

Notes on Contributors

VITTORIA BARSOTTI is Professor of Comparative Law and Chair of the Department of Comparative and Criminal Law at the University of Florence. She has lectured widely in the USA and elsewhere; in 1998-1999 she taught at Northwestern University School of Law, Chicago. A specialist in comparative constitutional law, she is the author of several books and articles in this field, among which one on the use of non-decision as a policy instrument by constitutional courts, *L'arte di tacere* (Giappichelli, 1999) and another on sexual orientation in the case law of the US supreme court, *Privacy e orientamento sessuale* (Giappichelli, 2005).

TIZIANO BONAZZI is Professor of North American History at the University of Bologna, and Director of CISPEA, "Interuniversity Center on Euro-American History and Politics – Universities of Bologna, Florence, Eastern Piedmont, Trieste." Former President of the Italian Association for American Studies and Chairman of the Department of Politics and Institution, professor Bonazzi is a leading scholar of U. S. History. Among his many publications, an Italian critical edition of the Declaration of Independence, now in its fourth reprint, and a host of essays in European and American Historical Journals. The most recent: "Constructing and Reconstructing Europe: Torture of an American Prometheus or Punishment of a New World Sisyphus?," in *The Place of Europe in American History: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, ed. M. Vaudagna (Otto, 2007); ed., *Quale Occidente, Occidente perché* (Rubbettino, 2005); ed. (with C. Galli), *La Guerra civile americana vista dall'Europa* (Il Mulino, 2004); "Not like us': il controcanto americano all'antiamericanismo europeo," in *L'antiamericanismo in Italia e in*

Europa nel secondo dopoguerra, ed. P. Craveri and G. Quagliariello, (Rubbettino, 2004).

BILL BROWN is the Edward Carson Waller Distinguished Professor at the University of Chicago, where he teaches in the English Department, the Department of Visual Arts, and the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory. He has been a co-editor of *Critical Inquiry* since 1993, and he currently serves as Chair of the English Department. He published *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economics of Play* (Harvard UP, 1996), and *Reading the West: An Anthology of Dime Novels* (Bedford, 1997). He edited a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* on “Things” (2001) that subsequently appeared in book form; and his latest book, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (U of Chicago P) appeared in 2003. His essays have appeared in a wide range of journals.

ALESSANDRO CLERICUZIO is Associate Professor of American Literature at the University of Perugia in Terni. He has published essays on contemporary theatre, poetry and fiction, and on the cinema of David Lynch, John Sayles, Charles Vidor, Billy Wilder. He is completing a history of twentieth-century American drama, which will be published by Carocci in 2008.

RICCARDO DURANTI teaches English Literature and Translation at the University of Rome “La Sapienza.” Best known as a literary translator (he has just completed the complete works of Raymond Carver in Italian for Minimum Fax), he has also published several books of poems and a few short stories. A novel on the life of Thomas Shelton (the first translator of *Don Quijote*), written in English with Anamaria Crowe Serrano, is still waiting for publication.

DANIELE FIORENTINO is Associate Professor of United States History at the University of Macerata, and visiting professor at

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DONATELLA IZZO is Professor of American Literature at the University of Naples “L'Orientale.” Her more recent volumes include *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James* (Nebraska UP, 2001) and the editing of *Suzie Wong non abita più qui. La letteratura delle minoranze asiatiche negli Stati Uniti* (Shake, 2006).

GIORGIO MARIANI is Professor of American Literature at the University of Rome “La Sapienza.” One of the editors of *Ácoma: Rivista internazionale di Studi Nordamericani*, he is currently completing a book tentatively entitled *Addio alle armi? Pace e guerra nell'immaginazione degli Stati Uniti d'America*.

MENA MITRANO is author of *Gertrude Stein: Woman Without Qualities* (Ashgate, 2005) and co-editor of *The Hand of the Interpreter: Essays on Meaning After Theory*, forthcoming with Peter Lang. Her manuscript *Aesthetic Encounters and Public Meanings*

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PAOLO NASO is a journalist and teaches Political Sciences at the University of Rome “La Sapienza.” Visiting professor at Wake Forest University in the fall semester 2007, he has published several books on religion and politics in some international scenarios: *Come pietre viventi*, on Christians in Israel and Palestine (Claudiana, 1990); *Il verde e l'arancio*, on the conflict in Northern Ireland (Claudiana, 1996); *Il libro e la spada* (with Stefano Allievi and David Bidussa), on the religious fundamentalisms (Claudiana, 2000); *God Bless America*, on the religiosity in the US (Editori Riuniti, 2002). He is also editor of *L'altro Martin Luther King* (Claudiana, 2002), gathering some of King's speeches and writings unavailable in Italian.

MICHELE ROSA-CLOT holds a Doctorate in “Storia e sociologia della modernità” and a Degree in History from the University of Pisa. An Aquarone and a Fulbright scholar, he received an MA in American History from the City College of the City University of New York. Among others, his research interests focus on the political and social history of the United States, cultural and social history of political representation, and history of immigration.

MARA SALVUCCI is a doctoral candidate in Comparative Literatures and Languages at the University of Macerata, where she graduated in 2005. Her dissertation concerns the Hispanic ethnic minorities of the U. S., with a specific focus on their multilingual sphere. Her undergraduate dissertation on Sandra Cisneros (from which her essay is drawn) was awarded the first Agostino Lombardo Price in 2005 (“Premio Agostino Lombardo”) for the best Italian Honors Thesis of the year in American Studies.

IGINA TATTONI teaches at the University of Rome “La Sapienza.” Her interests have been mainly focused on twentieth-century prose: Thomas Wolfe (*The Unfound Door*, Bulzoni, 1992), Sh. Anderson, F. O’Connor, Th. Merton. More recently she has moved to the nineteenth century, especially with her translations of Walt Whitman’s early fiction, *Come coccole di cedro* ([2002] Donzelli, 2004), Washington Irving, *I racconti fantastici* (Donzelli, 2003) Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tutti i racconti* (Donzelli, 2006), and the Second Edition of Whitman’s *Foglie d’erba* (Newton, 2007)

MARKHA G. VALENTA is a Researcher in Contemporary History at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. Her current work examines relations between Muslims and the West, and questions of transnationalism, globalization, and the nation-state (*Tampering with the Nation: “America,” Postmodernism, Globalization*, forthcoming). She has also written on religion and postmodernism; among her more recent publications, *Tales of the Great Victory: World War II in Politics and Poetics*, co-edited with Diederik Oostdijk (Free UP, 2006).

Abstracts

TIZIANO BONAZZI, A People “Almost Chosen” by God: Understanding Abraham Lincoln in Post-Secular Italy

In order to understand the role of religion and secularism in the United States and their fall out in Europe and, namely, in Italy, it is necessary to reconsider United States history as part of the system of “Greater Europe,” extending to states of a European matrix arising in the Americas with the dissolution of colonial systems. The Christian right’s reaction to what it perceives today as a threat to the American universalism of providential origin from the radicalism of those who deny the equation between reason, universal moral values, the democracy founded upon them, and the United States, is actually part of a longer process. The outburst of post-secularity on the American public scene is a historic phenomenon that, because of the specific configuration assumed by the relationship between politics and religion in the United States, it seems to be structurally far less worrying than it might be elsewhere, starting with Italy. The real, serious problem in the case of the United States is the fact that the come back of “the religious” has taken the form of political nationalism and of a closed, intransigent culture. In view of the country’s global political role and its significance as the laboratory of extreme modernity – or post-modernity if one prefers – this has consequences that are difficult to see as auspicious. From this perspective, the essay addresses the question of the peculiar way in which the relationship between faith and the public sphere developed in the United States.

PAOLO NASO, *The Political Dimension of Evangelical Fundamentalism in the USA*

The R factor – where R stays for religion – is one of the major elements of the current US politics. In particular the Republican party and the Administration are influenced by waves of religious fundamentalism proposing a strong political agenda in domestic and in foreign policy as well. The arise of religious fundamentalism is not a new phenomenon at all. What is new is its political impact after 9/11 and its consequences in the US self-perception in the international scenario. The article explores the different waves of Christian fundamentalism and their evolution: from the origin related to the creationism vs. evolutionism debate; to the “religious right” in and immediately after the Reagan’s years; to its new millenarist theology outlining global war scenarios starting from the conflict in the Middle East and pushing the Administration to pursue a “Christian agenda” to restore supposedly traditional American values. Because of its military and cultural extremism this trend will not produce long term consequences. Nevertheless it can trouble seriously the democratic process and the constitutional principle of Church/State separation.

BILL BROWN, *Relics of the Secular*

Declarations about the waning role of religion in the modern world have now been displaced by the recognition that faith still captivates the human imagination, in the Middle East, in the U.S., and elsewhere. A world fully modernized and rationalized is a world that nonetheless remains “enchanted.” As a way of asking how to think about the role of religion in America, I look at three court cases from 2006 (in Wisconsin, Georgia, and Mississippi) that stage the battle over the teaching of alternatives to Darwin within the public school’s biology classes. Arguments on behalf

of “Creationism” disable the discipline of science to mark and manage its boundaries, compromising the very definition of an academic discipline. To pursue this question of boundaries within a different historical moment, I then turn to Charles Sheldon, author of *In His Steps* (1897) and William James, author of *The Will to Believe* (1897) and *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), both of whom defend religion passionately while conceptualizing it very differently. For James, religion remains private. For Sheldon, genuine religiosity requires the faithful to enact their faith at all times and in every dimension of life. It is the legacy of that insistence, I argue, that effectively dismantles any “wall” between the church and other institutions, which is why it falls to the court to adjudicate the separation of faith and science.

MARKHA G. VALENTA, *Islam as the New Frontier: America at Work in the World*

Starting from a consideration of the United States as affected by the context of global power relations as well as affecting it, this essay investigates a number of key issues in American self-understanding and suggests their relevance to an understanding of the US attitude to the Islamic world and to Iraq. The conceptual retooling of European Orientalism into a narrative of unbounded expansion; the inherent global reach of the US millennial tradition of (self-)redemption, with the consequent ambiguous entwining of liberation and imperialism; the ambiguous relationship of the US to modernization as democratization – simultaneously expressing a commitment to the secular and a deep investment in the sacred – , and the inevitable political violence marking such a revolutionary project in its very philosophical foundations; the endurance of the frontier narrative as creating a permanent “injun country,” marked by the continuity between a logic of violent encounters outside, and of the ghetto and imprisonment inside the nation:

these are some of the cultural issues that the essay examines, linking them to the US role in the current global field of power.

VITTORIA BARSOTTI, *The Supreme Court and the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment: Trials and Tribulations in Constitutional Interpretation*

The case law interpreting the religious clauses of the First Amendment of the Constitution is extremely complex and not always coherent. This paper will try to draw an essential “map” of the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States in order to focus on issues, problems and solutions comparable to the ones that are relevant in the Italian legal system. After a very brief historical introduction, in the second part I will describe the most important cases on the Establishment Clause distinguishing several subjects areas: Access to school facilities on part of religious organizations; Religious symbols on public spaces; Prayer before a school sport event; Prayer at school; Curricula; Funding of religious schools. In the third part, following a schematic overview of the problems related to the interpretation of the Free Exercise Clause, I will describe the most relevant cases before 1960 and the recent developments. Part four will underline that the Warren Court – to a large extent followed by the Burger Court – offered a wide range interpretation of both the Establishment and the Free Exercise Clauses, while a change occurred during the years of Chief Justice Rehnquist. In part five I will observe that year 2005 is a significant one. In fact, President Bush (who had not had the possibility to fill any vacancy during his first term) appointed two new Justices. Chief Justice Roberts has been called to the chair that had belonged for a long time to Rehnquist, and Justice O’Connor (whose vote had always been decisive in matters of relationship between state and church) is replaced by Justice Alito. The importance of 2005 also emerges with relation to the religious clauses of the First Amendment.

Evidence shows that, although the most conservative members of the Republican Party have been trying to influence the interpretation of both clauses, they have not always succeeded in their intent. Finally, I will briefly analyze *Gonzales v. O Centro*, an important case on religious freedom, decided in 2006 by the new court.

MARA SALVUCCI, “Like the Strands of a Rebozo”: Sandra Cisneros, *Caramelo* and Chicano Identity

This article explores Sandra Cisneros’s multicultural cosmos, through the image of a traditional Mexican shawl: the *rebozo caramelo* which gives the title to her latest novel. Through this basic metaphor connecting weaving and storytelling, the essay highlights the prominent traits of Cisneros’s personality – her close bond to the symbols of her ethnic identity, her social commitment and her lively and sagacious character – as well as the hybrid space of the Chicano community, which she tries to depict in its rich and complex blend of Pre-Columbian, Mexican and North American cultures. The author’s great loom intertwines different lives, centuries and languages in a huge unique fabric, while past and present, male and female, First and Third World, together with any other element of cultural conflict, are constantly mixed and renewed in her deep disorienting border.

MICHELE ROSA-CLOT, This Stalin Frankenstein System: Adoption and Abrogation of Proportional Representation in New York City, 1936-1947

Starting in the second half of the 1910s, some American cities tried to attach proportionalist reforms to their new municipal charters. Many campaigns failed, a few were successful. Among

the latter, a relevant one took place in New York City in 1935-36. As a result, between 1936 and 1947 New York adopted, in place of the majority system it had used until then to elect its Board of Aldermen, an electoral law based on proportional representation to elect a City Council. Although the proportionalist charter was abandoned in 1947 to restore the traditional electoral system, the deviation from the traditional political patterns and electoral behavior during New York's proportionalist decade can provide useful suggestions to ponder some of the traditional assumptions of American political history.