"America, America, Blasphemous Dream": Nietzsche's Metamorphoses and the Immigrant's Existential Crisis in *The Fortunate Pilgrim*

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Abstract:

Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim* traces the existential and cultural dissonance that shapes the Angeluzzi-Corbo family's struggle to reconcile inherited Italian values with the demands of American individualism. Drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche's "Three Metamorphoses" from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, this analysis frames Lucia Santa as the "great dragon," a figure who enforces ancestral authority and preserves inherited values. Her children occupy various stages of Nietzsche's spiritual transformation: Sal and Lena adopt the Camel's burdens of duty, Gino and Vinnie charge forward as defiant Lions, and Larry and Octavia reach toward the creative autonomy of the Child. Yet none of the children actualize the Overman's radical self-creation. Cultural inheritance and the tension between ethnic loyalty and American individualism obstruct their progression. Rather than fulfilling Nietzsche's teleology, the narrative exposes its limitations. Puzo reframes metamorphosis not as transcendence, but as a cycle of interruption. Through this reconfiguration, the novel foregrounds the fractured subjectivity of second-generation immigrants, who must construct identity amid conflicting imperatives without ever fully reconciling them.

Keywords: metamorphosis, assimilation, existentialism, bicultural identity, Nietzsche, great dragon

Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim* dramatizes the generational conflict within an Italian-American immigrant family, emphasizing the psychological and cultural strain of assimilation. Lucia Santa, the formidable matriarch of the Angeluzzi-Corbo family, fiercely upholds traditional Italian values such as loyalty, sacrifice, and communal duty, insisting that her American-born children honor these ideals. Yet, as the promises and pressures of American life pull them away from this inherited ethos, her children begin to resist. Their rejection of these roles initiates a crisis of identity that is not only cultural but also existential in nature. As Thomas J. Ferraro notes, Puzo's depiction of Italian-American life explores the "dynamics of reproduction, evolution, and invention" (500)—a process that mirrors Friedrich Nietzsche's model of spiritual evolution in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Nietzsche envisions this evolution culminating in the emergence of the Overman, a figure who transcends inherited norms to create self-defined values. In his parable of the "Three Metamorphoses," the spirit evolves

from the burden-bearing Camel to the defiant Lion and, finally, to the creative Child. Each figure in the younger generation of the Angeluzzi-Corbo family reflects one of these stages, yet none completes the existential journey to selfhood in its entirety. Their failure to do so stems from the cultural weight which they carry as second-generation immigrants, inheriting a rigid framework of Italian values from Lucia and other community elders. As they attempt to assimilate into American society, the Angeluzzi-Corbo children engage in a proto-existential struggle to reject these inherited values and construct independent identities. While their trajectory echoes Nietzsche's model of spiritual metamorphosis, Puzo's novel complicates this framework by demonstrating how familial duty and entrenched cultural norms continue to obstruct the possibility of genuine self-definition: none of the novel's youth reaches the status of the Overman.

Nietzsche's parable of the "Three Metamorphoses," which appears early in his proto-existential treatise *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, tracks a spirit's journey from burdened submission to rebellious defiance and, ultimately, to the creation of personal ideals and freedoms.[1] The first stage, the Camel, symbolizes a spirit that bears the weight of external demands and societal values. Of this stage, Nietzsche writes, "What is hard? Thus asks the load-bearing spirit; thus it kneels down like a camel and wants to carry a heavy load" (18). This submission, however, sets the stage for a profound evolution. Alone in a desert, the Camel becomes the Lion, which "freedom it wants to take as its prey, and to be master of its own desert" (18). The Lion rejects the constraints of inherited values and societal expectations, confronting the "great dragon"—a symbol of sociocultural dogma—whose skin is inscribed with the command, "Thou shalt" (18). In this act, the Lion refuses to passively accept external authority, but this defiance alone does not create new values; it simply dismantles previous constraints. Furthermore, a spirit that continues the journey to selfhood must evolve beyond the Lion and progress to the Child—a symbol of both renewal and boundless creativity. Nietzsche describes the Child as "a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea-saying" (19). The Child creates the opportunity for self-realization, but it does not fully actualize it. It is the Overman who fully seizes this potential, living according to self-created values. As Nietzsche emphasizes, the Overman is the ultimate aim of this journey: "I teach you the Overman. Man is something that shall be overcome" (7). Thus, the Overman stands as the ideal, fully self-created individual who transcends inherited values and defines existence on its own terms.

In *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, Lucia Santa embodies Nietzsche's metaphor of the "great dragon," a formidable force of inherited tradition and cultural authority that her children must confront while forging their own identities in America. In a new, American world, which the narrator describes as "a sadder wilderness, where the language was strange" (7), Lucia clings to these traditions as a safeguard against the alienation and uncertainty of assimilation. Her devotion to tradition stems from a fear of losing the cultural bonds which she believes sustain her family, making her reluctant to let go of the past. This fear manifests in her treatment of her children. For example, during a tense kitchen argument, when Octavia expresses her ambition to attend night school and become a teacher, Lucia dismisses her dream and presses her to pursue a more traditionally feminine line of work: "you, such

a beautiful dressmaker, you earn good money" (12). Lucia's response highlights her belief that traditional roles provide stability, while untested paths lead to instability. Furthermore, when Octavia later rejects the notion of marrying a "guinea," Lucia retorts with sharp sarcasm: "ah, this is how a daughter speaks to her mother in America? Brava. You would make a fine schoolteacher" (23-24). This remark reasserts the matriarch's control, framing Octavia's independence as disloyalty to family and culture. In Nietzsche's philosophy, the "great dragon" symbolizes the overwhelming societal forces that suppress individual freedom, and Lucia embodies this force, imposing a rigid framework of cultural values on her children. Through her actions, she perpetuates the cultural dogma that stifles their attempts at self-definition. Lucia's treatment of Octavia underscores the tension between the preservation of cultural identity and the individual's right to pursue personal freedom, a tension that defines the novel's portrayal of an existential push and pull.

What is more, Lucia's strict enforcement of these norms extends to her son Gino during Vincenzo's wake. In the Mulberry Street funeral parlor, she accuses Gino of neglecting familial duty, stating, "you never went to see your father in his coffin" and "you never had time to comfort your own flesh and blood" (248). This public rebuke affirms Lucia's role as a guardian of Italian tradition, insisting that familial obligations outweigh individual desires, which she views as threats to the collective strength which is essential for immigrant survival. These lines also illustrate Lucia's function as the enforcer of a collective identity, where Gino's personal pursuits—such as spending time with friends or grieving in solitude—constitute betrayals that undermine the family's unity, a core tenet of her cultural heritage. As Evan Brier notes, Lucia's authoritarian control reflects the power dynamics of a world in which she must navigate survival alone, following the collapse or death of her male partners (Brier 290). Furthermore, Lucia's self-perception as the family's guiding force, as Anthony J. Tamburri notes, positions her as "the bearer of light, possessing that requisite vision that will allow her to bring her family forward toward a better way of life" (45). This vision, Tamburri suggests, drives Lucia to maintain strict control. Her husbands' failures—Anthony's death in a work accident and Frank's mental collapse—leave her to lead alone, reinforcing her dragon-like authority. Thus, Lucia stabilizes the family but hinders her children's efforts to craft new identities, personifying the Nietzschean "dragon" they must challenge.

Furthermore, other older-generation Italian immigrants—such as Zia Louche and the gossiping women of Tenth Avenue—reinforce cultural dogma by championing the Italian virtues of duty and family cohesion that Lucia Santa strives to instill in her children, thereby strengthening her role as the novel's Nietzschean "dragon." For example, during a debate over an old Italian scandal, the narrator notes, "it amused Octavia to see her mother defer to Zia Louche and the old crone valiantly do battle for her mother, each of them treating the other like a duchess" (14). As a figure even older than Lucia, Zia Louche embodies an even deeper, more entrenched connection to Italian tradition than Lucia herself. Lucia's deference to Zia Louche signals not merely respect, but also an affirmation of the very cultural order that the matriarch seeks to impose on her own children, reinforcing her authority as a formidable enforcer of that order. The collective mindset of the neighborhood women further

clarifies cultural stakes when the narrator observes, "the women talked of their children as they would of strangers. It was a favorite topic, the corruption of the innocent by the new land" (6). These lines reveal the older generation's fear that America corrupts the Italian identity of their children, a fear that Robert A. Orsi explains in historical context, noting that "many of the immigrants were haunted by the fear that their entire social order would collapse in the new world; their fears led them to suspect that the very air and water of the United States were weakening the domus" (107).[2] This fear justifies Lucia's intense devotion to preserving her family's cultural values. What is more, such fear turns to condemnation when the women discuss a young girl from the neighborhood: "what type of daughter was she who did not cut short her honeymoon on news of her godmother's illness, the summons issued by her own mother? A real whore" (6). The gossiping women's outrage at the young woman's failure to uphold familial obligation embodies the same relentless, moral absolutism that defines Lucia's role as a Nietzschean "dragon," unyielding in her commitment to preserving the cultural order. In this way, the women's shared judgments not only reflect but also bolster Lucia's uncompromising drive to enforce tradition, reinforcing her as a formidable enforcer of the values that sustain her family.

Where Lucia Santa and the older generation of Italian immigrants to which she belongs represent a Nietzschean "dragon," enforcing rigid Italian cultural ideals, the matriarch's youngest children, Sal and Lena, embody Nietzsche's Camel stage, bearing the burdens of her expectations through obedience, passivity, and consistent physical proximity to their mother. For example, Lena shares a bed with Lucia, and both she and Sal are the most homebound children, especially early in the novel, staying inside the home and remaining closest to their mother. While the outside world represents the pervasive influence of American culture, Sal and Lena stay sheltered within the home, absorbing Lucia's traditional identity with little exposure to external shifts. Moreover, after Sal and Gino narrowly escape injury by jumping over a bonfire, Lucia responds by beating Gino with a tackeril. Terrified, the boys run inside to hide under the bed. When they emerge, Sal asks, "Is Mamma still mad?" (136). Sal's concern for Lucia's mood contrasts with Gino's silence, highlighting Sal's constant awareness of his mother's emotional state and his desire to maintain peace. This sensitivity to Lucia's emotions further illustrates Sal's role as the obedient Camel, constantly striving to fulfill his mother's expectations. The same obedience surfaces during a Sunday feast celebrating Larry's child's First Communion, when "Sal and Lena cleared the table and started washing the mountain of dishes" (265). Here, the pair takes on responsibilities without complaint, demonstrating a quiet acceptance of their roles within the family structure. This sense of passivity deepens during an emotionally charged scene as the family prepares to leave its Tenth Avenue home for the final time. While Lucia breaks down in grief over leaving the familiar space, Octavia, focused on the logistics of the move, urges her to hurry. Lena steps in with, "leave her alone," and Sal adds, "we'll bring her down, you go ahead" (273). Sal and Lena shield their mother from Octavia's impatience, further underscoring their passive yet load-bearing role. Through these actions—serving, protecting, and remaining close—Sal and Lena exemplify Nietzsche's Camel, quietly upholding Lucia's values and

expectations while remaining tightly bound to the familial and cultural identity which the mother works to preserve.

As a figure of rebellion in the novel, Gino Corbo embodies Nietzsche's Lion stage—rejecting Lucia Santa's cultural ideals to forge his own path through American individualism and defiance of familial constraint. Nietzsche's Lion represents the spirit's revolt against the "Thou Shalt" of external authority, confronting the "dragon" of imposed values with the courage to create freedom. Gino enacts this Lion-like rebellion through both physical and ideological defiance, challenging not only Lucia Santa's authority but also the norms of the Italian immigrant community. In a childhood scene on Tenth Avenue, Gino resists the dragon, like Zia Louche when she tries to restrain him during a game. The narrator describes the incident, noting that "the boy spat at Zia Louche, the fake spit of Italian women that shows contempt in a quarrel. It got him free, and he was so quick that his mother hit his face only a glancing blow as he sped away" (17). This gesture of mock contempt, followed by Gino's rapid escape, symbolizes his rejection of communal control; it privileges personal autonomy over deference. Similarly, Gino's decision to enlist in the Army against Lucia Santa's wishes further affirms his rebellion, marking a deliberate break from his mother's authority and a step toward asserting his independence (266). This act not only severs him from the tenement and familial oversight but also represents his attempt to identify as American, choosing to fight in the American army and asserting national allegiance in direct opposition to his inherited Italian identity. His enlistment aligns with the ideology of Fred L. Gardaphé, an Italian American literary historian who argues that becoming "American" often requires second-generation Italian immigrants "to defy our parents, our grandparents, and anyone or anything else that reminded us of our non-American ancestry" (16). Yet Gino's attempt at ethnic transformation falters, as American society would likely continue to view him through a lens of ethnic difference. As Matteo Pretelli observes, "after Pearl Harbor, together with Japanese Americans and German Americans, many ethnic Italians saw their private liberties restrained, while those few that were considered national security threats were interned for the duration of the war" (8). Therefore, although Gino enlists with the hope of achieving a new identity, his rebellion remains incomplete; he breaks from inherited ideals but cannot fully transcend them, as the American society he seeks to join would still cast him as an immigrant "other." He remains, then, in Nietzsche's Lion stage: defiant, but not yet free to create new values of his own.

Gino's rebellion also manifests through ideological defiance, as he rejects Lucia Santa's values of sacrifice and communal duty, embracing a vision of personal freedom that aligns with Nietzsche's Lion. His refusal to accept the labor-driven immigrant life becomes evident in his hatred of the railroad job; in fact, such hatred becomes a feeling so intense that "sometimes his body actually chilled, his hair bristled, and his blood turned so sour in his mouth that he could not help walking away from the light to the darkened windows to stare down at those imprisoned streets sentineled by yellow lamp posts" (264). This moment, as Gino reflects on his work, reveals his contempt for the toil Lucia Santa considers virtuous; instead, he views it as entrapment. His pursuit of self-interest over

familial obligation culminates in Lucia Santa's realization that within her son, "a terrible hatred rose, and she thought, most of all he wanted his own pleasure. He had wanted to live like a rich man's son" (274). This reflection, as Lucia Santa confronts Gino's departure, underscores the boy's ideological commitment to personal pleasure, defying her ethos of collective sacrifice. In her analysis of *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, June Dwyer discusses Gino's transformation, noting that Lucia Santa realizes he "would never come home after the war. That he would become a pilgrim and search for strange Americas in his dreams" (Puzo 274; qtd. in Dwyer 62). Dwyer both notes and emphasizes Gino's search for personal freedom and his rejection of the traditional immigrant experience, reflecting his desire to embrace a new American identity (62). This "pilgrimage" captures Gino's rejection of his familial roots and aligns with Nietzsche's Lion-like revolt against inherited authority, marking Gino's defiance as both a literal and ideological rebellion against his past.

Nietzsche's Lion stage also manifests in Vinnie, whose defiance of Lucia's rigid Italian values emerges through his deliberate isolation—a fierce rejection of the matriarch's ideals of familial unity and the sanctity of work. For example, early in the novel, Vinnie distances himself physically and emotionally, positioning himself "high over Tenth Avenue," where he "brooded on his window sill, the long line of rooms behind him dark and empty, the door from the hall to the kitchen securely locked." (18). From this perch, he detaches from both the vibrant street below and the family he isolates himself from as if "he was self-exiled" (18). His solitude asserts autonomy, dismantling Lucia's vision of unity. What is more, Vinnie's resentment toward Octavia further reveals his estrangement. The narrator notes this hatred, stating that Vinnie "hated her [Octavia], too. She had betrayed him. She had not protested their mother's sending him to work" (19-20). This hatred stems from his forced labor, where "he would carry heavy baskets of bread in the hot sun while other boys swam in the river, played stickball and 'Johnny Ride the Pony,' and hitched onto the backs of trolley cars to see the city" (18). The task embodies Lucia's fervent belief in work as a cornerstone of honor, a value she upholds when she gloats over "the bank books on Friday nights" (263). Vinnie's disdain for Octavia's complicity in his forced labor, as well as his rejection of the toil itself, further exposes his rebellion against the family's labor-centric ethos, severing ties to Lucia's sacred obligations. Yet, while rejecting these values, Vinnie does not replace them with new ideals. Instead, he isolates himself, his silence and anger filling the void left by his cultural abandonment. Through his physical withdrawal and emotional rejection, he channels the Nietzschean Lion's destructive roar, dismantling Lucia's world but failing to build a new one; he remains with only an empty, autonomous void.

Vinnie's suicide completes his Lion-like defiance because suicide is a deliberate act that not only goes against but also annihilates Lucia Santa's values of familial duty and survival, embodying Nietzsche's Lion stage through an ultimate rejection of inherited norms. In the aftermath of Vinnie's suicide, Larry confronts the engineer who witnesses the act—Lefty Fay—who insists, "Larry, I swear to Christ that's the way it seemed to me," claiming that Vinnie deliberately walked into a train engine. Larry responds with a chilling threat: "I'll crucify you," trying to erase the truth of Vinnie's choice and suppress the rebellion it represents against Lucia's world (244). The moment marks a key turning

point in Vinnie's struggle against his mother's unyielding control. Cognitive theories of suicide, as David Lester explains, emphasize that suicidal individuals often suffer "tunnel vision (cognitive constriction) and rigidity in thinking" (154), a condition that grips Vinnie as he narrows his vision to a single escape from the crushing demands of loyalty and labor. Caught in a matrix of oppressive familial expectations, he believes only two paths are available to him: submission or obliteration. Unable to embrace the conformity required by Lucia's system, he chooses death, believing that it is the only way to assert the autonomy he could never achieve within the strict boundaries of his family's values. In this act, he roars against the "Thou Shalt" of Lucia's world, fulfilling the Lion's role as destroyer of inherited authority. What is more, at Vinnie's funeral, Gino observes his brother's body lying on "white satin," with his "bones, his brows, his high, thin nose swelled like hills around his closed, hollowed eyes"—a grotesque transformation that marks Vinnie's "awareness of defeat" (251). Vinnie's suicide represents the Lion's destructive fury, obliterating the world he inherited. Yet, his death does not create anything new; his rebellion, powerful in its rejection, falls short of the Child's creative freedom. Rather than transcending the confines of his past by creating new values, Vinnie becomes trapped in a nihilistic void. His act of destruction leaves him in a tragic stasis, negating the world he could no longer bear, but failing to replace it with something transformative. His death reflects not the birth of new ideals, but the failure to overcome the limitations of his inherited world—a stark contrast to the Child's potential to create a future based on his own freedom.

In contrast, Larry's arc aligns him with the Nietzschean Child stage, as he shapes an identity rooted in American opportunity, transcending Lucia Santa's cultural ideals through leadership and self-reinvention. His transformation begins before the narrative even starts; on the novel's opening page, the narrator describes Larry riding on a horse "as straight and arrogantly as any western cowboy. His spurs were white, heavy sneakers, his sombrero a peaked cap studded with union buttons. His blue dungarees were fastened at the ankle with shiny, plated bicycle clips" (1). This image is not merely the depiction of a fashion choice; it symbolizes Larry's early embrace of the Nietzschean "sacred Yes," signaling a rejection of his Italian roots in favor of the mythos of the American cowboy. However, this persona is more aspirational than fully realized; it is an early stage in Larry's attempt to embody the mythic American ideals of autonomy and power. Later in the novel, Larry becomes "the president of a union, giving out jobs as grandly as a duke in Italy" (273). This moment signals Larry's rise to a position of authority within the American system, but it also reveals the persistence of his Italian heritage. Despite his newfound power, his actions—bestowing jobs with the grandiosity of an Italian duke—illustrate that he cannot fully sever his ties to his cultural past. Larry's ascent from an immigrant "dummy boy" to institutional leader reflects the Nietzschean Child's destruction of inherited values to make space for the new. Yet old-world sensibilities continue to shape this new identity. By embracing union work and the mobility it brings, Larry transforms labor from servitude to empowerment, reshaping his understanding of success and work. While he redefines labor as a means of empowerment, his exercise of authority still draws on the symbolic weight of his Italian roots, suggesting that his transformation remains incomplete. In his efforts to reinvent himself, Larry

reaches a pivotal moment where his American success remains intertwined with the legacy of his heritage. He may embody a new persona, but it continues to reflect the values of his upbringing. Larry's journey embodies the Nietzschean Child who, after rejecting the old, creates new values—but this process is not a clean break from the past. It is a continuous evolution, in which the old world lingers even as Larry strives to redefine himself in the new.

Embodying the imaginative spirit of Nietzsche's Child stage, Octavia, similar to Larry, forges her own identity, distancing herself from her mother's expectations through education and assertive self-direction. For example, early in the novel, Lucia Santa urges her daughter to become a dressmaker—a stable, familiar trade rooted in domestic tradition—but Octavia longs to attend night school with the goal of becoming a teacher (12). Her longing reflects more than ambition; it directly opposes the future her mother envisions for her. As Tamburri notes, "Octavia finds herself living in a not dissimilar interstitial space between old world and new, and in so doing, she must balance the presumed duties of a daughter with her own desires to break out of those traditional roles" (49). In Nietzschean terms, Octavia adopts the Lion's role by rejecting Lucia's values and asserting her own will. She envisions a future of intellectual purpose and personal growth rather than the familial duty her mother imposes. This outlook directly challenges Lucia, who clings to tradition out of fear and a desire to maintain control. However, rather than becoming trapped in a state of Lion-like defiance, Octavia shifts into the Child's role by creating new values through reinvention. While she ultimately does not attend night school, she refuses to relinquish her desire for teaching. Instead, she redirects that aspiration, becoming "a sewing teacher for the Melody Corporation, an organization promoting the sale of sewing machines. Octavia gave the free lessons that went with each purchase" (80). In this way, she pursues her goal of teaching through a creative reinvention of herself and her path, reaffirming her autonomy and rejecting the passive submission her mother expects. This shift from defiance to reinvention mirrors the Child's creative power in Nietzsche's framework, as Octavia transforms the world around her, asserting her individuality and vision for the future.

Octavia's actions continue to embody the imaginative freedom of Nietzsche's Child stage as she actively constructs a self-defined identity that breaks from her mother's traditional ideals. Through both her physical appearance and her rejection of conventional roles, she asserts a will to self-creation which transcends mere rebellion, transforming her values through imaginative reinvention. In a deliberate act of defiance, she dresses distinctly from the Italian women of the tenement, with the narrator noting that she "wanted to be everything these women were not! She wore a powder-blue suit and white gloves, as her high school teacher had done" (11). This aesthetic choice marks more than a personal preference; it signals a symbolic break from Lucia Santa's expectations of femininity and reflects Octavia's desire to inhabit a role grounded in intellectual purpose. As Rose De Angelis observes, "refusing to feed the male's sexual fantasies and his idea of woman as sex object, Octavia wears man-tailored suits and metaphorically crossdresses to 'redress' injustices" (39). Octavia's resistance, then, not only challenges the objectifying male gaze but also undermines Lucia's internalized version of femininity—one based on principles such as submission, decorum, and domestic beauty.

What is more, the daughter's rejection of marriage and motherhood further distances her from the values her mother upholds. For example, the narrator observes a conversation between the pair, noting that "Octavia smiled to make her words less cruel. She said, 'I just meant I don't want to get married or have children if I do. I don't want to give up my whole life just for that,'" prompting Lucia's lament, "'Ah, poor child of mine'" (24). The pity in Lucia's response reveals her unwavering belief in traditional female fulfillment, a belief that Octavia quietly dismantles. In place of this inherited vision, Octavia imagines a life shaped by her own aspirations. This act exemplifies the Child's role in Nietzsche's metamorphoses: to forget the past, generate new values, and say "yes" to a future of one's own making. Her choices reflect not just resistance but creative authorship, highlighting her continued pursuit of an identity grounded in self-determined meaning rather than filial duty.

The Fortunate Pilgrim conveys the existential and cultural struggles of the Angeluzzi-Corbo family in a way that echoes Nietzsche's "Three Metamorphoses," mapping an immigrant journey from obedience, to rebellion, to attempted reinvention. Lucia Santa enforces inherited Italian values as the Nietzschean "dragon," Sal and Lena absorb those burdens like obedient Camels, Gino and Vinnie rebel with Lion-like defiance, and Larry and Octavia reach toward the imaginative spirit of the Child. However, none of the children truly completes the journey to selfhood. Each of the children begins a metamorphosis, but none creates or lives by fully self-made values—the mark of Nietzsche's Overman. During a moment of shared lamentation between the older women of Twelfth Avenue concerning Lucia's misfortunes, one woman interjects and captures this failure in striking, ironic detail:

> True, true, and yet she has a grown daughter, a forelady—intelligent, married to a softer man. She has masculine children who would do credit to any mother. Lorenzo, married, giver of grandchildren, making his fortune in the bakery union; Gino, now a good dutiful boy, a head of the family that made you think of Italy with his hard work on the railroad and never in trouble with the police. Salvatore, who won medals in school and would surely be a professor. Lena, an Italian daughter of the old school, a worker in the home, ever obedient, ever dutiful. Look how they all respected Lucia Santa. The two married ones still gave money; Gino brought his pay envelope home unopened. (259)

Though the speaker offers admiration, the passage reveals how each child settles into a spiritual plateau. Larry, who once seemed to invent a new self through his rise in the union, earns praise not for autonomy but for fulfilling familiar roles such as marriage, income, and the provision of children. Similarly, Octavia's transformation ends in a conventional marriage, not in the intellectual independence she once pursued. Gino, who once defied tradition by enlisting in the Army and rejecting labor, becomes "dutiful," returning to the very values he once rejected. The Camels, Sal and Lena, never escape their initial obedience. These lives may appear stable, but inherited expectations define them. The passage reveals a deep irony: the children's "success" only reinforces Lucia's cultural vision, rather than dismantling it. What looks like becoming is, in fact, returning.

This failure stems not only from cultural pressure but also from internal contradiction. Even

the most imaginative characters—Larry and Octavia—struggle to reconcile their American aspirations with inherited duty. They live in a tension between two selves, caught between what Andrew Wong describes as "independent and interdependent modes" of identity (251). For bicultural individuals, this cognitive dissonance—the "uncomfortable feeling" that arises when one becomes "aware of some inconsistency among various attitudes, beliefs, and items of knowledge" (246)—is not a fleeting discomfort but a chronic state. In the world of *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, that switch between selves never resolves. The children remain suspended between the code of ethics they inherit and the freedom they desire. In this sense, the novel offers not the triumph of becoming, but the exhaustion of trying. The Angeluzzi-Corbo children begin to evolve, but their growth stalls under the weight of cultural memory and psychological strain. They stand just short of Nietzsche's Overman, with the contradiction of being both Italian and American, and both obedient and autonomous, ultimately haunting them.[3] *The Fortunate Pilgrim* dramatizes the immigrant condition as a tragic loop, a loop where the dream of reinvention gives way to a return, and where no act of self-creation fully escapes the gravity of heritage.

Endnotes:

1. *Thus Spake Zarathustra* adopts a narrative form, but scholars generally agree that Nietzsche conveys his philosophy through Zarathustra's voice, therefore marking the text as a treatise rather than a piece of fiction. For example, Thomas Brobjer declares, "Nietzsche's Zarathustra is Nietzsche! Or better, Nietzsche's Zarathustra is the sublimated Nietzsche!" (30), presenting Zarathustra as Nietzsche's idealized philosophical persona. Richard Gravil similarly asserts that Zarathustra acts as "an imaginary prophet, who is, of course, the mouthpiece for his [Nietzsche's] own beliefs" (21).
2. Although much of Orsi's work focuses exclusively on first generation Italian immigrants who settled in Harlem, the sentiment of this quotation applies broadly to Italian immigrants who settled throughout each of New York's several boroughs.
3. Dennis Barone, focusing on Italian-American Protestantism, makes a similar observation, noting, "from a multiplicity of texts, a message and a pattern may emerge: Italian American Protestantism as a negotiation between adopting the demands of Americanization and maintaining a cherished italianita" (137).This dynamic mirrors the Angeluzzi-Corbo children's struggle to reconcile Lucia Santa's traditional values with their American aspirations, reflecting their incomplete Nietzschean metamorphoses.

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