Mary Cappello

Shadows in the Garden

Poetics of Loss, Italian/American Style

> Today I have convinced the men in the shop to open the shades providing that I close them before dark. What is there better than light?
>
> —From the journal of my maternal grandfather, John Petracca

I. Beads

I remember how my Sicilian grandfather, Giacomo Cappello, mourned the death of his wife, Ninfa, my grandmother. He wore black for one year and numerous days thereafter; TV was strictly prohibited, as though it would throw too much light into the room or distract one from the work of grieving. So when we visited—I was a child—we played cards, made hats out of newspaper, sat in silence while my grandfather wept. At this point, my grandfather took up a new habit: each week when my father and I brought him to our house for dinner, he would take his mute, darkly clothed place in the front passenger's seat and almost audibly, breathily, pray. He was reciting the Rosary. Last week, my mother's sister, my aunt Josephine, died. My aunt made thousands of rosary beads in her lifetime. After her daughter died at aged two and a half of spinal meningitis, my aunt took to crafting the beads and to religion, Catholicism became increasingly her life's devotion. My aunt's death was followed by news of a close friend's serious, possibly fatal illness. Trying to doze this evening before the television set—*Atomic Cafe* is on—I find myself imagining a

particularly vivid, efflorescent set of blue beads passing between my fingers. And suddenly I—vociferously anti-Catholic—am reciting to myself with crystal clarity the calming repetition of the Hail Mary—ten such songs followed by an Our Father. How could I know those prayers, having not recited them or turned in the direction of their predictable intonations for solace in twenty years? The memory is, to say the least, strange, sometimes charming, in what it will lose and find. Now I find a bead between my fingers, now I lose the space between it. And is the space of who I am in the feltness of bead to finger or in the space between?

I like to think my ancestors can help me in times of need, so now I am calling on Aunt Josephine, her spirit still close to the earth, my mother said. In my imaginary dialogue with Aunt Jo, she tells me she cannot help me unless I pray. Unless I pray— Fill in the blank with all unimaginable disaster, loss. I tell her I can't pray because I don't believe. This is the short version of a longer dissertation on the oppressiveness of organized religion, the damage wreaked upon my psyche by Catholic training, the biases reproduced in the otherwise seemingly contentless utterances of church dogma. "Besides," I remind someone—is it just myself now? myself and my dead aunt? myself *as* my aunt?—"even my aunt who is a nun says she does not pray much: her *day is a prayer,* she says."

Still I wish for the beads. Blasphemous idolater that I am, I want their talismanic lure. Or maybe, really, I want to feel what linked my aunt, my grandfather, to earth, how the string of beads linked them to each other, how this form of meditation in repetition thematized their loss.

I believe that we all carry with us devalued resources attached to unpopular or ghettoized states of mind, and my goal is to find the words, face, song, story—the unintelligible core of those resources—for the new poetic forms they can suggest. Rosary beads, musical notes, the sprocket holes and frames of home movies are some of the handicraft that is my familial legacy. They are marks of something sighted, something sung when voicelessness threatened, instances of remaking in light of traumatic unmakings of their authors' worlds. To read them from the distance of several generations entails the translation of the conviction that they can offer me something I need to know—an inherited artistry, a labor of love, an embodiment—or maybe just something I need to tell.

Every year on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, my grandmother Rose and my aunt Josephine would meet at Wanamakers, a popular department store in Philadelphia. They would rendezvous at the store's trademark, an enormous bronze eagle, and, browsing or shopping, they would in this way celebrate what is considered by some Italian Americans

the day of the little Christmas, specifically the day on which the three wise men visited the child Christ. January 6, 1954, would be remembered as a profound exception to the rule. On that day, my aunt called my grandmother to say that she would not be able to meet her, that when she was putting Janice's, her daughter's, snowsuit on, something strange and sudden occurred. Janice's head jerked backward and she was unable to stand up. She developed a high fever. My aunt called the doctor. Janice became increasingly ill. My aunt called a rescue squad. It took only eight hours for spinal meningitis to take Janice from their midst. She died on the way to the hospital. Because Janice died on a city street rather than at home or in a hospital, her body had to be taken to the morgue, where my uncle then had to reclaim her as his own.

Family members tried to make sense of the incomprehensible loss in various ways. My grandmother blamed the industrial area where my aunt lived. Whenever she visited, she said, she found the child in her playpen covered with soot. My aunt, the more directly injured by the loss, momentarily exacted a less environmental, more metaphorical, aggressive and superstitious rationale. She said that Janice died because my grandfather, a worrisomely unreligious man, did not go to Communion at my aunt's wedding two and a half years earlier. The pain of this accusation sent my otherwise reasonable grandfather back to church. My uncle, my aunt's brother, on hearing the news of Janice's death punched his fist through a wall. My great-grandmother at unexpected moments shared out loud the thought that burdened her, much to the dismay of my aunt. "Poor Janees," she would say, "it's snowing on her." My mother and her sister Frances were given the job, ordered by the Board of Health, to burn anything that Janice might have touched that day or, if the item was not burnable, to wash it in disinfectant. They found themselves destroying the gifts they themselves had given her as a baby on this, the feast of welcome—a refusal of a second, a little, Christmas. At the viewing it was stipulated that Janice's body be separated from mourners by glass. For the first time ever, my mother's boss told her she could stay away from work for as long as she liked and thus keep at a presumed distance the terror of infectious disease.

It is no doubt true that my aunt lived with a loss from which she never fully recovered, and yet I wonder what that means: "recovered." Aunt Josephine lived. Aunt Josephine made. When she looked at me, her sister's daughter, she knew I knew she saw *her* daughter, but never grudgingly, lovingly. So what would it mean to say she never recovered?

Aunt Josephine recovered enough to care for other children. She adopted a boy whose biological mother had dropped him from a second story window when he was an infant, and she gave birth to another son, referred to by doctors as the miracle baby because she conceived him after a partial hysterectomy. In an interview on trauma, Robert Jay Lifton suggests that for the survivor "insight begins with the shattering of prior forms" (Caruth 134). A new form must be created to attach to the prior shocking event for which one had no experiential referent and therefore no imagery to make sense of the trauma.[1] In the space of unfillable absence, Aunt Josephine made rosary beads and other artifacts that one might not hesitate to call kitsch. Mostly she worked with yarn and rope, crocheting brightly colored afghans, needlepointing keychains in the shape of geometrics, improvising her own imitation Mondrian tissue box covers, and my favorite pieces—the dresses made to fit nothing other than a roll of toilet paper. Any standard-size doll could fit into the roll, to don the sequined miniature cap my aunt also made, and voilà: an aristocratic lady, wearing usually a lime green or neon orange dress, could be found gracing the back of one's toilet, and only you would know what she was stuffed with, what gave her skirt its hoop.

Though my description may sound parodic of the thing itself, what I really mean to imply is the mocking, if not irony, implicit in these particular creations of my aunt. Many of my aunt's craftings had an unutilitarian utilitarian quality. The toilet paper dress had a "use," but one would be hard-pressed to say its use was necessary, immediate, or urgent, even though the presence of the doll meant there would always be an extra roll. Suspended somewhere between pure kitsch and art, the dresses transformed the roll of paper from something useful to something decorative. Like "good art," they got one thinking about the abundance of taken-for-granted useless items produced in the name of capitalist need. In a sense, they were one instance of my aunt's deciphering her loss as a joke, the joke that was played on her, and responding not by mocking others but by mocking the emptiness at the center of objects that would pretend to fill a desire.

Within the realm of aesthetic theory, critics have affiliated kitsch with escapism and political quietism, with the duping of the working class by totalitarian forces, with cheap and superficial sentiment, with an inability to feel complex emotions, and with "killing time" (Calinescu 248). I imagine each tug of yarn drawn through its hole, each tying of a knot to hang an ornament by, each pulling taut of a pipe cleaner like the furred edge of a cat's ear fondling one's fingers, as forms of *facing* time, as ways that my aunt continued to be in time. If kitsch attempts to "assuage a fear of

emptiness" (Calinescu 251), I wonder if the emptiness usually at issue is merely an imagined emptiness, even if an originary emptiness, or if certain forms of kitsch can suggest that an emptiness that one had only encountered or been engulfed by has now been confronted.

Teasing a set of beads out from within its blue velvet pouch like a snake charmer, I try to imagine the shape the world may have taken for my aunt after the loss of her daughter. I imagine doorways narrowing and perception funneling to a point. And a great labor required in first moving from that point, into which what used to be distinguishable as tree, cloud, house, sun, self had collapsed, to another point, and much later letting the point open to recalibrate difference, watching a new world issue from the point as though from a spring—not the same tree, cloud, house, sun, self as before but a renewed sense of being in time. I don't want to call it recovery but change for change: the loss as unexpected call, the beads as symbolized response.

There are a great number of sides to a rosary bead, a great many ways to understand how, through their crafting, my aunt may have devised a poetics of loss, a way of confronting emptiness. In the face of the ungraspable, a bead is grasped, pause, and grasped again. Like learning to walk again, what has to be mastered is the movement from bead to bead. A well-wrought rosary bead is as sensual as a nipple hardening between thumb and forefinger, a reattachment to sense. Though the believer is told that reciting the prayers attached to the beads will sanctify her, I think more interesting than cleansing is the idea of the rosary as something held. Rather than induce the disappearance of the self, it seems to encourage a dialogue or double-voicedness, a bass line with improvisatory accompaniment? The Hail Mary that one repeats for ten counts, or a decade, is, for example, supposed to be accompanied by meditation on a so-called Joyful, Sorrowful, or Glorious mystery decided on from the start. Lest one get lost in the mystery, the Hail Mary returns one to ground; lest one be tempted to wallow in dirt, the mystery beckons one to stand, to fly. This is of course my homespun theory made from my aunt's homespun rosaries and not, I hope, an interpretation the Catholic Church would agree with. I'm hoping for a conversion not to faith but from raw materials to making, from fingered to formed.

I know that my aunt did not merely "serve" the church in her rosary making and did not capitulate to the church's attitudes toward women. She addressed letters to me with "Ms."; in those same letters, she let me know she accepted my lover as a member of our family—"Hope all is well with you and Jeannie," "Give my love to Jeannie." As she was going into

coma on her deathbed, among the few last words she thought to write on paper my mother read to me over the phone: "Thank you Mary and Jeannie for the flowers." Having spent more than her share of time on so many solitary islands of illness as a child, my aunt, I believe, maintained an independent preserve of fortitude that could not be overcome by consolatory dogma.

I cannot know what, through her rosary making, my Aunt Josephine was trying to "say," nor can I surmise what she envisioned in the solitude of her daily recitations or with groups of people in prayer. I do know that, in the chapel of her own funeral mass, I failed to be consoled by the ritualized prayer that perhaps anesthetized so many there. I realized then that the Catholic church service was entirely "performative" in the sense that linguist J. L. Austin elaborates that term in *How to Do Things with Words*. It did not matter *what* the priest was saying (cf. the automatic trance that the mass cast over the mourners) but *that* he was saying them. His utterances performed an act (vis-à-vis loss) without having much discernible content, especially with regard to the lived life of Josephine Petracca Falter. The mass was a perfect ritual of dissociation, the highest form of superficial feeling, the most magnifying form of kitsch. The way the candles were flickering, like the stuttering of an artificial log fire, I couldn't tell whether the flames were real or electronic flares in red plastic casing. The sound did remind me of the staccato coughs akin to sobs that were my pained uncle's attempts not to cry. If the person traumatized or in mourning is already uncomfortably dissociated, then artificial respiration in the form of more recognizable dissociating mechanisms may only return her to the world deluded once more.

I see in the manufacture of the rosaries something better and more, for in my aunt's decision to *make*, not merely "say," rosaries, she in a sense chose to handle the co-constitutive matter of absence and presence on a daily basis. Making something requiring some meticulous care and imagined beauty, often prepared as a gift for friend or family, resecured my aunt's interest in living; and yet to fashion rosaries is to circumscribe a circle, a hollow, a loop made of luminous orbs. I want to say again that to make rosaries and to say the Rosary are different kinds of acts. What would the poet make if the book and the pen weren't ready-made? If one chose to manufacture one's materials, would one's poetry look different? Would one choose not to make poetry at all? Rather than deposit her prayers, her worries in a journal, my aunt decided on different materials—color of beads, icons, forms of linkage—for making a journal each day. Each set of rosaries that my aunt made was an instrument for someone

else to play on. I'm only sorry that the intended, the prefabricated song could not be sung to her but to the anonymous force whose love she perhaps felt she had to earn.

If I cannot know what visions attended my aunt in her cramped living room workshop, I can reenvision rosaries I have known. The rosary of pink beveled beads I wore on my school uniform always felt like a pretend fringe imitating the fringes of the cool late-sixties–early-seventies plastic vest I slunk into after school. The mother-of-pearl rosary *bracelet* that my godmother gave me felt like a chameleon changing colors with my moods—around my wrist now camouflaging, now flashing varying states of mind. A powder blue pair lay nestled like an unexpected toy in the box for storing picks inside my mandolin case. Another pair hung or hovered, a dove on my bedstead, like an amulet. And the sound of beads collapsing into their pouch or into my palm comforted me like the returning retreat of water over pebbles that would not yield to it. I have to admit that saying the Rosary had about the same uninteresting effect as alcohol does on me today—sleep or stupor. If saying the Rosary could, like other meditative practice, encourage openness, alertness, or discipline of mind, I wouldn't know, for my childhood rosaries were more like differently purposed fetishes for me—one for each corner of the room—and less like exercises that properly aligned my soul for the Lord.

If I were a collagist, I could imagine hanging my old rosaries in glass boxes and labeling them with a name for the separate fetishistic purpose they served. On the backdrop that supported them, I would record a script describing the unutterable realities that they tried to keep at bay. Behind the bracelet, for example, I'd record a terrorizing rhyme that members of the Sicilian side of my family would play with me: "Round ball, round ball, pull-ee little hair. One slice, two slice. Tickle under there." While directing this uncanny verse eye-to-eye, the teller would first circle a forefinger into your palm, then tug at a piece of your hair, then slice at *wrist*, at upper arm, and finally tickle under your arm. The verse seemed guaranteed to conjure something, at first to implicate one in a magical ritual, only to later suggest that each part of the rhyme was a red herring, a distraction that gave the teller access to a vulnerable spot. Behind the rosary that doubled as a fringe, I'd write the story of the stomach shred by family violence.

In a related exhibit, I'd display rosaries in which the icons that directed the meditator to funnel her thoughts through Jesus-impaled to Mary-ascended, from martyred son to quintessentially humbled mother, were replaced with common objects that may or may not resonate for the viewer: miniature teabags, telephones, toothbrushes, objects of desire, of

bondage, of freedom, of conception and misconception, of moment and of insignificance, with the prayer to be determined by the route the psyche took through the object. (Students could be encouraged to write such rosary poems in creative writing classes.) Vision would be hoped for, and worlds of change.

All is context. In the working-class town where I grew up, wooden rosaries against a nun's habit signify differently than plastic beads on a schoolgirl's uniform. Plastic in itself isn't cool, nor wood warm. Though the rosary was intended for the faithful but unlettered masses, my aunt's decision to spend some important part of her days stringing and positioning beads on wire may not be so far from arranging, as the poet does, words on a line.

There is a shadow in the garden whose source is out of reach. The rosary says you will walk there nevertheless. At the end of a path you will come to a wide circle. Follow it. It may return you to the original path. It may not. Leave the garden gate open as you exit. A poetry that mimicked this would be easy for the part that by some formal arrangement took a reader around and out. Harder though, to make the words cast shadows all the while.

Aunt Josephine did not survive a surgery she was expected to survive. The doctors convinced her to go through with it: they could repair the damage left from a childhood battle with rheumatic fever. Her life would be different. She wouldn't be so tired, so out of breath. Aunt Josephine came out of surgery OK, surprised she had survived, she said, because she "had seen Janice." Several days later, Aunt Josephine died.

II. Notes

It must be understood that the great-grandmother who couldn't stand the thought of the child's body buried under snow associated snow with the foreignness of the country she had migrated to from southern Italy. She disembarked from the boat into Boston harbor snow, the first snow she had ever seen, ever felt. This woman, Josephine Conte, and her only son, John Petracca, my grandfather, came to join the husband and father who was already here. Mother and son fled together but never wholly left behind a great deal of loss: my grandfather was the only one of my great-grandmother's six children to have survived childhood. One wonders if my great-grandmother mourned for herself to see her namesake, my aunt, endure the loss of a child as well.

John Petracca bore the burden of the surviving son and shouldered into adulthood the material losses exacted by the Depression. On a shoemaker's wages he attempted to feed six children of his own. At age thirty-four, in 1934, he started to keep a journal, mostly in English, that began this way:

> From this day February the first of the year of our most Beloved lord, Jesus Christ, 1934, in the middle of my life, I, John Petracca, an obscure cobbler of Llanerch, Pennsylvania, while practicing in order to exist, my trade, taught to me by my loved Uncle, Antonio Conte in Teano have begun to write chronically some of my thoughts.

My grandfather was able to make shoes as well as repair them, and I have very strong memories of the textures, rhythms, and smells that permeated the shop that was attached to his home. He practiced "in order to exist" a number of other arts as well, especially music and writing, a trade he plied daily even though he felt to the end of his life that he failed to serve language well:

> Very hot has been the day but somewhat colder toward evening. Worked all day and earned very little comparing it with the wage that most people receive nowadays. I have bought writing paper to see if I can complete a few of my long ago begun short stories. 'Why do you want to waste time?' You have said. I do not know. I cannot keep away from writing even after realizing I am not able. I cannot spell. I cannot compose. I cannot create. And still I fool myself. I write, write and write. Just for what? That I do not even know! It is perhaps one of those things that cannot be explained neither to oneself. The only consolation that I derive from such undertaking is that I harm none and I am indeed glad!

The musical notes my grandfather scored like beads strung on a wire are what I want to turn to for now though, remembering the passage from his journal: "My mandolin and guitar break my terrible monotony. It is with them that I live, forgetting for the moment my poor social state and live in a world of grandeur all my own!"

When I was ten years old, a series of circumstances, including my grandfather's poor social state, converged to bring me into that world of grandeur. Partly as a scheme to treat my grandfather's material and psychological depression, my mother proposed that he begin to give lessons to me and one of my brothers on mandolin and guitar, respectively. My grandfather wouldn't accept money from his children, even though he

was in dire need, unless he rendered them a service such as this. I can't recall how exactly I became the designated mandolinist—my mother asked me if I'd like to try and I said yes?—but I wore the designation from that point on as a kind of privilege and blessing in the familial abode. None of my grandfather's children had learned to play his beloved instrument, so there was a sense that I, a member of the third generation and a female at that, was helping to preserve something from extinction. If the forces of assimilation had wiped any desire for the Italian language from familial consciousness, learning the mandolin stood for a more oblique, symbolic expression of postponing loss. A potential hazard of this might be that it shuttled "things Italian" to a nebulous, untranslatable place—the realm of music—at the same time that it translated the complex of that culture, the culture that was being forgotten, into "feelings" dissevered from intellection. Like my grandfather but differently so, I began to turn to the mandolin for feelings for which there was no outlet nor language in mainstream American culture. The polarizing illusion this fostered was that I was beginning to think in English and feel in Italian. What I could feel in those weekly lessons was a secret to be kept between me, the mandolin, and my grandfather.

Getting to the weekly lessons wasn't easy. My father, who suffered from colitis all of his life, drove like someone desperate for a bathroom, and my mother, who suffered at that time from agoraphobia, made the trip with apparent difficulty. This terrible tension, which I couldn't help perceive even if I couldn't fathom it, would dissipate once we arrived at my grandparents' house. The music really did seem to make people feel better. In the summertime my brother and I had the freedom to take the bus on Wednesday mornings to our lesson, and yet the ride there was still unpleasant. The bus, whose air conditioner was terminally broken, smelled predictably but no less rankly of vomit and body odor. Unlike the adult anxieties that plagued my parents, I "suffered" from a congenital cuteness that, combined with the bright red corduroy mandolin case my grandmother had sewn out of scrap material for me, made it hard to deflect the smiles from strangers who would never see me as the tough tomboy I wanted to be.

The time spent with my grandparents settled upon us like a happy oasis, a glorious routine. After my lesson and while my brother had his, I would pick the herbs and vegetables in the garden that my grandmother would use to make lunch for us. My grandmother's meals were neat as mathematical equations—her sandwiches were perfectly square as though she'd trimmed the edges, even though she hadn't; her fried eggs

were perfectly round—and I enjoyed this as an antidote to the fuzzy grasp I had on the numeric aspect of reading music. Occasionally during my lesson my grandmother would emerge from the kitchen to sing or dance. As we prepared to catch the bus, my grandfather would carefully choose now a rose, now a fig, for us to take home from the garden.

Roiling beneath the resplendent color and the quiet forms of those early afternoons was the frustration I experienced in attempting to master the special skills required by the mandolin. As soon as I got home from the lesson, I'd retire to a corner of the basement of our tiny row home, where, sitting on the toy chest with my mandolin, I'd try again to meet the challenge that made the mandolin distinct—its doubled strings and the tremolo that only a limp and nimble wrist could produce. I felt angry with my grandfather, as though he was leaving me with the impossible feat of not only growing wings on my back but making them flutter. Try as I might to make the two strings sound as one, I'd always end up hitting the strings above and below the one I was concentrating on. This, I could tell, would be like learning to keep one's coloring within the lines, and remembering how my colors always spilled over or strayed, I'd abandon the mandolin to the basement and run weeping to my mother: "I can't do it," I'd tell her. "I will never learn the tremolo," I cried. My mother, who at that time was reading Margot Fonteyn's biography and writing poems about Rudolf Nureyev leaping from TV screen into living room "to uplift her to earth," pointed me to the motto inscribed on the front and back cover of the Fonteyn bio: "What a difficult step," she used to say to herself, "I shall never be able to do it."

I did not become the Margot Fonteyn of mandolinists, but I did learn to make nearly beautiful music in the form of solo mandolin, in duet with second mandolin or guitar, and in a quartet consisting of me, my grandfather, my brother, and my grandmother, whom my grandfather had taught to play the guitar in the early days of their marriage even though she never learned to read music. By the end of two years, I could sustain the vast repertoire my grandfather had introduced to me. Tangos, polkas, waltzes, and numerous Italian folk tunes were at the center of our program, but my grandfather had also scored songs like "The Last Rose of Summer," "The Blue Bells of Scotland," and "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" for the enjoyment of the Scotch-Irish men whom my aunts had married, as well as more intricate, difficult pieces by Haydn and Verdi. Perhaps realizing that I might not carry the mandolin into adolescence unless I could learn to play some music I already recognized, my grandfather made an arrangement of the Beatles' "Yesterday" for me and "Go to the Mirror Boy" from

the rock opera *Tommy* for my brother. I had tried, with two of my neighborhood friends, to start a band consisting of mandolin, tambourine, and vocals—we called ourselves "The Bottomless Pits"—but it was clear that no one would be asking us to play our flat melodies at local graduations anytime soon. Another of my friends took to calling my mandolin my "ukelele" (it was the era of Tiny Tim), and I really did feel like an unobliging vaudevillian when a neighborhood mother insisted that my brother and I perform our Italian songs for her Girl Scout troop. At the end of the performance, I received a pin that made me an honorary member. A weirder performance experience I can't recall.

The mandolin is, of course, a staple of American folk music, bluegrass in particular, but perhaps due to the class and ethnic makeup of where we lived, bluegrass never made it to Darby, PA. The mandolin had become for me a very private corner of experience, reserved for dialogue with my immigrant grandfather. In those weekly sessions, I played my heart out, I grew calluses on my fingers, and I felt my jugular vein expand. My grandfather's two major directives to me in his slow, soft voice were "softer, softly," and "slow, slower." Listening to an old recording of myself and my grandmother recently was almost frightening for the seriousness in my child voice. I'm introducing a tune called "Perche Ridere" ("Why Not Laugh?") as though we're about to perform a Wagnerian dirge. The playing is lively and clearly joyous in many parts, but there is an intentness on my part indicative perhaps of a refusal to let the mandolin play me, or of something in excess that the mandolin couldn't meet, or maybe of the sheer difficulty for a child of achieving the modulation necessary to express the qualities of feeling implicit in songs with titles like "Sospiri" and "Valse Pensieroso."

After my third year of lessons with my grandfather and just as I was beginning to learn how to move into second and third positions on the instrument, just as I was entering the public junior high school as a happy egress from Catholic grade school, my grandfather died of the lung cancer that he had lived with in the previous two years. I remember distinctly the day we took my grandfather to the hospital for the last time, for two reasons: he told my uncle what suit he wanted to be laid out in, and my cousin accidentally closed my finger in the car door. It felt as though something had been yanked from me, as though my very body had gotten away from me, it hurt terribly, and I screamed at the top of my lungs.

My grandmother and I continued to play together on occasion, and my brother and I were sometimes coerced into long and frustrating practice sessions together, but for the most part I stopped playing the mandolin

after my grandfather died. With my confidante and teacher gone missing, the whole point of the music seemed lost. Many years later, in my tenure year as an academic, I felt drawn to the mandolin again. I had seen a short and wonderful Canadian film entitled "When Shirley Met Florence," in which the special lifelong friendship between two Jewish women, one of whom was a lesbian, was documented. Among other things the women shared, they played gorgeous duets together on mandolin and guitar. It made me see again what was possible with this instrument, and I momentarily considered starting to take lessons again. I do believe that there is more to be found, some resource for a marginalized poetics lurking in my grandfather's musical scores and in this instrument that continues to seem incongruous on the American scene (to this day, my partner wrongly or wryly refers to my mandolin as my "banjo"). There's something more there than a temporarily nostalgic kitschy salve to midlife crisis.

Once per year my grandfather gave me a book of ready-made mandolin music, but most of the time he wrote out each week's self-devised lessons and their accompanying songs. The music he marked wasn't of the fast and furious, dots-and-dashes, fountain pen variety. His notes, formed with a ballpoint, appeared as though he first sculpted them, then inlaid them onto the page or positioned them, collage-like, as in the manner of a Cornell box. G-clefs tilt toward unexpected concatenations of spheres; some steady *o*'s suspended outside gravity, some flecked like meteors, others held upright like pods on their stems; one or two vibrating rattles and every now and then a word advancing or receding: "first lesson to," "June 18, 1970," "staccato," "legato," "half," "quarter," "whole," "to my granddaughter, Mimi." Like Cornell, too, my grandfather hoped a child would be willing to handle the box, to shake it and draw it to her ear, to tilt and balance it on head, shoulder, crook of arm, knee.

How might the practice of scoring music in the form of lessons like this help to navigate loss? You lay something down like so many railroad ties, the staff; you fill something in, like birds or silence moving between the tracks; you wait patiently for yourself or your student to catch up to the movement, to learn its always unexpected time. My grandfather gave me hand-hewn orbs—opened, closed, half-moons, full, eclipsed—so that my fingers pressed to fret could feel something solid, touch something outside me; they could sound, and I could hear the sound, feel it echoed in my belly. But the distinction of the mandolin again is its doubled strings, added to which my grandfather ever encouraged the power and beauty of the duet, as if to say keep your ears open to your friend and, whenever possible, don't scream above her need for you. Like the rosary's play between ground and mystery, solidity and flight, the mandolin called for a two-tiered mobility; but maybe the real trick of bringing out the instrument's sweetness was to play in such a way as not to foster the illusion that the two strings were one.

On the tape of my grandmother and me playing together, there is much less of my grandparents' voices than I would like. They wanted to make a professional-sounding recording, as though nothing but music, not even ourselves, filled the room. Early on the tape there is a snippet of dialogue that I cling to, in which they seem to be saying the same thing but need each other both to say it and to mean it differently:

Grandmother: "Well, that was pretty good."
Grandfather: "It *is* pretty good, isn't it, Rose?
Grandmother: "I think it sounds pretty good, don't you, John?"
Grandfather: "Oh yes."

III. Sprockets and Frames

It is the 8mm movie that will save us.
—Jonas Mekas

My great-uncle, Antonio Polidori, husband to grandmother Rose's sister Anne, filled the house that he designed and constructed, aided by his only child, Richard, with novel forms of kitsch. If Aunt Josephine improvised on ready-made kits, Uncle Tony improvised on nature. Such craftings started in his lushly surreal garden, which, though typically appointed with rosebushes and wine-bearing grape arbor Italian American style, also featured trees that bore two kinds of fruit (the result of my uncle's experimental graftings) and unusual plants whose otherworldly bounty my uncle plucked, painted, carved, and decorated to fill a collection of unearthly delights. One plant yielded nothing but seed pods, which, in my uncle's hands, came to resemble birds whose beaks, now clearly tilted to sing, curled around almost to meet their heads. Two dashes of pipe cleaner simulated feet, sequins, eyes. Other plants gave way to gourds ranging in size and shape but mostly pearlike, which my uncle hollowed out to fill with Xmas tableaux or which he reshaped and painted to serve as makeshift musical instruments—mostly crookedly wandering tubular horns intended for parties or parades.

In the basement of his spectacular house, suffused with the light of wide windows reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright designs and reflecting

the tiles from the outside walkways that he'd painted in harlequin costume colors, my uncle, I'm told, *made* fantastic parties, hung photo collages, and invited friends to screen his latest home movies. By the time I got to know my uncle, in my childhood of the sixties and early seventies, he no longer threw parties, but he did occasionally rescreen his home movies. The parties came to an abrupt end (even though his filmmaking continued) after his son, Richard, aged twenty-one, was killed in a car accident. On Father's Day 1953, my uncle received a telegram from Louisiana, where the accident occurred, informing him of the death of his son.

Uncle Tony had purchased his 16mm wind-up camera at that cultural moment that made such surplus equipment available to amateurs after World War II. In 1950, following a calling from his mother to visit her in Italy, he purchased the camera and made the trip and his first films. (When he returned to the States from his trip, his mother died.) One such film consists entirely of a series of mostly 1950s family weddings, spliced together to form a nearly unbroken chain of ladyfinger yellow, apricot, dusty lavender, or pink flamingo–colored gowns. In ritualistic fashion my uncle brought each wedding troupe to his house and filmed them parading past house and garden in different seasons.

The films instigate feelings that I can only tentatively approach. I feel strange and excited on a cold, dark January evening on a visit with my lover to see if we can convince my ninety-year-old aunt to bring out the films. She is unable to run the projector, but my lover is willing to perform the intricate threading, and we both agree to take responsibility should the film break from brittleness. I need to see those films, knowing full well that my uncle would not document my life, the life of his lesbian niece, even though he treated me dearly if not exactly "tenderly" as a child. (When we visited, he'd squeeze me practically breathless, until once I told him, "Don't squeeze me. I'm not a lemon." Tickled by a four-year-old's metaphor, he greeted me with this refrain whenever I saw him thereafter.)

Much of the wedding-day footage my uncle shot suffuses me with a sense of its subjects' vulnerability. Viewing my relatives on this day of particular consequence and compulsory witness,[2] in a youthful moment, prim and blissfully regaled, I am reminded of the forms of loss and harm outside the purview of the frame that they could never have anticipated. In one frame my aunt Frances, her new husband, and their winter wedding party parade before Uncle Tony's house, but the line is broken by a blonde child who walks beside them rather than behind them. At another wedding, one where the camera seems wandering, at loose ends, with the

crowd merely humoring the filmmaker, a wide-smiling and waving Aunt Frances in a bright pink jacket erupts within the frame, consolingly. Now I read the child in the first frame as a knowing angel, an accompanist out of order, for my aunt Frances suffered from undiagnosed mental disorders all of her life and died in her early forties from a combination of kidney failure and depression. My mother wanted me as company to visit her in intensive care, but I was ever after plagued by images of my aunt's helplessness as she coughed up blood into a respirator tube. Especially difficult to view is the wedding of the cousin whose future will yield a son gruesomely murdered by a stranger who plucked the child from a hotel hallway where the family was vacationing, then slit the child's throat atop a Bible as though the child were a sacrificial lamb.

At moments like these, when the film seems rife with the threat of something as simple as its figures' missed steps or something much less comprehensible and dark, I concentrate on the sound of the projector's motor. Worn from disuse, the motor revs like an electric mixer at different speeds, until the film's images appear light as egg whites that bubble and bulge and dissolve.

Like the making of beads and musical scores, my uncle's wedding films are about linkage—in this case, a steady, virtually uninterrupted stream of domesticating ceremony. They are about longing and creativity and the missing. Sprocket holes and frames are crudely yet painstakingly spliced to fabricate continuity: picture the filmmaker as master of ceremonies pulling endless strings of lights out from within his long sleeve.

Banal and repetitive as these films might seem, there is really too much going on in them. The first sixty seconds alone—a passage from Aunt Josephine's wedding—offer a montage of eerily ethnographic acts that seem to document the struggle to be seen. It appears that my grandfather has been directed to encourage his mother to face the camera. Arm in arm, they begin slowly to approach Uncle Tony's seeing eye. Grandmother Rose pushes her way from the back of their crowded driveway toward the couple until she too is included in this bewilderingly slow-moving march of elders, who seem drawn toward the camera as though by magnetism. At this point a child runs out from the crowd and places herself squarely between the camera and Great-grandmother, whose head now appears to be perched atop the child's body. The whole scene is lit by a backdrop of rows of moving orchids on women's lapels. The child and others act as though they expect to see something in the camera's lens. The child jerks her head around, answering no doubt to a reprimanding call, bends, curtsies, and, facing the camera, puts a finger to her mouth as if to say

"ssshhh." This scene is followed by the only shot of Uncle Tony in the entire wedding montage, in profile, apart, casually picking his tooth. The footage of this wedding then concludes with a shot of a child, one knee bent and arms outspread, who clearly seems to be mimicking Al Jolson.[3]

Uncle Tony's wedding montage moves from random and self-impelled theatrics like these toward his orderly arrangement of parading wedding parties before his house, only to end with a camera that begins to wander when his subjects, now moving into the 1960s, begin to misbehave. The most deliberate attempt to create a kind of silent film narration, though, occurs at a point where the filmmaker trains his camera toward a corner of his front yard and house, then pans from left to right as if accidentally to happen upon or "find" a wedding party there: a photographer poised like a tai chi instructor bends to arrange the couple and his camera, a small cluster of the wedding party comes into view, and then the houses and moving cars and yards of the neighborhood as a whole. This is followed by two more pans beginning at the same point, that corner of the house, but each time taking in more of a sweep of the neighborhood and each time finding the photographer, couple, and party cluster at a different, later, slightly altered, and seemingly similar moment in time.

Here I see my uncle using the camera like a paintbrush, with each pan equal to one thin stroke of paint laid upon another until, out of these layered repetitions, a thickness, or difference, or presence emerges. It's an art that moves neither horizontally nor vertically but at the point where those axes cross over. It's not about direction or chronology—the passage of time through which loss keeps track of us—but space and its voluble dimensions. There are two other places in the film where forms become or assert themselves like this—unconstrained, what I want to call moments of lyrical condensation—where the form's appearance, so perfect and seductive and full of play, seems thoroughly accidental but whose inclusion in the frame exists, I am sure, by virtue of my uncle's having found, of his having fully sighted, an object, usually marginal to the subject at hand, that corresponded to something in his heart. These brief poetic films within the film could be called "The Red Hat" and "The Blue Ribbon."

A wedding party assembles in tiered rows on the front steps of the church it is exiting. In the bottom right corner a mother adjusts a headpiece on a child. The camera catches the wedding party center but soon begins to roam outside its periphery to the left, roaming uncertainly until a woman's hand holding a hat onto the back of her head, a ruby red hat, comes into the frame, shot from behind. Suddenly, the camera seems to

be shooting from above, from higher ground. The camera is, for the first time, still while the red hat threads a needle through the crowd, and it is as though everyone, without knowing it, is in thrall to the hat, each person having imperceptibly moved aside to let the red-hatted woman (does it matter that it belongs to my aunt Frances?) through and around and out, and she is waving, waving.

In the very next frame—now my parents' wedding—the party begins its regular procession around my uncle's gracefully ascending stone-tiered garden plots and toward the front of his house, but a blue ribbon interrupts the lens. It flutters and snaps unpredictably; now it is pocked, now dimpled; once a corrugated ribbon, again a sprocketed loop of fabric like a loosed piece of film itself. It runs fast and free along an edge of sky, it laps the hard edge of Uncle Tony's house, it randomly, hilariously anoints the heads of promenaders. Suddenly out of scale with what surrounds it, it's a stray bell cord demanding an immense strength to make its clapper crack like lightning, a bell peal to sound its unpremeditated chord. And who can tell if the sound will satisfy, sweetly greet, alarm, or change who hears it?

Perhaps my uncle sought to weave such immediate, telling movements into his films—the red hat, the blue ribbon—sooner rather than later after his son's death, for these two films were made just outside a year of that trauma. It's as though he postponed his grieving as withdrawal in favor of a passionate intensity for exteriorized, sharable, and supple visualization. Of course, the real staple of the wedding films is that structure my uncle had made with his son—the house. Sometimes the wedding films seem less about any particular church-sanctioned coupling than about the materializing of the house that Uncle Tony designed and built. In this sense, my uncle's films fit squarely within the bourgeois impulses of 1950s home movies—as odes to the middle class house and its nuclear family.[4]

Better off than his working-class relatives, my uncle could be seen as meanly showing up each wedding party, recorded for posterity, backdropped by his house. Contrary to what another family member might recall—that Uncle Tony was mean—I found him to be mostly extraordinarily playful, though a number of competing impulses might have been mixed into his forms of play. If Uncle Tony turns his camera in the direction of his house again and again, he might be laughing at or weeping for what it fails to hold, no child at its nucleus. More hollow, more symbolic than this visceral loss, though, is the missing *church* that haunts these films. In an obvious way, I mean the extent to which his house upstaged

the church as wedding proscenium. But there is also an untold family story lurking here like a ghost to the movies.

My great-grandfather (Uncle Tony's father-in-law) had, as my grandmother used to put it, a good deal of property "on the other side." She didn't mean by this the extraterrestrial heavens but the Campobassan region of Italy. When she was a child, her father's longtime altar boy partner (now a priest), wrote to him from Italy to tell him of unfunded plans to expand the town church. This church, that had memorialized the moment that "our Lord was taken down from the cross and put in the Blessed Mother's arms," needed, for reasons left untold, to be made into a cathedral. The church's symbolic patronage originated in a vision that had "come to a peasant on top of a mountain," my grandmother once explained to me, and she had "poetry" at home to prove it. My great-grandfather directed his childhood friend to sell all of the property he had left in Italy and to "do what you have to do to the church." Once the church was rebuilt, the clergy "went to the trouble," as my grandmother put it, to offer to pay for my great-grandfather's boat fare back to Italy, where they would make a banquet and parade in his honor. My great-grandfather declined the invitation, so they asked instead for a photo of him that they would place in the foyer of the cathedral among pictures of the church's founders. On Uncle Tony's 1950 trip to see *his* mother, he traveled as well to the cathedral of his in-laws, camera in hand. What he found instead and what he filmed were a grassy knoll and piles of rubble where once had stood the cathedral destroyed in World War II. Fifty years later, I am confronted with a double vacancy, for, while all of Uncle Tony's film reels are carefully labeled and securely stowed, the canister marked "Italy" is empty: the film of the vacant lot that was once a church that was made in place of a home in Italy, the film of his trip to see his mother, appears to be lost.

Convinced of my uncle's playfulness and missing it, I picture him inviting me to play a game. I am supposed to find the missing reel, which may mean learning to travel as easily as he did to old places, to new places. I am to make a pie in the film tin and feed it to those bright red birds called cardinals. I am to make a pinwheel of the void.

Once I had explained to my uncle that I wasn't a lemon (or for that matter a red hat or blue ribbon), he stopped squeezing me. Instead, he gave me back my metaphor with a smile each time I saw him. Rather than confuse me with one of his lost objects, he might come to recognize me as a fellow artisan, a cohort in kitsch. In the rapid passage of holes that perforate some frames of his film, I can almost make out words, and beyond them, poems.

IV. Poems

> Forensics establishes which is that they will rather than linger and so they establish.
>
> —Gertrude Stein[5]

By now it must be clear that this essay is as much about my own struggles with loss as it is about the lifelines forged between emptiness and creativity in the lives of my relatives. The drive to return to my great-uncle's home movies was certainly enabled by what I had been learning about the poetry of super-8 and 16mm film from a new colleague, friend, and mentor in and around 1992—the well-known experimental filmmaker, Marjorie Keller. Marjorie, a magnetic, serene, immensely generous, and resourceful woman, died suddenly of no discernible cause in the middle of a February night in 1994 on a trip with her three-year-old twin daughters to visit her parents in Florida. I read and record the coroner's words, reported in a Providence newspaper, with difficulty: "I have looked at the entire body, both at the autopsy, when we first did the autopsy, and at microscopic sections of different sections. I see no abnormality." She was in her early forties. My partner had talked with Marjorie, who spoke enthusiastically of her sabbatical projects and a feeling of well-being, just a few days before on the telephone. I would, I had thought, speak with her when she returned from Florida.

I tried to rationalize the cruel inexplicability of Marjorie's death, especially in light of the loss that her daughters must face, the loss of an utterly devoted, creative—to say nothing of "together"—mother: I told myself there was another world where harder work was called for, a world worse even than our own, that needed Marjorie even more than her three-year-old twins needed her. And Marjorie, as a generous, gifted visionary was called to that other world's need. None of this made any more sense than an event that placed itself before me at this time—like those scenes that Uncle Tony only seemed to happen upon—that soon became the basis of a symbolizing process that might make its way to poetry.

On a foggy and dark morning in early March of 1994, the rain outside sounds like a bath filling with water. I drive to school hoping for comfort but feeling unbearably heavy, until I am buoyed up by the scene of silver buckets attached to maple trees. The trees, the buckets, the winter harvester who placed them there all seem to augur a season of sweetness to come. I am tempted to go home for lunch, the way I did in elementary

school, and when I arrive, there is a package from my mother that includes among its enclosures a postcard of a painting by Horace Pippin, *Maple Sugar Season* (1941), picturing the very scene I had witnessed in the morning: the trees, the buckets, the leaf-shaped footprints of the sap gatherer in snow. Pippin's footprints read like the palm of the sap gatherer, a portrait of him established by overlapping traces, deliberate steps, meandering stops and starts. It's not that I thought my mourning was taking me into a mystic circle of the synchronous but that I read the coincidence as a gift. I was struck by the idea of parallel witness—myself, my mother, Pippin—and from that day began to record such doublings in a notebook, with the thought that at the end of a very long time, one year, two years, my collection might lead to a poem.

A number of the doublings were linguistic, for example, hearing twice in a day the same phrase, "Caesar crossing the Rubicon"; the place-name "Bountiful, Utah"; the odd adjective "Lovecraftian." Others started as dreams that met up with experiences the next day: I dream that I must perform a flamenco dance. The dress and shoes are prepared. I can't remember if I know how to dance flamenco—of course I do?—if worse comes to worst, I'll improvise. The next day, I click on the car radio, and flamenco is playing. I can see the black shoes, the red dress, the upright posture, the red-brown floor. Some doublings were very literal, like finding a twin bloom on a magenta-colored daisy plant. Others were more metaphoric or associative, as in the example of cognate afterimages. When I close my eyes, I see the foliage in my garden: green stems, green leaves; when I close my eyes, I see the concert pianist's green dress. Or watching the splendid velocity, slow, of my eight-year-old nephew's bowling ball as it approaches and then ever so tentatively fells the pins. His T-shirt askew on his shoulder. The ball reminiscent of a silver-marbled bluefish hanging from a mobile in the doctor's office. Some doubles were surreal, as in the way an idle hair tie is always accompanied by a penny lying around the house, while others were very social, having emerged as the unexpected meeting point in conversation.

I also began to notice what other poets had to say about the number two. In Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*, "Reason looks for two, then arranges it from there." Brenda Hillman, in her deeply stirring, wise, and beautiful book on the sudden loss of a female friend and mentor, had written: "and I wanted to hear just one voice / but I heard two, / wanted to be just one thing, but I was several" (*Death Tractates*). Robert Hass, quoting Leonard Bernstein, had said: "Two is the rhythm of the body; three is the rhythm of the mind" (125), and in his own words, "Two is an exchange; three is a circle of energy" (130). The clinician Robert Jay Lifton, on trauma again, had spoken of psychological "doubling in the service of survival" (Caruth 137).

What I thought I was searching for in my gatherings of two was a meeting place and a hunger—the breaking of a fast. An ambidextrous art. And yet I hoped to resist the idea of two equaling a kind of natural balance or easy, longed-for harmony: vision being equivalent to the practice of making two eyes work as though they were one, the importance of acknowledging that one leg was longer than the other. Partly, I was trying to love chance meetings or the stark contrasts that happen within an hour of one's life. It wasn't a likeness I was in search of, but the shadow cast by letters, language's light. I realized my emphasis on two was overdetermined: a search for a poetics based on the technique of tremolo, a grief for a pair of girl twins, a longing for the double movement of the rosary, a distinction between reassuring repetitions and the repetitions beyond our control: that the day on which the news was heard will return to meet itself into eternity. Wanting to learn to treat each day as something other than an anniversary.

My poem is not ready yet. It seems to need multiple voices and a form of orchestration. It seems to want to be a collage, but there's a question of whether I need to know more about traditions of collage or if I can use my family's forms of juxtaposition to make it so, those hidden resources I spoke of from the outset. For now, I have this writing and the way in conversation it has led others to share with me their rosary beads, or prayer beads, or worry beads, and with every set a story of secret pleasure or secret pain. And I keep pulling more rosaries out of memory's sleeve. Perched at the end of the dinner table that my father regularly overturned once sat a plastic rosary container with the kitschy rhyme: "The family that prays together, stays together." For a spell in our hot, short kitchen, my mother had us try to say the Rosary together after meals. It was a desperate time; and as I recall, the rosary gig didn't last too long, for it failed to calm my father, and it paralyzed us.

A separate, recent event helps me to see it from a different angle. I'm on a crowded lake beach outside the city of Providence in northern Rhode Island. It doesn't have the charms of seclusion held by the southern beaches, and here there's no surf to drown the noise of one's neighbors. I'm finding the number of people, the volume of squeals overwhelming, claustrophobic. It's clear I won't be able to read here or to rest. Suddenly, whistles are blaring and muscled men and women are pounding furiously, running in one direction on the tiny beach. They've ordered everyone out of the water and have announced a missing child, nine-year-old Jamie, her

ponytail, her flowered swimsuit. Hand to hand, they've linked themselves to form a human chain as they walk the length of the lake, suspecting the missing girl has drowned. Behind my sunglasses I am crying. I can't seem to stop my tears. Midway down the length of the roped-in swimming area, the searchers are halted by a voice from the loudspeaker announcing a "positive I.D." Jamie has been found frolicking by a hidden corner of the concession stand. My tears, I sadly realize, are partly tears of surprise and relief that other people will look for you if you are lost. They will make of themselves a rosary. Rather than say the Rosary, my family should have gone for walks hand in hand. We should have walked and walked.

Notes

1. The traumas that Lifton is working from are, of course, more cataclysmic than the loss of a child to "natural causes"—such brutal humanly determined devastations as Hiroshima and the Holocaust. The psychoanalytic insights he provides are, I believe, applicable (without being exactly "universal") to a range of traumatic experience.

2. I have in mind Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick's insights on the wedding ceremony as performative: "It is the constitution of a community of witness that makes the marriage; the silence of witness (we don't speak now, we forever hold our peace) that permits it; the bare, negative, potent but undiscretionary speech act of our physical presence—maybe even *especially* the presence of those people whom the institution of marriage defines itself by excluding—that ratifies and recruits the legitimacy of its privilege" (11).

3. This image is striking to me as a trace of what Michael Rogin discusses in *Black Face, White Noise* as the obligatory passage of certain ethnics through blackface toward assimilation in United States culture.

4. Zimmermann notes that "in the 1950s the position, function and definition of amateur film shifted from aesthetics and technology into a social configuration exclusively administrating bourgeois, nuclear family ideologies" (111).

5. I encountered the quotation in Alicia Ostriker's introduction to Giannina Braschi's *Empire of Dreams*: "To claim or demand a structure is a form of argument, which is what Braschi scrupulously avoids. As Gertrude Stein puts it, 'Forensics establishes which is that they will rather than linger and so they establish.' The reader of Braschi may prefer to linger longer and establish less" (xv).

References

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Calinescu, Matei. *Faces of Modernity: Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977.

Caruth, Cathy. "An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Hass, Robert. *Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry*. New York: Ecco Press, 1984.

Hejinian, Lyn. *My Life*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1987.

Hillman, Brenda. *Death Tractates*. Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1992.

Mekas, Jonas. *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959–1971*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

"On Kitsch: A Symposium." *Salmagundi* Winter/Spring 1990: 197–312.

Ostriker, Alicia. Introduction. *Empire of Dreams*. By Giannina Braschi. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Parker, Andrew, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds. *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Rogin, Michael. *Black Face, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Zimmermann, Patricia R. *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.