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The Anxiety of Discovery: The Italian Interest in Native American Studies *(*)*

i remember that in websters dictionary the word genoa is just above genocide

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In the meetings of the American Indian Workshop,[1] a map of the various aspects of a specifically European vision of Indians has been tentatively drawn. An exemplary answer to the many questions raised is this statement made by Christian F. Feest:

> A simple explanation of the special relationship between Europeans and the Native populations of North America is that no-such relationship exists. Under close scrutiny it becomes apparent that all that interested and still interests Europeans is "Indians," a wholly fictional population inhabiting the Old World mind rather than the New World land. *(609)*

The subject of this enquiry is the border, the "in-between" space where cultures meet (Bhaba), and the history of the border through which Native Americans, as objects of a specifically Italian *découverte de l'Autre*, have abandoned the liminal status of invented Indians to enter the reality of a dialogical discourse.

A map of Italian publications in Native American studies (Giordano 1987, 1989, 1990) has revealed cycles of epiphanic first discoveries and of total eclypses. It is no wonder that the controversial quincentenary of the discovery of America was anticipated by events such as "Rediscovering Native American Peoples," a photographic exhibit held in Genoa in 1989; "Rediscovering America," a photographic exhibit and a workshop attended by Louise Erdrich, Michael Dorris, Joe Sando, and Ted Jojola,

held in Treviso in 1991; and "Discovering American Indians," featuring the American Indian Dance Theatre, Robert Mirabal and Mud Ponies in concert, and Jake Swamp, David Archambault, John Pretty on Top, and Cindy Kenny-Gilday in Rome in July 1992. These can be seen as symptoms of a discovery anxiety in a country which has occupied an ambiguous position in the history of the colonization of America. The homeland of explorers dramatically if indirectly connected with the genocide of Native American populations such as Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci, Italy has had no political or economic part in the colonization of the American continent and only a very minor role in the international colonial scene. On the other hand, as the homeland of the Holy See, Italy kept a constant link with the spiritual colonization of the Natives by the various orders of Roman Catholic missionaries.[3] Until the late nineteenth century, when information on the Native peoples was eventually derived from American ethnological sources, the discourse on Indians was generally mediated by the philosophical and the missionary colonial discourse. It was from Rome that in 1537 the Pope discovered, or declared, the humanity of the Indians "quia veri homines quia fidei catholicae et sacramentorum capaces" (Di Nola). The Collegium De Propaganda Fide was founded in Rome by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 with the aim of coordinating the work of the various Roman Catholic orders in the American missions. Its archives, together with those of the Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, contain the missionaries' detailed reports to their superiors, a wealth of information that is still being explored (Codignola, Pizzorusso 1990). Yet it was the Spanish Franciscan and Jesuit Padres, the French Capuchins, Jesuits, Recollets, and Sulpicians, together with Portuguese missionaries, who played the major role in the colonization. Only a small number of Jesuits were sent to the Spanish colonies in the sixteenth century from the Kingdom of Naples, a Spanish viceroyalty, and from the seventeenth century onwards to the French colonies from the various states in which Italy was divided (Pizzorusso 1992, *18*). Among these missionaries, the Jesuits Bressani and Kino are certainly worth mentioning here as particularly relevant to our investigation. Francesco Giuseppe Bressani, from Rome, was the first Italian to join the French missionaries in New France. His *Breve Relatione* (1653) on the failure of the mission of Sainte-Marie-des-Hurons is the first published document in Italian on the New France missions. The report also includes letters on his

captivity and torture at the hands of the Iroquois and translations of excerpts from the *Relations des Jésuites.* In describing the land and customs of the Hurons and the Algonquins, Bressani, although he uses such epithets as "Barbarians" and "unfaithful," displays a keen faculty of observation. In their dressing, Algonquin women are modest—much more so, in fact, than "the most religious women in Europe" *(9).* The Hurons are utterly democratic and egalitarian. They reckon time by the moons, like the Hebrews. They lack "religion," i.e. organized worship with priests, temples, and rituals, but believe in the soul's immortality and in the existence of a Supreme Being:

> their sentiments are widely diverging from those of our freethinkers and from those of the atheists. First, they believe in the immortality of the soul and in the existence of two separate homes in the West, one for the happy and one for the wretched; but these ideas are muddled with countless tales in the way the ancients did when speaking of their Elysian Fields. Second, they believe in good and in malevolent spirits … and they certainly have both the sense of a divine being and of his name, which they invoke in times of danger, although they ignore its true meaning *(19).*

Their languages show the presence of God in their souls, for they are "most beautiful and regular" and their structure "surpasses that of all European languages that we know" (Clements *52*).

The description of Indian cultures was a methodological stage typical of the Jesuit missionary approach—an approach which today is often seen as an objective "post mortem" (Catalano), following the disappearance of the traditions observed, since the frontier between cultures was considered "an obstacle to be surmounted, a goal to be reached and overcome" (Calarco *27).* This is the conception of frontier which was shared by Father Kino, Eugenio Francesco Chini from Segno, Trento (1645-1711), who was sent to Mexico, Arizona, and Baja California in 1681. A mathematician, astronomer, geographer, and explorer, he drew the first maps of the Sonora desert, discovered Baja California to be a peninsula, and introduced cattle ranching among the Natives. A missionary among the Pima-Papagos, the Yumas, the Gilas, the Cocoma-Maricopas, he aknowledged and defended the civil rights of the converts. His benevolent attitude is typical of the spiritual colonizer, for whom the discovery is a one-sided, transitional stage in the progress of Christianity. In his autobiography *(Favores Celestiales,*

1699-1710) and in his reports, Father Kino describes the land more than the people, who are considered simply from the point of view of a good Shepherd: the Pimas, like the California Indians, are "docile, extremely friendly, affable, and unafraid." These sun worshippers do not have a doctrine nor idols, nor spiritual leaders like in Japan or in China; therefore, it is easy to instil in them the idea of God, the Creator of the universe (Bolton 2, *270).*

Until the end of the eighteenth century, however, the missionaries' somewhat realistic reports had very little impact on the discourse on Indians outside of the Church. In the fine arts, the Natives were not discovered so much as invented following the changes in the colonial discourse. As the interest of seventeenth century intellectuals seemed to be concentrated on admiration of the complex culture and political organization of the Aztecs and Incas (Zanovello *132*) and to relegate most North American Indians to the role of barbarians and savages, artists saw the Indians primarily as objects of allegorical representation. The nude girl bedecked with feathers and armed with bow and arrow in Cesare Marino's influential *Iconologia* (1603) was used "by practically every Baroque artist" (Honour *131)* as an image of America. In the eighteenth century, the artistic canons of Oriental exoticism began to be applied to America. Even the more realistic scenes of Indian customs and war scenes painted on the walls of Italian "Indian parlours"—such as the one in Palazzo Barberini in Rome—were projected into an Edenic world of exotic flowers and animals (Giordano 1989).

By the mid-1760s, all the Jesuits had been expelled from both North and South America. Many refugees came to Italy where they shared their knowledge of Indian languages and cultures, explaining the innocence of the "Savages" with their lack of private property and their convent-like community organization. Antonello Gerbi's *La disputa del Nuovo Mondo* offers a critical survey of the eighteenth-century Italian debate on the "Savages of America," which centered on Cornelius de Pauw's *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains* (1768), on the physical and moral inferiority of the Native Americans, on the Burkes *Account of the European Settlement of America* (translated 1763), and on missionary texts.

Count Gian Rinaldo Carli from Capodistria (1720-1795), a minister of the Duchy of Milan, dismissed rather simplistically the theories of both Rousseau and de Pauw, and offered in opposition to America's Savages

("We know there are savages also in Europe and in Africa") the highly civilized Mayas and Incas. He exalted the Incaic government as "the most regular and paternal of all empires in the world at all times" (Gerbi *258),* maintaining that "the ruling principle of the governors was to impose happiness on their subjects" *(259).* His very successful *Lettere Americane* (1780) were also based on information directly obtained from a Peruvian Jesuit. Carli's discovery was of the common derivation of all Native American civilizations from Egypt and the Mediterranean civilization. This was an antecedent of the theory of the Egyptian origins of civilization which was later elaborated by the English scholars C. G. Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry at the beginning of the twentieth century (Sestan *142*). In the context of the debate on Vico, Gian Francesco Finetti published a treaty *In Difesa dell' autorità delle Sacre Scritture contro Giovan Battista Vico* (1768) in which he showed an illuminated understanding of primitive ritual:

> it seems clear that, instead of being caused by stupid superstition and monstruous cruelty, the use of human victims was the result of a false refinement of reason, owing to which man believed that sacrifices were all the more welcome to God when the victims were more precious. (Zolla *174-75*)

It was in Italy that the Mexican Jesuit Francisco Clavijero wrote his influential *Storia Antica del Messico* (1780-81) dedicated to Count Carli, in which he rejected de Pauw's theories, and his *Storia della California* (1789). A famous scholar of Native languages and the head of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti learned the Nahuatl language from Clavijero's manuscripts as part of his project to translate Catholic prayers. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Native Americans were admitted to the College of Propaganda, and in 1834 two young men from the mission of San Luis Rey, Paolo Tac and Agapito Amamix, taught Luiseño to Mezzofanti (Laurencich Minelli). The dream of a Native American Catholic state came to a tragic end in 1832 when William Blackbird, an Ottawa, was assassinated at the Pontifical College in Rome where he was to be ordained priest. He had been appointed by his tribe to negotiate with President Jackson that Michigan become an Indian state in order to halt the advance of whites (Zolla *102,* Feest *616*).

Giacomo Leopardi, one of whose tutors was the Mexican Jesuit

Giuseppe Torres, read Clavijero, Carli, and Robertson in the 1780 translation. He entered the debate on savagism and civilization in his philosophical notebook *Zibaldone,* distinguishing between "Savages," who lived innocently in a natural state, and "Barbarians," who knew some sort of civilization. The California Indians, considered the people furthest removed from civilization, ignoring language and society (Sozzi *207,* Gerbi *428*), became the noble savages, "beata prole" of the "Californie selve" in his poem *Inno ai Patriarchi* (Sozzi, Giordano 1989).

Accidental Discoveries

Although the library remained the privileged space for the Italian discourse on Indians, from the period of the American Revolution, when Franklin and Jefferson entertained relations with Italian intellectuals (Massara 1976), certain Italian travellers became, in Fiorentino's appropriate definition, also "accidental ethnographers." Their unprepared discoveries, however, were conditioned by the ideological limitations of European Enlightenment, which, notwithstanding its cosmopolitanism, saw only Noble and Ignoble Savages. Such was the case of the Bolognese geologist Giovanni Capellini (1833-1892), a friend of Louis Agassiz (Massara 1976) who met the Omahas and Poncas in 1863 (Fiorentino 1993). The same can be said of the notes on Northwest Coast tribes left by the Italian cartographer and Spanish Navy officer Alessandro Malaspina (1754-1810; Fiorentino 1993), as well as of the work of Giacomo Costantino Beltrami (1779-1855) whose adventures allegedly inspired both James Fenimore Cooper and Chateaubriand (Massara 1976, *18*). This accidental discoverer of the sources of the Mississippi river (1823) collected a considerable amount of pipes, weapons, shields, and other objects of remarkable interest which now form the core collection of a small museum in Bergamo (Fiorentino 1990, 1993). In his writings on his botanical expeditions of 1785-1787, Count Luigi Castiglioni (1757-1832) of the *école de Milan* (Marenco), an honorary member of the American Philosophical Society, projected onto the Penobscot and Choctaw Indians the image of the Noble Savage and attributed to the colonists the moral lassitude traditionally attributed to the Indians (Gerbi *300,* Fiorentino 1993, *88*).

Indians on Stage and Indian Galleries

The philosophical debate on the conflict between savagism and civilization was reflected in Italian theatre from the middle of the eighteenth century (Del Negro, Massara 1984), when, following the great success of *Alzire* (1736), Voltaire's tragedy on the conquest of Peru, and of Madame de Grafigny's *Lettres d'une Peruvienne* (1747), Carlo Goldoni produced two comedies of crossed love between imaginary Indians and Frenchmen. These were *La Peruviana* (1754), which brings an Indian princess to a Paris salon and to Christianity, and the tragicomedy *La bella selvaggia* (1758), set in Guyana among Indians whose natural virtues are those of the Venitian bourgeois class of Goldoni's times. With respect to the very popular Italian genre of melodrama, among many works on Columbus, on the discovery of America, and on the conquest of Mexico, several operas had Indians as protagonists. The opéra comique *L'Americano* (1772), for which Niccolò Piccinni wrote the music (Massara 1984, *31*), recounted the adventures of a California Indian in Italy. *Gli Illinesi* (1819, rev. 1836), an opera by Felice Romani with music by Antonio Coppola, was set among the Illinois. Here the Frenchman Guido is fighting his former companions for love of Irza, orphaned daughter of an Illinois chief. This impossible love, contrasted both by Guido's father and by the Illinois tribe, finds its realization with the promise of Irza's conversion to her suitor's God.

The stage, at the other extreme from the scholar's cabinet, was the only space where Indians entered the popular sphere since the public exhibitions of Indians, not uncommon in European cities (Feest), were almost unknown in Italy except for a few instances. In 1828, three Osage men had been "introduced" to King Carlo Felice and Prince Carlo Alberto of Savoy (Ciliento *54).* The same year, an Eskimo woman from Greenland, probably acquired in France, was exhibited in Northern Italian towns and cities by a Vincenzo Paganini (Zavatti). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Church was a more pious exhibitor, this time of invented happy converts at the 1892 Genoa quadricentennial Italo-American Exposition (Clerici 1990).

In February 1840, George Catlin began in Piccadilly, London, the European tour of his "Indian gallery" of 507 paintings and drawings of American Indian life that toured England, France, and Belgium for eight years with the accompaniment of *tableaux vivants* staged by fake as well

as by real Indians (Mulvey). Italians could only read an excerpt from Catlin's letters published in 1869 (Solimano *107).* A smaller but artistically relevant neo-classical "Indian Gallery" of four bas-reliefs, four full-size statues, fourteen busts and eight studies in terra-cotta painted limestone was brought to Rome in 1858 by the Dresden sculptor Ferdinand Pettrich, a gifted pupil of Bertel Thorwaldsen who had worked for several years in Washington (A. Mariani). The bas-reliefs represented a buffalo hunting scene, a war dance, a battle between Winnebago and Cree, and the Washington Council of 1837.[4] Among the statues were those of famous warriors: full-size portraits of the dying Tecumseh and of Sioux Chief Pouring Hurricane, and the busts of Black Hawk and Roaring Thunder of the Sauk and Foxes. Pettrich donated all his sculptures to Pope Pius IX and they were exhibited in the Lateran Palace (Giordano 1989). Admired as a work of art, the "Portrait Gallery of the Savages" became the object of learned discussions. In an essay written in 1859 Antonio Bresciani, the Jesuit director of the Collegium De Propaganda Fide, studied the Caucasian facial features in the statues and thus gave support to Humbolt's and Clavijero's theories on the colonization of Yucatan by the Phoenicians and of the Northern origins of Toltecs and Aztecs. Struck by the beauty and realism of the portraits, Bresciani saw them as the means by which Pettrich had enabled those distant "children of the forests" to cross the ocean in effigy and venerate Christ's Vicar (Bresciani *546*).

At the turn of the century, the Italian press offered the image of the vanishing American (Ciliento, Solimano) precisely at the time when Native Americans started coming to Italy not as objects of study for selected scholars—as had been Paolo Tac and Agapito Amamix or the Pettrich statues—but as involuntary agents of a new invention: as actors in the Wild West Show, which toured Europe between 1887 and 1906. Preceeded by the press reports of their success in England, France and Spain, Buffalo Bill's Indians arrived in Naples in February 1890. Some of them had come to Europe on a journey of discovery and knowledge, like young Black Elk, who was later to tell John Neihardt of his expectations:

> Maybe if I could see the great world of the Wasichu, I could understand how to bring the sacred hoop together and make the tree bloom again at the center of the world. (Neihardt 183)

However, no similar attitude was to be found in the culturally unprepared Italian public. Black Elk went back to Pine Ridge in 1889. The rest of the troupe, largely Sioux (Napier), held shows in Naples, Rome, Verona, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, and Milan. The American Natives were more impressed by Italian landscape and nature, especially by Mount Vesuvius, than by Italians. The public seemed to love Buffalo Bill but looked skeptically at the Indians and at the cowboys' feats, and challenged them to a rodeo with *butteri* from the wild pasture lands of Cisterna. After the show people flocked backstage to the arena where tents were pitched, to see the Indians' supposedly real everyday life. Among them was the Roman Count Giuseppe Primoli, who took very realistic photographs of actors and spectators after a performance in Rome, in the Monte Mario area, in March 1890 (Fulgenzi). Pope Leo XIII invited the troupe to the celebrations for his eleventh anniversary as pontiff. Ironically, after many reporters had been most impressed by the colorful body paintings and costumes of the Indians (Fiorentino 1987), the Indians in turn were impressed by the magnificent procession. The Swiss guards in their medieval costumes and the cardinals and archbishops following the Papal Throne through the Sistine Chapel in golden embroidered robes of white and purple silk struck the Indians more than "the great medicine man sent by the Great Spirit" whose power had not prevented the death of one of their comrades (Napier 399). By the time of their second Italian tour in 1906 and their last show in La Spezia, they were desperate to leave. The man who played Sitting Bull, fed up with always playing the loser, went on a drinking binge and got lost on his way home (Clerici 1987, *423*).

Discovering Native American Literatures

The Romantic revision of the far past, bringing into focus folk life and traditions, led to the rediscovery of the ancient bards and oral poetry. From this border arose a new discourse on oral literatures which included Native American cultures. Among the Italian intellectuals who engaged in the trascription of regional dialects and oral poetry, the most influential was Giuseppe Pitré (1841-1916), the Sicilian physician, historian, and philologist who, with his life-long project, the *Biblioteca di tradizioni popolari siciliane* (1871-1913), was the founder of the Italian school of

folklore. From Pitré's circle came a translator of Native American songs, Girolamo Ragusa Moleti (1851-1917), Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Palermo. An early translator of Walt Whitman, in 1891 he published an anthology of primitive songs from all over the world, *Poesie dei popoli selvaggi o poco civili.* Interested in the history of literary genres, Ragusa Moleti espoused van Gennep's theory put forth in *La formation des legendes* and saw the origins of modern poetry in primitive forms. His anthology was an attempt to give a panoramic view of oral literatures from all over the world, from Africa to Lapland, Native America, Afro-America, Asia, and Oceania. In the Appendix, he included a full translation of the Quechua epic *Ollontay.* Although questionable for its simplified "life and customs" approach, Ragusa Moleti's choice of genres is interesting as it includes lullabies, mourning songs, religious songs, war songs, work songs, slave songs, songs in favor or in hate of white people, satirical songs, love songs, wedding songs, animal songs, epic songs, and miscellaneous songs.

Evolutionary anthropologists—mostly in physical anthropology—were also marginally interested in Native American oral literatures. At the beginning of the twentieth century, for reasons connected with the development of Italian ethnology, oral poetry was still a privileged field of research (Cocchiara). A survey of oral literatures was published by the pathologist Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910), holder of the first Italian chair of physical anthropology, created at the University of Florence in 1869. Mantegazza had "discovered" Indians in northwestern Argentina and published an anthropological study of primitive love customs. He was also the founder of the anthropological-ethnographic museum in Florence, where he displayed items donated by other travellers.

A zoologist, Enrico Hillyer Giglioli (1845-1909), was also involved in the activities of the Florence School of Anthropology. He travelled around the world on a naturalists' expedition (1865-1868) and from 1883 became an internationally-known collector of archaeological and ethnographical material, which he also exchanged with experts of the Smithsonian Institution. His huge collection included several hundred artifacts and two thousand archaeological items from North America, and more than a hundred photographs of Native Americans by Hillers, O'Sullivan, and Bell. After his death, Giglioli's collection, together with his archaeological and ethnological library, went to form the ethnological core of the National Museum of Prehistory founded in Rome by Luigi Pigorini in 1876 (Tiberini).

Carlo Cattaneo (1801-1859) is considered by some scholars (Tullio-Altan) to be the Italian initiator of Cultural Anthropology and Social Psychology because he was responsible for including in the curriculum of philosophical studies at the Lugano Lyceum topics such as Cosmology, Ethnography, Individual and Social Ideology, and Linguistics. Yet his perception of America's Natives was conditioned by the concept of the Ignoble Savage which he had found in W. Robertson's *History of America* (Scuderi).

Giuseppe Sergi (1841-1936), Professor of Physical Anthropology at the University of Rome, founder of its anthropological museum and, after his break with Paolo Mantegazza, of the Societa Romana di Antropologia (1893), published several essays on American anthropology based on the publications of the Bureau of American Ethnology, before concentrating his research on the study of skulls. In his essay "Costumi funerari degli Indiani d'America" (1883) he compared Native American burial rituals with those revealed by archaeological findings in Italy, pointing to a similarity between Indian and Mediterranean animal sacrifices and painting of the face of the dead. Moreover, he compared Indian death ceremonies to those of the ancient Greeks. Patroclus' funeral, described by Homer in the *Iliad,* is quoted by Sergi as a definitive demonstration of the affinity between distant cultures at the "half-savage" stage of their development. The scholar's observations display certain similarities to those theories which saw the origin of religion in fear:

> we can discover in the funerary customs of various peoples the primitive knowledge of various races on the origins and destiny of man, and on his relations with nature and with the higher beings created by his fantasy under the influence of fear and ignorance. Through different funerary customs we can penetrate the curious and frightened soul of the poor savage ... (Sergi 1883, *464*; my translation.)

Paleoethnology is a safe cultural frontier, while the discovery is that of a doomed race:

> I shall take the reader to America among the Indians, scattered over an immense territory, but now diminishing and on their way to vanishing because of the colonizers from the old world. *(465)*

Sergi's interest in Native American physical anthropology continued for many years. Almost forty years after his first essay, he wrote of the importance of the morphological study of skulls as a proof of the Asian origins of America's Natives (1928).

At the 6th congress of the Société des Américanistes, in Turin in 1886, Vincenzo Grossi, lecturer in American Ethnology at the University of Genoa, read a paper on *Lingue, letteratura e tradizioni popolari degli Indigeni d'America.* His survey of the various linguistic groups was based on the works of Friederich Müller and Daniel Brinton. Native American literature was represented by an excerpt from *The Red Swan* translated by Ferdinando Borsari, by an Iroquois tale ("The Thunder-Makers"), and by a Blackfoot tale ("The Story of the Three Lovers") translated from the French versions, respectively, of V. Henry and Emile Petitot. Grossi's essay presented literature classified as "Eskimo" and "Red-Skin" *(pellirossa* is unfortunately still in use today), Mexican and Central American, Peruvian and Brazilian, and showed a good knowledge of the reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology. A shorter study, *Tra i Pelli-Rosse d'America,* concentrated on ethnographical "curios" and gave a short account of funerary rituals, orators, and poets.

In 1888, at about the time when American ethnologists started acknowledging the status of oral tradition as literature, the Italian geographer Ferdinando Borsari published the first work totally devoted to Native American Literature, *La letteratura degli indigeni americani,* a well-informed survey of all literary genres indigenous to North, Central, and South America, ranging from legends to speech, poetry, and drama. North American literature was represented by sections of *The Red Swan* and excerpts from H. R. Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches.*

This initial interest did not develop into an organized branch of scholarship due to a lack of first-hand experience in the United States. Unsurprisingly, the beginning of field work in ethnology followed the politics of colonialism. Through the 1930s, Italian ethnologists worked in North East Africa (Tullio-Altan). Until the 1950s, the only Italians to have any relevant contact with Indians were, once more, Catholic missionaries. All Catholic ethnologists adopted the theory of a universal primaeval monotheism elaborated by Father Wilhelm Schmidt (Leone), founder of the Vienna school of Ethnology, and from 1925 the head of the Vatican Missionary Ethnological Museum—where Pettrich's statues were

deposited and where they are still kept today in the improbable role of ethnological specimens. What scant university research there was on North American Indians was carried out in the fields of Geography, Physical Anthropology, Philosophy (Sestan, Gerbi) and Religious Phenomenology. Raffaele Pettazzoni, chairman of the School of Ethnology at the University of Rome from 1938, studied Indian myths as part of his enquiry into the nostalgia for the Edenic state that he saw as the common basis of all religions. A follower of the French school of Lévy-Bruhl and of the phenomenological school of Cassirer, Pettazzoni mediated their theories with Benedetto Croce's philosophical historicism. In Italy, Croce held a hegemonic position over the social sciences, the role of which was seen as limited to a "learned philological research that expects a philosophical illumination from high above and an epistemological right of way" (Cantoni *12*). The following words from Croce's *Filosofia e storiografia* are often quoted in this respect:

> Nature or reality shows itself as alive in the forms of knowledge, in poetry, and in philosophy but it is mechanical and fossilized in the classificatory sciences which establish laws and measures and are deterministic and mathematical. (Cantoni *12*; my translation.)

A turning point in this cultural impasse was represented by both the beginning of field work in Sicily and at Matera by E. Banfield and L. Moss and the publication of two books which opened the field of religious ethnology: *Naturalismo e storicismo* (1941) by Ernesto de Martino and *II pensiero dei primitivi* by Remo Cantoni (1941). Cantoni, an exponent of Banfi's school in Milan, followed the theories of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Cassirer. Ernesto de Martino applied his "critical ethnocentrism" in his field work on ancient rituals and magic in Southern Italy (Fabietti),

The first Italian ethnologist to work in North America was Tullio Tentori, a pupil of Pettazzoni. After co-authoring a study of Native American cosmogonic myths and some essays on California Indians, he worked with American ethnologists in the United States between 1949 and 1954. Back in Italy, he published a survey essay on the theories of the American ethnological school, introducing the work of L. H. Morgan, Boas, Kroeber, Opler, and Linton into Italy. In 1960, Marxist sociologist Vittorio Lanternari offered a sociological interpretation of Native American

rituals of post-contact times such as the religion of Handsome Lake, the Ghost Dance, and the Peyote cult. But we had to wait until the end of the 1970s for the book-length studies in North American anthropology by Mazzoleni, Monaco, and Marchiori (Giordano 1989).

The Necessary Indian

By the beginning of the twentieth century, "invented" Indians had acquired a stable role in Italian popular culture thanks also to popular magazines and to the novels of Emilio Salgari. This writer, who pretended to be a globetrotter but who in fact had never travelled outside of libraries, had written an enthusiastic newspaper report of the 1890 Verona Wild West Show which he saw as "a real representation of the American prairies, with the most important scenes of the wild life of the Great West and of the customs of those peoples" (Salgari *73)*. In the space of a few years, beginning in 1896, Salgari published a score of novels recounting adventures among the Wild Indians and featuring Prairie Kings, burning forests, scalp hunters, and even one female scalp hunter, *La scotennatrice* (1909). These successful inventions created a popular Frontier discourse and appeared to be so real that in 1924 the whole country welcomed the sudden epiphany of the self-appointed Tuscarora chief Tewanna Ray, alias Chief White Elk, alias Capo Cervo Bianco. In 1922 a handsome, competent actor in American Western movies, the Italian-American Edgardo Laplante (born in Pawtucket, RI, in 1888) had come to Europe and had successfully played in the London Music Halls. After marrying an Englishwoman under a false name, he had fled to Paris in order to avoid troubles with the police and joined a promotional Indian show for the movie *La caravane vers l'ouest*, as part of which he had gone to Brussels and Nice. Here Laplante took on the role of an Indian chief, claiming familiarity with top politicians and noblemen and declaring that all his money in Canada had been confiscated by the British. Imitating the model of Cayuga chief Levi General Deskaheh's mission to Geneva in 1923 to obtain a declaration of Independence from Canada of the Six Nations (Rostkowski), Cervo Bianco pretended to be in Europe to plead for the rights of the Tuscarora in front of the Society of Nations. He organized successful fund-raising Indian shows and lectures in favor of starving reservation children, living grandly on the money so raised. In Nice he eventually won the heart of an Austrian

countess, who invited him to her castle near Trieste and lavished money and jewels on him. Thereafter, he toured Italy in grand style, welcomed by nobles and politicians, while the press spread the fame of his generous donations of (the Austrian countess's) money to orphanages, hospitals, Fascist institutions, and begging crowds. During a visit to Florence, the Richard Ginori factory presented "His Highness" (as he was currently called) with his portrait in a full size porcelain statue. At the beach resort of Diano Marina he was admitted into the circle of the Piedmontese noble families, and on their suggestion he wired to Mussolini an urgent request for an interview signed "Principe White Elk fascista fiumano" (Colombo *151).* This only specimen in history of an Indian Fascist did indeed manage to meet Mussolini to suggest the idea of a common march to Geneva of Fascists and Indians, but the meeting was later erased from the records. Eventually, Cervo Bianco was brought to court in Turin by the empoverished Austrian countess, was committed for fraud, and had to serve a five year sentence. He lived his role to the very end, complaining in jail at not being granted the status of political prisoner (Ferrero *245).* His remarkable feats and possible mental disorder made his buckskin attire worthy of being preserved in the Museum of Criminal Anthropology founded by Cesare Lombroso in Turin. In the late twenties Cervo Bianco became the protagonist of a satire of Fascism in Delio Tessa's poems, *Alalà al pellerossa* (Ferrero *245).* Half a century later, fiction was further fictionalized when Ernesto Ferrero discovered that Cervo Bianco had stayed in the Diano Marina house where his grandmother had been born, and turned the newspaper chronicles of the 1920s into a novel, *Cervo Bianco.*[5] This charming novel explores the psychology of the characters with elegance and irony, and creates the feeling that Cervo Bianco's invention fitted in perfectly with the larger fiction of Fascism and its myths. The actor, who lives on the thin borderline between fiction and folly, believes in the healing power of what seems to be a necessary illusion:

> The prince gave the impression of giving himself all, and when he gave just a part of himself, he did so with such intensity that he charged it with symbolic meanings, like in the Eucharist. Women felt the macho in him, bemoaned Bacci, still a virgin at twenty-five ... D'Annunzio and Mussolini too owed their popularity to their reputation of lovers. Italian women would have gone to any length to achieve the privilege of spending one night with them. Italian women yearned tenderly for the redskin chief. (Ferrero *95,* my translation.)

This is the comment of his secretary, an engineer whose only reward is the privilege of being near Cervo Bianco. Melania, the young countess, spices up her love affair (Feest *610)* with her belief in the cannibalistic past of the Iroquois of which she has read in an old treaty: "Chaussinard-Poiret says that the Algonquins called the Iroquois 'Mohawk,' which means 'Those who eat living things.'" Her lover rejects her theory:

> "But cannibalism can also be a way of loving. Is there anything more beautiful than to offer oneself to one's beloved, to nourish him, to become his own flesh and blood, and rest in peace within him. You do not eat me because you don't love me."*(66)*

In vain does Cervo Bianco reject this Indian-Fascist macho image to substitute it with that of a matriarchal society. Any reference to reality is strongly objected to. Maybe also owing to the lingering spell of the Indian Prince, in 1930 the Fascist idealization of warriors promoted the translation of the first (invented) Blackfoot warrior autobiography available to the Italian public, *Lunga Lancia,* by Sylvester Long, self-appointed Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance (Smith), and three years later, for young readers, that of Charles A. Eastman's *Indian Boyhood.*

Fifty years after Laplante's invention, in a totally different political context, a section of the Italian students' protest movement discovered the Indian in themselves. This time the fiction was based on an odd mixture of the "movie Indian" stereotype, of *Black Elk Speaks* (which had been translated in 1968), *The Teachings of Don Juan, A Separate Reality, Journey to Ixtlan, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,* and *Custer Died for Your Sins,* which had become cult books by 1977 when the movement called Indiani metropolitani made its appearance in Italian universities. In this movement's point of view, which was influenced also by the works of Lacan and Foucault, the Native Americans had been fought, repressed, shut up in reservations, and transformed into outsiders and freaks by the dominant society because they were bearers of alternative values. Their status was thus akin to that of the revolutionary students with painted faces and rubber tomahawks who felt they had been shut up in a reservation and had been betrayed by the political left. But instead of looking at real, contemporary Indians, the students went back to the movie Indians and identified themselves with the Noble Warriors fighting the evil white oppressors. In the eyes of some Roman students, the Indian warriors, as

representatives of the universal spirit of social revolt, were *per se* Marxist. This equation was formulated in a letter to the Communist daily *II manifesto:* "was anybody more of an Indian than Karl Marx?" (G. Mariani *593).* That same year a number of Indian Support Committees were created by different groups of Green and Leftist students (Busatta *79*), while a closer contact with the reality of Indian life was eventually achieved in 1980 by Mario Capanna, a leader of the 1968 student protest and later a Member of the European Parliament at the time of the Mohawk resistance against coal mining in Akwesasne territory. Invited to join their protest, Capanna read Engels on the Iroquois and, reassured of their quasi-Communist status, left for the Mohawk Reservation. Taking advantage of the massive presence of news reporters for the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics at nearby Lake Placid, this experienced political activist helped devise a successful protest strategy which alerted the world media to what he denounced as the creation of "a small Afghanistan in the heart of the USA." A few months after the Mohawk won their case, a puzzled Italian customs officer stamped the first Mohawk passport (Capanna *185*).

The Frontier Revisited

Inspired by the new tendency to historical semi-accuracy in the depiction of traditional Indian life in Western movies since the 1970s, some contemporary Italian novelists feel the need to revise the history and the myth of the American West in imaginary journeys to the American Frontier. The first instance of this new phenomenon is *Passarono da qui* (1981), in which Mario Monti surveys two hundred years of the life and wars of North American Indians with such chiefs as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Chief Joseph, and others, accurately checking his historical data. His second book of this kind, *II guerriero dalle ali spezzate* (1990), revisits the history of the colonization of Oregon within the contemporary frame of a visit to Toronto of European journalists for a Quincentennial Conference. A small group of people decides to take an imaginary journey back to the 1840s and travel to Oregon "with both historical and fictional characters," creating their own Western novel. For fans of Western movies, Monti furnishes his books with a bibliography and a dictionary of Indian tribes.

II bisonte bianco (1990) by Ivan Arnaldi is an ambitious project of

deconstruction of all the stratified elements that have contributed to the creation of the myth of the Western Frontier, recomposed in a Western novel about a buffalo hunt. Presented as a series of variations on an American theme inspired by *Moby Dick*, this tale of a solitary horseman who goes West on a buffalo hunt is interlarded with metatexts in which the meaning of the book is discussed. The origins of Western fiction are traced back to medieval chivalric romance, the bison is considered from the points of view of etymology, zoology, history, myth, and the Plains Indians religions. The hunt of the Plains Indians is revealed to be a part of a ritual and is compared to the Mediterranean bullfight and to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, while the sacred White Bison is compared to Zeus as white bull. The history of the genocide of the Indians is traced back to the discovery of America, the colonization, the Indian Wars, and the extermination of the bison. A narrator called Babele embodies the confusion of languages and styles in the book. He ventures West in the company of movie actor Alan Ladd interpreting the character of Shane, the lonely rider, here seen as a modern Perceval. They make a fantasy journey through the Prairies in search of the White Bison through literary texts (Irving, Cooper), George Catlin's paintings, history books (Parkman, Turner), and Hollywood Western movies of the fifties. In this journey they meet Herman Melville, David Crockett, Calamity Jane, and Annie Oakley. After Shane has repeatedly proven his courage and purity, he is led through a labyrinth to the cave of the White Bison, only to fight the last battle with an archetype: the image of the bison painted on a granite wall. One wonders whether the four-column headlines in Italian papers in September, 1994, announcing the birth of a white bison on a Wisconsin farm[6], were a result of this book.

The transition from a monological narrative of discovery to a dialogical literary quest for the real Indian has eventually taken place with Sandro Onofri. His *Vite di riserva* (1993) is a fictional travelogue which follows the author's discovery of contemporary Native American life during a real journey through the Western United States that takes him to four reservations: Colville, Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Moenkopi. The journey is accompanied by historical and ethnological information and by quotations from Onofri's spiritual guidebooks by Native American authors: *Black Elk Speaks*, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, and *Blue Highways*, which cover a century of Native American experience. But all this is not enough to

prepare Onofri for the shock of reality. At Colville, he learns that the last time they were making an Okanogan ceremonial costume they had to resort to the University of Washington library, for there was no one left alive who could remember. As an instance of the way justice works where Indians are concerned, Onofri is told the story of an elder of the tribe who would not comply with a white neighbor's imposition restricting his fishing rights and was shot dead, the killer left unpunished. At first Onofri does not understand why his heart clearly vibrating at social injustice does not win him an immediate, easy friendship with the Indians. But after Dave Archambault tells him an insider's story of the 1973 Wounded Knee revolt, the frontier that has blocked communication seems to blur:

> the darker and uncontrollable part of myself takes sides with all those who refused to speak to me, with those who did not accept me out of anger or in the awareness of the impossibility of communication.... All in all, it is from them that I expect more: a new, powerful rejection, an obstinacy that might save their difference and extend the conflict. It is for their narrow-mindedness, which is so much against my deepest rooted convictions, that I understand them more, and I feel that we are brothers. *(96;* my translation.)

Slowly this Italian innocent abroad who, maps notwithstanding, feels that he is caught in a circular path *(50),* understands the meaning of difference when he feels the power of a chant accompanied by a drum-beat in preparation for a Sun Dance. When he witnesses the rain fall after a Butterfly Dance at the Hopi reservation of Moenkopi, he realizes the existence of a different religious dimension in which the Hopi find the serenity and the strength to resist and where the reference points of Western rationality are meaningless:

> Yet today they have danced and it has rained, which only half an hour ago would have been unthinkable. It is a phenomenon which repeats itself every single year from time immemorial; it means that the dance works, that the world is right, and that the way is perfect. Any other explanation is superfluous. *(149)*

Thus the pent-up rage, the unexpected social and religious cohesion of a people apparently doomed, are indeed the modalities through which—as the intended ambiguity of the title suggests—reservation lives become reserves of life force. The mythic Frontier has finally become the cultural

frontier (Krupat *5)* where facing the Other is a challenge for one's Western certainties.

Opening the Canon

This challenge had been felt but not met back in the 1950s, when Raffaele Pettazzoni stated in the introduction to the North American volume of his *Miti e leggende* that the spiritual world of Native Americans had been almost ignored in Italy. It is indeed remarkable that Pettazzoni had to find a justification and a status for his enquiry in world mythologies, situating it in a philosophical perspective—that of religious studies—which could be acceptable to Italian intellectuals of the time. He invited the reader to take the perspective of a new humanism, open to the cultural and religious world of primitive peoples; this would help Italian culture in the sense that it would be "enriched by an ignored vein of thought." Moreover, in opposition to the missionary discourse, he felt the necessity to exhort his readers to accept with an unprejudiced mind the primitives' world view, without asking them to renounce their ancient faith or their traditional customs (Pettazzoni *5*).

It was again in poetry that the tendency towards an opening of the cultural discourse was first revealed. An anthology of primitive poetry edited by Eckart von Sydow (1951) included an interesting commentary on the songs of the Pueblos which could open a new spiritual dimension to the Italian reader:

> The Pueblo poet builds his songs on the pattern of his house and of his village and of all his ceremonial masks, in such a way that lines are stratified one above the other.... It is the same principle expressed in terraces, which can be applied to the architecture and painting of that area. (21; my translation.)

The back cover carried a statement analogous to Pettazzoni's wish for an opening of the canon: "a wonderful discovery, probably the most original text to study the analogies between contemporary poetry and the archaic poetic spirit." It was a follow-up to the American Imagists' fallacy that had animated the ethnopoetic debate in the 1920s and, as a consequence, had achieved the inclusion of Native American literature in

the canon of American Literature (Giordano 1988). The debate had been taken up again in the United States by A. Grove Day in his 1951 anthology *The Sky Clears* and was proposed by Aldo Celli in the first contemporary anthology totally devoted to Native American songs, *Canti degli Indiani d'America* (1959). But a discovery of the Indian oral tradition through the Imagists' translations and the wish for an opening of the canon still carried an ethnocentric point of view based on the canons of Western aesthetics. Only the realization that from a different spiritual world there could come a different perception of forms, and the awareness that in the traditional Indian world there was no separation between aesthetics and religion, could lead to an authentic discovery and to a dialogical discourse. Among the first to perceive this was Cesare Pavese, whose essays and novels reflect his deep interest in the essence of myths and symbols. In his review of the African volume of *Miti e leggende,* he caught the bond between creativity and religion in the traditional world:

> One could say that the doubtless origins of poetry and of all arts in magic and in ritual have left their imprint also in narrative in the sense that one moves in the real world with the rhythm of a dancer. (Pavese *321*; my translation.)

In the sixties this discourse was continued by Elémire Zolla, a writer and philosopher, who brought to Native American Studies the point of view of "religious knowledge"[7] as the spiritual space where the frontier could become a point of exchange. In the early sixties, Zolla had edited an anthology of Western mystical writers, and he had been most impressed by *Black Elk Speaks.* He therefore started to enquire into the forms in which Native American shamanism had been perceived by Anglo-American culture. During a journey in the United States in 1968 he travelled to Taos Pueblo to witness a ceremonial dance and interview some elders. The result of his research was presented in *I letterati e lo sciamano* (1969), the first thorough study of how the spiritual world of American Indians and its expression in the oral traditions had been considered in American literature. The book argued that the idea of reformation (and of its opposite, regress) in Renaissance England was the basis on which the genocide of Native Americans had been founded, well before the Enlightenment concept of progress—the very antithesis to the traditional world view—became the official justification for the westward expansion. After tracing the history of the morphology of the Indian in Anglo-

American literature, Zolla introduced the work of Native American authors, from oral tradition to Indian autobiographies, to narrators and poets. Zolla's judgments now sound prophetic. His definition of *House Made of Dawn* as a series of "lyrics or paintings in prose" points to the later development of Momaday as painter; Zolla's conviction that the quality of the early poems published by the Santa Fe Indian School "strikes one as being superior to that of the poems generally published in literary reviews or by the large publishing houses" *(282)* is a prediction of the flowering of Indian poets that we have witnessed in the past twenty years. Zolla's pioneering work led to the Italian translation of many Native American autobiographies and of the work of J. Epes Brown and Alice Fletcher.[8] It was not until the end of the seventies, however, that a new generation of scholars rediscovered the Indians and began translating the work of contemporary Native American writers. Thanks to the interest of small presses, the works of James Welch, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie M. Silko, D'Arcy McNickle, and Gerald Vizenor have been made available in Italian sooner than in other European languages (Giordano 1987). An attitude of careful listening to and respectful consideration of voices that are inevitably Other is at least perceivable in contemporary scholarship.[9] At the same time, the sense that a discovery is still necessary is repeated in Coltelli's introduction to her interviews with Native American writers: "We need to discover, or rediscover, cultural values other than those rooted in Western aesthetics or in individual aesthetic sensibilities." This is a particularly meaningful statement, since the book is adressed to an international public.

The Italian discovery of American Indians continues and reveals itself to be a never-ending process. Parallel to the increase of the visits of Italian scholars to the United States are the visits to Italy of Indian scholars. After the 1983 Conference on World Culture in Rome and the 1986 World Religions Conference for Peace in Assisi, Indian political activists, scholars, writers, and artists have become a stable feature of international cultural exchange. Through the direct experience of their voices or their performances, the monological narrative of Indian discovery is gradually becoming a dialogical process in which the cultural frontier is being readjusted. A significant role in this process will be played by the Indian narrative of the discovery of Italy, which, hopefully, will no longer be considered only as Columbus' homeland. A major hint in this sense is James Welch's opening of the canon with his choice of Elio Vittorini's poetic style

as an example for the writing of his novels (Coltelli). Another significant instance is represented by the first Italian poems written by Indian poets from the border of their mixed-blood identities. Ralph Salisbury offers an ironic view of Italy in his provocative "A Descendant of 'Savage' Nature Worshiping Cherokees Visits Christian Venice." His reaction to the grandiosity of the golden buildings, to the beauty of the Grand Canal, to the history of past horrors in the so-called Cradle of Western Civilization, is the desire to see St Mark's Cathedral thrown into the sea, and an impossible wish to turn art and religion back to nature where they began:

> that gold-domed wigwam so damned big
> to turn it again to innocent stones
> emerging from ocean bottom
> and circling the sun's own gold-
> er than gold center and to turn
> religion again into
> the love, fear and awe it was born from
> would take more life than all
> my "primitive" ancestors'
> descendants have.

In "The Frati: Crypt, Chapel, Oboe," Jim Barnes finds relief to the dark and haunting atmosphere of a medieval crypt near Lake Como in the sudden burst of American music:

> Peter Platt, full of song lines, changes a dull
> reed, then strokes his oboe into music
> for God, long absent from this empty house.
> The chapel quivers with chords bounding off
> its rejuvenated walls.

A frequent visitor to Italy, Lance Henson tries to catch the aura of a landscape near Viareggio with this *haiku:*

> walking into cloud for a mile
> the quiet settles to stillness and woodsmoke

Duane Niatum—who with his mixed Klallam and Italian blood seems to embody the possibility of a dialogical boundary discourse—is

beginning to write his poems of an Italian discovery which is also a self-discovery. As a token of friendship, after his Italian lecture tour of 1992 he sent us his poem "Tomorrow Words Storm Shaped by Rain and Sun," in which a painful quest for identity is gradually soothed by the colours of the Italian landscape, the sounds of an unknown language, the beauty of art. At the end of the trip, a mythical Italy seems to have worked the desired transformation on the poet's soul:

> Later, the missing phrases swept away
> under the tracks, my tribe of names
>
> jabbered like the train-whistle voices,
> dangled like last year's olives in the trees
> while the Umbrian sunset painted a new path
> on to my Salish blanket recycling
>
> itself into this yellow and orange-ocher
> stone mosaic, Apollo and Venus' laurel
> grotto inspiring the dead to waltz
> into the visible, reverse my story's chorus
> asking for a last Aeolian harp's breath.

(*)This essay is an expanded version of the paper presented at the November 1992 A.S.A. conference on "Exploration/Exploitation: The Americas," and is part of a larger project.

1The American Indian Workshop was informally founded in 1980 as an interdisciplinary offspring of the European Association of American Studies. Its work is partially represented in the *European Review of Native American Studies.*

2 For the Italian reaction to the Quincentenary see Clerici 1993.

3 See Washburn, Codignola, and Pizzorusso 1990.

4 Originally commissioned by President Tyler to decorate the pedestal of Horatio Greenough's statue "Seated Washington" in the Capitol, they never reached their destination because of Greenough's prohibition (A. Mariani).

5 In 1988 the novel was turned into a radio serial for RAI 2 network by Alberto Gozzi.

6 "Nelle praterie ritorna il bisonte bianco" *il manifesto* 3 Sept. 1994: 30; Franco PantarelIi, "Comincia l'era del bisonte bianco" *La Stampa* 3 Sept. 1994: 8.

7 *Conoscenza Religiosa* is the interdisciplinary journal he edited from 1969 to 1984.

8 In the later edition of *I letterati e lo sciamano* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1988) Zolla expanded his study to include Carlos Castaneda and contemporary Indian writing to 1988.

9 See Daniele Fiorentino, *I Sioux* (Roma: Bonacci, 1991); *Parole nel sangue,* ed. Franco

Meli (Milano: Mondadori, 1992); Joy Harjo and Stephen Strom, *Segreti dal centro del mondo,* ed. Laura Coltelli (Urbino: Quattroventi, 1993); N. S. Momaday, *La strana e verace storia della mia vita con Billy the Kid,* ed. Gaetano Prampolini (Roma: Salerno, 1993); and Haney Geyogamah, *Teatro,* ed. Anna Maria Pinazzi (Roma: Castelvecchi, 1994).

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