

Classic Poetry Series

Emanuel Carnevali

- poems -

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Emanuel Carnevali(December 4, 1897 - January 11, 1942)

The best early Italian-American poetry deals with the excitement and disillusionment of life in this "new-found land." The immigrant Emanuel Carnevali (1897-1942) became the first Italian writer to make a significant, if short-lived, impact on modern American poetry. Supporting himself in Greenwich Village by shoveling snow and washing dishes, Carnevali enjoyed a special celebrity among populist Modernist poets like William Carlos Williams and Carl Sandburg. He published only one book, *Tales of a Hurried Man* (1925), but it established him in avant-garde circles.

Harriet Monroe, the founding editor of *Poetry*, eventually brought him out to Chicago to work on her magazine, but he was soon stricken with encephalitis. Impoverished, disillusioned, and disabled, he returned to his homeland where he wrote, "O Italy, O great boot, / don't kick me out again!" Poets like Carnevali, however, survive today mainly as historical figures—examples of the developing ethnic consciousness of Italian-American writers. They have at best modest claims to the attention of general readers of poetry.

Queer Things

One nostril means latin,
The other means greek.

My legs will be
little steel rods,
which will continue
trotting after
I am dead.

My arms are
two useless limbs
when I stand on my head,
(Which I never do).

My mouth, too often open,
will be my despair -
clogged and sputtering
and drivelling, -
when I'll be very old
(which will never be)

I hate my head
My rotting head
which will never fall of itself
like any decent pear.
It has the intention
of flying up to the sky,
but it will always trail in the dust:
eating grime and dirt,
screaming erotic songs,
begging all the world
to enter in it.

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