brothels of the Bowery, homosexuality crept in the shadows and scrambled itself into secret codes. (p. 70)

Thus did I spin out a whole counter-narrative of a very different Pascal D'Angelo. In it, the poet is picked up by a certain group of literati as they would some handsome rent boy. He is wined and dined and "literally feasted"—and then, once the novelty has worn off, once his "promise" as a writer has become yesterday's news, the invitations stop coming. He is cast out, exiled, his only souvenir a dinner invitation on fancy stationery in the hand of one from that glittering circle. Maybe D'Angelo wrote so often of light and goldenness and bright fields because so much of his life was lived in the dark. And maybe the Unrevealed was not a golden man of his imaginings, but the golden man of his unspeakable reality. Or this could be a wholly false narrative. Maybe I am simply lost in the archive, reading every last word again and again, forcing these words to cohere, to give up their meaning. This is what we are left with when we have no real answer.

V.

Who gets the last word? Certainly not the fickle "discoverer" of our Pascal, Carl Van Doren. Unlike D'Angelo, Van Doren was prolific and had a name that didn't go into eclipse during his lifetime. (That name is still current enough today, perhaps in part because of his nephew Charles Van Doren and the "Quiz Show" scandal.) A few years before Van Doren won the Pulitzer in 1939, he published an autobiography, *Three Worlds*, at the age of fifty-one.

D'Angelo was only four years gone by then, and clearly he was still on Van Doren's mind, since he devotes several pages to the poet. Most of the pages are taken up by that first impassioned letter that D'Angelo wrote Van Doren; however, the rest of the section is intriguing enough that it bears quoting in full (133-134):

I sent for [D'Angelo] and he came to see me, in his wrinkled overcoat that had no buttons and hung on him like a horse's blanket. Through his torn trousers I could see a bare knee, that winter day. He gave me a hard expressionless hand, awkwardly and timidly. He looked like dozens of Italian laborers I had seen standing beside chaotic roads—and I suddenly thought that men like him had built the ruthless highways of the Caesars. But he was taller than such men and his eyes were nearly level with mine. Eyes as soft as an animal's, with an occasional flash of eager fire. His eyes were the only evidence that he was a poet. Nothing that he said reminded me of his letters or his poems. Monosyllabically shy, he answered my questions, but said no more. It was like talking to some ragged peasant messenger who brought poems without knowing what they were.

His poems did not seem to me good enough to win the prize, but I bought two of them and paid him at once. In my *Nation* column, *The Roving Critic*, I wrote an article about him. Recognition came as fast as he had said it would. Other editors bought other poems and printed them. Friends of poetry sent offers of money and clothing. Mary Austin said she would give him a typewriter. Newspapers took up his story and made it a week's wonder. The Italian-language press celebrated him. I could not see that these things affected him at all, though when next he came to see me he was more warmly dressed. He could have a job, he told me, as editor on an Italian paper, but he preferred to be a poet in English. He was writing his autobiography. I helped him a little with that, and wrote an introduction when it appeared, late in 1924, as *Pascal D'Angelo: Son of Italy*. In the meantime

he went on working with his hands, in a Brooklyn cemetery. After the autobiography he dropped out of sight again and lived obscure until the papers in 1932, learning that he was dead, remembered the story of his short renown.

He would probably have been a poet of one book in any circumstances. It has been guessed that he was not even that: that he only ran errands for some knowing writer who used this trick to hoax an editor. I find it easier to believe that Pascal D'Angelo the poet existed than that he was invented. Who invented him, the letters—I have them still—with their cry for help, the poems, the convincing and moving autobiography? A man clever enough to invent them would have kept on writing. Pascal D'Angelo might have stopped. "All my day's labors are gone, forever. But if I write a line of poetry my work is not lost." Perhaps his book, seeming to him monument enough, quieted his passion. Other men, in the grip of that ancient instinct, get children, build houses and temples, establish fortunes or empires. Pascal D'Angelo taught himself to write and wrote a single book. "If you killed all the horses in the world," John Erskine once said, "there would be no more horses. But if you killed all the poets, there would be as many poets as ever in the next generation."

What if you instead killed all the literary critics?

How is it that the world can give your work its worth? A writer's reputation can rise and fall. I remember standing at the elevator bank in 1745 Broadway with my editor, looking at the names of all the Random House authors who had won the Nobel Prize for Literature over the years. Frans Eemil Sillanpää, we said to each other, who's he? I think of Pascal, working "with his hands" in whatever Brooklyn cemetery that was. While he worked, was he composing his poetry? Contemplating his mortality? I think of him buried out in St. John Cemetery in Middle Village, his name returned to "Pasquale" in the death rolls. He sleeps beneath the green lawns

among the likes of Charles Atlas, Gerry Ferraro, Robert Mapplethorpe, and enough mafiosi to sink a cruise ship, his headstone funded by a bunch of adoring young women with dreams in their eyes. Dreams of love or poetry or maybe simple compassion for a human who died so lonely. A “week’s wonder”? For a writer, the moment of writing is the real wonder, the real moment. It’s not when a book is published and definitely not when it is—or is not—reviewed. I used to not believe writers when they talked about the joy that writing gave them, results be damned. But after many years of writing, I got there. I got there noiselessly, without fanfare, surprising myself. When a writer is in the zone, everything else disappears, the materiality around you, the hardness of your chair, the cold or the heat, the noise outside your window. It really is just you with your words. Even to say “words” is reductive, misleading. It is just you, the writer, within your dream of creation.

And I think Pascal lived in such a dream. It protected him. Our hearts are broken only because we are on the outside, looking in.

“Capital’s Monstrous Outrages”

THE VOICE OF IMMIGRANT LABOR IN PASCAL
D’ANGELO’S *SON OF ITALY*

by Caroline Pari-Pfisterer

I.

As the story of the genesis of Pascal D’Angelo’s autobiography, *Son of Italy*, goes, Carl Van Doren (1924), the literary editor of *The Nation* from 1919–1922, “discovered” him and encouraged him to compose a full-length autobiography from the fragments he had shared with him during their initial meeting in January 1922 (x). Van Doren had responded almost immediately to D’Angelo’s passionate plea for recognition in his poetry contest submission letter, which is included in the last pages of the autobiography. Although D’Angelo did not win *The Nation*’s poetry prize in 1922, Van Doren shared D’Angelo’s story and published two of his poems in his column, “The Roving Critic,” on January 25, 1922, the *de facto* date of D’Angelo’s introduction to the world. While this story is well-known, what needs to be considered is that D’Angelo had already written some of his autobiography, which he showed to Van Doren. D’Angelo’s poems first appear in *The Nation* exactly as they appear today, interweaved within his autobiography, which was eventually published in 1924 with an introduction by Van Doren. Consequently, we cannot read his poetry or his autobiography as two separate texts; they are two parts of a whole. There are a few interesting reasons why he would begin writing his autobiography *before* ever being published but this will be evident by the conclusion of this essay. My main purpose here is to

provide a rereading of *Son of Italy* that challenges previous interpretations.

Scholars of D'Angelo have followed Van Doren's (1924) lead in placing *Son of Italy* in a subgenre of American literature: "autobiographies of immigrants" (xii). In doing so, they have also noticed how it does not quite fit the characteristics, patterns, motifs, or themes of immigrant autobiography. For Van Doren (1924), "*Son of Italy* adds a new note" to the stories of "how this or that new-comer fought his way up to the level of a competence and perhaps of some public post" (xii). For William Boelhower (1984), D'Angelo "chooses to speak from the periphery, as a marginal figure," and challenges the dominant stereotype of Italians as laborers by confirming it "as a positive image" that reminds American readers of "the ironic fate" presented to the new immigrant. Boelhower concludes that the "true meaning of his use of the success-myth convention, therefore, is to generate a dialogue between the traditional promise of opportunity and the excluded Italian American type" (128). Boelhower further claims that D'Angelo's text enlarges "the range of acceptable types in the American pantheon of canonized selves" (129). Fred Gardaphé (1996) also frames D'Angelo's story within the success-myth convention, but as an Italian fashioning an Italian American self; D'Angelo is a "voice struggling for recognition and acceptance in a new world" (36, 37). Robert Viscusi (2003) believes D'Angelo's "immigrant ambitions" led him to imagine a powerful Italian national identity. It is difficult to discuss *Son of Italy* without detailing D'Angelo's remarkable transformation from peasant to poet and frame it within the success myth of the United States, though these same scholars problematize that very process.

The emphasis that Kenneth Scambray (2003) and Carla Anne Simonini (2015) place on D'Angelo's

resistance to the success myth aligns closer to my own view. Scambray argues that D'Angelo's life narrative is "a countertext to the melting pot theory that dominated US society at the time ... the ethnic voice that speaks undermines the image of the successful, assimilated self and any attempts to read *Son of Italy* as a unitary, immigrant success story" (169–170). Similarly, Simonini claims that "D'Angelo's work further challenges conceptions of italianità and Americanness alike. ... [H]e can hardly be considered a 'self made man'" (152). Thus, D'Angelo forces us to reimagine what "success" means in the United States for immigrant laborers.

While all these scholars recognize the politicized tensions between Italian and American identities present in D'Angelo's autobiography, they don't go far enough. First, D'Angelo's severe condemnation of an oppressive social class system, both in Italy and in the United States is not a break in the narrative; it drives the narrative. Second, this critique is the overarching theme of his poems and it is what motivates him to write them. Finally, a closer look reveals that D'Angelo never truly fashions an American self. Instead, he depicts the remaking of a peasant Abruzzese Italian into an exploited immigrant worker; he never unchains himself from his worker identity. Influenced by Rudolph Vecoli's insistence that we investigate the intersection between social class and ethnic identities, I examine the consistent voice of immigrant labor everpresent in the text, which parallels Marxist thought and radical labor movements, and is influenced by the revolutionary romanticism of Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Like many immigrants from Italy, D'Angelo does not identify as an Italian; he identifies with his region, Abruzzo: "We of the uplands of Abruzzi are a different race" (14). The title of his autobiography should really be *Son of Abruzzi*, as Scambray notes in his essay of the

same title. There is an excruciatingly painful distance between himself as an immigrant and, I would add, as a laborer, and Americans. Americans are always “them” or “they.” Explicitly, they are pale, cold, and hypocritical; implicitly, they are the oppressors. Gardaphé’s (1996) observation of D’Angelo’s use of chiaroscuro, the stark light/dark contrasts are useful for the kinds of contrasts depicted in the autobiography (40). For one, it becomes clear that Americans are quite prejudiced against immigrants. The anti-immigrant remarks that were pervasive in newspapers of the time and led to the restriction on immigration from southern Europe by 1924 are all heard by D’Angelo. During a visit to New York City after one year of being in the US, his eyes are open with wonder at sights he could not enjoy on previous visits and at the unjust behavior of Americans. While window shopping, he hears “slurring remarks about ‘those foreigners.’” When a gaudily dressed prostitute walks by, he notices that she garners none of the remarks he endures and wonders at the hypocrisy. His enjoyment of the grand sights of modernity is contrasted with disturbing encounters of discriminatory behavior. He concludes with thoughts of “how lovely and yet repulsive this enchanted city was” (80). This contrast between the “lovely” and the “repulsive” defines much of his life. D’Angelo never really sees himself as American nor does he appear to try to become one. And when he gains recognition as a poet, it is as a universal “pick and shovel” poet.

II.

D’Angelo’s narrative is a social critique from the perspective of an immigrant laborer, which parallels Marxist thought, particularly in its invocation of vampires. While critics have noted D’Angelo’s depiction of his

childhood village with its strong beliefs in wizards, witches, and vampires, a symbolism that can be read as a critique of the landowning system that exploited the peasants, few have explored its consistency or its radicalism. D'Angelo begins his explanation of this by saying, "Our people have to emigrate. It is a matter of too much boundless life and too little space. We feel tied up there. Every bit of cultivable soil is owned by those fortunate few who lord over us," and concludes with, "It is the landowners and the moneylenders who are the real vampires among us—not pitiable, demented old women" (48–49). Landowner vampires literally take the life energy of tenant farmers like D'Angelo's father: "That season of excessive toil made my father much older. His tall strong body was beginning to bend." The brutal years lead to his father's decision to emigrate to the United States. Of course, he could not escape the vampires. In the United States, D'Angelo darkly notes the presence of vampire-like factories in his description of Shady Side, a factory town with "nothing but factories and workingmen's shacks. [...] And over each of them, feeding upon them, looms the ever-present factory or mill" (76). Almost as soon as D'Angelo begins working in America he becomes aware of a brutal capitalist system of exploitation of immigrant labor, one that he is determined to expose and that motivates him to write.

Landowning aristocrats have a long literary tradition as vampires, even before *Dracula*. For political scientist Mark Neocleous (2003), though, vampires are not just aristocrats feeding off their tenants. Neocleous challenges the idea that they represent "capital's desire for accumulation," established by Franco Moretti (2005) in his influential discussion of *Dracula*. Marx's use of the metaphor of the vampire in *Capital*, according to Neocleous, must be understood within the context of his critique of the political economy of the dead.

Capital is dead or accumulated labor that depends upon living labor.

Neocleous identifies the three explicit vampire metaphors located in the chapter “The Working Day” of *Capital*, which are strikingly similar to the way D’Angelo conjures the creatures. For Marx ([1867]1992), the question of the length of the working day epitomizes the struggle between capital and labor, or vampires and their victims (344). Marx characterizes capital as having a “voracious appetite for surplus labour” (344). Surplus labor is the extra labor that workers perform above and beyond what they need to live (“necessity labor”) and that provides capitalists with profit and their own leisure time at the expense of workers’ time and lives. Explicitly, Marx explains that “Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (342). Marx’s chapter is filled with quotidian detail of a twenty-four-hour day that robs workers of their humanity and their lives. While labor laws regulated the working day somewhat in certain industries, Marx reported on industries that had no “legal limits to exploitation” so that capital’s desire to extend the working day was a “werewolf-like hunger for surplus labour, in an area where capital’s monstrous outrages [are] unsurpassed” (353). Finally, Marx believes the shift system that prolonged the working day into night “only slightly quenches the vampire thirst for the living blood of labour” (367).

D’Angelo viscerally grasps Marx’s formulation that once a worker sells his commodity, his labor power, he is no longer free and is subject to exploitation that disfigures him or shortens his life. When D’Angelo complains about the “brutality of enforced labor” in which “[w]e sell our lives, our youth, our health—and what do we get for it? A meager living” (72), he understands that “the vampire will not let go ‘while there remains a

single muscle, sinew or drop of blood to be exploited” (Marx 1867, 416). When D’Angelo compares the unheard “thuds of the pick and the jingling of the shovel” to “a good line of [his] poetry,” his onomatopoeia is the sound of workers sacrificing so much of their humanity. For Marx, the working day “produces a deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal moral and physical conditions of development of activity, but also produces the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself” (376). The longer the day, the shorter the workers’ lives, to sum up one of Marx’s arguments.

As Marx compiles in “The Working Day,” D’Angelo vividly depicts the dangerous working conditions that result in injury and death. After the first few years of “endless toil” pass uneventfully, D’Angelo begins to experience firsthand the exploitative dangers immigrant laborers endured. Two men from their gang, Teofilo and Andrea, are killed in a freak accident when a derrick falls and crushes them. The traumatic event breaks up the gang: “We had lost all heart; work in that place was oppressive; we felt enslaved” (106). Like Marx, D’Angelo equates wage labor with slave labor.

D’Angelo is left alone in the United States when his father and some of the others decide to return to Italy. His next job at the Erie Railroad in New Jersey is a twenty-four-hour shift, the kind Marx excoriated as the epitome of the vampire’s quest; it is what workers needed to protest. According to D’Angelo, his wages here were below market value, at a time when wages were beginning to rise. But his description is imbued with safety concerns and a long litany of deaths:

That was our work; handling and carrying wet ties on our shoulders, now and then stumbling on the rough ground of the unlit yard, and cursing just to appease our pains—with the heavy ties and rails on

our shoulders and the slippery ice under our feet. ... All around was noise and confusion; trains piling on trains—cars creeping smoothly at you in the darkness, bells, toots. While I was there two men were caught under a freight car, several were smothered under coal in the coal dumps, one suffocated in the steam house. (108)

D'Angelo immortalizes and humanizes one of the dead workers in his poem, "Accident in a Coal Dump," which opens with the line: "Like a dream that dies in crushed splendor under/ the weight of awakening" (109). There is an explicit attempt to give the dead worker life in order to contrast the dehumanizing nature of such a gruesome, work-related death. D'Angelo tells us "[h]e had been a handsome quiet fellow, a family man." As a whole, D'Angelo's poetry and prose contain the voice of immigrant labor, one engaged in class warfare, and that humanizes those who suffer and die at the hands of capital: "It was a war in which we poor laborers—Poles and Italians—were perpetually engaged" (108).

In fact, labor protests around the country were erupting and often leading to bloody conflict in its most active period of 1900–1920. Strikes in the textile factories were frequent in Lawrence, Massachusetts, beginning in 1903, and a 1912 strike gained worldwide attention for the emerging worker movement across the United States. The largely female immigrant textile workers of the 1912 strike fought for a shorter work week, but when their pay was reduced, they went on strike. There were violent clashes with police and when one striker was killed, the labor organizers Arturo Giovannitti (also a poet) and Joseph Ettor were framed for the deaths.

On April 20, 1914, Rockefeller's troops opened fire on striking mine workers in Colorado and burned their tent city. This tragic "Ludlow Massacre" was "the most brutal of all confrontations between workers and

mine owners.” It resulted in the deaths of forty-five men, women, and children, many of whom were Italian immigrants (Mangione and Morreale 1992, 268). The horrific scene of burned women and children angered workers around the country, and they rose up in protest. Among those who organized and led unions and became involved in the growing labor protest movement between 1900 and 1920 were Italians, including Giovanni Vaccaro, Carmelo Rocca, and Alfonso Coniglio (Mangione and Morreale 1992, 277). In 1917 attention turned to the Bolsheviks who overthrew Russian imperial powers in March and took power by October. Perhaps strengthened by the working-class revolution in Russia, workers in the United States continued their fight. In the fall of 1919, thousands of unionized textile workers went on strike in New York for an eight-hour work day after negotiations led to a wage cut (Mangione and Morreale 1992, 302).

Around the same time, there was a massive coordinated government effort to round up and deport radicals, anarchists, and Communists, many of whom were involved in the fight for better working conditions and to some extent the violent overthrow of capitalism, as is well documented (Avrich 1991, Stark 1922, Frankfurter 1927). An intensification of these efforts began in 1919 after the U.S. Attorney General Robert Palmer’s home was targeted by an anarchist. They became known as the Palmer raids or the Red raids. Although the raids officially ended in 1920, the damage to radicals had been done. And no one paid a price greater than Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, whose arrest and trial dominated the headlines of domestic and international papers from 1920 to 1927, which certainly would have caught D’Angelo’s eye as an avid reader of newspapers. During these years, protests erupted all over Europe, South America, and Japan by radical groups who were angered by the

unfairness of the arrest and trial. The executions of Sacco and Vanzetti, along with a backlash against labor and other radical movements, led to the death of Italian American radicalism as has been documented in Cannistraro and Meyer's collection, *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism*.

The extent of the influence of worldwide labor movements and the subsequent suppression of labor protests in America on D'Angelo has been overlooked or underestimated in critical works. It is my contention that his autobiography reflects this shift toward antiradicalism that drove radical discourse into the ditches. In other words, D'Angelo's poetry and prose become his only available means of protest; he is motivated to cry out against injustice. As soon as D'Angelo is on his own, he becomes more outraged at the injustices faced by powerless, dehumanized immigrant workers. First, D'Angelo's and his fellow Polish and Italian workers' attempt to negotiate for higher wages fail:

In 1916 while all the other companies were paying good wages our own beloved railroad, the Erie, was persistent in allowing us \$1.50 per day. We asked for \$1.75, which was reasonable and less than what other places paid. But our demands, though honest, were indignantly rejected and the whole gang left in a body. (110–111)

As Jim Murphy (2000) points out in his D'Angelo biography, D'Angelo was barred from membership in unions at the railroads as an unskilled laborer (97–98). Yet D'Angelo's worker group's actions mimic a union negotiation and a labor strike. It's clear from their "reasonable" request of a rate lower than the market rate that the workers do not want to leave but are forced to by temptations of higher wages. The move takes D'Angelo to Northern New Jersey, where

he descends to the lowest point of his life thus far. D'Angelo foreshadows the bitter conflict with a foreman through a summary of what immigrant laborers endure: "For wherever he goes there are hovels, hard work and brutal foremen—and that feeling of autocracy over him which he probably never knew before and which makes him bestial and unconsciously fatalistic" (110). Like the unnamed vampires hovering over the factory towns, D'Angelo claims an abstraction—autocracy—as that which destroys workers. It takes away any remaining shred of human dignity and autonomy.

Autocracy, of course, has a human form: the heartless and sadistic foreman, Domenick. What's striking is not just Domenick's cruelty toward D'Angelo, but D'Angelo's reaction to him. When Domenick demands he push a wheelbarrow full of concrete up a slippery plank, D'Angelo must submit, "a weakling under the force of necessity." This forced submission "split [his] thoughts like lightning" and he realizes that "a fire was smoldering" in him (114). As D'Angelo predicted and tried to avoid, he slips and injures his hand: A rusty nail pierces his right hand.

D'Angelo's stigmata appears in a chapter framed by Christ. It opens with the poem, "Omnis Sum" and ends with the words of a fellow Abbruzzese, Michele, "a stupid world drove nails through other hands—other hands" (121). "Omnis Sum" [I am all]* invokes Jesus's crucifixion: "On the Calvary of thought I knelt, in torment of/ silence." D'Angelo expresses his frustration at his powerlessness as an immigrant laborer who suffers much like Christ; he is crucified by capital, in Marx's terms, and tortured by enforced silence: "My mind was dark. I felt like a hurt dog who slinks off to some corner where it can lick its wounds in silence." Such forced silence,

* For translation, I rely on Dennis Barone (2016).

like autocracy, limits his human potential and makes him “bestial.” This silence is suppressed anger. When Domenick refuses to give him any other job, D’Angelo’s “thoughts were in a whirl.” When he encounters Domenick later that night in his search for work D’Angelo says, “a fury such as I had never known before flared up in me;” his thoughts turn violent but he is stopped by Michele. After the outrageous injustice of not being paid for two weeks of work due to the contractor’s bankruptcy, D’Angelo’s “mind was turbulent” as he thinks to himself, “Why, I am nothing more than a dog. A dog. But a dog is silent and slinks away when whipped, while I am filled with the urge to cry out, to cry out disconnected words, expressions of pain—anything—to cry out!” (126). He feels a “power that was forcing [him] to cry out to this world that was so fair, so soft and oblivious of our pains and petty sorrows” (126).

D’Angelo’s juxtaposition of his inspired determination to combat silence by protesting injustice with his resignation to this fate is the same dichotomy that he faced his entire time as a “pick and shovel” poet. To live and write poetry, he must work. Soon after this dark chapter of his life, D’Angelo teaches himself English and begins his obsession with words. Ultimately, he turns to poetry and prose to unleash the cries of the immigrant workers. He tells Van Doren in his famous letter, “I am not deserting the legions of toil to refuge myself in the literary world. No! No! I only want to express the wrath of their mistreatment. No! I seek no refuge! I am a worker, a pick and shovel man—what I want is an outlet to express what I can say besides work. Yes to express all the sorrows of those who cower under the crushing yoke of an unjust doom” (165). This last phrase brings to mind the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.

III.

D'Angelo claims that when he discovers the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley he again feels "an urge to express [him]self, to cry out [his] hopes and dreams to this lovely unheeding world" (144). Most scholars note the inspiration that Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, a famously difficult text, provides for D'Angelo. Boelhower (1984) titles his chapter on D'Angelo's autobiography "The Right Promethean Fire." Gardaphé (1996) concurs: "Boelhower fittingly labels D'Angelo 'an Italian-American Prometheus' for D'Angelo brings the control of his destiny out of the hands of the gods and into his own" (47). Like Boelhower, Viscusi (2003) claims that "he figures himself as Prometheus, a good European counter for Whitman" (46). But even while scholars recognize the influence, there has never been a thorough analysis of what D'Angelo found in *Prometheus Unbound* and how it may have shaped his poetry or *Son of Italy*. Ironically, Shelley's own inspiration was derived from time spent in Rome during the spring, "in that divinest climate," as he details in his preface, which epitomizes the same characteristics of nineteenth-century travel writing of Italy outlined by Simonini, though she does not investigate this influence either.

Prometheus Unbound is a four-act lyrical drama depicting Prometheus's conflict with Jupiter, the God who punished him for defiantly sharing fire with humans. For anyone familiar with Shelley's thought, it's evident that the tyrannical Jupiter, the "Monarch" and "Oppressor of Mankind" represents corrupt social institutions, like the Roman Catholic Church and the British monarchy, or anything that crushes the human spirit. For Marx, capital is the oppressor; for D'Angelo it is also capitalism in its various forms like the commissary system, the

padrone system, the autocratic foreman, and the bankrupt contractors.

As Boelhower, Viscusi, and Gardaphé point out, D'Angelo would have identified with Prometheus's suffering. D'Angelo would also have seen that Prometheus resists Jupiter's "autocracy," as D'Angelo prefers to say, through his power as a Titan, "his highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature" and his use of language (Shelley [1820] 1977, 133). Indeed, words are imbued with power. After all, Prometheus did not only disobey the Gods when he gave fire to humans, he cursed Jupiter who retaliated by chaining him on a mountain for eternity. The inviolable curse still invokes fear in all the elements, for Act I is essentially Prometheus's attempt to recall the curse now that he begins his redemption. It is noteworthy that the whirlwinds, to whom he appeals for the curse's words, remind Prometheus that the curse "Made us keep silence—thus—and thus—Though silence is as hell to us" (I: 105–106). These lines recall D'Angelo's tortured silence at the injustice he endures. Mother Earth then recounts the impact of Prometheus's curse on Jupiter, "our Almighty Tyrant," and on everyone on Earth as the curse was the cause of chaos, famine, floods, and plagues. Having suffered for three thousand years, Prometheus hopes to end the conflict with Jupiter to restore his humanity, though he will never submit to Jupiter's rule. In Act II, Prometheus's wife, Asia, retells the story of how Prometheus gave knowledge to Jupiter with the understanding that humans would always be free, but when Jupiter brought only suffering and slavery to humanity, Prometheus retaliated with his gift of fire (knowledge) to humans to alleviate their suffering: "Such the alleviations of his state/ Prometheus gave to man—for which he hangs/ Withering in destined pain" (II: 98–100). These scenes would confirm for D'Angelo

that his words and knowledge could alleviate suffering. Further, the Romantic poet's conception of Nature as antidote to modern civilization is evident in D'Angelo's deep ties to Nature throughout his own autobiography, ties that are disrupted only by laborious toil. And while D'Angelo's poetry turns dark when it is placed in the frame of an industrialized America and clearly depicts a disconnect from Nature, he is always re-communing with Nature when he gazes at the stars. The stars are like the oceans connecting the continents and a place where he can dream about his family.

There is also evidence that the narrative arc of *Prometheus Unbound* influenced D'Angelo's autobiography, for ultimately both are hopeful and optimistic stories about humanity's ability to overcome fate. The initial scenes in Shelley's mythic drama depict Jupiter's tyrannical control over an enslaved humanity. Humans and nature suffer from the corruption of slavery. It is a world enslaved by time, imagined as Spirits of Hours, and vitiated by hatred, fear, pain, evil, despair, and death. Natural progression and natural relationships are disrupted. The poem's climactic scene is Jupiter's fall from Heaven, which frees Prometheus and restores equilibrium to humanity. All of Nature celebrates with joy and happiness as love returns to the world, a new world in which:

the man remains
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed—but man:
Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree,—the King
Over himself: just, gentle, wise—but man:
Passionless? No—yet free from guilt or pain
Which were, for his ill made, or suffered them (194)

Women, too, are transformed: "Speaking the wisdom
once they could not think,/ Looking emotions once

they feared to feel/ And changed to all which once they dared not be” (III:iv:157–159). Human knowledge explodes in the arts and sciences. Earth has been reconstructed into a Promethean world, full of love, hope, and freedom.

D’Angelo’s autobiography mirrors this structure with his time in America portrayed as a world in which tyrants rule over enslaved immigrant laborers. Though capitalism does not fall like Jupiter, D’Angelo’s world changes with literacy. D’Angelo becomes much more optimistic and hopeful on the path to literacy. For some, such a path could lead away from manual labor to office work, the type of work that does not physically deform a person as his fellow worker Old Felice advises him (146). For D’Angelo, it leads to poetry. His sole ambition is to write poetry with fierce determination against all odds. His undeterred spirit shows grit. It does not matter that he is starving or living in a filthy apartment because he is following his bliss, as mythologist Joseph Campbell would say. For Marx, he becomes the unalienated worker, fulfilling his potential, regaining his humanity, formulating his own fate. D’Angelo concludes his autobiography with his appreciation of “the tributes of my fellow workers who recognized that at last one of them had risen from the ditches and quicksands of toil to speak his heart to the upper world” (168). One can almost imagine Marx ([1867] 1992) reflecting on D’Angelo: “Suddenly, however, there arises the voice of the worker, which had previously been stifled in the sound and fury of the production process” (342). It was not through union activity, or legislation to shorten the work day, as Marx suggested and encouraged, but through an autobiography containing poetry that D’Angelo would cry out to the world for the better treatment of immigrants and laborers. But by speaking his heart,

D'Angelo understood the power of words to influence social change, for Shelley was his tutor. And with his worker identity prominent, the “pick and shovel” poet, he transcended national borders and became a Romanticized universal man.

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