

# Refusing the Sentimental Italian Immigration Story in Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article examines how Denise Giardina's award-winning novel *Storming Heaven* offers a counterpoint to views of early twentieth-century Italian immigration to the US that rely on assimilationist conclusions. The story of Sicilian immigrant Rosa Angelelli is embedded within the fictional retelling of West Virginia labor history known as the Mine Wars. Giardina creates a female immigrant protagonist who makes plain the abuse and trauma Italian immigrant women and girls face. This point-of-view is normally obfuscated in favor of a male immigrant's perspective, but Rosa's story is neither ignored nor erased. As one of four protagonists in the novel, Rosa's fractured remembrances are told through a halting discourse, revealing her isolation and the danger that awaits her no matter the choices she makes. Taking from Loretta Baldassar and Donna Gabaccia's ideas on personal intimacy, Rosa's struggles are not an exception, but an object lesson in how immigrant women and girls are often left with no means to develop community or intimacy, endangering their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

## Keywords

Denise Giardina, *Storming Heaven*, Italian immigration narratives, Mine Wars, historical fiction, West Virginia, Italian female immigrants

In *Storming Heaven* (1987), award-winning author Denise Giardina fictionalizes the West Virginia Mine Wars of the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> The novel's narrative is shared among four protagonists who rotate point-of-view. Their differing stakes in the coalmining community and geographic region illuminate how injustice serves the profit margin. Mayor of the racially integrated and independent town of Annadel, C.J. Marcum also serves as co-editor of the *Annadel Free Press*, but he disappears from the narrative after he is shot by one of the Baldwin-Felts men assigned to remove miners and their families from their company housing.<sup>3</sup> Surrogate son to Marcum, Rondal Lloyd is a miner who becomes a strike organizer while Carrie Bishop, who receives the most narrative space in the novel, is a nurse and labor activist. The last central protagonist is Rosa

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<sup>2</sup> From 1912 to 1921, coalminers in West Virginia fought to unionize; collectively known as the Mine Wars, this series of strikes did not bring about fair wages and safer working conditions, but instead the US government's intervention on behalf of the coalmine owners (Blizzard, 2010; Corbin, 2011; Savage & Savage Ayers, 2018; and Lawrence, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Marcum is born on his family's land, which was stolen by the railroad in the 1890s and then sold to Lytton Davidson's American Coal Company. His narrative focuses on regaining his family's land.

Angelelli, a Sicilian immigrant and wife to one of the coal miners. While Carrie's, C.J.'s, and Rondal's perspectives drive the story of the labor strikes, Rosa's offers up an intimate portrait of how immigrant women are moved like cargo from one continent to another with little consideration given for what they want or need. Rosa experiences physical and mental violence, leaving her vulnerable. She never develops alliances or affinities with anyone in her community, endangering not only her survival, but also her sons'.<sup>4</sup> The intimacy of Rosa's story, told in short, half-remembered snippets interspersed between the more directly focused narratives on the Mine Wars history, makes clear how suffocating immigration can be for women and girls who relocate to rural environments in the US.

Before her arrival in the small southern West Virginia town of Davidson, named after the mine owner Lytton Davidson, Rosa's agency is compromised. Her father forces Rosa to marry the Sicilian immigrant Mario Angelelli for his earning potential as a coalminer. This arranged marriage will provide funds to feed Rosa's father's other seven children. He orders her to "go and send back money" since, in his worldview, a woman can be of no "help" except as a commodity (Giardina, 1988, pp. 49-50). His demand suggests that Rosa has no use beyond the financial gain her body will provide her family upon marriage. The teenager's forced immigration removes her from her community and her mother's comfort and protection.<sup>5</sup> Once married and in West Virginia, she will have no guidance or companions. Rosa's isolation is exacerbated by a husband who does not want intimacy with his wife, but only a body to cook, clean, and birth sons.

Robert Viscusi argues that Italian immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century "were entering ... a large transnational and transactional space" (2018, p. 617), but for someone like *Storming Heaven's* Rosa, the US becomes a place of conscription rather than connection and opportunity. Rosa's father's economic need usurps any choice that Rosa might make for herself. Her body becomes an object used to barter a better financial circumstance for her family in Palermo and to assist her husband in making a home in Davidson.<sup>6</sup> Rosa's husband does not see her as a partner, leaving her without any close connections in this rural environment. Personal intimacy, as sociologists Loretta Baldassar and Donna Gabaccia point out, is "central to the development of human life around the world in the twentieth ... and twenty-first centuries" (2011, p. 4); however, Rosa is denied any ties beyond her position as an object to be owned and traded. Two decades later, after her sons die in a mine collapse and her husband abandons her, none of her family in Sicily or Davidson's local community try to assist her, or even recognize that she needs help. The mine owner Davidson takes advantage of her situation and grief. He moves Rosa into his home, ostensibly as his maid, but there is an intimation that he sexually assaults her. Her forced and

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<sup>4</sup> Lisa Lowe connects intimacy to the "residual" and "emergent" forms of "alliance, affinity, and society" that those on the margins and beyond urban centers must learn to convey and to create (2015, p. 19).

<sup>5</sup> While Rosa's age is never disclosed, her memories of Palermo are that of a young girl. Rosa remembers her mother allowing her to sit on her lap while she feeds her daughter "oranges" and calling Rosa "bambina" (baby girl—my translation), a term of endearment for a child or adolescent (Giardina, 1988, p. 49). In Palermo, Rosa chases butterflies and cries when they die. These memories suggest that Rosa is no more than 18 years of age when she arrives in Davidson.

<sup>6</sup> In the early twentieth century, Sicilian immigrant men sent back millions of lire to their families. According to Linda Reeder: "Savings deposits [in Italy] rose from approximately four million to more than six million lire between 1902 and 1906" and "[i]n 1907, emigrants sent more than fifty-five million lire to Sicily through international money orders from the Banco di Napoli" (2003, p. 148).

unacknowledged work, in addition to the brutality she suffers at the hands of her father, her husband, and the mine owner, is bound up in fulfilling men's aspirations and needs.

By confronting issues of domestic violence and gender subjugation within larger events, Giardina's *Storming Heaven* reframes the Mine Wars to center an Italian female immigrant story within this US labor history. The character of Rosa illuminates how generational trauma emanates from the process of immigration and unfair labor practices in American coalmining. Like other Italian American women writers who also focus on social justice issues, including violence against women and "sex and class oppression" (Giunta, 2002, pp. 120-121), Giardina's work serves as a counterpoint to sentimental portraits of Italian immigration that privilege close-knit families and assimilation as the goal.<sup>7</sup> *Storming Heaven's* narrative illustrates how Italian immigration to the US does not always lead to success, especially for girls and women. Rosa undergoes an isolation that endangers her emotionally, mentally, and physically. Her voice stirs the residual embers of a scorched landscape to reveal the systemic and ubiquitous abuse and betrayal that Italian immigrant women and girls often face when forced to leave their homeland.<sup>8</sup>

### Italian Unification and Southern Italian Immigration to the US

Sicilian mass migration did not begin until 1896, twenty-five years after Italian unification when the southern and northern provinces of the Italian peninsula were joined together to become the Kingdom of Italy. Between 1901-1915 over 1.1 million Sicilians—mostly men and boys—emigrated from Italy; the US was their most preferred destination (Tirabassi, 2018, p. 123). Sicilians and other Southern Italians were driven from the new nation of Italy through government policies that were made by those in the northern regions where almost 75% of the new nation's income was "generated," but only a third of the population lived (Tirabassi, 2018, p. 117). Those in the south were left without "public works programs, transportation improvements, educational reforms, and badly needed irrigation projects" (Vellon, 2014, p. 16). Taxes and mortgage rates were raised, "compulsory military service" was added to further tax the poorest of the newly formed nation-state, and the *contadini* (peasants) were forced to take on more debt to maintain subsistence-living conditions (Tirabassi, 2018, p. 117). When Italians—especially Southern Italians—immigrated, they did so without "a collective Italian consciousness," and the "social, educational, and cultural divides" that expanded after Italian unification did not magically disappear when Southern Italian immigrants arrived in another country (Vellon, 2014, p. 16). These immigrants' loyalty remained with their *paese*, the towns where generations of their families had lived. Whatever money they made, many of these migrants hoped to send it to their families or bring it home themselves.

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<sup>7</sup> Memoirs like Louise DeSalvo's *Vertigo* (1996) and *Crazy in the Kitchen* (2004), Annie Lanzillotto's *L is for Lion: A Bronx Butch Freedom Tale* (2013) as well as fictional works like Tina De Rosa's *Paper Fish* (1996) center the Italian immigrant U.S. urban experience over the rural one, which echo other more romantic and sentimental portrayals focused on Italian immigrant men, including Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969) and Jerre Mangione's *Mount Allegro* (1943). Even when Italian women immigrants are centered in scholarly texts, the focus is on subjects who have relocated to urban environments (Bencivenni, 2014; Fiore, 2017; and Guglielmo, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> While Working Class and Appalachian Studies scholars acknowledge the narrative complexity of *Storming Heaven* regarding labor rights and social justice issues, especially as it relates to the Mine Wars, they minimize or ignore the centrality of Italian immigration in and to the novel (Conway, 1999; Greene Eads, 2013; Greene Eads, 2012; Easton, 2000; and Fennell, 2021).

The coalmining industry strategically recruited from Southern Italy, but men and boys often immigrated without wives, mothers, or sisters.<sup>9</sup> When women or girls immigrated, they did so as part of a family unit rather than as “wage workers,” and, according to Linda Reeder, they “played crucial roles in creating communities and shaping notions of ethnicity” (2003, p. 7). Those who immigrated to rural environments had fewer opportunities and their experiences could be more isolating. Joan Saverino argues that Italian women’s agency was compromised whenever they moved from their homelands to the US, but immigration to rural towns was more burdensome. According to Saverino, Italian immigrants who relocated to Appalachia “were not able to form mutual aid associations that existed in urban areas where large concentrations of Italians lived together” (2014, p. 296). Instead, the Italian immigrant women and girls who arrived in West Virginia found themselves alone and with little opportunity to make friends, join networks, and develop communities beyond their immediate families due to language barriers and cultural differences.

For example, the immigrant Anna Guarascio was considered an expert teacher of embroidery in San Giovanni in Fiore in the Southern Italian province of Calabria, but she lost this status when she and her two small children joined her husband in the north-central coalfields of West Virginia in 1915 (Saverino, 2014, p. 281). Guarascio was “a stranger, both socially and culturally isolated” in West Virginia and this “rural isolation” within the confines of an undeveloped coal camp was unfamiliar and harsh to someone who was used to friends and family in the well-established town of San Giovanni in Fiore (Saverino, 2014, p. 295).<sup>10</sup> Even though she desired to join her husband, Guarascio was not prepared for the loneliness or her loss of status. When she met one other Italian immigrant woman in the coal camp, her life changed for the better; the two women became lifelong friends and their families interacted as one.

*Storming Heaven*’s Rosa never finds a friend. She is a teenager who has learned how to sew, but she does not have enough life experience to be viewed as a master embroiderer or teacher. Her youth leaves her without the tools to survive in a new community and her status as a newlywed leaves her vulnerable to misunderstandings about her place in the community. Detrimentially affected by the isolation, Rosa may have had more opportunities to find and create community or ask for assistance in an urban environment like New York City or Chicago, but Rosa’s breakdown is in part due to how alone she is, not just how alone she feels. In Tina De Rosa’s *Paper Fish*, Edvige Giunta argues, the immigrant character of Sarah suffers a “cultural dislocation” that is both “disorienting” and unsettling (2002, p. 56). Although their circumstances are different—Sarah is a Lithuanian immigrant who marries an Italian immigrant—both Rosa and Sarah lack the means to change their circumstances. While Sarah lives in Chicago where the promise of community is larger, both she and Rosa are estranged from their primary communities. Additionally, Rosa has no confidants or friends within the town. She notices the “very pale” women in “faded” clothes who “turn their heads [away from her] and whisper” when Rosa passes them in her red skirt

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<sup>9</sup> According to Tirabassi, “[I]n the first decades of the Great Migration was an influx of agents and subagents who traveled throughout [Italy] recruiting young men on behalf of the shipping companies. In 1901, when a law was passed to prohibit it, there were more than 10,000 agents. From that point on the most likely source of information directing migrants toward the Americas came from the persons who wrote or returned with their stories” (2018, p. 123).

<sup>10</sup> Coal camp is the place where the coalmine and the workers’ homes occupy the same space. Towns often sprung up around coal camps to further support the coalmines. In *Storming Heaven*, the town of Davidson sprung up around the multiple coal mines that Davidson has started. The Angelellis live at the Number 6 coal camp, about a mile from Davidson’s center.

(Giardina, 1988, p. 50). This description suggests that the women could be jealous of her youth and beauty or that they are not welcoming to immigrants who do not speak English. It could also be that the women suspect something untoward since she has obtained a job as Davidson's maid; perhaps they even know what happened to his last maid. No matter what they are whispering, Rosa does not understand. She internalizes the difference as something that is wrong with the color of her skirt. She wears bright colors while their clothes are lifeless and dull. She could not know that her red skirt may signal to them that she is sexually promiscuous or, more simply, marks her as an outsider to the area.

The Appalachian women are not the only ones who talk about Rosa. School age boys yell out "dago" as she walks past them (Giardina, 1988, p. 50). In the nineteenth century, the "disparaging term" dago was used interchangeably for "Italians as well as Hispanics" and classified [an individual] as being 'in between' the Caucasian and African races" (Luconi, 2010, p. 34). An 1890 Congressional Committee on immigration heard from "the foreman of a construction company [who] stated, . . . that an Italian was not a 'white man' but rather a 'dago'" (Luconi, 2010, p. 34). Immigrants are often categorized as "in-between peoples" and their statuses become ambivalent, not due to a lack of papers or citizenship, but because of racist and ethnic stereotypes that become normalized in public discourse (Roediger, 2005, p. 12; Higham, 1983; Orsi, 1992; Vellon, 2014; and Vellon, 2018). Southern Italians who immigrated to the US were seen as "racially 'other'" due not only to their darkened complexions, but also to what was viewed as their "primitive" cultural practices (Guglielmo, 2009, p. 9). Southern Italians may be of European ancestry, but in *Storming Heaven*, those of English, Irish, and Scottish descent do not see a kinship and reject any comparisons.

While it is not surprising that Rosa faces this type of racialized discrimination, her response is curious. She chooses to tell Mario, who threatens to "kill" the boys (Giardina, 1988, p. 50). During work in the coalmines, Mario has assuredly heard the word used against him and his fellow Sicilian immigrants. His response to Rosa's story is more about his honor and respect than Rosa's, but if he chose to find the boys and physically hurt them, it would leave Rosa more alone than she already is. Rosa must recognize that she is not safe anywhere in the town even if she has no real understanding of why. Her disorienting feeling of displacement emanates from her lack of positive connections. She cannot reach out to anyone for context and never comes to understand why the boys insult her and the women whisper behind her back. Those who do engage with her—her husband, her father, and the mine owner—only do so for what she provides, not for who she is.

Mario and Rosa are not brought together by this discrimination. Rather, the emotional chasm between the married couple leaves Rosa vulnerable to physical and verbal abuse. Any attempt by Rosa to form a bond with her husband is met with disdain and anger. Mario could create a real partnership with his wife since his body too is seen as a commodity. Rosa's husband is the star of Davidson's American Coal Company amateur baseball team. Mario's baseball skills eventually allow him a path out of the coalmine, but he is still beholden to Davidson for his and his family's survival. He may be lonely and frustrated, but he punishes Rosa for Davidson's chokehold on Mario as well as the coalmining industry's unfair labor practices. Rosa and Mario's relationship is based upon her ability to maintain the home he desires, but she can never meet his goals. He berates her every chance he gets. He keeps all pleasure and comfort from his wife, including the means to properly heat the house when he is not at home (Giardina, 1988, p. 50).

This lack of simple necessities forces Rosa to live in a kind of survival mode. One cold day she sneaks a sip of Mario's homemade wine to keep the chill from her bones. Mario is enraged when he discovers what she has done with his property. He views Rosa as something he owns and punishes her accordingly. He "hit[s]" her and calls her an "*ubbriaca* [drunk]" (Giardina, 1988, p. 50). The irony here is that Mario comes home most nights and drinks himself to sleep, but he holds such control over her that he marks his bottle so no one else can drink the wine without his permission. While she has no power in her home or the town of Davidson, she does possess power narratively. Even though Mario calls her a drunk, the narrative does not support this perspective. She understands the difference between "Tally wine," which is sweet, and Spanish wine, which is "sour like an olive," but Mario controls how and when she drinks this homemade wine (Giardina, 1988, p. 50). When Rosa takes some without Mario's approval, she does so as a last resort. She is cold and thinks the wine will help her cope with the bitter winter weather that she has not acclimated to since leaving Sicily. Mario rages due to his lack of control in this situation; he feels mistreated and disrespected. He also carries fear that the townspeople will believe his wife is a drunk. This view centers Mario and his reputation and gives little thought to Rosa's needs.

Even with the singularity of her perspective, Rosa does not argue or defend herself—her thoughts about what has happened remain flat and unconnected. The only clue given that she knows Mario behaves inappropriately is her shift in focus. Her perspective moves from Mario's physical and verbal abuse of her to his "whip[ping]" of their sons (Giardina, 1988, p. 50). By contextualizing Mario's behavior in this manner, Rosa reveals how her husband views both her and their sons as his property. Bereft of any sense of self, she has no way to defend herself or her sons from Mario's violent disposition.

What further complicates this construction is the house in which the Angelellis live does not belong to them; it belongs to Davidson. Mario leases a company house in the Number 6 coal camp within the town of Davidson; when Mario is no longer useful, the entire family could be forced to vacate the premises. Mario uses Rosa's presence to elevate his own position beyond that of being beholden to the mine company for everything he has, including his income and house. He views any action she takes or anyone's reaction to her as an attack on his manhood and respectability. Mario cannot fathom a partnership with his wife when he too struggles as an immigrant. He wants autonomy in a new space, but the all-encompassing control of the coalmine denies him that respect. Rosa and their children suffer for her husband's inability to see past his own needs and fears.

Mario moves within the public sphere, but Rosa has no warmth in her life literally and figuratively. The only coping mechanism she possesses is a retreat into the past. Her memories are mostly a nostalgia that embraces her mother's comfort. When Mario insults her or becomes physically abusive, and when the mine owner Davidson takes advantage of her good nature, she retreats into recollections of her abbreviated childhood. Barely more than a teenager after birthing three sons, Rosa recalls sitting on her mother's lap while the older woman "[fed her] oranges" (Giardina, 1988, p. 49). This reminiscence is one of the few that give Rosa pleasure, but memories cannot be asked for advice or provide physical support. In losing herself to the past, Rosa's singularity stands in stark relief to the rest of the Davidson community who intermingle and rely on each other for everything from basic needs to strike organizing. Rosa's life contrasts the closeness around her. She spends years talking to a woman she saw for the last time when she was barely a teenager

placed on a ship bound for the US. This woman saw Rosa more as a “sister” than a daughter (Giardina, 1988, p. 50). Rosa remembers her mother as kind and nurturing, forgetting that her mother had no power to stop her husband from sending Rosa to West Virginia. Her mother is the only one that sees Rosa off at the dock when the girl leaves for the US, ostensibly to make sure she gets on the ship. Rosa fantasizes about seeing her mother again and leaving Mario while her “hair is still black” (Giardina, 1988, p. 50). Even though Rosa becomes a mother and wife, she still desires the love a mother has for a small child—although even that relationship is problematic since her mother was more likely no more than a teenager when she gave birth to her eldest child Rosa.

Rosa’s fixation on her mother springs from, in part, the lack of connection she has with the other women in the town of Davidson. There may not be other Sicilian women immigrants in the coal camp; the Sicilian men who immigrated may have had their families remain in Sicily or they may not be married.<sup>11</sup> As a married woman, she would be forbidden to speak to the Sicilian coalminers or any male at all. Any interaction with a man or boy who is not her husband would be seen as an offense punishable however Mario saw fit. Her position as Mario’s wife limits with whom Rosa interacts. This situation is further exacerbated by the few people—man or woman—who may understand her language since she speaks dialect and has limited English.<sup>12</sup> Rosa’s lack of female companionship means she has few interactions, save for the mine owner, where she might learn standard Italian or English.

This lack of community causes Rosa to rely on the memories of her mother. Rosa turns to thoughts of her mother and Palermo whenever a new wound is inflicted, and, in this way, she maintains the connection “to the people and places [she] supposedly left behind” even if it is only in her mind (Gabaccia, 2012, p. 2). Rosa remembers her mother to keep “an all-consuming displacement” from completely overwhelming her (Giunta, 2002, p. 44). For Rosa, the nature of her location, her standing as a new wife in an unhappy marriage, and her lack of English language skills lead to the unstable and difficult position in which she finds herself. She is not embraced by a network of immigrants, nor does she become a member or even a leader of an immigrant women’s circle. Rosa is alone and abused. The suffocating spaces Rosa must move between do not become nurturing or renewing, but new sites of trauma. Her husband and the mine owner take advantage of Rosa due, in no small part, to a lack of community support.

Normally, a story like Rosa’s would supplement a dominant narrative about someone like Mario, her husband. Her strife and struggle would be subsumed by a positive immigrant story of struggle, success, and assimilation. Rather than minimize a Southern Italian immigrant woman, Giardina centers Rosa’s story within a larger narrative focused on an important historical era. Her unsuccessful immigration narrative is sewn to a larger framework focused on Appalachian workers’ rights and the largest labor uprising in the US during the twentieth century. *Storming Heaven*’s embroidered narrative illustrates how capitalistic greed affects everyone in the town no

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<sup>11</sup> According to Maddalena Tirabassi, “Emigrants were mostly young men who migrated in groups from the same town... Migrants intended to return after having earned a decent amount of money. ... Women and children followed the man only if he decided to remain” (2018, p. 124). In this way, Rosa is an anomaly since she is married to Mario and immediately sent to the US.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Carnevale suggests, “Immigrants were not only exposed to English for the first time, but to other immigrant languages as well, including in the Italian case, different regional dialects and standard Italian” (2009, p. 11).

matter their status or proximity to the coalmines. Everyone suffers, but Rosa's plight gives voice to the least among the workers and their families. The outcome of protests and strikes for fair wages and working conditions will never be for Rosa a success or failure.

### Labor and Immigration

As Jill Fennell argues, *Storming Heaven* "is an excellent case study for looking at how labor is represented aesthetically in fiction for social justice purposes" (2021, p. 35).<sup>13</sup> Fennell notes that Rosa's subject position makes her vulnerable to the mine owner "as a sex worker," but this label is misleading (2021, p. 42).<sup>14</sup> Rosa's work history is complicated by her multiple positions as immigrant, married woman, and mother. There is no indication in the text that she is ever employed or used as a sex worker, but there is cause to believe she has been sexually assaulted. Beholden to both the mine owner and her husband, Rosa is limited in how she might defend herself. Both Davidson and Mario objectify her, but as a representation of capitalism Davidson pigeonholes Rosa as "my best maid," even better than the one he employs "in Philadelphia," where his wife lives because she refuses to live somewhere so "dirty" (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). This kind of linguistic violence sets up Rosa as a servant who is expected to be "dirty" in all the ways that the mine owner might want to use her, but it still does not make her a sex worker (Giardina, 1988, p. 68).

Like her husband Mario, Davidson is not only linguistically, but also physically violent. Rosa recalls how the mine owner "stretch[ed] out his hand and touch[ed] the cutwork" of her hand-stitched white chemise when she cleans his home (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). He states "[s]o pretty" as he touches the bodice of the blouse, but what he finds aesthetically pleasing remains obscured by Rosa's point-of-view (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). If he admires "the cutwork"—the one thing that belongs to her—there could be a passive demand for her to create something especially for him. The "[s]o pretty" could refer to the whiteness of the chemise itself. His declaration and promiscuous physicality could also be symbolic of Rosa's naiveté and his desire to "dirty" her with his body through forced sex (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). Rosa occludes the truth of the situation in which she finds herself. Her awareness of his impropriety is shown only in her deflection. She ignores his touch while acknowledging the chemise's embroidery as her own.

Rosa names the work "*punto tagliato*," which is a particular kind of Italian embroidery also known as cutwork (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). The fabric is purposefully cut and then filled or connected with other pieces of cloth. The intricate nature of this needlework requires precision and patience to complete the complex patterns that are at odds with each other. The work is labor intensive. While many Italian immigrant women used their needlework as seamstresses in factories or through piecework in tenement workshops, Rosa does not have an opportunity to take this work beyond the personal or the mine owner's need. Rosa uses her explanation of her work to deflect the mine owner's carnality. Her response prompts him to ask Rosa to "stitch [his] pillowcases," but Rosa

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<sup>13</sup> Published in 1987, *Storming Heaven* seems like a direct response to President Ronald Reagan's firing of 11,345 striking air traffic controllers on August 5, 1981, and A. T. Massey Coal Co. President E. Morgan Massey's refusal to sign the United Mine Workers agreement with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association on October 1, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Fennell offers no other context to support this claim; it is the only time Fennell mentions Rosa. William Jolliff acknowledges Rosa is "taken advantage of sexually by her (and her husband's) employer, Lytton Davidson" and that when he moves her into his house after her sons are killed, "he continues to use her sexually, then, even in her destitution and mental illness" (2020, p. 68).



has no choice (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). She is his maid, and her husband works in Davidson's coalmine. The couple lives in a company house leased to Mario. She will do what he wants. She has pride in her work, but once she leaves Sicily, she no longer has control for whom she creates these intricate works, nor can she generate a profit from her expertise.

Mary Jo Bona suggests that fictional characters such as Annunziata in Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1939) and Octavia in Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1964) sew in order for their families to "survive" (2014, p. 150). Rosa's position is different; Mario's work provides necessities for the family, including a home in which to live. If Rosa receives financial remuneration for her work, it is never stated how much or what these funds might provide for the family or for her. She never has access to money, including sums she might receive for the work she does for Davidson. Perhaps the Angelelli family leases the company house at a discount, receives extra scrip for the company store, or her earnings are simply turned over to Mario. No matter the circumstance, she receives no monetary recompense for the labor she does for Davidson or Mario. This lack of income places her in danger whenever she thinks for herself or attempts to enact a cultural ritual. When she wants to pay respects to the dead or the Virgin Mary by lighting a candle at the church, she is reduced to "steal[ing] a penny from Mario" (Giardina, 1988, p. 168). Her husband is viewed as the head of the household and the provider. Subsequently, when her boys are old enough, they are forced to work in the mines and for Davidson's baseball team. The male members of her family are the ones who are seen to have value. Their labor may be dangerous and suffocating, but their work elevates Mario Angelelli's status. Rosa's labor is expected and rendered invisible except when Davidson notices her for his own pleasure.

The embroidery skill Rosa has learned from her mother and other Sicilian women in her *paese* is not life-sustaining or financially rewarding, but destructive to Rosa's mental and physical health. While she may take pride in her sewing, this "marker of identity" places her in jeopardy (Giunta and Sciorra, 2014, p. 4). Her embroidery skill makes her an object of desire and puts her in the path of Davidson's "dirty" touch (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). The type of needlework in which Rosa works—*punto tagliato*—mirrors the fracturing of her mind as she recalls dangerous interludes including when Davidson touches her chemise. Her thought process and memories are shared through incomplete sentences and confusing time jumps.

As Edvige Giunta suggests, writing an Italian immigrant character within a US context means bridging gaps in memory and language. The issue is one not of translation, but of authority. For many Italian American women writers "'the master's language' has already become the 'native/mother tongue'" (Giunta, 2002, 47). In Giardina's case, the author chooses to obfuscate Rosa's dialect through the use of a halting and abbreviated English. The Italian that appears in *Storming Heaven* is mainly standard Italian, but "the cultural substratum of the ancestor's language" is being intimated, which is why Rosa barely speaks (Giunta, 2002, 47). Rosa's narrative comprises four short chapters in a 25-chapter novel and her discourse is a mixture of English, standard Italian, and silence. Rosa reveals the English used on the page is not the language she normally speaks or thinks when she says: "Baby. I say in inglese. You are my baby" (Giardina, 1988, p. 196). These sentences suggest that although her chapters are written mostly in English with some standard Italian sprinkled throughout, Rosa's memories and her conversation with others takes place in a Sicilian dialect that no one can understand except her husband. Since her

language is not represented on the page, Rosa is shown coping with any negative emotions or situations by moving quickly from one memory to another in languages that are not her own.

When Davidson reaches out to Rosa and tells her that she is his “best maid,” the young wife’s mind splits between past and present (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). Rosa recalls how “Senore Davidson” “comes to visit me here” followed by the one-word sentence “Once” (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). These two phrases—fragmented and incomplete—suggest she is not comfortable with Davidson and understands that she is in danger from his touch. The word “visit” in the first sentence is ironic (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). She is in Davidson’s house, but this word suggests that he makes time to seek her out while she is cleaning his home. Rather than completing her tasks without interruption, her labor becomes an observable and interactive public act. Davidson’s choice makes Rosa someone who is watched and an observer of the one who is watching her. Rosa recalls her conversations with Davidson from the point-of-view of someone who lacks any positive attention directed her way. There may have been a time when Rosa looked forward to Davidson’s interruptions, especially since he may seem genuinely interested in her and her work. He is also a central figure in the success or failure of the community and her family; she may feel pride that he takes time to “visit” her while she works in his house (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). The word also suggests that Davidson is ingratiating himself to Rosa even though she is his maid, another one of his many workers in the town named after him, which makes his actions suspect.

In a later remembrance, Rosa recalls how Davidson pontificates about the Latin names of the butterflies while she dusts the glass cases where his beloved collection is pinned. He patronizes her by suggesting that she should know the Latin names since Italian is a Latin derivative. Rosa shrugs ignorance, but she remembers one name he shares with her—the *Argynus* Diana—and promises herself that if she has a daughter, she will name her Diana (Giardina, 1988, p. 67).<sup>15</sup> Nancy Carnevale argues that “many immigrants experience their new worlds in translation” (Giardina, 1988, p. 80), and Rosa is no exception. Rosa’s silence and fractured sentences hint at both her inability to understand the danger she is in until it too late and why Rosa has a mental breakdown. In this scene, Davidson reveals his own ignorance about how little English Rosa speaks or understands. Rosa would not speak standard Italian. Her language would be rooted in a dialect and what little standard Italian she picked up along the way. She does not understand English well enough to explain these nuances, and she may be embarrassed or not understand or know how to discuss her *paese* and its relation to the nation of Italy. The conversation between them remains amiable if one-sided with Davidson doing most of the talking and Rosa nodding her head or imitating some of his words. Compared to how her husband and the young boys on the street yell at her and the women whisper behind her back, the mine owner seems interested in what Rosa thinks and knows. She may feel relief to be around Davidson, but he misinterprets the comfortability she exhibits in his presence.

The one-word sentence “Once” that follows the phrase “comes to visit me here” marks Rosa’s shift in understanding (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). When he touches the bodice of her blouse, his familiar stance suggests a former intimacy. Whether this contact is welcome or takes her by surprise, she knows that it places her in danger. Any interaction with a man who is not her husband would enrage Mario. Rosa’s utterance of “Once” reveals her worry that Davidson has become too informal with her (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). The word also indicates that she cannot refuse whatever

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<sup>15</sup> Rosa has four sons and never has another child.

he demands. Trapped by her need for community and conversation, the unsafe situation in which she now finds herself forces her to remain silent.

While Mario knows that his wife cleans Davidson's house, he would see any physical exchange, up to and including sexual assault as a transgression and embarrassment to himself. Her utterance of "Once" is the only indication that something occurred for which she was not prepared (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). It also reveals the precarious situation in which Rosa finds herself; she would be blamed for anything that might happen from a simple greeting to rape (Giardina, 1988, p. 68).<sup>16</sup> Davidson's crime becomes both Rosa's punishment and a secret she must keep if she wants to avoid further trauma at her husband's hands. She has no one with whom to share or to process what has happened or happens to her when she is cleaning Davidson's house. Other women in the town keep her at a distance. Their whispers suggest they are suspicious of her or her position. They may see Rosa as a threat to their own well-being and safety.

In some West Virginia coalmining towns, "the company store superintendent" issued Esau scrip so families could buy necessities on credit when husbands or sons were injured or unavailable for work in the mines (Kline, 2011, p. 80). Esau scrip, named after the brother in the bible who "sign[ed] away his birthright" for a meal, was a promissory note good for only 30 days (Kline, 2011, p. 81). What most women and certainly the men of the family did not know was that the wives and daughters were collateral on this debt. If the men were unable to go back to work within the time allotted, the debt had to be paid back by these women "submitting to the sexual depredations of the company men" (Kline, 2011, p. 82). Nowhere was this "bureaucratized rape" more apparent than at the Whipple Company Store in Fayette County (Kline, 2011, p. 81). Women renamed a room provided for trying on shoes as "the rape room" (Kline, 2011, p. 79). They would be brought to the third floor under the guise of seeing new shoes that had just arrived at the store, but once they were inside "the rape room" they were locked in until the Esau scrip was paid off in whatever way "the company men" found acceptable (Kline, 2011, p. 79). The women kept quiet about what happened to them since they did not want their husbands to retaliate and lose their jobs or their lives (Kline, 2011, p. 80). The women also did not think there could be any justice even if they spoke up.<sup>17</sup>

Their lack of agency is reflected in the position that Rosa occupies, not due to a literal representation of Esau scrip, but through Davidson's enactment of *seignoral* rights. Davidson founded the town and named it after himself. He serves as the de facto lord of the manor. He thinks he can do and does do what he wants with anyone or anything, including Rosa. Raping Rosa would not be viewed as uncommon when Mario is alive. Under this circumstance, like the women who were forced to pay back their husband's Esau scrip, Rosa would have chosen to hide from Mario a sexual assault by Davidson. Her use of the word "Once" is one indication that Davidson has done something to her beyond talking at her (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). The second is the way she shifts context quickly. After she utters the word "Once," she reminds herself that Davidson lives in

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<sup>16</sup> In *Unto the Daughters: The Legacy of Honor Killing in a Sicilian-American Family*, Karen Tintori (2007) uncovers how in 1919 two of her great-uncles killed their sister Frances at the age of 16 after she defied their wishes to marry a Mafia boss 20 years her senior. Instead, she eloped with a local barber. The brothers cut off her hands and put her feet in cement before dumping her in the Detroit River at Belle Isle for marrying a man she loved.

<sup>17</sup> There is evidence to suggest that this practice continued well into the early 1930s and it is only in the late twentieth and now twenty-first century that these stories are finally being told (Kline, 2011, p. 76).

Philadelphia “sometimes” (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). This second word suggests that she feels safer when he is gone and is a reminder that Rosa’s safety is tied to absence, not presence. As much as she craves connection, she knows there is danger in any contact with the men in her life.

Later in the narrative, when Davidson tells Rosa that her sons have died in a mine explosion, Rosa’s compromised position is exposed to the community. The mine owner gives no thought to her needs, her lack of English language skills, and her position in the town. His first thought is for his comfort and profit. Rosa recalls how Davidson “cries. He presses his face against [her] belly. The baseball, he says. My pitcher, my first base. Carmello will be in the American League” (Giardina, 1988, p. 169). Davidson reveals his familiarity with Rosa’s body by acting like a grieving parent or spouse, only he mourns his profit margin. He will not take responsibility for the explosion even though the lack of safe working conditions is his responsibility. His worry focuses on how he will replace a good ballplayer rather than the men and boys who have died in the mine explosion—an explosion due to his willful negligence.

He expects Rosa to offer him comfort. Davidson sees her as a nurturer, a caretaker, and an object of desire. He does not notice that “everyone is crying” or that “the women lean together, they sway, they do not close their mouths” (Giardina, 1988, p. 169). He does not even care that his public physical embrace has placed Rosa in a dangerous position. Rosa looks over his grasping body and infers from the images of her neighbors that what has occurred is catastrophic. Separated from her community and the other women in the town, Rosa has nowhere to turn and no one to help her. She surmises that her sons are dead from the postures of the grieving women and not from Davidson clawing at her body in front of the entire town.

When Mario sees Rosa and Davidson together, he yells at Rosa to “go home” (Giardina, 1988, p. 169). Both parents are grieving, but Rosa chooses to turn her rage at their sons’ deaths onto Mario rather than Davidson. She cannot see that Mario is mourning as well, especially when his default emotion is rage. She responds to his demand with one of her own, a shocking occurrence in the Angelelli household, most especially because it occurs in public. She yells: “Leave me .... Always you whip them. But when they are hurt, they cry for mama. They love mama” (Giardina, 1988, p. 169). Her inability to fathom his grief stems from his previous violent behavior and her response to it. While Mario berated and beat her and their sons, Rosa was not only a victim, but an enabler. Her response to Mario may be tangled to feelings of shame and guilt. When their son Francesco was 9 years old, he refused to work in the mines. Rosa watched as Mario tied the boy to a fence post and “pour[ed] the slops down his back, [and] set... the pigs on him” (Giardina, 1988, p. 51). Only after Mario left the house did Rosa ask the local doctor for help. When the physician questioned her, Rosa covered up Mario’s abuse by saying that Francesco’s back had been ripped apart after “[h]e slip and fall down the slate pile” (Giardina, 1988, p. 51). Rosa did not defend Francesco nor ask the doctor for assistance. Rosa might feel guilty that she was unable to keep Francesco and his brothers from working in the coalmine. This construction means that Rosa is telling herself a fiction that the boys loved her or went to her when they felt unsafe. There has been no safety, ever, in the Angelelli household for anyone, including Mario. Rosa lashes out at Mario who, she believes, has placed them in this situation, but she might also feel that she is at least partially responsible for their deaths by not being able to defend them and keep them out of the coalmines.

Rosa may also feel shame or fear that Mario has seen Davidson holding onto her in a stance that would be reserved for her husband in private, not in public. Rosa's emotional state compromises her ability to understand the precarity in which she and Mario stand. She takes her grief, shame, and guilt and places it on Mario, who would normally be the safest person on which to explode although even that is not certain. She cannot afford to be angry at the mine owner or anyone else in the town from which she has been ostracized, but she has acted out in public, not in private, placing both Mario and her in the spotlight. Mario understands that Davidson is responsible for the sons' deaths, but he may also be shocked to see Davidson holding onto Rosa, and even more surprised to see Rosa yell at him in public. Rosa only sees an abusive husband who still wants to tell her what to do even in the face of losing all four of her sons.

Whether Mario leaves town of his own will or is murdered by Davidson's henchmen is not clear. There is an intimation shared by another miner with Rondal that Rosa's "old man run off after the Number Six explosion," but there is no proof to this supposition (Giardina, 1988, p. 199). It is just as likely that Davidson had Mario killed. It would be simple to have one more dead miner, especially one that is angry and may cause problems due to his attractive wife. Davidson has used murder before to keep total control of the coalmine. He has had strike organizers killed to keep these workers from forming a union.<sup>18</sup> Having Mario assassinated would not be out of the question.

The last image of Mario comes from Rosa's point-of-view. The couple are in their company house after Mario sees Davidson in Rosa's arms at the mine. Mario is drunk. The wine bottles are "glowing like candles" and he asks, "Where is God?" (Giardina, 1988, p. 170). He stands before a glass "reliquary" that Rosa's mother sent from Palermo (Giardina, 1988, p. 69). When it had arrived, at great expense, Rosa told Mario, "Now God is in the House" (Giardina, 1988, p. 69). The reliquary contains the sacred objects of holy water, candles, and a small pieta—the image of the mother Mary holding her crucified son Jesus. Encased in purple glass, Rosa views these items, blessed by a priest, as holding the residue of Mary and Jesus. After Rosa sets up the reliquary in a makeshift altar, she lights candles, takes up her rosary, and prays before the sacred totem (Giardina, 1988, p. 69). Rosa's prayer contains a private plea to be healed from suffering, but she is not alone while she prayed. Her husband Mario sits in the corner like a ghost, "strok[ing]" a baseball (Giardina, 1988, p. 69). In this early scene, these two immigrants pray to their gods: Rosa focuses on the spiritual and Mario on the secular. The two are separated by not only how different their dreams are, but also their respective positions within the town.

In the married couple's last scene together, they are once again alone in their home, but Mario's question returns them full circle to their differences. He asks, "Where is God?" before smashing the reliquary (Giardina, 1988, p. 170). Mario's question is his drunken way of acknowledging how little authority he has in his own home and how far away he is from his secular American Dream. Mario is drunk for several reasons. His sons are dead. His friends in the mine have died as well.

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<sup>18</sup> Early on in *Storming Heaven*, Rondal recounts how two "gun thugs" in Davidson's employ threw the strike organizer Johnson, a black man, into a Winco furnace (Giardina, 1988, p. 82). They give Rondal 24-hours to leave the state or promise him that he will meet the same end. In fact, Giardina centers two Black characters: Johnson and Doc Booker, a Black doctor who also publishes a socialist paper. Booker is the one who tells Rondal that Johnson was sent because the job of union organizing was "too dangerous" for a white man (Giardina, 1988, p. 81). While Johnson's death is a warning to Rondal of what could happen to him if he does not stop recruiting for the union, it also reveals how little Black life matters to the coalmining company, and how courageous it was for a man like Johnson to take on the work of union organizing.

He suspects that Davidson has been sexually familiar with Rosa. All three of these circumstances reveal how little agency he has in Davidson. His frustration, anger, and sadness culminate in a question that has no answer for him and distances Rosa further from him.

Rosa's choice not to comfort Mario is a response both to years of abuse, but also to the shame she may feel when Mario sees Davidson holding onto her in public. She watches her husband cry as his hand bleeds and her lack of compassion emanates from years without real intimacy in her marriage. She distances herself from Mario and what he senses because he has never asked her to see who he is. Rosa lays everything that has happened to her sons at her husband's feet and says he "is in Purgatory" because he has "cursed God" (Giardina, 1988, p. 170). She cannot fathom that Mario grieves; he cannot reach out to the one person who knows what he is feeling. They remain separated at a time when they most need one another. This separation has a high price. Rosa will no longer have the protection of being Mario's wife. Mario's public anger has left him vulnerable in a way that places his life in jeopardy.

After this scene, Mario vanishes from the narrative. His disappearance barely registers with the citizens of Davidson. While Mario may have taken off on his own, if he was dragged away by Davidson's thugs, there is a chance Rosa saw his removal from their rental. She may blame herself for this disappearance, and that, in addition to her sons' deaths and anything Davidson does to her, may be what causes Rosa's complete breakdown. She would feel guilty for many things, including for allowing Davidson to touch her in public, for Davidson raping her, for not defending her sons from Mario, for not stopping Mario from beating her sons, for not fighting for her sons when they expressed no interest in working in the coalmines, and for not protecting Mario when he saw Davidson holding Rosa after the mine explosion.

With Mario gone, no one questions the mine owner moving Rosa into his house as his full-time maid. Like the butterflies Davidson collects, Rosa is pinned by Davidson's desire to own and control everything within his grasp. Akin to the Latin names of the butterflies he has gathered from around the world, Rosa could be called his exotic *Sicilis*. Once she had been forced to do Mario's bidding; now she must answer to Davidson. Her time in "the big house" becomes a fractured remembrance of her mother, domestic chores, and the violence Davidson perpetrates on her person (Giardina, 1988, p. 169).

Rosa obliquely reveals that Davidson has sexually assaulted her. She holds onto roses that her son Francesco had planted for her in the yard of the company house Mario leases. She remembers three things about holding these roses. The first is that the roses' thorns scratch at Davidson's arms. The second is that she has tasted Davidson's blood because she states it is "like salt" (Giardina, 1988, p. 170). And the third is that "his hands are warm like the hands of the priest when he signs the cross upon my forehead" (Giardina, 1988, p. 170). These incomplete remembrances are glimpses of Rosa's attempt to fight back against a man who takes his comfort however he chooses. In tasting the blood on Davidson's arm, she may have bit him or she may have purposefully used the roses to thwart his assault. His blood is not like the blood of Christ that she would receive at Holy Communion in Church, but instead the blood of the devil who is only satisfied by extracting the life of every person he encounters. When Davidson's warm hands squeeze her body, Rosa understands that she is just another pinned butterfly in his vast collection. Rosa has lost

everything—her sons, her husband, her family in Sicily. Like Mario, she too may be wondering where God has gone when the devil stands before her with demands for pleasure and comfort.

For Davidson's part, he tells Rosa that she "forgive[s] so easy" (Giardina, 1988, p. 170). He chooses to believe that Rosa has succumbed to his charms, but she has no choice. Rosa's mind is sacrificed to his needs and egos. She knows what is happening to her is wrong, but she has no clear language to express the overwhelming totality of his invasiveness on her person. Once Mario is gone, Davidson sees possession of her as his right. He has lost the opportunity to make a profit off her husband's and sons' labor, but he still has his "best maid" (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). There is no one to protest this move, not even the mine owner's wife since she has made it clear she has no desire to visit or live in West Virginia. Davidson imprisons Rosa in his "dirty" house to clean his clothes, dust his furniture and collections, and sexually assault her (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). Davidson possesses her by the fact that no one else can or will look out for her. She becomes one more piece in his vast collections of coalmines, houses, and butterflies. Her body—because no one is interested in her mind—belongs to him like it belonged to her father and her husband. She has no choice in how her body is used to labor. Davidson fulfills his own desires with no thought for Rosa's needs. He does not care for or about her, only for what he wants. Davidson's greed and solipsism means Rosa continues paying *seignoral* rights for a husband who disappears after the death of their children due to unsafe working conditions at Davidson's mine.

Rosa's only companions after being moved into Davidson's house are her memories and "[t]he butterflies," who, she notes, "watch" what happens to her (Giardina, 1988, p. 169). She notices them "turn[ing] their heads this way and that" (Giardina, 1988, p. 169). While what the butterflies "watch" is never articulated clearly, her mental state suggests that she has suffered numerous traumas, including on-going sexual assault, within the walls of Davidson's house (Giardina, 1988, p. 169). In grieving the loss of her sons and the disappearance of her husband, she never fully comprehends what has happened to her now that she has no familial or community ties to the area. Her work as Davidson's maid becomes a job that includes unwelcome sexual assault and hiding the evil Davidson does, including, perhaps, murdering her husband.

### **Burning Down the House**

Rosa is freed from Davidson's capture, but not due to her own choices or agency. Rondal leads a group of mineworkers in setting Davidson's house on fire to protest the mine owner's unfair labor practices. Davidson discovers their plans, and he retreats to Philadelphia before the fire occurs. Rosa is left alone to fend for herself. The men do not realize that Rosa remains in the house and as the flames lick at the walls, Rosa hallucinates. Instead of running from the house, she follows her mother's voice to the room where Davidson keeps his collections, and she sets the butterflies free. In a parallel construction to Mario's breaking of the reliquary, Rosa "break[s] the glass" in which the butterflies are housed (Giardina, 1988, p. 196). What is different for Rosa is that she believes she is setting the butterflies free, perhaps in a wish that she too could be free. When she believes she is hearing the butterflies "scream" because they "are so frightened," she soothes them by "whisper[ing]" to them (Giardina, 1988, p. 196). Rosa would have died in the fire if Rondal's prescient sense had not sent him into the house fearing someone might still be there. When Rosa sees Rondal, her mental state has so deteriorated that she believes he is her dead son Francesco come to save her and the butterflies, and she entreats him to "help [the butterflies] to fly" (Giardina,

1988, p. 196). Rondal's guilt drives him as he carries her out of the house and eventually takes her to Carrie to sort out what will happen to the Italian immigrant now that she is alone without a home.

Rosa is no more than collateral damage in the fight for control of the town and the mine. None of the men Rosa encounters—father, husband, mine owner, striker—see Rosa as a person; she is only known in relation to others she must serve or to those men who are slightly afraid of what she represents. The fire is the final injustice to Rosa, but the reason for the fire has no connection to Rosa. Her husband Mario found her wanting as a wife and mother. The mine owner only saw her as his “best maid”—of whom he could take advantage (Giardina, 1988, p. 68). And Rondal believes she is “kind of loony” (Giardina, 1988, p. 199). The men are not the only ones who cannot read Rosa's pain, even Carrie, who idealizes Rosa as “an angel,” cannot fathom the depth of Rosa's distress or the abuse she has suffered (Giardina, 1988, p. 200). The fire burns away Rosa so completely that all that is left is a blank slate upon which others write their feelings and beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

No man who witnessed or participated in the labor strikes is allowed to speak directly of Rosa.<sup>20</sup> Her narrative makes clear that the men in her life view Rosa as an object, but they are not given narrative power to claim her fully by denying them any direct point-of-view to discuss her. Even Rondal is not given the privilege of telling the story of finding Rosa in his narrative strand. Carrie is given the authority to recount Rondal's story of Rosa. Carrie recalls that Rondal said that he “can't take care of no crazy woman,” but he felt responsible for making Rosa homeless (Giardina, 1988, p. 199). To mitigate his guilt, Rondal allows Rosa to believe he is her son Francesco because he “didn't have the heart” to tell her otherwise (Giardina, 1988, p. 199). His compassion is rendered partly due to his own guilt in creating the circumstance in which she now must live; he never recognizes that he saved her from an untenable situation.

When Carrie reaches out to Francesco's widow, she tells Carrie that Davidson “had assured [me] all was well” (Giardina, 1988, p. 200). In this statement, Rosa's need is obfuscated. The daughter-in-law never attempted to speak with Rosa and Rosa never asked for the daughter-in-law's help. It could be that Francesco told his wife about the abuse he received from his father and that his mother never helped him, or it could be that the widow is overwhelmed with the responsibility of taking care of a newborn after her husband dies. She may be no older than Rosa was when Rosa

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<sup>19</sup> Conway suggests, “Rosa stands witness to the sad loss of many women to insanity, especially in the nineteenth century. They refuse to believe that the world they live in is sane and turn their pain upon themselves more than upon others” (1999, p. 153). This analysis ignores how Rosa's immigrant status affects her position in the town of Davidson and how people respond to her mental breakdown. And, like Carrie, Conway idealizes Rosa's breakdown by suggesting that Rosa's “freeing” of Davidson's butterflies “give[s] her life meaning and offer[s] us inspiration” (1999, p. 153).

<sup>20</sup> In the afterword dated 1987, written by the son of Carrie Bishop and Rondal Lloyd, Dillon Freeman discusses what happens after the Battle of Blair Mountain, including a short piece about Rosa. Rosa remains in the state hospital and during one visit with Rachel Honaker, Rosa's granddaughter-in-law, Dillon sits with Rosa and writes her story, “as I remember she told it, her mottled brown fingers gripping my arm, her long fingernails digging into my flesh as she called me by the name of her long-dead son” (Giardina, 1988, pp. 292-293). This description does not give him the privilege to share her story, but only to show what is left of a once vibrant girl. Rosa is reduced to a mentally unstable and physically deformed person who cannot remain in the present moment. Her sewing is no longer an option, and her memories are stuck in the past. Giardina originally gave this remembrance to one of Rosa's granddaughters, but the character was cut from *Storming Heaven* (WVU Libraries Collection, A&M 3740/b3/f3—MSS: Storming Heaven/draft ms; undated).



immigrated to the town of Davidson. Francesco's widow may still be innocent since she works at her family's store, Ricco's Italian Bakery, in the nearby town of Justice, which suggests she might not understand what it means for the mine owner to move Rosa into his home in such a rural setting.

In *Storming Heaven*, Rosa's mental decompensation creates a gap. No one will know her history, her heritage. She will not pass on family traditions nor share in the growth of her family. She cannot share her experience of abuse because her mental state cannot recover without a sustained and loving community surrounding her. While Carrie is the only character allowed to discuss Rosa in a first-person point-of-view, she does so in a way that minimizes the traumas Rosa has suffered. She notes how Rosa's "face was unlined, beautiful, and peaceful" and further equates Rosa's "white shawl" with an innocence that erases all that Rosa has endured (Giardina, 1988, p. 199). Once Rondal rescues Rosa from Davidson's house, Carrie and Francesco's widow intervene in Rosa's care and arrange for her to be admitted to "the state hospital" (Giardina, 1988, p. 292). This construction suggests that women, even immigrant women, have a place that is more than ancillary in the mining communities. She must be cared for as the laborers must be looked to, but it is women's work to recognize the pain and care for someone who is so deeply traumatized. Carrie's view of Rosa as an "angel" centers Rosa as a spiritual being—one haunted by past trauma (Giardina, 1988, p. 200). But even Carrie may only think Rosa is grieving her sons' deaths and her husband's disappearance. She may not fully understand or be able to acknowledge the extent of the physical, emotional, and spiritual damage done to Rosa. Carrie may not even have access to what happens to immigrant women who wind up alone in a coal camp or it may be that she knows she can do nothing to help except find Rosa's extended family.

### **The Haunting Presence of the Southern Italian Immigrant Woman**

Rosa's presence haunts *Storming Heaven*, and in the sequel, *The Unquiet Earth*, Rosa's story metamorphoses into a Demeter-like myth where Rosa wanders in the garden searching for her sons. The grandchildren of Rosa and Carrie, and the children of Francesco do not know any of the trauma that their grandmother has suffered. In this way, Rosa moves from the one who is haunted to the one who haunts West Virginian, Appalachian, and Italian American history. This haunting affects her grandson Tony Angelelli, the son of Francesco, who is described as "one of those damaged people who look perfectly on the outside, smiling and pleasant, but there is something missing inside" (Giardina, 1992, p. 34). As the progeny of Mario and Rosa, he is "the Italian bookkeeper" who is viewed with mistrust as an emissary for the American Coal Company (Giardina, 1992, p. 33). He may be financially successful, but he is still an outsider.

His grandmother's fractured voice continues to haunt Davidson and Southern West Virginia. Rosa cannot simply be dismissed as an illiterate immigrant. Her presence implicates both the US and capitalism in the dangers faced by Southern Italian immigrant women. The absence of a consistent narrative space or clear linear through-line is what centralizes both her immigrant and gender status. Rosa's past is many contemporary female immigrants' present. Giardina's *Storming Heaven* demands a reconsideration of Southern Italian immigration to the US as a contested site of trauma and loss rather than a place of sentimental success and assimilation.

In *Storming Heaven*, the mine owner Davidson has the right to name a town after himself, collect mines, butterflies, baseball players, and maids without anyone questioning his motives. He visits his wife in Philadelphia every few months, but he always returns to his most-prized possessions, including Rosa. He has a right to her because she lives in his town, in two of his houses—first the company home he leases to her husband and then his own large house, and he provides employment for the entire family. His touch defiles not only the pristine white clothes Rosa embroiders, but also her mind. Her trauma is magnified by having nowhere safe to turn in a coalmining town built and owned by the coalmining proprietor.

In sketching out Rosa's life, the name of the coal company—American Coal Company—places responsibility for what happens to Rosa squarely on national and capitalists' shoulders. The way the mine owner Davidson treats Rosa situates her personal tragedy within the paradigm of how the US treats its immigrants. The practices of the past haunt present national discussions regarding good coal jobs and immigrant rights, and Rosa's narrative suggests there is a steep price to pay for not remembering or misremembering through sentimentalization or erasure of the past.

If the US cannot take responsibility for its newest inhabitants, there is a further critique of capitalism since Rosa lives in Davidson, a town named after the coal company owner. All those who live in the coalmining town cannot escape the greed of capitalism embedded in the mythical and illusory fabric of the American Dream. There may be success and plenty, but they are reserved only for those whom the immigrants and working class serve. In making profit off the backs of labor, men like Davidson do not reflect on the landscape they have colonized, or the working conditions made untenable by their greed. For Rosa, nothing she touches in Davidson belongs to her—even her sons are viewed as the property of her husband and Davidson. The usury nature of how women's bodies are commodified through unfair immigration and labor practices are made manifest in Rosa's physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds. Without community or space, Rosa retreats inwardly with the ghostly and ghastly images of what immigration and unrewarded labor has wrought on her mind and body.

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