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***Dodging Satan. My Irish/Italian, Sometimes Awesome, but Mostly Creepy, Childhood*** by Kathleen Zamboni McCormick. San Mateo, CA: Sand Hill Review Press, 2015. 189 pp.

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Is this book a novel? Is it a memoir? The fact that its first-person narrator and protagonist, Bridget Flaherty, does not share the author's name, indicates that, in narratological terms, we are reading fiction. Yet the vivid details, the psychological tension, and the quirky characters we encounter manifest that first-hand experience lies at the basis of what Kathleen Zamboni McCormick shares with us in this funny, tender, insightful volume.

Bridget grows up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the only child of an Irish father and an Italian mother, who attends Catholic school and who, like children the world over, observes, describes, and interprets what she sees. The tension between the two sides of her family run openly, and it is clear that Bridget is closer to her mother and her clan, a large, affectionate and stereotypically loud bunch who have each other's back under all circumstances. Take, for example, aunt Maria, sheltered by her sister and her family, "to escape from uncle Lou, to recover from the injuries she suffered when he threw her down three flights of stairs" (156).

Violence, physical and verbal, permeates her existence, sometimes enacted, but mostly as a looming threat. Secrets are equally ubiquitous. As I was reading *Dodging Satan*, the Italian *dictum Dio, patria e famiglia* kept coming to mind, perhaps because the ties among patriotism, religion, and family are so crucial in chapter 1, "Why Is God in Daddy's Slippers?" Bridget has two uncles who survived World War II "when they touched the crosses around their necks, and God touched them back" (9). God is a pervasive, disquieting presence in Bridget's pre-teen years; nuns and family members underscore that his rules have to be respected, and Bridget goes from deep self-doubts in her abilities to follow them, to the belief that God is calling her to be a nun (which, incidentally, would save her from being subject to a husband), to the awareness that women are second-class beings in God's eyes. Against a conservative view and patriarchal practices, Bridget finds solace in Mary (or BVM for short): "Since Mary, a female, is so important to Catholicism, you feel that no one should be disappointed by having a girl instead of a boy, or if they are, they might just discover one day what a big mistake they made. Mary showed the world that girls shouldn't be underestimated. And since we always seem to be in every possible way, as I've discovered, she's a real comfort" (173).

McCormick's novel is both quintessentially American and deeply Italian. Growing up female within a traditional Catholic culture implied the internalization of self-effacement, subservience, and debasing service (to priests, teachers, parents, husbands, other people's ideas, and more). As I was reading this touching and unsettling book, I was often reminded of Michela Murgia's 2011 volume, *Ave Mary. E la Chiesa inventò la donna* (Turin: Einaudi): although the latter takes theology explicitly to task, its analysis is always grounded in the author's life experience. It does not matter, ultimately, if this is memoir or fiction: what is crucial is that McCormick illuminates what is often hidden, with delicate details and unaffected language that resonates with all readers.

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