

***Studies in Italian American Folklore*. Edited by Luisa Del Giudice. (Logan, Ut.: Utah University Press, 1993. Pp. vii+285)**

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Studies in Italian American Folklore. Edited by Luisa Del Giudice.
(Logan, Ut.: Utah University Press, 1993. Pp. vii+285)

Studies in Italian American Folklore is one of the finest discussions of Italian American material to date. Its wide assortment of essays on music, architecture, religion, and identity are grounded in rich ethnographic data and vividly describe Italian social life as it spans across generation and region. This engaging work offers a provocative look at how people creatively interpret their ethnic identities in various public and private settings in the U.S. and Canada. Two of the articles in this collection deal with the significance of home and food—some of the most important, yet least studied, markers of Italian ethnicity.

The first essay describes the social and cultural context that surrounds the “villanella”, a female-based Calabrian song genre. Anna L. Chairidakis sheds light on this intensely social, gender-marked event by providing detailed descriptions of kinship networks and cultural practices. This immensely nuanced study is imbued with thoughtful observations and provocative ideas about Italian culture, especially as they relate to women. Luisa Del Giudice’s research on the archvilla in Toronto, on the other hand, offers a fascinating analysis of how the fascists’ use of the arch as a symbol of prestige and mobility significantly shaped Italian Canadians’ vision of the home. Scholars interested in issues of space and folk architecture will find this section particularly useful. Further, Sabina Magliocco’s superb article on the role of food in a Little Italy Festival in Indiana provides an interesting discussion of the complex ways in which food is creatively used in a festival setting to appeal to different audiences.

The more historically oriented research on a 1929 pilgrimage to Rome describes early efforts by the Order of the Sons of Italy to enlist support among Italians overseas for Mussolini’s nation-building program. In this article Dorothy Noyes shows how the trip attempted to instill national loyalty toward “la Patria” (the fatherland) and foster pride in *Italianita* (a unified Italian identity) through the uses of Rome’s mythic past and popular fascist songs like *Giovinezza*. This study skilfully interprets a remarkably interesting chapter in Italian American history. Italian contributor Paola Schellenbaum’s theoretical piece on Californian Italians’ use of cultural stereotypes critically examines questions of historical memory and the ways people meaningfully organize the past “to make sense of their life and experiences in the New World” (p. 159). Joseph Sciorra touches upon religion and local politics and analyses the Rose Bank grotto built by the members of Mount Carmel. This insightful study explores the myriad of meanings various members of the community (builders, clergy, and journalists) bring to this highly contested and sacred place. The bibliographic section on Italian American and Italian Canadian sources also brings together an excellent assortment of useful references.

On the whole the book provides the critically important empirical basis for understanding larger theoretical issues in folklore such as the politics of representation, the invention of ethnicity, and the uses of memory in the construction of identity. While issues of continuity and change inform this work, the scholars are more concerned with how people use and manipulate their identities in response to changing social conditions in the present. In keeping with recent developments in oral history and ethnic folklore scholarship, these studies tend to focus on the ways people constantly reinterpret the past to make sense of their lives. The individual is viewed as a social actor who "playfully use[s]...symbols available in the cultural register" (p. 122) to signal and experience Italianess at different levels of intensity. I found the treatment of fascism's role in shaping the Italian ethnic's imagination remarkably interesting and refreshing, especially in a discipline that too frequently views the ethnic in a romantic, apolitical light.

This fresh, contemporary portrait of Italian Americans breathes new life into the area of ethnic folklore and should be essential reading for anyone interested in Italian culture, Ethnic Studies and issues relating to the Italian immigrant experience in the U.S. and Canada. As a scholar who has spent time doing research in Canada and Italy, I found this book both enlightening and extremely useful

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It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working-Class Culture. By Thomas W. Dunk. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. Pp. xii + 191)

The study of occupational folklife deals with the complex of techniques, customs and modes of expressive behaviour characteristic of a particular work group (McCarl 1978:145). Unlike many studies of occupational folklore, Thomas Dunk's focus is not on work technique, but on custom and various expressive modes of behaviour. His study is concerned primarily with the leisure-time activities of a group of industrial workers in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This emphasis on customary forms of recreation reveals how occupation actually influences everyday life of a group he calls the "Boys."

Dunk makes it clear that there are many forces that act in the shaping and expression of working-class culture. In his investigation of the playing of lob-