

VIA

Voices in Italian Americana *a literary and cultural review*

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Voices in Italian Americana is a semiannual literary and cultural review devoted to the dissemination of information concerning the contributions of and about Italian Americans to the cultural and art worlds of North America. Each issue will be divided into three major sections: creative works, essays, and reviews.

Voices in Italian Americana invites submissions (between October 1 and May 31) in English (fiction and poetry also in Italian with English translations). Manuscripts for essays, fiction, and non-fiction should not exceed twenty pages, poetry five pages, type-written and double spaced; essays for the “Readings” section are limited to ten pages. All materials must follow the most recent edition of the MLA Style Manual and must be submitted in electronic format (Microsoft Word or Word Perfect). All submissions are reviewed by the editors and two other readers.

All editorial communications (review matter included) should be sent to Chiara Mazzucchelli (chiara@bordigherapress.org). For subscriptions & advertising, contact Anthony Julian Tamburri (tamburri@bordigherapress.org).

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a literary and cultural review

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EDITOR'S NOTE

25 years and still going strong! Social, cultural, and literary discussions around the meaning of ethnicity, identity, and migration in the field of Italian-American Studies are still relevant and developing. We take pride in being a leading journal for the publication of high quality research, fiction, and poetry that has helped advance our field.

We are also committed to providing our readers with the latest information about recently published books that address the many and different experiences of being an Italian American. *VIA* would like to welcome Fred Misurella as the new Book Review Editor. We consider ourselves very fortunate to count him as part of our editorial team and look forward to a successful collaboration.

Every issue of *VIA* offers new insights and sheds new light on different aspects of the lives and works of Italian Americans. In his essay "*Tra utilità sociale e auto celebrazione*," Luca Lanzilotta offers a new interpretation of one of the earliest Italian-American novels, Luigi Donato Ventura's *Peppino*. Lanzilotta speculates on Ventura's self-appointed role of the detached but, at the same time, sympathetic observer of the life of a young shoeshine in order to open the eyes of the American reader to the reality of many hard-working Italian immigrants. From novels to short animated films, in "Daffy Duck or the Generous Writer," Antonio D'Alfonso offers an original interpretation of *Duck Amuck* that takes into account the ethnicity of its creator, Michael Maltese. Two memoirs by Italian-American women are the focus of Lisa Downward's article, in which the author analyzes the mother-daughter relationships through the lens of ethnicity, class, and religion. In his article "The Sounds and the Fury," John Gennari adds another important lens to the understanding of the Italian-American experience, that is race, and he does so through an "acoustic" reading of Kym Ragusa's *The Skin Between Us*.

Following our critical section, we present you with a great selection of creative works and book reviews. We're very grateful to all our short-story writers, poets, and reviewers for their hard work and contributions. Please keep those ideas coming.

VIA has been able to grow in the past twenty-five years thanks to the interest and encouragement of our readers. Please feel free to contact me — chiara@bordigherapress.org — with suggestions and ideas, comments or criticism, to talk back to the writers and/or to the editors. We'd love to hear from you.

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Our Facebook page has almost reached 700 likes! Help us translate these likes into subscription. Spread the word about our journal!

We're always seeking out new subscribers, especially those institutional ones like libraries, cultural centers, and how about a doctor's office here and there. We know they're out there. Our goal is to double the current subscriber base inside the next three years. See what you can do to help get the journal out and about. As American and ethnic studies programs grow, it is good to have an impact through bookshelf presence.

Submissions' Calendar

Remember, we only read manuscripts between October 1 and May 31. This is a more realistic time frame in which to work, since so many members of our editorial board use the summer months to get to the work they've delayed during the school year. This also enables us to insure a 4–6 week turnaround from the manuscript receipt to communication of the editorial board's decision. Please be sure to follow our submissions guidelines on our website — <http://www.bordigherapress.org/VIA.html> — to help us keep to that time frame. We are currently reading for our Spring and Fall 2016 issues.

Grazie e alla prossima!

Chiara

VOICES IN ITALIAN AMERICANA

a literary and cultural review

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Francesco Trento and Aureliano Amadei. *Twenty Cigarettes in Nasiriyah*. Translation. Charleston, SC: Four Cats Press, 2014.

It is November 2003 and Aurielano Amadei, a twenty-eight-year-old Roman rebel with a cause and a vicious nicotine habit is bound for Iraq. He's at the Galileo Galilei airport in Pisa, waiting to board the C-130, an aircraft most civilians would characterize as high on noise and low on windows. He's never met the other travelers in the group, mainly Italian soldiers from a Naples-based infantry unit, the Sassari Brigade. And like most self-proclaimed antiwar activists, Amadei harbors some predictable ideas about military members:

I begin observing. After all the films I've seen and books I've read, not to mention the jokes and the photos and all the unavoidable clichés, my mind is naturally taken over by stereotypes. I realize it's a ridiculous image, but somehow I expect them all to have square jaws, a swagger in their walk, and a permanently pissed-off look on their faces. Instead, they seem like nice guys. (Trento and Amadei 12)

By the time they reach cruising altitude en route to the Middle East, the scruffy but charming, chain-smoking, collector of tales and observer of all things human takes note: "They've got stories to tell; things have happened to them" (16).

Herein lies just one example of the humorous and beautifully tragic twists of the heart that are scattered throughout this memoir, *Twenty Cigarettes in Nasiriyah*. It is the story of Amadei's near-death yet life-changing and perspective-widening experiences as a survivor of a suicide bombing at the Maestrale Base, an Italian military site situated in Nasiriyah, Iraq. A tragic, twist indeed: less than thirty-six hours after he boarded that flight and on what was supposed to be a first day out in the field scouting locations for a forthcoming film, he finds himself broken-boned and bloodied, nestled under a tanker truck with an Italian soldier, also mangled and injured. "And yet, check this out: Even if my jeans have been blown to shreds, even if my legs are soaked with blood, the front left pocket is still intact. Luckily, my cigarettes are still there. Along with my lighter" (57).

Oh how he loves to smoke! "I don't feel as though I've really arrived some place until I've smoked there" (29).

This young man's tough. This young man's funny. This young man's a survivor.

The November 12th assault left twenty-eight individuals dead, including civilians and Iraqi children. As for those who survived the ambush, translator Wendell Ricketts indicates in the book's Forward, "The number of injured has been reported at between 58 and 140" (viii). This wide range in the reporting of injured victims, may also offer a glimpse at the kind of misguided and misunderstood backdrop in place during this time of turmoil and war, a backdrop that Trento and Amadei question with vigor and a sharp edge.

The accounts in this book are courageous, at times ambivalent (which actually make them more believable) and do not shy away from grappling with the understandable questioning that permeates the story as it unfolds: What were the circumstances of this trip? Why so many conflicting accounts of what became known as the Nasiriyah Massacre? How did the fallout of the incident affect the way Amadei, as well as Italy and the rest of the world, experienced and understood the Heroes of Nasiriyah? And perhaps most im-

portantly, for this young soul whose faith was tested and whose luck was running high in those moments under the tanker truck, in the Iraqi desert, where smoke and sand and blood seemed to drape over his world: How does a human being navigate the layers of pain that set up shop deep inside us and redefine life after this kind of trauma?

With pacifist tendencies and a voice that exudes a passion for seeing exotic lands and telling human stories, this boyish, naïve filmmaker tells of boarding that plane and traveling to the Iraqi desert expecting nothing more than to gain experience in the moviemaking business and to work with a crew he admired. He went not to fight or participate in what some thought were peacekeeping efforts happening in that region. He went to shoot a film. Whether it is what he should have done in the first place is something that is mulled over in one of the final chapters of this memoir:

With some reflect, this is what I realize: if the November 12th attack demonstrated anything, it's that the very idea of shooting a movie there was crazy. And whoever authorized our presence at the base, the way I see it, committed an extremely serious mistake, a mistake that cost the lives of Stefano, Ficuciello and Olla. We're not talking about a documentary. It wasn't just two or three people running around in a place where things were risky, trying to get a few images on film. We weren't "documenting" anything. We're talking about a scripted movie, a work of fiction, with actors, set and costume designers, sound and light technicians, all the rest. (121)

This brand of wondering, laden with strokes of honesty and raw truth, offers readers a glimpse into the self-awareness that, with patience and time, can be unveiled after tragedy strikes. From reflections following the months after the assault when both medical interventions and civic expectations were frequent and sometimes dizzying: "It happens in these moments when, thinking back over what happened, I realize, in the end, that it's only thanks to Nasiriyah that I've come to see myself as mortal for the very first time, as someone in need, as a fragile human being" (151).

Here's to a mortal named Aurelino Amadei and to the book he and Francesco Trento crafted that looks near death in its eye and echoes the words of Joseph Campbell, "We save the world by being alive ourselves." *Twenty Cigarettes in Nasiriyah* weaves wisdom through its prose offering readers a fresh voice, unafraid of revealing the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and artistic paradoxes that make us human.

Kathy Curto

Sarah Lawrence College and Montclair State University

Michelle Reale. *The Legacy of the Sidelong Glance: Elegies*. Aldrich Press. 2014

The Legacy of the Sidelong Glance: Elegies, Michelle Reale's fifth book, presents a haunting portrait of a complicated woman bound by the politics of family and culture in a tight-knit Italian-American community. Burned free of sentimentality, this soulful collection of twenty-five prose poems explores the private life and tragic demise of Reale's grandmother, Angelina E. Serrao Messina. Pushing past the stereotypical ideal of *nonna*,