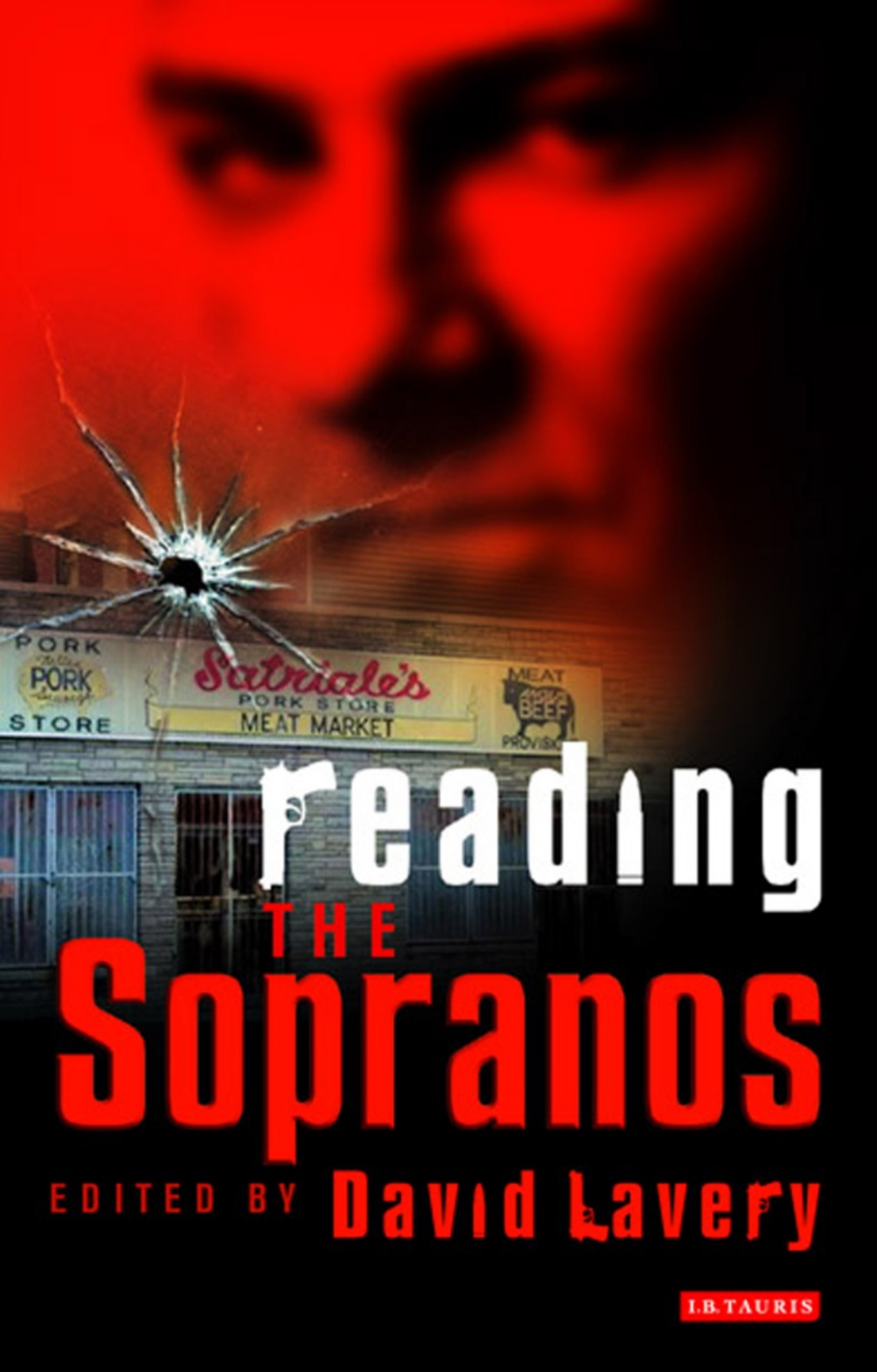

reading THE Sopranos

EDITED BY David Lavery

I.B.TAURIS

'Raises *Sopranos* discussion to a new level. The balance between the "close up" of an individual episode and the "long shot" of an overview or context proves the show's seriousness and depth. The writers' critical perspectives are so varied that even the most devoted fans should find something new and provocative. The arguments are all original, insightful, well supported. In the parlance of the academic Family, this is "a palpable hit".'

Maurice Yacowar, author of **The Sopranos on the Couch**

Reading Contemporary Television

Series Editors: Kim Akass and Janet McCabe

The *Reading Contemporary Television* series aims to offer a varied, intellectually groundbreaking and often polemical response to what is happening in television today. This series is distinct in that it sets out to immediately comment upon the TV zeitgeist while providing an intellectual and creative platform for thinking differently and ingeniously writing about contemporary television culture. The books in the series seek to establish a critical space where new voices are heard and fresh perspectives offered. Innovation is encouraged and intellectual curiosity demanded.

Reading THE Sopranos

Hit TV from HBO

EDITED BY David Lavery

I.B. TAURIS
LONDON · NEW YORK

Published in 2006 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

In the United States of America and in Canada distributed by
Palgrave Macmillan, a division of St Martin's Press
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

ISBN 1 84511 121 4
EAN 978 1 84511 121 2

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress catalog card: available

Typeset in Goudy Old Style by Steve Tribe, Andover
Printed and bound in the United States

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The rapid development of this book made me envious of the amount of time David Chase and company have to create a new season of *The Sopranos*. It could not have been completed without the contributions of many.

For their discerning and insightful essays, my thanks to all the book's authors: David Johansson, Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, Gwyn Symonds, Chris Kocela, Brian Gibson, Valerie Palmer-Mehta, Bruce Plourde, Dean DeFino, Jessica Baldini, Cameron Golden, Chris Neal, Doug Howard, Michael Epstein, Jimmie Reeves, and Mark Rogers. Particular thanks to the "two-timers"—McCabe, Akass, Epstein, Reeves, Rogers, Howard—who have contributed to both of my *Sopranos* books.

Thanks to Janet for the "brilliant" subtitle.

Thanks to Jimmie Cain for many wonderful "water cooler" discussions of *The Sopranos*.

Special thanks to Michael Prete for his excellent photographs.

Philippa Brewster at I.B.Tauris, a joy to work with, and Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, the *Reading Contemporary Television* series editors, always considerate and understanding, even during the heat of our accelerated publishing schedule, are the finest of taskmasters. Thanks, too, to Steve Tribe for his hard work on the manuscript.

Unlike Tony, I have only one family, a wonderful trio of brilliant and independent women. This book is dedicated to them.

David Lavery

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Painting with Words, Writing with Pictures: Word and Image Relations in the Work of Italo Calvino.

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INTRODUCTORY

Pulaski Skyway, New Jersey. Photograph by Michael Prete.

Introduction

CAN THIS BE THE END OF TONY SOPRANO?

David Lavery

I. LOATHING TV

I've got to watch TV to figure out the world?
Paulie Walnuts

Early in "Mr. Ruggiero's Neighborhood" (3.01), the first episode of Season Three of *The Sopranos*, Tony and his crew sit down for lunch. As salad and pasta are dispensed, the obsessive-compulsive, macho-prissy, extravagantly coiffed psycho Paulie Walnuts washes his hands, again. When asked why, he holds forth, literally ad nauseam, on the dangers of tying shoelaces, the disturbing hygiene of "your average men's shit house," and the spread of disease. Both appalled and amazed, Christopher Moltisanti, curious where his frequent nemesis has acquired such esoteric knowledge, asks "You saw this on TV?" "I've got to watch TV to figure out the world?" Paulie responds, rhetorically.

In Season Four's "Watching Too Much Television" (4.06), mob-wife-in-training Adriana, watching a rerun of *Murder One*, gets the notion that if she and Christopher marry (long her hope) she cannot be forced by the FBI to testify against him. When she later learns that expectation is false, the title of the episode finally become clear.

Season Five's "In Camelot" (5.07) finds Christopher alternately supporting/bankrupting J. T. (Tim Daley), a friend from rehab. At a twelve-step meeting, J. T. introduces himself as "a TV writer, which by

default makes me a douche bag." (J. T. mentions missing a deadline for *Nash Bridges* as the result of his addiction.) Desperate for money after a horrible night at the poker table, he will later try to pawn an Emmy statue only to be told it is practically worthless. "If it was an Oscar," the pawnbroker suggests, "maybe I could give you something, an Academy Award, but TV?"

Airing on HBO, already pre-branded as "not TV," in a series created by David Chase, a man who scorns the medium in which he has spent his career ("I loathe and despise almost every second of [television]" [Rucker interview]; see Lavery and Thompson), these medium-specific, self-referential slams should come as no surprise. *The Sopranos*, however, is no *Nash Bridges*, and, as the essays in this book, the latest contribution to the already extensive scholarly/critical discourse about a landmark series—the highest-ranked drama in the history of American television ("50 Greatest Shows")—demonstrate, there is much to learn about the world, both the mediated small-screen cosmos and the real world too, from at least the best of TV.

II. NOT TV

> Not only will ordinary folks watch a show [like *The Sopranos*] that demands constant attention, resists easy closure, relies on subtext and is rich with metaphor—they will pay near usurious subscription fees for it.
>
> *James Poniewozik*

In a March 2004 interview on National Public Radio's *Fresh Air*, Chase, a thirty-year, once nearly invisible veteran, in his pre-HBO life, of network television—before, that is, he destroyed his anonymity by creating HBO's signature dramatic series—reiterates his unhappiness with the current state of American television.[1] Sick and tired of the complaints of Chase's former employers the networks—all of whom had passed on his story about a New Jersey gangster and his two families—that HBO cable shows have an unfair, censorship-free advantage (see Levinson), Chase lists instead some of the freedoms network television fails to exercise:

> [A]ll of us have the freedom to do story lines that unfold slowly. We all have the freedom to create characters that are complex and contradictory. The FCC doesn't govern that. We all have the freedom to tell stupid, bad jokes that may actually turn out to be funny. And we all have the freedom to let the audience figure out what's going on rather than telling them what's going on.

Any regular viewer of *The Sopranos* will immediately recognize that Chase is actually spelling out the mission statement of his own masterpiece.

"You get bored," Chase confessed several years ago to James Longworth, "and I don't know if you can tell it from looking at *The Sopranos*, but I had just had it up to here with all the niceties of network television. I couldn't take it anymore. And I don't mean language and I don't mean violence. I just mean storytelling, inventiveness, something that really could entertain and surprise people. I just couldn't take it anymore" (34). Network television fails, Chase goes on to say, because it has forgotten its first obligation as a storyteller in order to pursue a not-so-hidden agenda:

> I think the first priority is to push a lifestyle. I think there's something they're trying to sell all the time ... I think what they're trying to sell is that everything's OK all the time, that this is just a great nation and a wonderful society, and everything's OK and it's OK to buy stuff. Let's just go buy some stuff ... There's some indefinable image of America that they're constantly trying to push as opposed to actually being entertaining.

In love with cinema, determined to make a "little movie" every week, Chase and company only grudgingly surrendered to the conventions of episodic storytelling but, from the very beginning, *The Sopranos* has been a character-driven, darkly funny, supremely ironic, frequently subversive, wholly democratic series with no "palpable design upon us," insisting we make up our own minds about all its often deeply conflicted, never wholly admirable characters and the culture that created and sustains them.

Chase fails to disclose, however, one undeniable, inequitable advantage working on HBO does offer him. A *Sopranos* season is only

thirteen episodes, and HBO has acquiesced in Chase's ever-increasing demands for longer-than-customary hiatuses between seasons. *The Sopranos* returned for its fourth season in September 2002, after sixteen months of replenishing the creative juices. Season Five aired after fifteen months off the air. The hiatus preceding Season Six will be only three months short of two years.[2]

We will soon learn what Chase, writers Robin Green, Mitchell Burgess, and Terence Winter; directors Allen Coulter and Tim Van Patten,[3] to name only Chase's longest-running collaborators, have made out of their longest gestation period. We will learn, too, whether Season Six will be the end of Tony Soprano. It will almost certainly not be the end of *Sopranos* Studies.

III. TELEVISION STUDIES/*SOPRANOS* STUDIES

In "Life with (God)Father," an essay in Regina Barreca's collection of essays on Italian-American culture in *The Sopranos*, renowned feminist literary scholar Sandra Gilbert (co-author, with Susan Gubar, of the watershed study *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* and numerous other books) stoops to conquer *The Sopranos*. Not a happy watcher, she finds *The Sopranos* to be the latest precipitation in "a rain of cultural messages excluding me from imaginative authority." Forced to watch it, she find herself "relegated to a somewhat comic, perhaps even grotesque underclass" (13). Along the way, bemused by the serious attention paid to television in general and *The Sopranos* in particular, she takes unbecoming, admittedly ignorant, and sometimes *ad hominen* swings at critics and scholars. Offended by television critic Joyce Millman's suggestion (in *Salon.com*) that even non-Italians can identify with *The Sopranos*, she responds by characterizing her ideas as "burbling." Bemused by my own attempt in the online journal *PopPolitics* ("Coming Heavy") to identify *The Sopranos*' characteristically postmodern intertextuality, she takes fussy pot shots at a quotation of Eco and then, embarrassingly, changes a quotation from my essay through a bracketed insertion that alters my meaning.[4] Later, she admits, evidently proud of the fact, that "I write this ... without having seen *a single frame* of the third season of *The Sopranos* ..." (25; my italics),

even though Barreca's collection, appearing in 2002, covered the first three seasons of the series. Would she brag about not having read, say, all of Emily Dickinson's published poetry prior to writing about her work? (Because I have no desire to be petty, I will not bother to point out the problem in Gilbert's phrasing: that television doesn't come in frames.)

The condescending, dismissive tone of Gilbert's essay should be familiar to anyone who follows the reception of television studies in the popular press. The vast majority of US reviews of important studies of significant television series, from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Six Feet Under*, are written by the nonplussed and incredulous. Committed to self-fulfilling prophecy, newspapers and magazines, it seems, wouldn't think of assigning a review to a friend of television. Even though the field continues to proliferate—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its sequel *Angel,* for example, have already generated over a dozen scholarly books, four international conferences, and well over a hundred published essays—Television Studies in general can't get no respect.

The emerging field of *Sopranos* Studies,[5] only three years old as I write, has seen the publication of over fifty individual essays in such scholarly journals as *The Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, and *Film Quarterly* and three edited collections, my own, *This Thing of Ours: Investigating The Sopranos* (2002); Barreca's *A Sitdown with the Sopranos: Watching Italian American Culture on TV's Most Talked-About Series* (2002); and Richard Greene and Peter Vernezze's *The Sopranos and Philosophy: I Kill, Therefore I Am* (2004); as well as monographs like Glen O. Gabbard's *The Psychology of The Sopranos: Love, Death, and Betrayal in America's Favorite Gangster Family* (2002), Maurice Yacowar's *The Sopranos on the Couch: Analyzing Television's Greatest Series* (2002, 2003), and David Simon's *Tony Soprano's America* (2002).[6]

Study of a television series is not comparable to, say, investigation of the human genome. Chromosomes and genes are not methodically allocated to appropriate experts for definitive assessment. No one is coordinating *Sopranos* Studies. No one is calling the shots; there is no boss to this mob. Still, trends are discernible.

Tony. More essays have been written on Tony Soprano himself than on any other single topic, almost all seeking to come to grips, in one way or another, with the central question of the morality of the series' anti-hero. Noel Carroll's "Sympathy for the Devil," for example, grapples with the apparent contradiction of the audience's identification with Tony's clearly criminal behavior. James Harold's "A Moral Never-Never Land: Identifying with Tony Soprano" and Mike Lippman's "Know Thyself, Asshole: Tony Soprano as an Aristotelian Tragic Hero" cover similar territory, the former implementing Tolstoy's aesthetics (from *What is Art?*), the latter examining Tony as a tragic hero according to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Sheila Lintott's "Tony Soprano's Moral Sympathy (or Lack Thereof): *The Sopranos* and Subjectivist Ethics" and Scott D. Wilson's "Staying within the Family: Tony Soprano's Ethical Obligations" offer additional assessments of Tony's moral code. Ronald M. Green seeks to understand the nature of Tony Soprano's business ethics in "'I Dunno About Morals, but I Do Got Rules': Tony Soprano as Ethical Manager." Richard Greene offers a tightly argued assessment of Tony Soprano's own fallibility in "Is Tony Soprano Self-Blind?"—he is, Greene concludes definitively. Jennifer Baker applies classical notions of the nature of human happiness in seeking to understand the motives of Tony Soprano in "The Unhappiness of Tony Soprano: An Ancient Analysis."

Feminist. Feminists have of course had a great deal to say about *The Sopranos*. Lisa Cassidy's "Is Carmela Soprano a Feminist? Carmela's Care Ethics" unequivocally finds *The Sopranos*' most important female character an "anti-feminist," but one potentially capable of reform. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe's "Beyond the Bada Bing! Negotiating Female Narrative Authority in *The Sopranos*" and Cindy Donatelli and Sharon Alward's "'I Dread You': Married to the mob in *The Godfather*, *GoodFellas*, and *The Sopranos*" both offer arguments (narratological/genre-based) for the surprising and unprecedented strength of women in the series. Regina Barreca seeks to account for her counter-intuitive/feminism-subverting attraction to the females of *The Sopranos* in "Why I like the Women in *The Sopranos* Even though I'm Not Supposed to."

HBO and Television. Both Paul Levinson's "Naked Bodies, Three Showings a Week, and No Commercials: *The Sopranos* as a Nuts-and-

Bolts Triumph of Non-Network TV" and "*The Sopranos* as HBO Brand Equity: The Art of Commerce in the Age of Digital Reproduction" by Mark C. Rogers, Michael M. Epstein, and Jimmie R. Reeves explore the series as a product of a premium cable channel. In "Bada-Being and Nothingness: Murderous Melodrama or Morality Play?" Al Gini brings a variety of media critics—Neil Postman, Susan Sontag, Marshall McLuhan—and thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Ernest Becker into play in trying to ascertain the appeal of *The Sopranos*. David Lavery and Robert J. Thompson's "David Chase, *The Sopranos,* and Television Creativity" takes a careful look at the "television auteur" who created *The Sopranos*.

The Gangster Genre. Comparing and contrasting the series to earlier manifestations of the gangster film or to true crime gangsters has been the focus of over a dozen published essays: Albert Auster, "*The Sopranos:* The Gangster Redux"; Ellen Willis, "Our Mobsters, Ourselves"; David Pattie, "Mobbed Up: *The Sopranos* and the Intertextual Gangster"; Glen Creeber, "'TV Ruined the Movies': Television, Tarantino, and The Intimate World of *The Sopranos*"; two essays by Martha P. Nochimson ("'Waddaya Lookin' At?': Re-Reading the Gangster Genre through *The Sopranos*" and "Tony's Options: *The Sopranos* and the Televisuality of the Gangster Genre"); Lee Siegel, "The Attraction of Repulsion"; David Remnick, "Is This the End of Rico? With *The Sopranos* the Mob Genre is on the Brink"; Fred Gardaphé, "Fresh Garbage: The Gangster as Suburban Trickster"; and Ingrid Walker Fields, "Family Values and Feudal Codes: The Social Politics of America's Twenty-First Century Gangster" (which offers an extensive comparison of Jim Jarmusch's film *Ghost Dog* [1999] and *The Sopranos*); Chris Messenger, "*The Godfather* Sung by *The Sopranos*" (a chapter in The Godfather *and American Culture*). George Anastasia, one of the premier organized crime journalists in the USA, assesses the real-world accuracy of *The Sopranos* in a wide-ranging essay entitled "If Shakespeare were Alive Today, He'd be Writing for *The Sopranos*."

Italianness. One book—Barreca's *Sitdown with The Sopranos*—and several essays—Jonathan J. Cavellero's "Gangsters, Fessos, Tricksters, and Sopranos: The Historical Roots of Italian American Stereotype Anxiety"; Roseanne Giannini Quinn's "Mothers, Molls,

and Misogynists: Resisting Italian American Womanhood in *The Sopranos*"; B. Beck's "The Myth That Would Not Die: *The Sopranos*, Mafia Movies, and Italians in America"—examine the series' Italianness, most simultaneously considering the role of the gangster genre in perpetuating cultural stereotypes. E. Anthony Rotundo's "Wonderbread and Stugots: Italian American Manhood and *The Sopranos*" examines men and manhood in the show.

Language. In "This Thing of Ours: Language Use in *The Sopranos*," Michael E. Gettings applies the "speech act" theory of philosopher J. L. Austin to an examination of the underworld slang and waste management jargon of *The Sopranos.* "'Soprano-speak': Language and Silence in *The Sopranos*" by Douglas L. Howard examines communication and miscommunication in the narrative.

Psychotherapy. One book, Gabbard's *The Psychology of The Sopranos*, and at least two essays—Peter Mattessi's "The Strong, Silent Type: Psychoanalysis in *The Sopranos*," and Michael Flamini's "'Pa cent' anni, 'Dr. Melfi': Psychotherapy in the Italian American Community"—assess the central role of psychotherapy in *The Sopranos*.

Religion. Carla Gardina Pestana examines the important role of the church and the nature of belief in the series in "Catholicism, Identity, and Ethics in *The Sopranos*." Peter H. Hare's "'What Kind of God Does This...?'" offers an overview of some of the series' theological questions and problems. And Peter Vernezze provides a Dantesque map of Sopranoland in "Tony Soprano in Hell: Chase's Mob in Dante's *Inferno*."

Sui Generis. Many essays on *The Sopranos* are one of a kind. Jeremy Creedon's "The Greening of Tony Soprano" is an ecopyschological reading of Tony's malaise. Steven Hayward and Andrew Biro's "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Tony Soprano" is a neo-Marxist reading of the series. "Unmade Men: *The Sopranos* After Whiteness" by Christopher Kocela explores the complex role of race in *The Sopranos*. Lance Strate's "No(rth Jersey) Sense of Place: The Cultural Geography (and Media Ecology) of *The Sopranos*" seeks to delineate all the many environments of the series. In "The Cultural Work of *The Sopranos*," Jay Parini outlines the many ways in which the show interrogates modern American culture by "draw[ing] ing attention to the fault lines

in family and community life" (80). Inspired by Tony's reading of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* (recommended by Dr. Melfi) in Season Three, Steven C. Combs' "Tony Soprano and the Art of War: New Jersey Meets the East" compares the struggle of organized crime in New Jersey to the Spring-Autumn (circa 770–476 BC) and Warring States (circa 475–221 BC) periods of Chinese history. David Hahn's "The Prince and I: Some Musings on Machiavelli" draws some parallels between Machiavelli's *The Prince* and goings-on in Sopranoland. H. Peter Steeves offers a Hobbesian/Cartesian-influenced reading of the individual and the community in "Dying in Our Own Arms: Liberalism, Communitarianism, and the Construction of Identity on *The Sopranos*." Avi Santo's "'Why Don't you take a look in the mirror, you insensitive prick': Weight, Body Image and Masculinity in *The Sopranos*" enacts its own title by considering obesity in the series. Joanne Lacey's ethnographic study, "One for the Boys? *The Sopranos* and Its Male, British Audience," assesses the way ten men in Brighton, England watched and understood the show. Dawn Elizabeth B. Johnston's "Way North of New Jersey: A Canadian Experience of *The Soprano*" offers an account of the reception of *The Sopranos* in Canada. Kevin Fellezs's "Wiseguy Opera: Music for *Sopranos*" listens to the role of Italian music in the show. Joseph S. Walker's "'Cunnilingus and Psychoanalysis Have Brought Us To This': Livia and the Logic of False Hoods" carefully examines the structure and themes of the series' first season. J. Gattuso Hendin's "Tony and Meadow: The Sopranos as Father-Daughter Drama" considers the mob boss as parent. Kevin L. Stoehr reads the series as both an existential drama and a manifestation of *film noir* in "'It's All a Big Nothing': The Nihilistic Vision of *The Sopranos*." And, as the title suggests, Sara Lewis Dunne's "'The Brutality of Meat' and 'the Abruptness of Seafood': Food, Violence, and Family in *The Sopranos*" digests the central role of food in the show.

The present volume, with the first five seasons of *The Sopranos* on the table, builds upon earlier work on the series and opens up new territory for exploration. The present essay is followed by two other introductory essays, "Surviving the 'Hit': Will *The Sopranos* Still Sing for HBO?" in which Epstein, Reeves, and Rogers continue

their examination of *The Sopranos* and HBO (begun in *This Thing of Ours*), this time considering what the end of the series means for both *The Sopranos* and HBO brands; and David Johansson's "Homeward Bound: Those *Sopranos* Titles Come Heavy," which presents a close reading of the series' famous opening credit sequence.

The book's second section, "Sopranos Women," includes readings of key females in the series. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass extend their earlier feminist interpretation of the show in *This Thing*, this time seeking an answer to the question "What has Carmela Ever Done for Feminism?" Valerie Palmer-Mehta's "Disciplining the Masculine: The Disruptive Power of Janice Soprano" considers Tony's unruly older sister. In "Eve of Destruction: Dr. Melfi as Reader of *The Sopranos*," Bruce Plourde offers a reader-response take on the series' resident psychiatrist.

"Episodes," the third section, gathers essays that take hard looks at individual hours of *The Sopranos*: "Employee of the Month" and "Another Toothpick" in Jessica Baldanzi's "Bloodlust for the Common Man: *The Sopranos* Confronts Its Vengeful Audience"; "The Test Dream" in Cameron Golden's "'You're Annette Bening?': Dreams and Hollywood as Subtext in *The Sopranos*"; and "Christopher" in Christopher Kocela's "From Columbus to Gary Cooper: Mourning the Lost White Father in *The Sopranos*," a continuation of the author's earlier essay on whiteness in the show.

"Music, Theatricality, Aesthetics," *Reading* The Sopranos' fourth section, includes three more essays. Chris Neal—in "Gangstas, Divas, and Breaking Tony's Balls: Musical Reference in *The Sopranos*"—contemplates the significant role of music. Gwyn Symonds reflects on the staging of its larger-than-life personae in "Show Business or Dirty Business?: The Theatrics of Mafia Narrative and Empathy for the Last Mob Boss Standing in *The Sopranos*." And in "Art Imitating Life Imitating Art: Aesthetics and Ammunition in *The Sopranos*," Franco Ricci exhaustively foregrounds the paintings, statues, photographs so often overlooked in *Sopranos'* mise-en-scéne.

Reading The Sopranos' final section—"Criminal Justice, Power, Homophobia, Race"—is comprised of Douglas Howard's close look at the Bureau and the mob in the series: "Tasting Brylcreem: Law,

Disorder, and the FBI in *The Sopranos*"; Dean DeFino's consideration of Tony Soprano's Machiavellian side: "The Prince of North Jersey"; and Brian Gibson's examination of bigotry and homophobia: "'Black Guys My Ass': The Queerness of Racism in *The Sopranos*."

Three appendices (a complete list of *Sopranos* episodes, writers, and directors; a catalog of Intertextual Moments and Allusions in *The Sopranos,* updating a similar catalog in *This Things of Ours*, this time covering Seasons Four and Five; and a list of characters); a composite bibliography; and an index complete the book.[8]

IV. THE END

> Two endings for a high profile guy like me: dead or in the can.
> *"For All Debts Public or Private"* (4.01)

How then does a "high-profile" show like *The Sopranos* end? As I have shown elsewhere ("Apocalyptic Apocalypses"), the "narrative eschatology" of any long-running television series is complex, offering "a variety of 'little deaths,' mini-apocalypses": those sub-climaxes network and basic capable narratives require for commercial breaks (absent, of course on HBO); the wait-until-next-week climax of each episode (Melfi's vengeance-denying "No" to Tony's "Is there something you want to say?" ["Employee of the Month," 3.04); the culmination of a particular narrative arc (Adriana's stint as an FBI info whacked by Silvio ["Long Term Parking," 5.12]); the ending of each season (that shot of the ocean, the new home of Big Pussy, at the end of Season Two ["Funhouse," 2.13), and, most apocalyptic of all, the finale of a series.

Such finales—of *M*A*S*H,* of *Seinfeld*, of *Sex and the City*–have, of course, become "cultural spectacles" (Morreale), and no doubt *The Sopranos* will inspire yet another. The book you hold, however, was written in ignorance of the end of *The Sopranos.* As it was being completed, word came down from on high that a deal had been reached between HBO and David Chase to produce eight additional "bonus" episodes of *The Sopranos* to air about nine months (January 2007) after the previously thought-to-be-final, twelve-episode Season Six, already set to begin in March 2006.

None of this book's contributors has seen a single episode; none knows the answer to the question (inspired by the lament of Caesar Enrico Bandello in *Little Caesar* [1931]), posed in the title to this introduction. We don't know on which horn of the dilemma Tony predicts to Melfi he (and the narrative) will be impaled. We are not even certain that Governor Chase may not, once again, grant a last minute reprieve, extending the life of the condemned.[8]

1.

SURVIVING "THE HIT"

WILL *THE SOPRANOS* STILL SING FOR HBO?

Michael M. Epstein, Jimmie L. Reeves, and Mark C. Rogers

"A Hit is a Hit"—the tenth episode of the inaugural season of *The Sopranos*—examines some of the same connotations of the word "hit" that we elaborate in this essay. The episode begins with Tony's minions executing a classic gangland "hit" that produces a suitcase full of cash. But the more relevant spin on the word "hit" occurs near the end of the main storyline. After frowning though wannabe rock-band Visiting Day's demo tape (bankrolled by Christopher Moltisanti's share of the blood money from the Mafia "hit"), Hesh Rabkin states the obvious—Visiting Day sucks. When the distraught Christopher asks Hesh to elaborate, Hesh showcases the accumulated wisdom of decades of success finding and exploiting talent in the music business. "A hit is a hit," explains Hesh. "And that's no hit."

Our use of the word "hit," of course, is also an obvious double-entendre relating to both the gangster content of the narrative and to the enormous success of the program itself. Still, as we reflected on the title, it also became apparent that there is a third way to interpret "hit," one that refers to the impact that the end of *The Sopranos*' run on HBO—and its distribution into other windows—will have on the