

Differentia: Review of Italian Thought

Number 6 *Combined Issue 6-7 Spring/Autumn*

Article 35

1994

The Noble Savage, Allegory of Freedom by Stelio Cro

Giuseppe C. Di Scipio

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia>

Recommended Citation

Di Scipio, Giuseppe C. (1994) "The Noble Savage, Allegory of Freedom by Stelio Cro," *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought*: Vol. 6 , Article 35.

Available at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia/vol6/iss1/35>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought* by an authorized editor of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu, hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu.

than an attempt to frustrate or block his reader's semiotic iter, I would contend that such problematics in textual boundaries and framing, discussed above, constitute Rimanelli's desire to involve intimately his reader in the co-production of textual signification. That is, the purpose of Rimanelli's sign-system is not to elicit, simply, pleasant and/or unpleasant memories and imagery in his reader's mind. Rather, he attempts to render his reader complicit in an emotional and/or sensorial state as expressed through his prose. Indeed, then, it is expression, not description, that defines Rimanelli's prose. And his reader, in his/her complicity in this polysensorial state, becomes a co-participant in Rimanelli's sign production and signification. Hence, his "liquid" novel, precisely because it acquires its signifying shape from, metaphorically speaking, the form of its reader's hands—like any liquid that takes the shape of the container into which it is poured.

ANTHONY JULIAN TAMBURRI
Purdue University

1. I refer to Maria Corti's essay, "Testi or microtesti? I racconti di Marcovaldo di Italo Calvino" (*Strumenti critici* 27 [June 1975]: 182-93).

2. In a sense, this microtext, as therefore the entire book, throws the reader in medias res. The opening words—"Just after finishing this, I went out in the open . . ." (27; emphasis added)—make reference to a previous act/thing, that being the act of writing and/or the actual finished product. This beginning, however, I would contend, also adds a personal touch in that it simulates an exchange between author and reader, as if the author were handing the book over to the reader.

3. With regard to possible Italian intertexts in Guido Gustavo Gozzano's and Aldo Palazzeschi's poetry, I would point out that Gozzano's borrowings from other European poets are well known and have been studied and examined by a number of Italian critics. Similarly, Palazzeschi also spoke in terms of other poets' work, though differently. In describing his "strofe bis-

betiche," he states: "Sapete cosa sono? / Sono robe avanzate, / non sono grullerie, / sono la . . . spazzatura / delle altre poesie" ("E lasciatemi divertire"; translation: Do you know what they are? / They're leftover things, / they're not silly acts, / they're the . . . garbage / of other poetry [And Let Me Have My Fun]).

4. From the New Americanist perspective, Fred L. Gardaphé, more than he does in his preface to Rimanelli's book, deals with *Benedetta in Guysterland* in his penetrating, forthcoming book-length study, *Italian Signs, American Streets: Cultural Representation in Italian/American Narrative Literature*. Gardaphé offers an excellent analysis of Rimanelli's socio-cultural parody that lies at the base of *Benedetta in Guysterland*.

5. See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981): 258ff.

The Noble Savage, Allegory of Freedom

Stelio Cro

Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier
University Press, 1990

The volume represents a first rate intellectual journey into the philosophical significance of the "noble savage" emerging from the "discovery of the new world" and its early chroniclers—Columbus himself, Las Casas, Peter Martyr—up to the Jesuits' Reductions in Paraguay and Rousseau's formulation of "the noble savage" as an allegory of freedom.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I, containing six chapters, yields the basic historical foundation of the "Rise and Fall of the Noble Savage." Part II deals with "Reality, Myth and Allegory of the Noble Savage in the Eighteenth Century."

The author abundantly documents his belief that Peter Martyr's *De Orbo Novo* is a direct source for Montaigne's *Essais*. He also points out how *De Orbo Novo* arises from a humanist tradition

which, however, Peter Martyr transformed by taking into account "a style of language which interpreted the new reality of the New World." Pietro Bembo himself may have mediated the utopian concepts of the New World, later used by Montaigne, by asserting that the people in this New World lived in a golden age. In essence the aspiration of humanists, from Dante to the Quattrocento, which Cro calls "the Return of Ulysses," that "human dignity" become a reality, came to fruition in Columbus' voyage. In this theatre of humanistic realization the figure of Peter Martyr assumes a central role. Cro concludes: "Peter Martyr's role is decisive in both, spreading the news and giving the meaning of the discovery, while choosing a style of Latin which was breaking away with Medieval tradition" (38). Consequently Peter Martyr's impact on the following centuries is evidenced in the French Enlightenment with Voltaire's and Rousseau's transformation of the "noble savage" into a symbol of revolution. In Rousseau it is actually transformed into a republican ideal. Although Voltaire attacked the Jesuits and their creation of the Paraguayan Reduction—a state within a state meant to benefit the native populations—he failed to see how the Reductions were an impediment to the colonial designs of Spain and Portugal, and so he criticized the Jesuits more than the Spaniards. He saw the Jesuits as agents of Spain even while they were being expelled and persecuted. Voltaire maintained that the "noble savage" was, therefore, a victim "of evil plots by the Jesuits." It is in Rousseau, by way of Montesquieu, that the Jesuits' Reductions are accepted in their historical function and reality. Thus the "noble savage" becomes a republican ideal.

This discussion is indeed stimulating and thought-provoking; it is what gives luster to this volume. To cite a

case in point, when the author considers the repercussions of the events concerning the Reductions and the subsequent expulsion of the Jesuits in the year 1767, its philosophical implications raise a lot of questions concerning their effect on such historical events as the uprising of Tupac Amaru and the wars of independence against Spain. Indeed, the author's reflections inevitably make one ponder on the state of affairs in Latin America in the 19th and 20th centuries up to today. The chapter on the Holy Guaraní Republic, for example, reflects the economic and political implications of the Reductions of Paraguay which go far beyond the immediate self-interest of the Spanish "regalistas" and stimulates a critical analysis of the events surrounding the North-American intervention since 1898.

In Part II the author assembles outstanding scholarship and *subtilitas* in reconstructing the basis for the symbolic development of the "noble savage" in the 18th century as a supreme symbol of freedom against temporal and spiritual despotism. There are enlightening and probing chapters dealing with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Vico's anthropological discovery of the "noble savage," Montesquieu's praise of the Reductions and finally Rousseau's "referential allegory of freedom" of the "noble savage" as something destined to remain eternal in its meaning and a true, persistent myth.

One may take issue with certain conclusions, such as the allegorical interpretation of Machiavelli's *Prince* which serves both Rousseau and the author in creating "the allegory of freedom." Nevertheless, the volume is a lasting contribution supported by impeccable research and scholarship which enriches immensely the meaning of the "discovery."

GIUSEPPE C. DI SCIPIO
Hunter College/CUNY