


# Gangster Priest: The Italian American Cinema of Martin Scorsese (Toronto Italian Studies)

*By Robert Casillo*

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**Gangster Priest: The Italian American Cinema of Martin Scorsese (Toronto Italian Studies)** By Robert Casillo

Widely acclaimed as America's greatest living film director, Martin Scorsese is also, some argue, the pre-eminent Italian American artist. Although he has treated various subjects in over three decades, his most sustained filmmaking and the core of his achievement consists of five films on Italian American subjects - *Who's That Knocking at My Door?, Mean Streets, Raging Bull, GoodFellas,* and *Casino* - as well as the documentary *Italianamerican*. In *Gangster Priest* Robert Casillo examines these films in the context of the society, religion, culture, and history of Southern Italy, from which the majority of Italian Americans, including Scorsese, derive.

Casillo argues that these films cannot be fully appreciated either thematically or formally without understanding the various facets of Italian American ethnicity, as well as the nature of Italian American cinema and the difficulties facing assimilating third-generation artists. Forming a unified whole, Scorsese's Italian American films offer what Casillo views as a prolonged meditation on the immigrant experience, the relationship between Italian America and Southern Italy, the conflicts between the ethnic generations, and the formation and development of Italian American ethnicity (and thus identity) on American soil through the generations. Raised as a Catholic and deeply imbued with Catholic values, Scorsese also deals with certain forms of Southern Italian vernacular religion, which have left their imprint not only on Scorsese himself but also on the spiritually tormented characters of his Italian American films. Casillo also shows how Scorsese interrogates the Southern Italian code of masculine honour in his exploration of the Italian American underworld or Mafia, and through his implicitly Catholic optic, discloses its thoroughgoing and longstanding opposition to Christianity.

Bringing a wealth of scholarship and insight into Scorsese's work, Casillo's study will captivate readers interested in the director's magisterial artistry, the rich social history of Southern Italy, Italian American ethnicity, and the sociology and history of the Mafia in both Sicily and the United States.

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## Editorial Review

Review
‘*Gangster Priest* is a timely and essential contribution to Scorsese scholarship. In particular, Casillo accomplishes in-depth readings of some of the director’s most well-known feature films, such as *Casino, Goodfellas, Mean Streets, Raging Bull*, and *Who’s Knocking at My Door*? Overall, the volume is composed of fine analyses that stand on their own yet also complement one another and work as cohesive whole.’
(Dana Renga, *Italian American Review: Winter 2011*)

Review

‘With Gangster Priest, Robert Casillo gives arguably the best reading of Martin Scorsese’s “Italian American” films I have come across to date. Casillo’s incredibly thorough presentation of the historical and social contexts surrounding the films and the filmmaker himself helps us to see the Italian American films of Martin Scorsese in new and exciting ways. No other scholar has even attempted such a work.’
Fred Gardaphé, Director of the Italian American Studies Program, Stony Brook University

From the Back Cover

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Fred GardaphA(c), Director of the Italian American Studies Program, Stony Brook University-

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Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with good friends is thing

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