

in the name of identity. How does one dismantle identity when identity still mobilizes the public?

A careful reader of *After Identity* will reap plenty of rewards, as this volume advances Italian American studies on multiple fronts. It contributes to the ongoing rethinking of migration as a transnational phenomenon and the question of representing subaltern subjects. It proposes a pedagogy of teaching Self and Other through literature and migration. It offers insightful readings of Italian/American poetics and creates signposts toward an Italian/American literary history. And its topological critique makes a key intervention in interrogating the literary canon for marginalizing “minor” literatures. Linking power with literary production, *After Identity* also invites us to examine inclusions and exclusions of so-called ethnic literature in the United States in specific sites and contexts of power. This examination could shed light on the historical fluctuations and contemporary unevenness in the public presence or invisibility of Italian/American literature in American society.

After Identity opens spaces for further topological inquiries and a critique of the center from the literary margins. But can we imagine a postmarginal position for bicultural literature? A bicultural literature that performs critical work from the power of the center? Can we think after margins, so to speak, to have *national* literature advocate the interests that *After Identity* so passionately advocates?

—YIORGOS ANAGNOSTOU
The Ohio State University

Built with Faith: Italian American Imagination and Catholic Material Culture in New York City.

By Joseph Sciorra.

Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2015.

262 pages.

In his introduction, Joseph Sciorra explains: “This book offers a place-centric, ethnographic study—conducted over the course of thirty-five years—of the religious material culture of New York City’s Italian American Catholics” (xviii). The longevity of Sciorra’s commitment to the study of vernacular shrines, outdoor altars, *presepi* (nativity landscapes)—and to the craftspeople who make them—is reflected in his richly detailed treatment of both the formal

dimensions of this religious material culture and the changed conditions of its reception in the diverse city neighborhoods in which it thrives.

Sciorra's primary interest "has always been the work itself" (xxxviii). He shows how the "centuries-old Italian tradition of constructing freestanding wayside shrines along rural roads" (5) (*edicole sacre*, literally, sacred kiosks) was adapted by Italian New Yorkers to the "social-spatial conditions of vertical tenements, storefront spaces, and congested urban streets" (9).

He is attentive to the formal qualities of these shrines, particularly their ornamental features ("sea shells, either scallop or conch, are often incorporated as ornamentation and are placed at the foot of the statue or embedded in yard shrines' exterior walls") (31). He also reconstructs the diverse contexts in which these works were received. In 1899, for example, social reformer Jacob Riis experienced the *edicola sacra* as a manifestation of the Italian newcomers' "strange artistic genius" (10).

Over time and with the expansion of populous Italian American neighborhoods throughout the boroughs of New York City, *edicole sacre* became sites of "individual and group rituals acted out daily and in the context of the sacred calendar" (38). Or as a resident of Brooklyn's Carroll Gardens neighborhood told Sciorra of a wrought-iron shrine to St. Lucy built by the resident's late father: "In a way, it's basically become like a quick trip to church. A lot of people, before they do anything, on the way to the bread store in the morning, they'll stop on the corner and say a prayer or drop off flowers. And that's the beginning of their day. It's just another way of showing their relationship with a higher power" (37). The author's decades-long engagement with the culture of vernacular shrines also enabled him to track changes in form and content. While the Madonna remained the dominant sacred presence in these shrines, for example, Sciorra found that Padre Pio has enjoyed a great upsurge in popularity, fueled by post-World War II Italian immigrants whose devotion to the stigmatic figure predated his 2002 canonization.

Sciorra's treatment of *edicole sacre*, *presepi*, domestic altars, and the large-scale illuminated Christmas house displays that have made ethnic neighborhoods like Brooklyn's Dyker Heights famous at Christmastime is enriched by the author's ongoing dialog with the makers of these works, a dialog that unsettles the highly gendered world of stone masons and construction trades veterans, occupations historically synonymous with notions of Italian American masculinity. Chris DeVito of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, for example, confides in Sciorra that he "sees his friend James Quitoni from the Flatlands neighborhood 'as someone I can work with'" because—in Sciorra's words—"they share much about Catholic beliefs and practices, among other things, including the assemblage of a festive domestic altar each year" (44). Sciorra captures the spiritual and personal intimacy generated in the creative process of shrine building.

Another thing Sciorra records is the occasional dissenting voice, including that of one Italian American woman who initially confessed that she does not “believe in saints being exposed in front of, you know, like, in front of the house. I don’t feel that way.” The woman later revised her disparaging views, acknowledging, “If I did pass a house or something and did see a statue of St. Anthony, I would make the sign of the cross and pray and say an extra prayer in front of the saint. So, maybe I would feel a little differently now today” (53–54). The interview material that Sciorra curates operates in this book like a multi-textured counternarrative, complementing the devoutly academic language of Sciorra’s scholarly vocation.

Samples of “reported speech” figure even more prominently in Sciorra’s treatment of “multivocality” in the sacred space occupied by the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Grotto in Rosebank, Staten Island, where an enduring conflict pitted devotees of a local shrine built in the late 1930s against church authorities who objected to the popular veneration of this extraecclesial site. Over time, Italian American pastors at the local parish assumed the role historically played by Irish clergy, demanding that the laity reorient their allegiance from the shrine to the church. Sciorra contrasts this official disapproval of grotto devotions with recorded testimonies of “spiritual resolve and hope” by and about “pilgrims who actuate the grotto through prayer” (145) so ardent that healings are reported as part of the grotto’s legacy.

The final chapter of *Built with Faith* offers a closeup look at the history and contemporary politics of religious processions in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. “As a Catholic sacramental,” Sciorra explains, “the processed statue of the saint or the Madonna is imbued with the power to make the sacred present in the mundane world by encapsulating and broadcasting multiple narratives of religious beliefs and community history” (163). A deeper look at Williamsburg’s rival processions reveals “historic and contemporary differences between religious and social groups within the Italian community,” including differences “specifically associated with towns in Campania,” (169) the region of origin of much of the community.

At the same time, rapid demographic changes have prompted conflict over the proper boundaries and even the very existence of an “Italian Williamsburg.” Gentrifying newcomers sometimes erase the historic Italian presence in the neighborhood altogether despite their yearning for a rich cultural experience (in 2004 one new arrival cited “old Polish women, Puerto Ricans, Hasidic Jews” in offering a *New York Times* reporter a litany of “everyone who’s been living here for years and makes this neighborhood interesting and diverse” (183). Some even complain about the annual *giglio* feast for which Williamsburg was long renowned: “Noise, garbage smells, and crowds are some of the new quality of life issues being raised about the two-week feast held each July” (187).

Williamsburg is also personal for Sciorra: In 1979 he “helped stage a concert of Italian folk music by immigrant performers at the San Cono di Teggiano Catholic Association” (156). Two years later he began researching the popular July feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, with its traditional procession of the 82-foot-high *giglio* tower that is carried through the streets by parishioners and former parishioners; having moved to Italian Williamsburg in 1982, he has remained there ever since, raising his family and becoming deeply embedded in the life of the community. *Built with Faith* ends on a somber note: “The challenges facing Italian Americans who stage . . . displays of Catholic devotion in Williamsburg are formidable given current conditions” (189). Sciorra’s chapter on Williamsburg is so compelling that I wished he had explored the Italian American community of Hoboken, New Jersey, across the Port of New York, whose experience with gentrification predates that of Williamsburg. In Hoboken, the “born and raised”—longtime Italian American residents—have largely forgone their anger over gentrification (which began around 1980) in favor of a *détente* with newcomers that did not entail surrendering Hoboken’s distinctively Italian American culture, including the annual procession and feast celebrating St. Ann. Since Italian immigrants have settled in the broader New York metropolitan area, a regional perspective might amplify Sciorra’s exclusively New York City–based insights.

Joseph Sciorra’s thirty-five years of careful attention to the material religious culture of New York City’s Italian Americans parallels the triumph of the very methods he deploys in this wonderful book, especially the focus on “lived” or “popular religion,” terms that despite their limits indicate a culturally democratic, anti-elitist approach to the study of American religion pioneered by figures in Italian American studies including Sciorra himself, along with Robert Orsi, Thomas Ferraro, John Gennari, Luisa Del Giudice, Mary Clark Moschella, and Carlo Rotella, the title of whose book, *Good with Their Hands* (Rotella, 2004), although not specifically concerned with Italian American themes, could serve as an alternate subtitle to *Built with Faith*.

In an influential essay, Jon Butler (1991) argued that the “richness and complexity” of U.S. Catholicism was reflected in its sacred materiality, its ethnic particularity, and its pervasive cultivation of the places and spaces where the natural and supernatural converged. Butler suggested that these qualities could make of Catholicism “a model for understanding the American religious experience.” Modifying Catholicism with *Italian American* would have made Butler’s claim even more prophetic, since no tradition has inspired more compelling scholarly treatment over the past quarter century.

Built with Faith’s inestimable value also transcends the academic. It enriches my understanding, for one example, of the magnificent work of a Fordham University colleague, Patricia Bellucci, whose “AllSoulzNYC” mobile

shrine-making project offers “an interactive encounter with loss, witness & community on the streets of the city.”¹ *Built with Faith* also serves as guidebook and companion for Fordham University students who conduct field work each semester at sites of spiritual meaning in New York City. For scholars, teachers, and students alike in fields ranging from the culture of American Catholics to Italian American studies, urban history, and the material worlds of American ethnic communities, there is no book as simultaneously revealing and as eminently usable as this one.

—JAMES T. FISHER
Fordham University

Note

1. See <https://www.instagram.com/allsoulnyc/>.

Works Cited

- Butler, Jon. 1991. “Historiographical Heresy: Catholicism as a Model for American Religious History.” In *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*, edited by Thomas Kselman, 287–288. South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Rotella, Carlo. 2004. *Good with Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

In the Name of the Mother: Italian Americans, African Americans, & Modernity from Booker T. Washington to Bruce Springsteen.

By Samuele F.S. Pardini.

Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2017.

280 pages.

In his interesting study, Samuele Pardini argues that, as Italian immigrants to the United States achieved whiteness, along with gaining a racial distinction they simultaneously experienced cultural invisibility. During the height of the second great migration (1880–1924), even though immigrants arrived in America when racial categories were still relatively unfixed, Italians—along with Poles, Jews, and Slavs—were legally recognized as white. Nonetheless, according to Pardini, Italians in America have discursively revealed an “invisible blackness”