

Theodora D. Patrona, *Return Narratives: Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017)

Return Narratives: Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature, written by Theodora D. Patrona, presents a revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation on Greek American and Italian American contemporary writing. Here, Patrona examines six works that fall into the return literature sphere, with a stated aim of beginning the scholarship of comparative Greek American and Italian American literature in this space. All six works are written in English, and almost all are by second or third generation authors, which was a deliberate choice by Patrona to highlight 'their oscillation between two worlds and languages' (xiii).

Return Narratives is an attempt to answer two questions: "How are the journey to self-definition and the formation of subjectivity connected with the recourse to ethnic cultural pools in each of the novels examined? To what extent are these two elements affected by the constantly changing framework of social, historical, and economic conditions?" (xiv) Patrona successfully answers these questions through a comparative close reading of the texts under examination. She also puts forward an interesting argument for the similarity of Greek American and Italian American literature, making a comparative study of the two fertile ground, and possibly inspiring others to continue where she leaves off.

The six works explored by Patrona are *Cora* (Daphne Athas, 1978), *Umbertina* (Helen Barolini, 1979), *The Priest Fainted* (Catherine Temma Davidson, 1998), *No Pictures in My Grave* (Susan Caperna Lloyd, 1992), *When the Tree Sings* (Stratis Haviaras, 1979) and *In the Garden of Papa Santuzzu* (Tony Ardizzone, 1999). For a book published in 2017, it is notable that none of these were published this century. Patrona does, however, acknowledge the increasing publication rates of return Greek American and Italian American literature towards the end of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty first, so this is perhaps an area of further work for the author. Indeed, in her closing remarks she notes that an expanded comparative study could include more contemporary writing.

The works are examined in pairs, dividing *Return Narratives* into three sections of comparative close readings. Patrona notes that she selected the six narratives as they share a common theme of 'the challenging journey toward the ethnic persona's self-definition, as well as the changing perception of ethnic space' (xiii). On ethnic space, the book sticks to a rather loose and flexible definition, allowing Patrona to explore diverse avenues. It is defined early on as including spatial, geographical and sociocultural elements, with a focus firmly on the home country. In some ways, this definition functions to exclude a concept of Greek Americanness as a distinct and separate ethnic culture, by tying all ethnic self-definition to this concept of the homeland.

Although Patrona's writing is about return literature, where such a definition of ethnic space may indeed be more common, the function of the emigrant culture as a distinct entity from the homeland should not be discounted when discussing ethnic identity and concepts of ethnic

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space. While the emigrant culture is likely to have been heavily influenced by the home culture, it is also likely to have significantly shifted and evolved when influenced by the environment of settlement.

Patrona seems to acknowledge this when discussing the influence of myth, ritual and storytelling on the six works, with the characters using these cultural elements 'in their attempt to acquaint themselves with their ancestral home' (xiii). These myths, rituals and stories are seen through the lens of the emigrant culture, though, and an acknowledgement of the role of this culture in shaping views of the homeland could add much to the analysis of ethnic space and identity presented here.

Four of the works examined by Patrona have female authors, and she has involved a degree of feminist theory in her analysis, focusing on female self-representation in the creation of ethnic space and identity in these narratives. This can certainly be a useful frame of analysis, as much ethnic space is gendered. There is always the danger, however, that a reliance on feminist discourse can obscure other valid paths of investigation. Patrona manages to walk this line, and her use of feminist analysis helps to shed light on other areas of enquiry, rather than cast them in shadow.

Return Narratives marks a beginning point in the comparative study of Greek American and Italian American literature, particularly with regard to what they can tell us about ethnic self-identification and space. Patrona's detailed close readings of the six texts illuminate useful areas of thought and illustrate the limitations imposed on the characters in their journey of ethnic identity creation. Patrona herself notes that the field is ripe for further study, with expanded comparative studies of Greek American and Italian American literature encouraged. She also points to possible further study of the similarities and connections of the two emigrant cultures themselves. These all seem worthwhile points of enquiry, for which Patrona has established a solid foundation in *Return Narratives*.

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