Peter Carravetta. *After Identity: Migration, Critique, Italian American Culture*. New York: Bordighera Press, 2017. Pp. 278. ISBN 9781599540726.

After Identity shows that, due to the complexity of the phenomenon, the study of the Italian American experience demands an interdisciplinary perspectivism. The introduction to the book represents an excursus of the history of migration and the figure of the migrant. It is steeped in the idea that, to understand today's migration, one needs to draw new critical maps. Peter Carravetta structures his analysis in two sections: the first part is a sharp critical investigation of traditional views on ethnicity and identity, whereas the second part consists of a sophisticated literary interpretation of works (chiefly poetry) by major Italian American writers. Carravetta indicates that migration is not *simply* a process, but it "is made up in great numbers of a variety of constituents" (7). That being said, it is impossible to discuss ethnicity without considering that it, too, is "constituted by a cluster of different and not always coherent (sub)identities" (xii). In tune with contemporary critical approaches to the concept of identity that emphasize the malleability of culture (one title comes to mind almost immediately as one reads Carravetta's new book: Amartya Sen's *Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny*), the author indicates that it is high time to shift our holistic perspectivism on the study of identity, as the latter "has no contour, it is fluid, amoebic, viscous" (xii). Shifting perspectivism here also signifies to acknowledge that the Italian American experience is directly forged out of Italian history, thus when engaging in a critical discussion of Italian American affairs, one should consider the reasons why the Italians left their motherland *en masse*.

Carravetta notices that there is a pronounced lack of interest in connecting the history of post-unification Italy with the history of Italian immigration in America, for researchers seem to favour a scholarship focusing mainly on the way in which Italians assimilated in their hosting countries. Since "concerning how, why, and what happened before [the Italians] sailed westward, very little has been done" (44), Carravetta offers the reader a constructive example of how to use Italian history to understand, among others, "the problem of *origins* in Italian (and Italian American) culture" (43; author's emphasis). Carravetta goes as far as suggesting that it is not imaginable to talk about Italian or American poetry without considering Italian American literature (85). Assuming that it is possible to graph a literary history of Italian American writing (87)—Carravetta seems to take this methodological turn in the second part of the book—the fulcrum of

this history should no longer be the *ethnos*. Still, the concept of ethnicity should help us to address “a larger network of problems” (88), such as, for instance, the cultural interplay of writers of different backgrounds. Carravetta recognizes that Italian American literature is destined to remain at the margins. If, at a first reading, this statement could somewhat suggest a failure of Italian American politics in assuring visibility of American authors of Italian descent, Carravetta, eventually, makes a very interesting move by observing that, in the postmodern era in which we live today, the idea of “a stable, empowering center or mean or mainstream is a ‘philosophical fiction’” (105). Thus, labelling Italian American literature as “minor” is barely important, the author says (105).

Carravetta envisions the Italian American experience in a wider historical context. As he writes, “the first-generation emigrants/immigrants were participating in the larger political economy of the North Atlantic Trade triangle, and as such their interpretation requires a transnational perspective” (113). This observation anticipates the possibility of reconsidering (even rewriting) the Italian American experience as a story that emerges from the matrix of the Atlantic World. The implications of such a perspectivism are great, for they help to release the anxiety of identifying Italian American culture and literature with a specific empirical category. Once included in Atlantic History, the Italian American experience can finally be said to be a knot of sorts, the result of several cultural intersections, as Carravetta foresees throughout his inquiry.

The analysis of the Italian American literature brought forth in the second part of the book illustrates the transnational, transethnic potential of this tradition. Carravetta explains that “some of these poets write about things that have nothing to do with their ‘Being Italian American’” (147). As it stands in *After Identity*, reassessing the experience of the Italians in North America beyond the claustrophobic exceptionalism of ethnicity gives us the possibility to re-channel their migration history in ideal spaces where their singularity becomes a source of culture with global credentials. One of the most important merits of Carravetta’s book is that it generates new ideas worth pursuing in the future, thereby providing an opportunity to broaden the objectives of Italian American Studies.

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