

when “we” respect “them,” they do not respect us, but only see our respect as a sign of weakness and repay it with contempt. A naughty kid, drowning kittens for the pleasure of causing suffering and death to an innocent creature, displays a lack of empathy which should cause people to be on their watch for him or her in the future. One day he/she may enjoy bullying colleagues or even tormenting people in concentration camps. A notorious liar should be exorcised since this kind of behavior undermines the trust that is necessary for people to be able to live together.

An ambition to relativize all conventional knowledge about good and bad and true and false may lead to disaster. If there are no boundaries between “us” and “them,” when they are showing indecent or erratic behavior, any civilization may be overtaken by such traits. History has taught, and the present demonstrates, that being respectful towards fanatics, bullies and liars may result in political leaders who are just that: fanatics, bullies and liars. Wuthnow rightly complains about American politics escalating into “name calling, rumor mongering, and character assassination” (259). Bad manners in everyday and political life will undoubtedly interact.

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Francesca de Lucia, *Italian American Cultural Fictions: From Diaspora to Globalization*. Transatlantic Aesthetics and Cultures Vol. 7. Bern: Peter Lang 2017. 182 pages. ISBN: 978-0343-2567-7.

In *Italian American Cultural Fictions: From Diaspora to Globalization* (2017), Francesca de Lucia offers a rich overview of the Italian American presence in the literature and culture of the United States. In addition to the book’s scholarly value, its conciseness and ambitious chronological scope make it not only a sophisticated academic text, but also a useful book for survey courses on Italian American literature. Through a careful analysis of novels, films, memoirs, and newspaper articles, de Lucia traces the ways in which Italian American cultural fictions – and the identitarian narratives that find expression within them – evolve from a notion of “emblematic” ethnicity to one of “latent” ethnicity, two terms that de Lucia contributes to the conceptual vocabulary of Italian American Studies. The volume also places a valuable emphasis on cultural narratives of Italian Americanness, such as, for example, the deification of the Italian immigrant along Chris-

tological lines, or the notion of *serietà* (moral rigor) as a guiding principle for women.

In the introductory part of the book, the author tentatively suggests a “privileged connection between the United States and Italy” (33). This connection, de Lucia proposes, is grounded both in the Roman imperial legacy and its role in shaping an American self, and in the considerable Italian American presence in US mainstream culture. This alleged privileged connection emerges again in the rhetoric of the ethnic press during the Second World War (see 68,71), especially in the voice of a journalist who affirms that “Columbus, Verrazzano, the Cabots and others are indissoluble ties in the history of these two great nations” (71). I would be hard pressed to find flaws in de Lucia’s remarkable publication, but in my view this perspective requires further scrutiny as it seems to argue for Italian American exceptionalist aspirations, which some readers might take issue with.

In chapter two, de Lucia presents a trio of authors – Constantine Panunzio, Pietro di Donato, and John Fante – who employ two central tropes of Italian American writing, namely the oppositional myths of the Italian American as a quasi-divine creative force and as a victimized martyr, oppressed by systematic discrimination. She posits that Panunzio, di Donato, and Fante respectively advocate, subvert, and abandon these two central narratives in what is theorized as a progression towards “latent ethnicity.” The analysis of latent ethnicity continues in chapter three, which looks at early appropriations of Italian American characters by non-Italian American authors, such as John Dos Passos’s *USA*, W.R. Burnett’s *Little Caesar*, and Armitage Trail’s *Scarface*. This section reflects on the rise of a well-known aesthetic tradition that has laid the foundation for larger-than-life Italian American icons such as Puzo’s, Coppola’s, and Scorsese’s. Such a tradition envisions Italian Americans as criminals endowed with an alternative, yet relatable morality that grates against the codes of American society, bringing them to their unsurprising, yet somehow heroic downfall. I agree with the author when she claims that these characters follow a specifically American pattern of heroism fueled by the discrepancy between the laws of the individual and the laws of society. This discrepancy has found its expression in American literature in the moral dilemmas of Huckleberry Finn or in such seminal protest literature as Henry D. Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience.”

In the second part, the book focuses on the post-Second-World-War period, when the experience of Italian American women found expression

in literature. One wonders at the choice of addressing female authors in a separate chapter (“Domesticating Ethnicity: The Fictions of Women”) and relatively late in the book, but the author convincingly explains that the progression of chapters is chronological, and since “women writers began to engage in creative writing only in the post-war era” (12), the structure of the book makes evident the absence of female voices up to this historical moment. Analyses of the works of Mari Tomasi, Marion Benasutti, Dorothy Calvetti Bryant, and Rita Cirese offer a wide range of themes and concerns explored by women writers in post-war Italian American fiction. These authors tend to retrieve the classic themes of Italian American migrant writing – such as the “impulse for divinity” (Viscusi in de Lucia 103) – and also elaborate on the traditional narrative of *serietà*: a cluster of desirable female virtues such as propriety, reliability, and efficiency (101). The *serietà* cliché can result in facile polarizations of women as either *matres dolorosae* or disheveled seducers that are not far from contemporary representations of women (see, for example, Paolo Sorrentino’s Oscar-winning film *The Great Beauty*, 2013, or the TV series by the same author *The Young Pope*, 2016). However, through the conceptualization of *serietà* – a cultural narrative that would deserve to feature more prominently in discussions both inside and outside academia – the book adds momentum to urgent debates on womanhood.

In “Italian Americans in Jewish and African American Cinema,” de Lucia offers an insight in a medium that eminently contributed to shaping an Italian American pop iconography. In late twentieth century cinema, de Lucia argues, we see the postmodern demythologization of previously idolized figures such as the gangster. These *mafiosi*, de Lucia argues, “are not the titanic figures of *The Godfather*. They are often portrayed as ageing, shabbily dressed men with none of the personal charisma or aura of power usually connected with the cliché of the Italian American gangster” (123). In this section the author lingers especially on the symmetries and continuities between the Italian and the African American communities in films such as Jim Jarmusch’s *Ghost Dog* or Spike Lee’s *Jungle Fever* and *Do the Right Thing*. De Lucia’s exploration of the facets of these continuities is fascinating, as she posits that the films at hand present the two ethnic groups as, in many ways, symmetric and complementary, using each other to negotiate the visibility or invisibility of their shared ethnic/racial background.

In the concluding chapter, de Lucia not only elegantly moves from emblematic to latent ethnicity, but expands on the contiguity of the African

American and Italian American experiences via Kim Ragusa's autobiography *The Skin between Us* (2006). Ragusa's memorable portrayal of her Sicilian/Calabrian father sitting with her Black mother and grandmother and being "the darkest one there" (Ragusa in de Lucia 155) offers a vivid commentary on the constructed and fictional quality of Whiteness and Otherness. De Lucia also touches upon the ambivalent status of Sicily: a land suspended between Africa and Europe, Blackness and Whiteness. Sicily's liminal role as dispatcher and receiver of migratory waves highlights the book's relevance to current debates, as Italy is confronted with unparalleled migration flows that are likely to dramatically change the nation's self-narrations over the next years.

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Sielke, Sabine, ed (in collaboration with Björn Bosserhoff), *Nostalgie / Nostalgia – Imaginierte Zeit-Räume in globalen Medienkulturen / Imagined Time-Spaces in Global Media Cultures*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017. 286 pages. ISBN: 978-3-631-70081-5.

Sabine Sielke's edited volume (in collaboration with Björn Bosserhoff) is a systematic historical exploration of one of the most complex, yet strangely elusive global phenomena: nostalgia. *Nostalgie / Nostalgia – Imaginierte Zeit-Räume in globalen Medienkulturen / Imagined Time-Spaces in Global Media Cultures* is a bi-lingual collection of fourteen articles (in either German or English) that maps the field of nostalgia and its various transnational occurrences. This multifaceted volume is preceded by an introductory overview in which Sielke provides three larger conceptual frameworks, namely the narrating, imaging, and inhabiting of nostalgia. These prove to be fruitful vantage points to analyze the spatial-temporal dynamics that nostalgia encompasses. The collection offers transnational and interdisciplinary approaches to current debates on nostalgia through explorations of novels, TV shows, and other cultural artifacts (not exclusively American), and the wide array of essays demonstrates how nostalgia can be conceptualized as an expansive tool of cultural analysis that outlines global cultural and political entanglements. The focus lies on mediated global time-spaces and digital media cultures in the contemporary moment, evoking the importance of nostalgia in both locally bound spaces and in time-warping digital spheres.