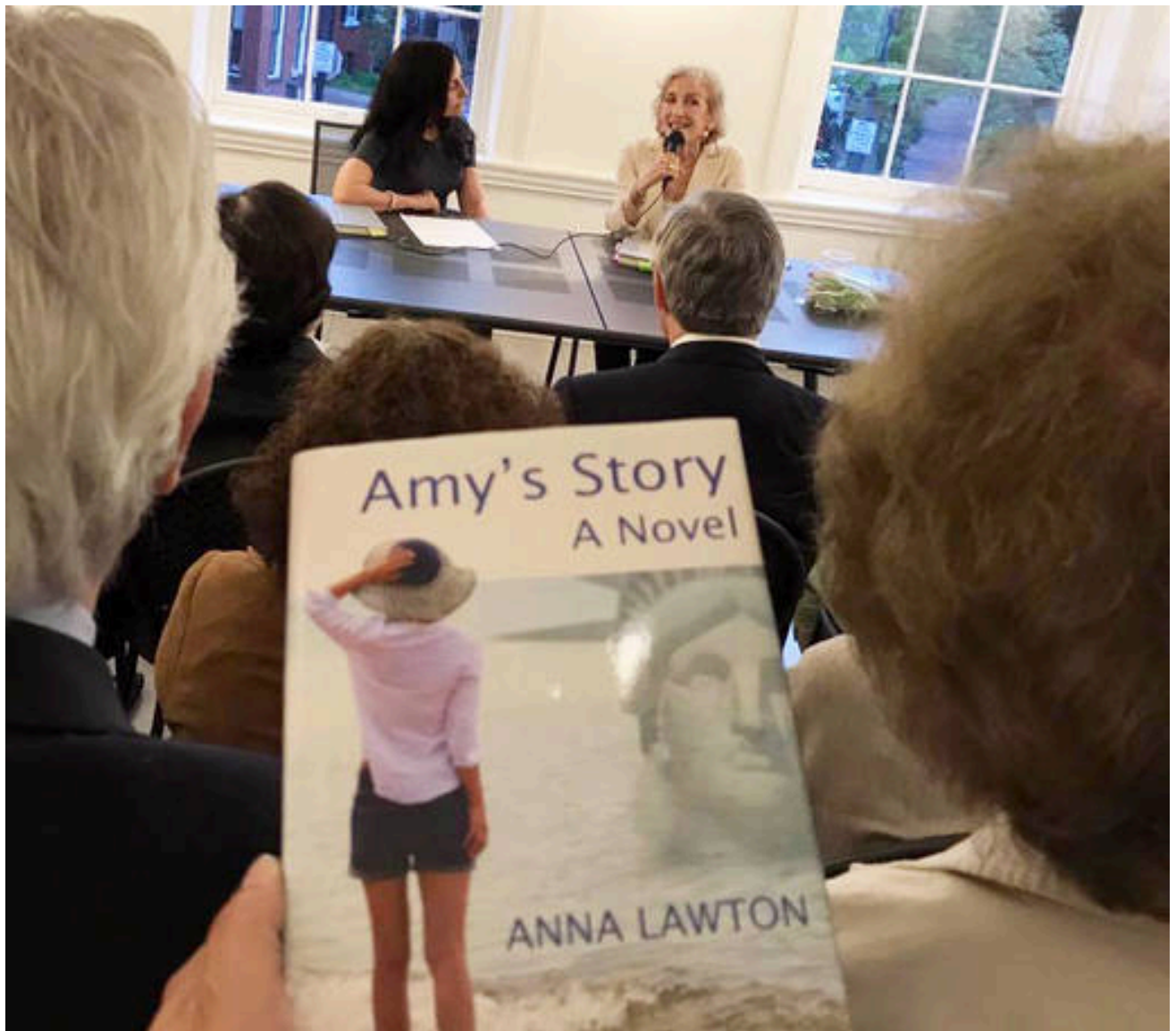




D.C. Book Night: Anna Lawton Talks About “Amy’s Story”

Daniela Enriquez (May 01, 2017)



On April 27th the Washington, D.C. literary crowd gathered to celebrate another success by one of its most well-known members: a presentation of Anna Lawton’s latest book, “Amy’s Story.” The venue was perfect: the staff of Via Umbria, a small but extremely welcoming Italian gourmet market, with an upstairs patio and a space for culinary and literary events, greeted us with an aperitivo including several Italian delicacies. Bottles were popped and the spumante started to flow from glass



to mouth. An organized – but long – line formed when the brand new books were brought upstairs to be bought by the readers and signed by the author.

After schmoozing for a good half an hour, the crowd took a seat and silently prepared to listen to a conversation between [Anna Lawton](#) [2] and [Lucia Wolf](#) [3], Librarian and Italian Specialist at the [Library of Congress](#) [4]. A conversation between a librarian and an author promised to be very interesting and the public was all ears!

We immediately learned that the background of [Amy’s Story](#) [5] is a friendship between two women, which started from childhood and continued through adulthood. If that reminds you of another famous novel that recently had major success in Italy as well as in the States, I can assure you that the plot is very different. Even though the author admitted that some veiled references to Elena Ferrante are to be found in the novel, the friendship in Lawton’s book is only the pretext for a more peculiar and intriguing story: Amy’s? Not, at all. Stella’s story that her friend Amy, a publisher, finds written in a manuscript and decides to publish.

The story is set between Italy and the United States, in particular New York and California, covering a period ranging from the early 60’s through 2011. Thanks to a very complex structure that is composed by a frame – Amy’s attempt to publish the manuscript – and the real plot – Stella’s memoir and story which narrates her life experience in the US – the author brings to life a rainbow of characters and adventures that the reader won’t soon forget.

Questioned on why she decided to create such a complex structure, Lawton answered that this is the only way she can write. A literal, chronological narration, from past to present, is not her style. Although in her first novel – *Album di famiglia* – the events happen more chronologically, this time the author decided to play more with her readers and to bring them from present to past and from that to a more remote time (in the novel we find a flashback to the 1920’s).

The two questions everybody was wondering about followed. First of all, Ms. Wolf asked if the story was autobiographical. Some of the people in the public knew the author and part of her life, and found suspicious the fact that she indeed lived and taught for years in California. But our investigative curiosity was appeased when Anna answered that the book was not about her life, and not autobiographical. Nevertheless, she admitted the need of a connection with something real in order to invent a story or a character, and so some of the ideas present in the book indeed have roots in real events and people.

The other object of curiosity regarded Lawton’s literary inspirations, both shaping her career and this book in specific. Without any hesitation she named three Italian authors: [Elsa Morante](#) [6], [Dacia Maraini](#) [7] and [Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa](#) [8]. However Ms. Lawton also told the public that another art form that deeply influenced her was cinema. The book in fact is full of cinematographic elements: close ups, long shoots and it also has a soundtrack, songs that help the reader fall into the atmosphere of various times being narrated.

To conclude the evening, Lawton read a few pages of the book taken from the 1920s’ flashback narrating the story of an Italian family headed to the USA during the first wave of immigration. It is always a gift to be able to hear an author reading his/her own book, so everybody listened with much attention, following the adventure of these immigrants from the beloved motherland to the new world and – in the process – we all started to think about our own immigration story and how different but at the same time how similar it seemed.

More talking, food and drinks followed the event and, most importantly, the book signing to which the author submitted herself with cheer and patience.

Visit the websites: annalawton.com [9]; newacademia.com [10]

Contact the author: alawton@newacademia.com [11]



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Links

- [1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/amy-1jpg-0>
- [2] http://www.booksandideas.net/_Lawton-Anna_.html
- [3] <https://www.loc.gov/rr/european/eurspecialists.html>
- [4] <https://www.loc.gov>
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