ENG 360: Italian American Literature

Final Paper Choice #1

**Topic: To hyphenate or not?**

You may have noticed that scholars of Italian American literature use various kinds of punctuation to express their view of the interrelationship between two ethnic cultures: Italian-American, Italian/American, Italian American. You started thinking about this topic in Week 10 when you explained Tina De Rosa’s use of the hyphen (and you all did such a great job then).

**The Debate**

In his introduction to *The Italian American Heritage*, Pellegrino D’Acierno claims that these variations are “a clear indication that the designation is itself under question and in flux within Italian American culture at large. The marking or unmarking of the term is, in effect, a declaration of one’s attitude toward ethnic and self identification.” He reminds us that an early term “Italo-American” is no longer used because of it was a sign of colonization. He considers the traditional form, Italian-American, as problematic because it highlights the identity of Italian-Americans as hyphenated Americans. Further, he explains, “the hyphen. . . is a graphic marker of a fractured and incomplete identity, not necessarily the sign of a rich bicultural self.” He prefers to remove the hyphen and put “in its place a gap that maintains a respectful silence.” Another scholar, Anthony Tamburri, “introduces the aggressive mark of the slash that activates all the contradictions at work in the hybrid identity of the Italian/American, thereby effecting a radical disturbance in the traditional equations.” (I’ve included Tamburri’s essay just to show you how he uses it, but it’s a challenging essay to read)

**Your Essay**

For this essay, you will first read the literature on this topic. Then, you will discuss which way you have chosen to represent the two words, Italian and American, and present reasons for your choice. The following essays about this topic are in the “Supplementary” menu button as pdfs:

Pellegrino D’Acierno, “Introduction” to *The Italian American Heritage* (see pgs xl-xli)

Thomas Belmonte, “The Contradictions of Italian American Identity: An

Anthropologist’s Personal View.” (see pg 14)

Anthony Tamburri, “Rethinking the Italian/American Writer”

In your introduction, describe the scholarly debate on the topic make sure you have a clear thesis statement that informs readers of your choice. In your body, present your reasons and evidence for your choice. You may use any of the literature and essays we’ve read this entire semester. Explore, explain, and describe what your form may mean. Be persuasive. Imagine writing to one of the authors who holds an opinion which differs from yours and convincing him or her to use your method. Don’t forget a conclusion. 3-5 pages (use Times New Roman, 12 pt. in Word).

**Steps to Completing this Essay**

Week 12-13 Read the essays and take extensive notes on the selected pages. Reread the Discussion Board question on Tina DeRosa’s use of the hyphen.

Week 14: Submit a 3-4 page draft

Week 15: Submit your final revision. Include a reflection paragraph on your revision process.

Final Paper Choice #2

For this final paper, you are required to read an author of your own choosing, or watch a film, both of which should have Italian American themes. Consult the class DB for the themes, or review the course material. You may read a collection of poetry or a few short stories by the same author, a play, a novel, an autobiography, or watch a film. You may read an author you came across this semester (but it has to be something the class was not assigned to read) or you can be adventurous and use the suggestions or web resources below and find your own (especially if you want to impress me!).

With this course in mind, read the author’s work or watch the film. Note any forms of italianità or any of the themes we discussed. Then, write a 3-5 page paper in which you:

* Briefly tell us who the author/ director is
* Briefly summarize the story, play, or film (for poetry, discuss the overall theme of the collection)
* For the summary, you should refer to setting, time period, characters, and the central conflicts, or how the story progresses
* Present any historical background, if needed
* Discuss 2-3 themes from the course and present examples of them from the text/ film
* Try to make text-to-text connections: does this story/ film/poetry remind you of anything you read in class this semester?
* Present some scholarship on the author/text/ film (use the BMCC databases, not Wikipedia!) <http://lib1.bmcc.cuny.edu/>

Look for “literary criticism”—scholars sometimes focus on one aspect of a story, i.e. theme, character, or compare it to another work. Search carefully for scholarship that fits your theme or focus.

* Create a meaningful conclusion that says something overall about your study of Italian American literature this semester
* Create an MLA Works Cited List (included in your 5-6 pages)

<http://lib1.bmcc.cuny.edu/help/citing/citingmla.html>

This list is meant to help you structure your paper. If you feel you want to add something that is not on this list, you may. Also, some of the items on the list are optional. But everyone has to present some scholarship by others.

Below is a list of possible choices for your final paper. You may do your own search and find your own book or film. These are only suggestions.

Novels

Rita Ciresi, *Sometimes I Dream in Italian*

---, *Blue Italian*

Tina DeRosa*, Paper Fish*

Pietro Di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*

Laurie Fabiano, *Elizabeth Street*

John Fante , *Ask the Dust*, or *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* (both made into films)

Maria Laurino, *Were You Always an Italian?*

Mario Puzo, *The Godfather*

Collections

Helen Barolini, *The Dream Book*

Anthony Tamburri, Paolo Giordano and Fred Gardaphe, eds.

*From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*

(see beginning of <http://www.iawa.net/database.htm>)

Plays

Albert Innaurato, *Gemini*

Autobiography

Louise DeSalvo, *Vertigo* (or her other memoirs)

Mary Capello, *Night Bloom*

Marie Hall Ets, *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant*

Constantine Pannuzio, *The Soul of an Immigrant*

Joe Vergara, *Love and Pasta*

Mary Taylor Simeti*, On Persephone’s Island*

Jerre Mangione, *Mount Allegro*

Films (title—director—year--theme)

*Mean Streets* Martin Scorsese, 1973 (urban life)

*Italianamerican* Martin Scorsese, 1974(documentary)

*Prizzi’s Honor* John Huston, 1985 (crime, honor)

*The Pope of Greenwich Village* Stuart Rosenberg, 1985

*Moonstruck* Norman Jewison, 1987 (romantic comedy)

*The Sicilian* Michael Cimino, 1987 (crime)

*Goodfellas* Martin Scorsese, 1990 (classic)

*Wait Until Spring, Bandini* D. Durredere (based on Fante novel, blue collar)

*A Bronx Tale*  R. DeNiro, 1993 (coming of age)

*Mac* John Turturro, 1993 (about his father, construction worker, big dream is to build homes in suburbs)

*Big Night* Stanley Tucci, 1996 (all italianita!)

Web Resources:

<http://www.italianstudies.org/iam/names.htm>

<http://www.iawa.net/database.htm>

(an excel spreadsheet version with EVERY author listed!

Categorized by genre, i.e. drama, poetry, etc.)