

“For Having Slept Much the Dead Have Grown Strong”: Emanuel Carnevali and William Carlos Williams

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NEAR the end of Tale One of his autobiographical memoir, *A Hurried Man* (1925), Emanuel Carnevali proclaims:

I'm as light as a rubber ball. I'm a butterfly and no tragedy has shaken the light dust from my wings, no tragedy will. . . . I'm on a journey beyond you and your things, you and your colors and words. On the mountains, over this city and that, I am the bird that has no nest, I am the happy stranger, I'm sailing under the sun. (23)

At the time that he wrote these words, Carnevali was likely unaware of the debilitating illness that awaited him. Projecting for himself a grand adventure beyond the limits of language and society, he embraces his lack of communal ties and affiliation. Celebrating a self-imposed exile, he imagines himself soaring above social obligation and responsibility, rushing from place to place wherever the winds might blow him. His epic journey would take him from Italy to the United States and back again: from Florence where he was born in 1898 to Turin, Bologna and Venice, to New York City and Chicago, and finally back to Italy, Bazzano this time, where he would migrate between hospitals and sanatoriums until his death in the early 1940s. The time he spent in the United States was relatively brief—he arrived in 1914 and returned to Italy in the early 1920s after being diagnosed with encephalitis lethargica.¹ And yet, as Carl Sandburg so eloquently put it: “His writings are the record of a personality that burned with twentieth century

flames, and that was marvelously alive to the intensities and contrasts of American life" (*AEC* 19).²

Despite his comparatively short stay in the United States, Carnevali found himself at the center of early twentieth-century American poetry in the years between World Wars I and II. His poems and prose were published in *Poetry*, *Others*, and *The Little Review*, three important venues for modernist art and literature. His work appeared alongside contributions from Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. Williams described Carnevali as one of "two prominent one-book men about New York in those days who promised great things" and dedicated the final issue of *Others* to Carnevali in July of 1919 (A 266). He likely saw Carnevali as an ally in the celebration of a uniquely American literary tradition and appreciated the young writer's zealotry, and was not alone in his appreciation of Carnevali's enthusiasm and dedication to literature. In fact, Carnevali befriended a number of other members of the early twentieth-century American literati including Sherwood Anderson, Kay Boyle, Robert McAlmon, Harriet Monroe, Ezra Pound, Carl Sandburg, and Ernest Walsh. That many of these writers, including Williams, would go to great lengths to help publish his writing and support Carnevali's medical care towards the end of his life underlines his importance in the American poetic scene in the early 1920s.

More recently, calling Carnevali "an almost Mythological figure," Dennis Barone remarks, "Anyone who knows anything about poetry written in English between the two World Wars knows the name Carnevali, but almost no one knows the words of the wonderful work he wrote" (87). Mario Domenichelli agrees, arguing that Carnevali was "more than a poet" and was the "embodiment of the late-Romantic myth of the poet in which life and poetry . . . take one and the same shape" (83). And yet, despite the vitality and vigor of Carnevali's contribution to American letters, he has faded almost into oblivion, and his work has vanished from the canon of modern poetry. This essay will explore Emanuel Carnevali's role in early twentieth-century American literature and his relationship with Williams in an effort to explain why Williams not only dedicated the final issue of *Others* to Carnevali, but also sent him regular monetary gifts until the start of the Second World War. In short, Williams likely saw Carnevali as a kindred spirit: a fellow firebrand who embraced the American language and was eager to help build an American literary community that would not be dependent on the European cultural establishment.

Critics and scholars have little factual information about Carnevali's life before his arrival in the United States in 1914, and what information there is from 1914 forward is ambiguous at best. Most of it stems from two sources, both of them authored by Carnevali himself: *A Hurried Man* (1925) and the posthumously pub-

lished *The Autobiography of Emanuel Carnevali* (1967). The books, which are autobiographical in nature, contain few dates and many of their claims are difficult to verify independently. Moreover, they are peppered with instances of poetic license (or deliberate distortion) and factual error.³ But Carnevali’s reputation not only suffers from biographical uncertainty, it also suffers from historical and material circumstance. Carnevali’s poor health, financial difficulties, and his immigrant status created difficulties for the poet and his reputation. By the end of his life, Carnevali’s exile was no longer voluntary. He was bed-ridden much of the time, and though he was not the subject of a medical quarantine, his illness made it difficult for him to maintain relationships with his circle of friends. He could not travel, and the political situation in Italy meant that his friends, many of them American expatriates living in France, could not visit him either. Towards the end of his life, frequent tremors even made writing difficult.

Nowadays, copies of *A Hurried Man*, which was published in a limited edition by Three Mountains Press, are rare and usually housed in non-circulating Special Collection libraries. As a result, critics and scholars tend to rely on the more accessible *The Autobiography of Emanuel Carnevali* for their information. Carnevali’s autobiography contains his final unfinished manuscript as well as selections of earlier poetry and prose. In addition, it includes both personal correspondence and versions of material previously published in *A Hurried Man*. The end result is a pastiche of Carnevali’s “Greatest Hits.” It is a text that critics have referred to as both autobiography and autobiographical fiction, but neither label accurately captures its contents, which include not only autobiographical sketches but also book reviews, poetry, recollections of friends, and what appear to be journal entries.

Carnevali began to compile the manuscript of the *Autobiography* towards the end of his life, and the American writer Kay Boyle, Carnevali’s friend and a fellow expatriate, tried to help him find a publisher for the book. In her words, “Once I had seen Carnevali, it became an obsession with me, the compiling of this book . . . I typed and retyped the bits and pieces he sent me, wrote to Bill Williams in Rutherford to send me all the writing that Carnevali had ever sent to him” (18). But before Carnevali could complete the manuscript or Boyle was able to place the book with a publisher, “the dark curtain came down between France [where Boyle was living] and Italy. Since then there has been silence” (19). Carnevali died in an Italian hospital during the war, but the exact date and cause of death are unknown. After his death, the project was sidelined for several years while Boyle continued her efforts at publication. She was finally successful almost twenty-five years after Carnevali’s death, and the *Autobiography* was published in 1967.

In 1978, Carnevali's half-sister Maria Pia Carnevali and David Stivender put together another version of the book in the poet's native Italian instead of the English of Carnevali's original manuscript. Titled *Il primo Dio* ("The First God"), the Italian publication claims to adhere more closely to the author's intentions and is published as a work of fiction rather than an autobiography (51). In addition, it does not include the materials that Boyle added to the 1967 book. Buonomo explains, "Although the English language version calls itself an autobiography whereas the Italian translation is presented as a work of fiction, both works are better described as partaking of the two genres" (51). Furthermore, William Boelhower has argued that "there is no definitive version of [Carnevali's autobiography] . . . the two available are both approximations" (qtd. in Buonomo 55).

Reading Boyle's edition of Carnevali's *Autobiography* with these difficulties in mind, one is struck by the intimacy of the authorial voice and the evocative depth of sensory impression. The book details an unhappy childhood with a mother whom Carnevali describes as a "morphino-maniac" and an abusive and violent-tempered father, whom he described as "the most ignoble of men" (23). Carnevali's parents separated during his childhood, and the children—there were two boys—lived with their mother until her death when Carnevali was only nine years old. After her passing, he and his brother went to live with their father, who sent his sons "almost immediately into boarding school" (44). Over the course of his adolescence, Carnevali attended three such schools in Bologna and Venice, and evidently found them all oppressive, referring to the schools as "jails" and his fellow students as "inmates" (44). Even as an adolescent, Carnevali had a rebellious streak and rejected social categories and strict definitions of selfhood. He was expelled from the third of these boarding schools after a failed romance with another (male) student. The expulsion was due to "hysteria" and "an attack of nerves" after the break-up rather than any fallout from the relationship itself (*AEC* 57). He returned to his father's house, but the living situation was untenable, apparently due to the difficult relationship between father and son. With his father's consent, Carnevali began planning to emigrate to the United States shortly thereafter. But his family may not have been the only thing Carnevali was fleeing: Paul Mariani suggests that he may also have left Italy to escape compulsory military conscription (167).

Like many European immigrants, Carnevali opted for New York City when he arrived in the United States. The transition was not without its bumps despite his initial eagerness. The sixteen-year-old Carnevali spoke little English, and he had even less money. Life in New York happened at a much faster pace than he had been accustomed to in Italy. The city was crowded and filled with skyscrapers, which Carnevali described as

one of the great disillusiones of my entire unhappy life. These famous skyscrapers were nothing more than great boxes standing upright or on one side, terrifically futile, frightfully irrelevant, so commonplace that one felt he had seen the same thing somewhere before. (AEC 73)

Together with its "awful network of fire-escapes" and "miserable panorama," the modern urban American city must have come as quite a shock and disappointment to Carnevali and the hundreds and hundreds of immigrants who found themselves in the same position: hungry, unemployed, destitute (73).

And yet, Carnevali also found the fast pace, the challenges, and the desperate struggles of life in New York invigorating and inspiring. Moreover, the United States was not burdened by centuries of artistic (or literary) traditions. As writers like Ezra Pound, H. D., and T. S. Eliot were fleeing American provincialism in favor of European culture and sophistication, Carnevali was running in the other direction. He wanted to embrace the newness and modernity of the United States and all that it represented. As Leonardo Buonomo explains:

Where could a young man who had repudiated his father go if not to a nation that was, by definition, "young" and whose very birth had originated a violent rebellion against its fatherland? Here was a country where, in Carnevali's words, "one could be young without feeling ashamed about it," a country that was "tired of the Family." That damned "the European shackles of the family." (55)

Emigration, according to Buonomo, was as much an act of rebellion against his father as it was an opportunity for a new beginning. To Carnevali, Italy represented generations of suffering: "Italy meant my father to me; it meant the beatings my brother gave me, it meant my terrible grandmother, and the loss of [my mother]" (AEC 63). New York offered a clean slate and a chance to start over.

Upon arriving in the United States, Carnevali decided to adopt the English language as his own, perhaps in an attempt to further his distance from Italy and all that it represented to him, most notably his father's disapproval. Learning English was, in effect, a figurative rejection of the fatherland, and a more literal rejection of his father's language. Without money or prospects, Carnevali drifted from job to job, working as a waiter or a dishwasher in one of New York's many Italian restaurants when possible and accepting handouts when work was scarce. As his English improved, he began to write. At first, he wrote essays and screenplays, but his early work did not find an audience; none of his film treatments were picked up. And yet, Buonomo observes that it is "significant that the vehicle of [Carne-

vali's] first literary efforts turns out to be the latest and most modern form of expression (cinema), an art that perhaps more than any other may be aptly called the language of the new world" (56). Even if they were not successful, Carnevali's attempts at movie treatments suggest that he embraced modernity and aesthetic innovation as well as their various media, especially film.

He had more success writing essays and book reviews, but it was not until he began to write poetry that Carnevali began to find his voice and his audience. In *Autobiography*, he describes his poetic commencement as a kind of divine revelation: "a faint dreaminess, a vagueness of emotion, a feeling—I say feeling—like a messiah, like sweet Christ. . . . And all of a sudden I began to write" (95). Poetry, then, was his artistic epiphany, and not only did he write verse with an almost religious fervor, but he also started submitting his work to various New York publications hoping to get something into print. His early poetic efforts, which he described as "absurd rhyming poetry" accompanied by "desperate appeals" met with much the same reception as the screenplays: they were rejected (95). But Carnevali's persistence apparently paid off. In *Autobiography*, he reports that *Seven Arts* accepted two of his poems for publication (96).⁴ Unfortunately, the magazine folded before Carnevali's work was printed, and there is no official record of the acceptance. But even if they could not publish Carnevali's verse themselves, the *Seven Arts* editors must have thought that the young poet had potential. They introduced him to *Poetry* magazine and encouraged him to send his work to its editor Harriet Monroe in Chicago. Carnevali wasted no time dispatching his manuscripts. According to Joseph Parisi and Stephen Young, Carnevali not only sent Monroe poems but also wrote letters in which he "unburdened his soul." Something about Carnevali's case must have moved Monroe because she wrote back and "offered advice about the poems to her 'dear boy' (as he soon was called), as well as consolation" (235).

Carnevali's first poems debuted in the March 1918 issue of *Poetry*. "The Splendid Commonplace," a largely autobiographical six-poem sequence, received six pages in the magazine. The speaker, himself a poet, is unemployed and unable to sleep, and yet he captures moments of serenity and beauty among the ordinary noise and commotion of the metropolis. For example, "His Majesty the Letter-Carrier" captures and celebrates the hustle and bustle of an ordinary morning:

Half past seven in the morning
 And the sun winks at me,
 Half hidden by the last house of the street.
 His long fingers
 Scare away these trotting little men

Who rush westward from the east to their jobs.
 Laughing, the sun pursues them . . . (*Hurried Man* 96)

Carnevali has moved away from “absurd rhyme” and has begun to explore free verse forms, but poetic form seems secondary to the interplay of nature, specifically the sun, and the “trotting little men” rushing to work. The passage captures an ordinary morning in the city—regular men in their daily routine—and transforms it into a playful game of cat and mouse in which the poet/spectator and the sun are mischievously chasing men to their jobs. Despite the fact that the speaker is likely out of work himself (otherwise he too would be rushing to a job), there is no bitterness or desperation. Instead, his unemployment has allowed him a unique perspective from which to view the city and its inhabitants. His subject is normal, quotidian urban life and a common mailman whom he hopes will deliver:

some money to buy some food and a clean collar,
 a letter from an editor that says:
 “You’re a great poet, young man!”

But the postman doesn’t deliver any of these things. In fact, he doesn’t even slow down. Instead he walks by the speaker’s door without even acknowledging it, confirming the speaker’s fundamental lack of connection with the scene he has observed. He watches life around him but doesn’t participate.

The speaker’s perspective in “His Majesty the Letter-Carrier,” that of an immigrant outsider looking in, would become one of Carnevali’s most notable features, and he capitalized on it in his work. As Domenichelli has observed, “Carnevali always kept on the threshold, never really belonging to anywhere, a guest everywhere, a stranger and a perpetual outsider” (84). His poems reveal a paradoxical desire both to participate more fully in the scenes he witnesses and to celebrate his separation from them. The choice to write in English, his second language, what Domenichelli has called his “language of exile,” would have further distanced Carnevali from American experience because he was still learning its idioms and rhythms (84).

But while Carnevali’s decision to adopt the English language might be read as a rejection of his father or an embrace of exile, it is also very likely one of the things that appealed to Williams. Williams had been feeling somewhat like an exile himself since many of his friends and fellow writers had sailed for Europe, but he was determined to stay in the U. S., and doing his best to build an American literary scene. His work with *Others* magazine was a significant part of the

effort. Like Carnevali, Williams believed that there was something unique and important about American culture and its language, what he would come to refer to as “the American idiom.” American English represented a kind of cultural revolution. Williams remained adamant throughout his life in his insistence that American literature did not need to be bolstered by any European traditions, whether French, German, Spanish or especially British. In the “Prologue” to *Kora in Hell*, Williams disparages those critics who celebrate T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound as pinnacles of United States poetry. To him, their verse is “to be damned not because of superficial bad workmanship, but because they are rehash, repetition” of European sources (24). Williams was looking for poets like Carnevali who were willing to break free from European models, whether classic or contemporary, Dante or De Gourmont. Carnevali’s immigration and his decision to write in American English instead of his native Italian likely signaled to Williams that the two men shared this affinity: Both were looking to escape the tyranny of their European predecessors and counterparts; both saw American English not as an underdeveloped derivative version of the Queen’s English but rather as a new and exciting alternative to an aging and outworn language that had become bogged down by the weight of tradition.

According to Parisi and Young, after Monroe published Carnevali’s poems, she visited him in New York and introduced him to a number of other writers living in the city: Anderson, Waldo Frank, Alfred Kreymborg, Lola Ridge, and Williams among others (236). It was then that Carnevali began to associate himself with *The Little Review* and *Others*, but he also stayed in contact with Monroe, who had given him an advance on his work and awarded him a \$50 prize in 1918 (Parisi and Young 236). But even with her financial assistance, Carnevali was still living hand-to-mouth, going from one job to the next and having difficulty maintaining regular employment.

Meanwhile, in addition to waiting tables and writing poetry, Carnevali got married. His wife was also from Italy; she was visiting New York on vacation when she met Carnevali. Williams describes the young couple:

They were just two kids, she a girl who had happened to live across the corridor some place where he was staying. She was not literary. He was straight, slim, with a beautiful young man’s head, keenly intelligent—an obviously lost soul. Before him she was in obvious adoration. . . . This was New York at its best, the highest potential which you saw there with a catch in your throat, knowing it was almost certainly doomed to destruction. (A 266)

Williams’s characterization of the marriage is both poignant and pessimistic. He seems to idealize the young couple for their youth and beauty, and at the same time, what attracts him to them is the sense that such a relationship cannot last. As I have discussed elsewhere, for Williams, destruction and violence are necessary and essential parts of the creative process.⁵ In a sense, the Carnevalis may have been a real life example of the model of creativity Williams expounded in *Kora in Hell*. This model of artistic production is based on the myth of Kora (more familiarly known as Persephone or Prosperina) and is grounded in a cycle of love and loss, birth and death, destruction and renewal. For a time, Emily and Emanuel Carnevali were inseparable—in fact, Williams claimed that at Carnevali’s first public reading, the young poet insisted that his wife sit next to him on the stage: he did not want to be apart from her even for a short time. After the wedding, she worked as a governess, and her income allowed her husband to spend more time and energy on his writing.

In the spring of 1919, Carnevali occasionally socialized with the New York literati: Williams, Kreymborg, Marianne Moore, and others. He began to make a name for himself and quickly earned Williams’s respect, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that he delivered a rather scathing critique of the *Others* poets at a gathering at Ridge’s house. In this critique, which was later printed in both *Hurried Man* and the *Autobiography*, Carnevali attacked Williams, Maxwell Bodenheim, Kreymborg, and Ridge herself for betraying the authentic expression of poetic truth for formal innovation:

I am disgusted with your little-review talk of technique and technicians. Easier than everything, commoner than everything, is to have a technique, to talk like Ezra Pound does in his “Subdivisions of the Poetical Department Store with Antiques for Sale Only to Those Who Know How the Oriental Pooh-Pooh-Chink Wore His Slippers.” The fakers need a technique, they who go lying for cent and lying for more a cent and a half: the beggar who must fake his boss, his wife and his children in order to soothe his fundamental fears, he needs a technique. You do not speak plainly because what you are made of is not plain, that may be. But I say you do not speak plainly because you don’t want very much anything, because your soul is never anything or anywhere, and you go hey-heying, oh-ohing, ah-ahing hach-haching around, looking for your soul. Because your thousand and one beliefs let you be only octopuses with a thousand and one tentacles unable to account for all of them and make them move at the same time decisively toward something. . .

If you are poets, as they say, I don't want to be a poet. . . I say you discovered yourselves and you're disgusted with the find and you are hiding behind a thick-woven, ragged curtain of image-words, stunts, tricks of verse that lacks even the one-two-three-dip of rhymes which would at least make them decisively comic. (*Hurried* 265)

Though he would later become one of Carnevali's friends and supporters, at the time that this diatribe was delivered, sometime in the spring of 1919, Pound represented to Carnevali everything that was wrong with contemporary poetry. Namely, Carnevali believed that Pound favored technique over substance and the international over the local. Carnevali's invective seems to be a direct reaction to Imagism and Pound's *Cathay* poems, "A Jewel Stairs Grievance" in particular. Carnevali accuses Pound of issuing rules, manifestos, and decrees dictating what genuine poetry should look like while forgetting that poetry should tell the truth and reveal the poet's soul. Instead, Carnevali suggests, Pound uses allusion, language, and technique as a disguise to hide behind. Several months after Ridge's party, *Poetry* magazine ran Carnevali's review of Pound's *Pavannes and Divisions*, which further illustrate this point. The review is titled "Irritation" because "Irritation inspired [Pound] and he inspired irritation in his readers" (*Hurried* 190). Pound's poetry, and by extension his vision of art, is sterile, lifeless: "The book has no sadness, no drunkenness, no love, no despair, no whimsicality, nothing but opinions and—an attitude" (199). For all of its technique and its author's rules and discriminations, Pound's poetry lacks genuine emotional expression.

In his tirade, Carnevali accuses Williams, Bodenheim, Kreymborg, and Ridge of becoming lazy and simply adopting Pound's ideas as their own. Like Pound, they have traded emotional authenticity for technical facility. Instead of expressing themselves and their beliefs, he argues, they rely upon fancy language and artistic manifestos in order to hide the fact that they don't actually believe in anything or care about anything. Worse, they have all abandoned their muse(s): "I hate you because you suggest and like to suggest that what made you first write is no longer there, that your youth's will is gone, that you do what you do disinterestedly" (*Hurried* 258). He resents them for simply going through the motions of their work without any kind of emotional drive or fire. Carnevali's critique was not all complaint and bombast. He seems to understand on some level that one cannot sustain passion indefinitely: "The fight you had started in the beginning has you exhausted" (259). And yet, as Suzanne Churchill observes, Carnevali "claims that the violence of his hatred corresponds to the intensity of his love. He insults Williams, Bodenheim, Ridge, and Kreymborg in an attempt to reignite their rebellious fervor and restlessness" (128). Put another way, if Carnevali were less in-

vested in their work and in American literature more generally, the complacency of Williams and company would not bother him. Ultimately, his frustration that these writers, whom he portrays as poetry’s elder statesmen (and woman), will not hand over the reins to the younger generation wins out: “I say let pass, but I am ready, and I rather like it, to knock you down and step over your bodies” (266).

For his part, Williams seems to have respected Carnevali’s zeal and agreed with his assessment of the literary landscape. Williams had been something of a polemicist himself in recent years. In fact, in the “Prologue” to *Kora*, he voiced similar sentiments regarding his friend Ezra Pound:

E. P. is the best enemy United States verse has. He is interested, passionately interested—even if he doesn’t know what he is talking about. But of course he knows what he is talking about. He does not, however, know everything, not by more than half. The accordances of which Americans have the parts and the colors but not the completions before them pass beyond the attempts of his thought. It is a middling aging blight on the imagination. (l 26-27)

Williams disliked Pound’s claim to universal knowledge, at least when it came to poetry and literature, but he also resented Pound’s abandonment of his homeland, United States poetry, and his betrayal of American letters even more than his pretentiousness. Pound and Eliot receive particular scorn in *Kora*—perhaps because other critics had begun to use their work as representative of American poetry. From Williams’s point of view, Pound and Eliot weren’t writing *American* poetry at all; they had left American literature behind when they sailed for Europe. Truly American poetry, for Williams, had its roots in the American landscape and its people, whereas the expatriates grounded their verse in European traditions, both ancient and modern.

Despite the young Italian’s enthusiasm for American literature, Carnevali had not turned his back on his European heritage. In an essay in *Poetry*, titled “Five Years of Italian Poetry: 1910-1915,” Carnevali describes the state of Italian poetry and the work of eight of Carnevali’s Italian contemporaries.⁶ Although he praises several of these writers, notably Giovanni Papini, Corrado Govoni, Salvatore Di Giacomo and Ardengo Soffici, Carnevali is largely pessimistic about Italian poetry and its prospects primarily due to Futurism and its dominance of early Twentieth-century Italian literature. As Carnevali explains it, Futurism was born of a need for fellowship and notoriety and “was built upon the mistakes, exaggerations and aberrations of some of the poets I have mentioned” (*Hurried* 223). Futurism, Carnevali implies, is deplorable because it is less a serious artistic movement and

more a ploy for attention. He laments its “obvious” bombast as “cheap” and dismisses its sensuality and intentional obscurity as “bourgeois” (224-25). Its only redeeming virtue is its function as a harbinger of modernity and a modern consciousness in Italy’s writers. Futurism might be obnoxious and off-putting for Carnevali, but it does demonstrate that Italian artists are evolving and progressing. He concludes the essay with the following:

The only school is that of simplicity. It has been said that making poetry is the process wherewith one frees the thing seen of all that is not artistic—the unnecessary, the commonplace, the grandiloquent and the poetical. And I should dare say that simplicity is then also the quality of being true, which means human, which means beautiful.

And I realize here that I owe an apology to Ezra Pound. (226)

Again, Carnevali celebrates the emotional content of poetry as that which gives verse both its artistry and its soul. He also seems to recognize that Pound shared some of these same values. After all, the main tenets of Imagism encouraged poets to eliminate the extraneous and abstract in favor of clarity and simplicity.

Carnevali not only championed his contemporary Italian poets; he, like Pound, also admired older Italian writers: Petrarch, Boccaccio, and above all Dante, who “embodies the greatest tradition—that of those who through literature judge men and the times” (184).⁷ Proclaiming that Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is “perhaps the most powerful work of all literatures,” Carnevali conceded that it is a poem both in and of a past time. Diverging from Pound and Eliot, both of whom tried to incorporate Dante and other poets from centuries past into their own verse, Carnevali like Williams believed that the modern poets needed to find their own voices and build their own traditions:

We are waiting for the poet who will give us a *Divina Commedia* of our own times, but it is something entirely different from Dante’s that we expect. A hell more terrific than the hell of Dante is the hell of modern warfare—an immense, eyeless, stupid machine that batters, mangles, crushes, distorts, tortures, crazes men. (185)

The modern poet needed to figure out a way to represent the entirety of the twentieth-century experience: Heaven, Hell and all Purgatorial points in between. In fact, that poet’s job will be “a hundred times more difficult than Dante’s” because Dante’s time was dominated by two power structures: the monarchy and the Roman Catholic church. The twentieth-century poet must not only deal with

politics and religion but also science and industry. That writer, Carnevali seems to suggest, will be an *American*. More specifically, and like the editors of *Seven Arts*, he locates the inauguration of such a poetry in the work of Walt Whitman, a writer who, like Carnevali, seems to serve as a kind of bridge from European literary traditions to the United States. Carnevali describes Whitman as: “the multitudinous man, for whom the world was a purgatory of striving joy and self-redeeming pain—he enumerated, at least, the modern world” (*Hurried Man* 187). Comparing Whitman to Dante, Carnevali acknowledges the scope of the American poet’s work but also concedes that Whitman’s poetry was only a beginning for American verse.

Carnevali’s diatribe at Ridge’s had expressed some of Williams’s own suspicions regarding modern poetry in general and the *Others* group more particularly. Both Carnevali and Williams refer to the problems with age: whether the failures of the aging body or the shortcomings of the aging imagination. Both complain about a lack of substance and an over-reliance on poetic form. And ultimately, both call for nothing short of revolution. It wasn’t enough for Williams to reshape *Others*; ultimately, he needed to dismantle it completely and move on to other projects. *Others* had given Williams his start as a poet and provided him with a community of more-or-less like-minded writers and thinkers. And yet, in spite of the support and opportunities that the magazine had provided for him, he tried to shut it down, not once but twice. Churchill attributes this urge to Williams’s need for “recreating a loss in order to rekindle the desire to reanimate poetry” (129). The *Others* community had allowed Williams and his contemporaries to become too comfortable, complacent even, with the state of modern verse. In order for Williams to recapture the drive and intensity that was so essential to his poetry, he needed not just to move outside of his comfort zone, but to raze it to the ground. Carnevali’s critique had given voice to these doubts and gave Williams the nudge he needed to put *Others* out of commission.

In July 1919, Williams again decided to dismantle *Others*.⁸ He dedicated the final issue of the magazine to Carnevali, whom he called “the black poet, the empty man, the New York which does not exist” (*Gloria!* 3). In his essay “*Gloria!*,” Williams takes up the critique that Carnevali had leveled against him at Lola Ridge’s party earlier that year. He lambasts the very publication he had been entrusted to edit as “stale” and “a lie” (3). Directing his attention to Carnevali, he exclaims:

It is for you we went out, old men in the dark. It is for you that the rubbish stirred and a rat crawled out for the garbage, alive! in that filth.
What else was *Others* at that time: a rat in the garbage heap of New

York. And now by God you come with a belly sticking to your back and you show us what we are, rats the stench had already told us that we are alive.

There is nothing to despise now but vermin: Others. ("Gloria!" 3)

Critics have interpreted the figure of the rat, so prominent in the above passage, in different ways. For Robin Schulze, the rat is a problematic and unflattering image that reflects the state to which *Others* has sunk: "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, garbage to garbage. Williams begs his audience not to regret the passing of something that was foul to begin with" (476). Carnevali, in this reading, embodies the brutal but vital survival instinct of modern poetry while *Others* has become diseased and vile. As Schulze argues, "*Others* had lost its claim to greatness because it had lost its awareness of the garbage heap of New York from which it sprang" (475). *Others* had lost touch with its origins in the dirt and muck, the refuse and rubbish of urban life; it had become sanitized and safe, comfortable and complacent. For Schulze, then, the rat is part and parcel of Williams's venomous attack. Suzanne Churchill disagrees and likens Williams's use of the rat to Marianne Moore's. She argues, "Like Moore, Williams celebrates rats for their craftiness, persistence, and unpretentious resourcefulness. 'Gloria!' is a carnivaleque celebration of vermin—an effort to upset the complacency of the well-established and not-so-new poetry and thus stimulate fresh productions" (144).

As a matter of fact, Moore may well have been on Williams's mind as her now infamous "Poetry" immediately follows the dedication to Carnevali.⁹ In its original context, the poem's first line, "I too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle" places Moore in direct conversation with Williams and suggests that she agrees with Williams's critique of his contemporaries. Moore's poem mounts another complaint against verse and its over-reliance on poetic technique at the expense of "the genuine." Her protests against "high sounding interpretation" and poetry that has "become so derivative as to become unintelligible" echo Carnevali's original disapproval of the *Others* poets (7, 8).

As Mariani observes, "What Williams liked most about Carnevali was his outspokenness, the way he said what was on his mind without worrying whose feelings he might be hurting" (169). Perhaps in an attempt to return Carnevali's candor, Williams pulled no punches in his *Others* dedication. When describing Carnevali and his poetry, Williams proclaims:

The man is smashed to pieces by the stupidity of a city of s**tas**s [sic].
He will not allow me to take a line out of a poem—"eyes like spittle",
"—the rocking-chair held him as God held Adam at the creation." He is

right. I am wrong when I yell technique at him. His poems are bad, full of nonsense because he is filled with death, day in day out: because he is young. ("Gloria!" 3)

Williams had offered to edit some of Carnevali's poems for him and help him to refine his technique, but Carnevali categorically refused, blasting Williams for his reliance upon form. And despite the fact that Carnevali's poems were "bad," Williams respected him and blamed not the poet but his circumstances. Williams decided that modernity and New York City specifically had tarnished and contaminated poetry and the writers who tried to produce it: "Who can write a poem complete in every part surrounded by this mess we live in? (3). Ultimately, Williams felt that to continue to publish *Others* as if this were not the case would be to perpetuate a lie.

Around the same time that Williams was busy putting *Others* out of its misery, Harriet Monroe arranged for Carnevali to be offered a job in Chicago. The position was with an Italian newspaper titled *The Citizen* where he would be responsible for "writing notes concerning the criminals of Chicago and soliciting advertisements and subscriptions" (AEC 155). Thus it was in service of his writing, at least on the surface, that Carnevali left his wife in New York and moved to Chicago. The marriage, which had been troubled for some time by infidelities on both sides, would not survive the separation. Initially, Carnevali went to Chicago alone in order to get settled and apparently planned to send for his family once he found a place to live. Once there, however, he seems to have had a change of heart. Telling his wife, as Mariani puts it, "that he had a destiny to fulfill as a writer and that she and the children would only be in the way," Carnevali urged her to forget about him and move forward with her life, alone (169).

Unfortunately for Carnevali, his job at the newspaper, like his marriage, did not last long. Carnevali did not share his employer's religious faith, and after one of many disagreements, he was fired, "but very gently, without violence of any kind" (AEC 156). Harriet Monroe then offered him a job at *Poetry* when Helen Hoyt resigned as associate editor in the fall of 1919. From his own account, Carnevali's tenure at *Poetry* seems to have been a tumultuous one:

We often quarrelled long and loud about what should be accepted or rejected and when she furtively printed something I didn't like there were howls in the office. . . . I was an undesirable worker and Harriet Monroe was dissatisfied with me. I must admit I deserved her reproaches for I was a lazy good-for-nothing sort of cub. (156-57)

During his time in Chicago, Carnevali kept writing, and he kept in touch with his friends in New York City, particularly Williams, and despite the difficulties he seems to have caused her, Monroe looked after Carnevali as much as she could and also gave him money so that he could pay rent. It was also during his time in Chicago that Carnevali began to show further symptoms of the illness that would torment him for the rest of his life. He had begun to suffer tremors in New York, and in Chicago not only did these symptoms worsen, but he also suffered from violent outbursts and delusions, and he “appeared to be going insane” (Parisi and Young 236). He was committed to a psychiatric hospital in Chicago, but the doctors could not diagnose his condition. In all, he spent approximately three months in various Chicago hospitals and a sanatorium, the expenses funded by various friends. During his convalescence, several friends visited him including Anderson and his wife, Carl Sandburg, Kreymborg, Mitchell Dawson and Robert McAlmon. For a time, the worst of his symptoms subsided, but his recovery was only temporary. Thinking that Carnevali’s condition might improve if he left the city, his friends collected money to pay his expenses and sent him to the countryside: Indiana and Minnesota and Wisconsin. He rhapsodized, “Here began the last great beautiful days of my life!” (AEC 191). Carnevali’s autobiography has several rapturous descriptions of the natural beauty that he experienced on this trip: from the hills of Indiana to the shores of Lake Michigan. But again after a brief respite, his condition worsened. When he was well enough to travel, he returned to New York. There he received the diagnosis of *encephalitis lethargica* though, as Mariani relates, Williams himself suspected syphilis (169).

Williams, Monroe, McAlmon, and Pound all tried to help defray the cost Carnevali’s medical bills, but by 1922, he was sent back to Italy where he was institutionalized in the charity ward of a hospital under his father’s direction. He spent several years as a public charge in a hospital located in Bazzano. In *Autobiography*, Carnevali observes, “Whoever comes to Bazzano, whether triumphantly in an auto, or slowly on his own legs, or meekly on a horse, is struck by the fact that this is one of the commonest towns in Italy” (AEC 202). Williams, in a letter to Harriet Monroe claimed that he thought Carnevali was “better off that way” (qtd. in Parisi & Young 300). But Carnevali disagreed: “Death is horrid in a hospital, and life is worse still. Both are two mangy wolves pursuing a human prey” (AEC 208). Williams continued to write to Carnevali and send his friend money, “ten dollars a month,” as did other friends, but the two poets never met face to face again.

During one of his trips to Italy, McAlmon visited Carnevali in the hospital where “Carnevali’s condition was a shock. . . . He sat up in bed, black eyes peering out of a thin oval face covered with parchment yellow skin. His arms, his legs, his whole body twitched and jerked. It was only when doped with scopolamine

that he got any rest” (*Being Geniuses* 137). Besieged by tremors, Carnevali had difficulty performing even the most basic functions, and yet he continued to write as much as he could. McAlmon was clearly touched by his friend’s difficulty because in addition to paying for his medical expenses at a private facility, McAlmon, who together with Bill Bird ran Three Mountains Press, also collected all of Carnevali’s writing and promised to have it published. The result was *A Hurried Man*, which appeared in 1925. The book received mixed reviews. Williams called it “the best example of . . . a book that is all of a man, a young man, superbly alive” (A 267). Harriet Monroe’s critique in *Poetry* is more ambivalent. While she praises the poet’s youthful spirit, his “adroit technique” and the “tragic beauty born of pain” found in some of his verses, she ultimately conceded that “it is a book of hints and fragments—a mere beginning and a shapeless beginning at that,” which is an “[inadequate expression of] the power that was in him” (213, 212). The book, reviewers agree, was admirable for a man in Carnevali’s condition, but it fell short of its author’s promise. Monroe, Williams, MacAlmon and Boyle all admire Carnevali’s spirit and determination, and they all express regret for what could have been had Carnevali not fallen ill.

By the time Carnevali and Boyle began their regular correspondence in the 1920s, his illness had become nearly debilitating. Boyle recalled

Sometimes it would take Carnevali a day to do a sentence, a week to do a paragraph, for a while he shook with the terrible ague of his illness, he would have to hold his right hand in the grip of his left in order to be able to strike the [typewriter’s] keys. And there would be long intervals when he would be too ill to set so much as a sentence down. (AEC 15)

Despite the difficulty, he continued to write and continued to try and publish. He managed to place excerpts from his work-in-progress, the *Autobiography*, in *This Quarter*, another little magazine published in Paris from 1925-32. Boyle was especially dedicated to her friend. She wrote him weekly letters until the Italian censors tightened the restrictions on mail delivery from France and the United States. Boyle had resolved to help Carnevali publish his autobiography, and to that end, she not only collected material from Carnevali himself, but also wrote to Williams, Monroe, and the poet’s other friends in an attempt to compile a complete manuscript. She also did her best to solicit donations for his medical care and singled out Caresse Crosby, Ira Morris, Eugene and Maria Jolas as being especially generous in their support. Lastly, she continued to help publish his work in periodicals, but by 1939, the political situation in Italy made such efforts virtually impossible.

Carnevali's final publication during his lifetime was in a little-known magazine titled *Kingdom Come: The Magazine of Wartime Oxford*. Published out of Oxford, England from 1939-43, *Kingdom Come* published work by both Oxford undergraduates and established figures such as Kay Boyle, André Breton, Hugh MacDiarmid, and Marie Stopes. The magazine, edited by John Waller and Kenneth Walker seems to be a hodge-podge of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction prose. An excerpt from Carnevali's *Autobiography* (at the time unfinished) appears in the magazine's very first issue.¹⁰ The excerpt recalls a woman named Annie Glick, whom Carnevali had apparently known in Chicago. Glick was Carnevali's "greatest love" and his muse, "the feminine entity every poet needs" (16, 17). And yet her femininity was problematic as well as inspiring: "Soft Russian women like you become flaccid with the years (for you were only a poor miserable woman after all)" (16). The chapter was revised before it was printed in Carnevali's autobiography, but more importantly, both versions are overshadowed by Carnevali's illness, which had again begun to progress. By the time Carnevali had published his reminiscence about Annie Glick, "poor miserable woman" that she was, she may have begun to lose her beauty, but Carnevali was also aware that his own strength was waning and his days were now numbered.

Today, Carnevali's name still circulates in memoirs of the 1920s and little magazine scholarship, but because his work has not been reprinted or anthologized, it has received very little attention from modernist studies. Carnevali has, however, begun to receive more notice in the burgeoning field of Italian-American literary studies. Despite Carnevali's ultimate (involuntary) return to Italy, he continued to write in English and to try and bridge the Italian and the American literary traditions. As a result, critics like Mario Domenichelli and Leonardo Buonomo have identified him as one of the first Italian-American writers in a lineage that also includes Don DeLillo, Camille Paglia, Mario Puzo, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Dana Gioia. Carnevali's *Autobiography* encapsulates this blending of Italian and American tradition and culture. Existing in two editions, one in English, the other in Italian, and published by a collaborative venture that spanned from Italy to France to the United States, the text reflects on Carnevali's life in both his native and adopted countries. It is a fusion of genre that includes prose and poetry, personal recollections and intimate desires. Finally, as modernist studies become increasingly transnational in scope and focus, figures like Carnevali and his hybrid textualities should receive more attention. His familiarity with Italian literature both classical and contemporary, from Dante to Marinetti and Papini provide a missing link in both Italian-American and modernist literary histories, and his work, both poetry and prose also helps us to better understand many already canonical figures like Pound and Williams.

In a sense, as the title of this piece suggests, Carnevali's work has been asleep, latent, since the publication of Boyle's edition of the *Autobiography* in 1967. But such a period of hibernation has primed him for renewed interest in modernist studies. In particular, recent developments in the digital humanities such as the *Modernist Journals Project* and the increased attention paid to the period's little magazines and their context should awaken a reappraisal of the poet. Carnevali's work gives us a different perspective on many of the familiar faces of modernist literature, especially Pound and Williams, and it also gives us a unique point of view from which to examine the urban experience in post-war New York and Chicago: the immigrant perspective, the perspective of a person living in poverty, and the perspective of one whose body had begun to fail. Despite his many difficulties and struggles, Carnevali's verse serves as a counterpoint to that of his contemporaries, particularly Williams and Pound, the two poets he saw himself in direct conversation with. His work captured the poignancy of ordinary moments and is remarkable in its sensory detail and emotional authenticity. And though many of his friends, like Harriet Monroe, believed that he succumbed to illness before reaching his full potential as a poet, those same friends worked tirelessly to get his work into print so that it might reach a larger audience.

Notes

1. According to the National Institute of Health's webpage on Neurological Disorders and Stroke: "Encephalitis lethargica is a disease characterized by high fever, headache, double vision, delayed physical and mental response, and lethargy. In acute cases, patients may enter coma. Patients may also experience abnormal eye movements, upper body weakness, muscular pains, tremors, neck rigidity, and behavioral changes including psychosis. The cause of encephalitis lethargica is unknown. Between 1917 to 1928, an epidemic of encephalitis lethargica spread throughout the world, but no recurrence of the epidemic has since been reported."

2. I cite Carnevali's *Autobiography* as *AEC*.

3. For example, Carnevali claimed that he traveled from Italy to the United States alone when in fact he made the journey with his brother. See *Buonono* 56-7, n96.

4. In his *Autobiography*, Carnevali erroneously identifies A. R. Orage as the *Seven Arts* editor who accepted his work, but Orage, who edited the London-based *New Age*, had no connection to the American magazine. *Seven Arts* was edited primarily by James Oppenheim with assistance from Waldo Frank and Van Wyck Brooks. Later in the *Autobiography*, Carnevali recounts meeting Waldo Frank at the *Seven Arts* office, so presumably, either Oppenheim or Brooks had tendered his acceptance.

5. See Templeton 80-100.

6. "Five Years of Italian Poetry: 1910-1915" was first published in *Poetry* was also included in *A Hurried Man*; all quotations and page numbers in this essay refer to the latter publication.

7. Like "Five Years of Italian Poetry, Carnevali's essay "Dante—and Today" was first published in *Poetry* September 1921 and then included in *A Hurried Man*. Page numbers given parenthetically refer to *A Hurried Man*.

8. Randy Ploog suggests that the decision to decommission *Others* may have been more collaborative than previously thought, or at least that Williams and Kreymborg had plans with Mitchell Dawson to resurrect *Others* under a new moniker. See Ploog 119.

9. All citations of Moore's poem are taken from the poem's first presentation, the version published in *Others* 1919. As Schulze notes, "Moore's revision of 'Poetry' between the two editions of *Observations* certainly stands as one of the most striking alterations of her literary career" (207). The *Others* version of the poem contains five six-line stanzas for a total of thirty lines. By 1925, the poem had been revised to a single-stanza of thirteen lines, and the poet's final revision cuts the poem down to only three lines.

10. A revised version of this piece appears in *AEC* 163-67. Given Boyle's connection with both the journal and Carnevali's *Autobiography*, it is possible that she is connected somehow the Carnevali's placement in the journal.

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