history of Italian Americans in Colorado, including a massacre that official history hardly remembers, as is the case with most memories and stories of organized labor in this country.

Furthermore, the documentary touches upon the idea of blending opposing points of view on Columbus's legacy and finding a compromise that will allow indigenous peoples and Italian Americans to retell American history outside the grammar of the invasion. In this sense, the film may be viewed as a resourceful pedagogical tool in the classroom: Besides illuminating for us the history of this national holiday within the context of Denver's indigenous and Italian-American communities, it prompts reflections and debates about the political meanings of ceremonial functions among multiethnic communities. In fact, it ignites questions about the legitimacy of freedom of speech and of protest, especially in a situation where the symbolic power of a name, "Columbus," does nothing but revive the scars of colonial history as well as reinforce long-standing power relations. Yet, far from giving way to an anti-Italian sentiment, *Columbus Day Legacy* reflects upon and acknowledges the validity of each side of the story. As such, it teaches viewers that it is time to look at this holiday as an opportunity for dialog and, as Glenn Morris puts it, for "mutual respect with one another." Fighting off the oppositional binary of "us against them," this film highlights the need to forge interethnic dialog among minority groups that propose new paradigms of cultural and political coexistence.

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The Tree of Life.
By Hava Volterra.
Ruth Diskin Films, 2008.
76 minutes, DVD format, color.

A father dies. A daughter grieves and in so doing realizes her father had never spoken of his family's past. She decides to search for his and, by extension, her own roots in Italy, a journey resulting in the documentary *The Tree of Life*. The film begins with a home movie of the director, Hava Volterra, as a child with her father, while Hava, as an adult, narrates. Throughout the film we see her on camera—in Los Angeles, Israel, and Italy—as she searches for her family's past. Her voice-over narration continues through the entire film, with her occasional reappearance serving as a visual unifying link in the story.

The historical part of the documentary is particularly beautifully presented. Volterra describes how her family can be traced back to Renaissance Italy, when an ancestor finds an economic niche for himself as a loan-banker. The use of animation and puppets—paired with superb musical choices and juxtaposed with the more conventional use of interviews with scholars—is well balanced and visually interesting. Scholars—such as Roberto Bonfil, Sergio Della Pergola, Alessandra Veronese, Anna Foa,

and Fabrizio Lelli—from Italian and Israeli universities make brief comments about various members of this distinguished family, which includes Meshullam of Volterra, Rabbi Moses Haym Luzzato (conventionally abbreviated as RaMHaL), Luigi Luzzati, and Vito Volterra. We are shown a *condotta*, or loan-bank contract, from an archive in Florence, as well as a travelog and letters to Lorenzo de' Medici written by Meshullam of Volterra.

Of particular interest is the connection to the RaMHaL, who, in a sense, represents the split personality of the Italian-Jewish scholar and who is revered today by three very different Jewish groups (Hebraists, Hasidim, and Mitnagdim). The use of puppetry to tell the story of the RaMHaL is brilliant. And yet it focuses on his Kabbalistic writings, without balancing this with what is more generally understood as his more important writings, those that helped modernize the Hebrew language and shape contemporary Jewish ethics.[1]

The segment on Luigi Luzzatti, an economist who was elected to the Italian Parliament in 1870 and who, after 40 years of working to modernize Italy, became its first Jewish prime minister in 1910, utilizes archival photographs to tell his story. Moving forward in time, for the segment on Vito Volterra, a professor of mathematics at the University of Rome, we enter the world of film, as well as the world of Mussolini and fascism. The World War II footage used to depict this period of Vito Volterra's life is masterfully utilized, as viewers are visually reminded of the fascist-era Italian Racial Laws of 1938 and the Nazi invasion of northern Italy a few years later.

All the historical material is intersected with the contemporary personal voyage of Hava Volterra as she travels from her home in Los Angeles to Israel to Italy. For this reviewer, these travel segments themselves are the weakest part of the film and might have benefited from being cut or edited further. During her trip to Israel, Volterra convinces her aunt to help with her project of exploring the Volterra family roots; specifically, she convinces her aunt to return to Italy and try to reunite with the northern Italian family that had hidden the Volterras during the Nazi occupation.

Back in Israel, Volterra interviews her father's colleagues and students at Hebrew University, where he was a professor. He and his siblings had moved to Israel after World War II; her uncle and her father became professors, and her aunt became a *kibbutznik* and a puppeteer. We learn that although her father was an educated and articulate man, he never spoke about his life in Italy and his family's history. Why? We don't really get an answer other than a musing comment from the director that perhaps he felt betrayed by his parents—people who had built a world that had failed.

What the documentary is missing is a discussion about the religious and ethnic continuity of this branch of the family. Italian Jews, even today, who are particularly committed to the continuity of their Jewish identity often move to Israel, given that the number of self-identifying Jews in Italy is relatively small as a result of intermarriage, emigration, and the Holocaust. The weakening trend in Italian Judaism is made starkly clear in the segment of the film depicting a cousin of the Volterra family, Fiorello LaGuardia, mayor of New York City from 1934 to 1945, who was a practicing Episcopalian although his mother was Jewish. So, when Hava Volterra asks the charming Rabbi Elia Richetti of Venice to chant a symbolic memorial *kaddish*, or mourner's prayer, for her father, the viewer who comes equipped already with a history of Jews in Italy may sense that he may have been singing it for her entire family

since she seems to be the end of the family tree. It is up to the viewer to understand that the world that failed was the world of complete acceptance of the Jews as Italians—as much as Jews contributed to Italian life on every level, the Racial Laws of 1938 and the Holocaust established that they were not "true" Italians. The film suggests that it was this lack of acceptance of Jewish Italians that led Volterra's father and his siblings to emigrate to Israel.

Although the film's historical focus is not as wide-ranging as I might have liked, its insight into the interrelations between Italy and Italian Jews over many centuries would make it a positive addition to college courses on Italian Jewry. More broadly, it raises questions connected to self-identification of a minority group and the challenges of the continuity of the identity of that group in the twenty-first century.

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Notes

1. The RaMHaL (1707–1747) was born in Padua and received an excellent Jewish and general education. His Hebrew was magnificent, and he wrote both poetry and dramas. He also wrote a book of ethics, *Mesillat Yesharim* (*The Path of the Upright*), which became one of the most popular books in the yeshivot of Eastern Europe. A third facet of his creativity got him into trouble: Claiming that he communicated with a holy being, or "magid," he recorded his mystical revelations. The community to which he belonged banned his further writing on Kabbala. As a result, he left Italy, spent some time in Amsterdam, and finally moved to Acre, where he died before his fortieth birthday.

Mal'occhio.
By Agata de Santis.
A Redhead Productions Film.
52 minutes. DVD format, color.

Mal'occhio (The evil eye) tells the story of first-generation Italian Canadian Agata de Santis's search for information about her family tradition of belief in the evil eye. With her own voice-over narration, the director traces her journey from her first inquiries using the Internet and library research to her journey to Calabria, Italy, in search of answers to her questions. Along the way, she interviews her family; her (Italian-Canadian) neighbors in Montreal; Italian Americans in New York; several scholarly experts, including Italian cultural anthropologist and *mal'occhio* researcher Raffaele Ferrara; and a folk healer in Eboli who has a lively practice of evil-eye removal. Each interviewee offers an interpretation, opinion, and new details until a complex but consistent mosaic of this belief system emerges. Viewers get a sense of the variety of beliefs that exist among Italians in Italy and in North America; the film's protagonists emerge as vibrant individuals with different backgrounds and motives, and there