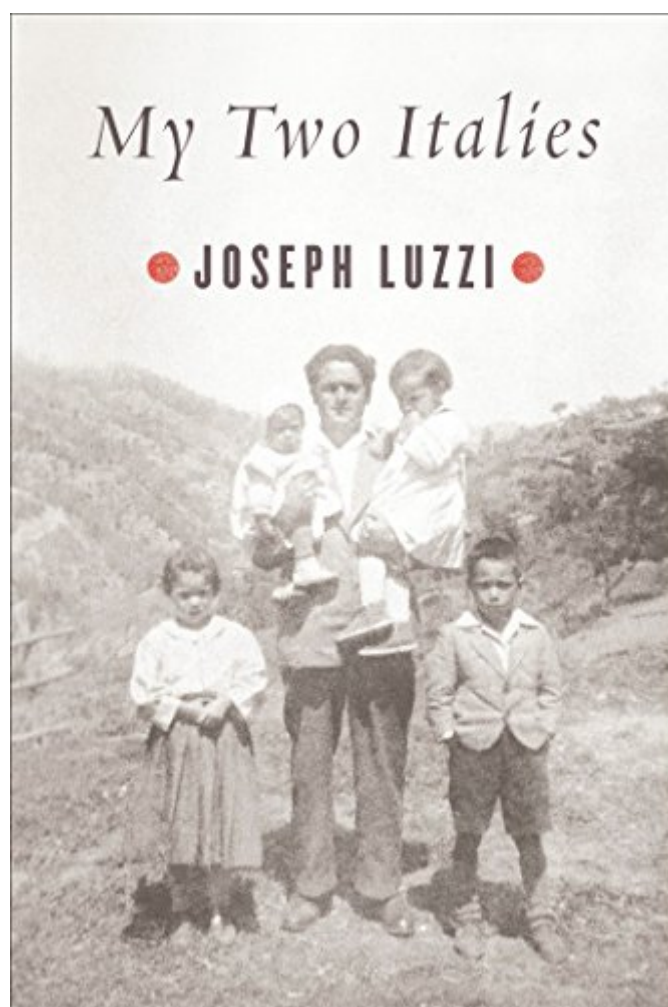


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My Two Italies



Synopsis

A poignant personal account from a child of Calabrian peasants whose lifelong study of Italy unveils the mysteries of this Bel Paese, "Beautiful Land," where artistic genius and political corruption have gone hand in hand from the time of Michelangelo to The Sopranos. The child of Italian immigrants and an award-winning scholar of Italian literature, in *My Two Italies* Joseph Luzzi straddles these two perspectives to link his family's dramatic story to Italy's north-south divide, its quest for a unifying language, and its passion for art, food, and family. From his Calabrian father's time as a military internee in Nazi Germany—where he had a love affair with a local Bavarian woman—to his adventures amid the Renaissance splendor of Florence, Luzzi creates a deeply personal portrait of Italy that leaps past facile clichés about Mafia madness and Tuscan sun therapy. He delves instead into why Italian Americans have such a complicated relationship with the "old country," and how Italy produces some of the world's most astonishing art while suffering from corruption, political fragmentation, and an enfeebled civil society. With topics ranging from the pervasive force of Dante's poetry to the meteoric rise of Silvio Berlusconi, Luzzi presents the Italians in all their glory and squalor, relating the problems that plague Italy today to the country's ancient roots. He shares how his "two Italies"—the earthy southern Italian world of his immigrant childhood and the refined "northern" Italian realm of his professional life—join and clash in unexpected ways that continue to enchant the many millions who are either connected to Italy by ancestry or bound to it by love.

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Customer Reviews

To my great delight My Two Italies is as good and fascinating as its premise. With much warmth and human feeling, Prof. Luzzi weaves two particular strands of Italy: the Grand Tour, Ruskin-in-hand, sprezzatura (genius) Italy and the hardscrabble, sun-scorched, Fourteen Years as Age of Consent south. His parents and older siblings were born in the mezzogiornio (midday sun south) - geographically of course the same country as the cultural trinity of Venice-Florence-Rome but somehow a universe away. When the parents escape to the States for a better economic future they are neither former Italians nor future Italian-Americans. Instead the parents remain steadfastly Calabrese. The good side of this would be the exquisite-sounding, pre-movement Slow Food meals. Their quotidian dinners today would be the cover story on a glossy food or travel magazine. The bad side, though, is a tough, old-school father who ostracized his daughter because she dared to want to move out and have her own place - at age 27. Given Prof. Luzzi's ancestry it seems to surprise even him that he develops such a passion for northern Italy art and literature. Yet he reminds the reader that there's a tremendous legacy of culture in the south as well; he describes a Naples museum in which he was the only visitor in a room filled with important works of art. Memories of scrimmaging through the Uffizi make the solitude alone sounds enormously appealing. On an early student trip to Florence he's taken aback when a northern girl says of his parents' region, "That's not Italy - that's Africa!" The (intended) putdown made me wonder what the father thought of African-Americans. Was he sympathetic to their plight as a fellow outsider, or did he believe that they should just work hard like he did and quit whining?

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