

Book Reviews

Contours of White Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America.

By Yiorgos Anagnostou.

Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009.

304 pages.

Editor's note: The Italian American Review asked three scholars from the fields of sociology, literary criticism, and Italian American studies to review Yiorgos Anagnostou's book Contours of White Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America in order to engender an interdisciplinary dialog around issues concerning the study of white ethnicity. The author in turn responded to the reviewers' comments and critiques.

American sociology has fixed the identities of white ethnic groups in relation to the mass immigration from Europe before 1924. This follows from a model of assimilation that entails a structural decline in ethnicity by the third generation. At that point, ethnicity becomes a private option, as delineated in Herbert Gans's concept of "symbolic ethnicity." It is located in "individual psychology," specifically in "feelings" of "nostalgia," and is dis-embedded from collective structures of cultural difference and status inequality. Ethnic assertion is compatible with expressive individualism and pop-culture multiculturalism and is thus a trivial subject compared to groups with assigned racial difference.

Yiorgos Anagnostou makes a case for continuing to take white European ethnic groups seriously. The book interrogates how "various pasts are used to create identities and communities and to imagine the future of ethnicity," and at the very outset the author posits "the enduring relevance of ethnic pasts for the contemporary social imagination" (3). The core of the book is an incisive analysis of Greek-American narratives of ethnic remembrance in the form of "popular ethnographies"—cultural texts or representations produced not by professional anthropologists or folklorists, but by ethnics themselves, including memoirs and novels, immigrant family biographies, oral history projects, and museum exhibitions. The proliferation of a cultural archive is attributed to identity politics orchestrated by "intellectual elites" (25) to compose a narrative counter to ethnic stigma. The author finds in these popular ethnic self-representations nuances or "contours" that are overlooked or dismissed in academic writings. Popular ethnography is accorded "analytical importance" because it reaches "wide audiences" (17) like the PBS documentary *Greek Americans* and the commercially successful film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Mass-media texts, alongside university ethnic-studies programs and ethnic festivals, are all "public sites of multiculturalism." Anagnostou believes that these texts are "expressions of enduring *collective* belonging" (95) that are able to "forge enduring group commitments" (26).

Anagnostou seeks to "complicate" ethnic meanings in regard to the self-representations of Greek Americans and of white ethnic groups in general. Ethnicity is "ideological," and therefore the "politics" of "usable ethnic pasts" entails a struggle

for power on both sides of the ethnic boundary. He maintains that Greek self-representations have always been hotly contested. There is perhaps no better example than the controversy surrounding the photo reproduced on the book's cover, portraying Cretan immigrant laborers saluting with bottles of alcohol and handguns — an image that many inside the ethnic boundary worried “makes Greek America ‘look like a Greek Mafia’” (5). In a manner that is typical for white ethnics, dominant narratives of “acceptable difference” like the PBS documentary *Greek Americans* align Greek ethnicity with mainstream American ideology of “multicultural” whiteness. This is a prominent thread in the volume, and Anagnostou deftly excavates identity frameworks that link Greek pasts, including the ancient civilization, to the interests of middle-class white America. The author adds that the “dismantling” of whiteness is “perhaps less visible” (225), which is probably an understatement. A notable example is an ethnography, authored by Helen Papanikolas, which appeals to interracial solidarity growing out of empathy for recent Mexican immigrants rooted in the initial Greek immigrant encounter with prejudice in America.

The contours of Greek-American ethnicity, supported by compelling religious difference and living roots, “complicate” the assumption of a “uniform” multicultural whiteness. Anagnostou maintains that the “powerful commitment” to a Greek heritage refutes a model of white ethnic identities that are “neither wholly privatized nor weak and readily disposable” (95). However, the Greek-American case cannot be generalized to all white ethnic groups because nationality is reinforced by religious affiliation. Greek-American ethnicity is also centered on a post-World War II immigration, which assigns a more formative cultural role to the immigrant generation in comparison to Italian-American ethnicity. The recent emergence of a third generation precludes the development of a “symbolic ethnicity” that undermines his criticism of that concept. Similarly, more recently arrived groups do not have a range of “ethnic options,” another concept in the sociological armament that Anagnostou criticizes as too individualized (14).

Anagnostou understands that the construction of compelling ethnic pasts takes commitment. However, absent institutional structures, “popular ethnographies” are likely to be occasions for symbolic ethnicity, especially as a third generation emerges outside the ethnic neighborhood. In particular, if he wants to contest sociological models privileging assimilation and “privatized” ethnic expression, it is necessary to ground ethnographic representations in collective practices and construction sites. The Greek Orthodox parish is critical for ethnic group formation, but Anagnostou treats it as an abstraction (99–100). A promising construction site is the nexus of ethnic interests and culture formed by the family restaurant business. In metropolitan New York City, this economic niche sustains a Greek-American status group based not only on similar work conditions but also on consumption styles. Orthodox parishes and a small-business-class culture sustain a residential Greek-American diaspora moving out of Astoria to suburban Long Island, including a summer colony on the east end.

Anagnostou does not mine local cultures for ethnic contours. Local demographic and structural factors play a critical role in shaping identity narratives. Academic rather than popular ethnographies are needed to complicate sweeping generalizations based on census data. The “twilight of ethnicity” metaphor originated by Richard Alba in his book *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* (Prentice Hall, 1985)

can explain the emergence of a historic and commercialized “Little Italy,” but not outer-borough communities like Bensonhurst, with a population of 100,000 persons of Italian ancestry. These outer-borough communities “complicate” Alba’s assumptions about assimilation, which are pegged to a pre-1924 folk culture. Communities replenished by renewed flow of immigration from Italy in the decades after World War II supported high rates of home ownership and yet were framed by conflicts with core American values that focused on the Mafia and episodes of racial violence in Howard Beach in 1986 and 2005 and in Bensonhurst in 1989. They combined Italian immigrant culture and American youth culture, notably the development of the notorious style known as “Guido.”

The author’s “intervention” into white ethnicity taps a diverse academic literature. Its theoretical backbone is a cultural studies perspective that grounds social identities in meaning-making by groups and individuals under conditions that are fluid and contested. This is the central idea of constructionist and transactional perspectives that frame the conversation about ethnicity in American sociology. However, Anagnostou does not reference this literature, notably the works of Joane Nagel and of Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann. Also omitted is the work of E.E. Roosens, which is particularly attentive to “the manipulation of symbols” (160) and the dynamics of power in the “reconstitution” of ethnic pasts (156), and of Anya Royce, an anthropologist who understands that ethnicity has to be “invoked” and that the ongoing creation of ethnicity results in a “traditional style,” an apparent oxymoron, which recognizes that the past has always been open to change. The author could have mined the cultural studies literature further. His reliance on Stuart Hall’s work on identity fails to locate it in a “system” of difference. The concepts of “hybridity” and “bricolage” would enhance the discussion of assimilation as ethnic production. Minority youth subcultures like Guido are noteworthy because they use and abuse ethnicity to assemble mainstream styles.

This is an important book for Italian American studies. Its principal value lies in its attention to diverse and often conflicting vernacular cultures that delineate alternatives to straight-line assimilation. However, its relevance to the scientific studies that it criticizes is perhaps compromised because it aspires to be ideological like the popular ethnographies it investigates. The author is pro-ethnicity as a cultural and moral position and endorses an ethnicity that expands through “dissent.” He subscribes to the view that the alignment with whiteness “strangles” Greek-American identity, and he critiques “white ethnic narratives that explicitly or implicitly contribute to the devaluation and domination of racial minorities” (16). In lieu of racialized identities framed by exclusion and power, he proposes an “ethical vision of becoming in the future” (160), specifically an alternative that “builds on the ecumenical and humanitarian ethos of Christianity” (227). This hope appears all the more idealistic because it is imagined without a basis in social structure.

—DONALD TRICARICO

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This book is a useful addition to the growing literature on white ethnicity. Yiorgos Anagnostou is concerned with endowing the notion of white ethnicity with a degree of nuance that will defeat simplistic uses of the category. With that end in view, he introduces a baroque figure of speech that almost defies analysis or application: “contours of white ethnicity.”

Anagnostou calls this phrase a “metaphor,” but that is perhaps too modest. He aims to find an approach that allows him to recover, without losing a critical or self-critical edge, a degree of cultural authenticity, a way of framing narratives of cultural production. This new figure of speech, contours of white ethnicity, is what a technical rhetorician might call a topographical metaphor—topographical because it implies the presence of a contour map; metaphor because an abstract noun like *ethnicity* does not refer to an existing thing that can, strictly speaking, be said to display any contours. Let us briefly interrogate this intricate figure of white ethnicity. *Ethnicity*, an old and very political noun, refers to the quality of belonging to a nation (itself a metaphor of birth), particularly to a foreign nation—and often, in its earlier usages, to a heathen (or ritually unclean) nation. *White ethnicity*, an oxymoron, has grown in popularity during the past twenty-five years, particularly in the United States, where, as Anagnostou frequently admits, whiteness is the mark of *clean* nationality, the standard against which the fallings-off of other (what used to be called “heathen”) nationalities can be seen clearly. Thus, the coiner of this figure has endowed the metaphors of birth (ethnicity) and of standards (white ethnicity) with powers of embodiment that belong to characters in a play or with powers of movement that belong to landscapes as shown by a tracking camera. The question of what white ethnicity does and does not do is the motor of this book’s argument.

The contour creates perspectives, and it also blocks vision. For example, this figure allows Anagnostou to take apart the simplistic identity formations that make such fools of many popular ethnographers, his chosen targets of satire. When a Greek-American apologist puts his own family’s struggles and star possessions into a narrative featuring the achievements of Aristotle and Pythagoras, the effect may not be as flattering as the account wants to suggest. A successful diner in Cincinnati, a university chair in Tulsa, a vast kitchen gleaming with polished marble in San Diego may be admirable possessions, but their virtues are not really commensurable with those belonging to the foundations of philosophy or the first great experiments in physical science. Such unconvincing attempts to appropriate the greatness of suppositious “forebears” call for serious dismantling, and they receive it in this book.

On the other hand, the twisting of topographical contours allows Anagnostou to advocate assuming positions that enjoy many benefits of whiteness while keeping a safe, or at least visible, distance from some of the standard-setting effects of white privilege. He refers to “polyphonies of belonging” and is able to examine the complex structures of white ethnicity, separating its rigidities from its historical turns and ironies. At times he needs to disavow his major figure of speech:

The image of ethnic contours I have in mind does not match the logic of a topographical map, where each contour marks a line of equal elevation and where contours never cross. In my view of ethnicity’s map, contours connect texts, statements, and practices that claim to represent ethnicity; because these representations are interrelated in vastly complex ways, ethnic contours intersect, tangentially touch each other, or converge in dense hubs. (60)

Nonetheless, his Jamesonian concentration on historicizing themes that are too often presented as eternal and essential gives him the opportunity to “interrogate ethnic whiteness,” to distinguish its constitutive features, and to analyze their deployment. In a chapter titled “Ethnicity as Choice,” for example, he offers a telling distinction between “identity as sameness” and “identity as difference” in the general narrative project of ethnicity.

This is at times a difficult book. Its historicizing ambitions are deconstructive, and they lead the author occasionally into rhetorical excesses where it is hard to follow him. Less difficult, but worthy of mention, is the author’s amazing fondness for the personal pronoun *I*, sometimes using it eight or nine times on a page, announcing how he plans to proceed in the manner of a magician warning the audience of miracles to come. This is not, however, a book of miracles. It is a serious attempt to revise the metaphors by which we shape arguments in ethnic historiography. The book leaves this reader both pleased and a little puzzled. Sometimes it exhorts us to political action. Other times, it laboriously points out that it is useful for any group to study its own specific position, both historically and politically. That is a good idea, though it is not a new one. In the long run, I think, the fortunes of this book will rest upon whether or not readers can take up Anagnostou’s ambitious metaphor and use it to analyze ideological positions in ethnic discourse, as well as to remember when framing arguments and narratives. This book encourages us to explore how things appear from various positions on the ground instead of just looking at them on a single plane, as if in a satellite photo. In his many evocations of the richness of the ethnic territories, Anagnostou has made a real contribution to the study of not only Greek Americans, his specific focus in this work, but also of all peoples who live in heterogeneous societies, places where everyone is someone else’s heathen.

—ROBERT VISCUSI
Brooklyn College, CUNY

Yiorgos Anagnostou’s book is a welcome addition to the sparse amount of contemporary literature on white ethnics. Many in the social sciences have assumed that Greeks and other European immigrants have quietly assimilated into the American mainstream. Anagnostou’s work has the potential to reignite the debate over white ethnics, their history, and their contemporary place in American society and to bring this diverse group back into the general consciousness of Americans.

In surveying the varied and powerful experiences of Greek immigrants, Anagnostou advocates a search for a usable past. Such a past is not a carefully scripted valorization of an immigrant rags-to-riches story or a complacent view of transplanting a Greek village, down to the extended family, into some American urban enclave. No, his usable past is constituted from the reality of diverse contours of the immigrant experience as seen in the deliberately selected cover of his book, which features a controversial photo of Greek immigrants: We see a group of miners, dandified in their sartorial best, solemnly posing while brandishing pistols and liquor bottles. While upsetting to some community leaders, who saw it as portraying Greeks

as crude and dangerous, his choice encourages us to recognize another authentic representation of immigrants' lives. According to Anagnostou, within ethnic groups there are often disagreements over how to depict the group to society. Nonthreatening images of a smiling Greek family or a prosperous store owner play nicely into the dominant discourse of benign multiculturalism. Yet, he opines, we need images with a rough texture as well. These images and stories encourage deeper exploration of an array of newcomers, such as images of strikers or exhausted women and men in ramshackle shanties.

Anagnostou's book uses a somewhat unique methodology, which he considers critical to postmodern analysis of ethnic identity. Rather than ignoring popular ethnographers as "amateurs," he recognizes the importance of their work. Many of the debates about "authentic" white ethnicity are often played out in the marketplace rather than in an ethnic enclave or the confines of the academy. Videos, films, books, and festivals represent a commodified ethnicity more accessible to many people seeking identity in a fluid and somewhat ambiguous modern world. Postmodern ethnicity is not the primordial ethnicity of the first generation, where blood ties superseded all other connections, the heart ached for the glorious "old country," and accented English, however fluent, still gave the speaker away as "foreign." The author recognizes that contemporary ethnicity for younger generations may not include direct knowledge of any early immigrants or their lives. Some ethnic contact may be preserved through hallowed photographs, stories, or trips to Greece. Yet others may grow up knowing nothing of their ancestry. What, then, is available for a seeker of identity – beyond yearly fund-raising festivals? Is their heritage to be dismissed except for carefully orchestrated activities designed to give a bit of flavor to people in a rapidly changing society?

To this question Yiorgos Anagnostou gives an emphatic *no*; Greek-American ethnicity is not a superficial shadow destined to fade into the twilight. He suggests the shapes of contemporary identity are simultaneously uncovered, recovered, and reworked into something new that still has a stamp of Greek-American culture. Furthermore, he makes it clear there is no one "authentic" version of the past. The past is a weaving together of various points of view rather than a neatly packaged history to be bought and put on a shelf. For example, Anagnostou's discussions of gender divisions are an important acknowledgment of what hides beneath the sepia tones of a treasured family portrait. Were Greek immigrant women adored as keepers of tradition while simultaneously producing the next generation, or were they mute and oppressed within the patriarchy of their rural peasant culture? Raising such questions in their ethnographies, Greek-American women press their community to reexamine the past. Gendered differences can be found in remembering of the immigrant past and in forging contemporary gender roles for Greek Americans today, according to Anagnostou.

Adding to these ethnographies he also carefully addresses the influential scholarly work of Richard Alba, who sees the immigrant generation as the epitome of an authentic ethnicity that gradually erodes with each successive generation. The reader is made aware that Greek-American ethnicity is alive and persists into the new millennium. The cornerstone of contemporary Greek-American ethnicity, Anagnostou suggests, can be found in how people forge social linkages through the effort to preserve and honor

a heritage that stretches back to the origin of the Western canon through the social discourse of Hellenism. The primordial ethnicity was part of the Industrial Era and could not be expected to persist into the technologically sophisticated computer age. Anagnostou brings forward a more complex view of ethnicity for Greek Americans in postmodern society. Rather than blending into the dominant white Anglo-Saxon culture, Greek Americans and others have established a claim to many benefits of whiteness without relinquishing a sense of Otherness. The nexus of Greek America may be a social psychological phenomenon existing among those who trace their roots materially or symbolically to Greece. In addition, Greek cultural festivals are popular, inclusive events that people of all ethnicities can enjoy. This point is very relevant if connections are to be forged from the white ethnic experience to the injustices that nonwhites still face, albeit in more subtle forms than before.

Greek Americans initially had an in-between racial status. Yes, they were Europeans and enjoyed many white privileges, such as voting, owning property, and being able to marry anyone of their choosing, rights that were not accorded to many minorities. But socially they were not quite white in a society where darkness was a liability. Working in dirty and dangerous jobs but paid less than native whites, Greek immigrants were aware of their low status and at times united with other racial outsiders to protest injustices. Still, over time their whiteness was less questioned, and they and other white ethnics need to admit that their gain was at the expense of others. Anagnostou takes care that his work does not contribute to the standard narrative demonstrating why Greek Americans deserve to be allowed into the white fold based on their ancient civilization's contribution to the Western canon or their hard work and business acumen, which raised them into the middle class. While such an image of Greek-American "acceptance" by the dominant society is enough to comfort many descendants of early Greek immigration, it is not enough for Anagnostou. He notes that glossing over a turbulent past on the road to acceptance leaves Greek Americans as the European version of the Asian-American "Model Minority." The Model Minority narrative supports an American ideology that anyone can find success in a free and independent nation that offers safe harbor for disenfranchised groups fleeing mistreatment; simultaneously it serves to silence those within the group who would remember the mistreatment. This model has been challenged by many Asian-American scholars, and Anagnostou similarly finds the model lacking historical accuracy. Instead he challenges the scholars of ethnicity to admit that Greek Americans and other white ethnics are alive and well. Once his view is accepted, new avenues of scholarship can open up that will benefit all Americans.

—PHYLIS CANCELLA MARTINELLI
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It is particularly gratifying to participate in this discussion, an exchange that cuts across disciplinary specializations. If the principal aim of *Contours* is to open up new ways of thinking about ethnicity, this peer review enhances it, illuminating further angles of inquiry and expanding conceptual boundaries. Both generous and reflective,

the reviews raise questions about aims, scope, methodology, rhetoric, and ideology in scholarship. I appreciate the recognition that *Contours* has the “potential to reignite the debate over white ethnics” as a timely call to examine the kind of cultural work that this category performs and reimagine “white ethnicity,” a collective project currently under way.

In order to anchor the exchange let me retrace the book’s principal claims and identify the stakes of the book in the scholarship of ethnicity. This is to respond particularly to Robert Viscusi’s somewhat ambivalent reception. The work leaves him “both pleased and a little puzzled.” What does this book ask scholars to do? he asks. It seems to be “exhorting us to political action.” The metaphor of contours indeed aims to evoke, in his words, “the richness of the ethnic territories.” The purpose is to reclaim heterodox, noncanonical, silenced, and emergent cultural forms within white ethnicity, a field whose heterogeneous and invisible topographies the metaphor seeks to bring to the center of inquiry. *Contours* sets itself numerous tasks: It situates ethnicity vis-à-vis power relations, notably racialization, in order to subsequently recognize and interrogate narratives that reproduce racial hierarchies; it works at the borders of disciplines to trouble canonical paradigms; and it analyzes the poetics and politics of popular ethnographies by raising public consciousness about the political implications of identity narratives. Ultimately, it makes a plea for a particular critical practice: to interrogate ethnic whiteness (i.e., narratives reproducing racial hierarchies) and recover identity locations construed around reinvention and an ethic of inclusion. It is primarily in this capacity that it stakes a claim to the scholarship of white ethnicity, arguing for the analytical value of charting ethnicity from a multitude of vantage points.

In this respect, *Contours* undoubtedly represents ideologically driven scholarship, an attribute that Donald Tricarico sees as a liability. His caveat is that the ideological texturing of the book may compromise its “relevance to the scientific studies that it criticizes.” This claim draws a wedge between ideological and “nonideological” scholarship, to subsequently attach higher value to the latter. I have taken exception to the position of an ideology-free social science elsewhere, in a debate—tellingly—with the very practitioners of the scientific studies to which the reviewer points (Anagnostou 2009). The explicit recognition of the ideological dimensions of one’s works stands, in my view, as one of the most enduring legacies of the interpretive turn in the humanities and social sciences.

It is necessary to clarify, however, that *Contours* does not endorse “an alternative that ‘builds on the ecumenical and humanitarian ethos of Christianity.’” This perspective is specifically associated in the book with a particular figure, Stella Petrakis, and her advocacy of the Christian ethic as an enabling principle for interracial acceptance in Greek America. Still, her activism may not be as idealistic as the reviewer maintains, for its power lies precisely in its *structural* alignment with the ethnoreligious orientation of the community. Once advocated institutionally, as in a recent editorial in the *Orthodox Observer* (Bakas 2011), the official publication of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, it stands to perform valuable antiracist work. It rearticulates a religious tradition to endorse interracial acceptance within U.S. Greek Orthodoxy. *Contours* notes the strategic uses of this position.

Why interrogate ethnic whiteness? Why identify progressive narratives among “European Americans”? Why, in other words, turn to culture to critique and inspire?

These questions directly speak to an acute skepticism raised in the reviews: Placing value on texts as agents for cultural change appears idealistic. Doubt is expressed that texts could indeed function as loci to shape meaningful ethnic subjectivities without the mediation of social structure. Donald Tricarico poignantly captures the crux of the matter when he writes that “absent institutional structures, ‘popular ethnographies’ are likely to be occasions for symbolic ethnicity, especially as a third generation emerges outside the ethnic neighborhood.” If we agree that symbolic ethnicity associates ethnic identity with “easily expressed and felt” cultural symbols (Gans 1979, 9), the passage above raises two interrelated points: It posits social structure (here the ethnic neighborhood) as the necessary condition for an enduring, deeply felt ethnicity and, in doing so, doubts the capability of culture (popular ethnography) to perform a similar function. I find great value in the invitation to examine the role of social structure in the making of ethnicity. The juxtaposition of cultural (textual) and social production introduces the long-standing debate over the constitutive power of “idealist” and “materialist” forces, “subjectivist” and “objectivist” perspectives. Revisiting this debate and examining its relevance to “white ethnicity” studies seems to be long overdue, given that structural realities (regional demographics, patterns of residence in both urban and suburban areas, institutions, material ties with the ancestral homeland) as well as cultural expressions (festivals, parades, documentaries, literature, films) contribute to the making of ethnicity. We stand to gain a great deal by sorting out the interface between the material and the symbolic in ethnic cultural expressivity and maintenance. The case of Greek-American family business owners in metropolitan New York City and outer-borough communities like Bensonhurst undoubtedly offers ideal sites to examine these processes, even calling for (gravely needed) cross-cultural comparative analysis.

For my purposes I stress the book’s approach to culture as an arena of contested meanings and to narratives both popular and academic, as crucial sites in the struggle for hegemony. Texts are of fundamental importance in this process as they shape to some extent the worldviews of subjects: How they speak about and act toward ethnicity is a function of culture too, not merely of social structure. Thus culture may act upon reality, and it is not merely acted upon by structure. After all, it was the discovery of a poem that motivated one of the authors I discuss in the book to undertake the arduous task of writing an ethnography, a text that represents committed production of ethnic meanings and contributes to the making of “community.” Popular ethnography, then, cannot simply reflect yet another expression of a superficial dallying with ethnicity. Why should a text reflect loose affiliation and not a deeply felt experience? Texts can inspire action directly bearing on social structure, transforming it in the process.

I fully embrace the call to “mine local cultures” in order to situate ethnicity in concrete ethnographic contexts, because “thick description” of community and institutional life is positioned to particularize ethnicity and recognize the complexities of cultural affiliation. Ethnography offers a key analytical tool to examine the multiplicity of ethnicity across class, gender, cities, regions, and even neighborhoods and to disturb social-science generalizations. It could indeed provide answers to the issue of privatized identities. Though the production of ethnography was beyond the scope of *Contours*, I do not fully understand how my work treats community as an abstraction. I certainly did not mean it in this manner when I spoke about community as social

construction. I wrote, for instance, that “[l]ocal Greek Orthodox communities, though fractured, nevertheless continue to command fierce allegiance from diverse publics,” and I emphasized their role in providing mutual support and advancing ethnoreligious and cultural interests (100). My research acknowledges collective practices that produce habitus that mediates individualized ethnic choices.

I thank the reviewers for citing sources that enhance my analysis. Diachronic in scope, *Contours* cuts through and across disciplinary boundaries—anthropology, folklore, sociology, history, and cultural, ethnic, women’s, and diaspora studies—representing an interdisciplinary project that required the navigation of a vast literature. It is precisely the kind of discussion initiated here and the dialog across disciplines and specializations that help amplify the analytical scope of our work. This is certainly a productive template on which to proceed. Furthermore, while ethnic and diaspora studies of particular groups produce exciting scholarship, a conversation that brings various cultural collectives in a comparative conversation presents itself as a compelling research direction. Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, Greek Americans, and increasingly Asian Americans, among others, intermarry, entangling their stories, opening spaces for cross-cultural fertilizations, and creating novel cultural expressions. Isn’t it time for ethnicity studies to follow suit?

—YIORGOS ANAGNOSTOU
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The Hellhound of Wall Street: How Ferdinand Pecora’s Investigation of the Great Crash Forever Changed American Finance.

By Michael Perino.

New York: The Penguin Press, 2010.

341 pages.

In 1933, three and a half years into the global economic crisis that began in 1929, a Senate investigation that seemed to be going nowhere sprang to life. With banks on edge and starting to fail around the country and in the waning days of the administration of President Herbert Hoover (who had initially trusted but progressively lost faith in the leaders of the financial industry), a freshly appointed committee counsel with a mind for detail and an aptitude for asking simple questions about complicated matters

set the media ablaze. His name was Ferdinand Pecora. His family had immigrated to New York a year and a half after his birth in Nicosia, Sicily (Enna province), in 1882. The family settled in the predominantly Irish-American neighborhood of Chelsea in Manhattan, where the young Ferdinand went to public school, although it was the family's attendance at the neighborhood's St. Peter's Episcopal Church that aroused an interest in debate and drama that Ferdinand would channel effectively as he rose slowly to prominence as a trial lawyer and Tammany Hall politician.

Pecora (which he pronounced "Pecòra") created for himself a public persona that seemed to play off of the stereotypical perceptions of Italian Americans at the time while also undercutting them. A bantamweight who accentuated his dark complexion with regular sun-lamp treatments, he spoke with a mid-Atlantic accent that revealed no trace of his immigrant origins or his working-class upbringing in New York City. He was a well-suited foil to the awkward but well-intentioned Republican Senator Peter Norbeck, a South Dakotan with a Norwegian-American accent, who chaired the Committee on Banking and Currency. Upon his arrival in Washington, despite little time to prepare and low public expectations, Pecora electrified the Senate chambers with pungent cross-examinations of the day's leading financiers. Michael Perino's book about the process offers a splendid mix of biography, hearing-room fireworks, and political context as he shows how Pecora prepared the way for some key financial reforms of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first term: a national bank holiday, the Glass-Steagall Act separating the banking and securities industries, deposit insurance, and the Securities Exchange Act that created the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Pecora did encounter resistance. The bankers hired expensive and influential lawyers, and there were some in Congress who stood by them. The frequent mentions of Pecora's ethnic background, as quoted in the press, were sometimes offensive. The hearings' most infamous episode of all took place in June 1933, during the examination of J.P. Morgan, Jr., when Pecora had a contretemps with Senator Carter Glass (of Glass-Steagall), who complained, "We are having a circus; and the only things lacking now are peanuts and colored lemonade" (286). A publicist for the Ringling Bros. Circus, which was then appearing in Washington, saw an opening, and the next day he brought the circus's female midget to the hearing room. Amid the ensuing laughter, she walked over to Morgan, who was then photographed with her sitting on his knee. Although the episode served somewhat to humanize Morgan, it did nothing to dim the energy or public appreciation of Pecora's continuing efforts.

Perino boldly tells the story as if it were Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, and he deserves credit for managing to keep the book a page-turner even as he gives us, among other things, a splendid account of the workings of Tammany Hall, a group biography of the period's leading Wall Streeters (that complements numerous group portraits we have had of the New Dealers), and a precise, day-by-day accounting of the financial crisis that was sweeping America at the time of FDR's inauguration. Historians of the Great Depression, of American capitalism, and of popular culture in the 1930s, along with anyone interested in American finance, will find Perino's highly readable book as instructive as it is entertaining. The several Wall Street acquaintances to whom this reviewer recommended it promptly passed it on to their friends after reading it.

What is missing from the book is a more extensive discussion of the consequences for Pecora himself. The reader learns about the financial legislation and the bankers who were sent to jail but less about the protagonist after his period in the limelight was over. Perino's focus on the hearings of 1933 is understandable, for reasons to be discussed shortly, but to skip lightly over the remainder of Pecora's career does the man a disservice. Six pages are hardly adequate for the nearly four decades of distinguished public service that followed these events. Although Perino speaks of "Pecora's unsuitability for administrative work" (301), he never presents evidence of it. This reader would have liked to know more about Pecora's time on the SEC, his fifteen years on the New York State Supreme Court, and the politics behind his unsuccessful run for mayor of New York City in 1950, when he opposed Vincent Impellitteri as the nominee of both the Democratic and Liberal Parties. Once he's done with the 1933 hearings, it seems, Perino is simply looking for a way to conclude the story.

Given the parallels between the Great Depression and the Great Recession that began in 2008, Perino's book implicitly invites readers to hope for a contemporary Pecora. In fact, on January 6, 2009, in the *New York Times*, Ron Chernow published an Op-Ed column under the headline, "Where Is Our Ferdinand Pecora?" Perino's book offers a chance to reflect on what happened, or rather did not happen, during the latest crisis. Why has there been no Pecora in a situation that appears to have needed one?

It is difficult to know for sure, but one of the more delicate aspects of the Pecora story is that the lawyer's 1933 airing of improper practices and malfeasance at the top echelons of the largest banks may have worsened matters for the economy as a whole. A cascading effect on public confidence made FDR's bank holiday, toward which there was much resistance, even more necessary. The essence of Pecora's approach was to show that problems that were well known to be affecting local and regional banks, resulting in bank runs, were similarly endemic in the nation's largest financial institutions. The crisis in confidence became such that Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) insurance, which FDR initially opposed, was now an absolute requirement for reestablishing the faith of depositors. It can be argued that these things would have happened anyway—that the damage would have continued to spread regardless—but all the same it was Pecora who brought them to a head.

Another issue that Perino's book raises is the way today's attempts to bring rationality to bear in governance so often involve a struggle with "regulatory capture"—the term that describes situations in which regulators are, to a large degree, controlled by the entities they are supposed to regulate. Regulatory capture is usually discussed with respect to an agency like the SEC or invoked ominously vis-à-vis the Federal Reserve. By now many of us worry that it encompasses the legislative branch, too—that Congress as a body is largely beholden to the entities that it oversees. In the 1930s, as Perino shows, the U.S. Congress was sufficiently heterogeneous and reflective of local interests as to allow for vigorous, multifaceted discussion, with proposals for action and reform coming from many directions. The situation today seems quite different, thanks especially to the homogenizing effects of media coverage and the inability of government to establish limits on campaign financing and expenditures.

Curiously, neither of the authors of our latest set of banking regulations, Christopher Dodd and Barney Frank, ran for reelection in 2012. It is hard not to look back nostalgically to the day when a brilliant Italian immigrant had the courage—and our Congress the ability—to call the banking system to public account.

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Since When Is Fran Drescher Jewish? Dubbing Stereotypes in The Nanny, The Simpsons, and The Sopranos

By Chiara Francesca Ferrari.

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.

176 pages.

In her book *Since When Is Fran Drescher Jewish? Dubbing Stereotypes in The Nanny, The Simpsons, and The Sopranos*, Chiara Francesca Ferrari grapples with the complexities of dubbing U.S. television series for an Italian audience, focusing on the practices of a media industry that aims to recreate the success of the English-language original in a different national and cultural context. She argues that dubbing not only represents a way to allow for the “invisible” translation and adaptation of unfamiliar aspects of the culture of origin into the receiving culture but, more significantly, dubbing functions to preserve Italian cultural and linguistic diversity and to resist the homogenizing effects of globalization.

In the book’s first two chapters, Ferrari lays out the historical background and the theoretical foundations for her case studies of *The Nanny*, *The Simpsons*, and *The Sopranos*. She discusses the development of audiovisual text translation and cultural adaptation, traces the history of dubbing from the xenophobic and nationalistic policies of Mussolini’s dictatorship to the present, and underscores the economic dimensions of the current practice of dubbing, which—far from being a remnant of fascist ideology—is an effective U.S. marketing tool that ensures the widest distribution of American cinema and television products in Italy and in most of Europe.

Ferrari focuses her attention on the use of southern Italian dialects and accents, which, after their successful use in the dubbing of *The Godfather* in 1970, have been systematically employed to further characterize a fictional stereotypical persona in dubbed cinema and TV imports. Borrowing Antje Ascheid’s felicitous metaphor of dubbing as a form of “cultural ventriloquism” that allows for the subliminal retelling of the receiving country’s national narratives, Ferrari correctly contends that, in the dubbed versions of U.S. imports, Italian audiences are presented with their nation’s narratives as an “us” versus “them” contraposition, which both nurtures a sense of Italian regional belonging and continually asserts a divide between northern and southern Italy. In this context, the use of southern Italian dialects and accents in the dubbed versions of *The Nanny*, *The Simpsons*, and *The Sopranos* serves to reiterate the dominant national narrative in which the Italian south is the Other.

In her analysis of the three television programs, Ferrari shows how their successful dubbing involves both a process of “domestication” (i.e., making familiar) and at times of “foreignization” (i.e., making unfamiliar) of cultural and linguistic elements present in the original. In the case of *The Nanny*, Jewish-American Fran becomes Italian-American Francesca, replacing the original Yiddish sayings with words and expressions in the Ciociarian dialect from Lazio. Ferrari argues that such changes were prompted by the lack of corresponding stereotypes of Jewish-Italian women and the fear that Fran’s Jewish identity would clash with that of the Italian audiences. Both here and elsewhere in the book, Ferrari overstates the influence of the Catholic Church on the Italian populace—which, by all indicators, is largely secular—while she neglects to point out the actual power and influence exercised by the Vatican on politics and the media.

At times it seems that Ferrari’s own representations of Italy are informed principally by stereotypes and not by a nuanced understanding of the context of the TV programs under discussion. In fact, one of the major shortcomings of the book is its lack of careful social, political, and historical anchoring, a deficiency that often results in a rather impressionistic and tentative analysis. For example, a closer look at the wider social, cultural, and political contexts of production and broadcasting of *The Nanny* would have revealed the fact that from the 1990s on, Italy’s national narrative about World War II was revised to incorporate and give great importance to the Shoah and the 1938 racial laws. It is likely that a TV serial with a stereotypical Jewish-American nanny would have diminished this revised narrative.

Save for a fleeting reference to Italy’s contemporary immigration from other countries, Ferrari’s analysis of *The Simpsons* is also detached from an actual cultural and social context. Ferrari contends that the fact that the various U.S. ethnic identities are not transposed into the dubbed version of *The Simpsons* reflects a form of erasure of difference that promotes a narrative of national homogeneity (18–20). In fact, except for Willie, the Scottish gardener who speaks with a Sardinian accent, and Carl Carlson, Homer’s African-American co-worker, who has a Venetian accent, the vast majority of American ethnics in *The Simpsons* are dubbed with southern Italian accents: Roman, Neapolitan, Apulian, and Sicilian; that is, they are identified as Italy’s internal Others. However, judging from the dubbing of Apu, the Indian store clerk, it does not appear that the transposition of U.S. ethnic stereotypes onto Italy’s immigrant communities promotes multiculturalism and reflects a positive sign of inclusion. In fact, in the Italian version of *The Simpsons*, Apu’s speech is not only marked by nonstandard intonation but also by grammatical errors, as if to underscore a flaw in his identity. While it is arguable that a negative representation is better than no representation at all, closer attention to the Italian history of migrations, both within and outside of the country, could have helped shed light on what Ferrari calls ethnic “erasure.” In fact, the transposition of the different ethnicities present in the original show to southern Italian identities appears to be, first and foremost, an implicit reference to the national narratives of past Italian migrations. Italian national discourse conceptualizes current migrations to Italy in terms of preexisting frames of “migrations” out of Italy and within Italy, established categories of difference, and stereotypical labeling. Thus, within this conceptual framework one could argue that southern Italian accents in *The Simpsons* seem to mark both the stereotype of the Italian emigrant and that of the internal migrant who performs “ethnified” occupations such as groundskeeper, policeman, etc.

In her analysis of *The Sopranos* (dismissing the “enraged” reaction of Italian-American groups to the all-too-familiar depiction of Italians as mobsters), Ferrari aptly compares Italian Mafia programs and the HBO serial, illustrating how the complexities of the latter’s translation and adaptation ultimately determined its late-night scheduling for a niche public and its limited success in Italy. While the accent of Tony Soprano, the Italian-American mobster, is domesticated into that of a native of Avellino, the word *mafia* is “defamiliarized” (120) and replaced with *mala*, short for *malavita*, i.e., criminality, “to stop perpetrating the stereotype that all Italian Americans are mobsters” (123). While Ferrari considers this substitution a form of censorship, she fails to explain to the reader that *mala* was the celebrated and glorified criminal milieu of Milan during the economic boom years (mid-1950s to early 1970s) and that such a choice may indeed add more of a positive connotation to Tony’s shady activities. Her discussion of *The Sopranos* is largely unfocused, as she flounders from one hypothesis to another to finally find the most likely answer to the difficulties surrounding the dubbing of the show in a short article in *Variety* that correctly points out the dangerous liaisons that former prime minister and owner of Mediaset Silvio Berlusconi had with *mafiosi*.

In her examinations of *The Nanny*, *The Simpsons*, and *The Sopranos*, which she enriches with quotes from various authors and experts, Ferrari does an excellent job of framing the three TV series within their genres and tracing their intertextual relations to other TV programs on American and Italian television. However, she does not clearly illustrate how cultural ventriloquism works in each case, nor does she identify for the reader the contextually relevant narratives in which Italian southerners figure as Other. In fact, Ferrari’s discussion of Italian national narratives and Otherness appears to be an afterthought rather than a foundational aspect of her project. Failing to provide any informed criticism of the Manichean opposition between north and south, the author herself seems to participate in the perpetuation of the dichotomy by repeatedly presenting the divide as insurmountable or “rooted in history.” She is also heavy-handed in her descriptions of the “defining” traits of some stereotypes, for instance, those that turn a Jewish-American nanny (or a working-class woman as in *Roseanne*) into the quintessential Italian American or southern Italian. One would have expected greater tact or more careful editorial advice.

In fact, in Ferrari’s exposition, her stated concern for the plight of the Other appears to be in blatant contradiction to what, in case after case, is an uncritical acceptance of the transposition of stereotypes from one national context into another in the name of preserving humor and producing an effective (i.e., successful and marketable) translation: “Thus, ironically, what should be a division to be overcome becomes in reality one of the most successful sources of ‘humor’ on Italian television, whether nationally produced or imported from abroad and dubbed” (97).

Contrary to her stated intentions (3, 18), and thus confounding this reader’s expectations, Ferrari does not scrutinize the practice of stereotypical characterizations of particular ethnic and social groups. In fact, her overarching interest in showing that successful dubbing involves the exploitation of regional and linguistic stereotypes prevents her from offering a critical look at the effects that stereotypes actually have on audiences. Ferrari does not propose a viewer-oriented analysis of the practice of dubbing stereotypes, nor does she problematize the effects that stereotypes have on a

socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse target audience, which in the case of *The Simpsons* in Italy consists primarily of children.

Ferrari makes no reference to the ongoing debate in the field on the effects that the stereotypical rendition of accents and dialects can have on audiences, nor does she discuss the ways in which the systematic use of Italian accents and dialects to elicit humor or add a negative connotation to characters or plot effectively teaches audiences to discriminate against the speakers of those dialects, who in turn are either marginalized or forced to succumb to standard language ideology in order to be accepted in mainstream society. Rather, without offering proof for her assertion, Ferrari states that, in the context of a global media market, dubbing becomes a way to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity and to resist the homogenizing forces of globalization. One would be tempted, however, to ask how language diversity can be preserved by the inferiorizing representation of accents and dialects. How can the use of largely artificial codes that draw their distinctive traits from different southern Italian dialects, but are often descriptive of none, represent a form of resistance to globalization? And why should it be acceptable and unchallenged to devalue Italian accents, dialects, and their speakers in the name of humor? Not too long ago, ignoring the effect that such conventions had on African-American audiences, white actors in blackface were thought to be funny and their performances a great source of humor. We should hope that, not too far in the future, greater attention will be paid to stereotypical and hurtful representations of accents and dialects in Italy and that such a convention will be abandoned just as blackface has been in the United States.

Throughout her book, Ferrari intersperses her discussion with excerpts from interviews she conducted with professionals in the Italian dubbing industry. While these quotes provide an insider's view of the politics of dubbing, nevertheless these media experts' ideas and opinions on Italian culture, society, and language are at times rather impressionistic and uninformed. Unfortunately, the author does not take into account scholarly literature that would have led her to a more nuanced analysis of the TV programs. Readers would have benefited from greater attention to the political, social, and cultural climate surrounding the production and broadcast on Italian television of these shows. Particularly glaring in this respect is Ferrari's failure to make any reference to the role played from the mid-1980s to the present by the overtly racist Northern League party in rekindling and fueling regional antagonism and in fomenting antisouthern prejudices, thus creating a hostile environment that informs the choice of accents in dubbed TV serials. Moreover, one would have expected a few words of comment on the fact that all three TV programs were acquired and broadcast by Berlusconi's Mediaset network, whose headquarters are in Milan. The question then arises as to how the geographic location of the media relates to the largely positive representation of the north and the overwhelming negative representation of the south.

While presented as an interdisciplinary study, *Since When Is Fran Drescher Jewish?* is firmly anchored in the field of media studies and the media industry; any foray outside those specific fields of expertise appears somewhat tentative and confused. Particularly fuzzy and imprecise are Ferrari's explorations of linguistic issues, such as the distinction between Italian national language and dialects, the discussion of the contextually determined use of second-person address pronouns (63), the explanation of the status of Sardinian as a language rather than as a dialect (91), or the description

of dubbed Italian-American accents (110). Furthermore, save for a very few cases in which she focuses on the transposition or substitution of particular words, Ferrari does not provide examples of the “accented” speech and dialect of the various characters, thus leaving the reader perplexed.

Because of its lack of solid, in-depth, historical and social research, this book would be difficult to assign as a text for interdisciplinary courses. Nevertheless, *Since When Is Fran Drescher Jewish?* is a timely contribution to the field of contemporary Italian media studies and provides a media-industry perspective on the translation, adaptation, and dubbing of foreign audiovisuals into the Italian national context. Ferrari’s book represents a good point of departure for anyone who desires to begin an investigation of the complexities of audiovisual translations.

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Corbino: From Rubens to Ringling.

By Janis and Richard Londraville.

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011.

221 pages.

An artist’s life is rarely easy. Even for the best, a tenuous livelihood and elusive recognition are a common fate. The Italian-American artist Jon Corbino was more fortunate than most. Nevertheless, amid some notable achievements and successes that enabled him to sustain a lifetime career as a leading painter of his generation, he faced his share of disappointments, frustrations, and struggles. Moreover, almost sixty years after his death, he is largely forgotten. All this is captured in *Corbino: From Rubens to Ringling*, the first-ever biography of the artist, penned by Janis and Richard Londraville. On the one hand, the couple has done us all a favor by recalling and chronicling Corbino’s worthy career. On the other hand, their earnest account of Corbino’s life and work becomes at times so intensely personal and colloquial as to lack nuance and an appropriately deft balance.

Giovanni, or Jon, Corbino was born in Vittoria, Sicily (Ragusa province), on April 3, 1905. His father was an intellectually disposed, politically active anarchist who fled to Argentina and then to the United States in order to evade arrest, abandoning his nineteen-year-old pregnant wife. Adding insult to injury, Corbino’s father financed his escape by selling his wife’s dowry, a family home. Thus, Corbino and his mother were left behind in Sicily to depend for support on her parents’ largesse. Hopes for a family reunion in New York City were thwarted either by miscommunication or the continued improvidence of Corbino’s father. Traveling to the United States, mother and son were detained for two weeks at Ellis Island in December 1910 and then deported back to Sicily when Corbino’s father failed to meet them at the New York docks. It was almost another three years before mother and son successfully immigrated to the United States and reunited with Corbino’s father.

Corbino was only eight years old when he landed in the United States for the second time. Yet throughout his life he was to retain vivid memories of Sicily and his two trips to American shores, especially his sight of the earthquake-devastated port of Messina, his harrowing, tempest-tossed transatlantic crossing, and the trauma of being separated from his mother at Ellis Island. Fortunately, in dealing with the tumult and insecurity of his own life, compounded by his immigrant status in the United States and the relative poverty of his parents, Corbino had a knack for drawing. Enrolled in New York City schools, he had the opportunity to pursue an education in art that helped him tap his native talents and transcend the tough streets of New York City's Little Italy.

As a student at the elite Peter Stuyvesant High School and then the Ethical Culture School, founded by Felix Adler, Corbino often felt like "some Sicilian bandit's son on the loose" (17). But he enjoyed studying with distinguished art instructors who encouraged his considerable gifts and taught him the necessary skills to make the most of them. After graduation, Corbino continued with studies at the Art Students League, arguably the "most important art school in the United States" (22). By the age of twenty-one, Corbino was exhibiting paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago. Just a year later, in 1928, he was invited to present a one-man show of his work at Oberlin College's Allen Memorial Art Museum. What followed was a brilliant thirty-six-year career that saw his paintings acquired by such major art institutions as the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Images of his paintings were frequently reproduced on the cover of *Art Digest* and other leading art periodicals.

Although Corbino did not like to be identified as an Italian-American artist and resented the condescension it sometimes engendered, he was deeply indebted to his Italian heritage and, more generally, to the European baroque tradition in art. Along with Roman mythology and transmuted moments from his earlier life in Sicily, his grandfather's horses were a perennial inspiration in his paintings of rural and circus life. Attracted to the "masters of color" – Tintoretto, Titian, and Rubens – Corbino also embraced the dramatic narrative flair of Caravaggio, Delacroix, and Géricault. In such early paintings as *Stampeding Bulls* (1937), *Vigilantes* (1936), *Montana Earthquake* (1936), and *Flood Refugees* (1938), Corbino strove to capture a tense moment in which action was about to explode. The muscular fleshiness of the artist's figures, together with a use of vivid color and the deployment of strong diagonal lines, helps convey an energy and emotional intensity that are striking and memorable.

Corbino's penchant for depicting disaster scenes wrought by the vagaries of brute nature was bound to resonate in a nation still seared by recent natural and economic calamities. In 1938, *Life* magazine published a full-length feature on Corbino at his new Rockport, Massachusetts, studio, dubbing him "the Rubens of New England." Impressed by the freshness and relevance of his work, art critics further acclaimed him "the founder of the school of baroque-romanticism."

However, in the late 1940s and early 1950s Corbino shifted to religious themes and circus scenes. He also adopted a softer, lighter palette and a more surrealistic style where horses, dancers, and acrobats appear in virtual flight, never touching the ground. While critics sometimes found this new direction less "convincing" and "coherent," they were still admiring. It was only after Corbino's death from cancer on July 9, 1964, that his work and reputation truly went into deep eclipse.

Part of Corbino's appeal from the late 1930s to the late 1950s was the vibrant and accessible alternative he seemed to offer to more controversial art trends, exemplified by the abstract expressionism of Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock. Corbino had only scorn for abstract expressionism, which he first dismissed as a short-lived trend and then denounced as the ruin of American art. He never understood or appreciated that, beneath its outward chaos and abandonment of traditional representational forms, abstract expressionism was a legitimate effort to reveal something profound about being and existence. Corbino refused to allow his art to be displayed in close proximity to abstract expressionist works. The fact that major American art institutions were avidly acquiring paintings by Rothko, de Kooning, and Pollock thoroughly discredited them in his eyes.

While Corbino certainly deserves to be appreciated for his vision, talent, and craft, particularly as an immigrant who made his place in a new land, he is not likely to match the stature of Edward Hopper or Thomas Hart Benton, who also opted not to go the way of abstract expressionism. Perhaps the best explanation is to be found in the frank assessment of fellow artist Will Barnet, who knew Corbino for more than three decades. Acknowledging that "there was something spectacular in Corbino . . . a fabulous voice," Barnet simultaneously observes that in using "the language of the great masters" his friend never tried "to invent a language of his own, and he should have tried, even if he had failed" (69). The Londravilles cite the vigor of Corbino's final paintings as evidence that his creative muse was not yet done with him. Nevertheless, even had he enjoyed a longer life it seems doubtful that Corbino would have accomplished what Barnet found lacking in his work.

In their biography, the Londravilles dwell a great deal on the more intimate details of Corbino's personal life. It does not make a pretty story. Corbino was married three times and had five children. Although he could be generous as a teacher and friend, his failings as a son, husband, and father were many. He held grudges and never resolved his resentment and ambivalence toward his parents and former wives. He took a wry pleasure in ridiculing his father in old age. Without any apparent provocation, Corbino once held a knife to his second wife's throat. One of his sons was hospitalized for almost a year due to polio, and Corbino never visited him. In another revealing moment, Corbino slammed a desktop down on the outstretched hand of his second-eldest son in order to teach him not to trust anyone. Perhaps exacerbated by the stress of a vocation where you are only as good as your last painting, Corbino suffered from an obsessive-compulsive personality, tinged with paranoid tendencies that left him perennially suspicious, keeping an "enemies list." All this rendered him barely fit to live with. Yet it does not necessarily make him exceptional among artists, given the proverbial artistic temperament. The Londravilles would have offered us a more useful and enduring biography if they had focused primarily on Corbino's professional career and more incidentally on his private life as it affected his art, rather than the other way around.

There are literary problems with the biography, too. Recollections of Corbino's family, friends, students, and colleagues—sometimes unattributed and often embarrassing in their frankness and haphazard informality—are awkwardly spliced into the text. The chapters are also rife with clichés and breezy, imprecise language that good editing should have averted. Not untypically, the biography's closing chapter remarks

that “Jon Corbino was never soft, and he didn’t die softly” (184). This is apparently a euphemistic reference to the night sweats, coughing fits, and convulsive spasms that beset Corbino in his last, heavily medicated days. Here, as elsewhere, the authors’ choice of phrasing borders on the glib and insensitive. Despite such flaws, which are considerable, the Londravilles’ book laudably begins to fill a gap in our record of a twentieth-century American artist who painted well, even gloriously so.

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Squeeze This! A Cultural History of the Accordion in America.

By Marion Jacobson.

Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

288 pages.

“With only one instrument, you can travel the world.” Thus begins Marion Jacobson’s fascinating exploration of the piano accordion’s history, diverse cultural meanings, and multifaceted musical and social roles in the United States over the last century. A chance encounter in a Lower East Side accordion store—where she was dazzled and inspired by the musical possibilities offered by the instrument—led Jacobson on a decade-long journey across the United States investigating the piano accordion’s past and present in all strata of society, a physical and metaphorical journey that has culminated in this valuable book. Throughout, the accordion is presented as a symbol of ethnic and national identity, a reflection of shared cultural values, and, simultaneously, a way for diverse groups of people to engage in dialog with audiences and fellow musicians across the nation, whether they use the instrument to perform polkas, tarantellas, Bach, or rock.

New York City, itself a microcosm of U.S. society, is Jacobson’s home base and constant point of reference; she holds a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from New York University (where this project began as a doctoral dissertation) and frequently performs in the city. From this starting point, the book takes the reader on a remarkable tour of accordion communities from San Francisco to Houston to the Midwest. Jacobson’s conversational style, wide-ranging subject, and wealth of ethnographic analysis make the book appealing and engaging for scholars and casual readers alike; fans of *They Might Be Giants* and Balkan-music aficionados will find as much relevant and thought-provoking material as will those who grew up watching the *Lawrence Welk Show* or singing along to Valtaro songs in New York’s Italian neighborhoods. A scholarly audience will be particularly interested in her methods and successful application of a wide range of theoretical material to her ethnographically diverse and geographically scattered subjects.

Readers of Italian descent will no doubt be aware of their community’s contributions to the worldwide accordion industry, both as manufacturers and as virtuoso performers. Jacobson’s study will be of particular interest to this audience for both

its exhaustive historical review of Italian and Italian-American accordion makers—many of whom had a decisive effect on musical tastes and styles across Europe and the United States through their ingenuity and constant innovations—and for its nuanced biographical treatment of several prominent twentieth-century Italian-American virtuosi, such as the brothers Guido and Pietro Deiro, Pietro Frosini, John Brugnoli, and others.

In the introduction, Jacobson recounts the experiences as a musician and listener that drew her to the accordion, explains how she transformed her curiosity into a full-blown ethnographic and ethnomusicological research project, and lays out the theoretical foundation of the study. She engages with a wealth of classic and recent work in ethnomusicology and anthropology, citing the writings of James Clifford, Arjun Appadurai, Kevin Dawe, and Andrew Bennett, among others, and focuses on the accordion as “a thing with a complex ‘social life,’ career, and networks of exchange” (5). Accordingly, she approaches the accordion as a “cultural technology,” a “network of circulating objects and relationships involving musical skills and a means of organizing cultural work” (6). This is the orientation that guides the course of the book, as she explores the many ways in which the manufacture, design, and marketing of the accordion and its consumption by the American public have contributed to its cultural significance as much as the actual music played on and associated with it. From this perspective, one of the more interesting themes explored is the accordion’s gradual transition from an immigrant instrument in the early twentieth century to a shiny, ultramodern musical machine representing mainstream 1950s white America—a product of what Jacobson calls the “accordion industrial complex” (52). From there, Jacobson shows us, the accordion became a symbol of banal decadence and nostalgic schmaltz after the triumph of rock ‘n’ roll and finally achieved its recent resurgence of popularity in the postpunk era, when it has been embraced by the counterculture as well as the mainstream as a compelling, warm, and physically engaging instrument.

Chapter 1 traces the history of the accordion from its beginnings in mid-nineteenth-century Europe through its introduction to the United States in the early twentieth century. Jacobson explains the details of accordion design and function, the difference between the piano accordion and the diatonic button accordions that it largely displaced, its paramount importance in vaudeville, and the issues surrounding innovations in construction and aesthetics. The role of Italian manufacturers, particularly the factories in the town of Castelfidardo (Ancona province, the Marches) and their astoundingly prolific production, is explored in detail along with the role played by Italian immigrants to the United States in the dissemination of the accordion in this country, both as performers and entrepreneurs who opened factories and shops in San Francisco, New York, and Chicago. Jacobson profiles important vaudeville performers such as the Deiro brothers, and she discusses the accordion’s role in dance bands, the recording industry, and radio.

Next, Jacobson details how the mass-produced accordion made a transition into mainstream American society through accordion schools, method books, clever marketing, and inclusion in programs of “highbrow” classical music. Chapter 2 begins with accordionist Charles Magnante’s symbolic “invasion” of Carnegie Hall in 1939. The American Accordion Association’s role in organizing and promoting competitions and providing a network of instructors and performance opportunities is shown to

have been decisive toward this goal, as was the decision to market the accordion as a sleek symbol of American ingenuity in the World War II era. Jacobson explains how the accordion's move away from ethnic enclaves and into classical and popular music resulted in its entry into not only thousands of American homes, where it was played by men, women, and young children, but also into conservatories and concert halls.

Chapter 3 details the accordion's rise to the level of pop stardom with the likes of Dick Contino, its increasing familiarity to the white middle class through the careers of Lawrence Welk and Myron Floren, and its eventual fall from popularity as American youth embraced rock 'n' roll. Jacobson shows how accordion manufacturers and educators failed to respond adequately to changing issues of taste, image, and cost in the 1960s, resulting in the accordion being displaced by cheaper and more fashionable instruments like the electric guitar and keyboard.

In Chapter 4, Jacobson profiles three accordionists who rose from their respective ethnic communities to national fame: Finnish-American Viola Turpeinen; Italian-American John Brugnoli, pioneer of New York City's unique Italian "Valtaro" style; and Slovenian-American Frankie Yankovic ("The Polka King"). All three artists demonstrated success in taking their inherited traditions and transforming them into culturally and economically successful "refolklorized" products that crossed social and ethnic lines.

The "accordion revival" of the 1980s and 1990s is the subject of Chapter 5, in which Jacobson shows how artists such as They Might Be Giants, Those Darn Accordions, "Weird Al" Yankovic, Carl Finch, and Guy Klucsevsek used the instrument as a subversively creative tool for social commentary and musical exploration. She invokes David Byrne's characterization of acoustic instruments as "machines of joy" (163) to explain the appeal of the accordion to audiences and musicians alienated by the electronically produced sounds of the disco and techno era.

Finally, Jacobson evaluates the degree to which the accordion has found a place in the daily lives of American music lovers by discussing accordion clubs, festivals, and music scenes in Texas and California. Emphasizing the "grassroots" character of these local scenes, where individual citizens join together to share their love of the instrument and a diversity of musical styles—including Czech-Texan, Zydeco, Celtic rock, and cabaret—Jacobson demonstrates in Chapter 6 how the accordion has become not only an important means of forming and interrogating group identity but also a symbol with even farther-reaching political and cultural capital.

Jacobson concludes by offering some thoughts on issues of power, gender, cultural authority, and the often playful use of cultural tropes surrounding the accordion's use in popular music in America. She analyzes the accordion as a means of community-building and connecting to a real and imagined heritage, contemplates its ideologically complex role in the "world music" scene of the last several decades, and speculates on the future of the instrument as its ever-increasing presence in popular music and a new wave of affordable Chinese-made accordions make it even more accessible to the general public.

The book is enhanced by a wealth of color and black-and-white photographs, many—including historic promotional photos and gorgeous plates of vintage instruments—culled from private archives and the World of Accordions Museum in Superior, Wisconsin. The volume contains some minor editorial errors that occasionally

confound the reader but do not detract from the experience as a whole. Ethnographically rich, compellingly written, and resting on a solid theoretical and methodological foundation, Marion Jacobson's cultural history of the accordion is a welcome addition to the extant literature on popular music, free-reed instruments, and cultural and diaspora studies.

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The Godfather Effect: Changing Hollywood, America, and Me
By Tom Santopietro.
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337 pages.

The title of Tom Santopietro's *The Godfather Effect: Changing Hollywood, America, and Me* makes a wide-ranging promise to study the influences both Mario Puzo's novel and Francis Ford Coppola's epic film trilogy have had on moviemaking, American culture, and the author himself. It is a tantalizing promise but one that is, at best, only partially fulfilled. Santopietro's often genial prose is chock-full of anecdotes from his family history (and from Hollywood) and broad commentary on the Italian-American experience, all set in relation to the Corleone saga. But the rigor and complexity necessary to sustain yet another book-length inquiry into the rich meanings of that story, much less the dexterity to integrate family memoir into a historicized interpretation of it, are largely missing here.

The book comprises a series of loosely connected essays on topics ranging from the expected ("The Lure of the Corleones" or "*The Godfather: Part II*") to the oddly impressionistic ("Religion, Death, and Grief" and "Frank Sinatra"). Both this looseness and this impressionism consistently undermine the development of Santopietro's stated thesis that Puzo and Coppola jointly "succeeded in delivering nothing less than the Italianization of American culture" (7). *The Godfather*, in either or both of its generic incarnations (Santopietro does not always distinguish between them), is ostensibly a central issue: Whatever historical material or personal narrative enters Santopietro's analysis intends to demonstrate the rootedness of the Corleone saga in the American experience, past and present. Indeed, without *The Godfather* in both the title and the pages of this work, Santopietro's excursions into history and memoir would likely not have made their way into print. Too often, however, I found myself thinking of the old (and ill-advised) method for testing the doneness of pasta: Throw it against the wall and see if it will stick. Over 285 pages, a lot gets thrown at *The Godfather*, and not enough of it sticks.

Santopietro's work is most fully realized when he recounts the backstory of Coppola's trilogy. Here, Hollywood anecdotes are entertainingly mixed with appreciative observations of the extraordinary craftsmen who turned a potboiler novel into cinematic art. If much of this material is available elsewhere, it nonetheless provides the book with its