



Martino Marazzi. *Misteri di Little Italy: Storie e testi della letteratura italoamericana*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001. 160 pp. \$15.50 (paper), ISBN 978-88-464-2950-6.

Reviewed by Giuseppe D. Blasi (Department of Modern Philology, University of Catania, Italy)

Published on H-Italy (March, 2003)

No Mysteries on the Visibility of Italian American Studies in Italy

No Mysteries on the Visibility of Italian American Studies in Italy

Martino Marazzi's *Misteri di Little Italy: Storie e testi della letteratura italoamericana* offers the reader an informative and in-depth perspective on Italian American studies as seen from the point of view of a Milan-based Italian scholar. The work is also a precious source of references for those interested in a multi-disciplinary transatlantic approach to the field. Most importantly, Marazzi's last effort shows us that, as far as one is concerned with culture, insularity will not pay. In fact, any cultural interchange, both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic, is the precursory act from which a "minor" literature will move from the margin to the fore of the national life. Frederick Douglass's words remain true today, reminding us that "if there is no struggle there can be no progress." This is the type of strife that Italian America has confronted when fighting against stereotypes and prejudice. It is an activity that both American and Italian scholars must contend with to give both America and Italy literary voices, such as Don DeLillo and Carole Maso, or Gioia Timpanelli and Joseph Papaleo, the latter of whom are lesser-known writers in the canon.

The discipline needs the involvement of Italian America and the commitment to Italian culture to flourish and endure. It also needs a joint effort to contradict beliefs which deem anything of Mediterranean descent as anti-intellectual, cynically Machiavellian, materialist, and not worth reading. Good literature is made by communal efforts and shared projects. This is why Marazzi's Northern perspective on this "new" American cultural arena (mainly of Southern Italian descent) is particularly welcome. The study also contains interesting primary sources by DiDonato, Fante, and Corsi. It is articulated in four major sections ("Narratori," "Poeti," "Prose di testimonianza," and "Il punto di vista italiano"). Within the space of three chapters, the first section focuses on the works of authors such as Luigi Donato Ventura, Camillo

Cianfarra, Pietro DiDonato, John Fante, and Ezio Tadei. This section has an important role since it gives the reader the historical background between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It also introduces key concepts such as the cogent link between the individual activity of the writer and the cultural milieu of the coeval Italian American periodical publishing industry. Another major emphasis focuses on the divide between literature written in Italian (though published in America) and literary production in American English. Marazzi identifies the epoch-making passage from Italian to English in the work of Francescantonio Michele Daniele. From the 1930s onwards, his writings are exclusively written in his adopted language (p. 41). ("Con la rottura di quella diga protettiva e l'apertura alla lingua del paese d'arrivo, la letteratura italoamericana, congedatasi dalla gente lontana, cominci a parlare inglese. Le fondamenta (con i loro 'misteri', e i loro 'gialli' e i 'rosa' delle loro pagine) vennero rapidamente inghiottite dalla nuova ondata.") The New Wave is obviously provided by the work of Pietro DiDonato and John Fante. But we should also remember the pivotal works of Guido D'Agostino and Jerre Mangione, whose efforts deserve much more attention than a spare note.

The second section has just one chapter, "Poesia degli italoamericani," on Cordiferro, Giovanitti, Righi, and Ruotolo, constituting the poetry written in Italian and often published in America. The third section revolves around two chapters. The first one raises controversial perspectives on Ventura, Cianfarra, and Prezzolini, and to what Marazzi points to as their antagonistic, if not plainly racist, perception of the other, i.e., the black American. The second chapter is a biographical portrait of Edoardo Corsi. The final section has a chapter regarding the relationship between Italian literature and America. Alberto Arbasino, Giuseppe Bonaviri, Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, Italo Calvino, Gianni Celati, Andrea De Carlo, Umberto Eco, Silvana Grasso, Goffredo Parise, Guido Pi-

ovene, and Mario Soldati are among those writers who have drawn on the American myth. The fourth section of the book gives the reader what is one of Marazzi's most salient statements: "il mistero sgradevole dell'esclusione, in Italia, della storia italoamericana dall'interesse degli specialisti" (p. 145).

This is a turning point in the study. The Italian scholar highlights the delay of Italian culture—both historical and critical—in the reception and analysis of the Italian American canon. Marazzi explains why the American myth, as developed by Italian writers, does not coincide with an actual interest in Italian America:

=Il fatto che gli Usa vengono allora visti piu' che mai come la terra della modernita', del futuro e del futuribile, dalla tecnologia all'economia, dall'architettura alla produzione artistica e all'impegno civile: un esempio per la traballante e neonata democrazia italiana. In questo contesto gli italoamericani sono percepiti come una traccia del passato statunitense, non del suo presente espansivo, certo non come una presenza anacronistica e dannosa secondo le indicazioni di un Prezzolini, ma in ogni caso come un fattore non rilevante ai fini della militanza critica e culturale di intellettuali spesso nel pieno dei loro anni piu' sperimentali e agguerriti. (p. 148)

In fact, as stated above, the development of Italian American studies in Italy must face the obstacle of stereotypical notions. A clear statement of this assertion is

found on the back cover, where the editor explains that Italian American culture has long been neglected due to "elitismo e indolenza scientifica." Strong words which today must be read in contrast to the impetuous renaissance in Italian American Studies in Italy. It has definitely overcome what I would term Vittorini's "mortgage" on Italian American authors. In his dealing with the value of authors such as Fante and Mangione, he writes, "nessuno di essi poi andato oltre il grido di presenza razziale contenuto in quell suo primo libro" (quoted in Agostino Lombardo, *La ricerca del vero* [Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1961], p. 68). Read this brief aside as a proof of the stimulating power of Marazzi's work. The book's rich references encourage us to reread books by Cecchi, Pavese, Vittorini, and Agostino Lombardo. They also invite the reader to look for those works by other Italian scholars long engaged in researching Italian American studies, such as Lidio Bertelli, Alide Cagidemetrio, Franca Bernabei, William Boelhower, Raffaele Cocchi, Francesco Durante, Emilio Franzina, Biancamaria Lalli Tedeschini, Stefano Luconi, Mario Maffi, Sebastiano Martelli, Elisabetta Vezzosi. Although they are not among the works quoted, one should also remember the analyses of Italian Americana by scholars such as Giuseppe Massara and Maria Vittoria D'Amico. Finally, *Misteri di Little Italy* succeeds in conveying the significance and wide-ranging spectrum of Italian American Studies both in America and in Italy.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Giuseppe D. Blasi. Review of Marazzi, Martino, *Misteri di Little Italy: Storie e testi della letteratura italoamericana*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. March, 2003.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7380>

Copyright © 2003 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.