

Radicalizing maternal narratives: Italian Americana as a field and feminist literary innovation

A lecture by

Mary Jo Bona

Stony Brook University

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Global & International
Studies Building 1122



About the talk: The field of Italian American studies has expanded boundaries through its interdisciplinary approaches to examining heritage cultures. As a result, diasporic, transnational, and translingual studies have intersected with canonical disciplinary areas such as Italian and English but also emerged from area studies such as Women's, Gender, & Sexuality, and Africana Studies.

This talk offers an example of such interdisciplinarity by examining the field of Italian American studies through the lens of mother-daughter studies and diasporic histories. Juxtaposing two experimental narratives, Adria Bernardi's *Openwork* and Alison Bechdel's *Are You My Mother?* Bona explores how maternal genealogies are constructed through what cultural anthropologists have called inalienable possessions. Bona will show how an embroidered tablecloth with transnational signification in Bernardi's novel or a costumer mother in Bechdel's graphic memoir construct new ways of thinking about motherhood, mobility, and more largely, American literary histories.

About the speaker: Mary Jo Bona is professor and chair of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at Stony Brook University with her affiliated department in English. Bona's work examines the nexus between gender and ethnicity, with transnational migratory identities, material cultures, and Italian diaspora studies as primary intersections. A specialist in the field of multiethnic American literature and feminist studies, her authored books include *Women Writing Cloth: Migratory Fictions in the American Imaginary*; *By the Breath of Their Mouths: Narratives of Resistance in Italian America*; *Claiming a Tradition: Italian American Women Writers*, and a book of poetry, *I Stop Waiting for You*. Bona is also editor of *The Voices We Carry: Recent Italian American Women's Fiction* and co-editor (with Irma Maini) of *Multiethnic Literature and Canon Debates*. Bona is a series editor of *Multiethnic Literatures* for SUNY Press and serves on the SUNY editorial board.

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