

awareness, whereas Pynchon has continued, and hopefully continues, to relentlessly fight in its defense.

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Francesca De Lucia. *Italian American Cultural Fictions: From Diaspora to Globalization*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2017. 180 pages.

In the introduction to his *Buried Caesars*, Robert Viscusi maintains that one of the biggest problems for Italian Americans has been and continues to be Italy itself. According to Viscusi, Italy's cultural and economic policy has relied heavily on diaspora communities to promote the penetration of goods and the exposure of the national heritage in the US. In return, descendants of Italian immigrants have received very little recognition. This neglect applies also to the academy, where Italian-American studies, despite of having attracted a small but devoted following, are still absent from major scholarly conversation. It is therefore important to register a new addition to the still meagre canon of works on Italian Americans authored by scholars from the fatherland. Francesca De Lucia, with her *Italian American Cultural Fictions*, follows in the footsteps of, among others, Martino Marazzi, Marcella Bencivenni and Simone Cinotto, who are contributing in spreading Italian-American studies in Italy.

Italian American Cultural Fictions is very ambitious in scope, aiming to provide a survey on Italian-American cultural production mainly, but not exclusively, in literature, from the "classic age" of the first part of the twentieth century to the present. De Lucia's intent, however, is not to give a detailed chronicle of a century of cultural production, but in particular to focus her account on the transition from an earlier mode of representation, labelled "emblematic ethnicity," to a more recent one, the "latent ethnicity." According to De Lucia, "emblematic" ethnicity focused on "the ways in which immigrants and their children struggled to overcome discrimination and elaborated a new identity borne out of the interaction of Italian and mainstream American elements" (27). Gradually, "emblematic" ethnicity has been replaced by a different mode, defined "latent"; the latter is the product of a "second diaspora"—from city ghettos to the suburbs—and of progressive cultural integration into the mainstream: the latent mode, therefore, is a way of representing ethnicity which sheds oppositional elements of the culture and reinvents identity by relying on neutralized and sanitized symbols.

Central to this study is the concept of "cultural fiction," a label broadly including representations of a specific culture produced in different forms—from novels to films and newspaper articles—by both insiders and outsiders of a specific group. The author's effort goes in the direction of finding common ground by intersecting viewpoints and media and thus identifying the narrative representation of the group as discourse, where insider views and visions from the mainstream are understood in continuous and dialectic relationship. However, fiction takes the lion's share of De Lucia's effort, and her forays into cinema, however insightful, fail to do justice to the extremely complex interaction between Italian Americans and the big screen.

Historical and cultural conflicts are crucial determiners in the shaping of these cultural fictions, and, in particular, the book identifies in WWII the “watershed period” responsible for a major restructuring of the defining ideas of ethnicity. The war effort allowed Italian Americans to assert their loyalty to the host country, the United States, without “feeling disloyal to their roots” (11). The fight against the Fascist regime was increasingly seen as liberation of the mother country, whose oppressed population did not possess the strength to break free from the dictatorship. Quite significantly, however, this episode remains underrepresented in Italian-American fictions, as, De Lucia notes, memories of this period are still “ambivalent and troubled,” a sign that official discourse did not completely overlap with private perceptions.

Spread throughout three chapters, the analysis of the “cultural fictions” that have accompanied or reflected on the crucial transition of the Italian-American community from the 1920s to the 1950s provide the most interesting contribution in De Lucia’s work, as the author charts this dark territory thanks to meticulous work on available sources. The very lack of significant fictionalizations of the period in question, in either book or cinematic form, highlights the traumatic effect that the whole war experience had on the community. *Italian American Cultural Fictions*, in this perspective, proves to be an invaluable synthesis as the scholar has managed to put together a sizeable amount of documents digging in different directions, which prove essential in making sense of this oxymoronic Italian-American tale of oblivion.

The first part of this survey, “Documenting Fascism and World War II in an Italian-American Perspective,” on the one hand registers the division of the Italian-American press in two opposite camps; the pro-Fascist, which urged the community to cling to national culture and values, and an anti-fascist cohort which started gaining ground after the invasion of Ethiopia and the consequent end of Washington’s benign attitude towards Mussolini. This latter group emphasized continuity between opposition to the regime and Americanism, even employing to its advantage the symbolic circumstance of Garibaldi’s birthday occurring on July the 4th. The chapter concludes with Frank Capra’s propaganda movies (*Why We Fight*, 1943) where, more than the content itself, it is the director’s ethnic background which, according to De Lucia, becomes part of the cultural fiction: in fact, the opportunity of having an Italian American who nurtured no qualms about which side to support proved to be a strong propagandistic move for the USA and contributed in framing America’s role in the conflict in a positive light.

The second part of this module, “Fictions and Memoirs of the Italian-American War Experience,” posits a crucial distinction between an official discourse, as shown in John Hersey’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel from 1944, *A Bell for Adano*, and marginal sites of controversy as found in two works by Italian-American writers. Hersey’s novel can be seen in continuity with Capra’s propaganda movies, with the main character, Major Joppolo, an idealized figure of rectitude with saint-like features, who symbolizes the unproblematic allegiance to countries at war with each other. Joppolo is “an integrated American who is capable of making effective use of his immigrant background” (82); ethnic origin is turned into insider knowledge and becomes a crucial asset for winning over the Italian population and paving the way for the liberation of the country. The only works by Italian Americans where

the war, albeit obliquely, is addressed, are Mario Puzo's first novel, *The Dark Arena* (1955), and Gay Talese's memoir *Unto the Sons* (1992), both providing evidence of an antagonistic ethnic stance alongside the official narrative. Puzo's work has an Italian-American protagonist, Walter Mosca, a veteran who fails to readjust to the society back home: according to De Lucia, "by antagonising the society of early post-war reconstruction," Mosca "makes the opposite journey to the standard one for Italian Americans who served in the army" (78), thus hinting at a problematic negation of the triumphalism that dominated public discourse. In Talese's memoir, instead, the author's father is portrayed as deeply conflicted between his public and private selves, showing an "almost schizophrenic combination of an endorsement of American values and an atavistic connection to roots" (83). The same silence is the main element emerging from the following chapter, which details the internment of Italian Americans following Executive Order 9066. This controversial phase of the community's history is briefly described by Jerre Mangione in his *An Ethnic At Large* (1978) and in a belated collection of testimonials from former interns in Lawrence DiStasi's *Una storia segreta* (2001)—another signal that "while the war acted as a catalyst for the group's process of integration, it also forced Italian Americans to repress and minimize certain elements of their culture" (90).

Italian American Cultural Fictions considers the "cultural amnesia" (163) regarding the war years as the necessary prelude paving the way for new, individual and more pacified forms of ethnicity which belong in the "latent" mode. This momentous passage, far from being exclusive to the community of Italian descent, is part of the postwar "second" diaspora from urban ghettos to leafy and spacious suburbs. De Lucia's wide catalogue of "latent" ethnics include intriguing readings of Don DeLillo, Anthony Giardina and the Afro-Italian-American Kim Ragusa, each showing different strategies of individual reinvention and incorporation of their cultural background.

In this perspective, the more recent evolution of Italian-American writing that is offered in the last part of *Italian American Cultural Fictions* highlights one of the problematic features of the "latent" restructuring of ethnic representation: in her survey of female writing in chapter 6, De Lucia underlines how both Mari Benasutti and Rita Ciresi employ cliché and caricature in representing Italian-American characters. In her reading, the scholar connects this choice to different individual causes, an interpretation consistent with her more general understanding of the "latent" mode as an "interior and non-essentialist trait" (165); the feeling remains, however, that a wider, more collective factor might be at work: if, as Fred Gardaphé suggested, Italian Americans are "whites" on a "leash," are the writers unconsciously voicing a deeper sense of unease, result of the lingering stigma affecting Italian Americans? Is the "latent-ethnic" writer, in his/her pursuit of a successful integration between heritage and the larger American scene, fighting a battle against mainstream "cultural fictions" that pigeonhole Italians into a small number of pre-determined roles? Can this fight be considered, or aspire to be considered, as a collective task for Italian Americans?

In an age of transmedial narratives, De Lucia's introduction of the "cultural fiction" concept provides a useful perspective to approach the often heterogeneous and multi-faceted discourses constructed around minority and marginal groups. Her subdivision of the Italian-American cultural narrative in two phases, persuasively

grounded on specific historical conditions, helps making sense of the evolution and changes within the Italian-American tradition. Her investigation into several instances of the “latent” mode provide convincing support for the interpretation of its connection with the multiple possibilities of negotiating an identity that opened up after WWII. *Italian American Cultural Fictions* will provide a precious reference point for further research on this controversial period of Italian-American cultural history, and scholars might want to follow De Lucia’s example of identifying narrative strands into disparate and seemingly non-narrative sources.

Sostene M. Zangari

Randall J. Stephens. *The Devil’s Music: How Christians Inspired, Condemned, and Embraced Rock ‘n’ Roll*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018. 337 pages.

Two films a couple of years apart encapsulate both the history of rock and roll, especially its roots, and what was best in the music in the 1970s. The film that primarily deals with the roots of rock is the popular cult film *The Blues Brothers* of 1980, which in the course of its humorous narrative frames rock and its roots between the Gospel number “The Old Landmark” performed by James Brown and the James Cleveland Choir and the eponymous Blues Brothers’ version of “Jailhouse Rock,” made famous by the King. The history is augmented with a number of classic blues and soul numbers by some the most outstanding artists of their respective musical modes. The other film is the landmark rockumentary *The Last Waltz of The Band*, brought to the screen in 1978 by that great rock fan Martin Scorsese, who had participated in making the now largely dated classic rockumentary *Woodstock*. *The Last Waltz*, on the other hand, showcases rock at its very best, making a strong case in the opinion of the reviewer that this popular music at its zenith could be called great art, which in that sense remains “forever young.”

What connects both films to the book under review is their take on the connection between rock and religion that Randall Stephens explores at length from a cultural history perspective. In the films we see and hear this history in a tangible fashion. In *The Last Waltz* quite pertinent is the rock-hymn “Forever Young,” performed on screen by a certain Nobel laureate to be who wrote it years before his overtly Christian album *Slow Train Coming* that was yet to come. More significantly, the film captures the inspired rendition of The Band’s classic “The Weight,” with the vocal support of the superlative Gospel group the Staples. The Gospel group did not have to depart from their métier to any great degree in their stirring contribution to this rock song’s performance, almost appropriating it from The Band, and demonstrating its debt to their spiritual music tradition. More directly related to Stephens’ study is the James Brown number referred to above, where the great soul artist reprises the “Devil destroying” routines—including “hard singing”: “shouting, keening, moaning, screaming, and exhortation” (Bayles 156)—of his musical mentor Ira Tucker, which in his career Brown had partially incorporated into his secular style. In other words, what both films largely prove in their own fashion is the first part of Stephens’ claim, that religion inspired rock. The book scrupulously charts the historical dynamics of