

Pauline Spatafora. *Dear Sister. Letters Home to Sicily from Wartime America*. New York: Reed and Quill Press, 2009. Pp. 248.

In 1938, following the death of her sister, Anna La Camera (Pauline Spatafora's mother) moved from Sicily to the United States in order to raise her nephews and nieces. Through this collection of the letters that Anna sent to her remaining sister in Sicily emerges an account of the daily realities of the lives of Italian immigrants during and immediately following the Second World War. Above all, however, the text follows the challenges faced by a woman who migrated not through choice, but obligation, and whose desire to return to the country of her birth is manifest.

The text constitutes one of the first published documents to bear witness to the life of an Italian female migrant to America in this period. As both a migrant and a woman, we can consider Anna to be doubly marginalized and, undoubtedly therefore, without Spatafora's intervention, Anna's is a voice that would otherwise have gone unheard. In fact, throughout the entire collection, there is very little authorial interference in the text, with Spatafora choosing instead to let the letters speak for themselves. Evidently, she wanted the narrative to belong to her mother, and felt — justifiably, as the letters prove — that her mother's voice was strong enough to speak unaccompanied. Indeed, when she does choose to comment, Spatafora does not even necessarily do so in the first person, but rather refers to herself by the name her family used for her as a girl, Lina Maria, thus making herself another "character" in this story.

Anna's is a life that is rooted in the private sphere and — in spite of the letters spanning the war years — she comments only occasionally upon external events and larger questions of public life or politics; and when she does so, it is most often with reference to the deprivations that her family faced. The majority of the letters focus instead, probably unsurprisingly for a woman in Anna's position, upon domestic issues. They recount the day-to-day struggles that confronted Anna, who, at just 30, was suddenly mother to a group of children — some of whom were almost the same age as she — and wife to a man she did not know. In addition, of course, Anna had found herself in a country whose language she did not speak, and whose culture she did not always understand. Many of Anna's letters focus upon the differences she perceives between America and Italy; she comments about the food, about attitudes towards religion and the church, and the effects that she believes America has upon family life. She observes, for instance, the differences in girls' and young women's behaviour in America, noting that they are often "looser" than back home, and, that "you can't say anything to [Tina, one of her nieces] because this is America, not Italy" (30). The letters likewise detail the major happenings in her family's life, and, as such, the reader learns of divorce, broken engagements, illness and even bigamy. The reader is also privy to details of Anna's married life: after only six weeks in America, she marries Luigi, her sister's husband, but their marriage seems only ever to be one of expediency and Anna is rarely

positive about their relationship. Instead, she tells her sister about the lies she must tell her husband and about the secrecy with which she must send letters, packages and money back home. In this way, Spatafora's text is a brave one that does not shy away from the disagreements and disputes that were taking place between her own parents, something which, in turn, evokes for the reader a truthful depiction of the genuine struggles of a migrant family.

Spatafora's text is thus a testimony, a work that stands out as a form of historical evidence of a turbulent period in the histories of both Italy and the United States. Evidently, Spatafora's intention was not to produce a work of criticism, or an analysis of the period and women's position within it; that said, however, texts such as this are vital for understanding the socio-cultural history of a country, through the lives and experiences of *la gente comune*. The notion that women's private diaries and letters could be of academic interest originated during second-wave feminism when historians such as Paola di Cori first called attention to their significance. In recent years, works by Patrizia Gabrielli (2007) and Dianella Gagliani (2006) have demonstrated the renewed interest that exists for women's wartime memories, and Spatafora's is a work that continues this legacy.

The collected letters of Anna La Camera additionally lay bare those sentiments which are familiar to anyone who has experienced migration; certainly, journeys of any kind can shape a person's life and a text that concerns itself with displacement such as that faced by Anna will perhaps inevitably also address questions of loss, belonging and memory. Throughout the text, Anna's sole aspiration is to return to Sicily, something which she is ultimately denied because of an illness that proves fatal. In one letter, she notes incredulously how, whilst all her Sicilian friends and relatives dream of moving to America, all she can do is long for home (79). What also causes her pain is the lack of interest in Italy that she observes in her nieces and nephews. Whereas she is determined to preserve an Italian identity, she feels that second-generation migrants are in danger of losing this part of themselves. This relationship with Italy is, however, one which Anna must have transmitted to her daughter, and was indeed the springboard for Spatafora's text: the letters were uncovered during her first visit to Italy, some thirty years after her mother's death. The result of Spatafora's find is this unique document, which, by voicing one woman's struggles to raise a family in a foreign land, speaks for innumerable other migrants whose stories will never be told.

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Marina Spunta. *Claudio Piersanti*. Fiesole: Cadmo, 2009. Pp. 166.

In this epoch of globalisation we are witnesses to a definite return to the microcosm in order to find both and, at the same time, a sense of identity constructed around the self and around one's roots, and a search for protection