



# US LITERATURE AND ITALIAN CULTURE: A LONG ROMANCE

(1763–1980)

Since the American continent was “discovered” by an Italian and later named after an Italian, it is perhaps not surprising that Italy has always entertained a special relationship with the Americas from the US in the north to Argentina in the south, to name just two of the continent’s many nations to which, over the centuries and for various reasons, Italians have emigrated (while, at the same time, retaining a strong tie with their country of origin) and/or from which they have sometimes drawn inspiration for their literary writings.

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I will be dealing with the Italian relationship with the United States, considering (albeit briefly, for reasons of length) its most important phases, especially over the period between 1763 and the 1980s. It should be stated right from the start that Italy has long nurtured an extraordinary empathy with this distant country, a little like the love of a tired old mother for her far-away, beautiful, and successful child. And this not only because the US was the final destination on the other side of a perilous ocean, the ultimate hope for its “tired, poor, and huddled masses,” as Emma Lazarus put it. This was also because, for centuries, Italians<sup>1</sup> believed (contrary to the evidence, if we think of the institution of slavery) that the US was the land of freedom, *par excellence*. If this is also

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1 I am using this appellation for clarity reasons, although we can properly speak of “Italians” only as of 1861, when, after having been a mosaic of different states for centuries, the unity of the country was proclaimed, even if it was completed only in 1871.

true for many, if not all, Europeans who left their own country and emigrated to “America”—as, following the British denomination/prejudice, the US was called by *antonomasia*—it was particularly true for Italians because of their tormented political history. It was also true for Italian intellectuals, in spite of the obvious language barrier (until after World War II, educated Italians, by and large, knew French rather than English) and in spite of the US being such a “young” (i.e., in the eyes of many, a naïve) country.

The first books about the US to be published in Italian translations were concerned with its geoeconomic and historical characteristics. In all probability (and for good reasons), the first two works to appear in Italian—as Agostino Lombardo stated in a pamphlet and in an essay which are landmarks for this overview—were descriptions of the whole American continent either from a geographical or a historical perspective (Lombardo, 1959; Lombardo, 1981). The *Gazzettiere Americano* (*American Gazetteer*), published in three volumes in Leghorn in 1763, was a description of the geography, agriculture, and climate of the entire continent. It illustrated its flora, fauna, rivers, and waterfalls, its outposts, the maps of its main cities, the traditions of its different peoples, its products, and the various European commercial interests in each of its nations. The *Gazzettiere Americano* was the translation of a book that had come out in London the previous year, and it was embellished with seventy-seven engravings that showed the awe-inspiring peculiarities of the “new” world. The second work to be translated into Italian, in 1780, was William Robertson’s *Storia dell’America* (*History of America*) (1777), which provided a history of the Americas. In it the author stressed the importance of environmental factors since, in his view, they determined the course of any civilization. A few years later, in 1782—and not by chance, given the political situation in Italy—an anonymous *Storia della Rivoluzione nell’America inglese* (*History of the Revolution in English America*) came out in Venice. In 1788 Filippo Mazzei, a philosopher, essayist, and friend of Thomas Jefferson (as well as of George Washington, John Adams, James Madison, and James Monroe),<sup>2</sup> published his *Ricerche storiche sugli*

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2 Mazzei had been involved in the American Revolutionary War as a middle man in the acquisition of guns for Virginia; he may even have contributed to the writing of the Declaration of Independence.

*Stati Uniti (Historical Researches on the United States)* in Paris. Bearing in mind that the Italian campaigns of the French Revolutionary Army had begun in 1792, Italian intellectuals and patriots started to look to the US as the nation that had been able to free itself from “foreign” subjugation. The struggles for the Risorgimento—which would last till 1871, when the country was, finally, completely reunited—had begun. Significantly, in 1809 Carlo Botta, historian, politician, and patriot, wrote the *Storia della Guerra di Indipendenza degli Stati Uniti d’America (History of the War of Independence of the United States of America)* with the intent of unfolding the model for a successful revolution. In 1816 he translated the United States Constitution. Between 1835 and 1840 the two volumes of Alexis de Tocqueville’s *De la démocratie en Amérique (Democracy in America)* had a huge impact in Italy. The Italian view of the US as the country of liberty was strengthened when two illustrious fighters for Italian independence—Piero Maroncelli in 1833 and Federico Confalonieri in 1837<sup>3</sup>—chose to sail to the United States once they were finally freed after having been imprisoned for ten years in Austria (Lograsso, 1928; Lograsso, 1958). Both Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872), the father of the Italian republic and a friend of Margaret Fuller (Giorcelli, 2001), and Carlo Cattaneo (1801–1869) referred to the political model of the United States in different ways. In his considerations regarding the possible political future for a reunited Italy, Cattaneo was inspired by and supported (unsuccessfully) the US federalist option.

The above shows how, initially, from the end of the eighteenth century, the Italian interest in the US—as far as both translations and original writings go—was largely due to the fact that it was associated with liberty and democracy. One should not forget, however, that, strictly speaking, a fascination with the American “myth” had already been promoted by its extraordinary “discovery” and touched upon in important Italian literary works of the sixteenth century. It is mentioned, for instance, in the chivalric poems *Orlando Furioso* (1532) by Ludovico Ariosto and in *Gerusalemme Liberata (Jerusalem Delivered)* (1575) by Torquato Tasso as well as in *Storia d’Italia (History of Italy)* (1561) by Francesco Guicciardini.

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3 The former remained in the United States till his death, in 1846; the latter only for one year.

In 1781 Vittorio Alfieri, poet, playwright, and passionate believer in Italian independence, wrote five odes in a book entitled *L'America Libera* (*Free America*), which was eventually published only two centuries later in 1976. Here, apart from singing the praises of US liberty and democracy, Alfieri also warns against their possible shortcomings—a rare response in those times.

If the history and the political system of the US, which were also seen as the reasons for its scientific and technological progress, were constantly present in the Italian mind, the country's nature—vast, exotic, and picturesque—was no less captivating. It had first been introduced to Italy, in French, via René de Chateaubriand's two novels: *Atala* (1801) and *René* (1802). Against the background of the US' stupendous wilderness, the sad stories of the two central characters are marked by the emblematic Romantic *topoi* of impossible love and death.

Turning to US literature, the first writer to be widely translated into Italian was probably Benjamin Franklin. In 1774, in fact, an anthology of his writings came out in Milan under the title *Scelta di lettere e opuscoli del signor Beniamino Franklin* (*A Selection from Mr. Benjamin Franklin's Letters and Pamphlets*). Because of his diverse scientific inventions and because he was a patriot and a diplomat, he attracted the attention of educated Italians (Pace, 1950). A few years later, in 1797, *Il buon uomo Riccardo* (*Poor Richard's Almanack*) (1732–1758) appeared. In 1830 his *Autobiografia* (1771–1790) was also translated into Italian. In the same years, a similar success was enjoyed by several tales from Washington Irving's *Sketch-Book* (1820) that were individually translated between 1824 and 1836. Starting in 1828, almost contemporary to their publication in the US, James Fenimore Cooper's novels were published in Italian. Having spent a year and a half in Italy (from October 1828 to May 1830), Cooper loved the country to which he dedicated two volumes of travel writings entitled *Gleanings in Europe: Italy* (1838). He even set two of his novels in this country: *The Bravo*, set in Venice (1831), and *The Wing-and-Wing*, set along the Italian coast from Elba to Naples (1842). His path-finders, his “redskins,” and his prairies entered thus the fantasy worlds of many an Italian youth from very early on. As of 1865 Ralph Waldo Emerson began to be translated, even if the first critical

assessment of his philosophy had come out a decade before in 1855. Its author, Eugenio Camerini compared Emerson, amazingly enough, to Ludovico Ariosto and admired the US philosopher's "high morality that is the true foundation of the Angloamerican spirit" (Camerini, 1878: 114)<sup>4</sup>.

The writer who for decades was considered to be the greatest US poet was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. A professor of Italian at Harvard and the translator of *The Divine Comedy*, his works began to be translated as of 1856 or 1857, and appreciative articles about them appeared soon afterwards. He was praised for being both a friend to the humble and somebody who embraced justice and charity. And when, in 1869, his *Poesie sulla Schiavitù (Poems on Slavery)* (1842) were translated, he became the champion of emancipation. A sign of Italians' indignation against chattel slavery (an institution which, nevertheless, did not substantially tarnish Italians' esteem of the US) was the great success enjoyed by the translations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *La capanna dello zio Tom (Uncle Tom's Cabin)* in 1852 (the same year of its publication in the US). The novel was published *simultaneously* by two different Italian publishing houses and in installments by three Italian papers (in Turin, Genoa, and Venice). Certainly up to the 1950s floods of tears were shed over its pages by Italian adolescents (as the present writer can testify!). It was Stowe's "civil passion" that was particularly appreciated by Italian readers and critics, who, candidly overlooking its patronizing aspects, held the book to be an antidote to contemporary Italian literary writings' emotional extenuation, to their lack of vital inspiration. Meanwhile Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe—in the wake of the French translations by Charles Baudelaire and Stéphan Mallarmé—were also translated into Italian. In 1884 the first Italian *Storia della letteratura americana* came out, written by Gustavo Strafforello.<sup>5</sup>

When the political motivations subsided because the country had achieved its independence and established its form of gover-

4 Camerini was also a compiler of dictionaries and of various other subjects. Henceforth, all translations from Italian critics will be mine.

5 In the twentieth century, the first book entirely dedicated to Emerson came out in Milan in 1905 and was written by a woman, Fanny Zampini Salazar.

nment (a monarchy, till 1946), Italian critics began to look to US literature with some degree of objectivity, underlining its merits and pointing out what they considered its drawbacks, even if these were often still seen in a fairly positive light. The first insightful critic and a good translator of US literature was Enrico Nencioni, a freelance writer who, from 1867 and for almost thirty years, wrote for the most prestigious literary journal of the time, *Nuova Antologia*. His criticism introduced Hawthorne, Emerson, and James Russell Lowell, among others, to this country. Nencioni was particularly fascinated by Walt Whitman,<sup>6</sup> whose poetic vitality he compared to that to be found in the Bible or in Homer. Nencioni contrasted Whitman's power with European byzantinisms, although he did not appreciate Whitman's long lists of names that he considered useless and boring. For him—using a telling metaphor—*Leaves of Grass* was more like a forest (for its “natural” energy) than a cathedral (Nencioni, 1897: 226). Thanks to Nencioni, Whitman was praised by the most notable contemporary Italian poets: Giosué Carducci (who, like Whitman, was in search of a new poetic meter), Giovanni Pascoli, and, in spite of his decadentism, Gabriele D'Annunzio. Even Marinetti and the futurists looked up to Whitman, as they saw in him the heroic prophet of anti-academism and of the Nietzschean *übermensch* (rather than the democratic poet of the common man). Nencioni was also an ardent admirer of Poe, considering his main gifts to be his “plastic” and “crystalline” style, his “deep scientific sensibility,” and the “mystic tie” that unites the corporeal and the spiritual in his characters (Nencioni, 1897: 103–105). Poe's criticism was also much valued by Pascoli, especially his search for musical resonances (which also coincided with Pascoli's aims and achievements). In effect, from this point of view, Pascoli considered Poe a “maestro” (Getto, 1956: 170). He even attempted a translation of “The Raven” under the title “*Tenebre*” (“Darkness”) between 1876 and 1879, though this project was never completed. Another influential critic who contributed to Whitman's success in this country was Giovanni Papini, co-founder (with Giuseppe Prezzolini) of the very important, anti-conformist literary journal *La Voce* in 1908. This review

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6 In 1887 Whitman was also translated by Luigi Gamberale. In 1897 Whitman's poetry was the subject of a book by Pasquale Jannaccone.

had, among others, the great merit of introducing William James and pragmatism to Italy.<sup>7</sup> Since the Italian philosophical scene of that time was dominated by the idealism of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, *La Voce's* pioneering work benefited Italian philosophers of a later period.

From the beginning of the twentieth century Mark Twain also started to be translated. In 1915 *Le avventure di Huckleberry Finn* (1884) appeared in Italian.<sup>8</sup> Above all, it was Twain's sense of humor that was much appreciated, even though, according to a respected critic of the time, Enrico Thovez, his language was too colloquial, too idiomatic, and, therefore, too barbaric and anti-literary.

With the new century, a series of historical, economic, and political factors contributed to a new phase in the relationship between the two cultures: the US intervention in World War I, the rise of fascism in Italy, the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the subsequent New Deal, the growth in Italian emigration to the US, the beginning of US world hegemony, and the actual *direct* knowledge that Italian intellectuals started to have of the US. In the 1920s and 1930s a very good translator and a sensitive, albeit idiosyncratic, critic of American literature was Carlo Linati. In 1925 he was one of the first in Italy to write about T.S. Eliot and *The Waste Land* (1924). He was also an admirer of Eliot's criticism ("very subtle and cold") and of his "scientific, mathematical style" (Linati, 1943: 15). In addition to Eliot, Linati appreciated Ezra Pound. There was something, he wrote, "barbarous and refined, brutal and exquisite" in Pound's work (Linati, 1943: 91). He praised Pound's fine ear and his capacity to draw inspiration from writers as different as Propertius, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud. In the late 1920s Linati also commented perceptively on *Moby Dick* (which had been "rediscovered" in the US in those years). At a time of cultural provincialism and fascist autarchy, Linati introduced the likes of Thornton Wilder, William Carlos Williams, E. E. Cummings, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, and Gertrude Stein to the Italian public.

7 Thanks to Papini, even *Towards Democracy* (1883)—the long poem by Whitman's British friend and disciple, Edward Carpenter—was translated into Italian in 1912.

8 *Le avventure di Tom Sawyer* (1876), which has always enjoyed a great success with Italian youth, had already been translated in 1909.

Linati was also the first to translate Henry James: *L'americano* in 1934, and, with his wife, Silvia, *Ritratto di Signora (Portrait of a Lady)* in 1943. In this same year, he published a collection of essays entitled *Scrittori angloamericani d'oggi (Contemporary Anglo-American Writers)*.

In 1934 the writer Mario Soldati published a book entitled *America Primo Amore (America First Love)*, which reflected his passion for the country where he had lived for two years (and where he would have liked to remain). In the same period, another influential—albeit, at times, skeptical and patronizing—critic of US literature was Emilio Cecchi, a freelance writer and contributor to major newspapers and journals, who carried out insightful analyses of William Faulkner and in 1939, together with his daughter Giuditta, wrote a critical biography of Emily Dickinson (they also translated some of her poems). Cecchi produced intelligent studies on John Dos Passos, Willa Cather, and John Steinbeck, even if he was often perplexed by the violence and the undercurrent of hatred and protest that he found in US literature. In 1939 he wrote *America Amara (Bitter America)*, which, as the title indicates, has little in common with the earlier work by Soldati. Here Cecchi illustrates and criticizes several crucial aspects of the US way of life that he had directly experienced during the time he spent there from 1930 to 1931 and from 1937 to 1938. Although he also complained about the widespread use of slang in US writers, he noticed “the new rhythm” that such an idiom lent to their works (Cecchi, 1939: 129). In 1947 he published an important collection of essays, *Scrittori inglesi e americani (English and American Writers)*. A contemporary of both Soldati and Cecchi was another great critic of US literature, even if he wrote relatively little on it: the Anglicist Mario Praz, thanks to whom American literature began to be taken up by Italian academics (American literature did not yet exist as an independent discipline in the Italian university system). Praz was an admirer of Dickinson, Poe, and Hawthorne, for instance, but also of contemporary writers such as Eliot,<sup>9</sup> Faulkner, Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, and Hemingway, whose “objective style, “economy of words,” and “great evocative power,”

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9 In 1932 he translated *The Waste Land*.



he praised as early as 1929 (Praz, 1951: 203). Like Cecchi, however, he too, at times, complained about the brutality and lack of “culture” he detected in US authors (Praz, 1951: 203).

In marked contrast, these “faults” in US literature were seen as virtues by the younger generation of Italian writers and intellectuals. These educated young Italians, living and writing under a fascist regime that stifled their efforts to renew Italian literature, saw these “faults” as the weapons that were needed to revitalize the bloodless Italian culture of the time, especially since—as their forerunners in the previous century had already claimed—they saw US literature as the fruit of its country’s freedom and democracy. The Piedmontese novelist and poet Cesare Pavese (1908–1950) superbly translated, among other masterpieces, *Moby Dick* in 1932 and in 1938 and 1940, respectively, Gertrude Stein’s *L’autobiografia di Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and *Tre esistenze (Three Lives)* (1909). He wrote exemplary essays on a number of US authors (even if he judged some of them—like Edgar Lee Masters<sup>10</sup> and Erskine Caldwell—rather too generously). As he wrote in an essay immediately after the end of World War II, “in the 1930s and 1940s [...] Italy was estranged, barbarized, calcified—it was necessary to shake it, decongest it, and expose it to all the springy winds in Europe and in the world. We discovered Italy [...] by looking for men and words in America” (Pavese, 1951: 247). Pavese had a deep understanding of Dos Passos and Sherwood Anderson, for instance, because he saw them expressing the truth of their “local” origins. Analogously, he hoped that Italian writers would find a serious source for inspiration in their own regional characteristics. He had confidence in the beneficial effect of the US literary impact on Italian culture because he considered the US to be “the gigantic theatre where, with more frankness than anywhere else, everybody’s drama is played” (Pavese, 1951: 194–195). After the end of the war, however, Pavese was wrecked by disillusionment. He concluded that, without a fascism to oppose, US democracy would risk becoming—despite its best traditions—a form of fascism itself and thus have a negative influence on its literature (Pavese, 1951: 196). Although these

<sup>10</sup> The first of innumerable translations (pouring out continuously till today), *L’antologia di Spoon River* came out in Italian in 1943, translated by Fernanda Pivano.

statements were written in the official newspaper of the Italian Communist Party and may, therefore, have partly been in line with the paper's ideological bent, Joseph McCarthy's infamous lists—and the blow they dealt to US democracy—would soon appear, thus demonstrating Pavese's foresight. His 1951 (posthumous) collection of essays, *La letteratura americana e altri saggi* (*American Literature and Other Essays*), became a reference book for anyone wishing to know and understand US literature.

The other Italian writer who, in the interwar period, was convinced of the exemplary lessons to be learned from US literature and who admirably translated and commented on a number of US authors (Faulkner, Hemingway, and Steinbeck, for instance) was the Sicilian Elio Vittorini (1908–1966). In 1941, at the beginning of the war, he edited *Americana*, an anthology of works by US authors translated by various Italian writers, such as Eugenio Montale, Alberto Moravia, Guido Piovene, and Vittorini himself. He also wrote the commentaries to the various sections of the book, his aim being to outline the development of US literature from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the 1930s. This goal was achieved with some excessive appreciations (Morley Callaghan, Evelyn Scott, and William Saroyan, for instance) and some important omissions (such as Edith Wharton and Sinclair Lewis). Since, like Pavese, Vittorini looked to US literature as a model for a “new” Italian literature, he endorsed the freshness and the ferocity he saw in the chosen authors. In his opinion, US literature displayed an extraordinary sincerity in its search for truth through a lucid—authentic and direct—examination and presentation of reality as it is. The anthology's first edition fell victim to the censorship of the fascist regime and was republished the following year with an introduction by Cecchi—without Vittorini's “ideological” commentaries.

After the end of World War II, the translation “industry” of American authors flourished. This trend continued throughout the 1950s for reasons that are not hard to understand: the US army had liberated the country from Nazi occupation and fascism. Indeed there was an explosion of interest (at times, indiscriminate and entirely haphazard) in US culture. Everything that came from the US (books, music, visual arts, films, plays) was avidly

consumed and promptly appreciated, purely because it was “fashionable.” Only some writers, like Italo Calvino and Giuseppe Berto, for instance, were able to profit and learn from the best that US literature was producing. Many others simply plagiarized what emerged from US publishing houses and was becoming a momentary fad, even in its country of origin. Furthermore, works were often translated even before they came out in the US and before any critical response had been formulated.<sup>11</sup> Since Italian editorial policies at both publishing houses and newspapers were rather erratic and unpredictable—with authors sometimes dropped by one publishing house and picked up by another—it is hard to surmise with any degree of certainty why some books were translated, while others, perhaps more valid, were not. What is certain is that the impact made (then as now) by US reviewers (especially those at *The New Yorker*) was highly noticeable in Italian choices. An important bulwark against such an indiscriminate flooding of the market was the 1954 translation of F. O. Matthiessen’s *Rinascimento Americano* (*American Renaissance*) (1941). For serious writers and critics, it became the text from which to start to have an idea *from the inside* of this literature (however subjective, if not also biased towards an “exportable” vision of US democracy, it might be).<sup>12</sup> At any rate, in 1949 and in 1950, respectively, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tenera è la notte* (*Tender is the Night*) (1934) and *Il grande Gatsby*<sup>13</sup> (1925) appeared. Works by two very relevant African American authors were also published in Italian translation in 1946 and 1947, respectively: Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mosé: l’uomo della montagna* (*Moses, Man of the Mountain*) (1939)<sup>14</sup> and Richard Wright’s *Paura* (*Native Son*) (1940). In 1949 Carlo Izzo’s anthology *Poesia*

11 Given the abundance of Italian translations and of publishing houses after the end of World War II, from now on this overview must, for length reasons, be even more selective.

12 According to Agostino Lombardo, Matthiessen’s vision of US literature had been inspired by Francesco De Sanctis’s *Storia della letteratura italiana* (*History of Italian Literature*), which came out in 1870, the year that marked the end of the Papal States (Lombardo, 1959: 45).

13 This novel, however, had first been translated in 1936 as *Gatsby il magnifico*.

14 Her novel *I loro occhi guardavano Dio* (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*) (1937) had been translated into Italian in 1938.

*americana contemporanea e poesia negra (Contemporary American Poetry and Negro Poetry)*<sup>15</sup> came out.

From the late 1950s through the 1960s, however, Italian attitudes towards US literature gradually changed. Nonetheless, even if the US now appeared as the country of ruthless capitalism rather than as a beacon of hope, US protesters and the Beat Generation found enthusiastic followers in Italy. Significantly, even though a writer like Vittorini wrote at length—in the reputable journal *Politecnico*<sup>16</sup> and, later, in his *Diario pubblico (Public Diary)* (1957)—about the negative influence, on American culture, of Protestantism and its strenuous fight against “sin” that, through the centuries, had become a strenuous fight against everything and everyone, he still wrote appreciatively about such contemporary artists as Robert Penn Warren, Nathanael West, William S. Burroughs, and Richard Brautigan. These were the years that saw the excellent translations of Pound by Alfredo Rizzardi, of Stevens by Renato Poggioli, and of Lowell by Rolando Anzilotti, to mention just a few. In 1956, Ralph Ellison’s *Uomo invisibile* (1952) came out.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the 1950s, Kurt Vonnegut’s science fiction work started to be translated (*Le sirene del Titano* was the first novel to come out in Italian). In 1959, thanks to the widespread scandal it had caused, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955) was published in this country. At the same time, the “classic” authors were re-translated more faithfully (Emerson, Thoreau, and Twain, for instance) and some were translated for the first time (Charles Brockden Brown, Langston Hughes,<sup>18</sup> and Frank Norris, among others). In the same years, an author as innovative as Philip Dick, a precursor of cyberpunk, began to be published in this country: in 1955, the year of its publication in the US, *Il disco di fiamma (Solar Lottery)* came out. More and more, Italian critics with a direct knowledge of the United States had the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with professional US critics and creative writers, also thanks to the Ful-

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15 Notice the strange title, as if Black poetry were not included in American poetry!

16 Vittorini founded it in 1945; the review continued publication until 1947.

17 For a more complete list of the Italian translations till 2005, see Alessandro Portelli, “La letteratura afroamericana,” *Acoma*, vol. 31, Winter 2005, pp. 64–68.

18 Hughes’s *Not Without Laughter* (1930) was translated as *Piccola America Negra* in 1968.

bright Program, which started its valuable mission soon after the end of World War II (in 1948). As far as criticism goes, two milestone works were published in 1956 and in 1957, respectively: Glauco Cambon's *Tematica e sviluppo della poesia americana* (which came out in the US under the title *The Inclusive Flame*) and Agostino Lombardo's *Realismo e simbolismo*. In 1956 and in 1957, respectively, Salvatore Rosati's *Storia della letteratura americana* and Carlo Izzo's *Storia della letteratura nord-americana* appeared. In the same years an invaluable job in advancing the status of US authors in this country came about thanks to the publication of the annual academic journal *Studi americani*, edited by Agostino Lombardo—the “father” of American Studies in Italy. The journal was published by the prestigious publishing house Storia e Letteratura, that, soon afterwards and for decades to come, brought out a prominent series of books of criticism on American literature. In the 1950s the Italian academic world was also appreciative of and open to the critical method and approach proposed by New Criticism. Many literary analyses by Italian scholars from various literary fields followed its lead. Thus, thanks to such illustrious supporters of its individual, independent worth (and not just as an appendix to English literature), in the 1960s Anglo-American Literature finally became a discipline in its own right in the Italian university system. The decade began with the publication of Marisa Bulgheroni's *Il nuovo romanzo americano, 1945–1959* (*The New American Novel, 1945–1959*), published in Milan by the exclusive publisher (and writer and art collector) Arturo Schwarz. Bulgheroni's scholarly overview showed how many US authors had been translated in those years: Saul Bellow,<sup>19</sup> Paul Bowles, James Agee, Truman Capote, John Cheever, Jack Kerouac, Norman Mailer, Carson McCullers, and Mary McCarthy, among others. Meanwhile, in the 1960s, also Thomas Pynchon and John Barth began to be translated: *V.* and *L'incanto del lotto 49* (*The Crying of Lot 49*) (1963 and 1966) as well as *L'opera galleggiante* (*The Floating Opera*) and *La fine della strada* (*The End of the Road*) (1956 and 1958). Other momentous works that appeared in Italy in those years were: in 1962, Bernard Malamud's *Il commesso* (*The Assistant*)

19 His first book to be translated into Italian in 1953 was *L'uomo in bilico* (*Dangling Man*) (1944).

(1957); in 1965, Philip Roth's *Lascarsi andare* (*Letting Go*) (1962) and Flannery O' Connor's *Il cielo è dei violenti* (*The Violent Bear It Away*) (1960); and in 1966, James Baldwin's *Gridalo forte* (*Go Tell It on the Mountain*) (1953). Concurrently, US avant-garde poetry received much attention. In addition to Eliot, Pound, and Williams, Charles Olson, Theodore Roethke, and, especially, Allen Ginsberg, the Beats, and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), among others, were translated thanks to the recommendations of intelligent advisors at the most distinguished publishing houses (like the freelance writer and translator Fernanda Pivano). Some of these US poets had a decisive influence on experimental avant-garde Italian movements, like "Gruppo '63," which included such notables as Antonio Porta, Nanni Balestrini, Edoardo Sanguineti, Amalia Rosselli, Alfredo Giuliani, and Umberto Eco. Apart from Einaudi (which could count on an editor like Italo Calvino), two publishing houses stood out in this respect: Feltrinelli, which, by and large, looked for literarily important and ideologically (left-wing) significant texts, and Garzanti, which, by and large, looked for culturally momentous "classic" texts. Something of a scandal erupted in 1962 following Einaudi's publication of J.D. Salinger's *Il giovane Holden* (*The Catcher in the Rye*) (1951). The novel was discussed in newspapers, weekly magazines, and journals, and from every critical angle. Regardless of the widely differing judgments, the book was an enormous success with the reading public. In the same year, to prove how the sociocultural climate had changed, Feltrinelli went on to publish Henry Miller's *Tropico del Cancro* (1934) and *Tropico del Capricorno* (1939) for the first time in this country. Again in 1962 another outpouring of vociferous opinions followed the translation of John Updike's *Corri, coniglio* (*Rabbit, Run*) (1960). In 1967 and 1968, respectively—not surprisingly, given the widespread Italian youth's social and political unrest—Malcolm X's *Autobiografia* (1965) and LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* (1963) came out.

In the 1970s and well into the 1980s, many, perhaps too many, "promising" US authors were translated and widely publicized (we need only think of the clamor surrounding the publication of the translations of David Leavitt's works, enthusiastically backed by Pivano). A relatively new phenomenon was the cult following gained by some science fiction, fantasy or horror wri-

ters such as Stephen King and Ursula K. Le Guin; the latter's *La mano sinistra delle tenebre* (*The Left Hand of Darkness*) (1969) was translated in 1984, whereas Isaac Asimov had been steadily translated since the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> In 1976 Sylvia Plath began to come out in Italian.<sup>21</sup> From the 1970s the publishing house La Tartaruga specialized in translating and re-translating works by established women writers (such as Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton, but also C. Perkins Gilman,<sup>22</sup> Willa Cather, and Gertrude Stein), and by such contemporaries as Grace Paley, Patricia Highsmith, and Adrienne Rich.<sup>23</sup> In 1980 the quarterly journal *Letterature d'America* (*Literatures of the Americas*) (with monothematic yearly issues on Spanish American, Anglo-American, and Brazilian literatures, as well as an everybody together one) was founded. In 1981 and 1982, respectively, Toni Morrison's *Canto di Salomone* (1977) and *L'isola delle illusioni* (*Tar Baby*) (1981) came out in this country. In these decades, owing to favorable public responses in their own country, or to prizes won, or to film versions, the first Native American authors were also translated (N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Louise Erdrich, and Leslie Silko, for instance)<sup>24</sup> as well as the first Asian American writers: in 1982 Maxine Hong Kingston's *La donna guerriera* (*The Woman Warrior*) (1976) came out.<sup>25</sup> In their respective fields, two anthologies helped fill the gap regarding writers who had not yet been translated or had not been translated in full: 1988 saw the publication of *Il labora-*

20 For a more complete list of the Italian translations till 2005, see Salvatore Proietti, "La letteratura di fantascienza," *Acoma*, vol. 31, Winter 2005, pp. 85–87.

21 Plath's first book to come out in this country was translated by the poet Giovanni Giudici and bore the title: *Lady Lazarus e altre poesie*.

22 Her *Donne e Economia* (*Women and Economics*) (1898) had been translated in 1902.

23 Some great books by women writers of the nineteenth century have been translated only recently, among them, in 2004, Harriet Jacobs' *Vita di una ragazza schiava* (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*) (1861). For a more complete list of the Italian translations till 2005, see Anna Scacchi, "'Contro ogni armonia è il disegno vistoso e scombinato.' Le scrittrici americane e l'editoria italiana," *Acoma*, vol. 31 (Winter 2005), pp. 21–32.

24 For a more complete list of the Italian translations till 2005, see Giorgio Mariani, "La letteratura indianoamericana," *Acoma*, vol. 31, Winter 2005, pp. 69–71.

25 For a more complete list of the Italian translations till 2005, see Manuela Vastolo, "La letteratura asiaticoamericana," *Acoma*, vol. 31, Winter 2005, pp. 72–75.

torio dei sogni. *Fantascienza americana dell'Ottocento* (*The Dream Laboratory. American SF of the Nineteenth Century*) by Carlo Pagetti, while, in 1989, *Scrittori ebrei americani* (*Jewish American Writers*) by Mario Materassi appeared. The most significant US authors of the nineteenth and twentieth century, however, continued to be re-translated and republished—often prefaced with insightful critical analyses—by the most prestigious publishing houses (for instance: Rizzoli, Einaudi, Mondadori, and Garzanti).

To conclude, very briefly: from the early 1990s up to the present, in the magmatic, at times disconcerting, panorama of publications and translations coming out from new, adventurous, and perhaps short-lived publishing houses, some interesting anthologies have emerged. These have included: *Sotto il quinto sole. Antologia di poesia chicana* (*Under the Fifth Sun: An Anthology of Chicano Poetry*) (1990) by Franca Bacchiega; *Il mondo Yiddish: antologia letteraria* (*The Yiddish World: A Literary Anthology*) (1995) by Elena Mortara Di Veroli and Laura Quercioli Mincer; *Voci dal silenzio. Scrittori ai margini d'America* (*Voices from the Silence: Writers at the Margins of America*) (1996) by Mario Maffi, who collected authors of Asian American ethnic origins; and *Voci di frontiera. Scritture di Latinos negli Stati Uniti* (*Frontier Voices: Writings by Latinos in the US*) (1997) again by Mario Maffi. In 1994 the biannual magazine of international North American Studies, *Acoma*, was founded. Among the established publishing houses, Marsilio stands out. In its “Frecce” series, the translations of US works are published with scholarly introductions, critical apparatuses, and with the English parallel text, thus granting readers the chance to refer to the original. Since the end of the last century, a number of smaller, but intellectually vibrant, publishing houses have specialized in US ethnic literatures (as in many Italian universities there has been an increase in courses dealing with ethnic minorities). For instance, Le Lettere in Florence tends to publish—although not exclusively—African American writers (James Baldwin, Nella Larsen, Paule Marshall), while books by Native American writers (Leslie Silko, Joy Harjo, the Native American theater) tend to be published—although not exclusively—by Quattro Venti in Urbino. In those years, the publishing house Palomar in Bari, in its series “La vigna nascosta,” has published—although



not exclusively—several important Chicano writers (Gloria Anzaldúa, Rudolfo Anaya, Tomàs Rivera).<sup>26</sup>

As US politics and literature continue to be seen by many Italians as the two faces of the same coin, notwithstanding the recent political disillusionments and bewilderments, US literature still has legions of estimators (especially among innovative Italian writers and, in particular, poets).<sup>27</sup> And in these times of economic crisis, even though the endemic racism of the US seems to occasionally flare up again, a great number of “classic” books by foundational authors is repeatedly re-re-proposed (with new commentaries) because they are still in demand. This is true to such an extent that today one can legitimately claim that many US novels—in some cases also thanks to their film versions—from *Moby Dick*, to *Ritratto di signora*, *L'età dell'innocenza* (*The Age of Innocence*), *Le avventure di Huckleberry Finn*, *Le nevi del Kilimanjaro*, *Il grande Gatsby*, and *Lamento di Portnoy*, as well as the poetry of Dickinson, Eliot, Pound, Ginsberg, Plath, and the plays by Eugene O'Neill,<sup>28</sup> Arthur Miller,<sup>29</sup> and Tennessee Williams,<sup>30</sup> among others, have become a shared literary heritage for Italians too.

26 For a more complete list of the Italian translations till 2005, see Erminio Corti and Anna Scannavini, “La letteratura dei Latinos,” *Acoma*, vol. 31, Winter 2005, pp. 80–84.

27 For instance, a group of productive, vivacious, and experimental poets (among them Marco Giovenale, Alessandro De Francesco, Antonio Loreto, and Giulio Marzaioli) are bringing forward the lessons learned from US objectivists. See *New Objectivists, Nouveaux Objectivistes, Nuovi Oggettivisti*, edited by Cristina Giorcelli and Luigi Magno, Loffredo, 2013.

28 O'Neill's *Desiderio sotto gli olmi* (*Desire Under the Elms*), published in 1924, was translated in 1945.

29 Miller's *Morte di un commesso viaggiatore* (*Death of a Salesman*), published in 1949, was translated in 1952.

30 Williams's *Un tram che si chiama desiderio* (*A Streetcar Named Desire*), published in 1947, was first played in Rome in 1949 under the direction of Luchino Visconti.

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RIAS VOL. 10, FALL-WINTER N° 2/2017